

# \*Reflections on Reading: Liz Kessler

Reading is a bit like eating.

A lot of it is essential. Food keeps us alive; reading gives us access to the world.

But once the important stuff is out of the way, the rest of it is all about pleasure. Eating is a vehicle for tantalising our taste buds, drooling over our favourite bar of chocolate, the smell of crispy bacon, the crunch of a packet of crisps. It's about socialising, spending quality time with friends and family.

It's a similar kind of thing with reading: get the essentials out of the way and the rest is about pleasure. Once we have the skills that enable us to read an important sign, finish our homework, sign up for the football trials – we can have fun, indulging in glorious pleasure, just like eating our favourite meals.

As a child, one of my favourite books was *The Adventures of the Wishing Chair*, by Enid Blyton. This is a magical book in which a brother and sister get a new chair, which every now and then sprouts wings and takes them off on adventures. I cannot tell you how many times I sat in a chair at home hoping that maybe this would be the time that it would happen to me – that my chair might sprout wings and take me on adventures.

It never happened. At least, in the real, physical world it didn't. In my imagination, it happened again and again. That's what this book did for me. It took me out of my life and into its pages. It gave my imagination the wings that allowed my fantasies to soar, free and limitless, on whatever adventures it chose.

Another of my childhood favourites was Norton Juster's *The Phantom Tollbooth*. This book takes the reader into a strange and wonderful land where all sorts of impossible things take place. Nothing is off limits and as you read it, your imagination is free to run wild.

I guess that books such as these must have influenced me as a writer, because I love to write books in which ordinary children find that a tiny bit of magic has entered their lives and given them adventures and possibilities that they would never have dreamed could be possible.

But this is what books can do for any of us. All books take us out of our ordinary lives and place us in a completely different world. Sometimes this world is a magical one; sometimes it feels as real as our own. But what is so extraordinarily wonderful about reading is that once we open a book and start to read for pleasure, we are transported into a brand new adventure, every single time. We can be wizards or mermaids. We can solve mysteries. We can scare ourselves silly if we want to! We can laugh, cry, make new friends. Between the pages of a book, we can do anything and everything.

Life is not just about grades and tests and jobs and homework. It is about opening ourselves up and embracing the world on every level we can. It is about giving our imagination wings and proving to ourselves, again and again, that we can go anywhere, we can do anything, we can be whatever we want to be.

Now that's quite a gift.



Liz Kessler studied English at Loughborough University, has worked as a teacher and a journalist and has an MA in Creative Writing from Manchester Metropolitan University. After taking a year off to travel around Europe in a camper van, Liz now lives in Cornwall.

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