

INTERNATIONAL CHILDREN'S BOOK DAY

APRIL 2ND 2014



SCÉALTA AN DUINE
SCÉAL AN CRUINNE

IMAGINE
NATIONS
THROUGH
STORY

Letter to the children of the world

READERS often ask writers how it is that they write their stories - where do the ideas come from? From my imagination, the writer answers. Ah, yes, readers might say. But where is your imagination, and what is it made of, and has everyone got one?

Well, says the writer, it is in my head, of course, and it is made of pictures and words and memories and traces of other stories and words and fragments of things and melodies and thoughts and faces and monsters and shapes and words and movements and words and waves and arabesques and landscapes and words and perfumes and feelings and colours and rhymes and little clicks and whooshes and tastes and bursts of energy and riddles and breezes and words. And it is all swirling around in there and singing and kaleidoscoping and floating and sitting and thinking and scratching its head.

Of course everyone has an imagination: otherwise we wouldn't be able to dream. Not everyone's imagination has the same stuff in it, though. Cooks' imaginations probably have mostly taste in them, and artists' imaginations mostly colours and shapes. Writers' imaginations, though, are mostly full of words.

And for readers of and listeners to stories, their imaginations run on words too. The writer's imagination works and spins and shapes ideas and sounds and voices and characters and events into a story, and the story is made of nothing but words, battalions of squiggles

marching across the pages. Then along comes a reader and the squiggles come to life. They stay on the page, they still look like battalions, but they are also romping about in the reader's imagination, and the reader is now shaping and spinning the words so that the story runs now inside his or her head, as it once did in the head of the writer.

That is why the reader is just as important to the story as the writer. There is only one writer for each story, but there are hundreds or thousands or maybe even millions of readers, in the writer's own language, or perhaps even translated into many languages. Without the writer the story would never be born; but without all the thousands of readers around the world, the story would not get to live all the lives it can live.

Every reader of a story has something in common with every other reader of that story. Separately, and yet in a way also together, they have re-created the writer's story in their own imagination: an act that is both private and public, individual and communal, intimate and international.

It may well be what humans do best.

Keep reading!

Siobhán Parkinson

Author, editor, translator
and former Laureate na nÓg
(Children's Laureate of Ireland).



SIOBHÁN PARKINSON

Siobhán Parkinson is an author for children and adults, and has published more than twenty-five books since she began writing professionally in 1992. She has won numerous awards and her books have been translated into multiple languages. She currently works as a publisher at Little Island Books and teaches creative writing at third level colleges. Siobhán is a former co-editor of *Bookbird*, the magazine of IBBY international, and former editor of *Inis*, a magazine published by Children's Books Ireland (CBI). She has been writer in residence to Dublin City and the Irish Writers' Centre as well as holding numerous Writers-in-Schools residencies, with a particular emphasis on working with children with special needs. In 2010, Siobhán was chosen as the first Laureate na nÓg, the Children's Laureate of Ireland.



NIAMH SHARKEY

Niamh Sharkey is the Creator and Executive Producer of Disney Junior's animated preschool series 'Henry Hugglemonster' and the author of *I'm a Happy Hugglewug*, the children's picture book published by Walker Books, on which the television series was based. Niamh is an award-winning author and illustrator of children's picture books. Her books have won numerous awards, including the prestigious Mother Goose Award and The Bisto Book of the Year. Niamh's books have been translated into over twenty languages. Her current titles with Walker Books include *The Ravenous Beast*, *Santasaurus* and her new title *On the Road with Mavis and Marge*, which won the Junior Book of the Year at the Irish Book Awards.

Niamh lives in Dublin, Ireland, with her family. In 2012, Niamh was elected as the new Laureate na nÓg, the Children's Laureate of Ireland. For more about Niamh's past, present and future, visit www.niamhsharkey.com



INTERNATIONAL BOARD ON BOOKS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

The **International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY)** is a non-profit organisation which promotes children's books at an international level.

The Irish branch of IBBY organises events and publications that promote books and literacy for children, with a particular emphasis on creating links between numerous different cultures and societies. We are delighted to host International Children's Book Day this year, which gives us the opportunity to display Irish talent and enthusiasm for the world of children's books.

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