

# Literacy Time

## PLUS+

### Author Profile

**Why do so many people say they like nothing better than to spend their spare time curled up with a good book? And why do so many of us love watching movies – at the cinema, at home, or even on aeroplanes and in our cars?**

## ANTHONY HOROWITZ

The answer could be because we admire the authors' writing style or the cleverness of the plot, or it could be the quality of the acting or the special effects in the movie which appeal. But if we are truthful, the answer is often because, for a short time at least, we can use books and films to escape from the everyday world in which we live and enter a world of fictional fantasy. We can forget about our own troubles and dilemmas and watch the actors on the screen playing out their own problems – or in the pages of the book we can travel to far off places and enter

mythical worlds that we could never dream of visiting for real.

### Reasons to escape

When Anthony Horowitz was a child, he had some very good reasons to want to escape from the realities of his life. Even though he was born, in 1956, into a wealthy family, he does not remember his childhood days fondly. He recalls being unhappy and overweight ('I was an astoundingly large, round child'), he describes having to spend time with a 'truly evil' grandmother, and he hated the boarding school he went to ►



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from the age of eight. He remembers the headmaster as a cruel bully. He would flog his pupils until they bled, and once humiliated Anthony, making him stand up in front of the whole school before calling him 'stupid'.

At just 8 years old, there was little that Anthony could do to change his life for real, so instead he asked for a typewriter for his birthday and began to write stories, in which he could fantasise about how he could deal with characters like his grandmother or his headmaster. So, many of his stories featured characters getting revenge or getting even, and Anthony would tell his tales to his school friends to cheer them up, too.

He also developed a passion for movies: he could forget his troubles and lose himself in the glamorous, exciting, action-packed world of colourful characters like James Bond.

#### **Mysterious father**

There were more problems to come for Anthony. The world of privilege into which he had been born – and in which he was looked after by nannies and served by two cooks – was soon to be destroyed. His father appears to have earned his money through a powerful yet mysterious job

working for the MP Harold Wilson, who became Prime Minister in 1964. Anthony's father was known as a 'fixer' but nobody seems to know exactly what that role involved.

Before his death, Mr Horowitz had moved all of the family's fortunes into a secret bank account in Switzerland. When he died suddenly, unfortunately for Anthony and his mother, no one else could trace the money, so they were left without a penny.

#### **Passion for storytelling**

Although Anthony's childhood was unusual, unsettling and difficult, it inspired such a passion for writing and film that it helped him to build a highly successful adult career. He continued to develop his passion for storytelling and was writing professionally by the time he was 20. His first novel – *Enter Frederick K Bower* – a children's book, was accepted for publication when he was just 22.

Since then Anthony has written countless books for both adults and children, including the *Diamond Brothers* series, *Groosham Grange* (inspired by his unhappy boarding school days), and a supernatural series called *Raven's Gate*. Anthony has also written for television

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◀ (he created the series called *Midsomer Murders* which stars John Nettles), for film (including the script for the *Stormbreaker* movie) and the theatre, including a West End play, *Mindgame*. He has even written the text (or *libretto*) for a Broadway musical, based on Dr Seuss' book *The 5,000 Fingers of Dr T*.

### Stormbreaker

Most recently, it is the *Alex Rider* series which has most captured the imagination of young readers and has led to further success through the movie, *Stormbreaker* which features big stars like Ewan McGregor (as Ian Rider), Stephen Fry (Smithers), Mickey Rourke (Darrius Sayle), Bill Nighy (Alan Blunt) and Alicia Silverstone (Jack Starbright).

The books (seven in the series to date) centre on a 14-year-old boy, Alex Rider, who is brought up by his uncle, Ian. When Ian Rider dies, it is the start of a new life for Alex as a spy – a life for which, he discovers, his uncle has been preparing him all along.

Anthony has always said he is not like Alex – but wished to be more like him. His passion for the James Bond stories and the mystery films of Alfred Hitchcock is reflected in the Alex Rider books, as is his taste for adventure.

Anthony has had a few action-packed adventures of his own. He loves scuba-diving (has even swum in the same waters as hammerhead sharks in the South China Sea), has worked as a cowboy in Australia, and has crossed the Andes on foot.

When he is not out and about, Anthony can be found writing in his office in a warehouse conversion in central London, which looks over the London skyline. He lives with his wife, Jill, and his chocolate Labrador, Lucky (so named because she has been run over and survived three times). He has two sons – Nicholas and Cassian. ■



On-screen resource 1 in the March 2008 issue of *Literacy Time PLUS Ages 9 to 11* (No 53) features an extract from the novel *Stormbreaker* and a clip from the movie showing the same scene, making it perfect for pupils wishing to explore how novels translate to the big screen. The resource also includes a short video showing the movie being made, and video interviews with Alex Pettyfer (who plays Alex Rider), Stephen Fry (who plays Smithers in the film clip) and Anthony Horowitz.

