

# NIEL BUSHNELL

AUTHOR VISIT INFORMATION PACK 2016

## WHO IS NIEL BUSHNELL?

Hello! Who the devil am I? I'm glad you asked. I'm a writer and animator, and I have two books for children published in the UK by Andersen Press. My first novel, **Sorrowline**, won the Northern Promise Award in the 2011 Northern Writers' Awards. Both books have been translated and published in Germany, Brazil and Thailand - all places I've yet to visit! When I'm not writing, or talking about writing, I'm animating.

I've worked on numerous film and TV projects including The Dumping Ground for CBBC and the Doctor Who DVD range. I'm a member of The National Association of Writers in Education, The Society of Authors, The Royal Television Society and The British Academy of Film and Television Arts. I live in the north-east of England with my wife and two daughters.

# THE BENEFITS OF AN AUTHOR VISIT

Of course I'm bound to tell you how important author visits can be for pupils! But don't take my word for it. There's been lots of research done that shows the great benefits of getting authors into schools. You can find some of it here: <http://www.societyofauthors.org/author-visits-primary-and-secondary-schools>

## WHO IS THIS FOR?

My books are aimed at boys and girls aged 9 to 14 and upwards, so any class from Year 5 and older should find this of benefit. The themes of time travel, action, adventure with elements of fantasy and science fiction make it appealing to older teens as well. History plays a big part in Sorrowline and Timesmith, specifically 1940 and World War Two. I explore what it must have felt like to experience some of those terrifying events.

I have lots of experience with reluctant readers and have delivered workshops as part of the National Literacy Trust's Premier League Reading Stars programme.



# PREMIER LEAGUE READING STARS

National  
Literacy  
Trust

## WHAT TO EXPECT ON THE DAY

The day usually consists of me delivering a talk and two workshops plus a book signing. The most successful events are usually set up like this:

- I start with my talk, so the pupils know a bit about me before they go into a workshop. Fill up your hall with as many pupils as you wish.
- Two one-hour workshops, content discussed and approved by the participating school.
- A teacher-supervised book signing session during lunch break. I bring my own food so you don't need to feed me, but a cup of tea will make me very happy!

I can also deliver single, half day talks & workshops or longer residencies. Just let me know what you need.



# MY BOOKS

I write fiction for children and young adults. I tell stories with fantasy and science fiction elements but they're typically set in our world and told from the point of view of a contemporary young person.



## SORROWLINE

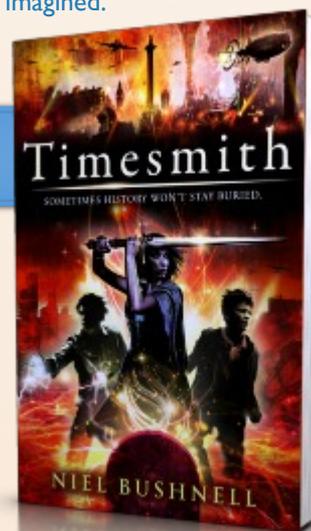
Twelve-year-old Jack Morrow is used to life being complicated. His mother died five years ago, and his father is now headed for prison.

But then Jack discovers he's a Yard Boy - someone with the ability to travel through Sorrowlines, the channels that connect every gravestone with the date of the person's death - and he is quickly pulled into an adventure beyond anything he could have possibly imagined.

## TIMESMITH

Thirteen-year-old Jack Morrow is haunted by the past. Desperate to help his family, Jack finds himself in a secret world deep under the streets of 1940's London.

Hunted by the undead knights of the Paladin Jack must find the fabled lost sword of Durendal before it can be used to resurrect the Paladin's evil master, Rouland. Jack's future, and that of his entire family, depend upon him stopping Rouland's return. But will time be on his side?



## SECRET NEW BOOKS

I've two new books waiting to be published. The first is a Young Adult story about a world-changing environmental event that causes global temperatures to plummet. Told from the point-of-view of a sixteen-year-old boy and his eight-year-old sister as they desperately try to find their missing mother.

The second book is a comedy fantasy for children, which I've also illustrated.

And I'm also working on the third and final instalment of the Timesmith Chronicles.

# SELLING BOOKS

It's really helpful if your school library can stock my books in advance of my visit. This makes them available to anyone who is enthused and inspired on the day. However, many pupils prefer to buy their own copy and have it personalised as a keep-sake. There are two options when it comes to selling books:

- I can sell copies at £5 each and I'm very happy to sign them if desired.
- You can buy books at a discounted rate of £4 per copy and sell them on yourself. There is a minimum order quantity of 50. You are free to set the sale price up to the cover value of £6.99. This has the advantage of helping to raise money for your library, or you can choose to sell them on at the discounted price to encourage your pupils to read. If you want to do this please do let me know at least two weeks before my visit to ensure stock is delivered on time.

If you would prefer to arrange for book stock yourself through a local Bookseller that's fine - just let me know beforehand.

# TALKS & WORKSHOP OPTIONS

The day consists of **three** 1-hour sessions, which can be either talks or workshops. It's important to include at least one talk, but you're free to decide which workshop options you'd prefer or to repeat a talk to another group later in the day. Many pupils like to buy a book so I also do at least one book signing session. I also offer Half Day and Single Session options.

## SESSION 1 – TALK: WHERE DO STORIES COME FROM?

This 50 minute presentation asks the audience to think about how stories affect us all, and where those ideas come from. I look back over my own life and career, using examples from projects I've worked on including TV shows like Tracy Beaker Returns, so it's a very visual talk that should entertain even the most reluctant of readers. I also talk about my research, delving into images from World War Two to explore techniques for generating story ideas. The presentation can be given to any number up to entire year groups - but I might need a microphone for a larger audience.

Requirements: Projector or screen, speakers, microphone for larger groups.

## WORKSHOP OPTION 1: DEAR FUTURE ME

This practical creative writing session is for a maximum of 30 pupils and is designed to get participants thinking about character creation by writing a diary entry or letter about their future selves. We begin by imagining our life in ten years time, our hopes and dreams. Then we imagine something has gone terribly wrong with our dream! The diary entry format allows pupils to participate in creative writing without worrying too much about a blank page and structure.

Requirements: Flipchart, paper and pens.

## WORKSHOP OPTION 2: EVERY PICTURE TELLS A STORY

This session uses a series of old photographs to let us step into history and stimulate stories. We ask who the people are in the pictures, what they were doing an hour before, and an hour after the picture was taken. By the end of the session the participants have created several characters and a premise for a story. This is something they can continue to develop in their own time or in future English lessons. Up to 30 participants.

Requirements: Flipchart, paper and pens.

## WORKSHOP OPTION 3: AND THEN WHAT HAPPENED?

This workshop is for smaller groups of up to 15 pupils who have already shown enthusiasm and talent in creative writing. This session is all about structure and how to find the end of your story. I discuss the typical three-act structure and use some visual examples to show how everything from jokes to movies use this to create their shape.

Requirements: Projector or screen, speakers, flipchart, paper and pens.

## WORKSHOP WARM-UPS

Each workshop session includes several warm-up exercises that help to relax the pupils and get their creativity flowing, including:

- **Chain Reaction!** - Spoken word association to spark stories.
- **What's in the box?** - Pupils write about the secrets hidden inside a mysterious box.
- **Possessed Pen!** - Two minutes of non-stop writing!

These workshops are designed to stimulate creativity and show pupils some simple tricks to help them find their own stories and ideas.



## TECHNICAL DETAILS

I use an Ipad to deliver my presentations. I have an adapter to connect the ipad to a projector through the VGA connection (this is the same connection used by laptops). As an alternative I also bring a HDMI adaptor. It's usually a failsafe method of connection but I do bring a backup of my presentation on a USB stick, just in case. I'll need a projector or a big screen and speakers.

## ADDITIONAL WORKSHOP OPTIONS

Storytelling isn't just about words - pictures tell stories too. Here's some additional options that use my animation and illustration experience to entertain and educate pupils.

### WORKSHOP OPTION 4: MONSTERS OF THE MIND: A DOCTOR WHO ANIMATION WORKSHOP

Imagine being challenged to create an animated version of missing 1960s Doctor Who episodes. That's what I was asked to do – now it's your turn. Using original audio recordings and shooting scripts, I help pupils stretch their imagination and draw their own characters. I also talk about how the Doctor's adventures have inspired his own writing.

Requirements: Projector or screen, speakers, pencils and paper.

### WORKSHOP OPTION 5: INTRODUCTION TO ANIMATION

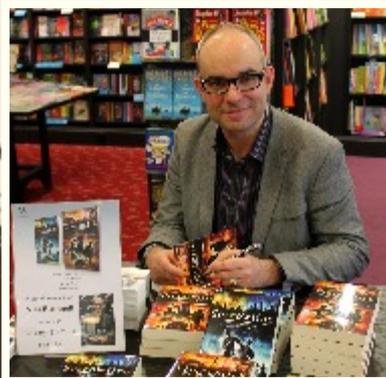
Do you have iPads in your school? If so you can use them to create simple animated films. This session introduces pupils to visual storytelling and lets them get started on their own piece of animation. A large space, like the school hall, is best for this workshop.

Requirements: iPads (one between two pupils) with free software installed - details provided, projector or screen, pencils and paper.



# GETTING THE MOST OUT OF THE VISIT

- Let pupils and their parents know it's happening. Send out a letter a few days before, reminding them they'll need money if they want to buy a book - you can find some suggestions for letter content [here](#).
- Consider contacting the local press. Many local papers like to cover author events and it's a great way to promote your school.
- Encourage your pupils to read my books in advance of the visit so they can come up with some really meaty questions! You can find some reading group notes [here](#).
- Why not build anticipation by getting pupils to be creative in advance of my visit! A great way to tie in English and Art is to ask pupils to come up with their own book title (fiction, autobiography, cookbook, anything!) and draw the artwork for the cover. And I'm more than happy to give away a signed book to the winner!



## TESTIMONIALS

*"It has been an absolute pleasure to work with Niel this year on two separate school projects. His creativity, enthusiasm and approach to creative writing allowed the young people to develop their own artistic flair and ideas! We thank him for all the hard work and commitment he has given us and very much look forward to working with him again in the future."*

Ree Collins, Projects Officer at Tees Valley Arts

*"I have worked with Niel with targeted children from our programmes - children who are typically not engaged with reading and hard to motivate. They were clearly inspired by him and excited by his approach to writing and history. What particularly struck me was his ability to listen to the children, ensuring that every child had a voice which brought out even the most reticent. I'm very happy to recommend Niel as an author to work with children and schools."*

Jim Sells, Manager, Premier League Reading Stars, National Literacy Trust

*"Warwickshire Schools Library Service shortlisted Niel Bushnell's first novel - Sorrowline - for our 2014 secondary book award. We were thrilled when Niel agreed to attend the celebration ceremony, and he willingly took to the stage, telling three hundred 11 and 12 year olds about his upbringing and writing life. He was a natural at this and thoroughly engaged the audience. He read from his second book and the pupils all eagerly bought copies afterwards. He also worked well with another author at the ceremony whom he had never met before and fielded questions of all kinds from the audience. We'd really recommend him for author visits to schools and libraries!"*

Stella Thebridge, Manager, Warwickshire SLS

*"Niel totally inspired our children with his amazing teaching techniques. One of our children really struggles to ever share her ideas normally, but with Niel's enthusiasm and creative starters, she produced a funny, innovative piece of writing and read it aloud to the class. I was astounded!"*

Sarah Bryan, Senior Leader, Broad Oak Community Primary School, St Helens