



Writing advice from a Dame!

Jaqueline Wilson is one of the most popular and recognised children's authors in the UK. So when she visited the Scholastic offices we asked her to share all her valuable writing tips.

Writing advice

Why did you decide to become a writer? For how long have you been a writer?

Even before I could read I have always loved looking at books and as soon as I realised someone was behind those lovely books I knew I wanted to be a writer.

How do you stay in tune with the issues facing children and teenagers today?

Although it is a long time since I was a child or teenager, I meet with lots of children at book signings and get hundreds of emails and letters every week. At signings I love looking at the latest fashions and talking to children about their hobbies and what they like to do with their friends. But maybe it is because I am still a ten year old girl at heart because I am still interested in what children are interested in!

What makes a good book?

Nowadays books need an immediately gripping story as children are not content to read a couple of chapters before the story gets going. From the very first paragraph children need to be sucked into the story.

Whether it's a real-life or fantasy the author has to believe 100% in the world that they are creating so children will want to step into this world as well.

Where do you draw your inspiration to write?

I don't think I have ever been inspired sitting at my desk and trying to think of ideas. Mostly I get ideas when I am doing something else entirely. I like to swim so I might get an idea when I am swimming up and down the local baths. My ideas always come when I am least expecting it. That's the exciting bit you can't control inspirations it just happens!





Do you find writing easy? Where do you normally write?

I think I find writing easy! I always find it slightly daunting settling down to write at the beginning of a story but the moment I start to write my imaginary world takes over. I can write about a 1000 words a day if I have to.

I do most of my writing in a notebook with a pen so I can write anywhere - sitting at the kitchen table, in the back of the car, on an airplane and once even standing up at a queue in the post office.

What tips would you give children who want to become writers?

Read lots- this is not to copy other people's ideas but the more you read the more it will enrich your imagination so you can come up with ideas of your own.

Keep a diary – children tell me all the time they want to be a writer but they don't actually write. Keeping a diary will get you into a habit of writing everyday.

Don't be too tough on yourself – if you get fed up with your story it doesn't matter you can put it down and start afresh.

The Suitcase Kid

Where did the idea for the Suitcase Kid come from?

I wanted to write a book about what divorce was really like from the child's point of view. I also wanted to write a story which shows divorce is more than just parents splitting up it could also mean a new home or new siblings or both.

Why are the chapters in alphabetical order?

I chose to write The Suitcase Kid with the chapter titles following an alphabetical order as I thought this seemed like a lovely idea to present a book in a different way. It also meant I did not have to tell the story hour by hour of what was happening in Andy's life and I could jump about in the story and leave bits out if I wanted to.

What sort of language and techniques did you use to help the reader visualize the characters and settings?

I usually write in the first person, so I can tell the story from the main characters point of view. This also allows me to tell the story as directly as possible so the reader feels like they are being told the story face to face.



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Although if you write in the first person you sometimes do not get a very objective point of view it is a good way of involving the readers and making them see things quite vividly.

How would you describe the character of Andy? What were you like when you were Andy's age?

Andy is a very imaginative girl. I too lived in my own fantasy world when I was younger and had lots of imaginary friends. Sometimes my parents would also not get on so I know what it's like to have parents arguing.

Who was the most difficult character to write? Why?

Uncle Bill this is because it was important to get the balance right as he isn't an evil man just that Andy finds him very annoying.

What tips would you give children who want to become writers?

I think if you want to become a writer you have to be prepared to work extremely hard. I often ask children what they want to be when they are older and they tell me a writer and then I ask them why and they say they want to be rich and famous. Sadly most writers aren't at all rich and are not very famous! Most of all if you want to be a writer you have to write for the sheer joy of putting words together and living in your own imaginary world. But I can truly say it is the most fulfilling professions so to all you potential writers – good luck!