

I have no interest in history...

INTERVIEW WITH TERRY DEARY

Terry Deary was born in Sunderland, England, in 1946. He now lives in County Durham, in the North-east of England. Terry is a former actor, theatre-director, museum manager and the author of 185 books, mainly for children and teenagers.

His books are sold in 38 languages from Russia to Brazil, China to Scandinavia and include both fiction and non-fiction, with Horrible Histories being the best-selling with over 20 million worldwide. In 2000 a Schoolsnet survey made Terry Deary the most borrowed British author in school libraries while a Guardian survey of March 05 announced him Britain's 5th most popular living children's author.

- Horrible Histories are some of the best-selling books of all time. What do you think is the reason for their success?

They are 'history' books written by someone who is not an historian. I am a children's author. My skill is in re-presenting the interesting facts about human behaviour in a way a 'text-book' writer cannot do. Horrible Histories are not about history – they are about something far more important – people.

- How did you become interested in history?

As I say I have no interest in history. I don't connect with historians. But I am interested in education. I want people to explore the only question that matters in education: 'Why do people behave the way they do?' Looking at anecdotes from the past we can start by asking 'Why did people behave the way they did?'

- Why should we be interested in history?

Because until we learn how people lived in the past we will never learn about ourselves. Once you begin to understand yourself, you can find happiness and, more importantly, bring happiness to others less fortunate.

- Why is humour important in telling such stories?

No one learns anything unless they are "engaged" by a narrative. You can do this by using techniques like surprise or suspense. Or by making them laugh. People like to laugh. But when the laughter dies you are maybe left with something deeper that remains behind. Knowledge or understanding or both.

- What are you working on next?

2008 looks like being absolutely packed. The Horrible Histories Tudor and Victorian plays are relaunched with Birmingham Stage Company. I am writing 4 new "City" plays that will be permanent tourist attractions in Cardiff, Windsor, Nottingham and London

while I will write Horrible Histories plays on WW1 and WW2 for touring in 2009 as well as a play on Welsh history.

Horrible Histories on television will premiere in May 2009 so I am running up and down to London a lot this year to write and act in the recordings of the 13 episodes. I also have a few of my own (non-Horrible Histories) television and radio shows to write and record. There is a major heritage project to create in Durham. The b-i-g dream for 2008 is to turn my "Fire Thief" fiction into a movie and a producer is already working on it.

Horrible Histories will launch a new fiction series this year and I am contracted to write a further 22 fiction books in 2008 and 2009.

- This summer Imperial War Museum North presents a family exhibition based on your book Frightful First World War and is specially designed for younger visitors, to commemorate the 90th anniversary of the end of the First World War. Do you think Museums are a good place to learn?

Not traditionally. Museums have a deserved reputation of being forbidding and precious about their collections. I have managed a museum and know curators who would be happy if the public were never allowed to see their artefacts let alone touch them or interact with them. Exhibitions like the one happening now in Manchester show what is possible and museums have to evolve or die.

- Why did you choose to work with Imperial War Museum North?

Because the world seems to revolve around an axle called London. Anything that can shift that balance is welcome. Manchester is a vibrant & booming city. It is also a northern city and, being a northerner, I feel an empathy with the whole place. n

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