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Author: Cressida Cowell

Interviewed by: Janice Forsyth

Other speakers:

JF Hello there. A very, very warm welcome indeed to Authors Live. Yes, it's true, it's happening right now. I'm Janice Forsyth and I'm so delighted, we all are, that you are here with us. And with me in the studio are some splendid pupils from Scotland, from Airth Primary School in Falkirk and Liberton Primary School in South Lanarkshire. Have a look at them. Aren't they lovely? And if all of you look to that camera there, you can wave to the people who are watching in their schools and libraries, and they're waving back at you, aren't they? And they've made lots of great new friends, all because of Authors Live. Splendid audience today.

They are very well behaved, but secretly hugely excited because actually today I think we have got on Authors Live, one of the most successful children's authors we've ever had on the series, it's true. I'm not saying it just because she's sitting here listening to me. It is true. She is Cressida Cowell, you will know her name and you'll know her books. She is the creator of the massively popular How to Train Your Dragon series and you'll have seen them on telly, on film too. Made into those splendid animations too, which I'm sure you have really enjoyed.

Now we'll be asking some questions of Cressida later after we hear from her, but also I should tell you that as well as that series, she's created a new series all about wizards. So she'll tell us a little bit about that and also about her very interesting childhood and how that had an impact and effect on her becoming a writer and what she writes about. So lots to talk about.

And we'd like to hear from you too. If you've got Twitter you could get in touch with your question which would be lovely. Any question for Cressida at all, start thinking now. Get them in and I'll try to put as many of them as possible to Cressida towards the end of today's event. And while you're at it with the Twitter, we've got a question for you. Are you ready for a question?

Aud: Yes.

JF: Are you? Good. We would like you to think about this and come up with an answer. If you could have a secret magical power, what would it be? There's a fun question for you. A secret magical power. Get in touch using the hash tag bbcauthorlive on Twitter. Right, shall I stop talking now? Shall I?

Aud: Yes.

JF: You're too polite.

Aud: [Laughs]

JF: Yes, yes. Because you want to hear from the main event, the wonderful author, Cressida Cowell. Please give her a huge Authors Live welcome there, and here, loud, loud. Yes.

Aud: [Applause].

CC: Thank you. Thank you so much. Thank you. Thank you everybody. Hi, I'm Cressida Cowell and I'm the author and the illustrator of the How to Train Your Dragon books, which means I do all the pictures as well. And to get us in the mood, I'm going to read from the very beginning of the very first book of How to Train Your Dragon, which I wrote these words about, oh 20 years ago. And this is how it began.

There were dragons when I was a boy. There were great grim sky dragons that nested on the cliff tops like gigantic scary birds. Little brown scuttly dragons that hunted down the mice and rats in well organised packs. Preposterously huge sea dragons that were 20 times as big as the big blue whale and who killed for the fun of it.

You will have to take my word for it, but the dragons are disappearing so fast they may soon become extinct. Nobody knows what is happening. They are crawling back into the sea from whence they came, leaving not a bone, not a fang in the earth for the men of the future to remember them by. So, in order that these amazing creatures should not be forgotten, I will tell this true story from my childhood.

I was not the sort of the boy who could train a dragon with the mere lifting of an eyebrow. I was not a natural at the heroism business. I had to work at it. This is the story of becoming a hero the hard way. Okay.

And I like read you that bit, not only because it's the beginning of the How to Train Your Dragon series, but because this sort of is a true story from my childhood, which sounds very unlikely, doesn't it? But [laughs] this is a picture of me here and in this picture I'm about, seven, eight, nine, ten years old. And I'm writing, all of the pictures of me when I was about seven, eight, nine, ten years old I'm often reading or I'm writing or I'm drawing or I'm making things up. Who here is about seven, eight, nine, ten years old? And out there as well? And likes writing and likes making things up and likes performing? And who would secretly like to be a writer or a cartoonist or write films or do something like that? Anybody here like to do that one day when they're grown up or be an actor? Quite a lot of you and I bet you there's a lot of hands up out there as well.

Well I'm so glad, I'm in the right place then because I wish I could go back in time and tell that kid one day she will be a writer. She would not have believed me, I can tell you. Because I'll let you into a secret. My handwriting was terrible, okay. Sorry teachers, but it was. And so I thought it was all about your handwriting. At the end of the day it's not about your handwriting, it's about your ideas. And I don't want some kid who finds it difficult with the handwriting, or the reading, the mechanics of reading, to be put off. It's not about your handwriting at the end of the day, kids, it's about your ideas, and I don't want a kid who has fantastic ideas to be put off being a writer.

So, I'm writing in rather an amazing place. My dad grew up in, my dad worked in London so that's where I grew up, yeah. But my dad was a mad keen bird watcher. He was something called an environmentalist. He was chairman of the RSPB that looked after, you know, birds and everything and later on he was chairman of Kew Gardens. And what that meant for us as a family, that every year from when I was a baby we would be dropped off here on this uninhabited island off the West Coast of Scotland, yeah. We'd be dropped off. You can see this island. Look how small it is. Look how small that island is. We'd be dropped off by a local boatman and picked up again two weeks later.

And there was nothing on the island. There was no houses, there was no Tesco's. No Tesco's. No mobile phones back in the 1970s, yeah. Who would love, who thinks that would be a wonderful thing to do? Who would love to be dropped off an uninhabited island off the West Coast of Scotland? Quite a few of you. Who thinks my parents were crazy? Yeah. My parents were crazy. What were they thinking? What if somebody broke a leg? Yeah. But it was an amazing experience for a child. You can imagine.

And from when I was about nine, my dad had, do you see that little thing that looks a bit like a tooth there, jutting up? That's a house. And my dad had this

house built on the island, yeah, from when I was nine and from then on we spent the whole summer on the island and I'll let you into a secret. That house there, yeah, has no electricity. So no television [gasp] intake of breath. Who would like to spend a whole summer on an island with no television on it? Yeah. A few of you. I like, quite a few of you there, yeah. Quite a few, quite a few over there. I love you, yeah. Because it was really amazing, spending your whole summer on an island with no television. Because this, partly because do you see us, just, that's me, my brother and sister and a friend. And we are running wild all over this little island because this was the 1970s. And anybody who grew up in the 1970s will know the notion of childcare in the 1970s was to open up the front door, boot the kids out and say, bye kids. Come back when you're hungry. Don't fall off a cliff. Yeah. Who thinks that would be so cool? Yeah. Me too. And nowadays we follow after our kids like we're their bodyguards. But back in the 1970s they just threw you out the front door and you just went and you played all on your own, and came back when you were hungry.

And this little island, this is to show you what gave me the inspiration. This really is the Isle of Berk, yeah, in the books, the Isle of Berk. This real little place in Scotland. I'm a bit biased, and I know I'm talking to an audience who will be, the most beautiful place in God's green earth. It's in the Hebrides so do try and go there, yeah, it's so beautiful, the Inner Hebrides.

But it was inspiration for How to Train your Dragon, because although nobody was living on that island and hadn't lived there for 100 years before we went to stay, many, many years ago it was the first place the Vikings came to when they invaded Great Britain and it was the last place they left. So once upon a time, real Vikings would have lived on that island, yeah. And they would have lived on that island and they would, came to be pirates and they stayed to settle. So lots of people, particularly up here in Scotland are descended from Vikings, particularly if you have red hair, you might be descended from a Viking. There's a kid here with red hair. You might be descended from a Viking, yeah.

So real Vikings would have lived on that island and we used to play in the little houses, the little ruined houses there. And I used to imagine, what would it be like to be a Viking? Yeah. Or what would it be like to be living on that little island and suddenly to see a Viking sail on the horizon? And you can see where these stories came from.

And the other thing was that a lot of the stories from round about islands, this is, I'm not allowed to say the name of the island, but it's near Mull, you know, Mull in the Inner Hebrides and a lot of the stories were descended from Viking stories, yeah. And there was one of the stories which was about a dragon that had

turned into a mountainside. Can anybody see something weird about that hill? That's me last May going back to the little island I was talking to you about. Can anybody see something weird about the hillside behind the house where we used to stay as a little, girl, I used to stay as a little girl. Can anybody see something weird about that hillside? Yes, my love? Yes, my darling?

Girl: It looks like, a little bit like a dragon.

CC: It looks exactly like the back of a sleeping dragon. Do you see? That's the head and that's the back and the wings and everything. Now I, on stormy nights, yeah, I used to lie awake imagining what if the sound of the storm was the sound of the dragon? Shaking off its rocky incarnation and waking up? You can see where these stories came from. And in the books, Hiccup, this is Hiccup by the way, Hiccup has a dragon that is quite a lot... Oh actually before, I was going to tell you a quick story before I tell you more about the books.

Yes, I'll tell you a quick story about, because I love this story. This is a picture of me and my brother and sister and a friend going out, all on our own, in a little dingy and notice that nobody in this picture is wearing a life jacket, yeah. And my little brother is wearing diving equipment, yeah?

Aud: [Laughs].

CC: I mean, what were they thinking? He was about, he's about six in this picture and he's about to go diving for crabs, yeah. My brother had a problem, okay, and the problem was that the crabs were at the bottom of the harbour and the harbour was quite deep, yeah. And [laughs] so my brother couldn't get at them. But my brother, you see, had a creative solution. And his creative [laughs] solution was to plop over the side of that boat holding onto a large stone [laughs], yeah. And the stone would carry him down [laughs] to the bottom of the ocean where he could drop the stone, very important to drop the stone, kids [laughs]. Pick up the crab and rise to the surface, yeah, holding the crab, yeah. With all of us peering over the edge going, do you think he's all right down there? I mean, he can only just swim, yeah. And some adult is taking that photograph saying, bye children, have a lovely time.

Aud: [Laughs].

CC: The 1970s. They do things differently there, yeah. So yeah, but creative solutions. My books are a lot about creative solutions. You know I said about being creative and want lots of you to think about being creative because I'm going to tell you this, why not? Because the creative industries make over 80 billion pounds a year for this country, yeah. Outperforming the rest of the

economy by double. Just thought I'd put that in there. So if any of you were thinking of going into the creative industries, there are jobs there for you. Anyway.

But creativity is about more than that. It's about creative thinking and children are the best thing in the world at creative thinking because they're the best ones for it because they don't know what the rules are yet. So you're fantastic at creative thinking.

So my books are a lot about creative thinking. And you don't have to be an artist to be a creative thinker. And Hiccup has a lot of problems that means he has to think creatively. I'm going to quote Einstein, why not? Because no problem can be solved with the same mind-set that created it. That's creative thinking. And you're great at it. Children are great at it. And Hiccup, you see, has problems like this. He has a dragon, which is slightly, his dragon is slightly smaller than the dragons in the films. Yes, I'll see if I can find a picture of his dragon, Toothless. That's Toothless. Toothless is one of my favourite characters, I have to admit. He's one of those very naughty, disobedient hunting dragons that you can sort of fit down the front of your waistcoat, yeah.

And I gave Hiccup two dragons, because I also love the Toothless in the films. Windwalker who is that really... Who would like a really cool riding dragon like Windwalker? Me. Yeah, I bet you guys would like one. But also I gave him a really disobedient hunting dragon called, very naughty, Toothless. And through the books, Hiccups has to train Toothless and he can't yell at him, which is what all the other Vikings do, but he... So comes up with a creative solution, which is speaking the language of Dragonese.

I'm going to teach you a bit of Dragonese, but before I do you have to get the adults in the room to put their hands over their ears because this is not a suitable language for adults, okay? So you may have to be quite bossy with your adults. Teachers are quite disobedient. Madam, you are an adult. Tell your adults, the teacher in the room to put their hands over their ears. All of you cameramen over there, you're adults, you have to put... Teachers, oh, I've never seen such a disobedient load of adults.

Okay, this is a bit of Dragonese. Have they all got their hands over their ears? Have they? Okay.

Boy: No.

CC: This is not a suitable language for adults, and you'll see why. Okay. Here are some common dragon phrases to get you started. Nai crappa in a hoosus

pishyou, which means no pooing inside the house, please. Mi mamma no like it, yum-yum on di bum [laughs]. I still laugh at that.

Aud: [Laughs].

CCL Mi mamma no like it yum-yum on di bum. My mother does not like to be bitten on the bottom. Pishyou kindly gobba oot my frieundlee. Which means please would you be so kind as to spit out my friend, okay. And through the books you can learn that language of dragonese.

And the other creative solution that Hiccup has to come, has to work out as he goes through the books, is he has to work out how to save the dragons, yeah. How to save the dragons. Who thinks, and this is what the film, the last film is coming out, oh in February I think. It's wonderful. I love the films. I really love the films. The last film is coming out in February and it's answering the same question that I ask in the books. Can Hiccup come to such a clever plan, such a creative solution back in Viking times that he can save the dragons? Who thinks that Hiccup back in Viking times was able to save the dragons? Who thinks? Who thinks that, you don't see so many dragons in Glasgow or in Scotland anymore, so maybe he wasn't... Okay, in this room practically all of the children have their hands up, and none of the adults. That's why I like writing for children. Because you don't know the rules yet. You can make the impossible happen. Okay.

Now I'm going to tell you a little bit now about The Wizards of Once, which is my new book series. This is The Wizards of Once and I'll read you a bit from the first bit of it. It's about magic. Okay.

When I was a kid I really wanted to be magic. Who here would secretly like to be magic? Yeah. Lots of you. Any adult who [laughs] doesn't have their hands up is not telling the truth, okay. [Laughs]. There's a lovely cameraman with his hand up right here, and the teachers. Okay. Will you tell me your secret magical power? What would your secret magical power be, darling? If you could be magic.

Girl: Mine would be to have the power to have fire.

CC: Fire? You'd be able to shoot fire?

Girl: Yeah.

CC: Out of your fingertips or out of your mouth?

Girl: Out of my fingertips.

CC: Out of your... That would be pretty cool. Okay, anybody else have a secret magical power they want to share? Okay, what about you, my love?

Boy: Invisibility.

CC: Invisibility, that's a good one, yeah.

Girl: I'd like to fly.

CC: Flying. That's a wonderful one. I would love the flying one. How about you?

Boy: Super speed.

CC: Super speed. You mean really, really quick. I really wanted to be magic. You be thinking about what your secret magical power will be. This is set three thousand years ago at a time when magic really existed. Okay.

Once there was magic. It was a long, long time ago in a British Isles so old it did not know it was the British Isles yet, and the magic lived in the dark forests. Perhaps you feel that you know what a dark forest looks like. Well I can tell you right now, that you don't. These were forests darker than you would believe possible. Darker than ink spots, darker than midnight, darker than space itself. And as twisted and as tangled as a witch's heart.

There were many types of humans living in the wild woods. The wizards who were magic and the warriors who were not. The wizards, this is the map, the story begins with a map. This is the map that I drew. Lots of stores, by the way, lots of you said you were interested in writing stories. A really good way to start a story is to draw a map of your imaginary place and then write a story about it. Lots of writers do that. Like the writer of Treasure Island, you've heard of that book? He first drew the map of Treasure Island and he said, even before he started thinking of the story, as he drew the map, the pirates came creeping out of the map at him. Long John Silver, his cutlass between his teeth. So draw a map of your imaginary place and then write a story about it. It's a fantastic story starter if you want to think of an idea for a story.

Anyway, this was the map that I drew and it's, the wizards are living on the left hand side of the map and the warriors are living on the right hand side of the map. These are two tribes who were at war. This, because this book is about something called empathy, yeah. Can these two children from these two different tribes who are at war, meet and begin to see things from each other's point of view, yeah? Because, yes, the many types of humans living in the wild was the wizards who were magic and the warriors who were not. The wizards had lived in the wild woods for as long as anyone could remember and they were



intending to live there forever along with all the other magic things until the warriors came.

The warriors invaded from across the seas and although they had no magic, they brought a new weapon that they called iron. And iron was the only thing that magic would not work on, okay. So the poor magic things, the warriors are getting rid of all the magic things. First the warriors fought the witches and drove them into extinction in a long and terrible battle. Nobody cried for the witches for witches were bad magic. The worst sort of magic. The kind of magic that tore wings from larks and killed for fun and could end the world and everyone in it.

But the warriors did not stop there. The warriors thought that just because some magic was bad, that meant that all magic was bad. And so they're trying to get rid of all the magic. But this is the story of a young boy wizard, that's Xar, he's one of the heroes and a young girl warrior who'd been taught since birth to hate each other like poison, yeah. This, now they're two very different kind of heroes. The boy, Xar, is from a wizard tribe, but he has no magic and he would do anything to get it. I love Xar. He's the kind, he's not a bit a like Hiccup. He's the kind of kid who acts first [laughs] and thinks later, okay.

I'll give you an example of this is what Xar is like. He's very, very disobedient. He's the most disobedient boy in the wizard kingdom in about four generations and forbidding things only encouraged him. In the past week, Xar had tied the beards, this is the naughty things that Xar had done in the past week. He'd tied the bears of two of the eldest and most respectable wizards together when they were sleeping at a banquet. He had poured a love potion into the pigs feeding trough so the pigs developed mad passionate crushes on Xar's least favourite teacher and followed him around wherever he went making loud, enthusiastic squealing and kissing noises, okay.

Aud: [Laughs].

CC: Yeah, so that gives you an idea of what Xar is like. And so he'll do anything to get it. And the girl, Wish is from a warrior tribe but she owns a banned magical object and she'll do anything to conceal it. And it's about what happens when these two characters meet.

The story begins with a discovery of a gigantic, black feather. Could this feather really be the feather of a witch? I'll give you a clue. It could be, okay. It could be. Yeah, so Xar has, I do all the pictures by the way. So I'm rather proud of the pictures of The Wizards of Once. I think I'm getting better, okay. So Xar has a raven and he rides on the back of these giant snow cats like Night Eye and this is

his giant called Crusher. And this is his sprite called Ariel. He owns these sprites and these really cute little sprites, one of my favourite characters is this tiny little sprite who is so small. I would love to own my own sprite. Who is so small it can fit on the end of your finger, Squeeze Juice, and Squeeze Juice gets in terrible peril in this book, yeah. Not my fault at all. But it just happened, you know.

And this is Wish's enchanted spoon. I love it. The object, the [laughs] enchanted object is a spoon. It's a spoon that also happens to be alive and she's a warrior so she's really not supposed to have enchanted objects. But her spoon just happens to be alive. The Wizards of Once, Twice Magic, which is the second one in the series, can't believe I've already got to the second one, this is the second one, The Wizards of Once and Twice Magic.

I don't want to give away what happened in the first one, but this one starts with Xar in a very bad place because he is captured in the prison of Gorman Crag, yeah. Part one Escape, but it's a question of whether or not... A Gorman Crag is a prison because people have found out that he's been using the magic of a witch. Xar had a very good idea at the beginning, well, is it a very good idea, or is it not? Xar's idea at the beginning of book one was to catch a witch, so that he could take its magic and use it for himself. Who thinks that's a good idea? [Laughs]. It's a terrible idea, which you'll find out when you meet the witches. So at the beginning of this book they've found out he's using the magic of a witch so he's been put in this prison called Gorman Crag and it's a question of whether he can escape, whether Xar can escape.

I'm going to tell you a tiny bit about Free Writing Friday. Because this is a picture of Wish, who is the hero I told you about, the warrior hero. Now Wish is this thing called dyslexic, although they didn't call it dyslexic back in the bronze ages, this is supposed to be in the bronze ages, this iron ages. But she is the writer in this story and I made Wish the writer because it's very important. My sister was dyslexic, so that people who might be dyslexic will know that you can still be the writer. Lots of great writers were dyslexic.

So at the beginning, or the end of the first book, The Wizards of Once, Caliban gives Wish a feather and he said, with this feather I want you, it's one of his feathers, I want you to write your own story, yeah. And so I started this new thing called Free Writing Friday, because when I was a little girl my handwriting, this is a picture of a book that I wrote when I was about eight, nine, ten years old. And you can see the handwriting is a bit scruffy and I've even spelled my name wrong [laughs]. My name, see there it says Crissida rather than Cressida, yeah. But my lovely teacher in year two had this thing called Free Writing, yeah, which meant...

Who would like this? A special book, okay, in which you can write whatever you like. Who would like that? A book where, whatever you like, any ideas. You could write cartoons, you could draw pictures, you could write stories about whatever you like and for 15 minutes every Friday you could write in it, and no teacher could mark it. Who would like that? Teachers, it's good for you too. No marking [laughs].

Aud: [Laughs].

CC: Yeah. Yes some of the teachers here have got their hands up as well. Yes, Free Writing Friday, why not? That, just 15 minutes to write whatever you want. So you can come up with creative solutions for things, yeah, and you can write about what you want to write. Because look here, yeah, this, I'm writing about magical creatures here. Things that start when you're nine years old, who knows what can happen? Maybe they'll end up being, you know, books. Maybe they'll end up being Hollywood movies. They're now making another movie of The Wizards of Once. As I say, the books I was, the stories I was writing on that little Scottish island when I was nine years old, now that third movie is coming out in January. Who would have thought? Things can happen that begin right here.

So I want everybody in this room who said they wanted to be a writer, or to write, you know, a screen writer, or a cartoonist or to make things up or just be a creative person in whatever they're doing, a creative teacher, a creative cameraman. Anybody who wants to be creative, and you could put your hands up over there as well. I want you to put your hands up. I want you to put your hands up in the air if you want to be a creative person one day and write books and draw pictures, or be an illustrator or make films?

I'm going to take this gigantic box of black imagine, invisible Caliban feathers and I'm going to throw them to you and you're going to catch them. Catch them. Catch them. Catch them. Catch them. Catch them. And you're going to take them away and then you're going to write your own story. Write your own story because the real magic is imagination. That's the real magic. Free Writing Friday. Why not try it, teachers? Free Writing Friday. Who knows what might happen?

JF: Brilliant, absolutely brilliant. I think we need a huge round of applause for Cressida.

Aud: [Applause].

- JF: Massive, massive, massive round of applause. Wow. Absolutely great. So you're all going to be doing that from now on, yeah?
- CC: [Laughs].
- JF: Did you catch those feathers? Did you catch those feathers? Fantastic. I tried to catch a feather but I failed.
- CC: Oh no.
- JF: That's because I'm a grown up. That must be it. We've got lots of questions coming in. I'm not surprised after such a great chat about things. I wish I'd been on that island with you.
- CC: Oh.
- JF: It looks amazing, absolutely amazing.
- CC: The Inner Hebrides, beautiful.
- JF: Oh, so beautiful.
- CC: And you're close to here.
- JF: Yes, it never rains there.
- CC: Please go, it's so gorgeous.
- JF: There no midgies [laughs].
- CC: Well there's an odd tiny little midge maybe, yeah. But actually, I mean one of those islands, Tyree, has the most amount of sunshine in the whole of the British Isles, can I just say?
- JF: Yes.
- CC: Just putting that out there. Not that I'm biased at all.
- JF: [Laughs]. So wherever you are, come to Scotland and you are here. You're already in Scotland. That's the magic of Authors Live.
- CC: Yeah
- JF: Now we're going to have some questions and I'll be reading some out from folk who got in touch through the magic of Twitter, but I'm going to invite a couple of people up from the audience to sit beside me and ask Cressida a question and

that is Fraser and Grace. So come on up and sit beside me on the couch. Well I think a huge round of applause please for your classmates.

Aud: [Applause].

JF: Thank you very much indeed. So I'll come to you first, Grace, and you can ask your question of Cressida.

Girl: Which current children's writers do you most admire?

CC: Oh that's so difficult. Ah, because I admire so many writers. I love, oh goodness gracious me. How can I chose? I love that book called Wonder. You know I said my book was about empathy and looking at things from, things from other people's point of view, that's, that's something that I think I love films and telly, may I say. I love films and telly because it's all story making, but I'm particularly keen on books. And the reason why, because things on a screen happen out there and in a book they are happening inside your head. You are that person. It's a great quote from To Kill a Mockingbird, walking around in somebody else's skin. So I love that in Wonder, you know, when they tell a story from different points of view and it makes you see things from other points of view and that's what I think books can do. So that's a book... And I love Holes, Louis Sachar. I mean I love that. I love so many writers. I love JK Rowling, I love all that. I'm very keen on fantasy, obviously. I love David Almond, Skellig. He wrote that book for older readers, but I just like so many.

And it's good to try lots of different books, just to see what kind of, you know, writing that you like. And don't worry, some people [laughs] some people may, but if you, if you're, if you don't worry if you're not enjoying a book that you don't finish it, because sometimes that makes books a chore, yeah. So, a really tricky question, I wish I could mention...

JF: A really question. And do you enjoy reading?

CC: Fantastic question.

Girl: Yes.

JF: And apart from Cressida, do you have any other favourite authors?

Girl: JK Rowling.

CC: Oh I love JK Rowling, yes. She's...

JF: Brilliant. Thank you very much indeed. And Fraser, what's your question?

Boy: What would your secret magical power be?

JF: What would your secret magical power be?

CC: Oh, there's so many and the great thing is that you can sort of [laughs] you can sort of, you can make your hero have so many because you could... So I suppose my secret magical power, I can't decide between flying, but also I do think being able to be somebody else, or be another creature, wouldn't that be really interesting? To be able to be, turn into another creature, or find out what it would be like to be something else? What would your secret magical power be?

Boy: Super speed.

CC: Super speed.

JF: Super speed.

CC: Or moving things, telekinesis or teleportation going back in time. There's so many good ones.

JF: I'm very glad that you're not able to do that just now.

CC: Yeah.

JF: The cameras would be all moving around. It would, and it would be the end of...

CC: Yes [laughs].

JF: ...Authors Live today. That wouldn't be a good idea. But great questions.

Girl: Thank you.

JF: Thank you very much indeed. If you go back to your seats.

CC: Thank you, great, questions, thank you.

JF: Let's hear it for Fraser and Grace.

CC: Keep reading.

JF: Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, thank you. And I have some more which have come in here. So Grace was asking about contemporary authors, but from Kenmore Primary, P5 to P7, hi there, thanks for joining us, Kenmore Primary. Cressida, they're asking, who were your favourite authors as a child?

CC: As a child?

JF: As a child.

CC: I read a lot as a child and lots of different... And it's great to read a lot because you, if you want to be a writer, because it gives you a sort of feel the way different stories are written. So I love lots of things. So I loved Little House on the Prairie, or Noel Streatfield or Enid Blyton.

JF: Oh yes.

CC: I loved Enid Byton, they're kind of adventure stories. But then, oh I particularly loved Diane Wynne Jones who, and Fantasy. So Tolkein and Diana Wynne Jones wrote, she wrote a fantastic book about some children who find a magic chemistry set and each of the chemicals does a different thing. So one of them makes you fly and another one brings your toys to life and... So do try that, The Ogre Downstairs. But I read loads.

JF: Ah yeah. I didn't read as much as you, but I did read Enid Blyton but you were living the Enid Blyton life [laughs] on that island, that's for sure. Hello to Luke, Primary 6, Hillside School. Hi Luke. You're going to like this question.

CC: Oh.

JF: Cressida Cowell, how do you feel being so popular?

CC: [Laughs]. That's a nice, how can I not like [laughs] that question? Well it's really nice. And it...

JF: [Laughs].

CC: ...wasn't always [laughs] like that, you see. That's why I show that picture of me as a kid. Because I do not think I was the kid most likely to succeed [laughs] if you see what I mean. So I do try and say that, but it's lovely to be popular now. But it's not something that happened overnight.

JF: No.

CC: That's the other thing I try and tell kids, because sometimes [laughs] kids think these things happen overnight. But you have to choose what you love and work very hard at it really. That's my...

JF: Yeah, and I guess if you love it, that does make it easier...

CC: Yeah, yeah.

JF: ...doesn't it? Because you want...

CC: Yeah. And it's very nice.

JF: Luke, lovely question, thank you very much indeed. And Sylvie, hi Sylvie, P7 Linlithgow Primary. Hi there. Cressida, if you could have a dragon, and I'm sure people have asked you this before, if you could have a dragon, what kind would it be and what would you call it?

CC: Oh, but you see I get to name all these different dragons. I'd have to say Toothless, wouldn't I? But if, if it wasn't Toothless, there's, there's a dragon in, or Windwalker, there's a dragon in the stories called A Deadly Shadow Dragon, and it turns invisible. It's like a stealth dragon and it has three heads, and the heads are always arguing and I love this dragon. And the three heads are called, Innocence, Arrogance and Patience, because I read somewhere that's what a writer has to have. Innocence, Arrogance and Patience.

JF: Very good. I love that. That's a lesson for life actually. And we've got some people... Thank you very much for telling us about secret magic power that you would like to have. Grandtully Primary in Perthshire would like to shape shift and teleport.

CC: Oh you see cool.

JF: Yes

CC: You see I try and put all these magical powers that I would love to have...

JF: Yes.

CC: ...into these books.

JF: Exactly. And those would be great to draw actually...

CC: Yes.

JF: ...as well.

CC: That's a really good one. Shape shift.

JF: Yes. You could go anywhere with that one. David, St. Ninian's Primary in West Lothian, I think a lot of people wanting to do this, David, including somebody in our audience would like invisibility cloak. Zak, St. John Ogilvie Primary in Livingston, this is a funny one. This might be quite good for the person in the audience here who wanted to sort of have fire coming out of their fingers.

CC: That was Zak.



- JF: Zak would like to spray water at people as his power.
- CC: [Laughs].
- JF: It's very handy.
- CC: It could be very useful because you could have the two of them in the same room. One of them making fire and the other one [laughs] shooting water to quench the fire. Perfect.
- JF: It'd be brilliant. And just one quickie from me.
- CC: Okay.
- JF: Do you always start, you were talking about maps, do you always start... Do you start with the drawings?
- CC: Yes.
- JF: Yeah.
- CC: I do start with the drawings. Because drawings give you a real sense of place, so that's, as I said, it gives you ideas for the place. If you write things on the map it gives you ideas for stories. So really do do that. And also draw your characters. Maybe draw a character and then write a story about it, because that gives you a feel for what the characters are like. And often when I'm drawing, I try and imagine I'm the character because Wish is quite unconfident...
- JF: Yeah.
- CC: ...but secretly very powerful.
- JF: Yeah.
- CC: She's the opposite of Kamikaze, my girl character in... I like the strong girl characters. But she's not obviously strong.
- JF: Yeah.
- CC: She's, you know, it just emerges. And so when I'm drawing her I kind of think, a bit timid, but actually very strong. I think about the character as I'm drawing it.
- JF: Yes, yes.
- CC: [Inaudible 0:39:46].

JF: Do you like drawing? Yeah? Do you like drawing? Brilliant. Well there you go, you can start and then you can start writing. And you will be those future creators, or creative solutions that Cressida was talking about and possibly making millions and billions, although that's not what it's all about.

CC: No.

JF: That's not what it's all about.

CC: It's about love.

JF: [Laughs].

CC: It is about love [laughs].

JF: It is about love, and empathy. It's been lovely talking to you, Cressida, have you enjoyed it?

Aud: Yes.

CC: Thank you so much.

JF: Yes. I think we should have a massive round of applause for Cressida Cowell.

Aud: [Applause].

CC: Thank you, thank you.

JF: Thank you very much.

CC: And happy writing.

JF: And you've been an absolutely lovely audience. Thank you wherever you are for joining us on Authors Live and if you'd like to watch it again or tell some people who might have missed it you can go to the Scottish Book Trust site, [scottishbooktrust.com/authorslive](http://scottishbooktrust.com/authorslive) and you can watch it all again and indeed all the other authors that we've had over the years. That would be great to have you do that. And look out for the next one which will be coming soon. But from all of us, to all of you, thank you very much indeed. And another huge round of applause and a cheer for Cressida Cowell.

Aud: [Applause].

CC: Thank you, thank you. Thank you very much.