

AUTHOR'S NOTES ON *Whispers in the Graveyard* by Theresa Breslin

I was becoming more aware in my work as a librarian of parents asking for story tapes to help their children with class reading books, of information enquiries from adults seeking help, of parents asking for books about dyslexia, for names of help groups, names of special tutors etc. In addition, our own reading promotion in the library showed up certain things. I noticed that some children could read and enjoy a book, but could not cope with writing a review about it. Some needed to have the book read to them, yet they could understand complex emotional issues within the story, and even discuss these freely, but could not form the letters to make the words to complete their book reviews. I became interested, interested enough to go along to the meeting of the Area Dyslexia Association...

I went with my notebook and the vague idea in my head that I could get a story out of this, as I like to write books that are relevant to children's lives. I very quickly slid my notebook back into my bag as I felt that I was being rude taking notes in the circumstances in which I found myself. I have never been in a room where there was so much pain. I was moved by the frustration, anger, and despair of parents, adults, children, teachers, social workers, and others trying to battle the system. I came out and had to sit for a few moments to recover myself. I drove home determined to write a book about it.

I decided on a boy as the main character, it seems to be that more boys have reading problems. I chose to write in the first person because the problem is so individualistic that I wanted to get right inside the head of the sufferer, and I wanted to put the reader there too. I decided to write in the present tense because it was... *is*... happening at this moment.

I needed a story... no point in wittering on about dyslexia without a good going tale. Without a "story" the book would be that Solomon goes to school, has a rough time, comes home, has a rough time. So what?

About the time I was writing the book a ring road was being built in my home town, and to do this it was necessary to move the interred bodies out of an old graveyard which lay in the path of the new road. One of the graves included a mass grave of smallpox victims (children) When the news became public there was a big scare. What if a plague was released in the town? Would people be exposed to a dangerous biological infection? However, when the grave was opened it was empty, nothing was left, but I thought... what if? What if? Instead of Point Horror, which was the current craze, let's have horror with a point.

I did some research into gravestones, symbols, designs, codes... and I thought this is it! A graveyard is the perfect place for my hero to hide out, a boy who loves stories. Solomon imagines his own stories from the language of the stones. As I began to write and I did more research on both my main subjects, the whole thing locked. It meshed together unlike anything else I've ever known - the solitary grave, Solomon's father, the stories, the presence of evil inside everyone, the power of words, the infinite resource of the human mind, - it all came together.

The result was the book: **WHISPERS IN THE GRAVEYARD**