



Q&A with Bryan R. Johnson

What inspired you to write Code 7?

Each night when I was putting my children to bed, I'd make up a story for them on the spot. I always made the children protagonists in the story, and I could watch their faces and see how engaged they were: their emotions and their brains racing. It was fascinating to experience storytelling with them because they just loved it, and I loved hearing how they think, talk, express ideas, and learn. After that, I decided to start write these stories down.

I hoped to write a book that would reach a wide array of kids, and middle-grade is really the "Golden Age" of reading. The characters and settings actually mirrored the ages of my kids and the experiences they were having in life at the time. The book was also inspired by their teachers, principals, and things they were working on, too.

What is your code for an epic life and why?

Each of the words featured in Code 7 plays a major part in forming my own values (Authenticity, Character, Care, Responsibility, Perseverance, Courage, and Become).

The last word, become, is built upon the idea that we're at a unique time and place in human history where we can increasingly author any kind of world that we can imagine. This includes, for example, the ability to program computer software, biology, genetics and hopefully soon, neural code - some of the very things that we're made of! Humans have authorship on a level that we've never had before, which raises a really important question about what we want to become because it's increasingly becoming an enlarged area of opportunity. I'm really excited about the potential.

What were your favorite childhood books?

Harold and the Purple Crayon, Berenstain Bears, Chronicles of Narnia, Dr. Seuss, Curious George, Treasure Island, Robinson Crusoe, and Where The Red Fern Grows, to name a few.

What do you hope children will learn from reading your book?

I hope that kids feel inspired to find and follow their own purpose. It's a difficult thing to extract ourselves from the values, priorities and ideas that we each inherit in life. I want kids to ask

themselves: If I could create my own purpose, what would it be? I want them to think about what they care about, not what others care about.

When I talk to kids who have read my book, I am amazed by how they remember their favorite characters, how they are able to quickly intuit why their favorite story in Code 7 mattered to them. I also believe my readers connect with stories that address relatable themes of friendship, peer pressure, bullying, and identity without it feeling like they are getting spoon-fed a lesson. In the book, seven ordinary children each have their own not-so-ordinary story, and by the book's end, I believe it inspires readers to ask an all-important question: can I make a difference to myself and to others? The answer is a resounding yes.

Can you tell us about the Code 7 Challenge and how readers can participate?

Yes! Children can pick their very own code word that inspires them and reflects who they are. They make a sign with their code word written on it, use the hashtags #Code7 #SWU and share it on social media. That person then challenges more people to participate in the challenge, and all participants are qualified to win challenge prizes to benefit someone else; Code 7 members can “share their care” of a teacher, librarian, or other children’s reading advocate and every participant will receive a free Code 7 e-book, as well as other free books from Starts With Us (a company whose mission is to publish books that empowers youth to make a positive impact by pursuing their talents and interests).

I really love the challenge because just asking the question alone, “What’s my code?”, is a fun and worthwhile exercise for kids to do. They rarely, if ever, get asked: What’s important to you? Most of the time kids are responsible for following instructions and rarely asked to come up with their own answers.

If you could give one piece of advice to a young writer or entrepreneur about “authoring” their own story, what would it be?

My advice is to be skeptical of advice! But that doesn’t mean you shouldn’t ask for it. Read what I wrote about this very topic on my blog: http://bryanjohnson.co/advice_oct15/

What advice would you give to a kid who wanted to be like you?

First, I would say, I’m flattered, thank you. But second, I would ask them to aspire to become themselves. I know that may sound perplexing to a child, but if I were to explain further, I would tell him or her that It could be disappointing to try to be like someone else. Other people measure themselves by standards that may be different from your own. Live up to your own standards. Ask yourself how you will contribute positively to the world? Then set the bar high, and become the person you know yourself to be.

As for my own path, it never occurred to me that I COULDN'T do something. I attribute the things I've done to the inability to realize I might not be able to achieve a given thing.

How many things did you fail at before you finally made a breakthrough in your life?

I don't give much power to the word failure. To me, success and failure is all just one big continuous iteration.

How can we convince children that they have so much power to make change?

Children live under an authority structure where they feel like permission needs to be granted to do anything. It's no wonder they only think the things that are possible are the things that are told to them ARE possible. I would encourage children to look within themselves and discover what they think is possible that others don't.

What's next for you?

The next frontier of human aspiration. I'm trying to contribute to the creation of a future where we would look back in a couple thousand years from now and be pleased about the decisions we've made and how we've played our role in contributing to a positive future.

I think you'll see more books as well; I find writing to be incredibly enjoyable.

To see my latest news, follow me on Twitter, Facebook or visit bryanjohnson.co. To receive email updates about my books, sign up for the email list at candywrapper.co.

I would like to write you a fan letter to feature you in a book report. How do I contact you?

Kids, please be sure to read all about me and my book Code 7 at candywrapper.co. For more information about the other things I am up to, you may also visit bryanjohnson.co. If you would like to write a fan letter, you may contact me. While I can't respond to every comment I receive, please know I read every fan letter I get, and your words inspire me to keep writing more books!