



NORTH AMERICA TOUR 2019 MARKETING PACK

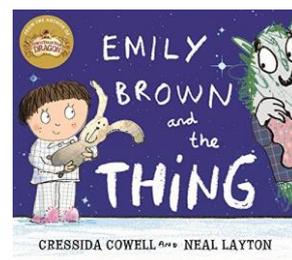
CONTENTS

1. Sample Press Release
2. Sample Schools Letter
3. Box Office Brief
4. Company and Creative Team Information
5. Tour Contacts
6. Access Performances
7. Website, social media and image Information
8. Brochure Copy
9. Q&A with Cressida Cowell
10. Cressida Cowell – Quick Facts

1. SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE



EMILY BROWN and the THING



Based on the book by
Cressida Cowell and Neal Layton

Something MONSTROUS is keeping Emily Brown awake...

One evening, Emily Brown and her old grey rabbit Stanley find a Thing crying outside their window. He's lost his cuddly and absolutely can't get to sleep without it. Emily and Stanley bravely set off into the Dark and Scary Wood in search of the missing cuddly but on their return they find the Thing can't sleep without hot milk either – or his tickly cough medicine... The daring duo head into the Whirling Wastes and even into the Whiny Witches' Cavern in search of the lost things - but nothing seems to help. The question is: what is really troubling the Thing – and will anyone ever get to sleep?

Tall Stories (creators of *The Gruffalo* and *The Snail and the Whale* stage shows) are delighted to announce that their highly acclaimed production *Emily Brown and the Thing*, an imaginative adaptation of the much-loved book by the award-winning duo Cressida Cowell (author of *How to Train Your Dragon*) and Neal Layton, will tour North America for the first time in 2019. *Emily Brown and the Thing* is one of a series of four books featuring the irrepressible Emily Brown.

The show is suitable for **children aged 3+ and their grown-ups**. The North America tour follows a sell-out run at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, a UK tour & international dates at **Sydney Opera House**, IPAY, Melbourne, Brisbane, Hong Kong & Paris. Created in Tall Stories' unique style, and told with original music, puppetry, physical storytelling and lots of comedy, *Emily Brown and the Thing* is a fantastic tale of derring-do for everyone aged 3 to 103!

PRAISE FOR THE SHOW

- "A slick storybook adaptation with a big heart... one of the company's finest hours!" ★★★★★ *The List*
- "A brilliant show: funny, touching, and completely satisfying" ★★★★★ *Edinburgh Guide*
- "Constantly amuses, delights and enthrals" ★★★★★ *The Stage*
- "A beautifully crafted three-hander... Tall Stories have a reputation for creating wonderful children's theatre every year, and 2014's offering is no exception." ★★★★★ *Three Weeks*

THE BOOK

- This is the second book in the Emily Brown series (the others include *That Rabbit Belongs to Emily Brown*, *Emily Brown and the Elephant Emergency* and *Cheer up your Teddy Bear, Emily Brown*).
- *That Rabbit Belongs to Emily Brown* won the 2006 Nestle Prize.

THE COMPANY

Tall Stories brings great stories to life for audiences of all ages. The company is a registered charity which tours the UK and the world with its exciting blend of storytelling theatre, original music and lots of laughs. Tall Stories was founded in 1997 by co-directors Olivia Jacobs and Toby Mitchell. Tall Stories shows have played in the West End, on Broadway and in the Sydney Opera House – as well as all sorts of venues and countries in between.

"Tall Stories sets the benchmark for children's theatre" *The Sunday Times*

More info & hi-resolution images: www.tallstories.org.uk or call 020 8348 0080 or email info@tallstories.org.uk

2. SAMPLE SCHOOLS LETTER

Dear Teacher

Something monstrous is coming your way...

Tall Stories, creators of the nationally and internationally acclaimed stage adaptations of *The Gruffalo*, *Room on the Broom* and *The Snail and the Whale* are to coming to _____ on _____ with their highly acclaimed production featuring the irrepressible Emily Brown.

EMILY BROWN and the THING

A magical, musical adventure adapted from the popular book by Cressida Cowell and Neal Layton

One evening, Emily Brown and her old grey rabbit Stanley wake to find *a Thing* crying outside their window. He just can't get to sleep. Emily Brown and Stanley set off on incredible adventures into the Dark and Scary Wood, the Whirling Wastes and the Whiny Witches' Cavern to find the Thing's cuddly... his bedtime milk... his medicine... But nothing seems to help him settle. The question is: what is really troubling the Thing – and will anyone ever get to sleep?

Tall Stories (creators of *The Gruffalo* and *The Snail and the Whale* stage shows) are proud to present their latest production. ***Emily Brown and the Thing***, a highly inventive adaptation of the much-loved book by the award-winning duo Cressida Cowell (author of *How to Train Your Dragon*) and Neal Layton. The show is suitable for **Grades Pre K – 3rd**.



Created in Tall Stories' unique style, and told with original music, beautiful puppetry, physical storytelling and lots of comedy, *Emily Brown and the Thing* is a fantastic tale of derring-do.

Parents and children the world over will recognise all the bizarre excuses a child can make to keep the light on and a parent in the room at bedtime and this story has a gentle message that there's really no need to be scared of 'Things' at bedtime. The production touches on themes of belonging, fear, bravery and adventure in an entertaining and enlightening way, accessible to the very young. The show supports the English and Literacy curriculum at Key Stages 1 and 2. At each performance, children will be given an education programme full of games and activities linked to the production and its themes. You can also download our teachers pack from our website (www.tallstories.org.uk), which is full of fun activities and ideas for lesson, to link the show with your classroom plans.

If you would like more information or would like to book tickets please contact:

INSERT VENUE DETAILS

3. BOX OFFICE BRIEF

- From Tall Stories, creators of *The Gruffalo*, *Room on the Broom* and *The Snail and the Whale* on stage.
- The show is for **age 3 and upwards** and their families.
- Tall Stories use a physical story telling style combined with original music and lots of laughs to create a lively theatrical experience that embraces its audience. In this show there are three performers.
- *Emily Brown and the Thing* is a tale of bravery and adventure.
- The show is an adaptation of the much loved book by award-winning Cressida Cowell (author of *How to Train your Dragon*) and Neal Layton.
- We encourage venues to have a 'babes in arms' / under 18 month olds go free policy.
- We recommend asking your local bookshops to have extra stock of the 'Emily Brown' series and to see if they might do a window display of the books.
- The show had a sell-out run at the Edinburgh Fringe in 2014 and was named as the second-best reviewed show of the Fringe (out of more than 3000 shows)

Age Group: 3 to 103

Running Time: 55 minutes, no interval.

Created by: Olivia Jacobs, Toby Mitchell and the Company



4. COMPANY AND CREATIVE TEAM INFORMATION

Tall Stories Theatre Company

Tall Stories brings great stories to life for audiences of all ages. The company is a registered charity which tours the UK and the world with its exciting blend of storytelling theatre, original music and lots of laughs. Tall Stories was founded in 1997 by co-directors Olivia Jacobs and Toby Mitchell. Tall Stories shows have played in the West End, on Broadway and in the Sydney Opera House – as well as all sorts of venues and countries in between.

Touring Company

Sophie Alice – Emily Brown

Sophie graduated from East 15 Acting School with a BA in Physical Theatre and a love for puppetry, clowning and storytelling. Professional credits: 'Autopsy' (ITV Studios); 'Pint-Sized' (Jermyn Street Theatre); 'The Gruffalo's Child' (UK, International, West End), 'Emily Brown and the Thing' (UK, International, Sydney Opera House) and 'Future Perfect' (UK) with Tall Stories; Deliveroo Summer Social (Commercial). Sophie has her wet weather wind coat and see-in-the-dark glasses already packed and can't wait to return to Tall Stories to join Emily Brown on her adventures around the USA and Canada.

Sam Buitekant – The Thing

Sam trained at St Mary's University receiving a degree in Drama and Physical Theatre. This will be Sam's third international tour with Tall Stories playing the role of The Thing. When Sam is not working with Tall Stories he is creating shows for his own theatre company Dead Rabbits Theatre. Their most recent show 'My Love Lies Frozen in the Ice' received two awards at the Edmonton Fringe Festival in Canada.

Jordan Turner – Stanley

Jordan trained at East 15 Acting School. Theatre credits include: 'We're Going on a Bear Hunt' (West End), 'The Selfish Giant' (Arcola Theatre), 'Alfie White: Space Explorer' (Tall Stories) and 'Animal Farm' (Courtyard Theatre), 'Now You See Me...' (Immediate Theatre). Film Credits include: 'Bittersweet Last Words', 'CRASH'. Jordan is also Artistic Director and performer with The Outbound Project; 'The Mission', '12 Million Volts' (UK Tour). He is very excited to be returning to Tall Stories and to hop around the US and Canada.

Matt Llewellyn Smith – Company Stage Manager

Matt studied Theatre Design and Production at Trinity College, Carmarthen. In the past year Matt has stage managed productions of 'How to Hide a Lion' (UK Tour), 'Kika's Birthday' (Edinburgh Festival, Little Angel Theatre and Orange Tree) and 'I Believe in Unicorns' (Hong Kong and UK tour).

Matt works as a freelance stage manager and has worked on over 100 productions. Highlights include Michael Morpurgo's 'Why the Whales Came' (UK Tour and Hong Kong), 'Wind in the Willows' (London Tour), 'Twelfth Night' (Covent Garden), 'Just So Stories' (Pleasance, London) and '1936' (Sadler's Wells).

Creative Team

Olivia Jacobs – Director / Writer

Olivia trained at Central / University of London. Directing includes: 'Wilde Creatures' (UK, Australia), 'The Canterville Ghost' (UK), 'The Gruffalo' (UK, USA, Asia, Australia, Europe, DVD), 'The Gruffalo's Child' (UK, Australia, Asia), 'Room on the Broom' (UK, USA, Australia, Asia), 'How the Giraffe Got Its Neck' (UK, Asia), 'William's Monsters' (UK, Poland, Asia), 'Something Else' (UK, Poland), 'Them with Tails' (UK, Poland), 'Mum and the Monster' (UK), 'Snow White' (UK, USA) and 'Latke Who Couldn't Stop Screaming' (UK). She is co-founder and joint artistic director of Tall Stories.

Toby Mitchell – Creative Producer / Writer

Toby studied at Cambridge and trained at Central. Directing credits for Tall Stories include: 'The Snail and the Whale' (UK, Poland, Dubai, Asia) 'The Snow Dragon' (UK, USA, Poland, Asia), 'Twinkle Twonkle' (UK, USA), 'Does a Monster live Next Door?' (UK), 'The Owl and the Pussycat' (UK) and 'Alice and Mr Dodgson' (UK). Other directing/devising work includes: 'Wilde Creatures', 'The Canterville Ghost', 'Future Perfect', 'Monsters Got Talent', 'A British Guide to French Pop' and 'The Island of First Loves'. He is co-founder and joint artistic director of Tall Stories.

Sam Conway – Associate Director (Current Cast)

Sam studied Drama at the University of Exeter. In addition to 'Emily Brown' he has worked for Tall Stories as an Associate Director on 'The Gruffalo's Child' (The Lyric) and 'Room on The Broom' (Sydney Opera House). Sam has also worked as a Guest Director for White Horse Theatre across Germany and Japan. Credits include, 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', 'Macbeth', 'All's Well That Ends Well' and 'Relatively Speaking'.

Isla Shaw – Designer

Isla trained at Wimbledon School of Art and Swinburne University, Australia. Tall Stories credits: 'The Gruffalo' and 'The Gruffalo's Child', 'Mr Benn' and 'Snail and the Whale'. Other credits: 'Pink Sari Revolution', 'My Robot' (Australia), 'The Importance of Being Earnest', 'Wipers', 'The Witches', 'Macbeth' and 'A Midsummer Nights Dream' (Shakespeare's Globe), 'Angelina Ballerina', 'The Wedding Singer', 'The Barber of Seville', 'Jump' and 'Frisky and Mannish - Just Too Much'.

JollyGoodTunes – Music & Lyrics

Jon Fiber and Andy Shaw of JollyGoodTunes have composed and recorded songs and sound effects for theatre since 1997. Show highlights include; 'The Gruffalo', 'Room On The Broom', 'The Gruffalo's Child', 'Mr Benn', 'William's Monsters', 'Them with Frozen Tails', 'Something Else', 'How the Giraffe got its Neck', 'Twinkle Twonkle', 'The Night Before Christmas', 'Don't Let the Pigeon Stay Up Late', 'The Life and Adventures of Santa Claus' and sound design for 'The Tiger Who Came to Tea' and 'Spot's Birthday'.

James Whiteside – Lighting Design

Tall Stories credits include: 'The Gruffalo', 'The Gruffalo's Child', 'Room on the Broom', 'Snow White' and 'Mr Benn'. West End credits include: 'Never Forget' at the Savoy; 'Footloose' at the Novello and Playhouse; 'Holding the Man' at Trafalgar Studios; 'The Female of the Species' at the Vaudeville and 'Calamity Jane' at the Shaftesbury. Other credits include designs for the Chichester Festival Theatre, Perth Theatre, the Rose Kingston and West Yorkshire Playhouse.

Yvonne Stone – Puppet Design

Yvonne studied puppetry at Central School of Speech and Drama. Theatre work includes: 'Room on the Broom', 'Mr Benn', 'The Snow Dragon' and 'The Gruffalo's Child' for Tall Stories; Terry Pratchett's 'Nation' for the National Theatre, as well as 'War Horse' and 'His Dark Materials'; 'The Lion King'. TV work includes: 'Space Pirates', 'DoodleDo', 'Mr Bloom's Nursery' and BBC3's 'Mongrels'.

Cressida Cowell – Book Author

Cressida Cowell is the author and the illustrator of the bestselling 'How to Train Your Dragon' book series, and the author of the Emily Brown picture books, illustrated by Neal Layton. 'How to Train Your Dragon' has sold over 8 million books worldwide in 38 languages. It is also an award-winning DreamWorks film series, and a TV series shown on Netflix and CBBC. The first book in Cressida's new series, 'The Wizards of Once' (also signed by DreamWorks), is a number one bestseller.

Neal Layton – Book Illustrator

Neal has illustrated more than 60 books to date, working with authors such as Michael Rosen and Cressida Cowell, and won several prizes including a Gold Award for 'That Rabbit belongs to Emily Brown'. He also writes his own books including the pop-up book 'The Story of Everything' and the best selling 'Mammoth Academy Series'. His books are currently in print in more that 16 languages worldwide. He now lives in Southsea, Portsmouth with his wife and two daughters.

5. TOUR CONTACTS

Tall Stories

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General Manager:

Charlotte Lund charlotte@tallstories.org.uk

Creative Coordinator:

Natalia Scorer natalia@tallstories.org.uk

Natalia is your primary contact regarding the 2019 North American tour

Production and Digital Marketing Officer:

Lucy Troy lucytroy@tallstories.org.uk

6. ACCESS PERFORMANCES

Tall Stories is committed to providing opportunities for all families to be able to attend the theatre. We frequently hold Sensory Friendly Performances aimed at children with an Autistic Spectrum Disorder or learning disability, signed/audio described performances, pre-show touch tours, and more. If you are interested in or planning on organising a performance of this sort for *Emily Brown and the Thing* we would be delighted to work with you on it. We can provide a visual guide to the story for Sensory Friendly Performances and any other aids that would be useful. Please contact Charlotte at charlotte@tallstories.org.uk to discuss any aspect of this.



7. WEBSITE, SOCIAL MEDIA AND IMAGE INFORMATION

Please use our website for further information about *Emily Brown and the Thing*: www.tallstories.org.uk/

It contains further information on all of our shows, including technical info.

High resolution production images and the Tall Stories logo are available for download from the 'Resources' page in the *Emily Brown and the Thing* section.

Facebook: Our Tall Stories Facebook page is: www.facebook.com/tallstories theatre - we are very happy to hear from you on any suggested posts you would like us to put out.

Twitter: Please follow us at @TallStoriesNews. We can retweet your tweets and are happy to discuss tickets offers to put out on twitter.

Suggested ways to use Twitter or Facebook for *Emily Brown*:

- Email a photo of your favourite cuddly toy.
- Draw your favourite cuddly toy and email us a photo.
- Dress up as *The Thing* and email us a photo.
- Competitions with ticket offers or books for prizes (please contact the office)

The book is published by Hachette Children's Books. From their website it is possible to download *Emily Brown* related activity books:

www.hachettechildrens.co.uk/Downloads/OrchardBooks/emily_brown_activity_sheets.page



8. BROCHURE COPY

Tall Stories presents

EMILY BROWN and the THING

Something monstrous is keeping Emily Brown awake...

Tall Stories (creators of the hugely popular *Gruffalo* stage show) are proud to present their critically acclaimed show, based on the much-loved book by Cressida Cowell (writer of *How to Train your Dragon*) and Neal Layton.

One evening, Emily Brown and her old grey rabbit Stanley hear a Thing crying outside their window. He just can't get to sleep. Emily Brown and Stanley set off on incredible adventures to the Dark and Scary Wood, to the Whirling Wastes and beyond to find the Thing's cuddly, bedtime milk and medicine... But nothing seems to help him settle.

What's really troubling the Thing – and will anyone ever get to sleep?

Praise for the show

"A slick storybook adaptation with a big heart... one of the company's finest hours!" ★★★★★ *The List*

"A brilliant show: funny, touching, and completely satisfying" ★★★★★ *Edinburgh Guide*

"Constantly amuses, delights and enthrals" ★★★★★ *The Stage*

"A beautifully crafted three-hander... Tall Stories have a reputation for creating wonderful children's theatre every year, and 2014's offering is no exception." ★★★★★ *Three Weeks*

"Both universal and moving... An adventurous, fully-realised production that beguiles its young audience like the sweetest of sweet dreams." ★★★★★ *Fest Magazine*

Praise for Tall Stories

'Tall Stories sets the benchmark for children's theatre' *Sunday Times*

'An engrossing, irreverently funny, melodic and exceptionally well-acted pleasure' *New York Times* on *Snow White*

'It is a rare treat to find a show that really is for all the family...' *The Scotsman* on *The Gruffalo*

'A truly theatrical feast that leaves both adults and children fully entertained.' *The List* on *Room on the Broom*

9. Q&A WITH CRESSIDA COWELL

Are there any children's books that made a big impression on you when you were a child?

I read a wide variety of books: domestic books like Noel Streatfield and Enid Blyton, but my particular preference was for fantasy like Diana Wynne Jones; Ursula Le Guin; Tolkien and Lloyd Alexander.

My favourite book as a child was 'The Ogre Downstairs' by Diana Wynne Jones. I loved this book so much that I read it to my younger brother and sister, to my little cousins – to anyone who would listen! It has a wicked stepfather, and chemicals that make you fly, and turn you invisible, and bring your toys to life. My children loved it as much as I did 38 years ago.

How did you become an author? What was your first book?

I have been writing stories since I was about eight or nine years old. But I was about 33 when I had my first book published. It was called 'Little Bo Peep's Library Book', and it was a picture book.

What inspires you? How do you decide what to write about?

The 'How to Train Your Dragon' books were inspired by the summers I spent as a child on a tiny, uninhabited island off the west coast of Scotland. The island had no roads, houses or electricity, and I used to imagine that there were dragons living in the caves in the cliffs. By the time I was eight, my family had built a small stone house on the island and from then on, every year we spent four weeks of the summer and two weeks of the spring on the island. The house was lit by candle-light, and there was no telephone or television, so I spent a lot of time drawing and writing stories. In the evening, my father told us tales of the Vikings who invaded this island Archipelago twelve hundred years before, of the quarrelsome Tribes who fought and tricked each other, and of the legends of dragons who were supposed to live in the caves in the cliffs.

A lot of the characters are inspired by real people in my life. For instance, my own daughters gave me the idea for Camicazi. They're not as good at sword-fighting as Camicazi, but they're every bit as chatty.

What was the inspiration to create the Emily Brown series?

The inspiration for the Emily Brown series was an incident that happened with my daughter Maisie when she was about three or four. Maisie had this small toy dog called Mr Dog, and wherever Maisie went, Mr Dog went too.

She and the dog were absolutely inseparable...

Until one terrible day, when Maisie was about to go to bed, and we couldn't find Mr Dog. We looked everywhere, and I mean EVERYWHERE...under sofas, behind chairs, in cupboards, in the garden...but Mr Dog was nowhere to be found.

For the first time in her life, Maisie had to go to bed without Mr Dog, and she was inconsolable; she cried herself to sleep. But even the next day, there was still no sign of Mr Dog, although the whole family turned the house upside down looking for him.

A couple of days later, I was cooking supper, and I opened up the freezer, and there, sitting on top of the fish fingers, as cool as you please, was Mr Dog! We'd looked everywhere, but of course, we hadn't thought to check the freezer. So I said to a delighted Maisie, 'What is Mr Dog doing in the freezer?'

And Maisie said, 'Oh I remember now, he was looking for the north pole...'

So that was the inspiration for the book, the extraordinary imaginary adventures that children go on with their toys, and also the strength of the bond between the child and the toy.

I have always been very impressed by the following quote from J.M. Barrie's Peter Pan:

'I don't know whether you have ever seen a map of a child's mind... The Neverland is always more or less an island, with astonishing splashes of colour here and there, and coral reefs and rakish-looking craft in the offing... It would be an easy map if that were all, but there is also first day at school, religion, fathers... three-pence for pulling out your tooth yourself, and so on, and either these are part of the island or they are another map showing through, and it is all rather confusing, especially as nothing will stand still.'

I wanted fantasy and reality to merge in these books, in the way that it does in a child's mind, and Neal Layton captured that beautifully in his illustrations.

Are any of the characters in the Emily Brown books like YOU?

I have to confess, I do rather identify with Matilda's mummy, the hardworking but anxious mother elephant in 'Emily Brown and the Elephant Emergency'. My children are always telling me that I have a tendency to worry too much about things – and I know they're right, which is why I wrote the book.

What I love about Emily Brown is her moral compass – she knows the truly important things in life, and she will not be swayed. In ‘That Rabbit Belongs to Emily Brown’, she will not give up Stanley, even when she is offered the most enormous bribe you could possibly think of: ‘*All the toys you could ever desire...*’ What a bribe! And she turns it down, all for the love of Stanley.

Writing for children is a constant reminder of what is truly important in life, because children are only interested in the truly important subjects.

Why do you like to write for young people?

I love being able to reach kids that wouldn’t ordinarily pick up a book to read.

Who are your favourite authors?

Ooo dear, I’m terrible at favourites; there are just too many wonderful writers to choose from. I love David Almond, Lauren Child, Louis Sachar, Eva Ibbotson, Michelle Paver, and so many, many more.

How long does it take you to write a book?

About a year including illustrations!

What is your preferred genre of writing and do you write across any other genres?

All writing is difficult, as well as exciting. I like writing comedy, but making sure that the comedy does not overtake the book can be challenging – I want the books to be moving and thought-provoking as well as funny. Finding the balance is tricky.

It was very satisfying to write ‘How to Steal a Dragon’s Sword’ because in this book, the reader suddenly realises that things that seemed to happen accidentally in earlier books have a significance that was not clear at the time. This is a very ‘Hiccup-y’ idea. It’s also very true to life – often we don’t realise what journey or ‘Quest’ we are on, exactly, until we are halfway there already.

How old were you when you realised you wanted to be a writer?

I was about eight or nine. When I was a child my handwriting was terrible, my spelling was incomprehensible but I loved writing stories... Aged nine I entered a writing competition which, to my amazement, crowned me the winner! It gave me the confidence to think, ‘I could be a writer one day’.

How can we inspire *more* of our children to love writing?

Well, to start with, inspire them to start from a young age and encourage them to keep going throughout their childhood and make them appreciate that writing is important for their adult lives. I don’t mean just writing stories but writing anything at all! It doesn’t matter if they don’t finish writing the stories, as long as they’re practising their own stories as much as they possibly can and *creating* something unique.

Ask them to make up stories about people they know. Some children may struggle to come up with characters’ names and personalities so to resolve this encourage them to write about their favourite characters from TV or film – or perhaps one of their friends or family.

Reading books to a child is a great way of sparking their imagination, even to an older child. Once children learn to read, you could be tempted to let them get on with it, but if you read a book with a child, you’re enjoying the book with them. You’re sending a message that books are important, reading is important, and therefore writing is important.

Of course grammar is essential later in life, but I can’t emphasise enough that grammar can’t and shouldn’t prevent creativity. Quite simply, if a child starts their creative writing by thinking they have to be perfect, they won’t express themselves in the way they want to.

Enter competitions. I am a testament to the positive impact they can have on a child’s confidence so when you see any writing competitions, encourage them to enter! You never know that competitive element might bring out the best in them!

How did you go about becoming a writer and was it difficult getting your first novel published?

I read English at university, and I took an M.A. in Narrative Illustration at Brighton. I won a ‘Highly Commended’ in a competition for students called the ‘Macmillan Children’s Book Competition’, and at the awards ceremony I met an editor who published my first picture book the year after I left the M.A. So I was very lucky.

What advice would you give kids who would like to become writers?

My top writing tip would be to read lots, to give you a feel for the way different stories can be told. Also practise writing as much as you can – write, and re-write – don’t worry if you don’t finish a story, as long as you are practising, that’s what matters.

What advice would you offer to parents who want to encourage their kids to read more or love books?

Reading a book with a child, even an older child, is the most important thing you can do for improving literacy and communication skills: books read to a child in their parent's voice will live with them forever. Sharing a book with your child, whatever their age, communicates how important books are. I read aloud with my children, even now they're older, both picture books and older books, and we also listen to audio books in the car. I take them to libraries, bookshops and second-hand bookshops – libraries and second-hand bookshops are particularly good for children experimenting and trying books that they might not have expected to like... I think it's also vitally important for children to see their parents reading so they know that it's a lifelong enjoyment.

Is it true that there's another How To Train Your Dragon film coming out?

There will be two more How to Train Your Dragon films, one coming out in 2014, and one in 2016. I am very excited, because the wonderful director and screenwriter of the first film, Dean DeBlois, will be directing and writing the whole trilogy, and the entire cast and crew are back for all three films as well, including the producer, Bonnie Arnold.

Do you ever get writer's block, if so, how do you overcome it?

I have to admit, I haven't had writer's block yet.

If you could be someone famous from history, who would you be and why?

I would love to be William Shakespeare, not only because he wrote those wonderful plays, but also because he wrote them as an actor, performing in the excitement and hurly-burly of Elizabethan London.

Were you encouraged to start writing by anyone in particular when you were young?

Yes, I had two teachers who were very encouraging. In year 3, Miss Mellows gave me loads and loads of blank exercise books and she let me write stories in them, even in maths lessons. Miss Macdonald was my history teacher when I was 12, and she set wonderful homework's, such as 'Write a story about a child living in a village on the west coast of Scotland, who sees a Viking sail on the horizon...'

What job would you like to have if you weren't a writer?

Teacher; anthropologist; stand-up comedian.

What do you like about being a writer and what do you hate about it?

There are so many things that are wonderful about being a writer – the pure pleasure of making things up, the glorious moment when you write something that you feel is poetic or moving or makes you cry, meeting children and parents who read the books together, and tell you that the books have meant something special to them...

I hate it when I get to the point in the process of writing a book when I have written reams and reams of words but the book hasn't 'come together'. That is like being lost in a very tangled, dark wood with no obvious hope of rescue, and it can be a very bad moment indeed.

What would your school reports have said about you?

They said that I day-dreamed a lot and that I was very disorganised. Here is an extract from one of my school reports, written by one of my teachers when I was 16: 'To follow up one of Mr. Byrom's points, there was at least one examination for which she had very little idea of the exact time until shortly before the examination was due to begin.'

10. CRESSIDA COWELL – QUICK FACTS

Biography

Cressida was born on 15th April 1966 in London.

She still lives in London. She is married to Simon Cowell (not THAT Simon Cowell), and she has three children, Maisie, Clemmie and Alexander.

She studied at Oxford University (English), and St Martin's and Brighton University (Illustration).

Books & Ideas

Cressida has been writing books since she was 9 years old, but the first book she had published was in 1999, when she was 33. It was called 'Little Bo Peep's Library Book', and it was a picture book.

Cressida illustrates the Hiccup books herself, but she also writes picture books that other people illustrate. She has had over 20 books published, including 11 *How to Train your Dragon* titles, and ten picture books, including the *Emily Brown* books, illustrated by Neal Layton.

She got the idea for the Dragon books from childhood holidays spent off the west coast of Scotland.

She doesn't quite know how she thinks of the funny names for the characters. She tries to make the names sound like the character of the person they are describing, so a rather unpleasant, stupid person will be called 'Dogsbreath the Duhbrain', for example. The Vikings really did have very descriptive names, such as King Magnus Barelegs, Olav the Stout, Eric the Red.

Films & Awards

The film of *How to Train Your Dragon* came out in 2010; the next one is coming out in 2014.

That Rabbit Belongs to Emily Brown won the Nestle Children's book award in 2006 and the *How to Train Your Dragon* film was nominated for the 2011 BAFTAs and the Oscars.

Likes & Dislikes

Cressida likes:

Dragons, books, movies, plays, musicals, boats, the sea in general, chocolate, drawing.

Cressida dislikes:

Spiders, limpets (for eating – trust me, not nice).

Odd Facts

Cressida's best friend at school was Lauren Child, writer of the *Charlie and Lola* and *Clarice Bean* books.