

Aaron Blabey

Australian writer

Born: 1974

Birthplace: Bendigo, Victoria

Significance: An award-winning and best-selling author, Aaron Blabey has written and illustrated many books for children. His works include standalone picture books such as *Pearl Barley and Charlie Parsley* (2007) and series such as *Pig the Pug* (2014–) and *The Bad Guys* (2015–).

Background

Aaron Blabey was born in Bendigo, Victoria, in 1974. An only child, he moved frequently with his family while growing up. Changing schools often, Blabey was a solitary boy who sought refuge in books. His favorite comic series was *The Adventures of Tintin* by Belgian cartoonist Hergé. Aside from reading, Blabey spent his childhood drawing—an activity he thoroughly enjoyed. However, he gave up on drawing after meeting another boy who he felt was more skilled.

Blabey attended high school at Bendigo Senior Secondary College. Leaving drawing behind, he turned his attention to acting, appearing in school plays during his junior and senior years. One day, while he was performing in a production of *Hamlet*, a talent scout spotted him. Following his high school graduation in 1990, Blabey began a career in acting.

Blabey's first television roles were in crime dramas, including *Phoenix* in 1993 and *Blue Heelers* in 1994. His breakthrough, however, came in the 1994 miniseries *The Damnation of Harvey McHugh*, playing the titular character. For his role in this political satire, Blabey won the 1994 Australian Film Institute Award for best performance by an actor in a leading role in a television drama.

Blabey continued to act for the next decade, appearing in series such as *Water Rats* (1997–99) and films such as *Mullet* (2001). Although he was successful, Blabey was far from satisfied with his career, which led him to retire from acting in 2006. Soon afterward, he began to work in advertising, but found he disliked it. It was during this time, however, that Blabey began to draw again—and then to write books for children.

Writing Career

In 2007, Blabey began his career as a children's author and illustrator with the publication of *Pearl Barley and Charlie Parsley*, a story that follows two very different friends: Pearl,

a boisterous, outgoing girl, and Charlie, a shy, introspective boy. The book garnered positive reviews from critics, with many commending Blabey for creating a tale that celebrates differences and the power of friendship. *Pearl Barley and Charlie Parsley* won the 2008 Children's Book of the Year Award: Early Childhood, given by the Children's Book Council of Australia, as well as the USA Teacher's Choice Awards book of the year in 2010.

Following the success of his first book, Blabey continued to write and illustrate picture books. However, while his works were praised by reviewers and won several further awards, they were not particularly strong-selling. This changed in 2014 when he published *Pig the Pug*, a story about a greedy and selfish dog named Pig who refuses to share his toys with Trevor, his friend. Combining rhyming text with vivacious illustrations, this humorous tale about learning to share was an immediate success in Australia and then the United States, spawning numerous sequels and translations. The books in the *Pig the Pug* series include *Pig the Fibber* (2015), *Pig the Winner* (2016), *Pig the Elf* (2016), *Pig the Star* (2017), and *Pig the Grub* (2018).

The year 2015 was an especially successful one for Blabey, filled with new projects. In February, he published the picture book *Thelma the Unicorn*. In this story, the protagonist is a pony named Thelma who dreams of becoming a glamorous unicorn. Then, one miraculous day, she gets her wish and rises to international stardom. A tale about learning to love oneself instead of trying to be someone else, *Thelma the Unicorn* was well received among critics, who praised Blabey for conveying a meaningful message in simple ways. Another critical success came later that year with the publication of *Piranhas Don't Eat Bananas*. The main character in this story is Brian, a piranha who likes to eat fruits and vegetables. Unfortunately for Brian, his friends are not happy about it.

In 2015 Blabey also published *The Bad Guys: Episode 1*, the first book in *The Bad Guys* series. This installment introduces the protagonists, all animals often considered mean or scary: Mr. Wolf, Mr. Snake, Mr. Piranha, and Mr. Shark. Tired of being called "bad," these characters embark on their first good mission: to rescue two hundred dogs from a maximum-security dog pound. The book received critical praise and earned numerous honors, including the 2016 INDIE Book Award for Children's Book of the Year, given by the Australian Independent Booksellers. Following *The Bad Guys: Episode 1*, Blabey published several more books in the series, which like the *Pig the Pug* books became

best sellers in Australia and the United States. In 2018 it was announced that Blabey would serve as an executive producer on an animated film adaptation of the series.

Impact

Blabey's tales have been successful for their humor, action, and their silly, quirky characters, characteristics that appeal to his young audience. The stories that Blabey creates have heart and depth, transmitting meaningful messages that engage the emotions, and therefore also resonate with children of all ages and different genders.

Personal Life

Blabey married voice-over artist Kirstie Hutton, with whom he has two sons. His favorite movie is *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, and he has cited Indiana Jones as his ongoing hero. The singer-songwriter Bob Dylan is another of Blabey's artistic inspirations, and he owns a large vinyl record collection.

Principal Works

Pearl Barley and Charlie Parsley, 2007

Pig the Pug, 2014–

Thelma the Unicorn, 2015

Piranhas Don't Eat Bananas, 2015

The Bad Guys, 2015–

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