

Introducing... Britain's New Children's Laureate



An interview with **Jacqueline Wilson**
by Robin Thomas

Author Jacqueline Wilson's first novel was written for adults, but fortunately for millions of youngsters, she much prefers writing for children. She has written more than 75 novels to date, has been translated into over 30 languages, and sales of her novels have topped an amazing 20 million copies worldwide!

Jacqueline Wilson routinely displaces J.K. Rowling from the top of bestseller lists in the UK, has won dozens of awards, including the prestigious Smarties Award and has been shortlisted for several more. She has also been the most-borrowed author from UK public libraries for two years running, and in 2005 was named Britain's new Children's Laureate—an honour which acknowledges the importance of exceptional children's authors in creating the readers of tomorrow.

Accolades aside, what makes her writing so appealing to children? Well, she uses a direct approach tempered with humour and sensitivity, and tackles all manner of subjects: divorce, death, bullying, coping with stepfamilies, guilt, parental neglect, sexuality and friendship. Her stories are filled with warmth and quirky characters and one has only to read a novel of hers to understand why her signings can last up to eight hours!

An avid reader, Wilson takes along at least 20 books when going on holiday, and owns more than 15,000 books herself. A vocal proponent of reading aloud to your children, Ms. Wilson expressed it best in her acceptance speech for Children's Laureate when she said "there's nothing quite like a real person, an arm cuddling you, a smile at the close of a chapter."

Jacqueline Wilson answered a few questions for READ magazine from her home in near London:

Your books deal with difficult issues, such as bullying, coping with new stepfamilies, death and bereavement, depression, guilt, and many others. How do you decide which issues to address in your novels?

I don't start a book deciding to address a particular issue. I make up a child in my head and then decide to tell their story.

In the past, you have written a few books for adults, but now focus on writing for children. How does writing for children differ from writing for adults, and why have you chosen to focus on kids?

I much prefer writing for children. You can be more direct, funny and emotional.

You have over 15,000 books in your home. How do you decide which books to keep and what do you do with the ones you don't?

I try to keep most of my books—but I have dear friends in Hay-on-Wye who are second-hand booksellers so occasionally I give them books I don't want any more.

Why do you think children find your books so appealing?

Because they're written with humour in a direct contemporary style—they seem to make children laugh and cry.

What is the nicest compliment you received from one of your fans?

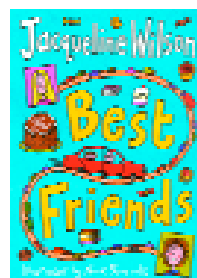
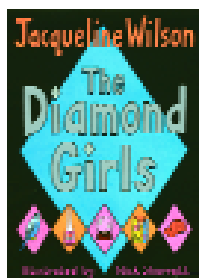
One child said that I am a "total goddess"!!

What does being Children's Laureate mean to you?

It means a great deal—it keeps me promoting children's literature in general. I'm trying very hard to encourage parents and caregivers to read aloud to their children.

In your acceptance speech for the Children's Laureate, you said, "If you get children reading eagerly then they're generally hooked on books for life." Can you give parents some advice on how to get their children reading eagerly?

My best advice is this: Read to them with enthusiasm when they're babies and toddlers—and carry on reading to them as they get older. It's the loveliest cosy bonding experience between adults and children. **R**



Two of the more than 75 novels Jacqueline Wilson has written—learn more at www.ReadMagazine.ca

Illustration of Jacqueline Wilson, above left, by Nick Sharratt from the cover of *The Jacqueline Wilson Diary 2006*