

Curiouser & Curiouser
St Gabriel's
Wednesday 29th March 2017

When we arrived at St Gabriel's we didn't know what to expect. Greeted by Sherlock Holmes & Mary Poppins at the front door should have given us a clue but we had no idea of the rollercoaster we were about to embark on. Our literary tour guides pointed us in the direction of the hall and we entered a fantastic gallery of children's literature. Moody lighting, dioramas and brilliant book reviews were on display, meaning that we were engaged from the start. This show was clearly going to be jam-packed with content.

We entered the performance space which was filled with actors already set and a sense of anticipation in the air. As we waited for the show to begin we saw that most engaged of characters – the reader. Lost in the world of their chosen stories, we may as well have not been there at all.

The show started and we were treated to some brilliant reflections on great authors and why reading is so very important. The parade of characters before us was like a whos who of children's books through the ages, bringing energy, smiles and more than a sense of carnival to the whole affair. We were guided by samba drums and playing cards to our designated route of Gryffindor and this is where our journey truly began.

Throughout the library, the drama studio, outside, inside, everywhere - we were given snippets of the lives of the characters who each in turn shared their tales with us. From the glittery magic of the fairies to the menace of the Trunchbull, through to the silly riddles of the Tweedledee and Tweedledum – this show really packed a punch. We were guided down the chocolate river, invited into Grandma's cottage and welcomed to the library by the librarians and Matilda alike. We were treated to lessons in house building by the Three little pigs, given a scary lesson in child control by the Witches and shown how to make dubious pies by the most tuneful of bakers. We even met a cat in a hat. And a thing. And a second thing. We honestly couldn't move for book characters – there was so much amazing content on show.

The finale to the evening was the Mad Hatters Tea Party – a slightly bonkers affair for all concerned, topping off a wonderful evening with song, dance and a real feeling of celebration. The Queen of Hearts may have put Alice on trial, but this show definitely finished happily ever after. The music was brilliant and a special mention needs to go to Puss in Boots for a stunning displaying of rock driven classical guitar. It ended the evening in fine style.

The show ended with those timeless words from Charlie & the Chocolate Factory – "Want to change the world? There's nothing to it...". After watching this show – it left me knowing that books can definitely do that. As an author, my interest is always sparked by anything that engages people with reading and this show did exactly that. Learning after the show that the content had come entirely from the very talented young people performing to us only hit home further the power that stories can have. They can transport your mind away, make you look a little more at yourself in the mirror or guide you to new places that you never even knew existed. This show was a fantastic way to engage people, especially children with literature and should be heralded as a huge success.

A huge well done to everybody involved with the show and I look forward to seeing what new projects St Gabriel's will be undertaking in the future. Thank you for a truly brilliant evening and I hope it all goes just as well for the exam performance – I'm certain it will.

Break a leg!

Paul Jenkins
Author
@teacherwriterPJ