

## C. S. Lewis: On Writing for the Child-Like

C. S. Lewis believed children were among the most important readers an author could have. In fact, most of the books Lewis himself loved the most were those he discovered as a child and read throughout his adult life.

He did not make a rigid distinction between what adults and children should read about, nor did he have a "theory of children's literature." He believed, as I do, that a good story is a good story, readily accessible (with the exception of extremely violent or sexual-oriented themes, of course) to young and older minds.

The following quotations reflect his joy in writing for children and the care he took in addressing their interest and needs for enjoyment of a work. These quotations are drawn from his work, *On Stories* (Harvest Books, 2002).

1. No book is really worth reading at the age of ten which is not equally (and often far mote) worth reading at the age of fifty—except, of course, books of information. The only imaginative works we ought to grow out of are those which it would have been better nor to have read at all.
2. Where the children's story is simply the right form for what the author has to say, then of course readers who want to hear that will read the story or re-read it, at any age. I never met *The Wind in the Willows* or E. Nesbit's Bastable books till I was in my late twenties, and I do not think I have enjoyed them any the less on that account. I am almost inclined to set it up as a canon that a children's story which is enjoyed only by children is a bad children's story.
3. When I was ten, I read fairy tales in secret and would have been ashamed if I had been found doing so. Now that I am fifty I read them openly. When I became a man I put away childish things, including the fear of childishness and the desire to be very grown up.
4. Let there be wicked kings and beheadings, battles and dungeons, giants and dragons, and let villains be soundly killed at the end of the book. Nothing will persuade me that this causes an ordinary child any kind or degree of fear beyond what it wants, and needs, to feel. For, of course, it wants to be a little frightened.
5. Those of us who are blamed when old for reading childish books were blamed when children for reading books too old for us. No reader worth his salt trots along in obedience to a time-table.
6. And I think it possible that by confining your child to blameless stories of child life in which nothing at all alarming ever happens, you would fail to banish the terrors, and would succeed in banishing all that can ennoble them or make them enduring. For in the fairy tales, side by side with the terrible figures, we find the immemorial comforters and protectors, the radiant ones; and the terrible figures are not merely terrible, but sublime.
7. Once in a hotel dining-room I said, rather too loudly, 'I loathe prunes.' 'So do I,' came an unexpected six-year-old voice from another table. Sympathy was instantaneous. Neither of us thought it funny. We both knew that prunes are far too nasty to be funny. That is the proper meeting between man and child as independent personalities.