



Exclusive Q&A with Jessica Townsend, author of *Nevermoor: The Trials of Morrigan Crow*



1. What are some of your favorite words?

My favorite word of all (and incidentally my favorite smell) is petrichor. I also like mellifluous, egalitarian, mournful, slumgullion, malevolent, benevolent, diaphanous, and resplendent.

2. Do you consider yourself to be a good speller? Any fun or interesting spelling stories you'd like to share?

Spelling has always been my thing, especially as a kid. My teachers told my parents that once I'd seen any word once, I could spell it. In second grade, I decided to use one of my spelling list words ('over-exaggerating') in a story I was writing, called "The Three Koalas." But I mistook the meaning and used it totally, hilariously out of context. It's still kind of a joke in my family.

3. When you were a kid, what did you want to be when you grew up?

I always wanted to be an author—in fact, from the age of seven, when I wrote that story about the koala family. But I clearly remember at the time that I had a whole laundry list I would bring out whenever someone asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up: "An author, a violinist, a singer, a dancer, an archaeologist, and a polo player." (I didn't know what polo was, only that it involved horses.)

4. What are some of your favorite books? What do you think our book club should read next?

My favorite books from childhood are *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott, *Tomorrow, When the War Began* by John Marsden, and the Harry Potter series. As a grown-up, I would also add to the list the His Dark Materials series by Philip Pullman and *Never Let Me Go* by Kazuo Ishiguro.

Next up for book club you should consider reading *The Voyage to Magical North* by Claire Fayers—which is a rollicking pirate adventure full of magic, hilarious puns, fantastic character names, and clever wordplay.



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5. As our spellers prepare for their own “Show Trials” (showing off their impressive spelling skills in their regional spelling bees), what advice do you have for them? What kind of lessons can they learn from competing in such an event?

I used to compete in various things when I was a kid, and I remember that I never felt like it was okay to be nervous. You were supposed to pretend you were totally fine so that your competitors didn't think they could psych you out. My advice would be that it's okay to feel nervous, and to admit it when you do—even to embrace your nerves. Being nervous means that you're worried about doing a good job, and that you're taking it seriously, both of which are good things. The day you don't feel nervous is the day you should quit.

6. Besides being a talented storyteller, do you have a "knack" that you would share during the Show Trial?

I'm quite good at picking actors' voices in animated films, and I can also raise one eyebrow like a cartoon villain. I'm certain this combination of talents is something I can develop into a full-blown Wondrous Society-worthy knack... somehow...

7. We create a spelling list for each book we choose, and we had so much fun choosing words from *Nevermoor* particularly because so many of the character names are really great words you can find in the dictionary. Can you tell us a bit about how you choose character names and what your favorite character name from *Nevermoor* is?

I've always been obsessed with names. When I was little I would write endless lists of the names I loved, so I knew I'd either need to write books or have fifty children. There are some names in *Nevermoor* that I chose simply because they sound nice together, or they look good on the page, or they just feel right for their character—Noelle Devereaux, for example, and Kedgerree Burns. Others were chosen for their meaning, like Hawthorne Swift (a talented dragonrider of exceptional speed and agility), or Cadence Blackburn (...that one's a bit of a spoiler).

But my favorite character name is probably Jupiter North. He was named for the Roman god Jupiter, who was the king or father of the gods. Although he is a vaguely rubbish adult, Jupiter does function as Morrigan's sort-of father figure, and he is also the moral compass of the story—Morrigan's True North.