

THERE'S A GORILLA AT THE DOOR!

INTERVIEW WITH CLARE HELEN WELSH FOR THE READING REALM.

Before we sit down in The Reading Realm and start chatting about your book, what's your drink and snack of choice?

Hello, Reading Realm! Since it's a cold and blustery morning as I'm writing this, I'll take a hot chocolate with cream and marshmallows please – drink and snack combined. Although, if you push me, I'd have a cinnamon bun with cream cheese icing!

Without giving too much away, can you tell us about your new picture book *There's A Gorilla At the Door*, which is illustrated by Sam Caldwell?

Daphne has just moved in with her stepfamily. Her parents throw a party to cheer her up, but some surprising animal guests appear at the door! Daphne learns that happy families share in their similarities and celebrate their differences. Spoiler – it all works out good in the end!

What inspired the story? What do you hope young readers take from it?

I wanted to write about the interconnectedness of life – that we, as humans, often have more in common than meets the eye. I take a lot of inspiration from the natural world and had been thinking about how this is true for animals too. Did you know that 40 million years ago, dolphins and hippos shared a common ancestor? They look very different today, but still share one important characteristic – neither can sweat and use water to stay cool!

Do you have a favourite illustration by Sam Caldwell from the book you can share with us? Why is it your favourite?

It's 100% the frogs diving in the loo... with snorkels! I love that one frog scores another a number 1!

Lots of animals visit Daphne during the story! Do you have a favourite animal party guest?

I love Aunt Gertude! She is a disco-dancing gorilla. She's going to feature a lot in my school visits for this book. I've spent a lot of time wondering what her favourite song is – I've settled on 'You Should Be Dancing' by the Beegees.

If you were an animal, what would you be and why?

Interesting question! I think I'd be a bird – something that can soar high through the sky and travel long distances too. I used to have flying dreams as a child and LOVED them.

Are there any other stories you've enjoyed recently that you can recommend to us?

I recently read *A Horse Called Now*, by Ruth Doyle and Alexandra Finkeldey, which I thoroughly enjoyed for its gorgeous tone and important message. I also loved *Snail in Space* – another empowering theme, delivered through bright bold characters on an action-packed adventure/ It's by Rachel Bright and Nadia Shireen.

Finally, can you describe *There's A Gorilla At the Door* in three words?

Riotous. Uplifting. WILD!

