

Signed Stories

Interview with Polly Dunbar, author and illustrator of *Penguin*

Penguin doesn't speak in the book. Were you concerned with how he would be signed?

I was delighted with the way Penguin was signed; he came across just like a penguin even though there was hardly any movement! I thought it was very funny and it worked well to see the signing of Ben's lively speech compared to Penguin's stillness.

Are you happy with the final signed story?

Yes, I think the signed version of *Penguin* works so well; it is almost like watching a little play of the book alongside the words and illustrations. The story is really brought to life for deaf children and for hearing children... and for me! Hurray!

Why does Penguin only speak at the end of the story? It is because he only speaks when he has something to say?

Penguin is a book about communication – that is why I'm so glad it was chosen for Signed Stories. What I wanted to show was that we all have different ways of expressing ourselves. Ben thinks Penguin feels nothing because he is not responding to him with words; Ben getting frustrated doesn't help. Penguin talks right at the end of the book, because at this point, Ben finally understands Penguin and is willing to listen in a different sort of way.

I love the final picture. Why did you use an illustration in a speech bubble to show what Penguin was saying?

I drew Penguin's speech in pictures to show how his way of talking was very different from Ben's, but also magical and colourful! I wanted Penguin to retell the whole story to show that he had been aware of everything that was happening all along. Also, the pictures provide a chance for the reader to retell the story in their own words... or act it out... or sign it!

Now that your book has been signed, do you find that you are more conscious of deaf children when working on new projects?

When I write stories, I try to make them as visual and as theatrical as possible, so that children who have not yet learned to read, or who cannot hear, will be able to tell the story to themselves just by looking at the pictures. Of course, now I've seen the extra special dimension of signing I would love to be greedy and have all my stories signed!



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Interview with Natalie Pollard, who signs *Penguin*

Have you ever signed anything like this before?

No, I've never worked on a project like this before. I've translated news stories and TV programmes, but nothing which actually involves me getting into the character of the story and acting it out. It's a brilliant project for me and the team – we've all loved it!

In the same way that we can speak in different voices, do you sign in different ways for different characters?

Yes, I use role-shift to refer to the different characters of Ben, Penguin and the blue Lion – I use my facial expressions to show what each character is feeling.

I notice that you don't say, "said Ben" like the narrator does in the story. Why is that?

British Sign Language (BSL) is very different from English. At the beginning of the story I fingerspell Ben's name – but then for the rest of the story I take on the characteristics of Ben so it doesn't interrupt the flow of BSL.

How long did it take you to practise signing the story before you were filmed?

It took me about a day and a half to read and absorb the story. I really wanted to understand the feelings in the story – especially Ben's frustration that Penguin didn't want to talk!

For each book on the website, it is very important for us to fully understand the story, what it is about, and to be able to absorb any possible emotions and feelings for each character. By doing this, we can convey the story better in BSL.

Did you find it tricky signing Penguin's "everything" picture at the end?

No, I understood what Penguin was feeling at the end – relief that Ben was safe and happy that they were best friends.



Signed Stories

Interview with Joseph Theobald, author of *Marvin Wanted MORE!*

Where did the idea for Marvin Wanted MORE! come from?

I was thinking about consumerism and the environment when I first sketched a sheep eating the world without quite knowing why he was doing it... But these seemed like slightly serious topics, so the book became more of a story about self acceptance.

Were you flattered that your book was chosen to be signed?

Very much so. It's a great project that should really help deaf children to communicate from an early age.

Are you happy with the final signed story?

The final signed story looks great! It's really nice to see Marvin animated. I think the book may have been chosen because it's a simple, funny story that can almost be understood from looking at the pictures alone. This makes it good for learning to read, be it the written word or signed language.

Your book appears to have quite a strong message about being happy with who you are. Do you agree?

Yes, this may also be why it was chosen.

Now that your book has been signed, do you find that you are more conscious of deaf children when working on new projects?

I suppose so; I wouldn't really have thought about it before. I've always tried to make my stories as inclusive as possible, with themes that anyone can relate to. It was interesting to see the story being signed, as it emphasises the importance of the facial expressions and body language given to picture book characters such as Marvin.



Signed Stories

Interview with Jason St Lawrence, who signs *Marvin Wanted MORE!*

You use a lot of facial expressions and your body when signing the story, so is signing more than simply using your hands?

Body movement and facial expressions are very important in sign language to show the emotions and details – without using these, the storytelling would look boring and not be half as much fun. Children’s stories are usually read with playful voices, so we use the full beauty of BSL to make the signed story fun for all.

Are you a signing actor?

I’m not really an actor, but a lot of sign language storytelling is like acting. So you must “paint a picture” using body language, facial expressions, pointing and eye gaze to show the fine details of the story.

Did you read the story and practise different ways of signing Marvin, or is it simply a case of signing the story in just one way?

The rest of the team sat with me and discussed the full story for hours, and practised signs to agree the best way to sign the story. While filming in the studio with the director and BSL expert, they advised improvements to the signing of the story. Although I signed the story three times, the second take turned out to be the best, so made it onto the website.

Why is Marvin Wanted MORE! a good book to sign?

Marvin Wanted MORE! is a fantastic book for the Signed Stories website. It has a sweet lesson to be learned that tells everyone they are loved as they are and should just be themselves... AND not to be too greedy or it could make you sick! Marvin is great fun.

Did you enjoying signing Marvin being sick?

It was great signing Marvin being sick. I just tried to sign the gooey noise of the whole world flowing from greedy Marvin’s ever-hungry stomach! Blaaaaaaaaaah!

Are you pleased with how the final story turned out?

This was my first signed story and I’m delighted with how it has turned out. The animation adds so much energy to the story, which is hard to imagine when stood against a blue screen in a studio with nothing behind! I’m proud to be part of a wicked team determined to create a mega website jam-packed with different kinds of stories for all to enjoy!



Marvin's emotions

