



## Inspiration

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I WAS FIRST INSPIRED to write by my children: specifically, I was inspired by my two-year-old daughter and her fearless attitude to a Dr Who Top Trumps card. ‘A *foxie!*’ she said delightedly, on turning over a picture of a snarly werewolf. I wondered what would happen if a werewolf actually met my feisty toddler: whether they’d eat her up regardless or (more likely) fall into line.

I’d written down the earliest things all of my children said, and stored this in in their NHS Red Books. I then delved into these treasure troves to give voice to a toddler Red Riding Hood who meets a hapless Wolf. I scribbled down a first draft on a scrappy sheet of paper. Eventually, after many, many drafts, this became *Very Little Red Riding Hood*, my first picture book.

For my next book, I had to structure an original story without the scaffold of a fairy tale. By this point, I’d ditched the scraps of paper and bought myself a notebook. The first seeds of my book *The Marvellous Moon Map* were sown at a gig by a band called Stornoway. They sang a song called ‘Fuel Up’, which is about, as I scribbled in my new notebook, ‘friends helping out; travelling on’.

This scribble, along with echoes from *The Wizard of Oz*, a play in which I was performing and – of course – a phrase from my toddler daughter, grew into the new story. It took months to assemble, but without that first scribble, it might never have happened at all.



Now, when I talk to RLF students or children in schools, I show them that scribble. I show them my notebook, full of crossings out. I do this to illustrate that inspiration for me often comes in snatches of thought; that a story doesn't usually arrive fully formed. I see students realise that writing doesn't come out right first time; I feel children's self-belief ping around like magic beans.

Sometimes my ideas spring from a suggestion from a publisher. Picture books are expensive things to produce and hard to place, so it's often good to get a sniff of something an editor's looking for, rather than writing something they just don't want. This doesn't mean your own imagination isn't involved. I've written stories which started from a publisher's request or by looking at an illustrator's portfolio, but my own inspiration has to kick sharply into play, too.

I now keep separate notebooks for different projects — full of quotes, jokes, images and idle thoughts. My Notes app on my phone is rammed, too. Sometimes an idea or a character can lie around for years, and then the right book at the right time will call it up.

It's exciting – and also a bit terrifying – to think of all those potential scraps of gold wafting around every day, like that moment I noticed my daughter picking up that Top Trumps card. And, so I'm forever snatching ideas by their tails and writing them down, haunted by the ones that get away, loving and cherishing the ones that don't.