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Author/Interview subject: Kes Gray (KG)
Interviewed by: Janice Forsyth (JF)
Other speakers: Audience (Aud), Girl (Girl), Boy (Boy)

JF Hello there, a very warm welcome to Authors Live. Thank you so, so much for joining us, brilliant to have you along today. My name is Janice Forsyth and with me today are pupils from Castleview Primary in Edinburgh and the Communication Unit in St Anthony's in Renfrewshire. But, don't take my word for it, why don't you have a look at them and why don't you make friends? Those of you who are watching in your schools or at home, wherever you are, I want you to do a double-handed wave to our brilliant pupils who are here. On you go, everybody, wave to everyone. Over there, you can see them there through the magic of the camera. Isn't that fantastic? Lots of new friends. Right, you can save the waving now, you can relax. Very good waving, did you enjoy that?

Aud Yes.

JF The excitement is only just beginning. I'm very excited, everybody here is excited. Are you excited? I can't hear you, are you excited?

Aud Yeah.

JF So pleased to hear that. Now, if you are excited, and clearly we all are, wherever you are watching and listening to us, we would love to see some pictures of you. If you'd like to send us some photos, and even some messages, you can do it. It's just so easy, if you've not done it before it's really, really simple, you just use the hashtag #bbcauthorlive. Can we all do that together? BBC Authors Live.

Aud BBC Authors Live.

JF You guys are great, you guys are great too. We really love to see your pictures and get an idea of where you're watching and the fun you're having in the classroom, so it would be really good for you to do that, thank you very much indeed. So we're all very excited today because we've got a truly smashing guest author who has written loads of books for children of all ages. I'm sure you

know that, because you'll have read a lot of them. Today he is here because he's going to tell us about some of his picture books, including one with a title that I think is a very good warmup exercise for your mouth. It's, Quick Quack Quentin. Can we all do that together, after three? One, two three...

Aud Quick Quack Quentin.

JF ...Quick Quack Quentin. Shall we do it one more time? Quick Quack Quentin.

Aud Quick Quack Quentin.

JF Fantastic. He's also going to be talking about his really brilliant, massively popular, series of books called Oi, all about animals and where animals are allowed to sit. You know those books, don't you? So, shall we get into the mood for that? Why don't you, just wherever you are make yourself comfortable. You can have a wee wriggle, make sure you're comfortable in your seat. Yeah, are you all sitting comfortably now? All ready? Brilliant. I want to hear you now, let's have a huge cheer and massive round of applause for the brilliant, Kes Gray, boys and girls.

Aud [applause] Yay!

KG Hello everybody. Yes, I am Kes and, yes, I've written lots and lots of books for children and I believe you do know Quick Quack Quentin very well, is that right?

Aud Yeah.

KG Have you read Quick Quack Quentin before?

Aud Yeah.

KG Yeah, well, I'm going to read it to you later but, before I do that, what I thought might be fun is if I tell you a little bit about me when I was very young. Not just your age but even younger. Would you like to see once I have moved on from...would you like to see a picture of me when I was a baby?

Aud Yeah.

KG Now then, this picture of a baby is a lovely picture, I look very cute, but I have to say I have taken this picture into schools before, you'll never guess what they've done. They've laughed. Promise me you won't laugh, yeah? Do you want to see a picture of me when I'm a baby? When I was a baby I was ever so cute, are you ready for this one?

Aud Yeah.

KG You won't laugh, will you?

Aud No.

KG Promise. Double promise?

Aud Yes.

KG Here we go then.

Aud Aww [laughs]

KG Aww, isn't that cute? Did anybody laugh?

Aud No.

KG No, of course you didn't, because it's absolutely true. I was born with a moustache.

Aud [laughs]

KG Yes, I was born with a moustache, and it looks pretty good, doesn't it?

Boy Yeah, it looks really good.

KG Yeah, I loved my moustache, I was the only person in the whole world to ever be born with a moustache, and I loved it, and so did my mum. Every day my mum would change my nappy and then she'd comb my moustache, and we thought it was a very good look. Do you think it's a good look?

Aud Yeah.

KG Yeah? Do you think it's a good look, everybody at home?

Aud Yeah.

KG Yeah? Well, every day my mum would comb my moustache and then, by the time I was about two years old, I could comb it myself. I used to comb my moustache myself and, by the time I was about four years old, my moustache didn't look like that anymore. Do you want to see what it looked like?

Aud Yeah.

KG It looked like this. Now, is that a good look, or is that a good look?

Aud Yeah. No.

KG Yeah, what do you think? Hands up if you'd really like a look like this? Yeah. Well, this was the kind of moustache that I had when I was about four years old and I thought it was fabulous. Every day I'd get up, comb my moustache, sometimes I'd even brush it because it's quite a long moustache now, isn't it?

Aud Yeah.

KG Well, I'd look after it and every day was brilliant because I had this fantastic look, but then everything changed when I was five years old. When I was five years old, something terrible happened. Yeah, do you know what it was?

Aud What?

KG Well, my mum and dad only told me I had to go to school. I went, go where? They went, go to school. You're five years old, you need to go to school now. I went, but I don't want to go to school, I like being at home, I like playing games all the time at home. They went, no, you have to go to school. I went, but...they went, no buts, it's the law, you're going to school. So I went to school, and that's when things got rather tricky for me, do you know why?

Aud Why?

KG Well, at break time in the morning, guess what they made us drink? School milk. Now, school milk came in a little bottle about that big, and there were two types of school milk. One was cheesy, stinky, lumpy school milk, and that was the school milk they gave you in the summer because they'd left it out in the sunshine, and then in winter there was lumpy, crunchy, icy school milk because they'd only gone and left it out in the snow, and we had to drink that every break time. Now, just imagine, if you've got a fabulous moustache like this and you take a bottle of school milk and you try and drink it, what colour is school milk?

Girl White.

KG White. What colour is my moustache?

Aud Brown.

KG Brown. So if you go like that with a bottle of school milk and take it away, what colour has your moustache turned?

Aud White.

KG White. Is that a good look?

Aud No.

KG No, it's not a good look, and it got worse because, at lunchtime, sometimes we had custard. Now, I really like custard. Does anybody know what colour custard is? Yes?

Girl Me?

KG Yes.

Girl Yellow.

KG It's yellow, isn't it? Well, I really like custard so much that I never used to use a spoon when I had my custard, I just used to sort of splat my face straight into the bowl and rub my face all around the bowl, a bit like a pig, really. Of course, when you lift your head up, what colour has your moustache turned?

Aud Yellow.

KG Yellow. Is that a good look?

Aud No.

KG No, and not only that, sometimes we had strawberry custard. Does anybody know what colour strawberry custard is? Yes?

Boy Red.

KG It's reddy-pink, and if you splat your face into a bowl of strawberry custard when you've got a lovely big moustache like this, what colour does your moustache turn? Yes.

Girl Pink.

KG Pink. Is that a good look?

Aud No.

KG No, so I had no choice, really. I had to shave my moustache off. Would you like to see a picture of me when I was minus my moustache?

Aud Yeah.

KG Yeah, here I am here. Aww, isn't that cute?

Aud Yeah.

KG Now, then. This was me when I was about your age, I think, but there was something about me that was quite strange, because I actually didn't want to be

me, because I like to be all sorts of things, all sorts of times. Shall I tell you who my best three friends were? They were teddies. Has anybody got a teddy? Hands down. Hands up if you've got more than one teddy? Hands down. Hands up if you've got more than ten teddies? 100 teddies, more than 100 teddies? More than 1000 teddies? Yes, well, do you know how many teddies I had when I was your age? Three. Three teddies, because I was born a long time ago, and in the 1960s you couldn't just go in and buy loads of teddies, they were really hard to come by. Do you want to see my teddies?

Aud Yeah.

KG These are my three teddies. Aww.

Aud Aww.

KG Now, then. Right at the far end is my teddy, and he was called Teddy, okay. In the middle, there's a panda, that's my panda. Now, he was called Panda, okay. Right at the very end there's a little one, and he's a monkey. Now, he was called Monkey. How did you know that? How did you know? That's really clever. So I had three teddies, Teddy, Panda, Monkey. I had three teddies and I had two superheroes. Do you want to know who my superheroes were?

Aud Yeah.

KG Okay, well the best superheroes, I think, have superpowers, and the first superhero might be someone you don't know about, because he was on the telly all the time when I was your age, but I'm not sure if you'll know who he is. Do you want to see who it was?

Aud Yeah.

KG It's this person here.

Aud No.

KG It's the Milkybar Kid. Does everybody know who the Milkybar Kid is?

Aud Yeah. No.

KG Well, the Milkybar Kid had chocolate powers. The Milkybar Kid was amazing because what he could do is he could step out onto the streets not just wearing a cowboy hat and a sheriff's badge, but he could go out onto the street and then, for no reason at all, he'd start singing a special song, and at the end of the song, when he said, the Milkybars are on me, guess what happened? Milkybars came from everywhere, they just kind of covered him in Milkybars. They fell out of the

sky and they landed all over him, and it was brilliant. Shall I show you who I wanted to be next?

Aud Yeah.

KG Now, I think you might know who this is.

Aud Batman.

KG Batman and...

Aud Robin.

KG Robin. Batman and Robin. I really liked Batman because he was fantastic at stopping baddies. Do you know how he used to stop baddies? He had three types of punch. He could do a biff, that's how he did a biff. So he'd go biff, he could do a boff, and that was a boff, yeah, and he could do a pow. If he did a pow, he used to go like that, pow. So it was, biff, boff, pow, he was really good. Does anybody know how Robin used to fight baddies? Shall I show you? Robin used to fight baddies like...he didn't go, biff, boff, pow. Robin went, like that.

Aud [laughs]

KG That's not very good fighting, is it?

Aud No.

KG So that's why I wanted to be Batman. Now, then. Guess what? Who do you think amongst us has got superpowers? Have a guess.

Aud You.

KG Me, I've got superpowers as well. Do you want to see them?

Aud Yeah.

KG Okay, right, are you ready for this? I'm going to give you a demonstration of my superpowers. Do you know how I can stop baddies? Biscuit power.

Boy Biscuit power?

KG Biscuit power. Do you want to see me use some biscuit power?

Aud Yeah. [laughs]

KG It's quite amazing and quite dangerous, okay. So are you sure you want to see it?

Aud Yeah.

KG Okay, you want to see me use some biscuit power. I have to stand up for this, and I'm going to need somebody to assist me. Now, if you look behind you and you look right up there, there's Janice.

JF Hi.

KG Janice is going to pretend to be a baddie, okay. Now, then. Biscuit, a Rich Tea biscuit. Shall I see if I can stop Janice with my special biscuit powers?

Aud Yeah.

KG Okay.

JF [laughs]

KG Now, then. Everybody watching?

Aud Yeah.

KG Here's a little safety message from Kes Gray, superhero. Do not try this at home, this is one of those dangerous things you can try. It took me 50 years to perfect my superpowers, okay, and just remember that when I try and take Janice out with this biscuit...

JF [laughs]

KG ...it's not something you want to be trying at home, especially if your mum or your dad like biscuits because when they go to the biscuit tin there won't be any left. Okay, here goes.

JF And I've got to...I've got to make sure there's nobody around here, that it's safe to do it, Kes.

KG Yes, good idea.

JF The coast is clear, nobody else is here.

KG Okay, so how about we go, three, two, one, and you go, there's a baddie.

Aud [shouting]

KG Okay, so we'll go, three, two, one, there's a baddie.

Aud There's a baddie.

KG Take that, baddie. Oh, did I stop him?

Aud No.

KG Maybe I should try Ginger Nut, because Rich Tea biscuits sometimes go slightly the wrong way, so I'll try it with a Ginger Nut biscuit, shall I?

Aud Yeah.

KG Okay, ooh, you baddie. Where's the baddie?

Aud There's the baddie.

KG There's the baddie. Three, two, one, take that, baddie.

JF Argh!

Aud [laughs]

KG That wasn't bad, was it?

JF That was good.

Girl That was very close.

KG And you don't even just have to use sweet biscuits. If I was at home one day, let's say I was having some cheese and biscuits, yeah, so I've just put a bit of cheese onto a cream cracker like this, okay, and then I put a bit of cheese on it and then, suddenly, I look up and I think, uh-oh, it's a baddie, what I could do is I could just throw my piece of cheese away, take hold of my cream cracker and we could go, three, two, one, there's a baddie.

Aud There's a baddie.

KG Take that, baddie.

JF Oh!

KG So, that is my superpower, which means that I was the only person ever to be born with a moustache, and I'm probably the only person on the planet to have secret biscuit superpowers. What do you think? Good?

Aud Yeah.

KG Pretty good, okay. Now, then. When I left school, I was thinking, what am I going to do? Who am I going to be? I thought, I know, I'll be a superhero,

because I've got superpowers. But it wasn't as simple as that, because do you know how much biscuits cost?

Boy Loads.

KG Loads, and let's say if I kind of saved the world on a daily basis, that's going to cost me a lot of money in biscuits, isn't it?

Girl Yes.

KG A lot of money in biscuits. So what I decided, it was going to be far too expensive, so I thought, I know what I'll do, I'll be a children's author instead. I'm going to read you a story now, this is a very silly story. It hasn't got a superhero in it, it has Quick Quack Quentin, and Quick Quack Quentin is a duck with a super-big problem, and it goes like this. Quentin was a duck with a very quick quack. [quacks] And again, said the doctor. [quacks] Hmm, said the doctor. What's wrong with me, quacked Quentin. It's simple, said the doctor. I'm afraid, Quentin, your quack has lost its A. Is there anything you can give me for it, quacked Quentin. I'm afraid not, said the doctor, the only thing than I can give you is a D, an O, a C, a T, another O, or an R. I see, sighed Quentin.

Quentin left the doctors and went to a farm to look for an A. Hello, Quentin said to a group of animals who were gathered by the fence. I was wondering if I might be able to have the A from your farm. What do you need an A for, asked the farm animals. [quacks] Explained Quentin. Well, we're sorry, Quentin, they said, we'd like to help you, but if you have the A from our farm, it won't be a farm anymore, it'll be a frm, and we don't think the farmer would like to be a frmer. I understand, said Quentin. I'll give you my O, if you like, woofed the dog. Really, said Quentin. No problem at all, replied the dog. Quentin took the O from the dg and tried it out. Quock. You do sound a bit better, said the dg, but you don't really sound like a duck.

You can try my E, if you wish, shouted the hen. Quentin took the E from the hn and tried that out. Queck. You still don't really sound like a duck, said the hn. Try my I, oinked the pig. Quick. Try my U, bellowed the bull. Quuck. But it was no good. Sorry, Quentin, said the farm animals, nothing we can give you helps you sound like a duck. Quentin sighed, thanked the farm animals, and went to the zoo. Quoock, said Quentin, standing beside the z gates and trying out both of the O's, but quoock sounded just as odd as quock, queck, quick and quuck. Quentin went to find some animals with A's.

All the zoo animals with A's were very sympathetic but there was one big problem, the apes didn't want to be pes, the snakes didn't want to be snkes, the

camels didn't want to be cmels, the parrots didn't want to be prrots, and the pandas didn't want to be pndas or even pands. It's hopeless, qucked Quentin, waddling glumly back towards the zoo gates, I'm a duck with a quick quck and there's nothing anyone can do about it. I can do something about it, said a voice, you can have one of my A's if you like, I've got three. Quentin looked up and there was the strangest looking animal he'd ever seen. What kind of animal are you, qucked Quentin. I'm an aardvark, said the strange looking animal, and I've got far more A's than I need, help yourself.

Quentin took the first A from the ardvrk and excitedly tried it out. Quack. It works, Quentin cried. Quentin gave the first A back and swapped it for the second A. Quack. That A works too, shouted Quentin. Works for me as well, smiled the ardvrk, take your pick, Quentin. I'm cured, whooped Quentin, listen to my wonderful quack. QUACK, QUAACK, QUAAAACK!

Aud [laughs]

KG Don't be greedy now, said the rdvrk. What's Quentin gone and done, how many A's has he taken?

Boy Three.

KG Three. That's a bit greedy, isn't it? Do you think he should have taken three, or just maybe one or two?

Aud One

KG Just one, really, but that's what Quentin's going to do now. Quentin is going to start going everywhere he can looking for A's. Now, just imagine if Quentin came in here now looking for A's and he looked at you and he found out that you had an A in your name and decided to take it. Is anybody here in this room called banana? No, no one's called banana? Well, if you were called banana and Quentin came in and took all your A's, what would you be called then?

Aud Bnn.

KG Bnn.

Aud [laughs]

KG If you were called...what if you were called caravan? Anyone called caravan?

Aud No.

KG Well, if you were called caravan and Quentin came in and took all your A's, what would you be called then? Crvn.

Aud Crvn.

KG You'd be called crvn, because he took all your A's. I went to a school a little while ago and there was a girl called Arabella. Quentin came in, took all her A's, guess what everyone had to call her once Quentin had left? Rbll.

Boy Rbll.

KG Has anybody here got a name with an A in it? Yeah, what's your name?

Boy Alex.

KG Alex? You'd be called Lex.

Aud [laughs]

KG What's your name?

Boy Liam.

KG Liam? You'd be Lim.

Aud [laughs]

KG What's your name?

Girl Thenia.

KG Thenia? So you'd be Theni.

Aud [laughs]

KG What about over here, let's do a couple from over here?

Girl Lyla.

KG Lyla? You'd be Lyl, or Lyl, you could be Lyl.

Girl [laughs] Yeah, because I don't have...

KG Right at the back, away we go. What's your name?

Boy Bryan.

KG Bryan? You'd be Bryn. Okay, now, then. I'm going to read you another story now, but before I read you the story, I need to show you something, somebody. Are you ready? Does anybody know what this is? What's that?

Aud Frog.

KG No one thinks that's a duck, do they? No one's looking at that going, that's a duck, isn't it? No, that is a...

Aud Frog.

KG ...frog. This is a frog and he's sitting on a...

Aud Log.

KG ...log. Can anybody tell me why this frog is sitting on this log? Does anybody know? Yes, why do you think the frog is sitting on the log?

Boy Because there's no other places for them.

KG Because there's no other places? Well, in a way, you're right, because do you know why this frog is sitting on this log?

Boy No, I don't.

KG It's because the publishers, and the publishers are the people who make books, do you know what they've gone and done? They've stitched his bottom to the log. They've stitched his bottom to the log. See that? He can't get off the log. That is the only reason that this frog is sitting on this log, because the publishers have stitched his bottom to the log. If his bottom wasn't stitched to the log, do you know where he'd be?

Boy Where?

KG He'd probably be outside playing, he certainly wouldn't be sitting on here, because this frog does not like sitting on logs, and this is the story why. This is Oi Frog. See at the bottom there, it says, by Kes Gray, that's me, you know, and it's illustrated by Jim Field. Now, I've done lots of books with Jim. Jim Field illustrated Quick Quack Quentin too, and he's one of the very best illustrators in the world. Shall we look at the story of Oi Frog? Are you ready?

Aud Yes.

KG Okay, here we go, I'll sit him there. Oi Frog, sit on a log, said the cat. I don't want to sit on a log, said the frog, logs are all knobbly and uncomfortable, they can give you splinters in your bottom.

Aud [laughs]

KG I don't care, said the cat. You're a frog, so you must sit on a...

Aud Log.

KG ...log. Can't I sit on a mat, asked the frog. Only cats sit on mats, said the cat. What about a chair, said the frog, I wouldn't mind sitting on a chair. Hares sit on chairs, said the cat. Well, perhaps I can sit on a stool, said the frog. Mules sit on stools, said the cat. Well, what about a sofa, said the frog. I could stretch right out on a sofa. Gophers sit on sofas, said the cat. It's very simple, really. Cats sit on mats, hares sit on chairs, mules sit on stools, gophers sit on sofas and frogs sit on logs. What do lions sit on, asked the frog. Lions sit on irons, said the cat. Ouch, said the frog. What do parrots sit on? Parrots sit on carrots, said that cat...

Aud [laughs]

KG ...lions sit on irons, and parrots sit on carrots. It doesn't sound very comfortable, said the frog. It's not about being comfortable, said the cat, it's about doing the right thing. What do foxes sit on, asked the frog. Foxes sit on boxes, said the cat. Foxes sit on boxes and fleas sit on peas. What do goats sit on, asked the frog. Goats sit on coats, said the cat. Goats sit on coats, cows sit on ploughs, and storks sit on forks. What do gorillas sit on, asked the frog. Gorillas sit on pillars, said the cat. Gorillas sit on pillars, rats sit on hats, weasels sit on easels and moles sit on poles.

What do seals sit on, asked the frog. Don't you know anything, sighed the cat. Seals sit on wheels. Seals sit on wheels, doves sit on gloves, newts sit on flutes, lizards sit on wizards and apes sit on grapes. What about puffins, asked the frog. Puffins sit on...

Girl Muffins.

KG ...muffins, said the cat. Puffins sit on muffins, snakes sit on cakes, owls sit on towels, gibbons sit on ribbons, lambs sit on jams, bees sit on keys and pumas sit on satsumas. Well, I never knew that, said the frog. Well, you do now, said the cat. What do dogs sit on, asked the frog. I was hoping you weren't going to ask that, said the cat. Shall we see what dogs sit on?

Aud Yeah.

KG Dogs sit on...

Aud Frogs.

KG ...frogs. What's he saying?

Aud Help!

KG Help! That's right, the frog's got a little flag and it says, help! Because he doesn't really want to be sat on, does he? Certainly not by a great big dog like that.

Girl No.

KG Now, then. Shall I tell you a little secret?

Aud Yeah.

KG When I first wrote this book, that wasn't the ending to the book, I wanted a different ending. It's a similar ending but it's a little bit different, because do you know what I wanted the ending to be?

Aud What?

KG I wanted it to be this. Squelch.

Aud Squelch.

KG Now, when I did it the first time my publishers went all through the book and they went, squelch? What are you doing then? I said, I've really squashed him, I've really, really, really, really squashed the frog, isn't it funny...

Aud [laughs]

KG ...and they went, that's not funny, that's very, very, very, very wrong. I went, why, it's really funny. Squelch is much funnier than help, or I thought it was, because do you see what's happened, because he's been squelched so much, his eyes have all gone boing, and his tongue's gone, blah, and it's so funny. Do you think it would have been funnier if I'd have gone squelch, what do you think?

Aud Yeah.

KG Shall I tell you why I think the publishers were a bit worried? Because I think they thought if I squelched the frog too much at the end of the book, that might be the very last Oi story, because the frog might have been too squelched to be in any

other books. I reckon that's why, don't you? They were probably right, because if I'd squelched the frog too much, I wouldn't have been able to write this one, Oi Dog. Now, I don't know if you've ever read Oi Dog but, because the frog isn't very happy about being sat on by a great big dog, I had to write another story, and it goes a little bit like this. I just need to tell you the beginning of this book, and it starts like this.

Oi Dog, get off the frog. But I like sitting on frogs, said the dog. Frogs are all squishy and squashy, and when you sit on them they go [blows raspberry].

Aud [laughs]

KG You know the rules, said the cat. Cats sit on mats, frogs sit on logs and dogs sit on frogs. Well, I'm changing the rules, said the frog. From now on, dogs sit on logs, not frogs. Really, said the dog. Really, said the frog. Dogs sit on logs and cats sit on gnats. Now, does everybody know what a gnat is?

Aud No.

KG A gnat is like a mosquito. Does anybody know what a mosquito does to you? What does it try to do to you all the time? Yes, what does it try to do? It tries to...

Boy Suck your blood.

KG It tries to bite you, doesn't it? It nibbles you, and if you were sitting on a mosquito, where would it nibble you?

Girl Your bum.

KG On your bottom.

Aud Bum.

KG And that's why the cat is going, ouch.

JF How good was that?

Aud Great!

JF Isn't Kes absolutely brilliant? I just want to say hello to some of the people who've been in touch with us on social media, lots and lots of primary schools. I have to put my glasses on. Let's have a big cheer for Rosebank in Dundee, James Aiton in Cambuslang, St Margaret's Primary in Johnstone, Ben Wyvis in Conon Bridge, Stornoway Primary in the Western Isles, hi, Bell's Brae Primary in

Shetland, St Gabriel's in East Lothian and St Ninian's Primary in Livingstone. I think we should have a huge round of applause for those brilliant primaries...

Aud [applause]

JF ...who've been so enjoying everything today, and Kes' event will be available to watch soon. All you do is go to the website, scottishbooktrust/authorslive, and we've got tons of others there, in fact we've got 60 shows that you can watch. But, right now, can we have a massive round of applause and cheer here and there for the amazing Kes, thank you very much indeed.

Aud [applause]

KG Bye-bye, everybody.

JF Thank you.