

Nick Arnold as a Featured Author

Nick Arnold has written over 50 books. He is best known as the writer of the Horrible Science series that has been published in over 40 countries. With sales of over fifteen million books, Nick Arnold is probably the world's best-selling science writer for children.

In the past few years teachers have increasingly used biographical material about authors in literacy related teaching to use the facts about the author's life and experiences to illuminate their written work. The aim of this paper is not to provide advice on how to do this in the case of Nick Arnold. Instead it is to prompt discussion and list resources that are available to teachers and students.

Questions and answers for students

Q Which different genres and styles of writing are used in the Horrible Science books?

A There are examples of the many genres and writing disciplines including narrative stories, journalism, diaries, letters, play scripts and cartoon stories.

Q How does the author use humour to enliven scientific explanations?

A Humour is used to lighten the tone of the text, to entertain the reader and to make the scientific and factual material more memorable. There are a wide range of humorous writing techniques ranging from puns and word play, to amusing cartoons and often deliberately bad jokes.

Q How does the author deal with complex scientific information?

A Some scientific information – for example the nature of light and electricity and Einstein's theories can be "difficult" to learn. The books deal with this information partly through simplification, and partly through the use of comparisons and devices such as the shrinking machine and alien spacecraft to make the concepts more meaningful and to provide concrete images that enable the reader to imagine how the science works. In some places fact files are used to present information quickly and concisely.

Q How does the author handle scientific vocabulary?

A New words are presented gradually and where needed, although sometimes they appear in a glossary section near the start. New words are always clearly separated from the surrounding text. When they are used again the reader is often reminded of where they first appeared.

Q Nick Arnold is not himself a scientist – how is this reflected in his writing?

A The books assume no prior knowledge of scientific ideas or words. There is no assumption even that the reader is interested in science. Unusually for science books, use is made of facts and stories from history or other subjects.

Q Is the view of science in these books, positive or negative?

A Science is shown to be both a body of knowledge and a method of acquiring knowledge. Essentially both are neutral although examples are given in the books of the positive use and the mis-use of science. In this way science is shown to offer a choice of threats and the opportunities that must be exploited wisely.

Q Is there an ethical dimension to the books?

A There is no overt ethical "message" but a close reading of the books indicates that the greatest good is represented as empathy, altruism and concern for the environment. All kinds of greed and cruelty, especially towards the weak and vulnerable are shown to be destructive and shameful. The books also celebrate the fact that science is international and universal.

Q How is the “gory bits” presented?

Whilst the books are billed as “horrible”, the “horror” never exists for its own sake. Rather it is there to grab the reader’s attention and to render the factual information memorable. The horrible bits are therefore not intended to be disturbing. In general horrible material is dealt with in a way that is non-sentimental and respectful if it relates to recent times or involves children.

Q How does Nick Arnold adjust his writing style for younger readers?

Whilst sentences can be complex, the vocabulary used tends to be simple and direct. The reader is constantly addressed and encouraged to interact with the book whilst being treated as an equal. So-called “reluctant” readers are encouraged to sample the text through the use of cartoons, quizzes and factoids.

Q How is fictional material presented?

Unusually for science books, *Horrible Science* use fictional characters to present, comment on or demonstrate scientific information. Whilst this can help to dramatise and liven up the subject there is a danger that younger readers might be confused about what is true and what isn’t. To prevent this happening the fictional material is clearly separated from the factual and if there is any danger of confusion – for example, in the use of alien characters, the text clearly sign-posts what is true and what is made up.

Sources of information on Nick Arnold

Books

A list of *Horrible Science* and other books by Nick Arnold is given in the BOOKS AND GIFTS section of Nick Arnold’s official website – **nickarnold-website.com**
Creating Writers by James Carter (published 2009) and available from **Amazon.co.uk** includes an interview with Nick Arnold and examples of his written work to demonstrate how he writes.

Websites

For a biography of Nick Arnold see MY HORRIBLE LIFE in **nickarnold-website.com**.
For more up to date information see the NICK’S NEWS section accessible from MY HORRIBLE LIFE or the ALL ABOUT NICK section. THE MEDIA ZONE in this website includes downloadable press releases with more biographical information and a selection of downloadable jpegs.

For Nick Arnold’s role from 2006 as a Book Festival director see

appledorebookfestival.co.uk

Other websites with information about Nick Arnold are given in the LINKS section of **nickarnold-website.com**.