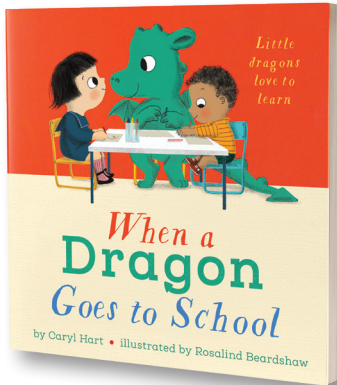




When Dragon Goes to School



Starting school is a big milestone. Knowing what to expect can help ease that transition. Caryl Hart's new book, *When a Dragon Goes to School*, follows a dragon as it explores the routines and manners that children, will experience in preschool. Magination Press asked the author about creating this delightful new picture book, which is a companion to *When a Dragon Comes Stay*.

Magination Press: What inspired you to write *When a Dragon Goes to School*?

Caryl Hart: The first book in the series, *When a Dragon Comes to Stay*, was so popular that my publisher, Nosy Crow, asked if I'd like to write a second book where the little dragon starts school. Of course I said yes straight away!

I remember only too well how difficult it was to settle my own children into school when they were small — we had lots of tears and leg-clinging, which was hugely upsetting at the time. Little did I know that, while I felt terrible for the rest of the day, my girls skipped off to have fun as soon as I was out of sight!

Starting school is such a huge milestone for young children and creating fun, reassuring books is a great way to help prepare them. Our story includes common routines like hanging your coat and bag on a peg, entering the classroom, sitting in your special place, listening to the teacher and being kind to your new friends — all things that most children will experience during their first days at school.

Children who are already familiar with the school environment can sometimes struggle to talk about their experiences and might not know how to tell their grownups when things don't go quite right. Reading books like *When a Dragon Goes to School* can help open up this dialogue and give children the tools they need to process difficult, exciting, or new experiences, ultimately helping them feel happy and safe.

MP: Why are manners in school so important?

CH: Young children are often used to being the sole focus of attention at home, so learning to get along with others can be quite a challenge. Understanding school routines and learning to consider other people's feelings help the school day run smoothly, which ultimately makes the experience a pleasant and rewarding one for everyone!

Most children do actually want to behave in a way that will please the adults in their lives, and modeling appropriate behavior in picture books can help them work out what is expected of them. Demonstrating funny scenarios of what would never do is a funny and endearing way to discuss the behaviors they are aiming for.

MP: Can you recall a teacher that you had in school who helped you learn good etiquette?

CH: I can't remember anyone at school specifically teaching me about manners — my parents were pretty good at that! I think learning good manners is just part and parcel of the fabric of school life.

We raise our hands when we want to speak, we share our toys and equipment, we cooperate in our role play, we look at the teacher when they are talking...I've met many, many very patient teachers who reinforce this good behavior constantly throughout the day. And many, many fabulous children who know what is expected and delight in helping to create a positive atmosphere in their classrooms.

My favorite teacher at primary school was a lady called Mrs. Jack. She could play the guitar, and sing, and was great fun. We used to think she lived at school and I remember being very surprised when I saw her in the street once!

MP: Can you tell us a little bit about writing in verse? What is that process like?

CH: Writing in verse is different for every book. Sometimes I just start and see where the rhyme takes me, and other times, as for the When a Dragon series, I start with a pretty clear page plan, so I know what I'm going to talk about on every spread.

Then it's a case of teasing out the words and experimenting with different combinations with the hope that I end up with a verse that tells the desired part of the story. Of course, it needs to rhyme, and also the rhythm, or scansion, has to match the pattern I've established for the book or series as a whole.

Getting the scansion right can be tricky, especially as people pronounce words differently. For example, do you say Princess or Princess? How you stress different syllables affects the way you read the story and therefore how it scans.

The most challenging part, however, is when my editor asks for tweaks or changes. It's almost impossible to change just one word in a rhyming verse so any minor changes often require a total rewrite of the verse in question. I will often spend a whole day creating a single verse, so it can sometimes be difficult to go back and rewrite it – but I know that the end result will be better so I just have to take a deep breath and go for it!

MP: Why did you choose a question-and-answer format for your Dragon books?

CH: This concept actually came from Nosy Crow — they came up with the idea of putting a Little Dragon into a home setting in the first book, *When a Dragon Comes to Stay*, to see what she would do. The refrain, “Why no! Dragon’s don’t do that!” was also their concept. All I had to do was create a story to fit!

I actually think this format works brilliantly as it gives young children a chance to think about how they might behave in certain situations. Or perhaps how their friends or siblings might behave. Children love to take the moral high ground and the *When a Dragon* books give little ones a perfect opportunity to identify the right way to go about things. It also gives us, as creators, an opportunity to inject a great deal of humor into the story and to show that, just like the little dragon, we are all still learning!

MP: What was the most fun part of creating *When a Dragon Goes to School*? What was the most challenging part?

CH: I hesitate to use the term “naughty” because I think it’s rather judgmental and negative, but the best bit about writing the book was thinking up some cheeky things that our little dragon might do when she started school. I wanted to choose things that young children would find funny and endearing without making our little character seem mean or unkind. I hope we succeeded!

Read an interview with Caryl Hart about creating *When a Dragon Comes to Stay* [here](#).

This Article’s Author

Caryl Hart is a full-time children’s writer, who also runs creative workshops with schools. Her Princess series, illustrated by Sarah Warburton, has sold hundreds of thousands of copies around the world. She lives in Sheffield, United Kingdom. Visit her online, and on Twitter and Instagram.