

Reviving the Art of Storytelling on World Book Day - April 2011

by Annette Robbins, Librarian, Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Bristol

It is always with slight apprehension that I make a booking with an author who has not previously visited the school. This pressure is magnified given the weight of expectation when celebrating World Book Day. Early email communication with local, Bristol author T.M. Alexander proved promising when she was not only very accommodating but said she was happy to use flipchart rather than any multi media, advanced technology.

I booked our prestigious theatre for the occasion of the visit. The author is on a stage effectively in the round, at a level with the audience. Using the theatre meant I could open up the event to the entire group of eighty, year 7 highly, excitable boys.

When Tracy arrived on the morning of Thursday 3rd March, the date of this year's World Book Day she had in tow a cream steel bin which she said, when questioned, was full of props. My curiosity was aroused so I knew instantly that the boys would likewise be curious and that the session would have immediate appeal.

There followed a raucous hour in which Tracy with flipchart and pen, extracted wild ideas from the boys that were included in the adventure story that she said they were going to help her create to celebrate World Book Day. There was no shortage of volunteers shouting "Pick me! Pick me!" when at intervals during the composition of the story, a prop was drawn out of the cream bin, which sat centre stage. These props, which included a Lemur tail and a Russian hat were incorporated into an ever expanding storyline that seemed to explode across the stage. Tracy was not cowed by the level of excitable noise, clapping and laughter displayed by the pupils. She had the right measure of allowing them to participate enthusiastically, without loss of control. The noise could be viewed as a barometer of how much fun the pupils had and the great ideas they suggested for ending the story demonstrated that in participating, the boys felt the story belonged to them. It was storytelling with a difference, an inclusive storytelling which felt appropriate for the occasion and significance of the day.

Tracy happily stayed and signed books after the event for pupils and it was interesting to note, that whilst I had her Tribe series on display, she did not refer to them in the session and yet I sold more books at that event, than with previous authors who actively promoted their books.