

Q&A with Jake Hope

on the publication of TAKING THE LONG WAY HOME



Why are picture books important?

Picture books are some of the first books we encounter and can help provide positive associations with books and reading. I remember rifling through kinderboxes when my mum would take me to the library each week for storytimes. There were so many different and exciting stories and styles of illustration. I still hold fond memories of some of my favourites as a child including Quentin Blake's first book 'Patrick' which sees a man find a fiddle on a market stall and all the weird, wonderful and whimsical things happen as he plays it. There are explosions of colour and magic with trees dripping with buttered toast, it's a lip-smackingly delicious story which I still love to share to this day!

How did you start to write picture books?

I began writing picture books after working with BookTrust helping to set up the Storytime Prize. I was Chair of the Youth Libraries Group at the time and working on the prize really made me think about what makes a picture book ideal for sharing and the types of stories that fire minds and imaginations. I've always loved the interaction between words and illustrations and the dynamism that can arise out of this and the more I thought about all of this, the more ideas I found myself having...!

What is *Taking the Long Way Home* about?

It's about a brother and sister whose uncle comes to collect them from school. The younger sister, Zarah, hates walking so is frustrated when the uncle suggests they take the long way home. All kinds of adventurous and unexpected things happen. The five senses all appear through the story and the idea of keeping our eyes, ears and minds open is a theme. The world around us can be an adventurous and unexpected place if we are awake and alive to its possibilities!

How did you get the idea for the book?

I have three nieces – Radhe, Jini and Priya who the book is dedicated to – Priya is the youngest and always grumbled and groaned whenever we went on walks together so I'd try to find little stories or fun things for us see and do as we walked!

The title for the book came from walking a friend's dog who absolutely loves being out in the wide world and watching what is going on, and sniffing here and there. I always feel bad when it's time to come home so try to find ways to try to extend the walks telling her we'll take the long way home!

How can you use it with children?

I love encouraging children to think about what's going to happen next and to think about their own senses! There's a refrain, 'anything can happen on the long way home,' which it's fun to get everyone to chant together when reading it to groups as part of a storytime!

What does it mean to see the book in paperback?

It's fantastic seeing the book in paperback and knowing that it will be reaching more young readers because of this. Brian Fitzgerald's illustrations are incredible and I love the idea that more children will get enjoy his work. There are so many details to explore, discover and pore over and I love the way, as visual readers, our eyes are taken for walks through each of the different settings!