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Author/Interview subject: David Almond (DA)

Interviewed by: Janice Forsyth (JF)

Other speakers: Audience (Aud), Emily (E), Grant (G)

JF: Hello there! A very warm welcome! I am Janice Forsyth and this is the latest of our Authors Live events, brought to you by the Scottish Book Trust, in association with BBC Scotland. It is so great to have you along. Hello there! We know that there are thousands and thousands of you watching in schools right across the country, watching online and on Glow. Now, we also have a very privileged audience with us right here. They are S1 and S2 pupils from Our Lady's High School in Motherwell, and S2 pupils from Clydeview Academy in Gurruck. Would you like to see them? I think you should because they're looking so marvellous! You can wave to each other. You wave to that camera there; say hello to all the thousands of people watching online. How marvellous! Aren't they gorgeous? They are indeed! Now if it's your first time watching this, just be aware that at times, because it's an online broadcast, sometimes the picture might judder or freeze. Don't bother trying to fix it, that's just perfectly natural with these broadcasts, it will resume normally. So, without any further ado, let's meet our totally brilliant author today. He is one of the country's most successful and talented writers working for children and young people, and do you know something? He's won just about every award going, and his books are massive bestsellers right across the world, right from his first novel for children, Skellig. So please give a massive warm welcome out there, and here, to David Almond!

Aud: [Cheering and applause]

DA: Thank you very much! Good morning, and good morning to everybody out there. It's fantastic to be here! It's great to be here in Glasgow, with you people, and it's great to have it all broadcast to so many thousands of other people, all across the place, just a wonderful thing. I do lots of events, but I've never done an event

quite like this before, so thanks to the Scottish Book Trust and the BBC. I'll do a few things this morning; I'll talk a bit about myself, about where I came from, I'll talk about my writing, I'll show how I turn my kind of thoughts into books, how a book come into the world, I'll answer your questions, I'll read a bit to you, and I'll be lots of stuff just about reading, but also about writing. One of the things I really love about writing for young people is that the people I write for are all writers, because you all have to write don't you? Everybody out there has to write, everybody watching has to write. People say to writers, 'When did you start writing?', but the question should be, for people who aren't writers, 'When did you stop writing?' So people grow up as writers. So what I want you to do first of all, is to do something which seems very weird, but it's also very ordinary. So here I am standing in front of you, as a grown man; I want you to imagine me getting younger and younger and younger and younger, until I'm a boy, until I'm a little toddler, and I'm getting smaller and smaller. Can you imagine that? And weirdly, you can, can't you? I say, 'There's an empty space, can you imagine a young David Almond in it?' and you can. And imagine David Almond getting younger and younger, until he's just a baby. Can you imagine a baby in that space? You can, can't you? It's weird. There's an empty space, imagine David Almond as a baby. Think I'd began to be a writer when I was baby, a time I can't even remember. When I was a baby just a few months old, my mum said she used to put me in her arms and walk down the high street in Felling, which is the town I grew up in. So I grew up in a little town called Felling, across the river from Newcastle, and halfway down the hill, on the high street, there was a sign above the street which said 'Almond Printer', and my uncle Amos had a printing shop. My mum used to take me along the alleyway to see my uncle Amos, go into the printing shop, and she said one day she was standing there in the printing shop, with little David in her arms. Can you imagine him? He's quite cute isn't he? The I was in her arms and she said she was standing there one day, she was talking back and forward to my uncle Amos, and as she stood there, the printing machine started to work, and turn, and off the bottom of the printing machines came the printed pages of the local newspaper, and she said at that moment, little David Almond started to jump up and down and go, 'Googoogagagagaga!', pointing and laughing at the printed pages coming off the rollers. And you know the way baby's eyes are caught by flickering lights or by birds flying overhead, my eyes were caught by print [gasp] and I went, 'Goo!' and I fell in love with it, and one of the things that I still love more than anything about being a writer, is just that – black print on white paper, I think is absolutely gorgeous. And probably that began when I was the baby, when I looked at print and went [gasp], and of course you couldn't go to that baby and say, 'What do you want to be, son, when you grow up?' 'I want to be writer!' Of course you couldn't, but I think the image of

print got into my brain, and ever since, I've been pursuing it, ever since I've been trying to make that, and every time one of my books comes out, it's sent to me by the publishers and I feel very clever. Oh yes, I'm very clever, very grown up, but inside me still, there's a little baby just a few months old, going, 'Googoogagagaga!' So I began to be a writer when I was a baby. I grew up in an ordinary town, I was an ordinary kid, from an ordinary family who didn't have loads of books, but who had some books. So I didn't come from a very literary background, and people say, 'Where do your ideas come from? Why did you become a writer?' And I think another thing that turned me into a writer, was something else that you might recognise as well. In our family there were people like my auntie Jan, and my auntie Jan was a little woman with dark hair, she was an identical twin, so there she is. Auntie Jan had never read a book in her life, but what she could do, she could stand in a room, or sit in a room, with her family around, and she could natter and gossip and go on and on and on, which words spilling off her tongue, and I remember sitting as a little boy and thinking, 'Oh no, she's off again!' Have you got anybody like that in your families? We all have, don't we? And I remember thinking, 'Oh no, Auntie Jan's off again,' but weirdly, I know when I'm writing well, that the voice of people like my Auntie Jan, who had never read a book in her life, come though to my words. And I think that's another thing about words, about pages of books; they look very distant, they look like kind of distant literature, the black marks on paper, but they're also to do with this thing, they're also to do with the human voice. And I think it's really important to remember that, that words on the page are sounds as well, and sentences are like the sentences that people speak, and my sentences are come from people like my auntie Jan, who had never read a book in her life. Another big influence on me, in this ordinary little town, that word ordinary's really weird, isn't it? Because when I was growing up, and people would say to me, 'What do you think you want to be when you grow up, son?', and I would say, 'Well, I want to play for Newcastle,' and people would say 'Oh yeah, you want to play for Newcastle.' And then occasionally I would say, 'I think I want to be writer,' and people would say, 'A writer? How do you think you can be a writer? You're just an ordinary kid from an ordinary family who goes to an ordinary school. Who do you think you are? What are you going to have to write about?' But the kind of paradoxical thing is, the more I've written about that place that I grew up in, about the people that I grew up with, about the landscape of the northeast, the more my books have got published all around the world, and in many ways, they're about very ordinary people, doing very ordinary things, and often we think about our own lives, don't we? We think 'My life's just ordinary.' Bu there's no such thing as ordinary. Each of our lives, each of your lives, contains extraordinary elements, because you are all extraordinary, we are all amazing, creative, extraordinary

people. Anyway, just down the hill from where I lived, after school and during weekends and holidays, I'd get together with my friends, on a little patch of grass, and the patch of grass was just, you know, the size of this space that we're in now. So I'd get together with my friends, and we'd play. What do you think we played on this patch of grass? After school and at weekends, what do you think we played? Yes?

Aud: Football?

DA: Football. We played football constantly, we were football nut. We'd get together on the patch of grass, play, play, play, on this little muddy patch of grass. And because it was a little town, everybody passing by would look across and say, 'Oh, there's the boys playing football on that little patch of grass.' But to us, who were playing on the patch of grass, that muddy patch of grass wasn't a patch of grass in our imaginations. Where was it in our imaginations? In our heads, where was it?

Aud: Wembley?

DA: It was Wembley. It was Wembley, or it was St James' Park, because we supported Newcastle. So to us, we were playing in a famous stadium. And anybody passing by would look across and say, 'Oh, there's David and Peter and Terry and Colin, but I wasn't little David Almond running around on the patch of grass, who was I in here? Who was I in my head? Yes?

Aud: Michael Owen.

DA: Somebody like Michael Owen, yes. We were all famous footballers, and we all know that feeling, don't we? When you play something, you commit your whole body to it, but you also commit the thing, which makes it extraordinary. And what this thing is, is a head and an imagination. I used to think the imagination was going to be something really strange and something really hard, but actually, the imagination is us, the imagination inside us, just waits to be used, and even when we're playing things like football, it's an act of the imagination. So the imagination is just there, waiting to be used, the imagination is us, that what we are. So on one side of the street, I was playing football, imagining I was a famous footballer, just across the street, on the other side of the road, there was a small square building filled with books. A library. A library. The kind of place that we take for granted, just an ordinary, small square building filled with books, and often I'd go into that library, and I was covered in mud from playing football. Ever since I'd been little I knew I wanted to write books, and the more I went into that library, the more that dream got stronger and stronger, and I began to dream that one

day I'd go into that library, I'd put my hand up to a bookshelf, and I'd take a book down from the shelf, and what did I dream I would see on the cover of the book? What did I dream I'd see on the cover of the book?

Aud: Your name.

DA: My name. I dreamed I would see a boom with my name on. So all the time I was going in there when I was nine, ten, eleven, twelve, read the books, and then I'd look at the shelf and I'd say, 'My book will be there, my book will be there, my book will be there.' And then I grew up, left home and I went away. And then a couple of years ago I had a fantastic day because the telephone rang and I picked the phone up and it was the library I used to go to as a kid, the library I used to go to when I was your age, and they wanted me to go back and work with some kids from a local school. I said, 'Yes that would be fantastic.' So back I went, across to Felling, to the library I used to go to when I was a little boy, and a growing boy, and the first thing I looked at was the patch of grass where we played football. It was still a patch of grass, but it was still a famous stadium. I walked across the street into the library, the kids hadn't arrived yet, so what did I look for? What did I go and look for? Yes?

Aud: A book with your name on it?

DA: I went and looked for a book with my name on it. And I stood in exactly the same place that I'd stood when I was nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen. And I looked up at the shelf where I'd said my book would be, and I put my hand up to the shelf, and I took the book down, and on the cover of the book it said 'By David Almond', and inside me, there was a ten-year-old boy who went 'Yes! Yes! It worked!' And I think it did work. I think the books that I write now, I began to create when I was the kid covered in mud in the local library, I began to create when I was sitting listening to my auntie Jan, nattering and nattering and nattering and nattering, I began to be a writer when I was a little baby in my uncle Amos' printing shop, and they all came to culmination, in these things, in books. So that's where books come from, books come from, kind of ourselves, from our own lives, from ordinary people. I used to look at books as a kid and think 'Books must be so weird, so remote, so strange; I'll never be able to get somehow to the world of books.' What's the world of books? We are the world of books, the world of the imagination, the world of words. That's what we all are, and stories and books come from ordinary things, ordinary voices, ordinary people. But one thing troubled me about books when I was going into that library, and wanting to be a writer. I'd look at a book and I'd say 'It looks so perfect; I'll never be able to do that.' It looked perfect. What I hadn't seen was where the books come from, and my books, they'd end up looking so perfect, and I'm sure people take these off

the shelves and say 'That David Almond, what a tidy mind he's got, what a perfect mind he's got.' I used to think writers had perfect minds. Has anybody got a perfect mind here? Anybody got a perfect mind out there? We haven't, have we? We are imperfect beings. My books that end up looking so perfect, begin in notebooks like this, and I wish I'd seen this when I was a budding writer, when I was twelve, say. My books begin like this, as kind of mess, as a kind of mess. And this really, that's like the inside of my head, that's more like the inside of my head than straight lines on a page, because we all have heads like this, don't we? We all have heads that are filled with stuff that's just flying around in them. I gave a talk recently in a theatre, and at the end of the talk I said to the audience, I said, 'Has anybody got a question?' And there was a girl sitting right in the front row, and she put her hand up, and she said 'Yes,' she said, 'How do you turn all the mess that's in your head into straight lines on a page?' And it's the perfect question, isn't it? How do you turn all the mess that's in your head into straight lines on a page? And I think the way to begin is by accepting that your head is a mess. So every time I set off to write a new book, I get a notebook, I get a pen and I start to scribble and doodle and play, and I think the idea of playing is really important. We all know that writing can be hard and difficult and serious, don't we? Writing can be really hard, but you have to keep on remembering that writing is also a kind of game, it's like playing. So when I go to my shed, I work in a shed at the bottom of the garden, I sit down and I open my notebook and I play, and I doodle, and then I begin to write sentences, and then I begin to write paragraphs, and then I go to my computer, and I print out work on the computer and I scribble all over the computer print-offs, and I scribble over it again and I print it out again and print it out again, until eventually I've got a whole manuscript, like this, that I send off to the publishers'. And then the publishers spend months and months and months and months making sure that when a book finally comes out, it'll look perfect, and that when people take this off the shelf, a finished book, they'll look at it and say, 'That David Almond, he's got such a tidy mind.' What they don't see, down beneath it is the kind of archaeology, you go down, down, down and you find those messy notebooks, because in the end it goes back into this, doesn't it? One of these, yeah, it goes back into the mess of the human head, and that's where my books come from. People say to writers all the time, 'Where do your ideas come from?' And you can talk and talk and talk and talk, but in the end you have to go, 'Well, they come from in here.' Our heads are astonishing. There's a really simple thing you can do with your head, which I think is amazing, but it's so easy, and you have a look at how big your head is, put your hands around your head, and then you hold in front of you how big your head is by doing that, and then you think 'My head! It's tiny! It's not even as big as a football. Compared with the size of this room, it's tiny. Compared with the size of

Glasgow, it just couldn't be seen. Compared with the size of everybody that's out there...' But then you think, 'What's inside that head?' Everything that's happened to you since you were born, all the stories you've heard, all the dreams you've had. You can think about what's happening on Mars, you can think about what might happen ten thousand years in the future, you can look at stars at night that are billions of miles away, that are billions of years in the past, and they come into your head. So your head, that's that big is actually one of the most immense and amazing things in the whole universe, and you carry it 'round on your shoulders. It's amazing. So when people say 'Where do ideas come from?', next time somebody says 'Where are you going to get a good idea from?' - 'Out of here, because it's filled with amazing stuff.' And when I'm doing this with my notebooks, what I'm doing is getting the stuff out of my head, onto the page, and turning it into stories. So that's my technique, and in the end it produces books. It produces books, and these are the things which come out, you know the things that I think I've loved since I was a little boy, the things I loved in the library, the things I grew up to love, the things I love now. How many people really like books? How many people like reading? It's fantastic! How many people out there like reading? A really interesting thing happens to you when you write for young people. People say to you, 'What do you do?' I say 'I'm a writer.' They say 'Oh that's interesting.' Then they say, 'What do you write?' And I say, 'Well, I write a lot of books for young people.' And you know what people often say, '[Sigh] Young people. They don't read any more, you know.' What I want to do to those people, is to bring them to meet people like you, and people like you, who know so much about books, who still love books, who still love stories, who know so much about writers. If I ask a question, 'Who are your favourite writers?' Put your hand up. Who's got favourite writers? Yep?

Aud: J.K. Rowling.

DA: J.K. Rowling. Anyone else with favourite writers?

Aud: Anthony Horowitz.

DA: Antony Horowitz.

Aud: Enid Blyton.

DA: Enid Blyton. Anyone else? And out there, there are thousands of famous writers, well-known writers, who are being talked about. People say books are dying. People say people don't read any more. It's absolute rubbish. Because people like to pretend, 'Oh, things are getting worse and worse, and kids of today aren't interested in books.' And we have thousands of people watching this today

because they are interested in books, because they are interested in books. So my books I have here; this book has just come out, and this book has just come out. The paperback of this book has just come out. This book is called 'My name is Mina' and 'My name is Mina' is a prequel to a book called Skellig, and 'My name is Mina' is about a girl who is really interested in writing herself, I think because I'm a writer, I'm really interested in words, and Mina's really interested in words as well. She's interested in the power of words. Now, the power of words, we think, 'Oh, yeah, words are really powerful, blah, blah, blah.' Here's the amazing thing about words. I'll give you a word, right, I'll give you a word, I'll give everybody out there a word. It's just four letters long, right? And it's just like a black mark on a page. Here's the word. And what I want you to do, and you out there as well, when I give you the word, just keep it as a word. Don't let it become anything else. Here's the word, right – T – E – N – T. Tent. Put that in your mind, keep it as a word, just keep it as a word. Stop it being anything else. Can you do that? What happens to the word when you put it in your head? What happens to it? What happens to the word in your head?

Aud: You imagine that's you're outside, maybe camping, in the tent.

DA: Yeah, you start thinking about things like camping. What does the word become?

Aud: The object itself.

DA: It becomes the object itself. Yep?

Aud: You get a lot of ideas into your mind about what's happening.

DA: Lots of ideas around tents just coming into your mind, and that's just one word. One word like tent, turns into a picture, it turns into memories, it turns into things like smells, it turns into ideas, it turns into a huge amount of stuff, and it's just one word. And then you think, 'How many words are there in a book?' Thousands and thousands, so each time you read a word, it makes your brain do astonishing things. And that's the power of words. Mina, who writes lots of stuff about words, one of her favourite pages, she writes lots of pages, is that page. And that page has just got one word on. She says, 'That's one of the best pages I've ever written.' And in the middle is a tiny word, and it says 'skylark'. And skylark, she's saying that word is like bird in the sky, you put the bird in the sky, and it's like it sings, it sings at the top of the page, just like a word sings, like a bird sings in the sky. That's what she says about words, and that's what I think about words. Words are extraordinary things, put them together into stories, extraordinary things. Another book that's come out, just a couple of weeks ago, is this book called 'The True Tale of the Monster Billy Dean'. Mina's interested in words, she

does lots of things with words. Billy Dean, is a boy who is brought up in isolation from the world, he knows nothing about language, he knows nothing about the world, but there's something about being human that drives us to tell our stories, and Billy can't write, but he still wants to tell his tale. So can he spell? He can't spell. So Billy has to tell his tale, and make up the words that he spells, and he says interesting things about words as well. One of the people who, in the end, teaches him how to write, is a butcher, and the butcher, in his butcher's shop, has got lots of pictures around the wall, of different animals. And he points to a lamb, and he says, 'That's a picture of a lamb, Billy, and that's how to spell lamb.' How do you spell lamb?

Aud: L – A – M – B.

DA: L – A – M – B. And Billy looks at the word and he says, 'That's not right.' How do you think Billy spells lamb? How do you think Billy spells lamb?'

Aud: L – A – M.

DA: L – A – M. And then the butcher says, 'Oh, and that's a calf.' How do you spell calf? Yep? At the back, yeah.

Aud: C – A – L – F.

DA: C – A – L – F. And Billy says, 'That's not the way to spell calf.' How do you think Billy spells calf? How do you think Billy spells calf? Yep?

Aud: C – A – F.

DA: C – A – F, or C – A – R – F, because, to him, that's the proper way to spell calf. And he says, he says, 'The way to spell things right, often looks weirder than the way to spell them wrong.' Which is true, isn't it? I remember, as a little boy, finding out how to spell one, and the teacher stood in front of us and said, 'You spell one with O – N – E.' And I felt so disappointed, because I thought, 'That's not how to spell one. You spell one W – O – N, don't you?' So learning to write and learning to spell are kind of weird. They're wonderful things, learning how to use words is wonderful, but it's kind of occasionally very barmy. English spelling is very barmy, and it was lovely to write a book by a boy who can't spell because I thought, 'Oh, that's quite nice, because I'll be able to write as if I can't write, and spell calf C – A – R – F, and spell lamb L – A – M, and spell one...' How do you think I spell one? How Billy spells one in here? Yep?

Aud: W – U – N.

DA: W – U – N, or W – O – N. Won. That's the way to spell one, isn't it? So Billy writes his story. So these are two books which are out recently, and this one's for older children really and for adults as well, and this one, *Mina*, is... *Mina*'s a girl who doesn't want to go to school, she hates school, she hates teachers, she doesn't really like many people, but as well as pretending not to like them, inside her she just really, really, really wants to be with other people, she really wants to be at school, she really wants to like teachers, but she's kind of lonely, she's on her own and she spends ages writing a book, which is like a notebook, which is like a note books, and through the process of this, it takes her to the beginning of *Skellig*, which is the book that she leads up to. And *Mina* was a lovely book to write as well. She goes to a pupil referral unit and she writes empty pages, and she says 'An empty page is like an empty sky, waiting for things to happen', and if you think about that, it's wonderful. If I gave you all a blank page, on the one had you think, 'Oh, that's really worrying because he's going to make me write', but also if you look at a blank page, and you've got a pen in your hand, and I hope you'll all do this today, at some time, you get a blank page, you put a pen in your hand, and don't think 'I've got to write something fantastic', just think, 'Oh, I'll just play, I'll just write some nonsense, I'll just doodle, and scribble, and play, because writing is very human, very ordinary, and it really is one of the loveliest things you can do. It can be hard, but it can also be beautifully easy and a kind of joyous thing to do. Almost like playing football. I used to love playing football, I don't play football so much now, and somehow, writing feels a bit to me, a bit like playing football. It's been lovely to talk to you, it's great to be here, and I think we have some questions coming up, and thank you for listening. It's very weird talking to people I can't see, but it's great to be with you all. Thank you.

JF: David Almond.

Aud: [Applause]

JF: Wow, that's so inspiring, and it's just amazing to see the books as well, to see how it starts off with those doodles, and as you say, playing. Well, we've had lots and lots of questions from you all over the country as you can imagine, far too many to get through, but we'll see how many we can race through, and also we've got a couple of questions from some people here.

DA: Great.

JF: So I think we'll go first of all to the girl in the front row. You can maybe say what your name is and what your question is to David.

- E: My name's Emily. What sort of books did you read, that you liked, as you were growing up?
- DA: When I was growing up... How old are you?
- E: Thirteen.
- DA: Thirteen. When I was thirteen, my favourite writer was a writer called John Windon. John Windon wrote, his most famous book was 'The Day of the Triffids'. Has anybody read 'The Day of the Triffids'? Fantastic books, I really loved John Windon and I loved reading myths and legends, especially the King Arthur stories. And a writer that was mentioned earlier, Enid Blyton, when I was young Enid Blyton was everywhere, lots of writers.
- JF: Great, thank you very much and we'll get another question from the young man in the second row here, what's your name?
- G: Grant.
- JF: Hi Grant.
- DA: Hi
- G: What inspired you to become an author?
- DA: What inspired me to become an author? It's really hard to say, I think my uncle Amos did, the printer and he also wrote poems and stories that were never published but he didn't care. He just loved writing, so I think Amos... being a baby in his printing shop, other books that I loved, and sometimes you've got no idea why you want to be the thing you want to be, it's just something drives me to write, I want to write, it's what I love to do.
- JF: Thank you very much. I bet you loved the smell of print as well as looking at it
- DA: I love the smell of print, I do...
- JF: (laughs)
- DA: ...and the feel of the book.
- JF: Oh they're lovely things.
- DA: Yeah.
- JF: Um, right, here were some questions from Robert Gordons College in Aberdeen, and many people have asked the questions that you two have asked here too.

But a question about Skellig, how long did it take to write Skellig? That comes from Miriam.

DA: Hi Miriam. Skellig took me, I know, it took seven months. I began in August and I finished in February, which I think is seven months, and it was a book that was really weird and powerful to write because it just seemed to happen, you know often I'd hardly had to, it felt like I wasn't writing a lot of the time, it was like writing in a dream, and people write essays about Skellig now and they say 'that was really clever the way you did that on page 27, that matched up with this on page 92', and I say 'it wasn't it!', and I don't know how I did it.

JF: (Chuckles) So not too much planning then?

DA: Not for that one...

JF: Em, we have a question from [Cames? 30.17] School in Edinburgh, so this is from Thomas, hi Thomas, who knows a bit about you, he says 'I believe your first novel, eh Séances, was rejected by every publisher in the country' – sorry to remind you of this – 'will you publish this book in the future?'

DA: Hi, em, no I'll not. It was literally rejected by every single publisher, 33 publishers, all across Great Britain wrote to me and said, 'this isn't good enough', so then, you know you feel a bit stupid! I had spent five years writing this book and I felt a bit stupid, and I thought 'well, so what, I think I'll write another book!' So I wrote another book. Em, so the daft thing is now if I sent that novel to any publisher, any publisher would say, 'oh this is really interesting Mr Almond, thank you very much', but I've kind of used it as a, almost as a treasure chest, so that novel has fed into lots of other novels, and you learn how to write by writing, I learned how to write by writing that novel that was never published, so it didn't matter.

JF: It's a great question 'cause I guess there are people here and watching all over the country who might think, right you're inspiring me to write, but if they get rejected they might get put off by just one rejection.

DA: One rejection, I could, when I go and give talks I often take a file of my rejections, and I have dozens and dozens of rejections, and I have rejections for the same story that says 'dear David, dear Mr Almond, I'm really sorry, this story is far too strange for our readers', and then I have a rejection for exactly the same book, 'dear Mr Almond, sorry this story is far too traditional for our readers'.

JF: (laughing)

DA: You just have to, if you, you'll get rejected, anything you want to do you'll get rejected. There'll be people who say you can't do it, and there's gotta be one person that believes that you can do it, and who's that? You. You can believe. The world's full of people who will say 'ah you can't do that', but you can, you can do extraordinary things, really you can.

JF: Great. Em, this question comes from St Columbus R.C. High in Dunfermline, class 1 EN1, hello hope you're all watching, eh and the question is, David, 'from all the characters that you've created in your novels and stories, which one do you most identify with, if there are any, and why?'

DA: Well weirdly, when I wrote Mina, it was, I mean Mina as a sort of, you know, adolescent girl, I'm obviously not an adolescent girl, (chuckles) um but there was something about Mina that drew out something from me, so I weirdly felt very close to Mina, she was somehow a kind of mentor, or uh.. something inside me. But also other characters like Kit in Kit's Wilderness, who, Kit tells the story of Kit's Wilderness and I felt very close to Kit when I was writing that.

JF: Em another question from Juniper Green Primary School, hello there, eh in Edinburgh, the p6b class, and this is about the film of Skellig, because I'm sure a lot of you will have seen the film that was made of the novel. Eh David were you involved in the making of the film?

DA: In the making.., no. I went to a couple of days of filming, I'd been involved right at the start. The thing about a film is that it takes years to make it happen, so Skellig had been gonna happen for about eight years, and people who make movies, I think that, gosh they'd have so much stamina and so much determination, and so much grit, and I kind of backed away from it, and didn't think about it. And by the time Skellig came out I'd written about five more books, but film makers, it takes great determination, so I was, I was involved, I talked a lot to the director and the producers but in the end, you have to just say (admiring sigh) it's a different form, you do it.

JF: You talked about the thrill of seeing your book in print and going to the library and looking at it, was it a thrill to sit in the cinema and see your movie?

DA: It was terrifying!

(Both laugh)

DA: Terrifying! Em, I mean fortunately I'd seen it on a dvd before I went to the cinema to watch it, but it's still really strange to watch your book turned into a film, and see it come up on a screen. Yeah, but it was fine, it was fine.

- JF: Em, this question from Argyll and Bute from Kirn Primary School, p7 class, hi there! Eh, and this is, em, it's from Erin, and she says, 'in My Name Is Mina why did you use a Greek myth?'
- DA: A Greek myth... erm, I used the myth of Persephone who was the, you know, goddess of the underworld who comes back in the Spring, and it seems to me that one of the reasons that stories keep on getting told, myths keep on getting told, is that because no matter how ancient they are they tell us something very important about ourselves. So the myth of Persephone coming back, and coming back year after year, shows us that no matter how bad things get, no matter how dark things are, that in the end things'll turn over and things will be okay again, and then things will get bad again, but things'll get okay again. And really that kind of reflected Mina, reflect, Mina kind of goes through bad times but she comes through to the light again, and I think one of the things about myths is that they tell us really important things about ourselves.
- JF: Thank you. Uh, this question from Brichin High School in Angus, hi there, um, 'are you friends with any other writers?'
- DA: Am I friends with any other...
- JF: (Laughing)...Are you all, do you all hate each other? (Laughs)
- DA: We all hate each other's guts, em, yes I am and it's one of the great things about being a writer is it seems a very solitary thing because I sit (chuckles), I sit in the shed in me garden in Northumberland and eh, you think, 'the poor soul, stuck down there', but you get out a lot. So I get out sometime, so it's this week I've been with some writer friends, working at festivals in Bath and Bristol, so it's lovely to go and meet other writers, yeah.
- JF: Here's an unusual question, which is from [Cames? 35.51] School in Edinburgh, 'have you ever regretted writing any of your novels?', this is from Iain, hi Iain.
- DA: Hi, that's a really good question, I've never regretted wri... no I haven't, is the answer, but I almost published a novel, and I didn't publish it because I knew if I published it I would've regretted it, and that was a novel which, the poor publishers were about to publish it, and I said 'oh I'm sorry, I don't want you to publish that', and they said 'oh no', but I said, but by that time I was writing another book called The Fire-eaters, which when it came out I was really proud of it, but I know if I'd published the book that was gonna be before that, I would have felt 'oh no I should never have published that book!'

JF: Em, if you were not an author, is there another career you can imagine doing, or is that just an impossibility for you now?

DA: Another [not an?] author, em, well I'm still waiting to pay for a new castle

JF: (laughter) of course!

DA: I think I'd like to be a singer, you know I think it must be great to be a singer, so yeah some kind of singer.

JF: You can give us a song now if you want to? (laughs)

DA: No, I think my daughter might be watching

(both laughing)

JF: Em, interesting that, what, the book, the new book coming out in editions for adults and children, I mean, we've got a question here from Caitlin at St. Mary's who says 'do you prefer writing books for adults or children?', I'm guessing you prefer writing books for children?

DA: I just like writing books, and the reason that the new book is coming out in two editions for children and for adults, is because lots of adults read my books, but they say, why can't we find them on the adult bookshelves? So that's why we've published it for adults, so adults can find my books as well, cause em, I have lots of adult readers. Stories are stories, good stories are good stories for anyone.

JF: Fantastic. Em, and eh, just a final one. You've mentioned your favourite book, do you read lots of books, I mean are you reading books all the time...

DA: Yeah...

JF: ...and do you come up with new favourite books...

DA: Yeah...

JF: ...apart from the ones that you had as a child?

DA: Oh absolutely, and I think one of the things about writing is you just keep on finding writers that you know are gonna really inspire you! And recently I've been reading Jack Kerouac who I hadn't read for years, and I read Jack Kerouac again, and I thought oh, Jack Kerouac is a really important writer to me, kind of affect the way I write in the future, so it's really important to read and to write, to do the two things together, they're not separate, they're the same thing, do it together.

JF: Well believe it or not, that's all the time...

DA: That's it..

JF: ...we have for questions, but lots of people asked the same questions so I hope we got through as many as possible, em but if you do still have a burning question for David, there is another opportunity to ask him, you can do that in a live Glow chat, which is taking place today between 12.45 and 1.15. You need a password for that but you can find out all the information about it at the Scottish Book Trust website, eh while there you can have a look at the learning resources for David's event. Let me tell you that the next authors live event will be with the best-selling author of the Murderous Maths books, Kjartan Poskitt, Kjartan will be talking about the Murderous Maths books and showing us a few maths tricks to impress your pals and indeed your teachers. The event is for p5-s2, that's 10-14 year olds, and they're also to other meet our author special events coming up, you'll be able to watch Cressida Cowell, author of the How To Train Your Dragon series of books, that's from Thursday the 6th of October, that's National Dragonese Day, in case you didn't know, and the children's laureate Julia Donaldson from Thursday the 10th of November, both events on the Scottish Book Trust website, and you'll also find more info. Finally don't forget that you can watch this event, as well as all the previous ones, on the BBC Scotland learning and Scottish Book Trust websites again, so keep an eye out for more updates. In the meantime though, please join me in thanking David Almond, I'm sure he'd agree, keep writing, keep reading, and keep playing! Yeah! So from all of us bubyee, thank you very much, and a big round of applause for David, thank you!

(JF and aud applaud)