

# SYP Every Cherry Publishing with Emma Steel

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Every Cherry Publishing, Emma Steel, accessible reading, special educational needs, learning disabilities, symbol readers, sensory storytelling, inclusive education, representation, classics collection, user testing, audio books, sensory experiences, career change, publishing industry.

## SPEAKERS

Emma Steel, Gemma Mathers, SYP Committees

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SYP Committees 00:01

Emma, welcome to this episode of Inside publishing, the series where we interview industry experts on everything publishing.



Gemma Mathers 00:13

Hi everyone. I'm Gemma the podcast officer at SYP UK, and today I will be speaking with Emma steel, head of the every cherry imprint that sweet cherry publishing, we will discuss the importance of s, e, n, d, representation in publishing. Every Cherry's mission to make the industry more accessible, and Emma's personal journey into publishing. I hope you enjoy. Welcome to Inside publishing. I'm here with Emma from every cherry. Hi, Emma. Thank you so much for coming onto thepodcast,



Emma Steel 00:41

You are very welcome.



Gemma Mathers 00:43

So Emma, just give us a bit of a rundown of what every cherry does and what your role is in the company, and just what your guys's mission is, basically.



Emma Steel 00:53

So I'm Emma. I'm head of every cherry publishing. I I'm the head the imprint that was established to make reading accessible, specifically for people with learning disabilities, but it's also for people who might be at a lower reading level or for young people who just generally

also for people who might be at a lower reading level, or for young people who just generally might have a lack of confidence with reading, or a general lack of motivation to read, and it provides people with an easier way to approach reading in a I suppose I'm calling it a total reading experience, so I can go into that in a little bit more depth later,

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Gemma Mathers 01:43

brilliant. And for anyone who might not know, could you tell us a bit more about what is SEN, or SEND education is, and what it means and what might come under that umbrella?

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Emma Steel 01:55

Okay, so SEN and D means special educational needs and disabilities, and in this in the UK, specifically, we tend to refer to anybody with SEN as those people with a diagnosed disability. And a disability can basically mean an impact on how somebody learns something, or how they access something. So in the UK, we diagnose people under lots of different categories. Mainly, we'd look at communication difficulties, cognition difficulties, physical disabilities and sensory difficulties. And within all of those categories, there's obviously a lot more complex things to look at, but those categories can really help people to find out how to best support somebody with a disability. And then, I suppose, if there's so many disabilities for me to list, but you could put, you could describe somebody as having a disability, if they've got Down syndrome, cerebral palsy, physical disabilities, neuro divergence, in some degree, autism, obviously, depending on its I suppose it's severity and where you are on that spectrum. There's honestly so many, but I think there are some so you can there are some people who who are definitely diagnosed with a disability, but there's also learning difficulties, which is slightly different, so things like dyslexia come under that.

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Gemma Mathers 03:59

Okay, brilliant. So what I found interesting about you in the research part of this was you were actually a teacher before you were in publishing. What was it like going from having a teaching background, specifically in SEND schools, and learning with those students? What was the process like of going actually, I'm going to step away from that. Am I going to go into the publishing side of things and how do you think, specifically with every child especially, how has your experience as a teacher shaped your publishing career?

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Emma Steel 04:30

So I love teaching. I loved every lesson that I could be in teaching in front of a class of young people with disabilities, was where I wanted to be. I absolutely loved it, and still do if I ever get the chance to go into a classroom. Now, I love it. I think one of the things that really pushed me into publishing was I was an English specialist, and. Often, I found it really frustrating when I was teaching different books or different topics, because reading could be quite demoralizing for the young people that I taught because they really struggled to access it, and for someone like me who loves books and so passionate about reading, I found it really difficult to ensure that every young person in my classroom could foster that love for reading and make sure that they had that the best avenue to learn to read. So that was one of the

reasons why I started thinking, Oh, is education still I want to do, and then I think I came into publishing, really, by chance and cheekiness, I would say, so. So I met Sanji, and I'd written a manuscript anyway, which was kind of what brought us together. And then we got talking about accessibility and reading and how, you know, it's often overlooked for people with a disability. And then we ended up getting on really well. And I sent a very cheeky email and said, How about I come and work for you, and I try and make reading as accessible as possible. And it was one of those emails, you know, where you shut your eyes and you kind of press send, and then the next day I got, oh, here's an offer. And it was one of those. It was the most surreal thing in and I remember I was planning a lesson at the time, and it kept popped up on my phone, and I was like, what? So then it's like the massive dive you and leap you take, because obviously I was a very experienced teacher. I was actually a manager setting up an SEN department at the time, so I knew the industry really well, and to go from that to something completely new, learning a whole new industry, was a massive, massive leap, a massive career change. I think 37 in life. It's scary. However, I feel like I still use everything that I learn in my daily work anyway. I don't feel like I've let go of it. I've I use my specialism all the time. So I think the experience and everything that I learned, all the people that I met, have really fed into what every cherry is. So I'm feel very lucky. I'm very glad I sent that email. So to anybody wondering whether they should take the leap, always give it a go. I say, you never know what to be around the corner.

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Gemma Mathers 07:50

No, definitely. That's brilliant, especially considering publishing can be known as a quite hard industry to crack. So to take like a leap and go, You know what? I've got this much experience in this I'm just going to go for it, and how incredible that it just completely perfect timing. I know the perfect thing came your way. So on that there is obviously a clear gap in the industry when it comes to this representation, especially in children's publishing. What do you think publishers can do going forward to say we're not having this gap anymore, and start to kind of close it and give more to these people that need representation.

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Emma Steel 08:27

So I think representation and accessible reading are two separate things, but they can come hand in hand. So a colleague of mine described this really, really well. So we were talking about accessible reading and disability representation in publishing. Because, like you said, as an industry, I think everyone is learning that we need better representation and better accessibility. So one of the things that my colleague said to me was is that what every cherry tries to do is become a we would like it to be a mirror for somebody with a disability, and not just a window. So what we mean by that is it's great to have really good representation so that people from all different backgrounds or different capabilities or different disabilities, different cultures, can see themselves in the books that they read. There's something so empowering about that to be able to see yourself and to be able to sympathize with a character, learn from a character, connect with a character. So that's the window that you want everyone to be able to see through. But for somebody with a disability, I think accessible reading is really important to me, because without being able to access the stories, you can't. See through the window. You can't see it. You can't see that mirror. So one of the things that I've been really thinking a lot about is definitely more representation is needed in publishing, but also more accessibility. Because why? One of the best things, I think, is say, for example, if we if there was a character

with Down syndrome that was really well represented, surely you'd want somebody with Down syndrome to see that and be able to read that. And that's where I think accessibility and representation can come hand in hand, because we're really we want reading to be a mirror to everybody, so that everybody can see themselves, rather than it being that window.

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Gemma Mathers 10:46

Definitely. I think that's a really beautiful way to look at it as well. Kind of speaks to why you got the position it's like that is I've never, almost never really considered it that way to say things. But where can they meet in the middle? I think that's and the window metaphor, that's lovely, really,

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Emma Steel 11:03

I cannot take credit for that. It was my colleague, head of editorial, fee Scoble, Fiona Scoble, she said it, but we were discussing. We were having this same discussion, but she said it so eloquently. And I can't think of a better way to describe how how important representation is, but how important that accessibility is too, so that you can really get the full benefit of positive and brilliant representation in in literature,

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Gemma Mathers 11:33

definitely. And one of the things that I know that you've done with every cherry is not only you've written your own series, which is stories for for your senses. Yeah, tell me a bit about that. What was kind of the inspiration behind it? What came first, actually, the book series, the publishing job, both hand in hand. And how did like having kind of your experience in publishing, you've been on both sides of it, almost. You've been in the actual publishing side of it, and then you've been on the author side of it. So what was the process like, and what came first? What was inspiration?

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Emma Steel 12:03

So when I took the job at sweet cherry Sanji, the publisher asked me to set up an imprint for people with disabilities and so that people could access reading better. Just to put this into perspective, I had to Google what an imprint was. But yes, of course, I'll do it. So then when I thought about the imprint, I thought, right, I need to break this down into a language that I can understand. So I thought of it like a classroom. So I thought, right, if I had a classroom of lots of different readers, of lots of different abilities, how would I reach them? And so what I would do is I would split the class into three different groups, depending on how they best access reading. So some could access three words, but simple, a much simpler, much more simple level than we would potentially expect. So. For example, I would often teach 16 to 19 year old learners who had an interest of probably a depending 12 to 14 year old, but a reading age of a seven year old, so they could read words, but not at the reading level we would necessarily expect, because of many, many different factors. And everybody is individual. So you'd want to reach those, that group of young people, and push them, get them to learn more vocabulary, really, you know, push that reading on, then you'd have what we call our symbol readers, who

are people who struggle to read words, but can read symbols, which are small images that represent keywords. So for example, the word Apple would have the image of an apple above it. So we found that people with learning disabilities can potentially struggle with learning to read through phonics and visual representations can provide an added clue and safety net to reading, so it can enable and empower people to read. It's also a communication systems, so people use communication aids and press images rather than words to speak, which is another form of reading. So they they formed two parts of the classroom, and then the third part was people who may have profound a multiple learning disabilities, but actually really love to experience sensory story telling, so that's how I'd approach my classroom, and that's how I approach the imprint. So I thought, right, let's split it down into these three key areas, to everybody's dismay, because I think people assumed in publishing. Oh, we'll make one accessible book in one format. It'd be great. I was like, no, no, no. It doesn't work like that. One book doesn't fit all so that's how it was split down into the imprint. And I actually think that's one of the things that's made it so successful. Because it's so simple in approach, there's three key areas that you can can explore. Obviously, we're branching out more and more, but they're the fact, that's the foundation. And then to answer the stories for your senses, we came up with the name every cherry, and that's when we'd got the easier and symbolized range pretty solid. But then I thought, what are we going to do about people with profound and multiple learning disabilities? How are we going to get sensory storytelling into a range? So then I thought, Oh, I don't know how, but what if I give it a go? What if I write it and see so I just thought, we'll try a day at the beach, because it was summer time at the time when I wrote it, and I thought, you know, everyone enjoys a day at the beach. Let's give it a go. And I gave it a go. And actually, Sanji editorial team were like, Oh, this is a great idea. And rather than using so the touch, you know, the touch and feel books, they're great, but for somebody with a learning disability or physical disability, sometimes people's hands can't touch something that's flat, and really they work better with tactile, real life objects, and that's what, that's what people are encouraged to use as they read the story. So it's been it. It was something that I thought, I don't know how to commission this out, so I'm going to try it myself. And then it seems to have been, we call it the underdog of the imprint, because actually we weren't, we weren't sure how it would go. And it's actually been really popular and great for preschool kids too.

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Gemma Mathers 17:03

Oh, brilliant. I love that. It's kind of like it doesn't matter on the age range, almost. It's not like, I think that's what the perfect part of this is that it's not tailored to one specific thing, as you said, one book doesn't fit all. Everyone has different needs and wants and needs in a book. And to find something that will fit whatever the age range, whatever the disability might be, they've got something that they can access. And I think that's wonderful to have something tattoo they can make sense of, because that's what we all go to books for you go to see yourself and to be able to feel something, and for them to be able to feel something in a page that maybe they wouldn't have been able to before, I think that's really

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Emma Steel 17:38

wonderful. Sorry, go on. Sorry. I was just gonna say, I think one of the things that I found quite difficult in Sen teaching. This is a story that I tell a lot. People may have heard this before, but one of the key things I always go back to for every cherry is I remember a student walking around with a very popular book. She was carrying it around really like, well, read book. Am I

allowed to say the name of the book? Yeah, it was a Harry Potter book. She was carrying it around absolutely loved it. Took it to every lesson with her. So I said, Right, let's sit down. Let's read it. And she just turned to me, and she was like, I can't read it, as if it was a really ridiculous thing for me to ask. Bear in mind this young person, she was 1718, at the time, and I just thought, She's so motivated. She so badly wants to read this book. She was carrying it around with her, just to show everyone that she owned this book, but then she couldn't read it. And I just thought something, we need to do something about this. Obviously, there's films, but it wasn't the film she was carrying. She was carrying the book. Yeah. So I think that's one of the key things that I always go back to when I always try and remember, we are trying to reach these young people that are so motivated, desperately want to get into these magical worlds, but just there's too many barriers, and it's breaking those barriers down that are so important with this range. No,

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Gemma Mathers 19:15

I think that's wonderful. I think that is because thing, I'm such a book nerd in this regard, and I tell people this all the time, that people like, well, they just watch the film, and I'm watch the film. And I'm like, No, there is nothing like reading a book and seeing it all play out on your mind and grasping what's gonna happen and like that is and crazy to me, that she's holding this book that she wants to read so much and she just can't, and the idea is completely impossible to her, I think. Yeah, on that note, one of the things I was having a little bit of stock of the every trade website. And one of the things I noticed that I thought was incredible that I'd never thought of, was that you've done a symbolized Classics Collection, and they're all books like Dracula, which, yeah, is kind of a hard read anyway, yeah, definitely, and you've made them accessible. And I just tell me a bit more about that collection and how that came about, and, yeah, what the process was.

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Emma Steel 20:06

So I think one of the first books that we need, I always refer to, is Frankenstein, and it was one of the books I was asked to teach as part of my the English curriculum at the school I was teaching at. So I was teaching 14 to 16 age range at this point, and it's on the curriculum for 14 to 16 year olds in mainstream. So we taught it in Sen. And what I would do is like I said, I'd have my my I'd adapted the book into the easier and then to the symbolized into the sensory. That's how we did the class. But what we did was we made our own monster. So everybody, like, made a leg or an arm, and then we we, like used a wool and put the monster together. And then we had, like, the sounds of the storm and bringing the monster to life. And then we put this huge monster on the set, on the wall, and that was a monster we spoke to when we did the lesson and we read about and that that kind of experience of learning and understanding, bringing that book to life, was something that I'd always cherish, and we did it with a Christmas carol as well. So these classics are all on the curriculum, and so we would, I think most send teachers would agree. You you make you bring these books to life to make sure that everyone can access them. But then I think one of the things that we take for granted is that say, if we are I don't know a barbecue or a dinner or something else, we might talk about Frankenstein, or we might mention Dracula. And we know who these people are, and we may have read or studied the books. We know, you know, Romeo, Romeo, where, for right that Romeo, we've heard all of these things. We've heard like, you know, Shakespeare's classic lines, and we know what they mean, but for somebody with a disability, you're kind of almost left out from those

conversations if you haven't had that experience where you know the story has been brought to life in the classroom for you. So I think the symbolized classics range is really important for people with disabilities or who just really do struggle to access the classics, which is quite a lot of people to be able to just take part in that, that culture of how stories have evolved and come to life. And you know, somebody with a disability might be watching their older brother or sister study Dracula, and they might think, well, I want to study it too, and they can now do that with these stories. And just as a little side note, my husband does actually read these books in the easier format, and then go to barbecues and tell everybody that he's read, you know, Dracula, Frankenstein, Moby Dick, he will, you know? Why not? It does?

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Gemma Mathers 23:09

It makes them more enjoyable as well. I think sometimes, yeah, I know I was like, sometimes you pick up a book and you just think, this is hard. This is hard, and it takes a lot of brain power. So have something, even if you don't fit into necessarily the category that they're aimed at, why not? They sound fun and they sound way more like yeah, I have read Frankenstein, even though I might not have read the original, but I've read this new version. And why not? I think that that's the whole point, I suppose. Is accessibility for everybody. Yeah, definitely, one of the things I was really, really interested in is, how do you think having these stories and having this accessibility can have an impact on education in particular, because I know that was where your background was, how do you think it might help like parents and teachers and especially the students that are coming up into this world, and what the impact you think it will have on them in the long run?

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Emma Steel 24:05

I think that's a very big question to answer. So I think if we start with parents, so we did a lot of user testing, and we did a lot of focus groups, and we worked a lot with young people, parents, teachers, at the initial setup of the imprint, but we still do now. So these books have been we published our first titles in May last year, but we know that, you know, there's always room for improvement and growth, so that's part of what we do. And one I remember a parent said to me once that they always felt a bit jealous of their friends who had children who could bring home a book bag and read and have that time with their parents where they would read and just have that you know, that one to one experience with a young person, and even though. The schools do send home books for people with disabilities. Often, if they're not in symbol form, or they're not in the way that best written, in the way that best suits that young person, sometimes the book will be read to the child and not the child reading to the parent. And I think that's almost it's sad, I think that parents don't have that opportunity, and children don't have that opportunity to have that moment with their parents, carers, guardians, whoever they may be. So I think from a parent's point of view, it's really important that their young child has access to books in a way that can empower them and make them feel like, Yes, oh, this books brilliant. And I think one of the things that every cherry does do, which is great for education, parents and readers, is that we provide a free audio book, free audio glossaries. And for the symbol books. We do a free, signed video. So if a young person thinks, right, I can read, I've read the first two pages, and I need a bit of a break. That's okay. We've got you you can listen to the audio book. And, oh, actually, I I'm struggling with listening to the audio book. I need a little bit more visual okay, don't worry, we've signed it for you, too. So we've tried to make sure that every young person, if they can't read the book all the time, maybe they can



follow along, or they can watch the book be signed to them, and just you know, see somebody signing a book in the language that they're used to using is really empowering. I think in education, as a scnd specialist teacher, if I'd have had these books, it would have made my life so much easier, because I was adapting these stories. So they've been very well thought out. So the range that you just mentioned, so we've done starter collections of the classics, but at least three of each title in the box sets, each feature on the national curriculum in the UK. Obviously, though they have appeal. We've learned worldwide because classics are classics, and classics are timeless, and everyone wants to buy them. So another thing I've learned as well, especially since COVID, is that reading levels have gone down and that there is a rumbling in the education world that maybe phonics isn't the best way for every young person to learn. So for phonics to learn to read through phonics, you need to be able to speak and you need to be able to hear the sounds. So say the sounds, hear the sounds. But if you can't hear or you have a hearing impairment, or you have a speech difficulty, phonics can be quite challenging, which is where the symbols and all the safety nets we've created can really be put into place. So educators can feel like, Oh, well, you know, phonics is working a little bit, but they just need that little bit more support. Let's add in the symbols and that they are designed to work hand in hand. They're not exclusive or independent of one another. So we hope that it complements any kind of teaching process, but I think mainly it's about inclusion. So really, you want a young person to be in that classroom studying Frankenstein, Dracula, whatever that text may be, and not have to go into a breakout group because they can't access that text? Actually, no, it's okay. So one of the things I don't know if you'd seen on the website, but the easier and symbolized range, is if a teacher said, turn to page 20, the easier. In the symbolized tech, the content matches on the page. So everyone can turn to the same page and everyone can read the same content, but in different formats and in a more simplified way. So the idea being that everyone feels included, and no one has to have that embarrassing thing. Of all, will I read in symbols or I need to go out because I don't understand it. It's supposed to be fun. And really, reading should be fun. And you know, you and I both enjoy reading because we are book worms, but we want everyone to be able to be that book worm if they want to be, have that choice massively.

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Gemma Mathers 29:24

And I think that also takes away from, obviously, the pressure in a classroom to be, God. I know I used to do it at school where you have to all read out loud, and you go, you count the paragraphs to go, right? I've got the biggest one. Of course I do. And you mentally prepare yourself to do it. And I think that takes away that pressure of, or, What if I can't join in? Because I think having a sense of identity in the classroom and the camaraderie of being around other people and feeling like you belong, I think that's a huge thing, to be able to have your own version of something that you can read and join in with everybody else. I think that must do massive things for confidence and for just their sense of identity, really. I think that's one, yeah, exactly.

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Emma Steel 30:02

And it's also, you know, being part of classroom discussions, classroom debates, like, I don't know, I go back to Frankenstein, but was was the monster bad, or was he bad because of the way he was treated? Do we feel sad for the monster? How, you know, all of these questions and really exploring the book and the character. It's so great to be part of that exploration together.



I just, I think splitting groups up, depending on, depending on reading ability is needed sometimes exactly it really is at points, but so is that inclusivity in the empowerment and fostering that love for reading. Because if you're constantly sent out of a classroom because you're not quite at the same level as everyone else, you're just gonna think, I don't want to read that book. You want to be part of that community.

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Gemma Mathers 30:55

I always think, massively, the people, it's gonna sound terrible, but the people that always say I don't like reading. I just don't, I'm like, you don't know what you're missing out on. There is such, I could talk about it for hours. How incredible it is just to love reading and to be able to do it, and for them to be able to do it in a way that they can understand, I think, is completely incredible. One of the things I did want to ask is, what challenges did you have, or every have, every cherry have when coming up with this, like coming up with the imprint and picking books that we're going to cater specifically to children with these problems, and how do you overcome them? How did you go right with doing this? And this is how we're going to do it,

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Emma Steel 31:35

I think. Yeah, so that's a really good question, something that I think we still work on as an imprint all the time, because we are constantly evolving, bringing out new stories. But I think firstly, what we have to do is make sure that the that people the books are of a certain quality and standard that mean that people want to buy them and buy maybe one, and then maybe a few more, and people want to invest in what we're creating. So there has to be a certain standard of quality and understanding of Sen reading, but there also has to be some commercial value so that the sales and marketing team can market this product, sell it, and people want to consume and buy it. So there's a balance there. And I think that balance of making sure that the reading is accessible and commercial need to kind of work hand in hand, which is where sometimes gaps in the market can be really difficult, because what you want to do is you want to provide a really amazing product that people will buy and that people will be, in part, empowered and want to invest in and buy more. I do think that being said, I have had, and do have, we have, obviously a style guide and everything that you would expect from a publisher. But there's certain non negotiables that I think, right, we cannot, we can't move on this. Like this is a solid rule for symbol readers, or this is a solid rule for sensory story telling. Like we there are certain things that that the SC and D community need in order to be able to access reading. And if we blur those lines, I think it weakens a product. So it's about being headstrong and be like, Yeah, okay. So there's a commercial need, obviously, but there's also the need of the community, and it's where they come hand in hand. So I think that was definitely something as head of every cherry that I always had to bear in mind. But I do think the team and sweet cherry in general have been really they've really allowed that to happen. So let's take this risk, because I do remember at one point the first books that came out, we were worried that the symbolized books wouldn't sell because they were so unique and so different in the market. So I remember as being a little bit more reserved with the titles we chose for the symbolized set. And then when they were the box set was coming out, I got a message from someone in sales saying, oh, symbolized books are on the reprint tab, which means they're up for reprint. And they'd actually gone to reprint before they published. And it was one of those things. We were like, wow, we so misjudged this. So it's one of those. It's been a very big learning curve as well of what the market wants. So we've learned that in Asia,

symbol people learn to read in Asia through images initially. So symbol reading is almost it's not alien, it's completely what's what they're used to. So people are buying them for that reason. So English is a fire. Language as well as sense. So I think, to answer your question, in a nutshell, it's about balance. It's about what the people what people need from the imprint and also the commercial side of if we're going to create it, we need it to be of a quality that people will buy it so, and it's being headstrong, too, and knowing, you know, this is what we need, this is how we're going to do it, and really leading on that. And I think it's a challenge, but it's something that is worth, worth it, you know, to get, to get at the end product.

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Gemma Mathers 35:40

Massively, I only have a few more questions, and then I promise, I'll let you go. What has been your favorite book or collection to work on, and kind of side to that, what has been your most rewarding experience with every cherry so far?

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Emma Steel 35:54

Okay, so that is a really difficult question, because I do. It's really hard. Stories for your senses is obviously something that I'm really proud of, because I've written those books and I with with setting up the imprint, I never actually thought that, because I thought as head of imprint, I didn't actually think I'd write a lot and be published in the way that I have been for stories for your senses, so I'm very proud of those. And when we did research into the market, there really wasn't a lot out. Then I'm really glad that we can reach a group of people that will otherwise not be a not be able to access stories. So that's a big part. But I just, I love Do you know how we mentioned Dracula? I just love Dracula. Working on symbolized Dracula. I love that. And I think the class symbolized classics were a real challenge, because how do you make something like Moby Dick accessible in symbol format? There are 30 words on each page. It's so hard, it was such a challenge, but it's almost like a puzzle. And we have had a few new junior editors join us, and they've really enjoyed working on every cherry, because they say it is like a puzzle, and it's so concrete in what we want people to work on and what we need from editors. Actually, it's quite a nice break from the creative flow of, you know, wider publishing, some of it's so solid and unique, but however, there are other projects that are coming up that I think are going to be amazing, that we are looking into reaching out into other areas. So I would say symbolized classics have been probably the most one of things I've enjoyed the most. And you did ask another question, but I forgot what you said

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Gemma Mathers 37:51

it was, what has been your most rewarding experience, which I kind of guess you sort of answered,

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Emma Steel 37:56

yeah, I think, in all honesty. So when we launched our first titles, we went to a school as part of the launch, but as also, just to say, like so we worked with quite a few partner schools, and one of them, we went to visit, and we went into the classroom and they, these were young people

that actually helped to shape the imprint, and we actually brought the books to them and said, you know, you've helped to choose the size of the book. You know, help with the symbols, help with the audio, help with so many things. And then we we put them out. So you remember the classroom that I mentioned at the beginning. I actually went into a classroom and set it up exactly how I'd imagined. So I'd got the sensory stories in one corner. I got one, not corner, but one, yeah, corner of the classroom. Then you got the easier range, and then you the symbolized range. And it was so incredible to see how young people were accessing the stories, because it was just one of those, like things where you like, oh my gosh, they're actually reading them. And we'd left a table at the front of books for people, you know, books for people to come and just explore and seeing. So I saw a student scan the code and watched symbol this signed video. And it was so nice that they weren't reading the book, but they were watching the signing of it, and to them, because some of it's animated as well, they could really, you could see them watching what's happening. And then at the end of the class or the lesson, I asked them what had happened in the story. And lots of them were able to say, you know, they spoke about the Wizard of Oz, for example, or Frankenstein. And it was so amazing. And yet I just, yeah, that experience, you know, when you actually can take the books to the people that you've ain them for and watch them enjoy them. There's nothing quite like it. It was, it was an amazing experience

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Gemma Mathers 39:47

that sounds incredible. That sounds like kind of every, everyone's dream.

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Emma Steel 39:51

It was, yeah, literally, yeah. My friends would be like, how's it going? I'm like, I'm living the dream, literally living the dream.

G

Gemma Mathers 40:00

One of the big things that I wanted to ask, and kind of final question type thing, is, a lot of our interest is in people who move into publishing from a different career, which obviously you are a prime example of what advice would you give to people who, quite like yourself, have a lot of time established in one place and want to make the jump, but don't know how to or are kind of afraid to take the leap.

E

Emma Steel 40:26

I think I have mentioned this earlier on. I think it is always scary moving career. I think often things it's I always heard people say you need to step out of your comfort zone. And in teaching, I really enjoyed being in my comfort zone, but I did like to push, you know, I like to make sure that I was always delivering really good lessons, because otherwise I felt like I always thought like, what if, what if there was a parent in the classroom watching me deliver this lesson? Would they be proud that I was their teacher and teaching their child? So there's always that element of pushing, pushing yourself, to push those boundaries. But I think then have being at that stage of your career and then moving. One thing I think you can feel like in a

profession is you can feel a little bit trapped because you think, Oh, this is what I do. You know, this is my profession, this is my career. This is what I've built, all of my qualifications behind me. But I don't know the world is a massive place, and life is for living. And I really do think that, you know, try it because it's it, it is scary and it is a risk. And I do think that risk can be very scary. And there's lots of like, you know, the cliché lines of, you know, to take a risk and push yourself out of your comfort zone means that you really are pushing yourself. And there's loads, I can't even remember, a lot of these, like cheesy things, but I think the day that I sent that email, and close my eyes and press send, really, the worst that could happen was no reply or no. Sorry, we haven't got a position for you. That's the worst that could happen, but then look at the flip side. So definitely worth it. But I think if you're passionate about something as well, and it is about just being happy in life, you know, like teaching, I loved, I really enjoyed. There were elements of it as I started to get, you know, as I started to move through the profession, education education changes, like all industries do. Industries are constantly changing, and education was constantly changing. So I do think I may have, may have hit a wall on some things in education. However, I do think taking the leap into a new profession helps you to see that you aren't trapped. And sometimes hitting that wall might be a good thing, and if you start to hit that wall, then maybe it's a sign that taking that leap can be there is also is it's look, I was lucky to meet San Juan Abdul who took a chance on me. Also, at the moment, there is a lot of talk about Sen, you know, in the UK, about people being diagnosed sooner, about there being higher need for diagnosis, higher need for accessibility in education and everything else. But because every cherry is hitting the market at this time, we can provide support for the families that are waiting for those placements. So I do think there was a lot of luck involved there, but I just think life is for living, and if you don't try what's the worst that could happen? You know, if what's the worst thing? And putting yourself out there is someone saying no, and

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Gemma Mathers 44:08

then it's just next thing, yeah, yeah, then yeah, if it's not, if this a no now, then it's not the right time, and you'll find the next thing. And maybe that next thing will be the right thing. You never know. And sometimes the no might be a blessing. I think sometimes you never know. Like each different choice is just you're on a different path, then you never know where that leads. So, yeah I like that. Life is for living. Makes me think of Mamma Mia two.

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Emma Steel 44:36

No, it's true, though. I think you know, sometimes you can feel trapped. And I have met teachers. There's a lot of teachers that I have met actually, that feel financially trapped, because teaching can pay well when you get higher and higher up and you feel like but that's another thing. I was willing to take a pay cut. I was willing to, you know, think, right? Well, if I want. To make this change, I can't. You know, no brain surgeon can move from being a brain surgeon to working doing a triple bypass. You know that heart bypass? You can't, you can't have that move. You have to understand that they there may be a balance here, maybe in money or maybe in position. You might have gone from being a manager to being a junior, but it's all part of that learning and being open to it and thinking, right? Well, let's give it a shot,

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Gemma Mathers 45:32

definitely. And it's well worth being passionate about what you do. I think if you're going to do one job forever, make it something that you love, like one life, do what you love and do what you're passionate about. And that's the biggest thing, I think. Yeah, thank you so so much for coming on the podcast, Emma. It's been absolutely incredible to have you. You're very welcome. Thank you for having me. Yeah, of course. And everyone, go check out Every Cherry right now.

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Emma Steel 45:58

Yes, please do.

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Gemma Mathers 46:00

Thank you so much, and thank you everyone for listening. Thank you for listening to inside publishing. I've been your host. Gemma, if you enjoyed this episode, please rate and review us on Apple podcasts, Spotify, or wherever you listen to your podcasts, it really helps us to reach more people. Also feel free to let us know your thoughts on social media or send suggestions our way at [podcast.syp@gmail.com](mailto:podcast.syp@gmail.com), see you next time. Bye.