



Halloween is now upon us (more suddenly than ever before) it is actually quite spooky! In the Halloweek article I have included a number of events that can be run throughout this week to give it an extra special feel!

There is also news about a new film version of Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* coming soon. I have included some of my views about the new Tintin movie and also some thoughts on how to use the books with a reading group. Mention is made of SlimeKids – not a Hallowe'en related website but still useful when working with young people.

There is also a link to a guardian article on teaching young people to read which makes interesting reading. Guy Fawkes night follows on from Halloweek so I have included a brief write-up on what can be done with this particular celebration.

Finally this month's Eight Questions With... interview is with S.C. Ransom author of *Small Blue Thing* and *Perfectly Reflected*.

## Halloweek

Monday 31<sup>st</sup> October is Halloween, Tuesday & Wednesday the 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> October is *Día de los Muertos* – the Mexican Day of the Dead Festival. This makes it perfect to run an entire week dedicated to Spooky events in your libraries.

Monday is Halloween so if you run a Teen Group or Chatterbooks group on this day it may be possible to run a pumpkin carving workshop or even a spooky story event – maybe combine the two. Think about running a creative writing event – spooky stories created by the group, or each attendee can suggest the scariest story they know and argue about which one the scariest is.

In previous years I have, making a librarian mask is as simple as taking a photo of your face and printing it out on a sheet of

cardboard for the attendees to cut out and wear. The October 2009 edition of TLM: <http://bit.ly/43lyTI> has a step by step process on how you can make the mask

The Day of the Dead is a Mexican holiday that focuses on gatherings of family and friends to pray for and remember friends and family members who have died. It is particularly celebrated in Mexico, where it attains the quality of a National Holiday. The celebration takes place on November 1st and 2nd, in connection with the Catholic holidays of All Saints' Day (November 1) and All Souls' Day (November 2). Traditions connected with the holiday include building private altars honouring the deceased using sugar skulls, marigolds, and the favourite foods and beverages of the departed and visiting graves with these as gifts.

You can run *calaveras de azúcar* (sugar skulls) design competitions. You can follow the example of Jonathan Koshi and update the idea to pop culture items: <http://bit.ly/ghyTGI> & <http://bit.ly/nq4s3R> or print out a skull picture and have the young people create their own designs. To keep the theme spooky you can also read Mexican folktales <http://americanfolklore.net/folklore/mexican-folklore/> to them while they work

All Hallow's Read is a Hallowe'en tradition. It's simply that in the week of Hallowe'en, or on the night itself, you give someone a scary book.

This one can be done on a day or over the week, produce horror reading lists, see if you can get signed copies of scary books to give away as prizes – this is easier than you may think with the number of authors on twitter. It may be easier to stick signed book-plates into books as they are easier to post. Ask publishers if they can donate a copy or two or buy them and get them signed.

Anyway All Hallow's Read is an idea that was dreamt up by Neil Gaiman, his written material can be used for a Hallowe'en event all on its own. Sandman (create your own Merv Pumpkinhead), Neverwhere, American Gods, The Graveyard Book – there is so much creepy goodness in his back list you can go wild.

For the manga and anime fans that use the library (and particularly if you have an established manga group) run a Halloween cosplay.

There are a number of gothic-y, scary manga series including Rozen Maiden, Rosario Vampire, Hellsing, Reiko the Zombie Shop, Kurosagi Corpse Delivery Service, Cat-Eyed Boy, Hell Girl, Zombie Loan.

You can also encourage your manga fans to dress up as Sadako Yamamura the ghostly girl from The Ring movie. *"within seven days of watching a normal videotape, you receive a phone call, saying you will die in a horrible and painful way"* you could play pass the parcel with the "prize" being a video tape cassette.

Encourage the artistic members of the group to design and create their own manga horror characters. Almost anything that you can do during a standard manga meeting can be adapted for a Halloween special...

If your space and budget is limited you can fall back on a BOO!k discussion. You can put a Halloween theme on the proceedings by putting whatever snacks you provide for the group into trick or treat bags. You can also put a personalised joke into each of the bags, there are many websites that specialise in <http://bit.ly/4h0pl7> As a related-craft activity you could show off some Hallowe'en origami skills: <http://bit.ly/w1JPHm>

### **Much Ado About Nothing**

Joss Whedon (Buffy, Angel, Firefly, The Avengers) has just finished filming his version of Shakespeare's Much Ado About Nothing.

I have lost track of the Whedon-verse so am not sure if Buffy is still popular amongst teenagers but with The Avengers looming

ever nearer having his name attached to both films may spark an interest in Shakespeare amongst the super hero fans.

<http://muchadothemovie.com/>

### **The Secret of the Unicorn**

I am a massive Tintin fan, that will come as no surprise to anyone that knows me – and possibly no surprise to anyone else either what with it being a comic book... sorry *graphic album*.

I was fortunate enough to win tickets to the pre-premiere screening of The Secret of the Unicorn and was completely blown away. I went in to the cinema with a few reservations having seen some stills from the film and was not totally convinced that 3D motion-capture CGI animation was a good idea.

I was wrong, so wrong the film is a joyous adaptation of The Secret of the Unicorn with extra bits from The Crab With The Golden Claws (to introduce Captain Haddock) and extra characters from some of the other books in the series but the Tintin purist in me did not care. The adaptation was made with love, care and attention to detail. It works as an all-ages family-film and there are enough small pieces scattered like easter eggs throughout the film to delight the obsessive fans such as myself.

Tintin gets a lot of criticism these days about being racially insensitive (Tintin in the Congo), not having any strong female characters or anything else that people see that may cause offence in the pages of the books. Some of the contentious issues as well as the fantastic illustrations and cracking adventure stories are what makes it so good to talk about in a group, especially with young people.

Amongst the many topics that can be discussed in reading groups are: racial stereotypes most notably in Tintin in the Congo, the early editions of Tintin in America and The Shooting Star; alcoholism – most of the stories that feature Captain Haddock and occasionally Snowy; space exploration Destination Moon & Explorers on the Moon; history – The Blue Lotus covered the Japanese invasion of Manchuria and the subsequent

resignation from the League of Nations;  
politics – Tintin in the Land of the Soviets,  
Tintin and the Picaros; the slave trade The  
Red Sea Sharks; drug smuggling – Cigars of  
the Pharaoh & The Crab with the Golden  
Claws.

### **SlimeKids**

SlimeKids features an extensive collection of book trailers organized by year and by grade level as well as numerous language arts-related games in such categories as spelling, typing, vocabulary and grammar. Additionally, the website showcases an array of exceptional literacy-related resources such as author and book review websites as well as superb learning tools including reference works and search engines.

SlimeKids was created to provide students with a playful, easy-to-use interface through which they could learn about and access valuable online resources. The website is designed to self-motivate students to make their own choices and judgements about what is most useful for them as they read, search, watch and play.

<http://www.slimekids.com/>

### **Reading with kids? How hard can it be?**

Excellent article in The Guardian online about teaching children to read:

<http://bit.ly/rRzO3Q>

### **Why did Dracula go to the library?**

*He wanted a good book to sink his teeth into!*

### **Why did it take the monster ten months to finish a book?**

*Because he wasn't very hungry.*

### **Remember... Remember**

*The fifth of November.*

*Gunpowder, treason and plot.*

*I see no reason why gunpowder, treason*

*Should ever be forgot...*

After the celebration of All Hallows comes the remembrance of a freedom fighter cut down by a brutal and repressive regime or was it a crazy man with gunpowder trying to destroy the symbols or righteous government?

Whatever it was it will live on in fond memory or infamy...

Burning ~~freedom~~ ~~fighters~~ traitors in effigy and fireworks – what is there not to love about Guy Fawkes Night? The less said about rampant antiCatholicism the better eh what?

The Fifth of November is the perfect time to run a book discussion about Alan Moore's V for Vendetta, the film was not bad it is just the book is far superior – feel free to disagree that is what book discussions are about.

In the current climate of fear created by the closing and threatened closing of libraries this is the perfect time to introduce a new generation of protesters to their civic duties and rights of protest. You could even download the protest special edition of TLM for ideas: <http://bit.ly/mckiy5>

If you wanted you could even have an activity – cut out and create your own Guy Fawkes mask: <http://bit.ly/vTsb6>. You can also pick them up for £6 at Forbidden Planet (<http://bit.ly/9Ced8J>) where your average Anonymous protester shops.

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## **Eight Questions with... S.C. Ransom**

### **Q1 What influenced your decision to write for Teenagers?**

Actually, I didn't make a conscious decision to write for teenagers as a group – I just wrote a book for my daughter Ellie as a birthday present. It was only later, when it got published, that it was put into the Teen/YA category, so I really have fallen into this by accident.

### **Q2 How do you get into the heads of your characters?**

For me it was easy (for the first book of the trilogy anyway), because everything I was writing was for Ellie. All I had to do was to think how she might react to any given situation; what she would think and say, and I wrote that down. My main character isn't based on her, but is the sort of girl she might become when she's seventeen. For the other characters I delved into my own school days too, plus observations about my teenage son and his friends.

### **Q3 Do you know instinctively what will appeal to Teens or is it more a hit or miss process?**

I think that it's always hit or miss with teenagers! They can be so fickle in what they like or will recommend among themselves. I did have the added bonus of captive teenagers around the house, so I listened to their conversations and took a mental note of the things which were important to them. Driving them around is perfect for that, as they sit in the back chattering away and generally filter out the fact that you are there. You can find out some really interesting stuff by sitting silently in the front of the car.

Since I gave *Small Blue Thing* to Ellie I have been able to use her as a sounding board.

She was the first reader for both the second and the third books, and she gave me some really useful advice about the last book, encouraging me to stick to my original plan and not get swayed by others. I hope we are right – we'll only find out what the rest of the readers think when it hits the shelves in January.

### **Q4 What is the most satisfying part of the writing process for you?**

I really enjoy the plotting, thinking out solutions to the wrinkles which inevitably crop up, and then getting everything down into one enormous plan. Then it's just a case of filling in the gaps and expanding from 2000 words to 100,000. At the other end of the process, watching the first print run of *Small Blue Thing* was awesome. Thousands of copies of my daughter's birthday present being produced in beautiful, glittering covers: a priceless experience.

### **Q5 Do you ever read the works of other Teen/YA authors? If yes what can you recommend?**

I do, and that's what originally gave me the impetus to write a book myself. I was reading some of Ellie's books and although I enjoyed them, I was disappointed that so many were set in the States. I wanted her to have a book which was about the town where she lived, and places in London which she knows, like St Paul's Cathedral.

Since I've started writing YA, I've read lots more, and of course much of it is set here. Some of it is brilliant and inspiring, some just average. A few of the books which I've really enjoyed have been *When I Was Joe*, by Keren David, *Entangled* by Cat Clarke, *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins and *Noughts and Crosses* by Malorie Blackman.

**Q6 Are any of your novels based on personal experiences?**

My novels are about a teenage girl, Alex, who is living an ordinary life until something extraordinary happens to her. She finds a fabulous bracelet in the mud at the edge of the River Thames which allows her to communicate with Callum, a drowned soul trapped in a horrible half-life.

For the day-to-day stuff I drew on our life at home, and things which my daughter would recognise. For the paranormal aspects – sadly no! I did, though, try and ensure that the reactions of the main characters reflected how they might actually behave in those circumstances.

**Q7 Are you working on anything new at the moment or do you have anything planned?**

I have just sent back the final proof corrections for the last book in the trilogy, Scattering Like Light, and that means I now

feel free to start exploring other stories. Since I started writing I've found my head has been filled with other tales waiting to grow, and now it's time to let them. I have no idea where I'll end up!

**Q8 Do you ever do Library visits to Teen Reading Groups? If yes, what is the best way to get into contact with you or your agent about it?**

I really, really enjoy doing visits and talks. Most people seem particularly interested in the fact that I wrote the first book on my BlackBerry during my daily commute to my full time job, so I talk about that, how I got published (an interesting tale in itself!) as well as talking about the books. The day job does mean that it's easier for me to do evening and weekend events, but I can do some daytime ones. I don't have an agent but I can be contacted via my email [smallbluething@nosycrow.com](mailto:smallbluething@nosycrow.com), or by contacting Dom Kingston at Nosy Crow, my publisher.