

# Talking with David Almond about MY NAME IS MINA:

**Q: Why did you decide to give Mina her own story? Was this something you had toyed with for a while?**

**A:** The book came about because of a conversation I had with my editor at Delacorte, Beverly Horowitz. She phoned me soon before the 10th anniversary edition of *Skellig* was to be published. She suggested it'd be a great idea if I wrote a little extra piece to go into that edition. I tried to dodge the suggestion, then I said, How about a couple of pages from Mina's notebook. That's a good idea, she said. When I started to write the first notes, the whole book started to come to life.

**Q: Is Mina based on anyone from your own life?**

**A:** No. I've never known anybody quite like Mina. There are a couple of girls I met while I was a teacher who maybe had some of her qualities. When she came into *Skellig*, she seemed to arrive fully formed, with her name and her interests and attitudes. When she pointed at Michael and said, "Are you the new boy here?" it was like she was saying the same thing to me. It was like I was weirdly entering her world. She was the one who brought in William Blake, the interest in birds, the speculations about education, etc., etc. Without Mina, *Skellig* could have been a rather soppy book. She gave it strength and energy. Whenever anybody asked me who was my most interesting character, I'd always answer, Mina. When I started writing her own book, it was like she was still there in my head, waiting. About time! she said.

**Q: Mina seems wise beyond her years in many ways, yet she does show vulnerability and fear. Why did you choose to portray her in this way?**

**A:** Not long after *Skellig* was published, I was asked to adapt it for the stage. Then I was asked to write the libretto for the opera of *Skellig*. Each time I rewrote the story in a different form, I learned more about Mina. And I learned more about her from the actresses who portrayed her on the stage, especially from Charlie Sanderson, who was Mina in the production of *Skellig* that was shown in New York in 2010. I learned about the vulnerability and uncertainty that lies beneath her apparent confidence. When I started to write her book, her complexities just increased.

**Q: Is there a part of you in Mina?**

**A:** I guess there must be. She certainly shares a lot of my interests—in birds and birdsong, in William Blake, in the ways of the imagination, in the beauty of words, in the ways stories come to life.

-OVER-

**Q: Mina and her mother have such a close and special relationship. Why do you think her mother embraces her uniqueness, rather than wanting her to fit in and do what is the norm?**

A: Mina's mum seems to me to be pretty wise. She doesn't try to force Mina into a particular mold. She understands that Mina needs time and space to work through her sadness and to explore her joys. She allows her to grow at her own pace, to develop her own interests, and to grow up in her own way. Of course she doesn't give Mina free rein – she gives Mina lots of advice and helps with her decision-making. Crucially, she suggests that Mina might be spending too much time in her tree. She trusts her daughter, and most important of all, she gives her unqualified love.

**Q: Why do you think Mina's peers find her strange?**

A: Simply because she isn't a very conventional girl. And all of us can feel a bit threatened and mystified by the unconventional.

**Q: Has Mina come to terms with the loss of her father? Although it was long ago, it seems to be in constantly her thoughts.**

A: If you lose someone who's very close to you, especially when you're young, you never really come to terms with it. You have to find ways to accommodate that loss into your life. I think that that is what Mina is doing in this book. She's remembering her dad, exploring how to grow up, how to accept sadness at the same time as reaching towards abundant joy.

**Q: I found many references to subjects from your other books (coal miners, sculpting clay, tattoos). Did you do this deliberately?**

A: In many ways, a writer doesn't really choose the things that he or she will write about. The things you're really interested in keep coming back and back.

**Q: Do you have a favorite of your books?**

A: It keeps changing. I remain very close to the stories in *Counting Stars*, and I'm always very fond of *The Fire-Eaters*. Right now, though, *My Name Is Mina* really is my favorite. It was a fascinating book to write. It was lovely to share Mina's thoughts and dreams. I found new ways of expressing things that really interest me. And I love the way it looks.

**Q: What do you hope that readers come away with after reading *My Name Is Mina*?**

A: First and foremost, I just hope they enjoy it, and I hope they like and admire Mina herself. I definitely hope that they will be inspired to write themselves. I hope there will be moments when they are filled with claminosity!

