



A Q&A INTERVIEW WITH JULIA GREEN

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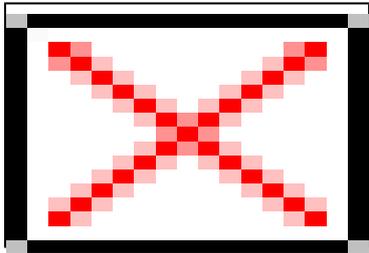
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Julia Green answers our questions on her new novel, **The Children of Swallow Fell**.

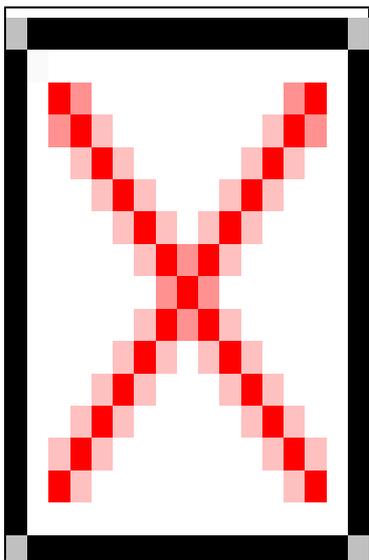
When war comes to the heart of the Italian city where Isabella lives with her family, everything changes. She makes the long journey with her dad to a safer place - the old house where he grew up in the north of England. In a remote and beautiful valley, she starts a new life, and learns what's really important.



Julia Green answers our questions on her new novel, [The Children of Swallow Fell](#) [3].

*Where did the idea for **The Children of Swallow Fell** come from?*

My stories often begin with a particular place. The seeds of this novel were sown when we visited beautiful Swaledale and the remote village of Keld in the north of England. My character Isabella came next, at a moment of radical change in her life. The 'trouble' she faces is linked to the real problems I see in the world: increasing inequality, global conflict, climate change, corrupt governments, social unrest. I wanted my new story to be set slightly in the future. I knew the story would deal with change and our relationship with place and the natural world, because these are things that are important to me. I wanted to explore some big questions. What do we need for a happy life? I didn't know exactly where the story would take me; I 'discovered' the story through the process of writing. I knew that it would be a story about friendship, and courage, and hope, and about children managing on their own without adults.



How did you feel when publication coincided with the pandemic?

It felt odd to have written a novel that resonates with the very particular, strange situation we find ourselves in with this pandemic. Many of us have had to make big changes. We've had to ask ourselves big questions about our lives and about what really matters to us. For some people, the 'lockdown' days allowed a slower pace of life that helped us reconnect with the natural world near our own homes: gardens, parks, countryside. I had no idea while I was writing this book in 2019 that the themes woven into my story would have such relevance when it came to be published in 2020.

The descriptions of the natural world are beautifully done. How important is it to you that your books connect children with nature?

I'd love to think that my books might help readers pay attention to the natural world: eg. the birds that live around us, wherever we live, even in cities. I always feel much happier when I am outside. I'd like all children to have that experience. The future of our beautiful planet depends on young people feeling connected to it. My character Isabella has been brought up in a busy city: she has to learn to see and love the new landscape she finds herself in. She learns the names of birds and wildflowers, and how to garden, how to thrive. Her survival depends on it. Our survival as a species depends on young people who are connected to the natural world and care deeply enough about it to make the necessary changes to the way we live on this earth. But I don't want to 'preach' - the story and the characters are everything. I want my readers to care about the characters, and share their experiences. I'd like them to immerse themselves in the story.

What would you say are the qualities that make a classic children's book and which are the books that are most important to you, or have had the most impact?

I think a classic children's book has an element of adventure, with children at its heart. It probably deals with big, universal themes - not too explicitly, but to give substance to the story. It will speak to a child reader, allow an element of escapism and a chance to experience things vicariously, through the characters. A classic children's book will have 'layers', and be written with great care and attention to language - though that will remain largely 'invisible' to the reader. The books I loved as a child, and which have remained important to me, include **Tom's Midnight Garden**, by Philippa Pearce, [The Children of Green Knowe](#) [4] - and all the Green Knowe stories - by Lucy Boston, **The Borrowers**, by Mary Norton, **The Little House in the Big Woods** by Laura Ingalls Wilder, **Charlotte's Web** by E.B. White, **The Family From One End Street**, by Eve Garnett, **Ballet Shoes**, by Noel Streatfeild. I could go on! All these books had beautiful and memorable illustrations, too, which added to the experience of reading. As an adult, reading [Skellig](#) [5] by David Almond had a big impact.

How hopeful are you for the future?

That's a big question! As a writer for young people, I write for the future. For the possibility of change. If I spend too much time watching, listening or reading the news or on social media I feel less hopeful, more anxious and angry. I'm sorry for the way we adults have messed up. The need for change is urgent. But day-to-day, my lived experience is that most people are good, want to help each other, care about the world. When I spend time with children, I feel much more hopeful. Writing, drawing, reading, imagining, creating are all acts of great optimism and hope.

*Julia Green lives in Bath, but her favourite places are wild remote islands, beaches, cliffs and hilltops. She has written more than seventeen books for children and young adults including **House of Light**, [To the Edge of the World](#) [6], **Tilly's Moonlight Fox**, **Seal Island** and **The Wilderness War**, which was shortlisted for the **Coventry Inspiration Book Award** and the **Warwickshire SLS Award**.*

[The Children of Swallow Fell](#) [3] will be published in August 2020 by Oxford University Press.

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