



Author Spotlight — Skye Hughes

We're All in This Together — a Picture Book by Skye Hughes



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Author: Skye Hughes

Why was it important for you to write 'We're All in this Together'?

I wanted to write a story that children could see themselves and their experiences reflected in. With the media and adult conversations ever present in our young people's lives, it was important to create a tool and resource for parents and teachers to use to help spark conversations about the pandemic and our ever-changing world with their children and students. Children are our future, and writing this book to help build connection and resilience in this moment in history was something I knew could help benefit their mental health and wellbeing.

What is the most important message you would like children to learn from 'We're All in this Together'?

I would love them to be reminded of our global community. This is a shared experience with people all over the world, and it is important to pause and reflect on the significance of this experience. The message is one of hope, resilience and unity.

How important do you feel it will be for children to discuss their lockdown experiences as you've described in 'We're All in this Together', once they return to school in 'normal' ways?

Having open conversations and giving children the time and space to process this experience is essential to normalising their emotions. It's okay to feel scared, or lonely or worried or unsure or have questions – and as adults, it's sometimes hard to know how to have these conversations and hold space for our little people. This book provides a tool to help make that happen. When we look at the statistics of mental health in primary school aged children, it can be confronting. The sooner we can build resilience by fostering gratitude and empathy, the better! This is why open discussions in a safe environment to help normalise emotions and allow them to be expressed in a healthy way is so important to the development of our young people.

Are you planning to write any other stories that might follow up on 'We're All in this Together'?

I am working on it! I'm in the drafting process of a follow up story, while also playing with new ideas that similarly explore big issues currently circulating our globe.

Do you like the way Alice Coates has illustrated your story?

I adore them! I love her line work and her attention to detail in mirroring some of the text in her illustrations. Her quirky and bright style caught my eye in the very initial stages, and I knew she would be the perfect illustrator for this project.

What do you like best about the illustrations?

I love the vibrant colours and the way each character stands out in their own way. She also draws arms without elbows, and I love that they remind me of spaghetti.

Which is your favourite illustration?

This is a tough call! Can I say all of them? I love Roshan lounging on the couch with his dog, or Kiana's eyes twinkling as she smiles. I feel these images perfectly capture so much of what lockdown has been like around the globe.

Now let's talk about you as a writer. When did you know you wanted to be a writer?

I have been writing stories for as long as I can remember. My mum recently gave me a bunch of school books from my primary years and they were filled to the brim with creative stories featuring terrible spelling and grammar! I suppose I've always been drawn to words and expression through writing. I think it was during high school though that I really fell in love with writing. I was lucky enough to have some incredible teachers who nurtured a love of literature and deep thinking and continually pushed me to try new things and explore different styles.

Where do you write? Do you like to be by yourself in the quiet, or do you like to write in a noisy space?

I mix it up all the time! What works for me one day, doesn't always work the next. I find changing my space is a great way to reset my mind. I often like knowing there is someone else in the house when I write at home, it helps keep me accountable and means I can shout out or share ideas when inspiration hits. My partner is very used to me throwing random questions at him without any context, particularly throughout lockdown!

What do you use to write – pencil and paper or computer?

If I'm out and about I'll often jot down in the moment thoughts in my phone notes and then transfer them to my computer at home. At home, I like to plan on paper and then take those thoughts and draft them on my computer. If I am ever feeling stuck, I will mix up mediums and switch to pencil and paper and find this super effective!

Do you have any advice for children as writers?

Enjoy the experience and remember there are no right answers. Write what you know and be creative. Writing is supposed to be fun, don't take yourself too seriously.

Do you have any advice for teachers in their role as writing guides?

When children are just starting, it's about fostering a love of writing. Positive reinforcement and affirmations help build confidence, as does setting them up for success with clear structures or ideas to get them started. Acknowledge every effort students' make when attempting something new, and during creative writing, avoid critiquing (that can be done in analytical writing if it has a place!). I also believe that removing any pressure associated with an outcome is a great way for young people to find their own feet with writing and feel more comfortable to explore and take risks.

What is your favourite picture book?

This is such a tough question! There are so many wonderful picture books. My favourite would have to be the same as it was when I was still a little girl, 'My Brown Bear Barney' by Dorothy Butler which was originally published in 1989. The story has always reminded me of being tucked into bed and having my Mum read to me every evening, precious memories!

Who is your favourite author? What do you like about his or her work?

Kobi Yamada, author of 'What Do You Do With An Idea?' and 'What Do You Do With A Problem?' has been an author I have admired for the past few years. His books are beautifully executed and speak to both children and adults alike. I love the way he captures an experience such as having a problem or an idea and expresses them in a universal way. I've even his books with my high school senior classes to help spark creativity and inspire action when choosing final project ideas – and they love them!

