

DIXIE O' DAY

Author: **Shirley Hughes**

Illustrator: **Clara Vulliamy**



INTRODUCING

Dixie O'Day is a dog, but of the special fictional kind that can stand up, wear clothes and drive a car. He is kind, trustworthy and stays calm in a crisis. He will always help anyone in trouble. And he is very smart: the only time you won't see him wearing a tie is when he's in his pyjamas!

Dixie has many thrilling adventures with his best friend Percy. They travel in Dixie's jaunty red car, which is his pride and joy.

MORE ABOUT

The breed of dog that inspired Dixie is an Irish Setter: it's quite a large dog, with ears that flop down and a big nose. The way he looks suits his character - solid and reassuring.

Dixie's car is a 1961 Ford Zodiac Convertible. Dixie often cleans and polishes it until it's spotless and shiny. Dixie always drives the car: Percy sits in the passenger seat and reads the map. There are always some sweets in the glove compartment.

Although they are best friends, sometimes Dixie and Percy do get a bit cross with each other. Percy is a more anxious dog, which can be irritating. But their big problem is Dixie's horrid neighbour, Lou Ella: she is very unfriendly to poor Dixie.

TOP TIPS

When creating a character, it can really help to think about what they are like and what they LOOK like at the same time - and the clothes they wear too.

Try talking out loud in the way you think your character talks: then their voice starts to come to life in your head, making writing dialogue so much better and more interesting.

Keep a little notebook with you ALL THE TIME - so you can write down any thoughts, however small, as soon as they come to you so you won't forget them.

It's great to give your character a friend and an enemy. Good stories will spring from the relationship your character has with both.

With thanks to Random House Children's Publishers.

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MOODY MARGARET

Author: **Francesca Simon**

Illustrator: **Tony Ross**

INTRODUCING

Moody Margaret was originally a boy named Moody Martin. But my husband Martin, for some reason, wasn't happy to be immortalised as Moody Martin.

The character was very similar to Horrid Henry, and I asked for his help. He thought I should make him a girl. At his suggestion, I turned Martin into Margaret, and made her a combination of myself and how I imagined Margaret Thatcher might have been as a child. I am the eldest of four children, and always bossed my siblings around, so Margaret was easy for me to create.

MORE ABOUT

Moody Margaret is bossy, loud, convinced she's always right, and a real match for Horrid Henry. Her parents are terrified of her, and she lords it over her best friend Sour Susan, with whom she is always squabbling. I love how strong and fearless Margaret is, and the fact that she alone stands up to Henry. I love writing about her on-off relationship with Susan, her attempts to trick Henry, and how clever and determined she is. I don't like how full of herself she is, and she wouldn't be my friend in real life, but she is a lot of fun to write about.

With thanks to Orion Children's Books.



TOP TIPS

When creating a character, my top tips are first to name them. Sometimes a name gives you clues about who they are and what they're like. For example, Weepy William is always crying, Rude Ralph is always rude. A character in my book *THE SLEEPING ARMY*, is a fierce warrior named Snot. With a name like that you know he's going to be funny as well.

Catch-phrases are a fun way to bring a character to life. Horrid Henry likes to say, "Out of my way, worm." You know he's going to be bossy and rude.

Ask yourself questions about your character to find out who they are. Where do they live? Who do they live with? Who are their friends? Who are their enemies? And, most important, what do they want more than anything?

Finally, let how your characters speak reveal what they're like.

I think of characters as people I want to get to know, and who want to get to know me. So say hi to them and listen to what they have to say.

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MATT

Author: **Gillian Cross**

Illustrator: **Adam Haynes**

INTRODUCING

In this picture, Matt is the boy with the bike. He comes from Britain, but he and his family have to leave suddenly - because it's too dangerous to stay. There's a food shortage and violent raiders keep breaking in to steal their food. So Matt and his family escape to France and Matt takes his most precious possession - his bicycle.

He's good at mending bikes. When they land up in a refugee camp, other people offer to pay him for mending theirs. But he needs spare parts to do that.

And suddenly he's a raider too...



MORE ABOUT

AFTER TOMORROW is Matt's story. As soon as I had the idea for the book, I knew exactly what he was like. He's hard-working and sensible and very practical. And once he's made up his mind to do something he doesn't give up.

He can be very stubborn though. From the moment he arrives in France, he hates the place. All he wants is to leave the refugee camp and go home again. Because of that, he gets mixed up with some ugly characters and finds himself involved in a cruel scam.

But he's brave and determined. When he has to make a hard choice, to save his little brother's life, he sets out straight away on a dangerous, difficult journey. He doesn't hesitate, even though it means making a huge sacrifice.

With thanks to Oxford University Press.

TOP TIPS

If you're writing about characters, don't ask yourself if they're good or bad. Real people are always a mixture. And often people's bad qualities are very close to their good ones - like Matt's stubbornness and his determination.

Try and get a feel for the characters. Imagine what it would feel like to meet them. What would you think if one of them walked into the room? And what would she think of you?

Ask yourself how people walk and speak. What they like to read. What they have for breakfast - and whether they eat slowly or gulp it down. Once you can picture them moving and talking, you'll find you know a lot about them.

Then you can ask yourself what they do when things get difficult.

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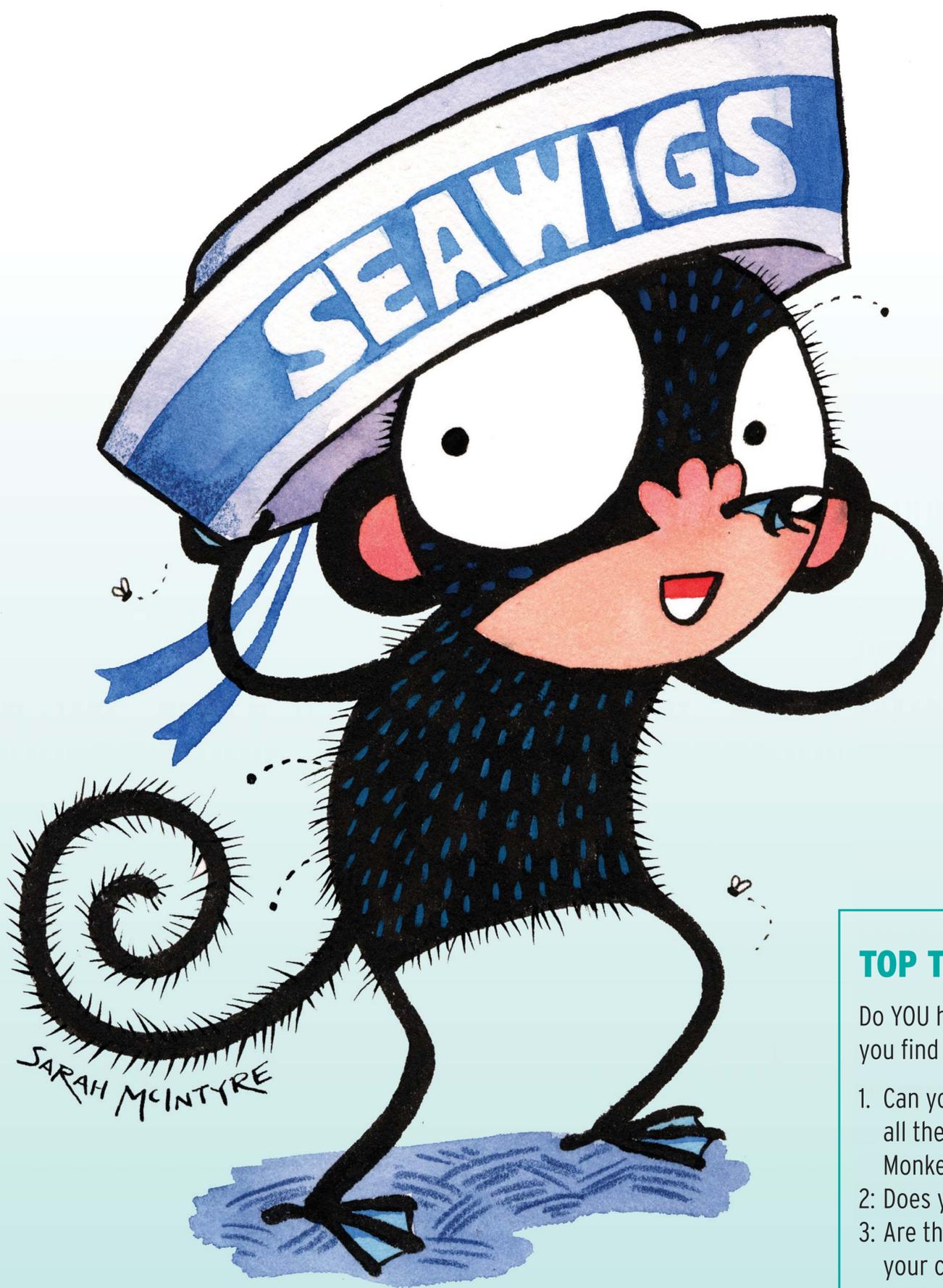
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SEA MONKEY

Author: **Philip Reeve**

Illustrator: **Sarah McIntyre**



INTRODUCING

This cheeky creature is a SEA MONKEY, from our new book *Oliver and the Seawigs*. We're not sure if it's a boy or a girl - it's hard to tell with Sea Monkeys.

One Sea Monkey on its own like this can be quite cute and playful - though still a bit of a handful, because it's full of mischief and into everything like a hairy toddler. But if a bunch of Sea Monkeys all get together, then they're a right nuisance.

MORE ABOUT

We both remember seeing adverts in the back of comics when we were kids, which you could send away for some 'sea monkeys' (they were just shrimp really). It made us wonder, what if Sea Monkeys were ACTUAL, REAL MONKEYS? Naughty, underwater ones, with manky fur and webbed feet?

Of course, you can't get our sort of Sea Monkeys by just sending away for them. The villain of *Oliver and the Seawigs*, whose name is Stacey de Lacey, is walking on the beach one day when he notices some strands of washed-up seaweed with big air-bladders on the end. He squeezes one, and out pops a Sea Monkey. So he runs around popping all the seaweed he can find. Pretty soon he has a whole ARMY of mischievous Sea Monkeys to help him!

TOP TIPS

Do YOU have Sea Monkeys? Here's a short quiz to help you find out:

1. Can you hear little giggly voices going "EEP!" all the time? ("EEP!" is the only thing that Sea Monkeys ever say.)
2. Does your stuff keep going missing?
3. Are there little, wet, webbed footprints all over your carpet/walls/ceiling/Granny?
4. Are there loads of Sea Monkeys everywhere?

If you answered YES to any of these questions, then YOU MAY HAVE SEA MONKEYS.

Our Top Tip is simple: RUN AWAY!

With thanks to Oxford University Press.

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PRINCESS MIRROR-BELLE

Author: **Julia Donaldson**

Illustrator: **Lydia Monks**

INTRODUCING

Mirror-Belle is a girl who comes out of a mirror. She looks just like the reflection of a shy girl called Ellen, but she behaves very differently, claiming she is a Princess and telling all sorts of unlikely stories about her life the other side of the mirror. Although her cheeky behaviour often gets Ellen into trouble, they have a lot of fun together. Mirror-Belle comes out of a different mirror in each story; in one of the stories she comes out of a wobbly mirror at the fair and looks all wobbly, and in another one she comes out of a pond and brings her dog, Prince Precious Paws, with her.

MORE ABOUT

One of my sons had an imaginary friend called Sammy who (he said) came out of the mirror and played with him when I wasn't looking. That gave me the idea for Mirror-Belle, though I decided to make her a girl, and I also decided that she would be real and not just imaginary.

Mirror-Belle has a lot to say about herself. She tells Ellen that her shoes were made by some elves and won't stop dancing until they are worn out, and that back in her land there is a special day called Wobblesday when everyone has to wobble. So she is quite entertaining, but she can also be annoying as she is so boastful and cheeky.

TOP TIPS

When you're creating a character, try to make them interesting and a bit different from normal: they could be very dreamy, or rather clumsy, or have some special talent. They don't have to be a hundred per cent nice (in fact, it's a bit boring if they are), but if they are your hero or heroine try to make the readers like them in spite of their faults.

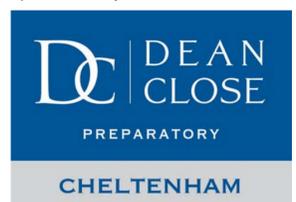


With thanks to Macmillan Children's Books.

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MR TUGG

Author: **Jeremy Strong**

Illustrator: **Rowan Clifford**

INTRODUCING

One of my most popular series of books is about Nicholas, his family and neighbours. The first title was called *My Dad's Got An Alligator!* and I went on to write about *My Granny*, *My Mum* and, of course the *My Brother's Famous Bottom* stories. If you have read any of these you will be familiar with Mr Tugg, the neighbour who constantly explodes with anger. Every story has to have its villain, and for this series it is Mr Tugg, stamping his feet, waving his arms and generally erupting like a volcano on two legs.

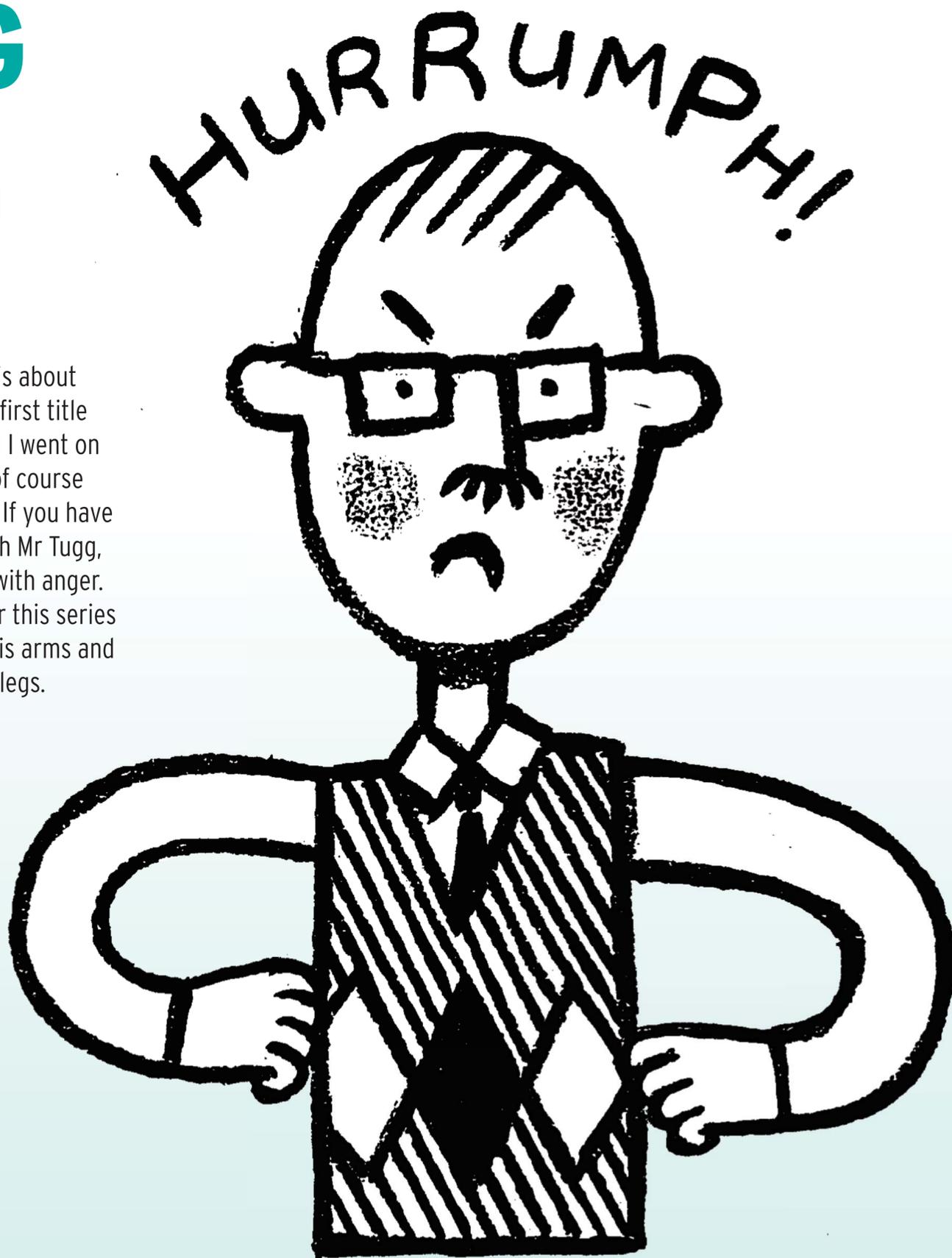
MORE ABOUT

Where did Mr Tugg come from? Like a lot of characters that appear in fiction, he was based on a real human being. As a child I lived in a small, terrace house. On one side we had nice neighbours who let me watch their television. (My family didn't have one.) On the other side lived a terrifying demon who scared the pants off all of us. SHE WAS A NIGHTMARE, shouting at us, yelling, exploding and generally petrifying us with her rages. Guess what her name was? Mrs Cross! Ha ha! You couldn't make it up!

Well, she terrified me when I was a child but now I have tamed her by turning her into Mr Tugg and writing about him/her. I love writing about him because he brings colour to the story, even if it's mostly red for anger. What I don't like is that I often end up feeling sorry for the old baldie. After all, it can't be much fun to be full of so much anger, can it?

With thanks to Puffin.

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TOP TIPS

Here are three top tips for creating characters.

1. Make sure you have a good mix of characters and remember that nobody is just one thing. Even Mr Tugg is nice sometimes, and friendly.
2. You always need a villain, possibly more than one. Maybe they are a bully, a trickster, or quite simply annoying like Mr Tugg. They will try and stop anything fun or exciting happening.
3. Make your character stand out. It might be the way they look or dress. It could be the way they speak, or the things they do. Perhaps they have an unusual hobby, like collecting fridges. (I know someone who does!) There are dozens of ways of doing this. Get thinking, and good luck!

TWIG

Author: **Paul Stewart**

Illustrator: **Chris Riddell**

INTRODUCING

Twig is a foundling, abandoned by his parents and brought up by woodtrolls. Although his adoptive parents are kind to him, Twig never fits in. He looks different. He doesn't like their food. He doesn't understand the way they think. And because he is different, he is bullied. He longs to meet his real mother and father. To achieve this, he does what no other woodtrolls ever do - he strays from the path. And so begins his great adventure through the world of the Edge.

MORE ABOUT

When we started writing the Edge Chronicles, we decided that we did not want our main character to be a typical 'hero' figure - the kind who always succeeds simply because he is the hero! Instead, we wanted a character who is insignificant in the world he inhabits. He might prosper. He might perish. But whatever happens, it is because of his own personal strengths and weaknesses, rather than any idea of destiny.

Twig soon proved himself to be strong and resilient. He coped well with the dangers of the Deepwoods, surviving an attack by a fearsome bloodoak that tried to eat him; battling with a venomous hoverworm, and winning; escaping a treacherous termagant trog, and all through his own resourcefulness. And along the way, because he is thoughtful, kind and loyal, he makes many friends.

Twig is in five of the eleven Edge Chronicles, as a youth and an adult. Despite his occasional obstinacy and hastiness, he became, for us, an individual we both liked and admired.

With thanks to Random House Children's Publishers.



TOP TIPS

Decide the appearance of the character. Is he, she or it dark or fair? Thin or fat? Big-nosed? Buck-toothed? Knock-kneed? Every decision you make will affect the way your character acts.

Discover their personality. Are they shy or outgoing? Are they selfish or generous? Or, more interestingly, do they learn and change because of what happens to them as the story unfolds?

Are they goodies or baddies? Most people are a mixture of the two, and the most interesting characters can be those who do good things for bad reasons and bad things for good reasons.

Know and understand your characters. They must not act 'out of character' and do something that the reader does not believe. After all, it is their journey through the world they inhabit that creates the plot of the book.

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