

# Animal planet

## Aussie author Sarah Brennan introduces Oswald Ox to children in China

Sarah Brennan's love affair with China started 11 years ago when she moved to Hong Kong and fell for the "quirky and stimulating" effect of the island. It was this fresh start that inspired Brennan to give up her job as a lawyer and fulfil her dream of becoming a children's writer. "It's a place of opportunity, where anyone can become anything," she says of her adopted home.

Since then, Brennan has gone on to write the popular *Chinese Calendar Tales* (with three volumes thus far: *The Tale of Chester Choi*, *The Tale of Run Run Rat* and *The Tale of Oswald Ox*) as well as the *Dirty Story* series. Describing Chinese culture as a "rich and colourful mine" which previous English language books have failed to explore, Brennan uses the Chinese Zodiac to correlate with the *Chinese Calendar Tales*. "I am going to be very busy for the next eight years – I believe in long term projects," she laughs. The characteristics of each year's Zodiac animal are used to mould Brennan's characters, such as with this year's edition, starring Oswald Ox. "When researching the characteristics of the ox, I came up with a wise old ox that doesn't care what other people think and keeps his own council," says Brennan. "He then ends up solving the problem. But we won't talk about that yet, because it's a bit of a surprise."

Growing up with exotic animals such as peacocks and wild platypus on her doorstep, it's no surprise that Brennan is a self-confessed animal lover, always managing to sneak an animal or two into every story. "I think it's always fun to have some interaction between animals and human beings, in particular animals and children," she says, reflecting her core belief that children are inherently nurturing and curious, relating easily to animals and nature. What's more, our furry friends are also favorites of Brennan's creative partner, the highly acclaimed political cartoonist Harry Harrison. "He just loves to draw

them," says Brennan of her illustrator. "They're his favorite."

The dynamic duo met by chance through Brennan's publisher when she first moved to Hong Kong and have worked together ever since. "They are my stories, but Harry is brilliant with the illustrations," Brennan explains. "He is very funny and has a tendency to pick my ideas and run with them. It's as if our humor is wired the same, so we

tend to bring out the best in each other."

Humor is a vital ingredient in Brennan's work: "I want the stories to be funny because once you've got kids laughing they're receptive to new ideas and education," she says, and each of her books has an emphasis on

education, blending Chinese geography, culture and history with a sprinkling of dark humour. For Brennan, however, the most important and inspiring aspect of



Brennan



writing is the reader: "You've got to think about the children and what's going to switch them on. I love writing for children because kids are wonderful with a fabulous curiosity and enthusiasm." It is also the cultural focus of her stories that enables Chinese children to enjoy Brennan's work. "The children appreciate the stories because they realize that they're written with them in mind and with things they can relate to. As soon as I start talking about dim sum, lemon tea, bean buns, all of these cultural references, their eyes just light up and they start to listen." // Sarah Brennan

reads *The Tale of Oswald Ox* at Garden Books on Nov 21, 2pm. Free. (5404 8729)

The Review 评论



Oswald Ox, illustrated by Harrison