

Date: 31st January 2019
Author/Interview subject: Frank Cottrell-Boyce
Interviewed by: Janice Forsyth
Other speakers:

Example transcript

JF Hello there. A very, very warm welcome indeed to Authors Live. Thank you so, so much for joining us. My name is Janice Forsyth and I'm thrilled that you are joining us today on a very chilly morning, but we're going to be warm and glowing by the end of today's Authors Live. Not least because I've got brilliant company with me in the studio. They are pupils actually from a school not very far from where we are now at the BBC, Oakgrove Primary School in Glasgow. They're a brilliant bunch. Don't take my word for it, have a look. In fact, why don't you wave to each other, Oakgrove Primary, there you go. There are all the kids and they can see you there. Wave back. Blow them kisses. Do whatever you like. Absolutely excellent.

Well let me tell you that we're going to have such a great session and I'm going to let you into a little secret. We have been wanting to have this particular author on Authors Live for a long, long time. Now he has wanted to come, believe me, but he's so busy and that's because he's one of the funniest writers in the country, possibly the world. Also, one of the most talented, so you can imagine that he's doing lots of stuff. Writing brilliant children's books, writing movies, films and also stuff for television as well. And just a few years ago there was the tiny little matter of writing what was the best ever Olympics Opening Ceremony in the history of the world. So, you can tell he's quite busy. Can you imagine how thrilled we all are that he's able to be here? He's Frank Cottrell-Boyce. It's true, Frank Cottrell-Boyce is here.

So, we're going to be talking about all sorts of things, but really focusing on the brilliant book which is Sputnik's Guide to Life on Earth. There is so much to talk about in it. And we'll also talk about writing and reading and all those things. So, we'd love to hear from you wherever are. We'll hear some questions from the people here from Oakgrove. You can get in touch if you do the Twitter thing and

use the hashtag BBC Authors Live. You've got that? Say it altogether. Hashtag BBC Authors Life.

Aud: Hashtag BBC Authors Live.

JF: Well done. We'd like your questions for Frank. I'm sure you've got loads in your head already, but as well as asking questions we would love to hear from you about your reasons why the world should be saved. Why we should save our beautiful planet. You can make a wee list or just tell us one or two reasons why. We'd love to know that. So, questions for Frank and reasons to save the world. Brilliant. Apart from that, do you think I should shut up now and introduce our fabulous guest? Will you give him a massive round of applause and the biggest cheering ever? Will you all do that as well?

Aud: Yeah.

JF: Fantastic. Let's hear it for the amazing Frank Cottrell-Boyce.

FCB: I wondered who you were talking about then.

JF: It was you, Frank. No truly welcome.

FCB: Thank you.

JF: And it is funny because we have been saying, you know, you are number one on our hit list to have on this show. But you are busy all the time, aren't you?

FCB: Yeah, yeah, it's good. It's good fun.

JF: You've got the dream job...

FCB: Yes.

JF: ...being a writer.

FCB: Absolutely the best.

JF: So, let's start then, let's talk about Sputnik's Guide to Life on Earth.

FCB: Okay.

JF: It's not the biggest book in the world, but it's absolutely jam packed with stuff. There are lots of events, there are lots of action and really, really lovely characters. Not least somebody that we could call a space dog.

FCB: Yeah.

JF: So, tell us about Sputnik.

FCB: Sputnik is an alien and he's come to earth on a kind of a mission, but he's got all this information about earth from a dog. Because the first creature to leave this planet, ever, was a little dog. A little dog called Laika, a Russian space dog. And she's one of a whole...

JF: And this is fact? Because it sounds like fiction.

FCB: This is true.

JF: This really happened?

FCB: And she was sent up and she orbited the earth, and she, very sadly, she never came back, which always made me sad. And I thought, well what if she lived and she met aliens and they talked to her about life on earth. What would she say? She would say, earth is great. Dogs are the dominant species. There's another species on earth called humans and their job is to build you little houses, bring you food, drinks, have things, throw things for you to go and fetch and if you poo in the wrong place, they clear it up after you. So, you would come to earth as a dog.

JF: Yeah.

FCB: If you were going to come to earth at all, you would come disguised as a dog.

JF: It's a great idea.

FCB: Because it's a great place for dogs, yeah.

JF: Oh, it's a brilliant idea and we expect from Frank's books lots of humour and you've already indicated, I love the fact of course they would think that the dogs are in charge and the humans are somewhere below.

FCB: Yeah.

JF: In fact, I quite fancy being a dog now. I quite fancy that. Apart from the fetching the stick thing. So, it's not just any old human being that Sputnik comes to meet. So, tell us about this boy. Because he's a really lovely boy.

FCB: Yeah. He meets a boy called Prez who has been living with his granddad but his granddad is getting older and needs a lot more looking after. So Prez is sort of on his own and he's, in the story, he's been sent to stay with a big family on a farm in Kirkcudbright in the South of Scotland.

JF: In Scotland, yeah.

FCB: Now it's a lovely, lovely place but farms have lots of rules. You know, don't open that gate or if you open that gate, close that gate. Don't, wash your hands. So, he kind of doesn't know how to behave. So, when Sputnik comes to the door, he's not sure what to do about him.

JF: Yeah. And see I haven't finished reading the book yet so I don't want lots of spoilers. I know you're not going to do that anyway, but what is so fascinating and it's brilliant in your writing because for a start I think we don't realise that Prez doesn't really speak much until he does.

FCB: Yeah.

JF: And then there's the reaction of everyone around him going oh, Prez spoke, because he doesn't really speak much, does he?

FCB: No, he doesn't speak at all in the book until the very end. And it's kind of a twist thing because Sputnik has come to earth thinking dogs are the dominant species so he can tell everybody what to do, but of course when Sputnik speaks people just hear, woof, woof, woof, woof, woof, woof, woof.

JF: Yeah.

FCB: They just think he's a really barky dog. And the only person who can understand him is Prez. So, they speak to each other.

JF: And it's the fun, isn't it, of books? Especially books for children that there are Frank's words but there are also illustrations.

FCB: Yeah.

JF: And it's great to have the sort of, the visual, the drawing of what Sputnik looks like.

FCB: Yeah, these are great drawings by...

JF: So how would you describe him?

FCB: Well because to you he looks like a dog, so that's quite funny when he does things that are not dog like things. So, if he goes to the toilet, he goes to the toilet in the toilet and he washes his hands at the sink and people look and, that is one clever dog. And he wants to eat with a knife and fork and it's, he just gets it all wrong about how, he doesn't know how to behave as a dog.

JF: Yeah.

FCB: So, it's quite difficult for Steven to draw, to find a way of drawing him so that he looked like a dog and a person. But Steven Lenton who did these drawings, this is what he came up with so the big googles sort of make him a little bit animal like.

JF: Yeah.

FCB: A little bit alien like and he wears his kilt and a flying jacket.

JF: Yeah, we loved the fact he's wearing a kilt...

FCB: And he's got a big jacket, he's got a big old voice.

JF: ...for us in Scotland.

FCB: Yeah.

JF: So, I mean I guess you could have set it anywhere but although you're from Liverpool, people recognise the accent and you live there, you do come to Scotland a lot, so...

FCB: Yeah, we spent a lot of time in Scotland, in Southern Scotland in Dumfries and Galloway which I really, really love and I don't know, Sputnik just appeared, like when you're writing you always kind of want ideas and like ideas come very slowly. And it's very, very seldom that you get an idea like that. But I was driving my daughter, I was giving my daughter a lift and we stopped at the traffic lights outside Tesco on the Formby bass-pass.

JF: This is glamorous.

FCB: I know. And the window was open and I swear the idea for this book just jumped in through the window like a dog. And I turned to my daughter and went, what if there was an alien that looked like a dog to everybody except for one little kid? And he'd come to save the earth but only this little kid could understand him. And she just went, yeah, fine. And I went, okay. So I just went home and wrote it and it was as though Sputnik had jumped into the car and when he did he had a kilt on and a pair or, he had a flying helmet.

JF: Oh right.

FCB: In my head he just had all those things.

JF: You see, I love that. Because I'm sure you might read books and think, how did the writer get that idea? And the idea of something appearing, it doesn't happen very often, but fully formed.

FCB: Yeah.

JF: How important do you think that is? Like for everyone watching and listening today, writing their own stories, you might think an idea jumps into your head, or a little bit of an idea and you think, och no, that's a bit rubbish. It might not be. What, would you give any advice on when you should write it down?

FCB: Well because, 'm saying that Sputnik jumped into the car, but the story didn't.

JF: No.

FCB: So, I think you keep your ideas together and like two little ideas, two small ideas make a much, much bigger idea when you put them together. It's like cooking. You know, if you put a spice with something it suddenly becomes a different thing.

JF: Yeah.

FCB: So, when you put them together. And also, when you put stuff from stories that you've read with you, because you are very special and you are very different. So, you can tell the oldest story in the world, but your version of it will be very different from other peoples.

JF: Uh-huh, that's good advice.

FCB: So, don't be embarrassed about nicking other people's ideas.

JF: So yes absolutely. You can use other people's ideas, absolutely. And although, you were talking there about that idea arriving and that's not sort of from real life, but you do draw on your own experience, don't you? Not least the idea of the large family that Prez has kind of landed with.

FCB: Yeah, we've got a bit family. I think you just, well that's what I mean, you're special and you're different.

JF: Yeah.

FCB: And you leak into anything that you do, you know. And that's why you should read a lot. That's why you should read a lot, because then you've got more ideas in your head that have come from other places and they all match up. It's like if you watch Ratatouille when he puts all the different flavours together. So, the

books that you've read and the stories that you know, they are the colours on your pallet. They are the spices in your box. Get them all in there.

JF: And I think, speaking to other writers, just keep doing it. If you've got ideas, keep writing.

FCB: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

JF: Does it get easier if you keep doing it?

FCB: No, it gets harder.

JF: Oh, that's annoying. That's annoying. I thought you might say that.

FCB: It just keeps getting harder.

JF: So, tell us a little bit more about the story then. You've got that initial idea of this creature, if you like. And, but there are lots of elements. We've got this really interesting boy. There's the family. You're exploring lots of different things.

FCB: Yeah, yeah well Sputnik's from a, Sputnik works for a big company that's clearing up the galaxy, he's decluttering the galaxy. You know your house gets full of stuff. He's decided that the galaxy, there's just too many planets. Because new planets are being formed all the time in these magellanic clouds that produce new planets. So, you have to make room by getting rid of old planets. So, they go round looking for rubbish planets and they decided that earth is a rubbish planet.

JF: Imagine that. Earth is a rubbish planet.

FCB: So, Sputnik has got to find ten good reasons to save the world.

JF: Yeah.

FCB: So, he spends... And Dumfries and Galloway is exactly the right place to start looking for ten good reasons to save the world.

JF: Yes. Dumfries and Galloway is also a good place to look at the sky at night, isn't it?

FCB: Exactly. There's a huge dark park there in Galloway forest, so...

JF: Yeah. What is it you call it? You describe it as, there's a lovely description in the book, is it caster sugar stars?

FCB: Yeah.

- JF: You know, as if the sky, the dark sky has been sprinkled with the stars.
- FCB: Yeah. And space looks a lot closer.
- JF: Yeah.
- FCB: Yeah.
- JF: There's quite a lot of food in your books. There's quite a lot of food in this book.
- FCB: Food. Really?
- JF: Yeah.
- FCB: Okay.
- JF: There's cooking...
- FCB: But that's true of all great kid's books, isn't it? That would be a good thing to think about when you're reading. What's your favourite meal in a children's book?
- JF: That is good.
- FCB: There's the Mad Hatter's tea party, there's that amazing food in the Narnia books. Butter beer in the Harry Potter books. All that stuff.
- JF: Yeah. That's a good one.
- FCB: So, food, we like food in children's books.
- JF: We're onto lists again.
- FCB: Yeah.
- JF: So Prez doesn't talk. He's in the middle of this big family where there's lots going on. Sputnik arrives. But there's also another very important person in his life, Prez's life, which is granddad,
- FCB: Which is his granddad, yeah.
- JF: Tell us a bit more about him.
- FCB: Well I can't really tell you too much about him without spoiling it for you, but the granddad like my granddad was a sailor and he's been everywhere in the world. So Prez thinks, well if I can get to my granddad he will know the ten best things in

the world. But it's quite, for reasons that I don't want to give away, it's actually quite hard to get to the granddad.

JF: Yes.

FCB: But that's the closest relationship that he has, so...

JF: But that's also nice, isn't it? Because it's that, I'm sure our children who are here with us today and also watching, wherever you're watching, it's lovely to have those older people in your life too.

FCB: Yeah, full of stories.

JF: Not least to talk about stories, yeah.

FCB: Yeah, full of stories, yeah.

JF: Yeah, indeed. So, tell us a little bit more. I'm just nosy. Do you have a special place where you go and write? Because you were saying the story, you have to work at the story. So, I'm wondering.

FCB: Yeah, you do have to just turn up and do it.

JF: Do you?

FCB: So, I have a room at the very top of the house which is small and it's got lots of books in and it's really comfortable and I can shut the door a little bit.

JF: Yes.

FCB: People can come in and out but it's still, that's my special place.

JF: And tell us, since, because we've got Frank here, do you know how long it took you to write this book?

FCB: How long does it ever take to write a book? Because Sputnik I wrote relatively quickly. But the book that I've just finished took me years to write. And it's, you can't tell what it's going to be. I wrote a book called The Unforgotten Coat which did really well, which I wrote in a couple of weeks. And Millions, my first book, I wrote in a few months.

JF: Yes.

FCB: But that doesn't mean anything because then another book can take you two or three years, so it's hard to know.

JF: Yeah. It's also the idea, isn't it, of being able to... That's the wonderful thing, I guess, about being a writer. There's a lot of work involved, but you can create literally your own universe.

FCB: World.

JF: And that's what you do with your books.

FCB: Yeah.

JF: You have a boy who's 13 and he's six, over six feet tall and has a beard and looks like a man and you put him into outer space.

FCB: Yeah. And I think the best thing about a book is it takes you to another world when you're writing. If it's another world that you want to be in, you don't want to let go of it by writing the end.

JF: Yes.

FCB: So, you want to stay in it a long time. So, I wrote a book called Cosmic which is all set in space and I loved thinking about space. That book took me so much longer than it needs to just because I didn't want to come back down to earth.

JF: Yeah, yes, I can imagine. Do you do lots of research for something like that?

FCB: Yeah, I did lots of research...

JF: Do you read lots of books?

FCB: ...for Cosmic and, well you couldn't really research Sputnik, could you?

JF: No.

FCB: Except by kind of thinking what's good about the world.

JF: Yeah.

FCB: Or pretending to be a dog, you know.

JF: Indeed.

FCB: I did quite a lot of reading about dogs and about the dogs that were sent into space. Because Laika was the first dog that went into space, but there were lots of dogs that were trained to go into space and went up to the edge of space and came down in their parachutes and they've all got amazing stories.

JF: And this all happened years, long before you were all born, but sort of when we were born. But it is one of those amazing things that happened that, as I said it is, it is like science fiction but this is actually true what Frank is telling you.

FCB: Yeah, they had this programme where they sent, they tested rockets by sending dogs up into space. And some of these dogs were... So, dogs were the first astronauts and they had cool little space suits and some of these dogs became very famous, like Belka and Strelka who went on lots of missions and then had puppies together. And because their rockets were called Sputniks their puppies were called Mutniks.

JF: That's great.

FCB: And one of their rockets came down in Siberia in the snow and it had a bomb on it so that people couldn't find out the secrets of how to build a rocket. So, the scientists who love these dogs went to rescue them but the snow was so thick and the blizzard was so wild they thought, we can't do it. And then they heard the dogs barking and they just got the dogs out in time before the rockets blew up. And all these amazing adventures that these dogs had before Laika became the very first one actually to go into space itself.

JF: You know everything about space dogs, don't you, Frank?

FCB: Space dogs. I can go through the list.

JF: I know. Now I think you're going to read a little bit...

FCB: Yes.

JF: ...of the book for us, which would be brilliant and maybe you have to sort of tell us...

FCB: It tells a little bit about it.

JF: This is from fairly early on in the book and perhaps you could tell us maybe where we're at at this point.

FCB: So, you know that Sputnik has come from another planet and only Prez can hear him when he speaks. Everyone else thinks, everyone else thinks he's a dog. Only Prez can see what he really is. Prez doesn't like to talk to anybody and I'm going to read you the birthday party of the youngest girl of the family that he's staying with.

There's one other thing you need to know about Sputnik which is that one of the things that Laika, because she's a dog, has said about planet earth is that

everything on planet earth is edible. You can eat or chew anything you like. That earth is basically one big all you can eat buffet. That's all it is. So, by this point in the book, which is right near the beginning, Sputnik has already tried to eat a caravan. And so this is the birthday party. This is Annabel's birthday party.

Because she was the birthday girl, Annabel was the first one outside. She tumbled across the yard with her lightsaber in her chubby little hand. Her friends all came behind her skipping and screaming. The plastic diamonds on their big floaty dresses twinkled in the sun. These children, said Sputnik, they're very pink and shiny like cupcakes. No that's just their party clothes. Are these children edible? No they're not edible. Children are not edible. They look edible, said Sputnik, they're definitely not edible. Do not eat the children. Ray brought the last children outside shouting, Annabel, look what I've found under my bed. And he waved a green plastic lightsaber over his head. Who would like a lightsaber duel? Has anyone got a lightsaber at home? Have you got one of those that you shake it and it pops out? Yeah? What colour is yours?

Girl: Red.

FCB: Red. And so whose is the red lightsaber in the film? Do you know? It's an evil one, I think. Do you know who it is?

Boy: Darth Vader.,

FCB: Who is it?

Boy: Darth Vader.

FCB: Darth Vader's. Okay. And she's got a green one, which is Yoda's. Okay. Who would like a light saber duel? Me, whooped Annabel and she came straight for Ray and clobbered his virtuous green lightsaber with her evil red house. Ow, Ray dropped his lightsaber. The little girl with the blonde ponytail who we don't see any more because of what happened next, grabbed it and the two little girls had a Yoda versus Darth Maul lightsaber duel up and down the yard. Then Annabel managed to get on top of a wheel barrow and disarm her friend, just by the shed. Then she waggled her lightsaber in Sputnik's face and threw it. Not very far, because she was only little and she shouted, go on, Sputnik, fetch. Sputnik looked at me. Fetch, he said. Fetch. Is she serious? She thinks you're a dog remember. Go on, she's only wee. Sputnik does not fetch, said Sputnik. But it's her birthday. Okay, just this once.

He trotted over to the lightsaber and examined it. You said this was a lightsaber. It doesn't do anything, it must be broken. It might need batteries but she doesn't

mind. Just fetch it. Have you got the manual? It doesn't have a manual, it's just a toy, just fetch it. I won't fetch, said Sputnik. Fetching is beneath me, but I will have a look. And he fiddled around for a while and then he handed the lightsaber back to Annabel. The little girl with the blonde ponytail who we don't see any more, because of what happened next, came at Annabel with the lightsaber. Annabel whooped and shook her lightsabere. A telescopic plastic blade should have popped out, but it didn't. Instead, a column of blinding buzzing red lights sliced through the air. Everybody stared. Woah, he really did make it work. I am the Sputnik, said Sputnik. Annabel's friend swiped at her with her plastic lightsaber. Annabel parried with her real lightsaber. Her friend's lightsaber exploded in a thick black cloud of stinking smoke. Melted plastic dripped down the handle. The friend squealed with delight and Annabel squealed with even more delight. Hang on, this could be really dangerous. Yes, it could, said Sputnik with a smile. As though really, really dangerous was the best thing any birthday party could ever be.

Annabel tore around the garden with her Darth Maul lightsaber looking for stuff to destroy. She started with the wheel barrow. Hot, yellow sparks fire worked from the metal as she swung the blade. The handle fell smoking to the grass. Her friends screamed and begged for more. They did not seem even a little bit worried that they might be next after the wheelbarrow. They chased after her when she ran at the sheet of corrugated metal that held up the compost heap.

It is not wise to run under a climbing frame while waving a fully functioning lightsaber over your head. It will cut the monkey bars in half and slam the jagged ends into the grass.

The kids jumped back. They howled with laughter. They seemed to think that being almost impaled by a smouldering monkey bar was the most fun you could ever have. They clapped while Annabel melted the corrugated metal. They cheered as drips rolled down its ripples like ice cream. Annabel swung round to take her bow.

The little girl with the blonde ponytail, who we don't see any more because of what happened next, saw the blade of light coming and ducked, just in time to avoid having her head chopped off. But not quite in time to save her thick blonde ponytail which fell at her feet like a dead gerbil that was slightly on fire. Everybody stared in horrible silence. You could have cut her head off. I said I could fix it, said Sputnik. Smell that burning hair. This is a great party. No, we've got to stop this. Someone could get killed. What did you give her a lightsaber for if you don't want her to use it? It's supposed to light up and twinkle, not cut people in half. Twinkle, what's the fun in twinkle? This is a fantastic

party. And he was right about that. Having your hair cut by a fully functioning lightsaber was the new face painting.

A little girl held her pigtails out straight while Annabel slashed at them and the girl with a massive afro stood with her eyes closed and let Annabel shave it off it a confetti of hot sparks.

JF: Let's hear it for Frank Cottrell-Boyce. Wwhat a great reading. Wow.

Aud: Applause.

JF: What a great section of the book that is.

FCB: Thank you.

JF: Health and safety nightmare, Frank.

FCB: Health and safety gone mad, yeah.

JF: Yeah, and that's it, you can do that.

FCB: Yes, you can. You're allowed.

JF: And what I'm wondering though is, remember I was saying at the beginning that Frank's done lots of stuff including writing films, this book is being made into a film.

FCB: Yeah.

JF: Is that happening right now?

FCB: Right now, yeah. We're working on it right now.

JF: Give us some secrets. Tell us some exclusive stuff.

FCB: Well it's going to be an animated film.

JF: Ah-ha.

FCB: And it's being made by Dreamworks who mad How to Train your Dragon. The same people who made How to Train your Dragon.

JF: So, it's an animation. Because I was thinking, how do you film that? So again, for animation...

FCB: Yeah. There were lots and lots of drawings of aliens that look a bit doggy and things like that. But it's going to be fun.

JF: It's also really good to hear you reading because obviously you meet lots of young people and you do readings, as writers have to do.

FCB: Yeah.

JF: And I always think writers might want to hide away because they're on their own but now they have to go and meet people. But it's good fun and clearly, you're used to reading and enjoy that. And that's important too, isn't it? Because one of the things I love about your books, and this book, the Sputnik book is, it's enjoyable if you're a grown up too. You don't have to be a grown up pretending to like it, because you're reading it with your child.

FCB: Yeah. When I was a kid, I loved reading in bed on my own, but lots of the most important reading experiences that I had were teachers reading to me at the end of the day on Friday. Friday treat was having a story. Being read to is such a great thing, I think.

JF: Yeah. And we grew up watching on television, because we saw Jackanory on television.

FCB: Jackanory. Jackanory. Amazing.

JF: Which was somebody sitting reading you a fabulous story.

FCB: And I can still hear those voices when I read those books.

JF: Yes.

FCB: Littlenose the Hunter. I can still hear that voice.

JF: Yeah, no it is really important, isn't it?

FCB: Yeah.

JF: You can read yourself, but actually reading together is utterly joyful. And, yeah, we've actually got some questions coming in.

FCB: Excellent.

JF: Let me just move to those just now. Thank you very much indeed for your questions. Let's just hear some just now. Hello to primary six, Alloway Primary. Thank you very much for watching. And their question for you, Frank is, if you could be any character from one of your stories, who would you be and why?

FCB: I still would like to go to space. I would still... I always wanted to be an astronaut when I was little so I would definitely be Liam from Cosmic who gets to go up into a rocket and does a space walk, which would be amazing, I think.

JF: That would be incredible. I wanted to be an astronaut as well. I really did.

FCB: Yeah, yeah.

JF: It never happened, strangely.

FCB: There's still time. You could still do it.

JF: There's still time.

FCB: Build a rocket.

JF: I don't think so. This is from Easter Carmuir Primary. Hi, Easter Carmuir Primary. Thank you for watching us. Oh, this is always a difficult one about where you get ideas from, but this is, where do you get your ideas for jokes?

FCB: Oh for jokes.

JF: For jokes.

FCB: Oh gosh that's such a hard question. Jokes are just hard work and you sometimes have a, you have an idea that you think, you write a line and you think, that could be funnier. So, you kind of underline it and then keep coming back and seeing if you can sharpen it. So, in that bit there where it says, like a dead gerbil that was slightly on fire.

JF: Yes.

FCB: I can promise you, because I got a dictionary out, there is no other animal that is funny on fire, apart from a gerbil.

JF: Just the sound of the word?

FCB: Try and put any other animal there and it's sad. But somehow, it's funny if it's a gerbil.

JF: Yeah, I did laugh out loud.

FCB: So, you kind of get the right word is the right thing.

JF: And I suppose we were talking about reading out loud, maybe that's why sometimes it's quite good to sort of say it out loud as well when you're writing.

FCB: Yeah. Like a dead kitten on fire is not funny. But a dead gerbil is.

JF: No, no it's not funny. Let's hear another one. This is from Deanburn Primary from Cameron in P4. Hi Cameron, and everyone else who's watching with you. Cameron's question for you, Frank, is oh it's just a small, tiny wee question.

FCB: Oh no.

JF: It's a tiny wee question. What is your favourite thing in the world? Cameron.

FCB: Oh Cameron. Oh Gosh.

JF: Favourite thing in the world?

FCB: I like all the little, I think there's important things in the little... What is my favourite thing in the world? Oh Cameron, how could you do this to me?

JF: Cameron has stumped Frank Cottrell-Boyce.

FCB: I don't know.

JF: Well you can think of anything.

FCB: My family. My family are my favourite thing in the world. There you go.

JF: Oh well done. And that's lots of things.

FCB: Yeah, that's lots of different things.

JF: Indeed, human beings.

FCB: That's slightly cheating really, but...

JF: That is cheating. Cameron, is that acceptable with you? I hope it is, Cameron. Yeah, I can see him giving the thumbs up through the camera. And let me go to this one. St. Marnock's Primary in Glasgow. Hello, St. Marnock's. What inspired you to become an author? What was...

FCB: I had a very good teacher in year six who read out, I used to sit at the back and I had a friend and we used to sort of pass drawing to each other a lot. I think we wanted to be cartoonists actually, but we were not like engaged. And then he was off sick in year six and I wrote, I put all the energy I used to put into making him laugh I put into a piece of work and at the end of the lesson she collected it and she looked at it and she looked at me and looked at it and she looked at me and if I had laid an egg she would not have looked more surprised. But she read

it out to the class and that was amazing. Because I think if she'd said, you come and read it out, I might have grown up wanting to be an actor or a comedian.

JF: Yes.

FCB: But there was something about hearing somebody else read your words and get a laugh that made me we start to think. And I still think about it today, but I think that's when I thought, words are something you could be good at. The way there were people in my class who were brilliant at football, there were people in my class who were brilliant at drawing, there were people in my class who were great at music. There was one person in my class who was an absolute genius at frightening people. He was like...

JF: Was that the teacher?

FCB: ...the God of bullying. No, she was lovely. She was a lovely nun called Sister Paula. But like he was just like an unbelievably brilliant bully and I couldn't do that.

JF: No.

FCB: But then I thought, well words are something you can be good at, you know, if you choose the right word you can make people laugh. If you say gerbil instead of kitten it's funny.

JF: Yes.

FCB: And you can make people think and you can make people sad and you can make the hairs on the back of their neck stand up.

JF: Do you remember what it was you wrote about?

FCB: It was about Vikings. I don't remember anything else apart from that. I know it was about Vikings.

JF: It was about Vikings and it was good.

FCB: Yeah.

JF: Brilliant.

FCB: It must have been.

JF: And do you know what? We've got some questions from people in our audience.

FCB: Oh brilliant, okay.

JF: From our Glasgow Primary School. So, I'm going to invite up to join us Hannay, Shara and Mohammed. Come on up and ask your questions. Come and join us. Give them a big round of applause.

Aud: Applause.

JF: Come on, don't be shy. You can go there.

FCB: You can sit by me.

JF: One on either side of me. Hello, hello, hello. Hi, you can sit here. Thank you very much indeed. Right, I'm going to lean across to Hannay for your question, and give you the microphone. So, what's your question for Frank?

Girl: What has been the highlight of your career so far?

FCB: Well this is pretty good. I love being in Glasgow and talking to people. That's good. But I do remember the day that my first book, Millions, was accepted for publication and just being so excited because I kind of knew it was going to happen but I was waiting for the phone to ring. And I had to go around the corner to drop my kids off at the baths and we had one of those portable phones. I didn't have a mobile phone, but I put it in the porch so that like it would be there as soon as I opened the front door. I was that excited. I couldn't wait to get into the kitchen. It was so thrilling. So, having your first book published and opening the box with them all in was so exciting.

JF: Great question, thank you very much indeed.

FCB: Yeah, a good one that.

JF: Thank you very much indeed. And we've got Shara. So Shara, what's your question for Frank?

Girl: You've written for Dr. Who. Is there any other iconic characters you'd like to write about?

FCB: Wow. That's a brilliant question.

JF: Anyone here watch Dr. Who?

Aud: Yes.

JF: Oh yes. Oh yes.

FCB: I loved, I really, really loved the Paddington films and I would have loved to have been part of that. But another iconic character? Do you know, wouldn't it be

great to write about Katie Morag grown up? What would it be like when Katie Morag in the future, when Katie Morag is my age, what would the island be like and what would her life, would she have stayed there? So, I think Katie Morag maybe.

JF: Excellent question. Do you have a favourite character? Do you watch Dr. Who?

Girl: Yeah.

JF: Yeah, great. Lovely, thank you very much for your lovely question. And Mohammed we're coming to you now for your question, sir. What's your question for Frank?

Boy: Where do you write?

FCB: Where?

Boy: Do you write?

FCB: I have a little, well I can write anywhere because if you're a children's writer you go to schools a lot and when I'm working on films, so on set a lot so I end up writing on trains a lot, which is very like when I was at school because I used to do my homework on the bus. So that's a good skill to get, but I do have this nice little room at the top of the house that I like to work in.

JF: And do you like to write, Mohammed?

Boy: Yes.

JF: Yeah? Go on, just tell, what sort of things do you write?

Boy: Stories.

JF: Yes. About what?

Boy: I don't know.

FCB: Do you know one of the best things about being a writer? If it's a really cold and rubbish day you can stay in bed.

JF: Yes.

FCB: You can do a good day's work in bed. Michael Morpurgo, you all went to see War Horse last night, I think? He writes all his books in bed.

JF: What?

FCB: Can you imagine that? What kind of life is that?

JF: And that's quite good when it's cold like this.

FCB: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

JF: Just stay in bed.

FCB: Just stay in bed.

JF: Amazing. I think Hannay looks, you're very impressed by that.

FCB: Yeah, she's like, yeah that's my career.

JF: Hanhay, excuse me leaning across, Shara, do you like writing? Yeah.

Girl: Yeah.

JF: Reading? Yeah? Any favourite books?

Girl: Amulet.

JF: Yes. Why do you like that one?

Girl: Because it's like an adventure story.

JF: An adventure story, yeah, yeah. What about you? Any particular favourites?

Girl: Maybe Danny the Champion of the World.

JF: Oh yes.

FCB: Oh, that's a great book.

JF: Yeah. Do you remember why that's a, you like reading that one?

Girl: I think it's just about like his son realises about his dad that he's like this different person he never knew before.

JF: Yes.

Girl: And it's just amazing...

JF: Yeah,

FCB: Yeah, it's very good.

Girl: ...their relationship.

JF: That's brilliant. Great, well look, thank you very much for coming up and asking your fantastic questions. Let's hear it for our three questioners.

Aud: Applause.

JF: Thank you. You can go back now.

FCB: Wow.

JF: Yeah, it's just that incredible magic of books. I think we have another one here. Oh yes. From Alloway Primary, hello Alloway Primary. A question for Frank Cottrell-Boyce, did you always want to be a writer?

FCB: I think from, I didn't know that a writer was a job when I was in year six, if you know what I mean.

JF: Yeah.

FCB: Like I knew writers, the writers that I loved all had very strange names and lived in strange places, but year six is when I started to think about words. So yeah, I think definitely actually, yeah. Since I was in year six I knew that I would be writing, whatever I did I would be writing.

JF: And when you had that magical moment when the teacher read that story that was to do with Vikings, although you can't remember exactly what it was, did you then, was it easy to keep writing at that point? Or...

FCB: Yeah that guy, Graham, my best friend, when he came back after being sick, we started to write these kind of adventure stories together and it was really, yeah, yeah.

JF: Because that's actually a good way...

FCB: He was the first person I wrote with.

JF: Right. That's so interesting because you don't have to be doing it on your own.

FCB: No, no, no, no.

JF: That's interesting.

FCB: Like some of the most important writing is, you do it with... Even when you write your book which has only got your name on the cover, you have an editor who's got loads of ideas and you tell, you talk to your children about ideas and your wife about ideas and the people you love about ideas. So, nobody really writes on their own.

JF: Yes. And also, you can start writing in all sorts of ways. We're talking about words but also...

FCB: Talking.

JF: Yeah. And like doing a comic.

FCB: Drawing, yeah.

JF: Graphic novel, all of that kind of thing.

FCB: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

JF: And you can do it anywhere. Oh, I want to ask you another, before this one, I want to ask you, because we were talking about the book being made into a film and the process, so are you actually writing it?

FCB: I'm writing the script.

JF: Right, because it's not always the case.

FCB: So the script for an animated film, it's like, it's a lot. It's not like an ordinary film where you kind of script over and then the actors go and do stuff. Because you've got to talk about what the characters look like and what they sound like and it's a much bigger job doing an animated film, but it's wonderful. I mean all my favourite films from when I was like, I loved Jungle Book when I was little, but I loved Finding Nemo. So, any kind of animated film I've always loved. So, I'm very excited about doing this.

JF: And you've written lots of films. And I guess that's another interesting thing about... Do you like films, boys and girls?

Aud: Yes.

JF: Yeah, of course. And there's some great stories there and a bit like reading a book, you can just get lost in the world of a film.

FCB: Yeah.

JF: It's all stories, isn't it?

FCB: It's all about stories.

JF: If you're interested in writing it's not just a case of reading.

FCB: Yeah.

- JF: There are stories, all sorts of stories in films and real life.
- FCB: Yeah, absolutely, yeah. And, you know, the best, I love books with maps in, you know, and those animated films that you can just, it's another world and you can get lost in it. You can go through them, through the mirror, down the rabbit hole, through the tardis, but it's the story that takes you there. The story is the map that takes you through it.
- JF: And tell me something else, do you get inspiration, you get inspiration from all sorts of people, the people in your life and all the rest of it. If you're on the bus or wherever, are you one of those people that's sort of listening into other people's conversations?
- FCB: Sadly, sadly yes.
- JF: You are?
- FCB: Yes, yes. You always write those things down.
- JF: Do you?
- FCB: Yeah, because people say wild things, don't they?
- JF: That's a good tip.
- FCB: Yeah, yeah keep listening. Well that's the job. The job is to notice things, you know.
- JF: Yeah, because...
- FCB: And noticing things makes you happy actually, you know.
- JF: It does. And I think it's the thing, you might think I've got a story, but I've only got one little idea or I heard that conversation, where do I go with that? But you were talking earlier about, if you just keep writing the stuff down and you might find that actually they can join up.
- FCB: Yeah. And some ideas don't let you go and it stays in the back of your head and then another idea comes along and say, oh this idea has been looking for this one. They're friends. And now you've got a band.
- JF: That's fun. That's brilliant. Our Lady's Primary School in Perth. Hello, Our Lady's. Thank you very much for joining us on Authors Live today. They're saying, well we know you're working on the film, are you working on another book at the moment?

FCB: Yeah, I finished a book, I've just finished a book about a robot. I'm obsessed with robots. So, I've literally just finished a book about a robot [voices overlap 0:34:02].

JF: Frank Cottrell-Boyce, why are you obsessed with robots?

FCB: Because they're kind of very like, I grew up thinking they were going to be robots, you know, like there was going to be robots walking around doing the dishes and everything and in fact there are loads of robots in your life but you kind of don't notice them.

JF: Where are they?

FCB: Well it's robots that do your, when you buy something and it says, if you like this you like this and it remembers your name, that's a kind of secret robot that you don't know about.

JF: Right, so that's not as much fun as the proper sci-fi robots is it?

FCB: No, I want a robot that shakes my hand and...

JF: I want one that does the dishes.

FCB: ...and does the dishes, exactly.

JF: I suppose there's a dishwasher but it's not as exciting.

FCB: The dishwasher is a kind of robot, you know.

JF: It would be good to have a robot actually standing there doing them. You could have a chat with him.

FCB: And actually, what started is that one of our neighbours got one of those robot lawnmowers.

JF: Oh yes.

FCB: That just sort of wanders around the grass all day. I was like, what's that? It's like spying on me. What's it thinking about when it's cutting the lawn?

JF: So when, yes, so when is the robot book coming out? Do you know?

FCB: It comes out in May.

JF: Right, very good. In a few months' time.

FCB: Yeah, yeah.

JF: And with that, that must be interesting, do you, are you able to work, you've got lots of ideas going on, but are you able to work on two things at once? Or do you just have to be working on that book and then you do the film?

FCB: You end up working on two things at once but you wish you were working on one thing at a time.

JF: Right. Are you good at keeping them apart, in your head? We don't see a bit of the book appearing in the movie?

FCB: No, no I don't do that, that's okay, yes.

JF: Because we'll be watching.

FCB: Yeah, do watch.

JF: And yeah, so we're also, if you can, reasons to save earth would be a lovely thing.

FCB: Yes.

JF: Remember to use the hash tag BBC Authors Live. It's funny, because the book starts with the whole idea of making lists which Prez' grandpa is really into. And again, I just wondered whether you are somebody and your family, or somebody else in your family, are you a big list maker?

FCB: No terrible at it.

JF: No?

FCB: No. And I think that's why it's in the book because it would be a good idea. No, I'm kind of someone who goes to the shops thinking, I just need to get this. There was something else. What was it? I don't know, oh maybe, you know.

JF: Yeah, yeah.

FCB: So, I'm rubbish at making lists.

JF: But presumably you have to be very...

FCB: And diaries.

JF: Presumably you have to be very organised to be a writer with all the projects you're doing.

FCB: Mm.

JF: No, you're not?

FCB: I try.

JF: I love it. I love it. So, thinking of Prez, because he's such an important character in Sputnik, was he somebody who came to you sort of fully formed? And when you're writing someone like Prez is he alive to you in your head?

FCB: Yeah.

JF: Even though he's fictional because when we're reading it we really believe in your characters.

FCB: Yeah, no I, yeah, he comes to life. I think it starts with like good stories are built around contrasts, you know, good guy bad guy, good girl bad girl, big fat guy, thin guy all that stuff. So, because Sputnik was so noisy, I was just wanted somebody very quiet and then I started to think about why he was quiet and you put a lot of yourself into it and I think that's why it becomes alive.

JF: So, it's yeah, so there's lots of thinking going on. And we were talking about the importance of reading and then we know that you were a big fan of libraries. I'm a big fan of libraries. I used to love going to the library when I was a kid, but for you, were there any particular writers? So, you'd your own experience of hearing your work read when you were wee, but were there any particular writers you were just like, oh this is amazing, I love these books when you were little?

FCB: Yeah. I mean loads of different ones.

JF: Of course.

FCB: But the library was like, it wasn't just the books, it was the space and the quiet and the library looked so amazing and definitely used to spend lots of time in libraries. And we had that thing we had people reading us stories and people's voices I loved. And the writers I read were, I loved Tove Jansson who wrote the Moomin books.

JF: Oh yes.

FCB: Because they were about a family that hibernated in the winter. What a brilliant thing that would be to do. I loved Just William. And I loved the Narnia books. I completely loved the Narnia books.

JF: Yeah, yeah.

FCB: Maps, maps.

JF: And more maps.

FCB: You know, being able to imagine yourself in there.

JF: Brilliant. Oh well look it's just been fantastic talking to you. And it's so interesting hearing about Dr. Who. Dr. Who is, we were talking about how these books could be read by adults and kids, Dr. Who is amazing in that way, isn't it?

FCB: Yeah.

JF: It just goes right across generations.

FCB: Yeah.

JF: Is that a part of the appeal for you?

FCB: Because a good story stays around for a long time. And it grows with you, you know, so like you watched Dr. Who when you were little and you can still watch it now, and you bring all that to it.

JF: Who was your favourite Dr.?

FCB: I loved, well I loved Peter Capaldi, I thought he was amazing.

JF: Yeah.

FCB: Absolutely amazing.

JF: I liked the other Scott, David Tennant, so there you go. Scotland rules Dr. Who. No, it doesn't. Thank you very much. We are almost, we are almost at the end of today's Authors Live. Aww.

Aud: Aww.

JF: Panto time. Aww. Well done. Have you enjoyed it?

Aud: Yes.

JF: Have you enjoyed it? Brilliant. Thank you very much indeed. Frank, thank you.

FCB: Thank you, thank you.

JF: Absolutely amazing to meet you and have you here. And now we know all about it when we see Sputnik on the big screen, you'll have heard all about it from Frank and you can tell your friends.

FCB: Yeah, yes.

JF: Can we have a massive round of applause please for Frank Cottrell-Boyce.

Aud: Applause.