

Paul's embarking on a monster project...



Paul Cookson

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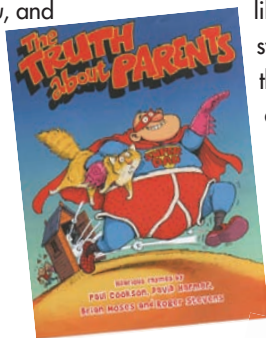
Things have been busy here on the poetry front line, with plenty of school visits all over the country, plus a week in Germany travelling round Forces Schools, coordinating a project for the National Football Museum called 'Poetry In Motion'. I have also been updating my website and have a couple of new books in the offing. Summer 2009 sees the publication of *The Truth About Parents* containing poems by David Harmer, Brian Moses, Roger Stevens and myself. This follows the successful collection – *The Truth About Teachers*. I love the large size of the books in this series: they feel like a *Beano* annual and are illustrated by David Parkins, who illustrates for *The Beano*.

David Harmer and I also have a collection of monster poems commissioned for 2010 – *It's Behind You* – so we're busy writing monster poems in all shapes and sizes.

A lot of people ask me how long it takes to write a book. So, I thought I would give you a quick summary of the process for *It's Behind You*, and perhaps offer a few writing ideas as well.

How it began

It all started when we got a letter from our publishers, Macmillan, accepting our proposal to do a collection of monster



poems. They gave us a deadline for submitting 70 poems: July 2009. That's 35 each, but we will write more so we can choose the best ones.

To ensure a wide range of poems and styles and avoid duplicating ideas, David and I sat down and decided which kinds of monsters we would each write about – vampires, werewolves, ghosts, etc. We will aim for a balance of longer and shorter poems, scary poems and silly poems, and real beasts and legendary monsters. And we will try them out in front of our target audience: the schools we will visit this term. This is really important as it allows us to edit, shape, and develop the poems before we reach our deadline. What always happens though, is that as you get closer to the deadline, you get more and more ideas – it's a bit like doing your homework at the last minute!

The final selection

We then send the poems to our editor, who reads them and chooses the ones she likes. We then agree/disagree/play swaps/compromise until we have the poems we want in the book. It's a balancing act in terms of styles, length, and order of poems.

Sometimes, the poems I really like don't end up in the book – like 'Our Teacher Is A Tongue Twister', which I wrote for *The Truth About Teachers*. It is disgustingly

funny... perhaps a little too disgusting. (See what you think... it is available for you to download from www.scholastic.co.uk/literacytime).

The next stage is for the poems to be typeset and sent to the illustrator. I'm always impatient and excited at this stage as I want to see how the book will look. There will also be a cover design and we'll talk about the blurb for the cover, too.

We often get photocopies of the artwork before we see it with the text. Once it has been designed, we get to look at the overall book and do some fine tuning: moving a line here or there, changing the size and position of a particular illustration, sometimes rearranging the order and pagination, and making sure all the words are spelled correctly.

Then it's a case of sitting back and waiting for it all to be printed. I love seeing the finished proofs – I'll often photocopy them and put them in a file so it feels like a book!

When the book eventually comes through the post, it's a great moment. Even though I've been involved in all the stages and seen the book in all its parts, there is something exciting about having the physical book in my hands, seeing how it looks and feels. I suppose it's the magic of starting way before with a blank notepad... then, a year or so later, the book is born!

Write your own monster poems!
Download Paul's Monster
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www.scholastic.co.uk/literacytime