

DAN SMITH Q&A

Here are some of the questions I have been asked in interviews or during school visits. If you have any other questions, please just get in touch!

What kind of books did you enjoy when you were growing up?

Growing up, I loved all kinds of different stories, but my favourites were always filled with adventure. I especially liked the Three Investigators series, and The Runaways by Victor Canning.

What is the first book you remember reading?

That's a great question . . . let me rummage through a few dusty boxes first. Ah, yes, Manx Mouse by Paul Gallico. I must have been about seven years old when I read it and can't remember much other than that it's about a mouse/opossum/kangaroo/monkey thing that's blue and has no tail. Oh, and I loved it.

What's your favourite book of all time?

That's such a difficult question to answer, and it usually depends on what mood I'm in! Umm . . . Lord of the Flies by William Golding. It's exciting, adventurous, dangerous, and just a little bit creepy - the perfect combination for a story.

What made you want to be a writer?

I *had* to be a writer. Books and films and comics have been a huge part of my life since I was very young, so I love stories. I always have stories spinning about inside my head, and if I didn't write them down, I would be unbearable!

Do you have a favourite place to write?

My favourite place is right here at home, but I don't have a writing place of my own, so I sit at the kitchen table.

What helps you write?

Peace and quiet. Tea and biscuits help too!

Would you say you're a day-dreamer?

There has always been a part of me that has drifted away to other places. My wife and children call it 'Danworld', and I can confirm that things are *always* exciting in Danworld!

Do you have any tips for aspiring writers?

Read a lot. I know it's tired advice, but it's so true. If you want to be a writer, you must love reading and you must love stories. Reading will help with all kinds of

things - from style and vocabulary to the basic mechanics of constructing a story. And it's also great inspiration when you find a book that you love.

You must also write a lot - but be sure to let your imagination run wild. You must never **ever** feel embarrassed by what you write about.

Be critical when you're reading your own work. Be honest with yourself. And if it's no good, either fix it or cut it.

Write because you enjoy writing, not because you like the idea of being a writer.

Where do you get your inspiration?

It usually just creeps up on me. I love stories so I read a lot of books and comics, and I watch a lot of films, so inspiration can often come from those things, but it might come from watching the news, browsing the TV guide, spotting an interesting story on-line or overhearing a conversation on the street. Anywhere!

What made you want to be an author?

I've always loved stories, and reading has been a big part of my life since I was very young. Growing up, I spent a lot of time in places where there were no televisions or games consoles, and sometimes even no electricity, so reading was the only thing to do. When I was at boarding school, books were a way of escaping from the routine of everyday life, so they were a great comfort to me. I suppose that after reading so many books, and having stories be such an important part of my life, it only seemed natural that I would write my own one day. And now I just can't stop myself!

What was your most unusual job?

I worked for the Social Security Fraud department for a while, and then I worked for a company that manufactured giant Christmas decorations for shopping malls. Do either of those count?

Why do you think reading is important?

Reading makes you smart! It helps young people to do better at school, it encourages us to be more open-minded, more creative, it expands our vocabulary, teaches us new skills, improves our memory, relieves stress, helps us to concentrate better, develops our understanding of other people and cultures,

provides a common bond with other people, it's entertaining, it helps us escape and . . . I could go on and on!

What is your key message when you speak to kids at school?

At schools I usually talk about my adventures, and about where ideas come from, but I also talk about the need for perseverance and practice. Like most authors, I have received my share of rejections, but I kept on working, practicing, trying to improve my writing, and re-submitting. The idea of practicing something over and over is often difficult for young people, but it's an essential part of becoming good at something. I also stress the importance of reading and how it can benefit them. I always end talks by telling them how 'Reading Makes You Smart'.

What is a typical writing day like for you?

That's an interesting question because if someone were to stand back and watch me work, it would look so boring. I drop my children off at school, answer a few emails, maybe take a few phone calls, then sit with a laptop, tapping at the keys, occasionally stopping to make a cup of tea or research something on the internet. But inside my head . . . that's a different matter. If you could see in there, it would be jungles and forests, arctic wastelands, exploding helicopters, deadly enemies and a fight for survival!

What is your favourite part of being an author?

I love it all, from writing the first lines of a book, to finally seeing it in covers, to going out to schools and talking to the students about what I do. I consider myself to be very lucky that I am doing what is, for me, the perfect job.

Where and when were you born?

I was born in England in 1970.

Where have you lived?

England, Sierra Leone, Sumatra, Brazil, Spain, and Russia!

Do you drive a Lamborghini?

Ha ha! No. I've been asked this a few times at schools, along with 'how much money do you earn' and 'are you rich?' Unfortunately very few authors are rich. I'm not sure I'd want to drive a 'Lambo' anyway.

Can you do a backflip?

No.