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Author/Interview subject: Philip Ardagh (PA)  
Interviewed by: Sian Bevan (SB)  
Other speakers: Audience (Aud) Boys in audience (Boy),  
Girls in audience (Girl), Female (F)

SB Hello, hello. It's so nice to see you all today. My name is Sian. I'm introducing today's event and today's special guest is incredibly special. He is a giant, quite literally, of children's literature. He has been to most children's festivals around the world. He has written over 100 books. Please start clapping your hands, stamp your feet and welcome Philip Ardagh to the stage.

PA Hello. Thank you very much indeed. This isn't a sausage roll, this is my sweat towel. We have to come to terms with this. So you're looking at me and a lot of you are thinking Viking God or handsome young man, but I will get moist during the event so I have my sweat towel. Sian, are you down there somewhere? You are.

SB I'm right here.

PA Good. Because the first question I want to ask is, because at the end people put up hands and they go, is that two separate beards sewn together? Or, is your brother as good looking as you? The other question I get asked is why do you sweat so much? And it has to do with being an author, so could you put your sweat free armpit, your hand in the air if you can tell me what you think an author spends most of his or her time doing?

Boy Do you spend most of your time reading?

PA Well really good, a really good... I spend reading for pleasure, I read for research. I read to see what other sort of books are out there and then writing. Reading and writing. Something I spend even more of my time doing? Put your hand up, grown-ups included. Well look there's a...

SB Okay, we've got one down here.

- PA There's a child. Go for it, Beth, go for it.
- SB It's Sian, Sian.
- PA Sian, sorry Sian. Go for it Sian, go for it Sian.
- Boy Sharpening pencils.
- SB Sharpening pencils.
- PA Sharpening pencils. That is a brilliant. Now I wonder whether you have seen Chris Riddell, former Children's Laureate because he does a lot of pencil sharpening. I sharpen pencils, I like stationery, I was a bit disappointed when we could all get computers because I have been published for over 25 years [gasp]. And in the old days we used to carve it on rock or use wax tablets and things. So sharpening pencils, buying stationery, reading, writing. There's something I spend even more of my time doing [gasp] unattended child there. Right, okay.
- Boy Thinking of ideas for books.
- PA Thinking. Absolutely. I don't just get up in the morning and go, that's me massaging my pet snake, no that's me at my computer. I don't just get up. I'm thinking, I'm planning. I might be thinking, what can I write a new series about? Or I might be at a tricky part of a story where I'm thinking, mm, what can happen next? So brilliant, we've got thinking, we've got writing, we've got reading, we've got [panting] sharpening pencils and stationery. But there's something that I spend even more of my time doing. So, so it's getting harder now. Anyone? Anyone? Anyone? Look, look, look, child there, there, slightly more [inaudible 0:02:56]. Yggdrasil. I was just going to ask her there. Yggdrasil, that's a strange name for a woman. Anyway. That's the worm in the Norse mythology.
- SB Yeah.
- PA Anyway I'm doing the talking. Excuse me, I'm talking about a worm in Norse mythology called the Yggdrasil that's eating the tree of life, which is her name, right.
- Girl Do you do a lot of talking?
- PA A lot of?
- SB That's fair. I agree with that child.

PA How long have you known me? Five minutes [laughter]. Oh, I do a lot of, I've had a hernia operation by the way, so if there's a terrible moment [noise] we'll stop, I'm not joking. Yeah, I know. A lot of people say to me, are you pregnant? And I go, no, I've got a hernia. So it's always a bit embarrassing, so a good tip, don't ask bearded men if they're pregnant.

That's a very good thing. I do, some of the time when I'm out and about doing events I do a lot of talking. But I'll tell you what it is I do. And what it is you forgot, that I'm human. You looked, I was introduced as a giant. Some of you were thinking Viking God. And you forgot I'm human. What, apart from breathing, what we spend most of our time... Who knows what a pie chart is? Stick your hand up in the air if you know? Just, more than that. I'm not going to come to you. We all know, a pie chart is when it's a bit circle and it's divided into sections like slices of pie. Now the bigger the slice the bigger the portion of what I will talk about. So if my life is a pie chart (eek) the biggest portion of the thing that I do is sleep. And that's what you do. In your life, some of you are already sleeping during this event. Some of you will fall asleep in the car, hopefully when you're not driving. But we spend most of our time sleeping. So that's the biggest slice of the pie.

The next thing we spend most of our time doing is eating, because we need fuel. Cars need petrol, we need fuel to survive, so we eat. Some of you are looking in awe, thinking he's so darned handsome and your mouth is open and the Scottish horsefly. I never know whether the horse is Scottish or the fly is, anyway. You go [gulp] and you swallow.

The third thing you spend most of your time doing is going to the loo. Going to the toilet. Because you can't use all the fuel you've got. Cars have exhaust pipes and things, we have sort of exhaust pipes and we go to the loo. So what I'm going to do now, within the first seven minutes of the event, is I'm going to give you that writing tip. So even if the rest of the event is very disappointing, you know, you find out it's a fake beard or I slip on a pool of sweat or something and you go back, you go what's Philip Ardagh like? You go, he gave this really good writing tip. So remember, we sleep, eat and go the toilet more than anything else. So do you know what Cheerios are? Have they reached Scotland? Yes, a lot of you know. Those little O's those cereal O's. What you need to do is get a that shaped bowl, not a flat shaped bowl, get a that shaped bowl. Get a that shaped bowl and get some semi-skimmed milk. Not skimmed milk, which is like that, sort of water that's covered white and not the whole fat milk because it's got the word fat in it. Semi-skimmed and you fill it almost to the top and then you sprinkle some Cheerios on it. Then you go to your favourite

loo, bog, toilet, whatever, and you sit down, get comfy and you rest your head in the bowl of Cheerios, like this [laughter]. Oh hello camera, come in close for this. And then you just let yourself doze off with your head in the bowl of cereal going [snore]. And some of the time when you breathe in you will get Cheerio and milk in your mouth and sometimes [splutter] up your nose, but what the clever ones amongst you will have noticed is that you're sleeping and eating and going to the toilet all at once, which means these slices overlap and on average that will free seven and a half years of your life which you can put aside to write international best-selling children's books. Okay? So there we are. So you don't have an excuse, I don't have time to write. I've found a way for you to write. Good luck with that, but don't be as good as me.

Anyway, while we have a spontaneous round of applause [applause] the great thing is this isn't going out live so they can edit and it'll look like you did that spontaneously. Later on we're going to have you shouting out things like, Philip Ardour you're a God and they'll just... Right I'm going to attempt [wooh], there we are, thank you.

So today I've been asked to talk about The Grunts. I've written lots of books and we'll come back to them later on, but I'm going to talk a bit about The Grunts to begin with. On the left we have Mr. Grunt. In the middle we have Sunny, spelled SUNNY as in sunny day and on the right we have Mrs. Grunt. And as it was said in the introduction, there's me what wrote the words, [coo coo] ah, I wish I was you. Because you get to look at me as well as hear me speak. And on the right, that is Axel Sheffler. Now can you put your hand up if you know, obviously apart from The Grunts, Axel Sheffler's most famous book? This will require you to stand up, Janine, okay.

SB Sian.

PA Thank you, Sian.

SB It's Sian.

PA Right, so if you know the most famous, look there's someone quite near you, so you don't even have to walk very far. She's got a very funny walk so do enjoy it. Okay, get in there. What...

SB What, what do you think?

PA ...is Axel Scheffler's most famous?

Boy The Gruffalo.

PA The Gruffalo. Didn't you know there's no such thing as a Gruffalo? Absolutely right. Axel Scheffler drew The Gruffalo which means he is very, very rich [laughter]. I have stayed in his house and he must have an agreement in his contract that he gets every piece of Gruffalo merchandise. So his house is full of Gruffalo duvets and cookie jars and everything. And I didn't know whether he had a sense of humour or not. And I slept in his basement which he had dug out. Because when you're rich you have your basement dug out. And I was in a lovely room with my duffalo, duffallo? They'll edit that out. My Gruffalo duvet and night light and things. And the window is open and it looked lovely. But then you looked out and then about two feet away you could see you were on the ground. There was the earth. So I said to him, Axel, could I have the window open? But I'm a bit worried that insects might get in. He said, insects, worms, badgers. So I realised that he had a sense of humour, which is good because you need a sense of humour when you work with me.

Right, so here we are. This is the very first time we meet The Grunts. And Mr. Grunt is furious because he's got his head down by the foot board and his foot down by the head board. And he thinks in the night someone has turned the bed around and he is absolutely furious when in fact it's just he got into bed the wrong way round. And he's so annoyed that he wants to take it out on somebody and you could see Mrs. Grunt is there, the right way round, so he grabs Ginger Biscuit. Now Ginger Biscuit is a ginger cat shaped door stop. Not a real cat, it was never a real cat, not a dead one stuffed, it just looks like a cat. And he grabs Ginger Biscuit and throws him out of the window to upset Mrs. Grunt. And Mrs. Grunt loves Ginger Biscuit and there she is. I always like to get facial hair in my books so it looks fleetingly like she's got a moustache.

Now I must tell you a bit about Ginger Biscuit. I can tell you something unique here because if you want to find out about the book you can go to your library and you can get the book out. But I want to tell you about Ginger Biscuit. I have a son. I have a son and he is called Fred and I said to Fred, can I use the name of your cat, Ginger Biscuit, as the name of the door stop? And he went, yes daddy. So I thought, great. So I wrote the book one and Ginger Kiscuit, Ginger Kisket [trail], Ginger Biscuit doorstep. And I wrote book two. Ginger Biscuit, doorstep. Just coming to book there, Freddy who is now a lot bigger. Fred comes into my room, he goes, Dad, and I go, yes Freddy? He says, you know I gave you permission to call the ginger cat shaped doorstep Ginger Biscuit? And I went, yes. He said, I'm withdrawing it. So I thought, okay, I could say to him, I am bigger than you. I put food on our table, very mean, don't use plates. I put

food on our table, you just have to live with it. And then I thought, one day I will be old and he may be taller than me and he might be about to put me in a home and it would be the choice between a very nice home with all the books I want to read, or a shed at the bottom of the garden with Old People's Home written with lipstick. So I thought, what am I going to do? So Ginger Biscuit is in an accident and he ends up very grubby and his name has changed to Chocolate Biscuit [laughter]. And now you know why.

And this is where the Grunts live. They live in a caravan and I like showing this picture because it's the difference between being an author, me, and an illustrator, Axel Scheffler. Because the author says, he built a caravan out of an old garden shed, a bit of an ice cream van, a side car from a motorbike side car and some old bits and bobs and that's all I have to do. And I say to him, so if I want to say, it was a wet Wednesday morning, you know the day of the week, you know the time of day and you know that it's raining. But how do you draw a wet Wednesday morning? It's a lot harder. So Axel went away and you can see there's the shed and there's the ice cream van at the back and there's the side car and there's some bits and bobs there. And he came to me and he said, that's, anyway I don't know. And I said, Axel, how are Mr. and Mrs. Grunt and Sunny going to fit in there? How do you expect them to fit in there? You need to re-draw it. And he crossed his arms and said, I don't have to. I drew The Gruffalo. So there we are. Second rate drawing for you there. Okay.

Now you'll notice at the front there is Sunny who is wearing a blue dress and two donkeys. There we are. Clip and Clop. And it's very difficult to tell Clip and Clop apart and the only way you can tell them apart is by looking at their ears. Because Clip's ears show 11 o'clock and Clop's ears show one o'clock. Not in the digital sense. If you've got a digital watch, well this is what we call an analogue watch. Now I'm going to go, Petra are you there? Yeah.

SB [Sigh] It's Sian, Pippa.

PA Could you, thank you, Sian. Could you, I'm going to ask some questions now. So who here has an older brother or sister? Put your hand up. Adults can play with this as well.

SB Hello

PA What's your name?

SB What's your name?

Girl Cici.

PA You have a big brother or sister?

Girl Brother

PA Is he here today?

Girl Yes.

PA Is he the one sitting at the end?

Girl Yes.

PA Do you like him?

Girl Yes.

PA Be honest. Imagine he's not there.

SB Cover your ears.

PA Do you sometimes want to do the things he does, because he's older than you and you sometimes wish he'd leave you alone because he's a boy and you don't want to do the same sort of things?

Girl Mm, no

PA That's a good answer. I think we'll leave it there. Let's try an adult. Is there an adult? Put your hand up if you're adult and you have an older brother or sister? Let's try this frightening lady at the end here. [Laughter]. Right. Hello madam.

F Hello

PA Do you have a big brother or sister?

F A sister

PA Sister. Oh dear. How do you get on?

F Mm, it's getting better.

PA Oh good. When you were, when you were very young were both of you quite competitive, or...?

F Yes, still are.

PA Yeah, you still are. Well I offer a therapy session.

F Thank you.

PA Come to... Thanks very much indeed. Right. Who here has a younger brother or sister? Right, okay. Can we try this young person here, please? Right, can you, Ingrisil is heading your way. There we are. What do you have?

Boy A younger sister.

PA Right. Do you get on quite well?

Boy No

PA No. A pattern is forming here, isn't it? Do you quite, do you tell her what to do sometimes?

Boy Yes

PA And she doesn't do it?

Boy No

PA Because she says, you're not the boss of me, you're not my mother.

Boy Yeah.

PA Yeah, okay. Excellent. Who here is an only child? Is there anyone here who's an only child? Okay. Well what I will say to you is what happened probably is, your mum and dad had you and the thought, so perfect we don't need another child, or more likely, now I see you more clearly, eh, if that's what children are like, we don't want any more of them. But that's not for me to judge. Okay. Who here has older and younger? Right, so quite a mix. Basically what we're saying is families come in all shapes [mumble] families come in all shapes and sizes. I have a big brother called Martin who is the only person I know who's read all my books. 100 books and he loved this joke. He rang me up and he says, I just love it in *The Grunts in Trouble*. The only way you can tell [emphasised laughter]. And I said, thank you, Martin. Two weeks later he rings me again. He goes, you know in that book where the only way you can tell Clip and Clop apart is because Clip's ears are saying 11 o'clock and Clop's ears are saying one o'clock? And I went, yes. He said, what if you're looking at them from a different angle? I said, what do you mean? He said, well if you're looking at them from over here their ears aren't going to be showing that time. And I said, that, Martin, is because it's a joke. Because as well as being my big brother he's also an idiot [laughter].

Now because *The Grunts* live in a caravan, a very badly drawn caravan as it so happens, there's food on tap because they eat road kill. Can you put your hand up if you know what road kill is, please? Right. Could we, I think this, I think

she's got road kill in front of her shirt there. I don't know if the camera man can zoom in. Look, I think she's got bits of animal and stuff there. Right, okay. What is road kill?

Girl Dead animals that were run over by cars.

PA Dead animals that were, are you American?

Girl Mm-hmm

PA Yes, you hide it very well, don't worry, I wouldn't have known. So okay, yeah. That's right. I told Freddy when he was young, my son we talked about earlier, you know, if you see sort of dead hedgehogs and badgers on the road it puts a crimp in your day. So I told him they were stunt animals so a badger will be lying there and then at five to one he'd look at this watch and go, lunch time. And he's stand up and go, see you. And then the hedgehog that's already got the tyre mark on its back would come along and assume the position. But yes, it's right, sadly it's when you find a dead creature and you scrape it off the road. And that's what The Grunts eat, which means they don't have to kill any animals because they're already dead. And that's rather nice, So I'll ask Axel to do... what's the main ingredient of that stew, do you think?

F Squirrel.

PA Squirrel. You're absolutely right. That's the squirrel tail there. But what was a nice touch, because Axel costs a lot, is he added little sort of cockroach crouton which I think, it might be a German thing. It might be a standard thing, I don't know. We have this a lot in Berlin. Anyway, there we are. Now this is an example of a picture. This is the revised picture. Because when I asked Axel to draw a squirrel sandwich he originally had the head of the squirrel at the other side. And it looked like a sweet little squirrel in a bread duvet. Apparently that's its arm sticking out there. So I said, Axel you cannot do that. You cannot have anyone, no-one will like Mr. Grunt, Mrs. Grunt or Sunny if you've got the head showing. So we removed the head and it just looks more funny. You go [laugh] squirrel sandwich. So do we do think about these things. And there's Mr. Grunt and he's leaning out of the window. Now Mr. Grunt loves Mrs. Grunt and Mrs. Grunt loves Mrs. Grunt but they shout at each other all the time. And they just shout whatever they like. They don't use swearing words. I'm going to divide you in the middle. The lady in the pink thingummy, technical term. Everyone this side, you're Mr. Grunt. Everyone this side, you're Mrs. Grunt. Mr. Grunt, you've woken up, you're annoyed, you turn to your wife. Now I'd like you to turn and let's, because they didn't know this was going to happen so it might break all the

sound equipment. But can you turn and look at Mrs. Grunt, shake your fist and shout, sponge bag.

Aud Sponge bag.

PA When I say.

Aud [Laughter].

PA Right. You know in pantomimes when people go, that wasn't very loud, well that was rubbish, so... Okay, three, two one.

Aud Sponge bag.

PA You don't like being called a sponge bag, so can you turn back and shout, toothpaste. So three, two one.

Aud Toothpaste.

PA Mrs. Grunt is much louder so let's try it now. We're doing this for real. This is going out on television. Three, two one.

Aud Sponge bag. Toothpaste.

PA Excellent. You see, you don't need swears to shout at each other. But in this case Mr. Grunt is not shouting at Mrs. Grunt, he's leaning out of the caravan and he's shouting at a squirrel. I'm just going over to my sweat towel now. This is an exciting moment for everyone. Because if this is edited badly suddenly my jacket will disappear. Right, okay so there we are.

Now I have a study and an office. I'm very lucky. So I have a study which is full of nice ticking clocks and brown furniture and things and then I have an office which is full of files and computers. And from my study there's a window and outside the window is a squirrel who lives in his favourite tree and he is very relaxed but occasionally if Ginger Biscuit, who we know who that is, goes round the bottom of the tree he goes [chatter] and gets very annoyed. So I put the squirrel in the book and there he is having an argument with Mr. Grunt whose caravan window is very near the branch, but never argue with a squirrel.

Now I will let you into a secret and please check this when you go home, but don't tell him I told you. If you look at Room on the Broom or the Friendliest Giant in Town or any of Axel's books he cannot draw people front on. Everyone looks like they've been run over by a steam roller. Room on the Broom. Tabby Mccatty Watsit. They all look absolutely flat. So I choose this picture to show that despite that, Axel can draw very well. Because look at that energy of that

squirrel biting his nose. And this brings me back to my big brother, Martin. Because I based this on something that happened to my brother, Martin.

He went to Exeter University but instead of actually living on campus, he lived in a bed and breakfast outside. And the first day he went to bed and breakfast he knocked on the door and they opened the door and they went, oh hello, you must be Martin. And he went, yes. And he saw there was a dog on the ground. So he bent down and patted the dog and when he stood up the dog was attached to his nose. No dog, pat pat, dog. Now my brother is 60 next year and he doesn't still have the dog attached to his nose, so at some stage he must have been freed. But that brought me great joy because knowing how much we all love our big brothers and sisters, even little brothers, I thought I'd put that in a book. So that is a tribute to my brother having a dog attached to his nose. So that's Mr. Grunt and the squirrel and this is them up to no good.

Mrs. Grunt has gone into a shop. She's being a decoy by opening a packet of dog biscuits and eating them and while she is doing that and the woman, this is standard procedure that if you find someone shop lifting, hit them with a broom, but meanwhile out the back Mr. Grunt is sneaking out with a big, big bag of peanuts. And strangely, later that night, the exact cost of the peanuts, the opened dog biscuits and wear and tear on the broom is posted through the letter box of the shop, so no-one loses out. It's a strange procedure. And the peanuts are for an elephant and the elephant is called Fingers because he can use his trunk like a pair of fingers and there he is, loving Sunny, their adopted son.

Mr. and Mrs. Grunt adopt Sunny. One day Mr. Grunt is walking along and he sees a baby hanging by its ears from a washing line and he goes, Mrs. Grunt has always wanted one of those, so he picks the baby, takes it home and she knows, one thing she knows that boys wear blue and that they don't like tidying their bedroom. So she gets one of her baby dresses and dyes it blue and as he gets bigger she gives him bigger blue dresses and they don't give him a bedroom. He sleeps on the landing outside their room so he doesn't have to tidy it. Brilliant mum. And there he is. His hair really sticks up even when he tries to stick it down with sticky tape and glue. And this is friend Mimi.

Now Mimi wears pink. She wears pink shoes. She wears a pink dress. She's got pink glasses with pink lenses, pink bow, and she makes pink crushed rose petal scent that attracts Frizzle and Twist, two humming birds that are with her all the time, even when she's having a bath. And the reason why she has all this pink is because she works in a house with Lord Big and the servants. And she's the boot boy and she says, there's no such thing as a boot boy, whose job it is to clean all the shoes in the house. She says, I'm a girl, I'm a girl, I'm a boot girl.

And they go, no, you're a boot boy. And she goes, no I'm a girl, I'm a girl. And they go, no, there's no such thing as a boot girl. You have to be a boot boy. So she decides she will be the girliest, most stereotypical girly boot boy there can be. So...

By the way, in the old days, before Queen Victoria, in Georgian times, if you wanted to play James Bond and you wanted to be the coolest guy in town, you would wear pink because in those days pink was a man's colour and it was really cool. So it just goes to show, because we think these things are girly or whatever, it's only what we've decided. But that's what she does.

And there's Mrs. Grunt with her mother, Ma Lunge, who hates anyone taller than her. And because she's about four foot three that's everybody. We never see Mr. Lunge because he's the last recorded death by unicorn. He's in the junk shop. He sakes a fake unicorn that's really just a stuffed white horse with a narwhale, that's a sea animal's tusk stuck on the end, and he has it delivered to the house and it's been wheeled down in the van to his house and it wheels out of control and it skewers him like a kebab. And on his death certificate it says, death by unicorn. So there we are.

Every book, I've talked about facial hair, every book has bees in it. You might have heard about beard of bees, they have competitions in strange countries where they get the queen bee and they put in a little tiny cage in someone's chin and then the swarm of them... Poor old Mr. Grunt always, always, always, ends up having incidents with bees in all the books. So that's him. He kicked an electricity pylon which is a dangerous thing to do, but what happens? He ends up with a load of bees. So we thought, hey, it'd be quite fun if we got a picture of one of us. I says, hey, one of us should wear a beard of bees, Axel. And he went, it's a very good idea. And then it arrived in St. James Park in London, by Buckingham Palace. And we said, okay Axel, put it on. And he said, why do I have to wear it? I said, because I've already got a beard. So this is hand made. It's not photo shopped. It's plastic bees. It was made and he wore it and I got some double sided tape and stuck a few to me, and we walked around London and no-one noticed, because they're a bit funny down there. And there we are. There are the four books. It started with Grunts in Trouble, then All at Sea, then In a Jam and then On the Run. They are puns. Can anyone tell me what a pun is? Preferably on this side because Janine is getting a bit bored and she's like, come on. Does anyone know what a pun is?

SB Sian.

PA Yeah, okay. Anyone?

- SB My name's Sian.
- PA Sian.
- SB Sian
- PA Sorry. Sian knows what a pun is. Ask yourself. Put the microphone up to your...  
So Sian what's a pun?
- SB Sian, what's a pun?
- PA And then tell me.
- SB So a pun is like a play on words, so...
- PA Very nicely put, well done. Thank you very much.
- SB Yeah thanks, thanks, Pippa.
- PA It's a play on words. So in a jam might mean you're in a fix but there's a lot of jam involvement in that. All at sea means you're all over the place, you don't know what you're doing, but in this case they're actually at sea. On the run. They really are on the run because they do cause terrible trouble wherever they go. They might be visiting someone and thinks, oh that's a nice bit of turf. So they dig up a golf course and chuck it in the back of the caravan but then they don't know what to do with it. So they give it to people. Or the... So they get into so, so many fixes and it's fantastic fun writing them and it was great fun working with the lovely Axel. That looks completely wrong but it's the last picture. So as we come to this end of the segment, more spontaneous applause please. Thank you.
- Aud [Applause].
- SB Thank you so much, Philip, but I think we should have a little Q and A session now.
- PA Right. A little Q and A. I'm just putting on my Q and A jacket.
- SB Flawlessly. Q and A jacket. Shall we take a Q and A seat?
- PA Thank you very much indeed.
- SB I've got a question to start off.
- PA Right.

- SB Hello. What was it like working with Axel Scheffler then?
- PA So tell... Rubbish.
- SB Rubbish.
- PA No it's great fun. People think that authors and illustrators are sort of in the same room together. If you write a picture book, I mean Axel wrote, illustrated so many books that Julia Donaldson wrote and they seem it's this really close relationship when they're together. In a lot of instances with picture books, the author doesn't necessarily meet the illustrator until its published.
- SB Really? So you're not sitting in a room together?
- PA So you're not sitting in a room together. I actually am working with an illustrator at the moment where it is an unusual situation because she works and her name's Elissa Elwick and she works on the story as well so that gives me a right to say, ooh I don't like that picture. So it's much more collaborative. So Axel and Julia don't work that closely together. With me and Axel, or Axel and me, I will give some rough ideas. I'll say, he's got to have a really big nose so he looks like his pet parrot or something like that. But... So in the actual writing the books, we don't spend much time together, but then it comes to go and promote it and poor old Axel, when he's on stage with me, I'm just the same but a bit more rude. Because if you think, oh he's being a bit rude about Axel, or what would he think if, when Axel is there I can really go for it.
- SB Really lay into him.
- PA So we've actually... But when we're in Germany I have no idea what he's saying so he could be saying... So I'm slightly distracted. I don't know if the camera can pick it up, I think there's an orange monkey in the audience. Could you...
- SB Aw.
- PA I don't know if you can see, there's a...
- SB Right, can you hold the orange monkey up?
- PA Could you hold the orange monkey up because it's slightly distracting.
- SB Wow that's...

- PA Because I was talking about Axel, I won't mention his family, but it was like... And I just thought I'd better be a bit careful. No, so he was a joy to work with but I imagine he liked working with me more than I liked working with him.
- SB Because you're a delight.
- PA Because I'm a delight.
- SB You're just a, you're a delight. Is there anyone in the audience who has any questions?
- PA Could I just say, because I'm very good with the timing. I hope you don't, but...
- SB Yeah, yeah.
- PA ...we only have time for three and a half questions.
- SB Three and a half questions
- PA So can we make sure they're really good, good questions.
- SB Excellent questions, so really dig deep. Think of the best either full or half question that you know.
- PA No we're saving the half one to the end
- SB Okay
- PA Could I say, I'm going to ask, Sian? Sian?
- SB Sian.
- PA I'm going to ask Sian to choose people. If you get chosen to ask a question and you want to ask a question, that's thanks to me. But if you've got a question you really want to ask and you don't get to ask it, that's Sian's fault. Okay, so could we have a really good question? Choose somebody.
- SB You're a nightmare.
- PA I know but that's...
- SB There is, who, oh I am going to choose, down here, next to the lady with the green top. There it is, and...
- PA Right. This is going to be a brilliant question. We've only got three and a half.

SB Good question

PA This is going to be so good.

SB Okay. No pressure.

PA What is the specific heat capacity of mercury?

Boy What is the next book you're going to write about?

PA I like that it's not my son. It's not...

SB What's the next book?

PA Really, no really.

SB Are you from the publishers?

PA That is such a good question. I'm really lucky in that I get to write lots and lots of books and I've a book called Norman the Norman from Normandy which is about Norman the Norman from Normandy and I had such fun writing that, that I'm now writing a follow up book where Norman the Norman from Normandy meets William the Conqueror who was also the Duke of Normandy, meets William the Conqueror's wife and she later became the smallest Queen of England ever. She was, she was probably almost as small as, as Ma Lunge, Mrs. Grunt's mum and it's about, and you think it's going to go on the Norman Conquest because it's all the build-up and they've got live reporters knitting the Bayeux Tapestry, you know, the latest technology but he, he never bothers to go and he goes back home. So I'll hopefully be writing more books like that, because I write fiction, non-fiction, picture books, big books. I'm just so talented. It's a, you know, you're looking at the eye candy and you're thinking, if he just lived on his looks, but I've got that and the towel.

SB And yeah, you've got the brains as well.

PA I've got the brains

SB And even knowing about knitting a tapestry

PA Yeah. But I should say the Bayeux...

SB I don't believe that's how a tapestry works

- PA No the Bayeux tapestry is not a tapestry, darling.
- SB Oh, is it not?
- PA No it's embroidery but I'd...
- SB Oh
- PA ...expect any intelligent person would know that. Right.
- SB I'm going to go, the person in the cool hat over there.
- PA Right, oh cool hat, yeah.
- SB Yeah
- Boy What's your least favourite book that you've written?
- PA Oh that's a really good question.
- SB Oh what's your least? What are you ashamed, what keeps you awake at night where you think about it? And you're like, oh it was terrible.
- PA This is going out on television.
- SB [Laughs]
- PA That's a really, really good question. I write two type of non-fiction books. I write non-fiction books about subjects that I know a lot about.
- SB Mm-hmm.
- PA So I know a lot about archeology in Egyptology and Haredi's and things, so I love that. So I don't really have to speak to too many people. I might, there's some people at the British Museum I'll speak to, but I can launch into that. And then there are subjects I don't know much about like atoms and molecules. And someone might say, why don't you write a book about atoms and molecules? And rather than going, oh, oh, I think, well that would be interesting, so I talk to people. And I realise the difference between this being a table in Scotland and me being an international best-selling children's author is just to do with our subatomic particles and you could rearrange the little particles within atoms to turn that table into me and me into that, but the only problem is in doing that, is it would cause a massive explosion so it couldn't be done. And I find that fascinating. So I've written, so I have books that I won't necessarily rush out to my friends and go, hey, read my books about atoms and molecules, but I'm proud of them in a different way.

- SB Because of the kind of process that...
- PA Because of the process. So it's difficult to choose a worst, but there are some books that I go back to, but what I'm really boiling down to is I'm not going to tell you.
- SB [Laughs].
- PA Okay, excellent. So we've had two questions. We've got one last full...
- SB One last full question. I choose you. I choose you.
- PA If she's a bit weird it's your fault. If you think if only we hadn't given her the microphone, it's your fault. Okay.
- SB Do a good question.
- F Could I ask you, if you could be a character out of any book, who would you be and why?
- PA Of a book that I wrote?
- F Yeah.
- SB Great question.
- PA I'm famous for a series of books about a character called Eddie Dickens and I mentioned my big brother and he is now my little brother as well. He's my big, little brother and my little, big brother because he's older than me and he will always be older than me and even when he's dead and I'm dancing on his grave going, you're dead, I'm not, he will still be my big brother. But he's my little brother in that I'm two meters tall. I'm six foot seven. But I used to get given his old pants. Now we've got an American in the audience, you remember. You're thinking, when I say pants you're thinking of these things, so when I say pants imagine I'm saying underpants. We don't call them underpants in England because we don't call the things under which they are pants, so they can't be underpants and we don't call them under trousers, we just call them pants. So Sponge Bob Square Pants would be Sponge Bob Square Trousers or Sponge Bob Square, why are you going on about Sponge Bob? Anyway, yes. Right. So I used to wear my brother's old pants when he grew out of them I had to wear. You know, we talked about second hand, these were second bottom pants [laughter]. Because although my mum used non-biological washing powder and that nice fabric conditioner with the little lambs gambling, not gambling as in

roulette wheel but, you know. So I had to wear his old pants and I thought this was completely unreasonable. So I thought how can I get out of wearing his old pants? And I did that by doing beefy sort of Incredible Hulk exercises in my bedroom and I got very bored so I know what I'll do to pass the time, I'll read books. But I was too young to read them. I could look at the pictures and make it up but I was too young to read them. So I then thought I'll start writing my own books. Slight problem with that is if you're too young to read you're too young to write because you can't read what you've just written.

F Yeah.

PA Got up this morning and went for a walk around town. What does that say? No idea. So I did squiggles. I got hold of an old diary, not an old dairy. That's a sort of cobwebby room with cow going moo, why does nobody milk me? Old diary. And I just did squiggles and then when I got older I did words, chicken, banana, egg and then got better at it. Chicken, b-n-n-n-n-n-n egg. And then sentences. The chicken slipped on the banana. Woah [woosh] laid egg. And then I got a story in the school magazine and from there I became a writer. So I think that's thanks to my brother. But the Eddie Dickens books I wrote as letters to my nephew, Ben. So another family connection. His parents lived in Moscow. He was sent to boarding school in England which is a bit like prison and I would write him letters every two weeks and they would be stories. And from then, I know you want me to shut up, but I'm not going to...

SB I'm leaning forwards [laughter].

PA I was doing well too. And they were stories and basically I wrote this whole adventure story, set in Victorian England and it wasn't written as a book and it ended up in 37 languages and I would like to be a character in that book and I would like to be someone called Mad Aunt Maud who had a stuffed stoat called Malcolm that she hit people with. And the reason why I'd like to be her was if I was her I wouldn't have to be someone who had to put up with her because she's really, really annoying. Time for our half question.

SB That could have been a two word answer.

PA I've got so much more.

SB We have got time for half question.

PA Half question.

- SB Who's got a half question
- PA Who's got a half question? Someone put their hand up. Yes?
- SB Over there, quick, quick, quick. Just say it as loudly and confidently as you can.
- PA Can I have the first three words of the question you were going to ask, please?
- Boy Do you have...
- PA Do you have?
- SB Stop. There we go. Do you have?
- PA Do you have? I have it in abundance and it causes moisture. I have been fantastic. A huge round of applause.
- SB Wow. Thank you so much. Philip Ardagh.
- Aud [Applause].