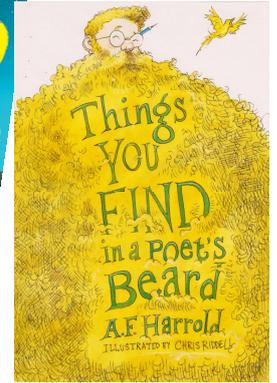
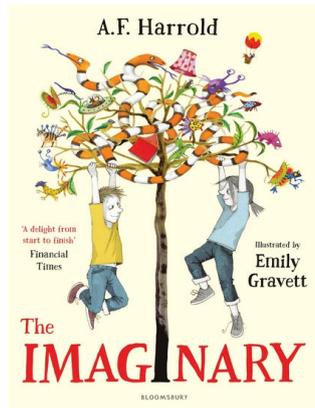


# A F Harrold



## AUTHOR SPOTLIGHT



### Why bother to read?

I don't really understand this question. I mean, what else is there to do? Reading is just what I am, who I am. It's what I've always done and it's helped fill up the last forty-odd years with life and love and laughter, in my head, when the weather on the outside hasn't always been so interesting.

### What was your favourite childhood book?

One of the books that I loved very much when I was a child, and that still travels with me wherever I go as an adult, was Raymond Briggs's *Gentleman Jim*. Not his best known book, but it was the one that I spent years poring over, absorbing, learning from, embedding myself in and vice versa. It features a couple, Jim and Hilda. Jim is a public toilet attendant, but he dreams of getting out of there. He reads the job adverts in the papers, he reads 'cheap' novels from the library, war stories and cowboy stories and eventually decides, after various daydreams, to become a highwayman. There follows the most pathetic, humbling and innocent series of encounters with authority figures, from the jolly RSPCA man to the traffic warden, from the Council Planning Officer to the skull-faced judge in the courtroom where Jim eventually ends up. It is stark, it is heartbreaking, it is awful. It is a demonstration of how not knowing the rules of the games everyone else is playing can crush you, and that echoed so completely with how I experienced the whole of my childhood. Remarkably the book has a happy ending: it opens into sunlight with Jim in prison, and Hilda visiting him... It's a beautiful, funny, sad book.

### Which of your own books is your favourite?

I very much like the two *Greta Zargo* books (which are illustrated by Joe Todd-Stanton). They're sort of science fiction comedy, about an 11-year-old girl trying to solve mysteries, while accidentally saving the Earth from being destroyed. I still think *The Imaginary* is such a good one, that I'm surprised I wrote it. I look at it from time to time, and I don't understand how I made something like that – it has twists and turns and heart and scary bits. And the most recent book, *The Afterwards*, (illustrated by Emily Gravett) is very good if you like sad-spooky-strange stories. *Things You Find in a Poet's Beard*, (which has pictures by Chris Riddell in it) has lots of poems in that I still like and enjoy performing in schools and other places.

A.F. Harrold is a poet and performer who writes for children and adults. Originally from Horsham in Sussex, he has lived for many years in Reading where he ran the popular Poets' Café event at South Street Arts Centre for over a decade. Since the publication of *Fizzlebert Stump: The Boy Who Ran Away from the Circus (And Joined the Library)* by Bloomsbury in 2012 he has mainly been working for children (collaborating with some of the finest contemporary illustrators, including Chris Riddell, Emily Gravett and Levi Pinfold), both in writing further novels and poetry collections, in school visits and in energetic shows at Literature Festivals around the world.