

## Library Newsletter 23 January 2020



### *Author SF Said in the Library!*

It's already nearly the end of January and I can't believe this is the first proper newsletter from the Library this term. Apologies for this – there are good reasons!

As you may know, the Library was transformed into a prayer/mindfulness space in the first week back from Christmas break so we had a very short week then, mainly for the children to return their books and borrow new ones. Then, last week, we were preparing for a visit from the amazing SF Said – of which there is more below. This week is the first 'normal' week back, giving me a breather to catch up on things.

Thank you to everyone who supported the event on Friday – I hope your children were as inspired as I know many of us adults were by SF's talk. For those of you who ordered books online and whose children were unable to collect a copy on the day, the bookseller is sending them today (signed!) to the school by first-class post so we should have them tomorrow. I have also bought three copies of each of SF's three books and they have nearly all been borrowed now in a wave of excitement!

### **Congratulations!**

Huge congratulations are in order for three of our young writers at St Michael's. Just before Christmas, the County Library Services ran a Christmas story competition and several children entered. I visited the children's section at Central Library on Monday and discovered that there were three winning stories – and two of them came from St

Michael's! Evie and Sophia in Year 4 collaborated on a story entitled 'A Christmas Tale' and Joshua's (Year 3) picture book, 'The Twin Christmas Cats', which featured in one of our Christmas newsletters, also won. Please join me in congratulating these children on their marvellous achievement. To have two out of three of the winners from the same school is outstanding and shows what fantastic writers we have.

### **The early bird catches the writing worm**

With the above in mind, we have details of two brilliant writing competitions that your children might want to enter:

#### **The Wicked Young Writer Award**

If you have a story to tell – whether as a piece of prose, poetry, an article or script – Wicked (the West End Musical) wants to hear from you! They are looking for pieces of up to 750 words maximum on absolutely anything, written by young people aged 5-25. Please see the attached poster for more information, or visit: [www.WickedYoungWriterAwards.com](http://www.WickedYoungWriterAwards.com). The closing date is 2 March 2020 and I will be dedicating Wednesday lunchtimes to writing, henceforth known as 'Writing Wednesdays'!

#### **500 Words**

Radio 2's annual 500 Words competition is back for its tenth year! We have had children enter in the past and would love children to do so again this year. The closing date is 8pm on 27 February, so get writing! Here's some blurb from the website:

*There's only one rule with 500 Words – which is the word limit. We want to see creativity and raw imagination. This competition is absolutely NOT about spelling, grammar or punctuation. It's not a curriculum exercise or writing test. Every single story we receive helps to improve education worldwide. Our buddies at Oxford University Press pour hours into studying the stories we receive and it's led to the biggest database of children's writing in the world. The findings of their research get taught in lectures and seminars worldwide, helping inform curriculums and improve education.*

#### **Author visit: SF Said**

Last Friday afternoon, we were delighted to welcome author SF Said to St Michael's. He gave an inspiring and interesting talk to all children in Key Stage 2 about his writing and how he arrived at where he is today: a multi-award-winning author – which is what he always wanted to be from a very young age after his mother gave him a copy of *Watership Down* which is his favourite book. He encouraged the children to follow their dreams, no matter what, and to dream big, and then asked them what they all wanted to do when they grew up. Answers varied from footballer, actor, writer (!) to teacher, farmer, marine biologist, archaeologist and astronaut!

Giving us a healthy dose of reality, SF spoke about how he sent out his first ever book to publishers, expecting them all to sign him on. Forty rejections later, he was annoyed and surprised and thought that publishers were clearly stupid. He then wrote a second book and, 40 more rejections later, thought maybe *he* was stupid instead. So he started researching people whose work he admired – film directors, writers etc, and heard them mention something called ‘a draft’ and realised that this was what he needed to do with his book because no book is ever perfect on the first attempt.

He then revealed that, since that moment, he writes lots of drafts until he’s happy, which takes a long time – three years at a minimum and seven years so far is his longest. SF had some helpful advice for aspiring writers – to write the first draft longhand, rather than on a computer, because it’s not as easy to delete in a notebook than on the screen. Then put it in a drawer for a while and come back to it with the mindset of a reader. Ask yourself whether you would pay good money for this book. Be honest! And don’t think it’s ready and finished until you can honestly answer that you would fork out £6.99 for it!

After the assembly, SF spent some time with Year 5, who used *Varjak Paw* as their class read before Christmas. The children read him some creative writing pieces they had completed from different characters’ viewpoints – many based on Cludge, the dog, and impressed SF with their imagination. In fact, since SF’s visit, some children in Year 4 have been plotting a story based on his third book – a science-fiction fantasy called *Phoenix* – which they have entitled ‘Phoenix Feather’.

This goes to show how important it is to have visiting authors – and illustrators – in the school. Children come away inspired to write and read and that lies at the very base of reading and writing for pleasure and will serve them well when they progress into secondary school and beyond.



*SF signing a fan's book!*

Below are some of the comments the children in Year 5 made about *Varjak Paw*:

"I really enjoyed reading the book because it was very well written with figurative language!" *America*

"I liked the idea of making a new breed of cat and Varjak visiting Meopotamia in his dreams." *Alfie*

"I like that Varjak Paw was brave enough to go to the city to find a dog. I also like that Varjak used the skills that Jalal gave him to defend himself." – *Jamal*

"What I like most about Varjak Paw is that Varjak when he wanted to save his friends, Holly and Tam, he was determined and didn't let anything stop him."

"I liked the part when Varjak meets Cludge and helps Varjak clean his wound." *Riham*

"My favourite character is Holly because at the start of the story she is a bit mean to Varjak but throughout the story she gets kinder and kinder and kinder." *Lara*

"My favourite part was when Varjak meets Sally Bones." *Thomas*

"My favourite thing about Varjak Paw is that it's a story of adventure and that Varjak has powers." *Jayen*

"I liked how it's about a secret world of cats and how a kitten is trying to learn his grandfather's martial arts." *Huw*

"I really enjoyed the description and effect." *Daniel*

"My favourite part was when Cludge and Varjak made friends. It's funny how Cludge talks to Varjak and Holly." *Elisabeth*

"I liked that Varjak was within his dream and he sees Jalal." *Rebecca*

"I liked Varjak Paw because that story is quite funny and the time where Razor scratches Varjak." *Yasir*

"The best parts of Varjak are when he is in a dream learning new skills and when he beats his brother in a battle." *Haroon*

"My favourite part about Varjak Paw is when Varjak meets Cludge and he's best friends!" *Renée*

"What I like most about Varjak Paw is how Varjak is disliked by most of his family but he still perseveres to save his family."

"My favourite character is Holly because she is adventurous and stern but inside she is kind and protecting."

"I really like the end of Varjak Paw because it's so dramatic!" *Aidan*

"I like Varjak Paw the most because he was different and stronger than the other Paws."  
*Benji*