



Nick Sharratt wins the 2017 Bookbug Picture Book Prize



'In quiet times and sleepy times a child can dwell in thoughts of his own, and in songs and stories of his own.'

Although children's author Margaret Wise Brown wrote these words over fifty years ago, they are still just as true today. Children need 'quiet times and sleepy times' all the more in our frenetic 21st century world – and they also still need songs and stories to 'dwell in.' Sharing a book with a parent, sibling, friend, teacher or librarian is one of childhood's greatest pleasures, and there is nothing better than a good picture book to show young children that reading is fun – but just what makes a good picture book great? Is it the story? The drawings? The plot? The jokes? A familiar story? An unfamiliar one?

'What's wonderful about picture books is the power that a young child has to turn images into real things for them, to actually engage with those pictures in a really intense way and to feel the sensations of what the picture's showing, and to step into the picture... I go goosebumpy when I think about the picture books.' (Nick Sharratt)

 For the first **Bookbug Picture Book Prize**, the **Scottish Book Trust** made a shortlist of three top contenders; *There's a Bear on My Chair* by **Ross Collins**, *Shark in the Park on a Windy Day* by **Nick Sharratt**, and *Hare and Tortoise* by **Alison Murray**. Then the trust handed the award over to some judges who really knew what they were looking for – the children.  Last November all Primary 1 pupils were given the three shortlisted picture books in the **Bookbug Primary 1 Family Bag**, and schools, libraries and nurseries were encouraged to vote

for their very favourite book. It didn't stop there either – the Trust provided lots of resources to make choosing fun, from activity packs, author videos and games to ideas for Bookbug parties and events. Over 19,000 children aged 3-7 cast their votes, and last Thursday at the **National Library of Scotland**, the winner was announced.

✘ **Catriona Wallace**, SBT's Head of Early Years, opened the evening; partnership with the Primary 1 Family Bag is, she explained, a huge part of the Picture Book Prize. The Trust delivers four book bags to every child in Scotland, from birth to Primary 1; the **Baby Bag**, **Toddler Bag**, **Pirate Bag** and the **P1 Family Bag**. There are also **Gaelic** versions of each bag available. The Trust is passionate about inspiring children to become lifelong learners, and the books in the P1 Bag form part of the experience of going to school (they are also available to home schooled children – parents should contact their local Bookbug co-ordinator, whose details can be found on the SBT website). Reading with your child is, Catriona said, 'vitaly important...a special time.'

2016 was the **Year of the Dad – Douglas Guest of Fathers** ✘ **Network Scotland** has said that 'story time (has)... become one of the most treasured parts of being a dad' (you can read Douglas's wonderful blog about his own shaky start in reading, and the joy he has found in reading with his own sons, [here](#).) Involving parents in the distribution of the Family Bags has encouraged some to volunteer to come into schools to read with children on a longer term basis – 'in some places' said Catriona, 'this would have been inconceivable before Bookbug.'

Welcoming the three shortlisted authors – and even Bookbug himself (or herself?) – to the stage, **Minister for Childcare and Early Years Mark McDonald MSP** spoke about the Scottish Government's commitment to children's reading. Like the Trust, Mark is keen to encourage parents to read with their children, noting that a child who is read to is far more likely to do

well academically;

‘Einstein said “If you want your children to be intelligent read them fairy stories; if you want them to be more intelligent, read them more fairy stories”‘

Mark also explained that the government’s new **Baby Boxes** scheme aims to give babies essential items, and ‘essential’ doesn’t only mean nappies. The Baby Box will also include materials from Bookbug – so when the scheme is rolled out across the country in the summer, Bookbug will reach every new baby in Scotland.

✘ And finally – the winner of the 2017 Prize was announced! Much loved by parents and children everywhere, **Nick Sharratt**, who has illustrated over two hundred books – including those of **Jacqueline Wilson**, **Jeremy Strong**, **Julia Donaldson** and **Michael Rosen** – is also an acclaimed children’s author in his own right. My children loved his *My Mum and Dad Make Me Laugh*, but his *Shark in the Park* books (*Shark in the Park*, *Shark in the Dark*, and now *Shark in the Park on a Windy Day*) are perhaps especially popular. Mark McDonald said that almost all the books that got his autistic son into reading have been written or illustrated by Nick – ‘He’s a hero to my family’.

Accepting the trophy, designed by Scottish paper artist **Emily Hogarth**, Nick said;

‘It’s wonderful to have my book included in the shortlist, ✘ and to see how children, schools, parents, teachers and librarians have all come together to be a part of this, with things like kite flying, painting and even acting out the stories – to see children having their say and reading and enjoying all of the books.’

Nick thanked the Bookbug team and the ‘fantastic’ Scottish Book Trust, with whom he has toured all round Scotland and met many, many children. The Award, he said, was ‘a huge honour –

and long may it last!’

Closing the evening, SBT Early Years Trainer **Paul Kane** commended not only all three authors, but also Scotland’s teachers, parents and librarians for their enthusiasm in getting ‘their’ children involved in the prize. He also thanked the Scottish Government for its continuing commitment to Bookbug, and **Creative Scotland**, in partnership with whom the Trust manages the Picture Book Award.

☒ So what does make these three books so special? For me it’s their sense of humour, their excellent artwork and their ability to address children’s very real worries in a fun way. Why not watch the SBT’s three author videos, in which Nick Sharratt, Alison Murray and Ross Collins read their own words, and decide for yourself? You can find all of them in the Bookbug section of the SBT website. Or better still, get hold of the books, and read them, preferably with a child – though if no child is available, you could do worse than read them to your dog, as one librarian at Thursday’s reception told me she does. Her Doberman absolutely loves it. Books change lives – including canine ones, apparently.

Shark in the Park on a Windy Day by Nick Sharratt is ☒ published by Picture Corgi; *There’s a Bear on My Chair* by Ross Collins is published by Nosy Crow; *Tortoise and Hare* by Alison Murray is published by Orchard Books.

Bookbug runs regular free, fun and friendly **Rhymetime** sessions for babies, toddlers, pre-schoolers and their families to enjoy together. Each session lasts around 30 minutes and includes songs, stories and rhymes, there is usually no need to book, they take place in a very relaxed environment and are a great opportunity to spend some quality time with your child. To find out more take a look at the Bookbug pages on the Scottish Book Trust website, or **ask at your local library** – most run at least one session a week, often more. The Bookbug pages also offer lots of ideas to help you explore

books and songs with your child at home.

