

Over the bank holiday weekend I went to the Hay Literary Festival for the first time. I was a bit hesitant as to whether I would enjoy it or not, wondering if it was for posh bookworm types who pretentiously mused out loud about the real meaning of a chapter in a A-level kind of way, but it turned out to be the total opposite and I absolutely loved it.

I adored reading as a child and could often be found sitting somewhere quiet with my nose in a book. My most treasured items are the story books my late grandmother bought me like *Now We Are Six*, *Winnie The Pooh* and Roald Dahl's *The Witches*. My imagination was ignited by simple stories which I would subsequently tell to my captive audience of teddies, accompanied with scary voices etc.

At Hay, as well as listening to authors speak about politics, feminism in the modern age, the internet and the Middle East crisis I also went to a session with Julia Donaldson, author of the *Gruffalo*. The hundreds of children in the audience sat and listened in awe as she read stories to them and they squealed with genuine excitement when the mouse went walking around the stage with the *Gruffalo*. It reminded me why learning to read is one of the most important things a child can do which is why this paper's Get Medway Reading campaign is such a brilliant initiative.

There is always a debate about how children learn to read and Ms Donaldson has recently questioned the Government's methods of teaching it. I don't know who is right or wrong on this but opening up children's imagination through the power of words and pictures is vital, particularly as when we grow up the world becomes so much more black and white. So my new post-Hay resolution is to read more stories, and perhaps a little less politics, for words can inspire the old as much as the young.