

MEET THE AUTHOR

Children's author **Jason Beresford** on reading and writing books and what makes him laugh



If there was one book you would recommend to a friend what would it be and why? Aaagh. Impossible to just pick one! My favourite book as a boy was Charlie and the Chocolate Factory (such imagination and economy of story telling – essential for a children's writer). As a teen it was To Kill A Mockingbird (because it was so thought provoking at a stage in my life when my thoughts needed provoking). Recently I have loved Shantaram (for the amazing breadth of vision), the Bookseller of Kabul (a reminder of how lucky I am) and all of Lee Child's Jack Reacher books (a very guilty pleasure!)

What was the last book you read that made you laugh? It is the autobiography of Jack Wild called "It's a Dodger's Life". I met Jack just before he died when I directed a documentary for ITV about the movie Oliver! Jack was battling throat cancer when we were filming but he still had a zest for life and a fabulous, infectious sense of humour that made working with him a joy. Reading about his scrapes as a young actor made me laugh a lot.

Which was your favourite book as a child? I probably should have read through all the questions before I started answering! It was Charlie and the Chocolate Factory (see Question 1).

What book are you reading now? It is "Black Wolf" by G.D Abson. It is a detective story set in modern day Russia and it is the setting I find particularly fascinating. It is another book – a bit like the Bookseller of Kabul – that makes me very grateful to be living in the UK.

Whose biography would you like to write? What a great question! Of the great figures of the past I immediately think of Shakespeare, or Nelson Mandela or John Lennon if it allowed me to sit down and talk to them one to one about their lives.

Do you dream your books? No. But sometimes when the ideas come it feels like a day dream because they seem to appear in your head out of thin air.

Do you ever scare yourself with the stories that you write? I don't because my stories aren't usually scary stories. I like to write funny stories. I do make myself laugh sometimes though and that is a bit weird!

Did you write good stories when you were at school? I am not sure if they were good stories but I wrote lots of stories. Usually about football because I was a big football fan – like most of the boys at my school - and that was all we ever talked about. The teachers must have longed for stories about something else!

Do you ever get stuck when you are writing? Yes! Very very regularly. Sometimes the answer is to write something that is okay rather than sit there waiting to have an idea that is brilliant.

Which book have you read that surprised you and why?

Great Expectations. I read it as a fresher at university – where I was doing an English degree – and it was my first Dickens novel. For A Level I had read books by other giants like George Eliot, Charlotte Bronte, Thomas Hardy and Jane Austen and (don't tell anybody) I hadn't enjoyed them. I was a working class teenage boy growing up in Coventry who liked football and The Specials. So reading these great canons of literature often felt like wading through porridge in concrete shoes. I assumed Dickens would be the same. He wasn't. Funny, clever, gripping and full of plot twists. My imagination was well and truly caught. Surprising on every level.

What inspired you to want to write? My kids is the short answer but I have always enjoyed writing and – just as importantly – sharing what I have written because I do like entertaining people. (My mum would probably say I am a bit of a show off.) I wrote pantomimes and sketch shows at university. Then I went to Japan and had a fabulous time writing a couple of stage shows with some friends. After that I was a TV reporter for years so I was writing stories every day. Then my children came along and making them laugh and capturing their imagination, felt like the most important thing in the universe. So when I had a funny idea about a superhero with really rubbish super powers (Slug Boy, who can wobble about a bit and move really slowly) I put him into a little story. It was initially to entertain my own children but then when I realised I could have an impact on other kids as well, that really was inspiring.

What are your top tips for people wanting to write a book? 1. Keep going. Start it, then get to the middle and carry on to the end. I know that sounds simplistic but it is supposed to be a rallying cry! I know it is very tempting to give up when you feel you have run out of ideas but the satisfaction of reaching the last page really is phenomenal so plough on. 2. Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good – whether it is at word, sentence or chapter level. Most writers I know are plagued by insecurities about their lack of talent (I know I am). But if you aren't careful you can over analyse and over edit yourself to the point that you lose your mojo. And it is really important to remember that it is your mojo that inspired you to pick up a pen in the first place so don't let it go.

Do you have a message for our NHS front line staff? You are doing a fabulous job and I can't thank you enough!

