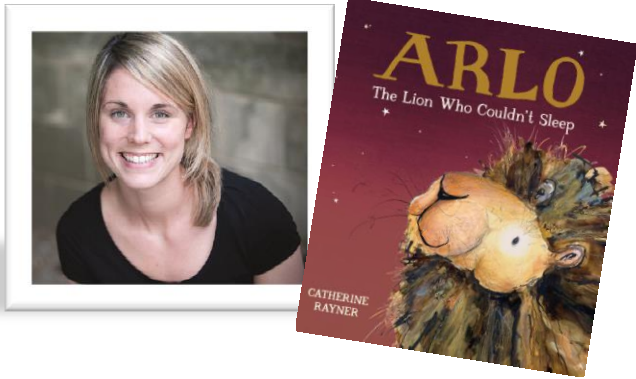


AUTHOR SPOTLIGHT



Catherine Rayner on *Arlo the Lion Who Couldn't Sleep*

ABOUT THE BOOK

Arlo is a very tired lion, and he's tried everything to get to sleep. But the grass is too prickly, the trees are too noisy, and his family wriggles too much. Goodness! How is an exhausted lion ever to get a wink of shut-eye? Luckily, Owl has a few tricks up her sleeve, and Arlo couldn't be happier to give them a whirl.

Q: *What or who inspired you to write Arlo the Lion Who Couldn't Sleep?*

A: Arlo feels as though he's been in my head as a character forever. It's a funny feeling when you start to draw a character you've known for a while—it's like an old friend coming to visit and makes you feel calm and happy. It certainly doesn't happen often, so it's a really lovely treat when occasionally it does!

The idea for *Arlo* happened a little while before I realized exactly what his story would be. I always knew I wanted to make a book about sleep and mindfulness for children, and I wanted to be able to incorporate sleeping lions somehow, but I just hadn't figured out a way to make it work.

I have two children; both sometimes struggle to get to sleep, and I make up little poems for them at bedtime to

help them nod off and calm their minds after a busy day. When I was working on the book, I started researching relaxation techniques, mindfulness, and meditation for children. There was a lot of connection, and I went about simplifying what I knew as a parent and had learned so I could draw on something that would hopefully become a helpful part of the bedtime ritual for parents and children alike. There is a rhyme in the story, which is memorable, and my boys now say it to themselves before lights-off time (I also now often use it when I can't get to sleep). I very much hope other children will learn it and find it helpful, too. I really wanted to make a book that is primarily an enjoyable read and a visual treat, but which also has gentle messages in the story that will be absorbed at a deep level.

Q: *Arlo the Lion Who Couldn't Sleep is rife with themes of mindfulness and calmness. Are these virtues that are personal to you? Do you feel they're particularly resonant for today's children?*

A: I feel that so much time is spent rushing about, we all forget to have those calm moments. Sharing picture books is a wonderful way to create a peaceful, quiet, and special quiet time. As an adult, half an hour with a good book is the perfect way to reset your mind and re-charge. If children can learn to enjoy this from an early age, then it is something they can turn to throughout life. It is so important—especially today when there are constant digital distractions.

Everybody's mind needs space from time to time, and it's something I feel that I can help with as a children's author and illustrator by creating books the people really want to read and enjoy. I take this aspect of my job very seriously. Looking after your mind is one of the single most important things we can do. I hope that Arlo can provide comfort, relaxation, and peace for people of all ages. He certainly makes me and my children feel ready for calm.

Q: *The owl tells Arlo to relax and imagine a place he'd love to go and the things he'd see there. What travel destination comforts you?*

A: Close to home, I love going up into the hills just outside Edinburgh on horseback. The views always recharge me. Further afield, Italy is my place to relax. The mountains, sun, and sea feel like a warm blanket. I always come home inspired and rejuvenated after a trip there!

Q: *How did you decide to write about a lion instead of another animal? Why did you choose an owl for the lion's companion?*

A: In the UK there is a popular children's game called "Sleeping Lions." In this, a group of children lie very still, and the first one to move at all—even a twitch—is out. The child who can stay statue-still the longest wins! The title of this popular game was part of the inspiration for the book, and I thought a book about a lion who simply can't sleep would be a nice nod to it.

I also think there is nothing more relaxing to draw than a relaxed lion. When I started to imagine the book, I was excited to be able to paint a restless lion turning in to a relaxed and happy lion as there is a huge amount of different emotions to illustrate in such a beautiful creature.

Owls are nocturnal, and Arlo needed a friend who had opposite sleeping patterns to him. A lovely night owl was the perfect companion to teach him how to get some much-needed rest.

Q: *Are you more like Arlo or the owl?*

A: I am more like Arlo! In fact—I use the rhyme in the story to help me nod off most nights, and I find it very helpful.

Q: *What inspired your illustrations?*

A: Dreams, shapes, colors, landscapes, deserts... The whole natural world!

I spent a lot of time designing the book so that the reader would enjoy every page turn and appreciate an array of dreamy color and texture to help them relax and unwind.

Q: *What is your process for developing your picture books? Does this process change from book to book?*

A: I tend to develop a character and a story at the same time. But this does change a little with each book I make as every single one has a pattern of its own.

People often ask me what the magic formula for creating a good picture book is. I wish I knew! It's a new challenge every time as books are a bit like living things; each is individual with its own problems to overcome. Each one takes a different amount of time to create, too. Some are quicker than others, some have been bubbling away in the back of my mind for years, and others appear in a "light bulb moment." I never find making a book easy—but it's always worth it in the end.

Q: *How was creating this book different from others you've written and illustrated?*

A: In order to create the book and the illustrations, I really had to get inside Arlo's mind. When I was working on the pages where he is feeling utterly exhausted, I also felt very rough as I had to delve right into his emotions to be able to illustrate his mood and expressions.

I was very flat and extremely tired while I was working on the first part of the story, but I perked up after he had his first good night's sleep. When I'm drawing a character, I have to go on the journey with them. Painting the dream spreads was lovely. I made myself feel calm and relaxed and put some lovely music on and lit a nice candle in my studio.

When Arlo is excited, I'd listen to louder music and have a dance around. Sometimes I think that if somebody saw me while I was working my way through a book, they would think I was totally insane! People have to believe that the characters I make have souls. I couldn't do this if I didn't feel the emotions they were going through.

Q: *What do you like most about writing and illustrating for children?*

A: Where do I start!?

I love making up stories, reading to children, designing characters, helping children learn to read, helping children develop a love of books that will help them throughout their lives. I love that I get to visit children in schools and at events. I love the letters and pictures I get from children from all over the world. I love the people that I work with on the books. I love the challenges that come with creating something new...

Q: *What do you hope readers take away from Arlo the Lion Who Couldn't Sleep?*

A: I hope that readers old and young finish the story feeling content and calm.

I hope Arlo helps to make falling asleep become a pleasure.

I also hope readers feel safe, cozy, and relaxed like Arlo and the other lions when they finish reading.

Finally, I hope that a level of mindfulness sinks into a child without any effort and that Arlo and Owl's rhyme helps them throughout their lives. Helping them to always appreciate peaceful moments.

Q: *What's next for you?*

A: Fish, unicorns, bears, birds, guinea pigs... I don't want to spoil any surprises, but I am very busy indeed...!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Catherine Rayner is an award-winning author and illustrator of children's books. She attended Leeds College of Art and Edinburg College of Art. Her work has won the Kate Greenaway Medal and has been short-listed for the same award numerous times. The *Sunday Times* named *Norris, The Bear Who Shared* a 100 Children's Modern Classic of the past decade. Catherine also illustrates greeting cards and exhibits her work in galleries, and her work is held in collections and archives worldwide. Every autumn, she tours with The Children's Book Show.