

Why I Write

Laura Henry-Allain

I am often asked how long I have been an author. My response is that I have always been a storyteller. As such, I either share stories verbally or write them down. Another question that often comes up in reference to my dyslexia is – how do I write?

I just do, is my response. My dyslexia is my superpower, and I have always loved reading books. I create characters, locations and communities without worrying about my dyslexia. How my dyslexia *does* impact me, though, is with my handwriting, spelling and grammar. I am also verbally dyslexic.

I was not officially diagnosed as having dyslexia until I was in my thirties. Throughout school, I struggled academically to the point of leaving without any qualifications – something I have rectified in the years since.

At school, I always felt a sense of shame with my learning challenges. This lasted into my twenties, when I was training to be a lecturer and my tutor remarked, after a lesson observation, that I hadn't used the board to write anything. I explained this was due to dyslexia. Her response was, 'Laura, you're a natural storyteller when you deliver your lectures. Please, just write and don't be ashamed!' That was the green light I needed to never be ashamed about being dyslexic and to shout nice and loud, and nice and proud, that I AM DYSLEXIC!

In a school visit assembly, when I shared with the children that I am dyslexic, I asked if any of them were dyslexic. No child put their hand up. I looked over to the teachers who nodded, indicating that yes, for sure, there *were* dyslexic children present. I then went on to tell the children that I have always loved reading and spoke about some of my dyslexia issues. Have they prevented me from writing and speaking? NO!

At lunchtime I took a walk around the playground. The children were excitedly saying hello to me and one child, covering her mouth, said, 'Laura, you know when you asked if anyone was dyslexic? Well, I am, and I didn't put my hand up.'

I chatted with her about her passions and strengths, helping her to focus on these and to never be ashamed of her dyslexia. Slowly, like melting ice, she removed her hand from her mouth, and I saw her big smile. The headteacher who was with me commented, 'She will never forget this conversation.'

The whole episode made me think of the actor Henry Winkler, aka The Fonz. Winkler is also dyslexic, and I once had the privilege of meeting him. He shared his dyslexic story, and these wise words, 'What is your greatness and what are you great at?'

As an openly proud dyslexic storyteller, I am shining a light on others to switch on their dyslexic superpower.

This piece was written in April 2023 and may not reflect updated research.

A recording of this text can be found at writersmosaic.org.uk

© Laura Henry-Allain