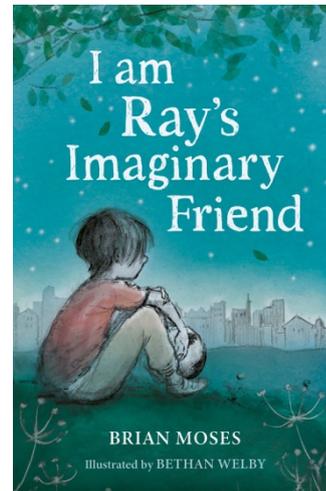


Getting to know

I Am Ray's Imaginary Friend

with author **Brian Moses**

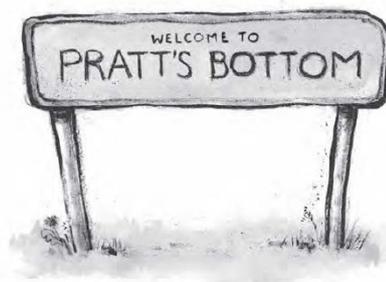


Ask children if they have, or have ever had, an imaginary friend?

What sort of person is your imaginary friend?

Or,

What sort of person would you want it to be if you did have an imaginary friend?



This book begins in a particular place, the actual village of Pratt's Bottom. I certainly didn't get everything right about the village, and I know I used poetic licence at times, but I needed Ray's story to begin in a typical English village, one that a boy like Ray would be very attached to.

I brought in features about the village as the book progressed, in order to give more indications as to why Ray is reluctant to leave.

Children might like to do something similar with their own locations, whether it be town or countryside. What are the features of your locality that you might bring into a story to make it interesting?

(As Ray lists in *'Moving Day, minus 2, p.90*)

They could write in the way that I've written about the village where I live (see my poem below, which is based on an idea by Pie Corbett.)

Twelve Good Things to do Where I Live

You can sit on the rim of the ridge
and watch the valley below fill up with fog.
You can search the woods for a flash of white
as the much talked about albino squirrel
finds a way through the branches.

You can bear witness to the conversations of owls
as twilight brings shades of grey to the hillside.

You can pause at the village war memorial,
and if a light shines at the top, find the name of someone
who died on that day.

You can look up, in the church porch,
at the grave markers brought back from Flanders Field.

You can visit the home of Rudyard Kipling
and feel his presence in every room.

You can trace with your fingers the shapes of skulls
on smugglers' graves in the grass.

You can recall Kipling's poem as you walk
the unlit High Street at night
and almost feel the presence of the gentlemen going by.

You can grumble about the traction engines
that rumble along to Etchingham,
cracking the surface of the road with their weight.
You can be surprised by the families of slowworms
that sunbathe on garden steps.

You can wonder at the huge pyramid mausoleum
of Mad Jack Fuller in Brightling churchyard.

You can be touched by the rays of a winter sun
as you climb back up from the valley,
and feel that sudden unexpected warmth
on the coldest of days.

Brian Moses



Examining Place Names

Pratt's Bottom is a strange name for a village, although you will find out in the book how many other 'Bottoms' there are in Britain. You will also discover the real meaning, although it may be a disappointment!

(See the first two poems in the book and 'Disbelief' page 202.)

Find a list of strange village names via Google and pick out the safe ones as there are several rather dubious names to be found down this rabbit hole.

Safe ones include Frog Street, Labour-in-vain Hill, Dull, Barking, Cheddar, Lower Slaughter and World's End

Now try to look at these places in a different way. Begin by asking questions.

Would I live my life in black and white in Dull?

'Do they eat their burgers with flies not fries, in Frog Street?'

FROG STREET

(Frog Street is a village in Essex)

Do they look at the world
through big bulgy eyes
in Frog Street?

Do they eat their burgers
with flies, not fries,
in Frog Street?

Do they sleep like a log,
or under a log?
Are they looking out
for princesses to snog?

Do they have slimy bodies
and small webbed feet?
Tell me, who on earth lives
in Frog Street?

...



Story Structure

I Am Ray's Imaginary Friend is a book of contrasts - less confident Ray/More confident Ray, village life/town life, rural school/town school, pre house move/post house move.

Change is often prominent in stories, how the main character resolves a worrying situation and comes out stronger at the conclusion.

Ask children to consider other stories that they've read and think how the main character changes in the course of the book.

Moving House and displacement

Some children will have had experience of this, others won't. What did children miss about their old home when they moved? What would children miss about their present home if they were to move? Think this time about the home itself and what factors make it special. Try and find those small details that make the home unique.

Explain that phrases such as 'My big bedroom' or 'my huge garden' would make dull lines in a poem like this. Look for special things - a hiding place, strange sounds at night, odd marks on a wall, a tree house, the smell of roses etc

If I left my house

I'd miss the 6th stair that creaks so loudly
when we tread on it at night.

I'd miss strange gurgles from the radiators
and the window that rattles when the wind blows.

I'd miss....

Similarly, children can write about what they'd miss if they left school.

Or if in Year 6, maybe they are leaving school in a few days. What will they miss? Again, look for small details.



Empathy

In the poem 'Bess Doesn't Want to Move Away' (page 63) Ray thinks about all the things that his dog Bess will miss about the village.

If children have dogs or cats, what would they miss?

The School for Imaginary Friends

What lessons might be on the curriculum at a school for imaginary friends? Think about the qualities that an imaginary friend might need.



Looking inside the book

Stopping Time (page 60)

What would be the advantages and disadvantages of being able to pause life at a certain point?

What are your happiest moments? Where and when would you stop time?

On a Scale of 1 - 10 (page 80)

Ray's Imaginary Friend thinks moving house would be a 6.

What other difficult circumstances might an imaginary friend encounter?

Moving Day Minus 4 (page 87)

What do you think Ray would be packing in his bag?

Ben (Page 102)

What is Ben's back story? How did he become a rough sleeper?

Feet (p108, p140, p158, p179)

The expressions 'finding his feet' and 'itchy feet' appear in some of the poems in the book. What do both mean? Can children think of other expressions that mention feet - keep your feet on the ground, best foot forward, rushed off my feet, under somebody's feet, feet don't fail me now etc.

Ending

What do children think about the way the book ends? Could it have had a different ending?

Brian Moses

