

# ALL ABOUT grammar!

Author **Tohby Riddle** tells **CHILL** about his new book and life as a writer



**CHILL:** What inspired you to create a book about grammar?

**Tohby:** I felt there wasn't a book out there presenting grammar in a way I'd like to see it – highly visual, cheerful and simply organised. It's the book I'd wished I'd had when I was a schoolboy.

**CHILL:** Can anyone read *The Greatest Gatsby: A Visual Book of Grammar*?

**Tohby:** The target audience is simply children upwards. I really thought a book like this could be useful to anyone, including adults and those learning English as a second language, because it offers another way of learning grammar.

**CHILL:** Can you tell us about the name – why *The Greatest Gatsby*?

**Tohby:** It's just a case of having fun with a famous title – while also showing the superlative adjective (greatest) in action.

**CHILL:** Do you have a pet hate grammar blunder?

**Tohby:** To my mind, the only true grammar blunders are statements that are confusing or make no sense.

**CHILL:** What are some of the most common grammar mistakes young people make?

**Tohby:** I have noticed that young kids have

trouble with past tense verbs. They understand that adding the suffix "ed" usually does the job – but it doesn't always. So the past tense form of "think", for instance, is not "thinked" but "thought". It's tricky for a beginner!

**CHILL:** Totally agree with that one. So, not only did you write the book but you're also behind the illustrations. Can you tell us about why the illustrations play such an important part in this book?

**Tohby:** Being a visual book of grammar, the illustrations are the heart of the book. The goal was to present the fundamentals of grammar as visually as possible – by turning grammar concepts into visual information – because our minds remember pictures better than words.

**CHILL:** How did you go about planning and perfecting how the book looks?

**Tohby:** There were many decisions to be made about the size and shape of the book, the paper, the colours and artwork style, so that the book felt really attractive and friendly – the opposite of what grammar books usually look like!

**CHILL:** LOL. Do you love writing and illustrating equally?

**Tohby:** I love both, because both can surprise and excite and reveal. I particularly love artful combinations of the two, because pictures can say things words can't.

**CHILL:** Your journey to becoming an author/illustrator is quite remarkable. Do you remember the first job you dreamt of doing as a young child?

**Tohby:** Funnily enough, I don't – only that I'd be an artist of some kind. For a while there I also wanted to play cricket for Australia!

**CHILL:** What was the name of the first book you fell in love with?

**Tohby:** The first book to truly amaze me was

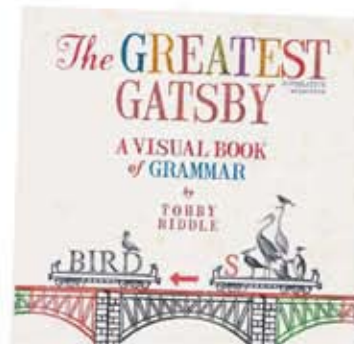
*Where the Wild Things Are*, but the first book I fell in love with was a little paperback edition of Peanuts cartoons – I ended up with about 60 of them and read them for years.

**CHILL:** Cute! For all the children out there with dreams of becoming a professional writer or illustrator, what is your advice to them?

**Tohby:** Be curious, be yourself, learn from books and art you love, and clock up lots of hours writing or drawing. And, of course, never give up!



CAPTION: This "English Words Network" illustration is from Tohby Riddle's new book *The Greatest Gatsby: A Visual Book of Grammar*



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