

2007/June Michael Rosen, Children's Laureate - Publishing News

Under the banner and battle cry of 'Diverse Verse For All!', may I present to you the new Children's Laureate: Michael Rosen. Poet, presenter, author, performer, broadcaster, lecturer, sometime playwright and activist, Rosen is a wellspring of creativity and probably best known as *the* bard of childhood; he's also the man behind *Word of Mouth* on BBC Radio 4, and *We're All Going on a Bear Hunt*, the now classic, award-winning readaloud picture book, illustrated by Helen Oxenbury.

In the eight years since Quentin Blake first assumed the role, the Children's Laureateship has grown in stature exponentially and Rosen, who takes over Jacqueline Wilson, is more than happy with his two-year posting. "Two years means that in the lifespan of most of us there will be plenty of Laureates, which is good and all for the best. And there's no reason why you shouldn't carry on with your ideas after you leave - look at Quentin with his museum of illustration. Clearly the way it's evolving is that the Book Trust want us to think of ourselves as a Laureate band...although in no way should it be some kind of aristocracy and this isn't a coronation."

Whatever the post is, or isn't, potential holders must be approached and asked if they will take the job on. Rosen was on a train when Shami Chakrabarti, director of the human rights organisation Liberty and Chair of the selection panel, called him. "I thought she was asking me to do a job for Liberty, and for half a second I muddled it with Amnesty, so I was already on the wrong wavelength and in itself the moment was quite poetic."

He was, he says, over the moon when he realised she was talking about the Laureateship because he'd assumed he wouldn't get asked until he was just about to drop off his perch. "I thought it was wonderful and I wondered how I could make it good for all the poets I know who flog their shoes to bits going round schools, like Valerie Bloom, and are somehow below the radar. These are people who should be celebrated."

Rosen is impassioned about everything he does, but particularly so when it comes to making schools more poetry-friendly. "Poetry has a fixed place in the curriculum - you will now look at a rhyming poem, discuss the verse

structure, tick, done - but it's not popular in the true sense, not being shared and enjoyed the same way it was back in the 80s. As a result of the Literacy Strategy quite a lot of it has been controlled down to 'read a poem, answer these questions on it'. I'm very strong on the idea that education has got it wrong about literature in general - it's not all about facts, outcomes, chronology and logic, they've missed the point...but it is my intention to be positive, people are alienated when you're just negative and that's no way that wins hearts and minds."

This is, you feel, going to be an interesting two years.