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Author/Interview subject: James Robertson (JR), Lari Don (LD)/Halloween

Interviewed by: Janice Forsyth (JF)

Other speakers: Audience (Aud) Boy (Boy)

JF Hi there, I’m Janice Forsyth, a very warm welcome indeed to Authors Live. Look, we've gone all spooky on you. There's been a huge wind that’s blown in lots of Autumn leaves onto our stage today. I love Autumn, I don't know about you, I certainly love Halloween, and this is a very, very spooky event today. Are you ready for it? Fantastic. Now, we don't have a live audience with us today, in our Glasgow studio, but I do know that so many of you are watching in classrooms, all sorts of places all over the country. So, hello, it's lovely to have you here, thank you so much for joining us. And in fact, pupils at Carronshore Primary School, in Falkirk, have sent us a lovely wave, hello.

Aud: [Waving].

JS: Oh, absolutely brilliant, thank you for that gorgeous wave, really, really lovely to see you. And indeed, hello in Falkirk, wherever you're watching, and anywhere else in the country, just so good to have you here. So have you been practising your spells, and your potions, have you been doing all that stuff? Fantastic. I've been doing it at home, strange smells coming out of my kitchen, I can tell you. Today’s Authors Live is all about Halloween, and Scottish folklore, Scottish stories. But don't get scared, because we have two wonderful storytellers with us today. They're going to tell us some Halloween tales, and let us know how they celebrated Halloween when they were about the same age as all of you watching First of all, we have author, James Robertson, now this is a first for Authors Live, because James has been on the programme before, we really like him, he's a brilliant storyteller, but he's not actually with us, he's on a screen. There he is, it's a first for Authors Live. Hi, James, how are you?

JR: Hiya, I'm alright Janice, how are you doing?

JS: Extremely well, we’re really looking forward to hearing from you. And of course, we’re not surprised, are we, to see that James is sitting in front of lots of books, he's probably written half of them, actually.

JR: I'm trying to just make myself look intelligent.

JS: Yes, well you're succeeding, it's a really lovely array of books, there. And with me, in Glasgow, in person, sitting opposite me, another fabulous storyteller and author, it is the wonderful Lari Don, hi Lari, how are you?

LD: Hi, I'm really looking forward to sharing stories today, it's not something I've done much of over the summer.

JS: Oh, brilliant. I know, it's a great opportunity, isn't it, to do that. You may not know this, and in fact, I have learned this today. I know about Halloween, but lots of people think that Halloween actually got going, it all started off here in Scotland. Lots of things we do at Halloween are linked to an old Celtic festival called, Samhain. And people believed, and this is lovely, that during Samhain, the border between our world, our world of children and grown-ups going about our business, and the world of fairies and witches, that border was at its weakest. Meaning that they could visit our world. I really like that idea. And today there are lots of traditions connected to Samhain that we still do today in Scotland. So have you been doing things like carving a Halloween lantern, yeah? Also, guising, now this year, we can't actually go around houses guising, but we can maybe do some guising at home. And also, dooking for apples, have you done that? I used to love doing that when I was a nipper. Lari, what about Halloween for you when you were a child, was that something that was really celebrated?

LD: It absolutely was, it was one of the highlights for us as a family. We did things, it feels different now, things like buying Halloween decorations, to decorate your house. We decorated ourselves, not our house, and I didn’t see a pumpkin until I was, I don't know, in my 20s. We carved neeps, and my mum was actually reminding me about the smell, when you used to carve a neep, and you put a candle inside it, and you kind of had the roasting smell…

JS: Yes.

LD: …of the turnip. So yes, that’s the smell of Halloween for me, slightly burnt turnip.

JS: Yes, well that was the key word there, turnip, neeps, you know, neeps and tatties, turnips and tatties. But also, James, I presume that when you were wee, it wasn’t the pumpkin, which is a thing that’s really come over from the USA, where Halloween is a big thing. But the turnip, my goodness me, much more difficult to cut into and carve, isn't it?

JR: They're a lot tougher, and they're wee-er as well, so you had to watch and be careful when you're carving your lantern out of a neep. I always thought, though, like Lari, I never saw a pumpkin until I was in my 20s, the first time I went to America, I'd never heard of them before.

JS: Yeah.

JR: But I remember, I always thought, when I did see them, that the neep lanterns, because they were wee-er, and the flesh was paler, they somehow looked a wee bit scarier, and a wee bit more impish. So I've always preferred neep lanterns to pumpkin ones.

JS: Oh well, wherever you're watching, maybe you could persuade your mum and dad to buy some turnips, some neeps, and do some neep carving. Although as we say, it's a wee bit trickier, but according to James, possibly more effective, and spookier. Did you do much guising, Lari, when you were wee?

LD: Oh yes, absolutely, that was what we did. We dressed up, my mum made all our costumes. And the one I remember best was, and it wasn’t always, we did do witches and things, but we also did other characters. There was one she made where I was Miss Moffatt, and my little brother was the spider. And she made him extra legs out of black tights filled with wool, and we walked about. I had a ridiculous mop cap. And it was a long way, we had to go a long way. I lived in the northeast of Scotland, and we didn’t live in a street, we had neighbours miles and miles away. So we would maybe only see half a dozen folk when we guised, but we had miles to walk to each of them.

JS: Gosh.

LD: And then, we had to do a turn, a song or a poem. And I remember one year, I learned a poem about a heron and a puddock, in Doric, and performed that for everybody, and then you got a wee bag of sweeties.

JS: I love it.

LD: So yes, I have really strong memories. And I made costumes for my kids when they were younger as well, so it's a tradition that’s carried on.

JS: Yeah, oh it's good fun.

LD: Yeah.

JS: A lot of hard work involved, especially for parents. And I should say, you might just know of trick or treating. And again, that’s something that’s come more from the USA. But it's really important to know about our own Scottish traditions, and guising, going out, which is something, obviously, James, that you'll have done a lot when you were a wee boy, too.

JR: We did, we went guising around the neighbours. And again, as Lari was saying, we made our own costumes, and it wasn’t just about witches and things. I mind one time…the other thing is, at my primary school, Halloween was the biggest day in the calendar, they really went big time for it. So, and the school, we'd finish classes a wee bit earlier on the day, and the school would be transformed into a whole, all the classes became wee kind of separate places, where you would go into one to go dooking for apples, and in another one there would be kind of like, you know, games that you would play. And everybody brought their costumes into the school, and we weren’t even really supposed to get our mums and dads to help us with the costumes that much, we were supposed to do it all ourselves.

JS: Wow.

JR: And it was the most exciting day of the year in my school, everybody just loved it. And one year, I remember, there had been some bad behaviour in the school, and they kind of, they cancelled Halloween as a punishment. And everybody was just scunnered, and totally devastated.

JS: I'll bet they were. Yeah, it's a bit like, this time of year, it's getting darker. I mean, I couldn’t believe it last night, six o’clock, it was pitch black. So we need something to brighten up our lives, even though we’re talking about spooky stuff, it's good fun. And I think we need that right now, don't we?

LD: Well it is good fun, but it's actually because it's getting darker, that this is when we celebrate Halloween.

JS: Yeah.

LD: This is when summer is ending, winter is coming. And long, long ago, folk here, and probably in Ireland as well, all the Celtic countries, thought that this was when the powers of darkness were growing. That’s why witches, and ghosts had most power right now. And also, there were several times of year, like Halloween, and May Day, and Midsummer, when the fairies were thought to show particular interest, and be out and about a lot. I'm not talking about cute wee fairies, human sized, child stealing fairies. So, the reason that we go guising right now, it comes from the word, disguise. It was a defensive thing, we were hiding ourselves, hiding our identities to try and protect ourselves from the forces of darkness. And also, if our masks were even scarier than the ghoulies and ghosties and things that went bump in the night, we might scare them off. So actually, it's a good way to cheer ourselves up, but it's actually because it's getting darker now, that we’re looking at all these dark stories.

JS: Yeah. And there are no shortage of stories. So yes, James, talking of stories, there is one story that you’ve had a hand in, just right for Halloween, a story all about a witch, and the passengers on her broomstick. It's Room on the Broom, by Julia Donaldson. Wonderful illustrations by Axel Scheffler. And James, you’ve written a version of Room on the Broom in Scots. And earlier, James recorded a reading of the story for us. So, how about this for a Halloween treat. The wonders of technology, we’re going to hear the story, right now. So make yourselves comfortable because here comes James, reading Julia Donaldson’s Room on the Broom.

JR: Room on the Broom, in Scots. The witch had a cat and an awfie lang hat, and gingery hair that she pit in a plait. Hoo the cat purred and hoo the witch grinned as they sat on their bizzum and fleed through the wind. But hoo the witch peenged and the cat fuffed and aw when the wind wis sae wild that the hat blew awa.

'Doon!' cried the witch, and they fleed tae the grund. They riped and they reenged but nae hat could be fund. Then oot fae the bushes (and this is the truth) There breeshled a dug wi the hat in his mooth. He drapped it politely, (a guid dug indeed) as the witch poued the hat firmly doon on her heid), “I am a dug”, said the dug, “I’m smert and I’m snell. Is there room on the broom for a dug like masel?”

“Aye!” cried the witch, and the dug climbed on board. The witch chapped the bizzum and wheech! Aff they soared. They flee dower the parks and they flee dower the trees. The dug wagged his tail and hud on wi his knees. The witch laughed oot loud and hud on tae her hat, but the wind wupped the bow fae her gingery plait! 'Doon!' cried the witch, and they fleed tae the grund. They riped and they reenged but nae bow could be fund.

Then oot fae a tree, wi a lug-dirlin shriek, there flichtered a burd wi the bow in its beak. She drapped it politely wi grace and wi care, then said as the witch tied the bow in her hair, “I am a burd, as nae doot ye can tell, is there room on the broom for a burd like masel?” “Aye!” cried the witch, sae the bird flaffed on board. The witch chapped the bizzum and wheech! Aff they soared. Ower the reeds and ower rivers they birled alang. The bird shrieked wi glee as the storm grew mair strang. They breenged through the sky clean awa aff the map. The witch grupped her bow but she let her wand drap.

“Doon!” cried the witch,and they fleed to the grund. They ryped and they reenged but nae wand could be fund. Then oot fae a dub aw drookit and sleek, lowped a paddock. He craiked “Is this wand whit ye seek?” He drapped it politely, (a paddock weel-bred) and as the witch gied it a dicht, proudly said: “I am a puddock, as bricht as a bell, is there room on the broom for a beast like masel?” “Aye!” cried the witch, sae he hoppit on board. The witch chapped the bizzum and wheech! Aff they soared. They fleed ower the muirs and the mountains sae braw. Puddock bounced, and the bizzum wis SNAPPIT IN TWA!

Down fell the paddock, the dug and the cat, tapsalteerie doon intae a bog – wi a splat! The witch’s hauf-bizzum fleed intae a clood and the witch heard a roar that wis fearsome and lood . . . “I am a draigon 0 nae messin wi me! And I’m planning tae hae WITCH AND CHIPS for ma tea!” “Naw!” cried the witch, fleein higher and higher. The dragon fleed efter her, perchin oot fire. “Help!” cried the witch, fleein doon tae the grund. She ryped and she reenged but nae help could be fund. The draigon drew nearer and, wi slaverin lips, he said, “Jist this once I’ll hae witch and nae chips.” But as he red up tae stert on his feast, oot fae a sheuch cam a scunnersome beast. It wis lang, daurk and claggy, aw feathered and furred. It had fower frichtsome heids, it had wings like a burd. And the soond fae its mooth, when it stertid tae speak, wis a yowl and a growl and a craik and a shriek. It marched fae the sheuch aw dreepin and broon, and it thunnered, “HAW YOU! THAT’S MA WITCH! PIT HER DOON!

The draigon drew back - He wis shooglin wi terror. He spleetered, “I doot there’s been some kind o error. I’ll no hing aboot, though it’s braw that we’ve met.” And he spread oot his wings and took off like a jet. Then doon cam the paddock the burd and the cat. And “Jings!” said the dug, “whit d’ye think aboot that?” “Oh thank ye,” the witch cried (jist aboot greetin) “Athoot ye I’m shair I wis gonnae be eaten.” Then she fullt up her cauldron and said wi a grin“Awa and find somethin, and jist fling it in!” The burd fund a twig, the cat fund a cone, the paddock a flooer and the dug an auld bone. They pit them aw in, the witch gied them a sweel, and she mummled some magical haivers as weel: “Iggety, figgety, foggety, FIZZUM!” Then oot cam. . . THE MAIST FANTOOSH, FABULOUS BIZZUM!

Wi seats for the witch, dug and cat (hoo she purred), a shooer for the puddock and a nest for the burd. The witch cried “Ya beauty!” They aw climbed on board. The witch chapped the bizzum and wheech! Aff they soared.

JS: Well, dare I say it, James, that was pure magic, absolutely fantastic storytelling there, thank you so much, James. Really excellent.

JR: No, a pleasure, a pleasure.

JS: And we know that, James, you have written Scots versions of Julia Donaldson’s stories before, last time you were on Authors Live, it was with the Scots version of The Gruffalo, which was just ace. What was it like, writing the Scots version of Room on the Broom? I mean, I was just so loving hearing Scots words, which at their best, they're so great at describing the feeling, or the sound of what’s going on. It's just brilliant to listen to.

JR: Aye, I mean, there's a lot of Scots words in there, and not everybody will be familiar with all the words. But as you were hearing the story, it is interesting that the English version, Julia Donaldson’s original version, was up on the screen, so you'd be able to, if you were being really canny, you would have seen where the Scots words change from the English words. And it's a great way of learning new words, you know, I just believe everybody should be able to have a vocabulary full of both English words and Scots words.

JS: Yeah.

JR: So yeah, it's a great way to learn a lot of new words.

JS: Oh totally, yeah, I was living that, Lari, actually, just seeing the English text there. But those illustrations, too, are just extraordinary. So, if you are in the mood for another story, we've got another one coming right up, because it's a double Halloween treat for you today. From our lovely Lari, here, who is going to tell us, an old Scottish folklore tale, it's full of magic and danger, but it's also a story about pigs and porridge. Of course it is. Lari, over to you.

LD: Thank you, Janice. So I know lots and lots of Scottish traditional tales. But this is one of my favourites. Because this story is set in one of the most dangerous parts of Scotland. A long time ago, one of the most dangerous places to live was right beside the edge of a forest. Not because of the wild animals in the forest, but because of the magical folk who lived in the forest. Warrior fairies, powerful witches, beings like that, who really enjoyed making life difficult for the people who lived just outside the forest. Sometimes, they would play tricks on us, sometimes they would be cruel to us. Sometimes they would try to steal our children. So if you lived very near a forest, you had to be careful, really careful, not to say, or do anything that would attract the attention of the magical folk in the forest.

So this story is about a farm, just beside a forest. And this farm was run by a young woman, and this farm wifey, all she had on this farm was a couple of stony fields, her wee son, Jamie, and a great big pink pig. And this great big pink pig was their hope for the future. Because this pig was going to have babies, she was going to have piglets, and the farm wifey and Jamie Head hoped, that if she had lots of plump, healthy, pink piglets, they could sell the piglets, and with that money, they could buy seeds to plant their stony fields, so they would have food for the next year. So they treated this great big pink pig like she was a queen, they fed her better than they fed themselves. Twice a day, Jamie would take a big bowl of whatever food they could find, into the pigsty for the pig. It would have maybe bannocks, and butteries, or neeps and kale, or oatcakes and crowdie, or skirlie. And he would take this food, he would give it to the pink pig and say, eat up, eat up.

And one evening, Jamie was carrying a great big bowl of porridge, with bramble jam on top. He carried the porridge into the pigsty, put it carefully down – oh, oh Mummy, Mummy, the pig’s not well, the pig’s awfy no well. And the farm wifey ran into the pigsty, and Jamie was right, the pig did not look well. The pig wasn’t standing on her four trotters waiting for her tea, she was lying flat on the floor of the pigsty. And she wasn’t a great big pink pig anymore, she was a great big grey pink, a kind of sickly, muddy grey. And worst of all, the farm wifey could hear the pig’s breath rattling in her ribcage, the pig was struggling to breathe. Now, the farm wifey knew, they had to get the pig up on her feet to help her breathe – come on Jamie, let's try and hoick this pig up. So they put their hands under the pig’s belly, and they, oh they heaved, and they hawled, and they hefted. But do you know, they'd been feeding this pig better than they'd fed themselves for months. She was way too heavy to get up.

So the farm wifey dashed into the farmhouse, and she got a couple of things from the kitchen cupboard. She put pepper under the pig’s snout, and the pig, ah-ah-ah-choo, sneezed. But she didn’t get up. She put mustard on the pig’s trotters, hot mustard paste, and the pig kicked her legs, but she didn’t get up. So the farm wifey clipped a clothes pig on the pig’s curly tail, and the pig waggled her bottom, but she still didn’t get up. The farm wifey sighed, oh Jamie, we can't lift her, she can't get up herself, I don't think the pig is going to be with us very long. Come on, let's get the warm, red blanket. And they wrapped a red tartan blanket around the pig – I'm going to stay with the pig tonight, Jamie, I'm going to keep her comfy, and keep her company. But I think you're going to need to say, bye, bye, to the pig, and go off to your bed, because I don't think this pig is going to be with us in the morning.

And off went Jamie, and the farm wifey sat down by the pig, and she stoked the pig’s ears. And she thought about how long she had known this pig. She thought about all the wee piglets she'd hoped to meet. She thought about all the seeds she'd hoped to buy for those fields. And the farm wifey sat there, and she thought about hunger. She thought about herself and her wee son, Jamie, going hungry. And she started to greet, and as she started to greet, she said, I'd give anything, I'd give anything to have my pig well again. And as soon as she said that, as soon as she said, I'd give anything, there was a whirling, and a burling, at the edge of the forest. And a green shaped whirled and burled out of the forest and landed right at the door of the pigsty. And there in the doorway was a wee old wifey, dressed all in green. She had a pointy green hat, and pointy green shoes, and a green dress, and a green shawl, and a green apron. She also had a long pointy nose, and a long pointy chin. And she said, you'd give anything, would you?

And she stepped into the pigsty, and she took a wee green bottle out of her apron. And she dropped one drop of green liquid onto the pig’s snout, another drop between the pig’s ears, and a final drop, on the pig’s curly tail. And the pig leapt up, and the pig stuck her snout into the bowl of porridge and started eating. And the pig stopped being a great big grey pig, and her nice healthy pink colour came back. And the wee old wifey popped the bottle back in her green apron, and she whirled, and burled, back to the forest. And the farm wifey hardly noticed her go. In fact, the farm wifey was so busy for the whole of that night, helping the pink pig give birth to a dozen plump, pink piglets, that the farm wifey almost forgot about the wee old wifey dressed all in green. But she remembered her the next evening, when there was a knock – chap, chap, chap – at the door.

And there, on the doorstep, was the wee old wifey dressed all in green. I've come for what you promised me. Oh, said the farm wifey, I don't think I actually promised you anything, but I am grateful because you did help my pig, so I should give you something to say, thank you. What about, oh I could give you this big tartan blanket, it smells a little of pig, but it's nice and cosy – a blanket, a blanket, I'm not wanting a blanket. Alright then, I've got a milk jug, it's a wee bit chipped but it pours beautifully, it's blue and white, I got it from my auntie, do you want the milk jug – I'm not wanting a milk jug. Okay, I don't have much else, oh I could give you, I suppose, one of the piglets when they're weaned – a piglet, a piglet, I'm not wanting a piglet, I'm wanting your son, Jamie. Oh, my boy, my child, but you can't possibly take my child – oh yes, I can, because you said you'd give anything.

And the anything I want is your son, Jamie. But, you can't take someone’s child, there must be rules against taking someone’s child – aye, there are rules. The rules I live by say I can't take him for three days after the promise was made, so you’ve got him for two more nights. And the rules I live by say I can't take him at all, if you can call me by my true name. So, if I can call you by your true name, you can't take my child – aye, but you'll never guess my name, you'll never guess it. And she whirled and burled, back to the edge of the forest. And the farm wifey sat down by the fire, and she started to think. She started to think about names. What name could she possibly call that wee old wifey dressed all in green. She thought, but all the names of all the folk she knew, her family, and her friends, and her neighbours, all those Margarets and Elizabeths and Marys and Annes and Agneses and Evelyns, but none of those names seemed right. Maybe a more exotic name from a story, a Helen, or a Cassandra, but none of them seemed to suit that wee old wifey.

Oh, she was a gae witchy looking wifey, maybe she had a gae witchy sounding name. What about Media, or Maleficent, or Morgana. She had a pointy nose, what about Landneb, or Saggy Lugs, or Skeletene. But none of those names seemed right, nothing seemed right. The farm wifey sat there for a night and a day, and another night, she thought of every name she knew. She made up quite a few names, and none of them seemed to fit that wee old wifey dressed all in green. So the morning of the last day, she decided to go out for some fresh air to clear her head of all those names, see if she could just focus in on one name. So she walked by the edge of the forest, but nothing helped her, her head was still full of names. So she thought a change of scene might help. She took a few steps inside the forest, she started to walk just inside the forest. But the change of scene didn’t help at all, it just suggested more names. The wee old wifey, she could be called Holly, or Ivy, or Rowan, or Gowan, or Nettle, or Docking Leaf, or Rosehip, her head was just full, whirling and burling, and beeling with names.

She sat down on a tree-stump, she'd no idea what she was going to call this wifey. And then she heard a noise, like laughter, coming from under her bottom. Actually, it wasn’t from under her bottom, it was from under the tree-stump. She looked behind the tree-stump, and there was a hole in the ground. She looked down through this tunnel, and she saw a wee house under the ground. And in the wee house was a wee old wifey, dressed all in green. And the wee old wifey was laughing, and chanting, and giggling, as she stirred a cauldron. And as she stirred she said, little ken’s a good wife at hame, that home is my name, which she doesnae ken, she cannae say, and the bairn will be mine the morro’s day, ha-ha-ha. And then she started stirring the other way, little ken’s a good wife at hame, that home is my name, which she doesnae ken, she cannae say, and the bairn will be mine the morro’s day.

And down she was, under the ground, and stirring, and giggling, and chanting. And above stirring, the farm wifey had a big grin on her face – no more names, just one bright shiny name, she knew what to call the wee old wifey dressed all in green. And she ran home, she was so happy when she got home, she gave Jamie a cuddle. She was so happy, she gave each of the piglets a cuddle, too. And then she waited for the evening, and that knock at the door – chap, chap, chap. And there, stood the wee old wifey dressed all in green – I've come for what you promised me. But before I give you anything, said the farm wifey, I get to guess your name, don't I? Because if I can guess your name, you can't take my boy – aye well, yeah, but you'll never, ever guess it right. But how many guesses do I get – three, three is a nice number, you can have three guesses.

Alright, then, is your name Shahrazad – Shahrazad, do I look like a Shahrazad? No, right enough, you don't look like a Shahrazad. Is your name Rosebay Willowherb – Rosebay Willowherb, do I look like a Rosebay Willowherb? No, no, you don't look like that either. Do you know who you do look like? You look like a Whippety-Stoury. And when the wee old wifey dressed all in green heard her true name on the lips of the farm wifey, she started to whirl, and burl, on the doorstep, and she whirled and burled so fast, that she whirled right up into the air. And she whirled so fast, and so high, that she vanished out of sight. And do you know, no one has ever seen that wee old wifey dressed all in green ever again. Because as soon as we know the true names of the magical folk in the forest, they have no power over us at all. And that is the story of Whippety-Stoury.

JS: Wow, I am clapping. I think wherever you're watching, we have to have a big round of applause for that brilliant piece of storytelling, wasn’t that fantastic. I could just see it all happening there, as Lari was doing that, the power of storytelling, it's immense. That was awesome.

LD: Thank you.

JS: James is nodding as well.

JR: Fantastic.

JS: That was brilliant, wasn’t it?

JR: Well done.

JS: Oh, amazing. I love the way you just kind of drew it out at the end, because we thought, she's just going to say, Whippety-Stoury – no, she's going to keep us hanging on. I also was very anxious, because I've got a son called Jamie, there was no way, no way you'd let her take him.

LD: Oh, sorry about that.

JS: That’s okay. That was brilliant. So I mean, we've talked a little bit there, earlier on, with James, about the power of Scots. But thinking about Scots, Scottish folklore, is there a real tradition, are there endless stories out there for people?

LD: Oh, yes. Scotland has lots and lots of wonderful stories, both from the Scots tradition, and the Gaelic tradition.

JS: Yes.

LD: Lots of amazing stories. But I don't think we have better stories than anywhere else, I think everywhere has amazing stories. I think the desire to tell stories, and the enjoyment of listening to stories, is a universal human thing. I think we all love stories. And for me, I love sharing Scottish stories, but I also love sharing stories from the rest of the world. I love the similarities, and the differences. Because stories travel. That story I just told you, Whippety-Stoury, I've heard people describe that as the Scots version of Rumpelstiltskin.

JS: Yes.

LD: But equally, I sometimes call it, Rumpelstiltskin, the German version of Whippety-Stoury. I mean, who knows which came first. They're similar but they're different, they reflect our different cultures. So for me, the fact that stories travel is amazing. But I also love the fact that stories change. When I tell that story in a class of kids, I will get them to suggest different foods to feed the pig, or different names we could call the wee old wifey. So every time that story is told it's very slightly different. So if you guys want to tell stories, you can change them, too, and by doing that you're part of the life and the evolution of the story. Because stories are not static.

JS: Yeah, I love the idea of that. I think if you are watching, you’ve heard that story now, and that could be just a lovely thing to do. You could get home and tell people at home that story, and it will just be a little different from the story that Lari told. I love this. Now, I also love questions for you guys. So we've got some questions coming in, live on Twitter. But first of all, we've got some specially recorded questions for Lari, and for James. And pupils at Carronshore Primary in Falkirk, they’ve been busy filming their questions, and have sent them to us. So here is our first question.

Boy: Did you share your stories with your family when you were wee?

JS: There you go, good question. Did you share stories with your family when you were wee. Well, James, were you telling stories from when you were a tiny wee lad?

JR: I was. I loved telling stories. I loved making people laugh, actually, when I was really wee, so anything that would get a laugh, I would tell a story to make people smile or laugh at me. So as soon as I got a pen in my hand, as soon as I knew how to draw with a pencil, I would draw wee cartoons, and make stories up, like kind of comic strips. So that was my way of telling stories. But yeah, basically, I just really liked making things up in my head.

JS: Yeah. There you go, so James liking making people laugh. What about you, Lari, were you telling stories when you were wee, and if so, what kind of stories?

LD: I was a blether from right at the very start, so yes, I think I was telling stories before I could read or write, or draw. I liked writing plays, I was, and always have been, about the drama, and moments of drama. And so I wrote plays, which I then forced my wee brother, and my cousins, to take part in. And I always gave myself the biggest part, obviously, why would you not, and got them to stand at the back holding things. And we would perform these to our families. So yes, I've been making up, or telling or sharing stories, and bossing people around, right from the start.

JS: Yeah, I love it. And I'm sure people watching, you’ve probably been telling stories too. Interesting hearing, James, you talking about doing little cartoons, because I'm remembering that I used to do, up until I was, you know, quite old, like at secondary school, I would like to draw my own sort of comics, with my own heroes that were always brilliant young girls doing marvellous things, yes. So, let us go to another question from our school, this is a question from the pupils at Carronshore Primary.

Boy: Who is your favourite character?

JS: Thank you very much for that question. Which is, who is your favourite character. Now this is very wide, actually, this is in all stories, in all fiction. Lari, let's start with you, do you have a favourite, an all-time favourite character?

LD: Okay, I'm going to cheat, actually, because I love both fiction, and I love traditional tales, once that have been passed on forever. So my favourite character from stories that people have told out loud forever, and ever, and ever, is 5000 years old actually.

JS: Oh, really.

LD: She's a goddess called Inanna, and she's the Sumerian goddess of love and war, and for somebody who's 5000 years old, she's pretty active. She wrestled a mountain in one story, and went to the Underworld, on like a tourist trip, once. So, Inanna, top goddess. And my favourite fictional character is the wizard Howl, in Diana Wynn Jones’, Howl’s Moving Castle. He's brilliant.

JS: James, do you have an all-time favourite character?

JR: Oh, my favourite characters change all the time depending on what I'm reading. But I think, to be honest, if I go back, the ones that really sort of set my mind blazing with excitement, were the characters out of Robert Louis Stevenson’s book, Treasure Island. That’s a book full of pirates, and they're the most exciting people. There's a guy called Long John Silver in there, and he's got a wooden leg and a parrot on his shoulder. And he's scary, but he's also kind of devious. And there was a really scary character in that book called, Blind Pugh. And I remember, round about pantomime time one year, and my mum and dad took us to a play of Treasure Island, and it was the first time I'd ever really been to the theatre. And these pirates were flying about the stage, and having all kinds of adventures. And for me, that was like, real life, even though it was a story, I felt like I was in the middle of real things happening, even though it was completely invented.

JS: Yeah, love it, absolutely love it. We've got loads of questions coming in. Fordbank Primary, P6b, hiya. Saying, enjoying our first Authors Live event, before we create our spooky poems. You're having a great day. Liberton, P2 and P3, a question for you, Lari – how did you get so good at reading stories?

LD: Practice, and passion. And also, actually, the important thing about telling a story is, it's not that you're trying to get it right or wrong, there's no way to do it wrong. I'm just telling you the story that I see in my head. So every time I tell it, it's different, so I don't worry that it's different. And if you're telling stories, you shouldn’t worry that it's different either.

JS: Brilliant. Miss Davidson, Letham Primary in Livingston, a question for James. Keep your answer short, if you can. Is it hard to keep the story rhyming when you change it into Scots, James?

JR: It's really difficult, that’s the most difficult thing. Because, you know, in Room on the Broom, in the original, dog rhymes with frog, but in Scots, dug doesn’t rhyme with puddock. So you put all the rhymes inside out and it's really complicated, yeah.

JS: Yeah, well, well done you. Knightsbridge Primary say, why are Scottish stories so special. That’s a massive question, we’ll just leave that one lingering, maybe you guys can talk about it later. Here’s a quick one from P2 Castleview Primary. Lari, what is your favourite Scots words? Castleview Primary say that theirs is, it's two words – ya beauty. What about you?

LD: Manky, minging, and mocket.

JS: Oh, love it.

LD: And I once called, three baddies, in the Spellchaser trilogy, those three names, because I just love the sound manky, minging and mocket.

JS: Fantastic. Do you have a favourite Scots word, James?

JR: I have loads and loads. I love Scots words for animals, so I love the word, puddock, for toad, but that’s because I love puddocks really. And puddie, and grumfy for a pig, all of this wonderful words, I love animal Scots words.

JS: Brilliant, thank you very much indeed. I can't believe it, it has flown by. Thank you so much for all your questions. Unfortunately, I've not been able to put them all to our marvellous writers today. So have a fabulous, spooky, Halloween, wherever you are. And in the meantime, from Lari, James, me, and all of the Authors Live team, thanks for watching, we’ll see you again soon. Bye, bye.