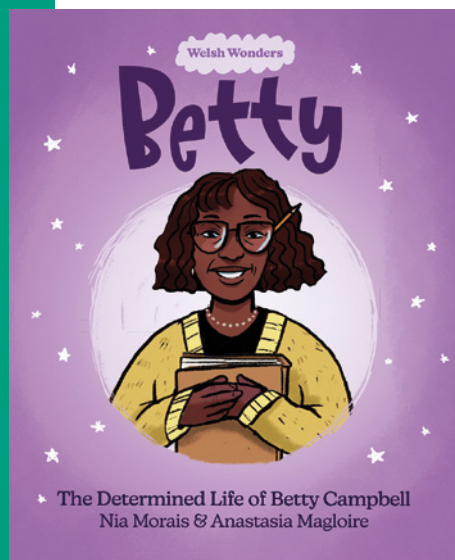
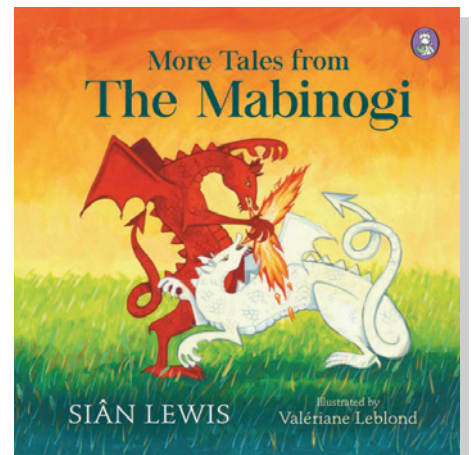
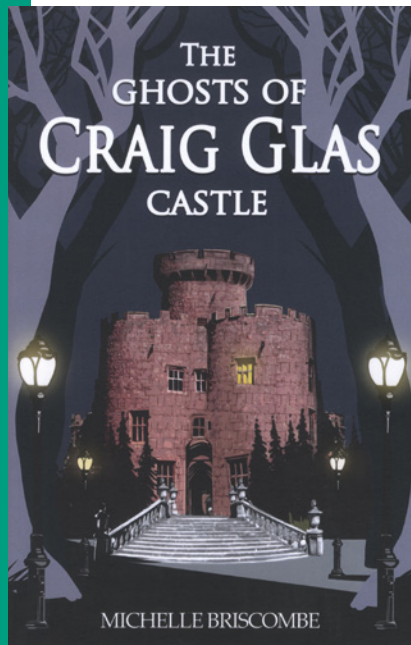


activity pack



A fun reading challenge that encourages reading for pleasure for primary-age children in Wales

# BOOK SLAM 2024-25



# Contents



	page
<b>What is BookSlam?</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2024–25 Books</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>General discussion questions</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Welsh Wonders: Betty – The Determined Life of Betty Campbell</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Meet the Author: Nia Morais</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>More Tales from the Mabinogi</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Meet the Author: Siân Lewis</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Where the River Takes Us</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Meet the Author: Lesley Parr</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Me and Aaron Ramsey</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Meet the Author: Manon Steffan Ros</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>The Ghosts of Craig Glas Castle</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Meet the Author: Michelle Briscombe</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>And I Hear Dragons</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Meet the Author: Hanan Issa</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Group reading log</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Reading log</b>	<b>21</b>

## What is the BookSlam?

This is an annual project that encourages young readers from Years 3–6 to read for pleasure, discuss the books they read, and enjoy preparing a creative video, as a group or class, based on one of the books on the reading list. Schools can compete in the 3 categories listed below, each category has its own reading list:

- Years 3–6 English medium
- Years 3 and 4 (Welsh medium) and Translingual schools
- Years 5 and 6 Welsh medium

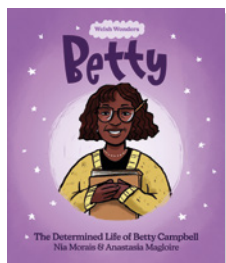
Guidelines are available for the three categories above.

The BookSlam competition is open to Years 3 to 6, and teachers are free to choose whether they would like to participate with whole classes or with reading groups. Schools will need to choose one book from the list to discuss and another to present as an advertisement. A county round will be held under the care of the county organisers, and the county winners will go on to the national round in the summer term.

The winning school will win a special trophy and one of the following:

- 1st prize – £200 worth of books
- 2nd prize – £150 worth of books
- 3rd prize – £100 worth of books

## 2024–25 Books



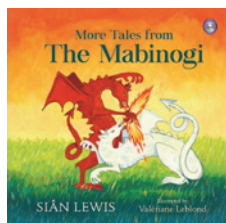
**Welsh Wonders: Betty – The Determined Life of Betty Campbell**  
(Nia Morais, Broga)



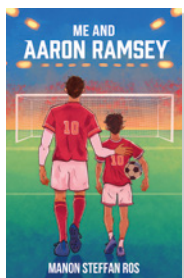
**Where the River Takes Us**  
(Lesley Parr, Bloomsbury)



**The Ghosts of Craig Glas Castle**  
(Michelle Briscombe, Candy Jar Books)



**More Tales from the Mabinogi**  
(Siân Lewis, Dragon Press)



**Me and Aaron Ramsey**  
(Manon Steffan Ros, Firefly Press)



**And I Hear Dragons**  
(Hanan Issa, Firefly Press)

## General discussion questions

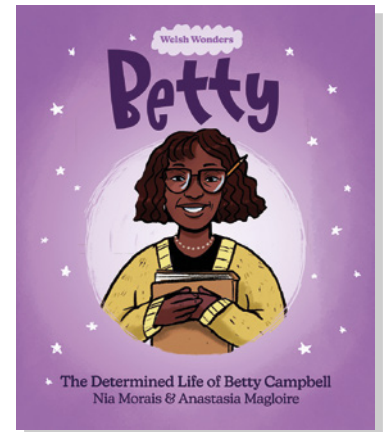
- What did you enjoy about the book and why?
- Describe your favourite part of the book. Why is this your favourite part?
- What didn't you enjoy about the book?
- Was this book easy to read?
- Was the book different to your expectations? If so, how?
- Were you happy with the ending of the story? Why?
- What would you like to change about the book? Why? How would you change it?
- Would you like to read the book again? Why?
- What questions did you have while reading the book? Were they answered? If so, how?
- What questions do you have now that you've finished the book?
- Do you think that you will remember this story in a few months or years? Why?
- Describe the book in one sentence.
- Would changing the location of the story have an effect on the story? How?
- Do you think that the title of the book suits the story? Why? If not, which title would you give to the book? What is your opinion of the cover?
- Did the book remind you of any other books, films, or TV programmes?
- Would you like to read more books like this? Why?
- What is your opinion about the themes that are discussed in the books?
- In your opinion, who is this book suitable for?
- If you were to meet the authors, which three questions would you like to ask them?
- If you had three copies of the book to give as presents, to whom would you give them? Why?
- If the book was made into a film or TV programme, who would you cast as actors for the main characters? Why?
- Have you learnt anything from reading the books? If so, what?
- Is there anything else you would like to learn more about after reading these books?
- How many of the stories in the book were you familiar with before you read it?
- What surprised you in this book? How so?
- Why do you think the author says that everyone should know these stories?
- Which patterns or recurring themes did you see in the book?
- If you could meet any character from the book, who would you like to meet and why?
- If you could be in the book, which events in the book would you like to experience yourself and why?



## **Welsh Wonders: Betty – The Determined Life of Betty Campbell**

**Nia Morais  
Broga**

Read about Betty Campbell's valuable contribution to our culture as Wales' first Black headteacher. Another book in the popular Welsh Wonders series.



### **Discussion Questions that work across the Areas of Learning and Experience**

- What kind of person was Betty?
- If you met Betty, what three questions would you ask her?
- What have you learned from reading Betty's story?
- What does 'determined' mean? Are you a determined person?
- Is Betty's story inspiring? Why?
- Betty is a hero to many people. In your opinion, what makes a hero?
- Do you have a hero?
- The book is part of a series called Welsh Wonders. Which other celebrities would you like to see in the series?
- Would you like to be a teacher?
- What do you want to do when you grow up?

### **Activities that work across the Areas of Learning and Experience**

Why not choose an inspirational person from history and create a portrait or profile of them? Use whatever medium you think will best suit your hero or inspirational person. Why not choose a celebrity from your village, town or city? You can display your portrait as a newspaper article for your local paper or community website.

Or...

A memorial has been designed to remember Betty Campbell and her important work and inspiring story. Have you seen the memorial in Cardiff? Why not design your own memorial to Betty? You can use words and pictures from the book to inspire you! Think about: where will your monument stand? What will it look like? What materials will be in your memorial?

### **Enjoyed Welsh Wonder: Betty – The Determined Life of Betty Campbell?**

#### **Why not try these next?**

**Welsh Wonders series – Broga**

**Wondrous Women of Wales – Medi Jones-Jackson – Y Lolfa**

**Brilliant Black British History – Atinuke – Bloomsbury**

**Black and British: An Illustrated History – David Olusoga – Macmillan**

## Nia Morais

### Where were you born and raised?

Cardiff.

### Where did you go to school?

Ysgol Pencae and then Ysgol Plasmawr.

### What did you like or dislike about school?

I loved reading and writing, learning new languages, and playing instruments (I learned the recorder and then the flute!).

### What did you want to be when you grew up?

First a lollipop lady, and then a hairdresser, and then an archaeologist, and then a doctor, and then a marine biologist ... but on top of everything else I always wanted to be a writer!

### What was your favourite book as a child?

Winnie-the-Pooh stories by A. A. Milne, *Molly Moon's Incredible Book of Hypnotism* by Georgia Byng, *Inkheart* by Cornelia Funke, *Indigo Blue* by Cathy Cassidy, everything by Meg Cabot, and I loved the *Calvin and Hobbes* comics.

### When did you start thinking about writing?

I loved reading so I wanted to write stories myself. My elder brother and sister also write so I got the idea of studying creative writing at university from them!

### Are there particular themes/subjects that appeal to you?

Magic.

### Do you have any advice for someone trying to write?

Don't worry if the idea isn't good at first. You need to try new things and be brave enough to experiment in order to create the story in your head.

### Quick Fire Questions:

#### What's your favourite childhood book?

*Inkheart* by Cornelia Funke.

#### Who's your favourite character from a children's book?

Calvin from the *Calvin and Hobbes* comics, or Mia Thermopolis from *The Princess Diaries*.

#### Favourite food?

Cake.

#### Favourite film/television programme?

*Coraline* and *Over the Garden Wall*.

#### Favourite word?

Sisial.

#### Superpower of choice?

Being able to blink from one place to another.

#### Favourite social media network?

TikTok.

#### What makes you smile?

Animals.

#### If not an author, what would you be?

A job to do with linguistics or a forestry officer.

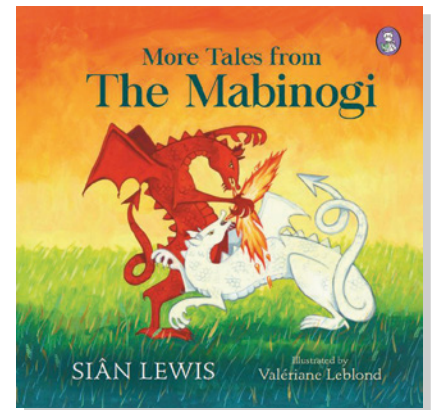
#### What's your advice for budding writers?

If you feel stuck and can't move forward with the writing, then there is something wrong with what you have already written. Go back not forward!

## More Tales from the Mabinogi

Siân Lewis  
Dragon Press

The much-anticipated sequel to the Tir na n-Og award-winning book *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi* by Siân Lewis, illustrated by Valériane Leblond. The three mythical stories skilfully re-told are 'Culhwch and Olwen', 'Lludd and Llefelys' and 'Macsen's Dream'.



### Discussion Questions that work across the Areas of Learning and Experience

- Have you read any of the other tales from the Mabinogi? Would you like to after reading this book?
- Do you enjoy reading or hearing myths and traditional legends? Why so?
- Do you have a favourite character? Why are they your favourite character? What do you like about them?
- Do you have a favourite story from the three in the book? Why?
- Have you heard of the Seven Wonders of Wales? What can you find out about them? Which one is closest to your school?
- Many stories have characters that have been described as 'good' and 'bad'. Why do you think stories need baddies? Why not make a list of the baddies you can think of from books or TV programmes to see what these characters have in common?
- Can you find any myths, legends or traditional tales that are in your local area?
- There are lots of giants in Welsh mythology, including Ysbaddaden Pencawr from the Mabinogi. Do you know of any others?
- If you had a magical power like one of the characters in the book, which would you choose and why?
- What century do the original tales originate from? Do you have a favourite century or historical period?

### Activities that work across the Areas of Learning and Experience

Research and choose a Welsh myth using the internet or books (we recommend *The Mab* by Eloise Williams and Matt Brown) and write a play to perform in front of your classmates. Remember to write a script, assign acting roles and think about costumes.

Or...

Why not create your very own pack of Mabinogi playing cards or top trumps? Make a list of all the characters (include the characters from *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi* if you can) and create illustrations and descriptions to match the characters.

### Enjoyed *More Tales from the Mabinogi*? Why not try these next?

*The Four Branches of the Mabinogi* – Siân Lewis – Dragon Press  
*Welsh Fairy Tales, Myths and Legends* – Claire Fayers – Scholastic  
*The Blackthorn Branch* – Elen Caldecott – Andersen Press  
*The Mab* – Eloise Williams and Matt Brown – Unbound  
*Culhwch and Olwen* – Catherine Fisher – Graffeg

## Siân Lewis

### Where were you born and raised?

I grew up near Aberystwyth in Ceredigion.

### Where did you go to school?

My first school was in the village of Penuwch. Then I went to Llanilar School, before moving on to Ardwyn School in Aberystwyth.

### What was the best thing about your school?

Apart from my friends and the staff, the best thing about my first school was the fact that I lived in a house that adjoined the school yard – because my dad was the headteacher. Sometimes, when everyone else had gone home, I would stay on in school and keep Miss Evans, the caretaker, company. While Miss Evans cleaned, I curled up in our little library and read books. I liked having a whole library to myself.

### What did you want to be when you grew up?

I pretended I wanted to be a ballerina, though I wasn't a very good dancer. Still, I enjoyed reading books about ballet, dreaming of being on stage and covering my bedroom wall with ballet pictures. Other than that, I wanted to study foreign languages, and that dream really did come true.

### What are your hobbies?

I like reading, walking and solving crosswords. I make up my own crosswords too, in Welsh, for our local *papur bro* and various magazines. I love dictionaries, because they help me with my puzzles.

### What was your favourite book when you were young?

It's difficult to choose a favourite book, but I do remember the first detective story I ever read. It was called *Trysorau Hafod Aur* by Meirion Jones. I was six years old when I read it, so it scared me a bit, but it didn't stop me reading detective stories. I still enjoy them.

### When did you consider being an author?

When my children were small, I began

working for the magazine department of the Urdd. That's when I first took an interest in writing. Writing for a magazine was fun, because you could do a bit of everything – stories, puzzles, history, cartoons.

### What advice can you give to budding authors?

When I was small, I used to type out stories and send them to my grandparents to read. It's a good idea to try out your stories on other people. Hopefully, they will tell you what they like, or don't like, and help you on your way.

### Do you have any rituals when you write?

I don't have any rituals, but I often have a cat on my lap. That helps (sometimes!).

### What is the best part about being an author?

When someone enjoys your book.

### Quick Fire Questions:

#### What's your favourite childhood book?

*The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett.

#### Favourite character?

Gwrhwr from *Culhwch and Olwen*. (He could speak every language, including the language of birds and animals – and ants!)

#### Favourite place to write?

In a room above my garage.

#### Favourite food?

A salad with lots of different ingredients.

#### Favourite film?

*The Wrong Trousers*, with the wonderfully sinister Feathers McGraw.

#### Favourite word?

Pilipala (the Welsh for 'butterfly').

#### What would my superpower be?

To fly like a pilipala.

#### What makes me smile?

My cat.

#### If not an author, what would you be?

A librarian.



# Where the River Takes Us

Lesley Parr  
Bloomsbury

From the author of *The Valley of Lost Secrets* comes a historical adventure set against a backdrop of the 1970s miners' strikes, perfect for readers aged 9+. Echoing *Stand By Me*, this thrilling middle-grade adventure gives us wonderful novel full of memorable characters, and a page-turning plot with relatable themes.



## Discussion Questions that work across the Areas of Learning and Experience

- How would you describe this book to another reader? Is it funny, sad, happy, exciting?
- The novel is set in 1974. What do you know already about this era? How is it similar or different to today?
- What kinds of things were popular in the 1970s? Think about fashion and music, for example. Can you find examples of books and films that were popular during this period?
- What does the Beast of Blaengarw look like to you? Can you create a picture or write a description?
- Would you like to go on an adventure like Jason and his friends?
- What is a strike? Did you know anything about strikes before reading this book? Have you learnt anything new?
- The novel takes place against the backdrop of the Valleys. What do you know about this area of Wales? Have you been to the Valleys? Do you live near or far away?
- Do you have a favourite character? Why are they your favourite?
- Have you read any of Lesley Parr's other books before? Would you like to after reading this one?

## Activities that work across the Areas of Learning and Experience

Why not play a part?

The hot seat ...

Sit in the 'hot seat' and play the role of one of the characters from the book, such as Jason, Richie, Catrin, Jinx, Tam, Rhodri, Aunty Pearl, Gary Hall, Dean Bolan or Snook Hall. The rest of the class can ask you questions.

Or...

*"I've got mates, good ones. Mates with a wild idea and just the right mix of stupidity and determination to pull it off."* (page 38). Two of the book's big themes are friendship and adventure. Why not split into two groups and discuss these themes in more detail? Can you find more examples from the book, like the one above, that exemplify these themes? How does the author showcase themes of adventure and friendship? Do these themes cross over in the story, and if so, how and where?

## Enjoyed *Where the River Takes Us*? Why not try these next?

*Raz Beri* – Matt Stephens – Firefly

*The Valley of Lost Secrets* – Lesley Parr – Bloomsbury

*Six Kids Save Planet Earth* – Paul W Robinson – Candy Jar Books

*Tapper Watson and the Quest for the Nemo Machine* – Claire Fayers – Firefly

*Me and Aaron Ramsey* – Manon Steffan Ros – Firefly

## Lesley Parr

### Where did you grow up?

Cwmafan, Port Talbot.

### Where did you go to school?

Cwmafan and Margam.

### What are your hobbies?

Cooking, walking, reading, seeing friends.

### What was your favourite book when you were young?

I had two: *The Little White Horse* by Elizabeth Goudge and *Watership Down* by Richard Adams, but what I read most was *The Beano* magazine.

### When did you consider being an author?

All my life, really, but I decided the time was right in 2011. It took ten years of hard work, learning and becoming a better writer till my first book, *The Valley of Lost Secrets*, was published.

### Are there any themes that appeal to you in particular?

I definitely seem to veer towards accepting change as a theme. And my books are always about relationships above all else – both friendships and familial. And always working-class!

### What advice can you give to budding authors?

The best advice I can give is to know when to walk away from your desk and take a break if the words aren't flowing. It's amazing how much more productive you can be if you give yourself a break – both physically and metaphorically.

### Do you have any rituals when you write?

Not really, but I like to put on music to suit the mood. I listen to a lot of albums by the tenor Joseph Calleja; so much so he gets a mention in the acknowledgments of my first book, which he has read and enjoyed, by the way! He sent me a voicenote to tell me – that was a moment!

## Quick Fire Questions:

### What's your favourite childhood book?

*The Little White Horse* by Elizabeth Goudge, and *Watership Down* by Richard Adams.

### Who's your favourite character from a children's book?

I have a huge soft spot for Todd Hewitt in Patrick Ness's YA Chaos Walking trilogy. I also love Gina Kaminski from *Gina Kaminski Saves the Wolf* by Craig Barr-Green and Francis Martin – a picture book, so the other end of the young reader spectrum!

### Where is your favourite place to write?

At my desk at home, with all my familiar and encouraging things around me.

### What's your favourite food?

Pizza or curry. I can't choose, sorry!

### What's your favourite film or show?

*Neighbours*, *Life on Mars* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Film-wise, it's between *Pride* and *The Wizard of Oz*.

### What would be your superpower of choice?

To fly.

### Favourite social media network?

Instagram.

### What makes you smile?

My husband and my friends. And thinking of my mother.

### If not an author what would you be?

A detective!

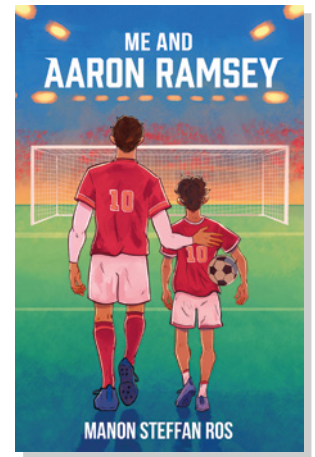
### What's your advice for budding writers?

Know when to walk away from your desk and take a break if the words aren't flowing. It's amazing how much more productive you can be if you give yourself a break – both physically and metaphorically!

# ***Me and Aaron Ramsey***

**Manon Steffan Ros**  
**Firefly Press**

*Me and Aaron Ramsey* tells the story of Sam and his dad who both love football, which is always there for them however tough real life becomes. That is, until Dad's dreams of football stardom go horribly wrong. Sam's love for the footballing legend becomes tangled with his relationship for his father as things go awry in their family life.



## **Discussion Questions that work across the Areas of Learning and Experience**

- Do you like football? Do you support a football team?
- Do you have a favourite football player?
- What is your favourite sport? Why?
- Did the story meet your expectations, after reading the blurb and looking at the cover? Would you recommend this book to other children your age? Why?
- Aaron Ramsey is Sam's hero. Do you have a hero? Why are they your hero?
- "Sometimes, I was so worried that my mind felt as if it were making a massive, terrible noise, even though everywhere was completely silent. Did everyone feel like this sometimes?" (page 22). Why not discuss the range of emotions that you think Sam experiences in the book? What advice would you offer to a friend who is feeling worried or scared? How can we show kindness to our friends when they are in this kind of situation?
- How does the author create suspense in the book? Can you find any examples in chapters 3 and 4?
- What are the main themes of the book? Can you find any examples in the book that demonstrate these themes?
- On the way to Cardiff, Divya plays Welsh-language music, including a song by Gareth Bonello. Why not listen to some of his songs, or research other bands and singers from Wales (there are a few more examples on page 94)? Do you have a favourite singer or band from Wales?
- Listening to music can lift our spirits and help us understand our feelings. Do you have a favourite song that always makes you feel better? Why this song? Can you describe the way the song makes you feel?

## **Activities that work across the Areas of Learning and Experience**

Sam tells the story of how he found his dad's notebook with a hand-drawn map of the town to show "every street, every lane and all the shops" (page 36–37). Why not draw your very own map of the village, town or city where you live? Or create an imaginary place and create a map of what it looks like. It can be magical or realistic and it can include, for example, a farm, shops, a football stadium. Remember to give your place a cool name!

Or...

Why not research the history of the national anthem of Wales? Sam sings the anthem before the football match and feels "proud" (page 103). Why not create your very own music poster with the lyrics of the anthem?

**Enjoyed *Me and Aaron Ramsey*? Why not try these next?**

*Raz Beri* – Matt Stephens – Firefly

*Fallout* – Lesley Parr – Bloomsbury

*Arnie's Flute 'N Veg* – Angie Roberts – Atebol

*Play* – Luke Palmer – Firefly

*Call Me Lion* – Camilla Chester – Firefly



## Manon Steffan Ros

### Where did you grow up?

I was born in Rhiwlas, a small hilltop village near Bethesda, north Wales.

### Where did you go to school?

Ysgol Gynradd Rhiwlas and Ysgol Dyffryn Ogwen, and I'm very grateful that I got to go to such great schools.

### What did you want to be when you grew up?

An author! I always loved books, and liked to think of little stories myself, but I didn't think that being a writer was a real job. I'm very, very grateful every day that I'm a writer now – it's the best job ever!

### What was your favourite book when you were young?

I had a really great teacher in Years 5 and 6, Gwenno Jones, and the books she read to us always captured my imagination. I specifically remember *O'r Tywyllwch* by Mair Wynn Hughes and *The Iron Man* by Ted Hughes. But I think that my favourite book when I was a child is still my favourite book to this day – *Boy* by Roald Dahl. I think the world of that book.

### What are your hobbies?

I love to read, of course, but I also like to watch things on TV – often random videos on YouTube! Cooking is also a great interest of mine, and football. I'm a big Liverpool fan and like to go to Anfield when I get the chance.

### Are there any themes that appeal to you in particular?

I like writing about young people, because I think it's an interesting, exciting but very difficult time in a person's life. Young people are expected to behave maturely like adults, but they don't have the same freedom as adults. That feels a bit unfair to me sometimes.

### What advice can you give to budding authors?

Remember that every writer works differently, and there is no wrong way to tell a story. Some writers make a definite

plan before writing a word, and others, like me, start writing without a clue in the world what will happen in the book. Don't worry about things like that ... and enjoy!

### What's the best / worst part about being an author?

The best thing is the fact that I make up stories all day, every day. The worst thing is that I get a bit obsessive about work and so sometimes stay up until the early hours writing ... but then I'm good for nothing the next day!

### Quick Fire Questions:

#### What's your favourite childhood book?

*Boy* by Roald Dahl and *O'r Tywyllwch* by Mair Wynn Hughes.

#### Who's your favourite character from a children's book?

It is very difficult to choose but I really admire Efa from the Melanai series by Bethan Gwanas.

#### What's your favourite food?

Bounties, mushrooms and cabbage, but not together!

#### What's your favourite film or show?

*Jurassic Park*.

#### What's your favourite word?

Trugaredd.

#### What would be your superpower of choice?

I think I would really enjoy the feeling of being able to fly.

#### Favourite social media network?

Twitter and TikTok.

#### What makes you smile?

Dad's bad jokes.

#### If not an author what would you be?

Historian.

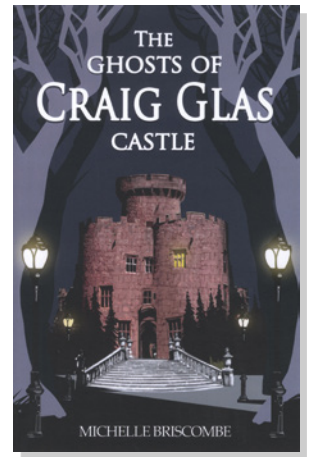
#### What's your advice for budding writers?

WRITE!

# ***The Ghosts of Craig Glas Castle***

**Michelle Briscoombe**  
**Candy Jar Books**

It's flattering when ghosts trust you with their stories -- if only they'd stop talking occasionally! So, when Flora and Archie are offered a trip to Craig Glas Castle in Wales and take a break from talking to ghosts, they can't wait to go. But not everything at the castle is what it seems, and soon the best friends embark on another ghostly detective adventure.



## **Discussion Questions that work across the Areas of Learning and Experience**

- What do you think is the message of the story?
- Would you recommend this book to a friend? Why?
- Have you read a ghost story before?
- Have you visited any castles before? Are there any castles near to where you live?
- This book is also a detective adventure. Do you like mysterious stories? Do you like adventure stories?
- How are Flora and Archie similar to each other? How are they different? What makes their friendship special?
- Did the story meet your expectations, after reading the blurb and looking at the cover?
- In groups or in pairs, why not try creating your own ghost story, similar to *The Ghosts of Craig Glas Castle*?
- Two of the book's big themes are friendship and adventure. Can you find examples from the book that exemplify these themes? How does the author showcase themes of adventure and friendship? Do these themes cross over in the story, and if so, how and where?
- Can you write your own descriptions of each character, and then draw a picture of what they look like next to the description?

## **Activities that work across the Areas of Learning and Experience**

How about designing your very own castle? You could do this using paper, or alternatively, you could create 3D models using cardboard and other materials you have in your classrooms. Or, using apps and technology available on computers or iPads, you could design your own digital castle. Remember to include, for example: turrets, a drawbridge and moat. Research different castles to help inspire you. Here are a few to help you get started: Conwy Castle, Caernarfon Castle, Cardiff Castle and Dolbadarn Castle.

Or...

How about creating a performance inspired by your favourite scene in the book? You will need to re-read the scene, write a script, and assign characters. You can take turns to perform in front of your classmates or film your performances and add effects using video editing software. You can then have a spooky cinema session and watch all your clips!

**Enjoyed *The Ghosts of Craig Glas Castle*? Why not try these next?**

***Megs*** – Meleri Wyn James – Y Lolfa

***The Haunted Life of Delores Mackenzie*** – Yvonne Banham – Firefly

**The Lucy Wilson Mysteries series** – Andy Frankham-Allen, Tim Gambrell – Candy Jar Books

***The Haunted Staircase and The Haunted Painting*** – Devika Rosamund – Candy Jar Books

***Vivi Conway and the Haunted Quest*** – Lizzie Huxley-Jones – Knights of Media

***Strange Tales*** – Daniel Morden – Firefly

## Michelle Briscombe

### Where did you grow up?

Cardiff and I moved to Barry when I was twelve.

### What was the best / worst thing about your school?

The best thing about school was learning and meeting my friends every day. When I was in primary school, I was given the best role as school librarian, which obviously meant I needed to read as many books in the school library as possible. No worst thing – but perhaps school dinners in the 1980s weren't as nice as they are now!

### What did you want to be when you grew up?

I wanted to be an actress, specifically a Shakespearean actress!

### What are your hobbies?

Reading (obviously) and I love walking and spending time in the countryside.

### What was your favourite book when you were young?

Can I name three? *The Tale of Mrs Tiggy-Winkle* by Beatrix Potter (I loved the illustrations, the fact that it was a very small book, as well as the idea that animals had other lives). *The Wind in the Willows* – animals and the countryside and the riverbank and adventures – what's not to love! When I was fourteen, I read *Wuthering Heights* and it was the first book to make me cry. I've read it numerous times since and it still makes me cry.

### Are there any themes that appeal to you in particular?

I like historical ghost stories but I also like fantasy and sci-fi.

### What advice can you give to budding authors?

Read, read and read some more! Read the books you love. Let them inform you and don't be afraid to write like your favourite authors until you find your own individual niche. It will come! Carry a notebook with you, you never know when inspiration might strike.

### What's the best / worst part about being an author?

The best part is when a story arrives in my head and I spend the time, thinking, planning, researching and eventually writing it. Then after about a hundred years of editing, I hold it in my hand as a perfectly formed book. No worst part – but there are moments of anxiety when I worry that nobody will like my story.

### Quick Fire Questions:

#### What's your favourite childhood book?

*The Tale of Mrs Tiggy-Winkle.*

#### Who's your favourite character from a children's book?

Mrs Tiggy-Winkle.

#### Where is your favourite place to write?

At my desk in my bedroom.

#### What's your favourite food?

Greek salad with lots of Feta cheese.

#### What's your favourite film or show?

It's a grown-up show and very dark, so I will probably not say.

#### What is your favourite word?

I use 'consistently' quite ... consistently!

#### What would be your superpower of choice?

Flight, but can I also have invisibility?

#### Favourite social media network?

Instagram.

#### What makes you smile?

My children and my husband.

#### If not an author, what would you be?

A Shakespearean actress, (see above!)

#### What's your advice for budding writers?

Read, read, read!



# ***And I Hear Dragons***

**Hanan Issa**  
**Firefly Press**

Groundbreaking anthology edited by 2022–2025 National Poet of Wales, Hanan Issa. A collection of diverse voices showcasing a range of experiences across Wales, focusing on identity, and dragons!



## **Discussion Questions that work across the Areas of Learning and Experience**

- Have you read a poetry collection before, or was this your first time? Did you enjoy it?
- Do you have a favourite poem in the collection? Do you have a favourite poem in general?
- What makes a poem different to a novel or story?
- What would you say are the main themes in the poetry collection? Have you ever written a poem before? Would you like to?
- What do think inspired the title? Do you like the title? What does it mean to you?
- What do you think of the illustrations? Do they help bring the poems to life? If so, how? Do you have a favourite illustration? Why?
- Poetry can help us to understand the impact words can have. Why is it important to think about the words we use?
- There is a poem in the collection called ‘Draig Lung’ by Angela Hui which explores “two ancient cultures. Wales and China.” What do you know about the Chinese dragon and its importance within Chinese culture and history? Why not research more about the Chinese dragon using books or the internet?
- Why not re-read a poem of your choice and discuss its themes in pairs or groups?
- “What’s in your mind’s eye when you think of me?” is the first line of the poem ‘The Dragon’s Song’ by Nia Morais. What do you think of when you think of dragons? Has your opinion changed after reading the poems in this collection?

## **Activities that work across the Areas of Learning and Experience**

Play Poetry Charades! Choose a poem and write out each line on different pieces of card or paper. (We recommend the poem ‘Y Ddraig Goch’ by Sarah Ziman.) These will be your playing cards. Then recite the poem all together so that you are familiar with the words and themes. Shuffle the playing cards and give them out randomly to all the players. Look at your card and then turn it upside down – keep your card a secret! Your teacher can choose the first person to play. Players must use their bodies to act out the activity written on the card. Remember, no talking allowed! You can put a time limit on each person’s go to make the game more difficult. The person who is first to guess the answer of the first player gets to go next. Once all the cards have been guessed you must line up in the correct order of the poem.

Or...

Why not choose one of the poems in the book and create your own illustration to bring the poem to life. It can be in the same style as Eric Heyman the illustrator, or completely different. Be as creative as you can!

**Enjoyed *And I Hear Dragons*? Why not try these next?**

*Miracles* – Connor Allen – Lucient Dreaming

*Red Sky at Night, Poet's Delight* – Alex Wharton – Firefly

*The Star Whale* – Nicola Davies – Otter-Barry Books

*Daydreams and Jellybeans* – Alex Wharton – Firefly

*Doughnuts, Thieves and Chimpanzees* – Alex Wharton – Firefly

## Hanan Issa

### Where did you grow up?

Penarth

### Where did you go to school?

Penarth Church In Wales Primary / Stanwell School

### What was the best / worst thing about your school?

Best thing – inspirational teachers.  
Worst thing – racist teachers.

### What did you want to be when you grew up?

A ballet dancer.

### What are your hobbies?

Reading, looking for seaglass, geocaching, cooking.

### What was your favourite book when you were young?

*Heidi*.

### When did you consider being an author?

I always liked to write poems for myself to make sense of the world, but didn't realise it was something I could be as a profession until I graduated from university.

### Are there any themes that appeal to you in particular?

I love a good fantasy adventure quest, conflicted, flawed villains, a story that surprises me!

### What advice can you give to budding authors?

Reaaaaaad! Don't be afraid to write rubbish – everyone starts with draft zero!

### Do you have any rituals when you write?

I like to light a candle and make a fancy coffee. But sometimes I get an idea in the middle of the night and then writing is just me squinting in the dark making very badly spelled half-baked sentences on my Notes app.

### What's the best / worst part about being an author?

Best thing – meeting people who enjoy reading and writing and hearing about what they are writing/ reading. Worst thing – I used to believe that writers have to write every day but I don't believe that anymore. Writers have to live and experience the world to write, so it's totally fine to take a day off and do something else.

### Quick Fire Questions:

#### What's your favourite childhood book?

*Heidi*.

#### Who's your favourite character from a children's book?

Miss Havisham (*Great Expectations*), because she's such a unique character.

#### Where is your favourite place to write?

I like a quiet coffee shop with good coffee where I can be around people without having to talk to anyone.

#### What's your favourite food?

Sushi.

#### What's your favourite film or show?

*Princess Mononoke*

#### What's is your favourite word?

Currently it's 'stelliferous'.

#### What would be your superpower of choice?

To fly.

#### Favourite social media network?

TikTok.

#### What makes you smile?

My crazy nephews.

#### If not an author what would you be?

Archaeologist.

#### What's your advice for budding writers?

Read as much as you can!





