

THE BEST JOB IN THE WORLD



National Simultaneous Storytime 2015 is nearly upon us. On 27 May, ALIA estimates around half a million children will be settling down to a good read with this year's book, *The Brothers Quibble* by Aaron Blabey. In preparation for the big read, INCITE spoke with Aaron about the books and libraries in his life.

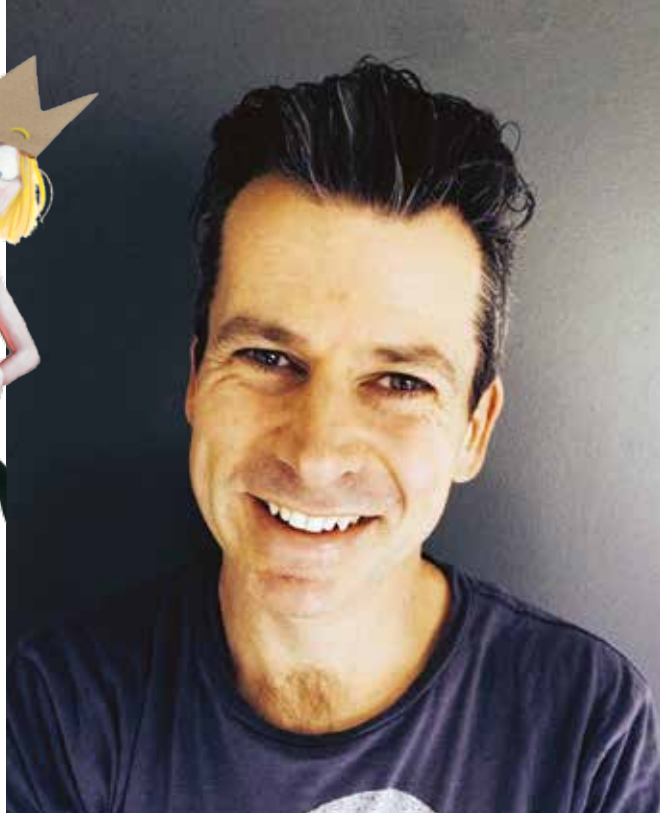
Aaron Blabey has accumulated quite a few awards for his books tackling the big issues of childhood, including Children's Book Council of Australia Book of the Year, and an Australian Film Institute Award. He's on the Smithsonian Institute's Notable Book List and his book, *The Ghost of Miss Annabel Spoon*, won a Children's Peace Literature Award as well as the Patricia Wrightson Award in the 2013 NSW Premier's Literary Awards. In 2012, Aaron was also a National Literary Ambassador.

Aaron says he started his writing career quite simply. 'It sounds a bit glib, but I started my career by just writing a book,' he says. 'There's nothing about [writing and illustrating children's books] that doesn't appeal to me. I have the best job in the world.'

'Picture book creation is a bit like song writing,' he continues. 'It allows you to talk about practically any theme you care to think of, as long as you do it with economy and simplicity. Therein lies the (beautiful) challenge. Sometimes, the simplest stories can be excruciating to resolve,' he says. 'And then some days, long reams of deeply complicated thoughts can just come tumbling out. It's random. There's no formula of any kind.'

But he doesn't think writing for kids is any harder than writing for adults. 'What's hard is learning to keep your muse within reach when the mundane creeps into your life and threatens to intrude on your private little creative world.'

'It's an endless juggle that requires bravery, audacity and faith, whether you're writing a 200 word ditty or a tome capable of holding ajar a big wooden door. The muse doesn't come with a guarantee. It's up to the writer to find her every day, regardless of what's circling overhead. That's the hard bit.'



Aaron Blabey: 'Sometimes, kids' books should just be fun.'

Like many of his picture books, *The Brothers Quibble* (published by Penguin Random House) explores a topic that resonates with many children – the arrival of a new baby in a household previously ruled by just one child. Aaron calls it 'a picture book about love (and war)'.

The lengths to which Spalding Quibble goes to assert his authority over his new baby brother are funny and touching, and the life lesson he learns is delivered in a friendly and fun way that enables children to easily apply to themselves. It rings so true, you would expect it to have had its genesis in personal experience as a brother. Not so. Aaron is an only child. 'But', he says, 'I do have two kids...'

When he heard the book had been selected as this year's National Simultaneous Storytime (NSS) book, Aaron says, 'I did the dance of the seven veils. But without the veils.'

Aaron's favourite library memory centres on his school library and gives us a clue about his focus on these childhood challenges. He told *My Book Corner* that '...being huddled in the corner of a school library with an open, dog-eared, musty old Methuen edition of *Tintin and the Seven Crystal Balls* on my first day at a new primary school will take some beating.'

'The library was my sanctuary when I was at primary school,' he says now, 'and those old copies of *Tintin* had an incalculably formative effect on me. They literally altered my world when I needed it most so I'm afraid they cast a long shadow over all my other library memories.'

His favourite childhood read though, was *The Secret of The Unicorn* by Herge. He calls it 'an excellent illustrated guide to being a spy that I've never been able to find again'.

Aaron recently wrote and illustrated his first book for adults. *Babies Don't Suck* was written especially for new fathers.

'*Babies Don't Suck* was like therapy for me,' says Aaron. 'It was highly personal because it was the book I wish someone could have handed me when our second baby was born.' More books for adults are planned although Aaron says he will be going undercover for these and using a pseudonym.

The Brothers Quibble will be read by children in libraries, schools, preschools, childcare centres, family homes, bookshops and many other places around Australia for NSS on 27 May. Now in its 15th year, this program aims to promote reading and literacy along with highlighting the value and fun to be had with books.

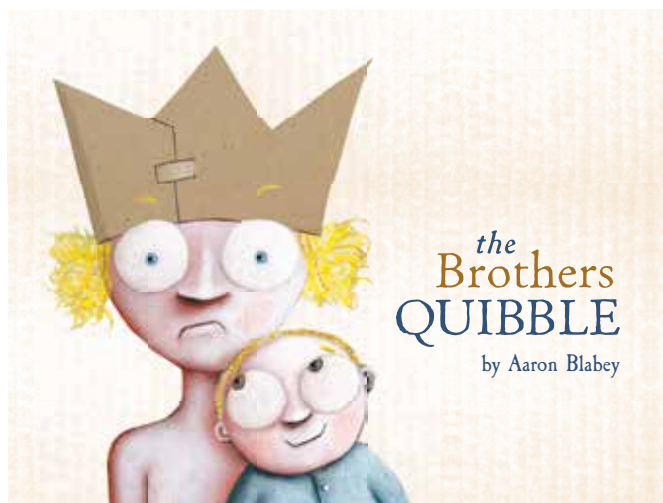
The selected publications must be by an Australian author and publisher, and our proud partner for the program is Penguin Random House. The books are selected based on their relevance to key learning areas of the National Curriculum for grades F to 6 and the preschool Early Learning Years Framework.

Aaron says he believes children's librarians need to understand that 'sometimes kids' books should just be fun.

'If kids associate reading with fun, the battle is won.'

'Writers, or any artists for that matter, don't like to be pigeon-holed,' he adds. That kind of thinking is something he asks children's librarians to avoid.

'Try not to expect [authors] to repeat your favourite books over and over again and approach their new work with an open mind. Continuing to experiment is what allows artists to grow and transition (sometimes painfully) into wonderful new incarnations.'



Around half a million children will be reading *The Brothers Quibble* by Aaron Blabey for National Simultaneous Storytime on 27 May.

SPALDING QUIBBLE RULED THE ROOST.
HE SHARED IT WITH NO OTHER.
BUT THEN HIS PARENTS INTRODUCED
A BRAND NEW BABY BROTHER...
UH OH.



Penguin
Random House
PENGUIN BOOKS

NSS resources and checklist for libraries

There are a number of resources available to support your NSS event.
Visit: www.alia.org.au/nss

- There are great Quibble-inspired downloads for kids such as a colouring-in sheet, a KEEP OUT door hanger and the colour crown template.
- Web graphics are available to highlight the event on your website.
- There is a video of author Aaron Blabey and also some teachers' notes.
- Don't forget to register for NSS: www.alia.org.au/node/add/nss-registration
- Tell the local media about your event.
- Share your photos and stories with us on social media – here's the hashtag: #NSS15.