

POETRY *in* MOTION

National Poetry Day falls on 28 September, so we speak to local writer Chrissie Gittins about the power of the written word

Words DOMINIQUE REGALADO



First things first, what do you love best about living in Forest Hill?

The green areas are absolutely fabulous, like Crystal Palace Park and Dulwich Park. I can choose which one to go to for walking. It feels quite open and green in south east London.

Is that where you like to write?

Well, I usually write at home, but going for walks are part of the process.

Why do you think poetry is important?

Poems say an awful lot in a very short space – an intense use of language. Poetry is enjoyed by children. They love to be playful and enjoy the language. I've written a couple of poems for my three-year-old twin neighbours. They have them framed in their rooms and they can almost recite

the whole poem now. I don't think any age is too young to introduce poetry to children.

What prompted you to begin writing poetry?

It was reading poetry at school and having fantastic English teachers, especially at secondary school where we'd spend a whole lesson on one poem. We'd take it apart and think about it, then put it back together again. It's the war poets that particularly got to me.

What influences your writing?

Things that I see, things that I read, things that I overhear, stories that people tell me, funny juxtapositions...

Do you think poetry requires a certain amount of humour, imagination and creativity that would be good for children?

All of those! They don't always have to be funny. I think there's this idea that children's poems are like jokes and have to be funny. Children experience a whole range of emotions just like adults do. A poem that I wrote called the *Powder Monkeys*, about child slavery on 18th century sailing ships, was chosen by

13-year-old children as the winner of a competition.

You visit school and libraries to give readings. Can you tell me about the last literary reading you attended?

I was at the Manchester Children's Book Festival last month. I was there on the Family Fun Day and it was held in a tent. There was a boy who sat in the front row. He told me afterwards that he borrowed one of my books at the library, and then he bought it. But he didn't know I was going to be at that event, so I was a complete surprise to him to be there in person. He requested a couple of poems from one of my books, which I'd got on my list of poems to read. He must've been about eight.

What are you working on at the moment?

For my third adult poetry collection, I was lucky enough to be given an award by the society of authors to travel in India for a month last November, following in my father's footsteps when he was in the RAF in WWII. He was stationed at various places, so I went to some of the places he'd been. My next adult poetry collection includes a series of poems I've written that was a result of that. **I**

See more at chrissiegittins.co.uk

