



CLASS ACT: AN INTERVIEW WITH PAMELA BUTCHART

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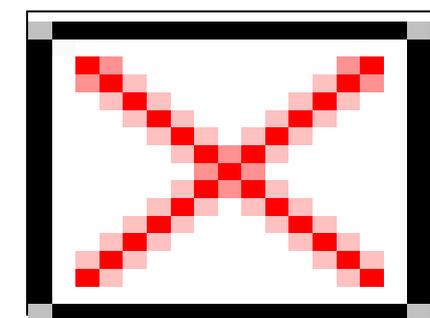
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Damian Kelleher interviews the winner of the 2016 **Children's Book Award**

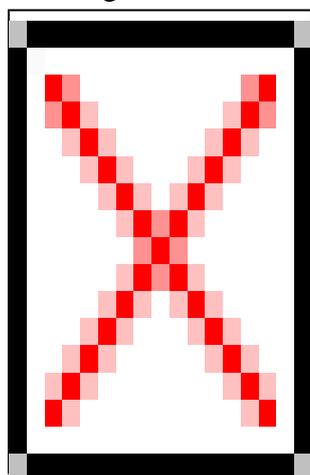
Pamela Butchart's books aren't just winning fans - they're winning awards, too, as Damian Kelleher discovers



It's not often Pamela Butchart is lost for words. But that's how she describes herself when asked about her current prize winning streak in the children's book world. After winning **Blue Peter's Best Story** award last year for **The Spy Who Loved School Dinners**, she has scooped this year's prestigious **Children's Book Award** for **My Head Teacher is a Vampire Rat**.

"I'm totally on a high," admits Pamela. "It feels quite surreal. I'm lost for words."

One of the high points of winning the award for Pamela was getting to meet fellow nominees Sarah Crossan (ah



Sarah?), **Horrid Henry** creator Francesca Simon ("I think I may have stroked her hair. I could feel my hand going out before I could stop it?) and author/illustrator Viviane Schwarz.: "I was so excited to see Viviane - I love her books, they're absolutely amazing. I have a one-eyed cat called Carlos and he's gorgeous. I saw a tweet she put out a few months ago saying that her cat had to have an incredibly rare and expensive treatment for his eye so she

decided to auction off some of her original works. So my cat Carlos bought one of her original drawings to help. This is what I tried to explain to her but it didn't come out quite like that. She must think I'm completely bonkers??

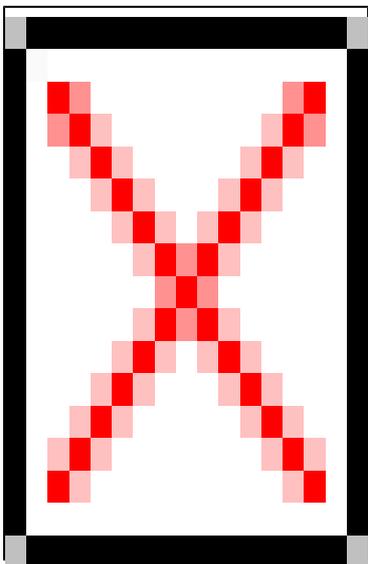
Like so many other successful children's authors, Pamela Butchart is a teacher as well as a writer. She describes herself as a 'high school philosophy teacher' and her lessons cover religion and ethics ('medical ethics is my area of speciality') which, I suggest, is quite a leap from her books.

'Yes, it's all quite different from **My Headteacher is a Vampire Rat**,?' she laughs. Time to give up the day job, perhaps?

'Definitely not,?' says Pamela. 'I didn't know what I wanted to do as a career but then I really liked philosophy in the latter years of my degree so I became a philosophy teacher and really enjoyed that. Then the books started to take off and I know it's weird to feel passionate about both sides - teaching and writing - but in the last few months I managed to get my head teacher to agree to let me go part-time. I can't imagine not teaching. Kids are too much fun to be around. Anyway if I left teaching, where am I going to get my ideas from?!'

There's nothing particularly usual about Pamela's route into children's publishing either. 'I've always loved children's books and had a few ideas but I never thought I'd ever write them down. About four and a half years ago now, the cat bought me a how to write for children self-help book, but my heart sank when I saw it. Even though I had two degrees and I taught philosophy, I was never very confident when it came to my writing - I always felt a bit of an impostor in the world of academia. I'd never done terribly well at school. I always felt like I was blagging everything to be honest.

Pamela's main concern was how she was going to write a children's book when she wasn't any good at illustration. 'So I started reading this book and on page 9 or 10 it explained that a publishing house would actually match you with an illustrator and you can just write the text. So I thought, well there's one barrier gone. I'm a big fan of self-help books and this one actually gave me the confidence to think, do you know what - maybe I can do this.'



She certainly can. Despite previous jobs as a late-night fishmonger at Tesco ('my friend and I used to tell stories to each other using the fish - langoustine and Madagascan crevette puppets. We had rubber gloves, mind?) and artist liaison officer for a 'really bad' Abba tribute band ('that basically involved trying to convince them to put down their cans of Red Stripe, leave the dressing room, and push them onto stage while they pretended to be semi-sober?'), Pamela has found her niche teaching philosophy and writing stories. I ask her, after two major awards, is she about to do a hat trick? Her first book aimed at older readers aged 10 plus is nominated for the inaugural **Lollies - the Laugh Out Loud Book Awards**

'I did my first 10 plus book **Petunia Perry and the Curse of the Ugly Pigeon**,?' she explains, 'and it's based = quite heavily on my experiences of my first few months in high school. It took me a long time to write that book - a long time to get it right - so I was delighted to be shortlisted for the Lollies. I felt really strongly about it because as much as I had a wonderful time in primary school, when I went up to high school, people looked at me as if I had an alien head! I used to have these really weird shoes and a really weird skirt and I was obsessed with dinosaurs. I noticed that all the other

girls seemed so much older than me. And they didn't bring their dinosaurs to school??

Damian Kelleher is a journalist and writer.

All published by Nosy Crow:

My Head Teacher is a Vampire Rat and **The Spy Who Loved School Dinners** by Pamela Butchart, illustrated by Thomas Flintham

Petunia Perry and the Curse of the Ugly Pigeon by Pamela Butchart, illustrated by Gemma Correll

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