



My Dear Noel: The Story of a Letter from Beatrice Potter; Quentin Blake

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Editorial Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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My Dear Noel is a most original and charming picture book that will appeal to children from about seven upwards, particularly if they enjoyed Beatrix Potter's books when they were younger. It tells the story of the friendship between the author (before she became well known) and Noel, a small boy who becomes ill and has to stay in bed. Children are shown the power of the written word as it is the letter Noel receives from his friend which speeds his recovery: it begins 'My dear Noel, I don't know what to write to you, so I will tell you a story.' It was this first Potter story that was expanded and published under the title **The Tale of Peter Rabbit** in 1902. Johnson's illustrations provide helpful insight into the dress, house and lifestyle of a middle class family living on the edge of Wandsworth Common towards the end of the Victorian era. Thus the book could enrich a history project of this period. With this in mind, the endpapers are also of considerable interest as a primary source: those at the front are a facsimile of the actual letters sent to Noel in 1893 while the back endpapers provide a more legible version in the correct reading order.

A recent addition to Evans' biography series for children, **Quentin Blake** is timely as the book's subject became the first Children's Laureate last year. Powling sets the context of Blake's early life, telling of a happy, ordinary childhood 'except of course there was a war on?', schooldays and recognition of his drawing gift during his time at grammar school. There are snapshots of how his life developed and of the interesting people he has worked with - eg Michael Rosen and Roald Dahl. With a light touch, Powling manages to indicate the complexity of a creative life like this one. We get a sense of the texture of an artist's life, particularly in the pages mapping out a perfect working day.

My husband remembers Blake, newly out of university, teaching him English at Chislehurst and Sidcup grammar school and peppering the lessons with lively cartoons. It is not surprising that Blake chose to make illustration rather than English teaching his life's work.

Running Order:

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