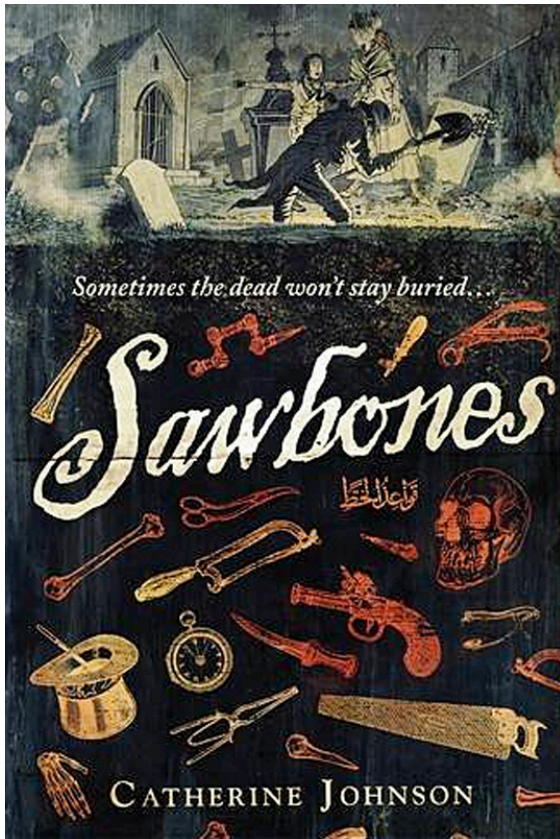


Talking writing and books with Catherine



Hiba: How long have you been writing?

Catherine Johnson: A long time, but I only started writing after I had children. At your age I liked writing and poems. When I got a bit older I thought I was rubbish at writing because I had some pretty nasty teachers.

I sent my script to the publishers who said it would make a really good book. I panicked: 'I can't write a book, I wrote half a page at school and the teacher said: 'That's not long enough for an essay'.

The publishers sent me on a course with a wonderful writer. It's all about confidence and it made me think that I like this, it's just like making stuff up and it's great.

Alma: How many drafts do you do for your published books?

Catherine Johnson: If you sit there and expect the first thing you write is going to be perfect... it never is. The only way to get better is to write rubbish!

I'm lucky when I write I have an editor who helps me to improve the story. Sometimes it's not the whole thing, it's just bits or the end that doesn't work. The way to get better at writing stories apart from reading lots, is to write it lots of times.

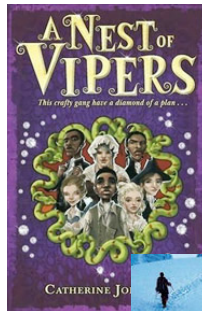
Hiba: Where did you get inspiration for your latest book 'Sawbones'?

Catherine Johnson: I went to the 'Hunterian Museum' in Lincolns Inn Fields with my son. They have all sorts of things like skeletons and paintings. The inspiration for Ezra came from a painting of a boy and the tumour that was removed in a jar. In the 18th century they would take out the blood vessels from dead bodies and use wax to preserve them. In the museum there are lots of jars of labelled body bits. The master of Ezra in 'Sawbones' is based on a real person, John Hunter, and it was his collection. hunterianmuseum.org

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Alma: What's the favourite children's book that you have written?

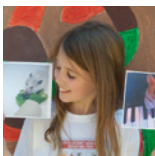
Catherine Johnson: It's the one that's always in my head and I haven't written down yet. It's all about having a great idea.

Hiba: Why do you like writing about history?

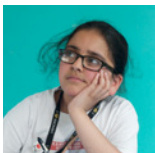
Catherine Johnson: When I was your age we had three TV channels. On Sundays around five o'clock there was a costume drama. I loved dressing up. The first historical book I ever wrote, I wrote because I wanted empire-line frocks. When I was a kid there were never people like me on TV in frocks, but it's much better nowadays. That's how it started and also it's living in London. Have you ever done that thing when you're somewhere really old, it could be my house, you touch the walls and shut your eyes and imagine...

Catherine's book 'Sawbones' will be out in the bookshops in October.

Other books she has written for children are: 'Brave New Girl', 'Arctic Hero', 'Nest of Vipers', 'Face Value' and 'Stella'. Catherine also visits schools, runs creative writing sessions and talks about black history with young people. She says: 'As a bit of a school failure myself I have found ways to make writing accessible and interesting. I like to show people ways of getting their own stories out'.



Alma Hartis Agee



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