

Interview with James Carter on Non-Fiction Poetry

Q. Why did you write your new book *Once Upon a Star* about the sun, stars and the solar system?

A. I had already written a book about the moon and then I thought I really need to do one about the sun as well, I need to expand this. I'm not a space nerd but I do love spacey things. I'm just fascinated by the fact that we're on a rock and it spins around the sun but if you asked me how many billions of years old the sun is, I'd probably forget!

Q. What is your book *Once Upon a Raindrop* about, and why did you want to write it?

A. I was thinking about what else I could write poems about so I wrote a whole big list of things and I remembered that back when I was a training to be an infant teacher, the first topic I ever did in my first classroom was water and I thought 'ooh aah!' The first thing I ever wrote for children was a really, really bad poem - 'Water is wet, water is clear, water is everywhere, water is here.' It was the worst thing ever. But I thought it would be nice to do the story of water. Not just the story of water but all its different uses, the things we do with it, how we use it and where it comes from.

Q. Why do you write poetry books about science and nature?

A. Because I like science and nature and have done since I was in the infants. I remember my teacher Mrs Smith saying, 'We're going to have a new topic next term, it's called nature.' And I thought 'Oh my gosh! Is that trees and squirrels and stuff?' I've always been into nature. I thought I might like to be a vet.

I loved science at school but I don't think science liked me. I was good at biology, but chemistry and physics were a bit tricky. But the great thing about writing science poetry picture books is that you don't need to get too many facts in, it's more about the language and the way you're telling it. I don't want to be too facty. I want to tell a story. I want it to be really engaging and using musical, repetitive language so some of that will sink in.

Q. Give us your top tips for writing a great poem based around science!

A. Read books first. Get all the information because there's nothing worse than starting to write something and not having the facts you need.

Read lots first and go to lots of places - go to a website, go to a book, maybe go and ask a science expert about something and let it all go into your head. Then let that all settle and start to write your poem.

It doesn't necessarily have to be a rhyming poem. Rhyming is like chocolate mousse, but not rhyming is like halloumi salad and there's a place for halloumi salad and there's a place for chocolate mousse. Not rhyming does mean you can say what you want to say whereas if you rhyme you have to be quite tight and structured.