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Author/Interview subject: James Mayhew (JM)
Interviewed by: Janice Forsyth (JF)
Other speakers: Audience (Aud)

JF: Hello there I'm Janice Forsyth, a very warm welcome to Authors Live. This is our series of virtual authors events coming to you in association with the BBC and the Scottish Book Trust. Now we're delighted that so many of you are watching in nurseries and in schools through Glow, right across the UK. Today we also have some real live children in the studio with us, so why don't you say hello? They're gonna wave over there to Simone's camera, these children are from Hyndland Primary School in Glasgow, aren't they a gorgeous lot? And so well behaved. Um now, if you are watching remotely of course you know all of this already but in case you forgot, if your image should just stop or freeze or judder that's completely normal, don't try to fix the screen, it will just sort itself out. OK? So don't panic, that's all going to be lovely. Now we're really, really, really thrilled to have author and illustrator of many many books for children, James Mayhew with us today. He is our very special guest and if you want to find out more about his books after this webcast there are learning resources available for a couple of James' books which you can download from the Scottish Book Trust website. Now I'm sure you know and love, certainly the children here do, the Katie books and the Ella Bella Ballerina ones too. Today we have an extra treat as James is not only going to be talking about his books he's going to be doing a bit of painting too. So please out there and here, a huge massive cheery welcome for James Mayhew.

Aud: (Applause)

JM: Thank you very much everybody. And good morning, and good morning to all the digital children that I can't see but I know are there. It's wonderful to be here, I've been looking forward to today for so long. I can't believe the day's finally arrived. And I've got so many things to show you and to talk to you about and I'm going to begin by trying to talk about and remember what it was like to be your age. How old are you?

Aud: [shout out a mixture of seven and eight]

JM: Seven and eight. Well that was a long time ago for me, but when I was your age what do you think I liked best at school? What do you reckon?

Aud: [inaudible]

JM: Painting. That's the correct answer. I drew and painted all the time, even when I wasn't supposed to be drawing and painting. I used to get into a lot of trouble from my teachers, even if it was maths or science or history, whatever subject, I would be drawing at the back of the class, sometimes dinosaurs, sometimes trains, and I never stopped drawing. I kept on drawing all the time. Now when I was about your age I entered a competition. Who watches Blue Peter? Anyone here watch Blue Peter? Excellent. I used to love that programme when I was little. And I entered a Blue Peter competition. I didn't win it, it was called the Design a Train of the Future competition and I sent off a picture of a train, and although I didn't win it I did get a letter and also got, if I look in my pocket, down here, a Blue Peter badge which I was very excited to get. It's falling to pieces now, it's lost the pin from the back otherwise I'd have it on my jacket but I've kept it all these years and it made me think that maybe my pictures weren't so bad. Maybe I could be an artist when I grew up. So I kept on drawing even though I was being told off at school and I remember one Christmas my parents gave me a wonderful present. It was a big wooden box which my dad had made and it was filled with paints and pencils, crayons, paper, transfers, stencils, everything an artist could want and I used that all the time to do lots more drawing and painting. Eventually I left school, hurrah [whispered] no I quite liked school really. But then I went to a different school, I went to an art school. And guess what I did there all day?

Aud: Painting?

JM: Painting and drawing. Only I didn't get told off anymore because that is what I was supposed to be doing. And while I was there I wrote a story. Now when I was your age at school I found reading and writing quite hard and I love looking at books because I love looking at pictures to begin with, but later on I started to enjoy words as well. And that's when I wrote this first book. It's all about a little girl called Katie who goes to a gallery with her grandma and when grandma falls asleep Katie goes to look at the pictures. And when she looks at the pictures she sees a sign, and the sign says 'Please do not touch'. Well, Katie can't resist. She does touch. And what do you think happens when she touches the painting?

Aud: She goes in the painting

JM: She goes in the painting. Of course she does because they're magic paintings and she climbs right inside and starts having adventures. These are the very first drawings I did for the book, they're not very good. I didn't think it would ever be turned into a real book but it did, it became my first ever book which is this one, Katie's Picture Show. And after doing the first story about Katie I started doing lots more stories about her and I always begin the same way, by doing lots of practice drawings like the ones in here. So I practice the painting, I practice all the pages in tiny little drawings like this. And I practice the words. And eventually when I get it right it gets turned into a real book. Now what do you think I use to make the pictures with? Any guesses? Yeah?

Aud: You sketch then paint it.

JM: I sketch then paint, that's absolutely right. What sort of things do you think you use to sketch with? Yes?

Aud: Pencil?

JM: Pencil, you can use pencil. I use something else though. I use ink which is tricky because you can't rub ink out. So I'm going to have a go at doing a painting now, would you like that?

Aud: Yes!

JM: It could go horribly wrong because I'm going to paint it upside down. That doesn't mean I'm going to stand on my head it means the picture's going to be upside down for me, it'll be the right way round for you. The story I'm going to tell that goes with the picture has something to do with this book. This is called Katie and the British Artists and if you look carefully you can see a big ship here, this ship is called The Fighting Temeraire, it was a battleship in a famous battle called The Battle of Trafalgar. And something in this story has something to do with this ship in the Battle of Trafalgar, you'll find out at the end. The story also has something to do with a famous Scottish writer but I'll tell you about that at the end. I've got to make sure I've got all my brushes ready. And I've also got a little tiny set of paints that I use when I'm travelling, which is here. It's a very neat set of paints, there's a little bottle of water here so I can rinse my brushes when I'm on trains and travelling. So, are you ready? OK here we go, there was once a boy called Henry who lived in a hotel beside the sea with his mother and father. Every day he would look out the window at the ships coming and going from the harbour and he longed to become a sailor and go to sea. But his mother and father said you don't want to go to sea Henry, why don't you stay here and work in the hotel? So he did, when he grew up he became a chef. But he never quite forgot his dream

of going to sea and one day some mysterious men came into the hotel, nobody knew who they were. Henry cooked them a delicious meal and afterwards they said to him we're looking for a cook for our ship, we've just bought a ship and we're off on an expedition, would you be interested in being the cook for us? Well that depends said Henry, what sort of expedition it's going to be. Ahh they said do you believe in pirates? Henry said well I'm not sure I guess they're just kids' stories aren't they? But then the men took out a map and they said it was a real treasure map and they were off to an Island called Cocos Island to look for buried treasure. Well Henry was very excited and he jumped up and packed his bags and the next day they all set sail for Cocos Island. It was a long journey, in those days it took a long time to travel across the sea on an old ship. It visited all sorts of places with wonderful sounding names, like Casablanca, but then disaster struck, the engine broke and they were stuck in the middle of the ocean. Henry was in charge of feeding everybody so he had to find some food quickly. He had no bait to catch fish with but he'd seen these amazing fish that leapt out of the water and flew with their fins. They were called Flying Fish. He decided to try and catch those. He knew they jumped out of the water because they liked the sunshine so he hung lanterns on the ship and at night the ship glowed almost like the sunshine and it tricked the flying fish and they jumped out of the water and landed on the deck. Henry quickly gathered them up and put them in a frying pan and then everybody had Flying Fish and chips for tea. Now he had bait because he had small flying fish so he used that to catch other things like a swordfish and even a shark. And when he was cooking the shark he cut open the shark's eye and out of the shark's eye rolled a strange round hard lump and the other treasure hunters said that's the lens from the eye of the shark, you should keep that, it's good luck. So Henry put it in his pocket to keep it safe. They sailed on to the Caribbean and then to the other side of America where there was a terrible storm, a hurricane, and the ship was nearly sunk, it was tossed around like a toy in a bathtub. Henry was very scared but he put his hand in his pocket and held on to the lens from the eye of the shark. And maybe it did give them good luck because the ship survived the storm and they soon reached Cocos Island where they put down the anchor and went ashore. Henry found a huge stone and on the stone were carved lots of names and his friends said these were the names of the pirates who had buried their treasure on the island. And they told him the stories of the pirates which went like this. In the country called Peru there's a great city called Lima and in Lima there's a large cathedral. In the cathedral there is almost unimaginable treasure, gold and silver and diamonds and sapphires and rubies, but best of all there's a statue of Mary and Jesus, life-sized, made out of solid gold. But when war broke out in Peru the people were worried that their special treasure in the cathedral might get stolen so they decided to put it on a

ship and send it out to sea to keep it safe. They put it on the English ship. That was their mistake, you should never trust an Englishman. The Englishman was called Captain Thompson and when he saw the treasure he couldn't resist it. He decided to become a pirate and he stole it. Then he went off with his crew looking for the perfect place to bury his treasure. Eventually he came to Cocos island, a tiny island where nobody lives and he thought it would be the perfect place to hide the treasure. Trouble was there was another pirate sailing by who was also looking for an island to bury his treasure, he was a terrible pirate called Benito Bonito of the Blood Stained Sword. He guessed Captain Thompson has some treasure so he attacked his ship, sank it, stole the treasure and took Captain Thompson prisoner. And he made him go to Cocos Island dig a hole, and bury all the treasure. Afterwards Captain Thompson escaped and he drew the map, the treasure map that Henry was now holding. So the next day they began to search for the treasure. They searched and searched and searched. They dug holes, they blew up caves but they couldn't find the treasure anywhere. Other people came to look for the treasure too, even the president of America came with his men and Henry got to meet the president. But nobody could find the treasure. In the end they ran out of money, Henry had to go home. He was very sad, he felt the whole trip had been a failure. But when he got home everybody rushed to meet him, they said welcome home Henry, tell us about your adventures, tell us what happened. So he started to tell his stories. He told them about the swordfish he'd caught and the flying fish and meeting the president of America and all the stories of Benito Bonito of the Blood Stained Sword. And he realised he did have a treasure, he had a lifetime of stories to tell. Now you might be wondering what this has got to do with the painting or the book I showed you and I'll tell you. The pirate Benito Bonito of the Bloody Sword that wasn't his real name, his real name was Captain Bennett Graham and when he became a pirate he changed his name. And he was a pirate in the English navy and he fought at the Battle of Trafalgar so he might well have stood on the ship in this painting. So that's the link to that story, and the other link that I wanted to mention is this is believed to be the legend that inspired Robert Louis Stevenson to write one of his most famous books, I wonder if anybody can guess what story that might have been. I'll tell you, it's Treasure Island. Now who thinks that story's true and who thinks I made it up? Do you think I made it all up or do you believe me? Do you think it's a true story?

Aud: Yes

JM Well it, some no's, oh well. What about you watching on computers? I can't hear your answers but I wonder if you're thinking it's true or not. Well, I can prove it is a true story because Henry was in fact my grandfather and he really did sail to

Cocos Island searching for buried treasure and in my pocket I have got something very special that he gave me to prove it's true. This is the lens from the eye of a shark, the real one that he caught when he travelled to Cocos Island. I'm just going to put a tiny bit more detail on the painting, like that, a feather in his hat and maybe a little bit of green on the trees and we need to carve his name in the rock, just like it was on Cocos Island. There we are. I'm going to take it off my pad of paper and put that on the easel. Now although a lot of the Katie books are about art, they're not all about art, sometimes I write stories about other things like Katie and the Dinosaurs, all those drawings I did in my maths class weren't wasted you see, they ended up in a book and the very latest Katie story takes place in Scotland. About a year ago I came to Scotland, I did lots and lots of sketching from the train, these sketches were done on the train from Glasgow to Fort William and I used these ideas and these colours and these shapes of mountains in the book which is called Katie in Scotland. And I think that you can tell from the cover who Katie meets when she and her brother Jack go to Loch Ness, but let's just test. Who do you think she meets? Good, all the hands going up, that's what I like to see. Yes, what do you think?

Aud: Erm, does she meet Nessie?

JM: She does of course meet Nessie. There she is, but it was quite hard deciding what Nessie would look like because usually I like to sketch things from real life and I did go to Loch Ness and I did do some sketching, but only of the castle and the loch because Nessie refused to come out and model for my drawing. So I had to imagine what Nessie looked like. And that was quite hard because if you go into a shop in Scotland you'll see lots of models of Nessie that look like this, let's have some water and like this, and I thought well, maybe she looks like that but I don't think so. If she looks like that where would her legs be? And that was a puzzle. So I started imagining what she looked like underneath the water. So I tried doing a long thin wiggly Nessie like this, with legs, lots of legs, but, I don't know about you, I didn't think that looked quite right. No! That's not how Nessie should look is it? Not even with spikes down her back. So I tried to think of another way to draw Nessie and I thought well maybe she's very fat with lumps on top of her so I did a very fat Nessie with just four legs this time so which seems a bit more sensible. Let me see. I did one like this. It does look more like a dinosaur. But that wasn't quite right either so I had to think again. I thought well maybe Nessie is a dinosaur. Maybe she's one of the dinosaurs that swims in the water. Maybe she's a plesiosaurs so that was kind of what I tried next. So I gave her flippers. I figured she could walk a bit on the flippers if she wanted to and I didn't give her loads of lumps and bumps on her back. I kept her nice and smooth so she could glide through the water. Like this. And that's pretty much how

Nessie ended up in the finished book. Let's put some colour on that one. 'Cause that was the other battle, deciding what colour Nessie should be. I think green too. That's what I chose. When I'm working on a book as you know I do lots and lots of planning and sketching and I've got some of the plans here for the Nessie story, Katie in Scotland, so I have to plan all the pages just like I do for my other books, in the same way. I've done lots of other books about other things not just Katie – Ella Bella Ballerina and Boy who lived in a cave and I love writing stories and drawing pictures for children and I hope you've enjoyed listening to me. I think I've been talking a long time now. It's time to ask you some questions.

JF: A round of applause for James. Wonderful. Thank you. Thank you very much.

Aud: (Applause)

JM: My pleasure.

JF: And I was thinking when you were doing that what somebody else was thinking out there who has instantly got in touch with us, who's listening. Crowfoot Primary. This is primary 4 and 5 and they say how do you paint upside down? Do you feel sick? Do you get dizzy?

JM: No you don't get sick or dizzy. You get cross-eyed, I would say. It's hard and some pictures go better than others. It's always a bit of a gamble. I think that's the thing about art. One of the things you have to do, I think, when you're writing stories and you're doing paintings is that you have to take a bit of a risk. You have to try it. It's no good saying I can't do that, I'm scared. You have to just give it a go. I think you should all try, and you watching computers, I think you should go away and try upside down painting. I think it would be a good thing to do.

JF: We will. Are you going to do it? I'm going to do it. The teachers are nodding as well.

JM: Give it a try. How hard can it be?

JF: Exactly. We have a question from somebody here in our studio, Highland Primary School and we have a little microphone for you. You can ask the question of James. What's your name?

E: Eliza.

JF: Eliza. Great name.

E: Do you think you're ever going to stop writing your books?

- JM: Hi Eliza. No I don't think so. It's a funny sort of job I've got because I love it but I work at home all on my own and so it's quite hard to come up with ideas. That's why it's great to come out and meet children like you. So unless I run out of ideas, which could happen, I don't think I'd stop writing. I love writing stories.
- E: Ok. Thank you.
- JM: You're welcome.
- JF: Great question. We've got another one just in, actually, for Kilmodan Primary. Why do you use a retro style of drawing, I suppose maybe a slightly old fashioned style?
- JM: Well I think there are several reasons. With the Katie books in particular, when I'm doing the stories where Katie climbs into paintings the scenes in the gallery have to be quite boring and old fashioned and not very exciting and modern looking, because if it was exciting and modern looking you wouldn't really notice the beautiful paintings by Monet and they're the bits I want to look really exciting so I keep this bit quite quiet. That's why also with the Ella Bella books they're done in a slightly old fashioned way because I just love old fashioned books. I love the way books were made many years ago. Sometimes they had to print them very carefully because they could only use one or two colours so they had to plan and design them really really carefully, and because of that they were very beautiful and thoughtful books so I've learned a lot from looking at those sort of books and finding out about the way people used to make books in the olden days.
- JF: Fantastic, thank-you. We've had lots of questions, incidentally, from schools right across the UK so apologies I can't get through them all, obviously, but I'll try my best to do questions that are asked by a number of people. And here's one from Carol whose another author, I think, what did you like to draw when you were small and have you kept any of your childhood pictures?
- JM: There's only a few. My mother did keep a few. Not very many. My favourite things- well you know about dinosaurs and trains. The other favourite thing that I drew all the time was Chitty Chitty Bang Bang which was my favourite film as a child. I was always trying to draw pictures.
- JF: I just hear someone the front row saying I love Chitty Chitty Bang Bang. I'm sure they're saying it out there too. Do you like drawing better than writing? This is comes from Felix and Murdo at Tighnabruaich Primary School. Hi Felix and Murdo. Great question.

JM: That's a really good question and a hard one to answer. I think if you'd asked me a few years ago I would have said painting and illustrating, because I went to art school as I said, so I feel, or used to feel more confident, but now that I'm doing more writing I've even started to writing stories for other illustrators. In fact I've got a picture here of a book that I've written for another artist called Clara Vulliamy so we're working together on this. It's called Bubble and Squeak. It won't come out for about another year or so but it's very exciting to write stories for another artist to illustrate because the writing part is so much shorter than doing the illustrating. So my job is done already and she's got to do all the hard work now.

JF: Brilliant. This one comes from Libby – hello Libby- from Manor Lodge School in Shenley in Herts – what is your favourite book that you've illustrated?

JM: That's an easy one to answer. It's this one and it's because it's got an illustration in it by my son. In the story Katie want to climb inside this painting of a horse, very beautiful painting. The horse is called a whistle jacket but there's no background. When Katie goes in the horse has nowhere to go so she draws a world for the horse to gallop around in and I got my son to do that. He made a huge fuss about it and I had to pay him £10. And he said I'm going to have to draw like a girl because it's supposed to be Katie's picture in the story, so that's what he did.

JF: How old was he when he did that?

JM: He was about your age – seven or eight.

JF: How wonderful. Can you imagine having your drawing in one of James' books? Fantastic! Lucky boy.

JM: There's another child's drawing in this one. I can quickly show you because we had a competition because I wanted Katie's portrait of Nessie in this book so we had a competition and a little girl in Scotland called Piper won the competition and this is her picture of Nessie which in the story is the picture that Katie drew of Nessie, and there it is printed in the book.

JF: Great. Fantastic. Anyone here seen Nessie, incidentally? No. Strangely. I have. Right. Is Katie based on anyone? And this comes from Katie in Lochgilphead Primary and Freya at Manor Lodge School in Shenley.

JM: Yes. She's based on my sister, Katie, who was very naughty when she was a child. She was just like this, how she is in the books. We did get taken to museums by our grandma. I lived in the country, miles away from any big cities

like Glasgow or London, so it was a real treat to go stay with Grandma and she would take us into London to the Natural History Museums and places like that and those memories stuck in my head and when I started wiring books the memories of my sister being naughty in a big museum with a grandma, that's where it all came from.

JF: So you have, in fact, answered a question that came from Niamh and Ryan from Tobermory High School who said what inspired you to write about your sister? So it was those memories. Now Freya again, in Shenley in Herts, You have a little boy - how old is he and are you writing any books based on him? So we know that his drawing appeared in that book, but any books actually based on your son.

JM: Yes there is one right here which is coming out in the summer called Boy. I did these sketches of Gabriel, that's his name, when he was about three. He's twelve now. He was twelve just yesterday and I used different materials for this book. I used pastels instead of the paint and the inks to get a completely different sort of effect to the pictures but this is absolutely based on him because he behaved like a little cave boy, frankly.

JF: I was going to say as a twelve year old boy how does he feel about having this cute little book about him?

JM: I don't know. Probably very embarrassed. He's mortified now.

JF: Lauren in Lochgilphead Primary – hi Lauren – good question from Lauren – who is your favourite author and/or illustrator.

JM: Hello Lauren. I have lots of favourites but my number one favourite when I was a child particularly was an author and illustrator called Tove Jansson who lived in Finland and she wrote wonderful Moomin books, set in Moomin Valley of which my favourite is Moominland Midwinter. Brilliant book. Recommend it to everybody.

JF: Fantastic. Primary 6 Lochgilphead Primary - hello all of you watching – have – oh dear – it's confession time – have you ever spilt paint all over one of your books? And, they add, we're watching you.

JM: Well I am a very messy artist. I mean I've already got paint all over my fingers. There's stains on this table. I do spill a lot of paint and sometimes one purpose because once I got very angry with a picture. It wasn't going right and I didn't know how I was going to make it right so I got a great big pot of paint and I just

tipped it all over the picture and ruined it completely, which was kind of satisfying in a strange way.

JF: But we don't encourage you to do that.

JM: No! But I knew then that I couldn't do anything with that picture. I'd have to start again so I started again.

JF: I see right. Now – gosh lots of Kates and Katies – Kate Kent – what do you like best about Scotland and how did you chose what to include in Katie in Scotland? She's not finished – this is a long question –

JM: Oh dear

JF: What did you have to leave out? Will there be a sequel? Love from – ah - the original Katie. Yes I still have the duffle coat.

JM: That's my pesky sister.

JF: No wonder she's got lots of questions.

JM: Well, she's never short of anything to say, my sister. Well, I'll embarrass her now because she's going to be fifty this year, the real Katie. There are so many things I love about Scotland. I love the friendly people. That's the thing that really strikes me. Everybody's so warm and friendly and welcoming when I come to Scotland. I love the scenery because I grew up in Suffolk which is very flat. I get dreadfully excited when I see a mountain. Of course you've got quite a few of those in Scotland. And I love the food as well. I love Tunnocks Tea Cakes. They're my favourite.

JF: Other teacakes are available.

JM: As for things I've left out...it's so hard to say. It was very hard because the book is only thirty pages long and I would have loved to have got more of Scotland crammed into it. I would have loved to have done perhaps, some of the farer flung islands, the Hebrides, that sort of part of Scotland but it just wasn't humanly possible to squeeze them into a thirty page book.

JF: Maybe a further island series could be forthcoming

JM: Maybe it could be.

JF: I think we've got time for a final question. Funnily enough, from Tobermory Primary on the Isle of Mull - that wasn't intentional – from Amy and Lewis – hi there – and they say, now this is a big question but I guess important for people

listening here and wherever they are who might think that they want to try writing a book for children. What is the most important thing to consider when writing a children's book?

JM: Well obviously the children and I think that is very important because sometimes you get children's book which are full of jokes which only adults get and children want to be able to understand the joke in a book. So I think the most important thing is to hold on to your memories. The things that happened to you when you were little and use those in your stories because that's what I've done. Most of then things I do come from memories when I was little or with working with children like you.

JF: Fantastic. Some of you fancy writing a book for children?

JM: Or illustrating it?

JF: Or illustrating indeed. Everyone here and I'm sure out there too. Those are all the questions we have time for. Awww. Sad isn't it? James, thank you so much for being with us today.

JM: My pleasure.

JF: before we say a final goodbye I should just say that the next author's live event will be with Andy Stanton, the award winning author of the hugely successful Mr Gum series of books and Andy will be making everybody laugh here and out there on the 16th June, 11 o'clock in the morning, with an event for 7 to 9 year olds so do hope you can join us for that. Finally don't forget you can watch this event as well as all the previous ones on the BBC Scotland learning and the Scottish Book Trust websites. Keep an eye out also on the Scottish Book Trust website for more updates on everything. So we'll see you all soon and everybody here and out there, a huge cheering thank you for James Mayhew!

JM: Thank you very much.

Aud: (Applause)