



AMAZING: The pupils at the book reading with organiser Natasha Radford, of the Chicken and Frog book shop

Author gives chapter and verse on novel nominated for award

600 children enjoy an 'inspiring' talk during launch event at Brentwood Theatre

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BUDDING writers from three schools were treated to an "inspiring" afternoon at Brentwood Theatre at the launch of a book nominated for a prestigious award.

More than 60 children from Shenfield High, Ursuline and Hogarth Primary watched videos of South African author Alex Smith talking about her new book, while actors read out extracts.

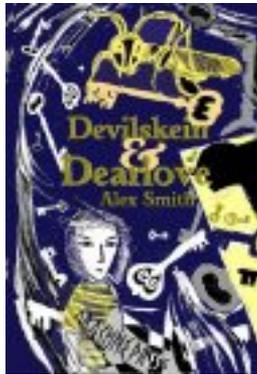
Best

Devilskein And Dearlove, a contemporary take on Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*, has been nominated for the 2015 CILIP Carnegie Medal, an award celebrating the best children's books.

The audience, which ranged from nine and ten-year-olds to those at sixth form, also heard extracts of the book read by actors and had a question-and-answer session with Cherry Potts, owner of London-based publishing company Arachne Press.

The Chicken and Frog book shop in Ongar Road arranged the event and owner Natasha Radford said it was "amazing".

She said: "The kids asked fantastic questions that the editor



NOMINATED: Devilskein and Dearlove by Alex Smith

of the publishing company answered and she recorded anything she couldn't answer and the author will send the answers back to the school.

"It was great because authors are amazing but they are not always brilliant at reading their own work, they often get nervous.

"We decided we would use Brentwood Theatre because it's a lovely space and invited schoolchildren to come down and had actors perform extracts of the book and played a video of an

What's the story?

Erin Dearlove lost everything in a violent attack on her family.

She is living with her bohemian aunt Kate in a run-down Cape Town apartment block.

Locked into a fantasy of her previous life, she shuns the offer of friendship from her new neighbours, until she meets Mr Devilskein, the demon who lives on the top floor.

He opens a door into another world.

animation of the book."

She added: "It's the first time we have done something like this but hopefully it will be the first of many.

"Maybe we can do something in the evening with more than one book. It could be the start of something really good.

"It inspired the youngsters to pick up a pen or pencil and have a go at writing.

"We had some sixth-form students who are very much into their writing and it was a really positive experience."

Alex Smith is a South African author who has published four books in her homeland, but the success of her first young-adult book has spurred Arachne Press

to publish it in this country.

Devilskein And Dearlove is a darker and more edgy reworking of the Frances Hodgson Burnett classic *The Secret Garden*, set in a run-down Cape Town apartment block.

Mark Reed, Brentwood Theatre administrator, said the afternoon was "inspiring".

He added: "It was a really unique open floor when anyone could ask anything and get back some good answers. The afternoon was lovely and it was all down to the hard work of Natasha at Chicken and Frog and we really hope it's something we could do again.

Cherry Potts, owner of London-based Arachne Press, said: "It's really nice to see young people taking an interest in books and writing.

"Something I have really wanted to be able to do is talk to young people about writing - how to do it well and get published - because I wish someone had talked to me about it at that age.

"Schools do their bit but when they are limited to the curriculum they can't give time to someone who is taken in that way."

She added: "It was really great of Chicken and Frog to help us organise it, it's nice to work with independent bookshops, and the theatre were really helpful with our video equipment."



INSPIRATIONAL: Alex Smith talked about her book on screen

Pupils win public speaking event

A DEBATING team from Brentwood School has won a public speaking event at Brentwood Town Hall.

Hamish Kadiramanathan, Bishka Chand and Alina Dragancea represented the school in the intermediate class of the Youth Speaks competition. They will now go through to battle it out at the district final on March 4.

The senior area final will be held tomorrow between Brentwood School, Ursuline Convent and two teams from Marshalls Park in Romford.

The regional final is due to take place at City of London Boys School on March 21 whilst the



RUNNERS-UP: Ursuline students Bryony Colton, Anna Jones & Millie Binnell with Deputy Mayor Cllr Roger Keeble

national final will be held on May 10 at Brentwood School.

The competition offers teams of three youngsters aged between 11 and 17 in two age categories the opportunity to experience

speaking on a public platform.

Brentwood a Becket Rotarian David Orton said: "The standard has been excellent and every year it gets that little bit better - we look forward to it next year."



WINNERS: Hamish Kadiramanathan, Bishka Chand, and Alina Dragancea with Graham Wale, the vice-president of Brentwood a Becket Rotary Club, and Deputy Mayor Cllr Roger Keeble