

The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilish questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week: writer and broadcaster Gyles Brandreth

The prized possession you value above all others... My Winnie the Pooh. I collect cuddly bears and have over 1,000. This one's special because I wrote a musical play about AA Milne called *Now We Are Sixty* in 1986 with the composer Julian Slade, who gave me the bear. Milne's son, the real Christopher Robin, liked the play and we became friends.

The biggest regret you wish you could amend... I've always lacked physical courage. I even get nervous on aeroplanes.

The book that holds an everlasting resonance... The Oxford English Dictionary. Language is what makes humans unique and English is the world's richest.

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day... I'd go to the Kremlin in Moscow and find out what Vladimir Putin really thinks and what he's playing at with the West.

Right: Oscar Wilde. Above right: coffee and walnut cake. Far right: The Return Of The Prodigal Son by Rembrandt



The temptation you wish you could resist... Cake, especially coffee and walnut.

The pet hate that makes your hackles rise... People eating while on the telephone. The sound is revolting.

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... Oscar Wilde, my literary hero – I'm the president of the Oscar Wilde Society. A conversation with him would be fascinating.

The film you can watch time and time again... *Ruggles Of Red Gap* from 1935, starring Charles Laughton. It's a comedy about an English valet who ends up working for rich Americans in the US.

The person who has influenced you most... My wife Michèle. I've been listening to her words of wisdom since 1968, although I've not always paid complete attention! She has the greatest integrity of anyone I know.

The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child... Don't dabble, focus. If you want to achieve anything you need to concentrate.

The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... I 'collect' statues on my iPhone – whenever I see one I take a photo and learn its history. I'm ready for a statue to be made of me.

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... My hair. As a Tory MP for Chester from 1992-1997, I say that I went grey for John Major and then bald for William Hague.

The song that means most to you... The Hokey Cokey because it sums me up perfectly. I can never make up my mind about anything! 'In. Out. Shake it all about' – that's me!

The poem that touches your soul... Dedicatory Ode by the 20th-century writer Hilaire Belloc. It tells you all about what matters in life.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... That I'm good at quizzes. I've been the Phone A Friend choice on *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire* and lost a lot of money. Maybe the way I speak gives the impression I know a lot, but I know nothing. Do not ask me to be on your quiz team, or you will lose!



'Maybe the way I speak gives the impression I know a lot, but I know nothing. So don't ask me to be on your quiz team – you'll lose!'

be in Manhattan with my American publisher, followed by pony trekking in Iceland and an elephant ride in Sri Lanka. For dinner Michèle and I would have fish on the Venetian island of Torcello. After all that I'd go home to south-west London and watch *Frasier*!

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... Driving through the wild country of Sri Lanka on holiday with Michèle in 1999. I remember thinking, 'things can't get much better than this'.

The saddest time that shook your world... A period of months in the mid-1990s when my father, my brother, my sister and my best friend all died.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... I failed to become prime minister and nor have I written *Hamlet*.

The philosophy that underpins your life... The sun always rises, so you might as well get up with it.

The order of service at your funeral... A traditional Church of England service, then a few fireworks over the graveyard.

The way you want to be remembered... He meant well.

The Plug... Gyles's one-man celebration of the English language, *Word Power!*, is touring from 2 April. Visit gylesbrandreth.net. ■

As told to Rob McGibbon

The unending quest that drives you on... To explore new things. So much interests me, yet there's so little time.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I'd steal Rembrandt's *Return Of The Prodigal Son* from the Hermitage in St Petersburg. It's the most moving painting I've ever seen.

The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions... My true fantasy would be to watch 48 episodes of *Frasier* back-to-back. But, for the sake of variety, I'd begin the day eating tropical fruit on the beach in Jamaica with Michèle, our children – Benet, 41, Saethryd, 39, and Aphra, 37 – and our seven grandchildren, aged three months to 11. Lunch would



PHOTOGRAPHS: REX SHUTTERSTOCK; ALAMY; ALLSTAR

PS...

Hugh Jackman and Taron Egerton star in Eddie The Eagle – in cinemas from Friday. Tamzin Outhwaite opens in How The Other Half Loves at the Theatre Royal Haymarket on Thursday. And the Pet Shop Boys' new album Super is released on Friday



NEXT WEEK

- The four BGT judges reveal what's in store for the show's tenth birthday
- Delicious recipes from the National Trust cookbook
- PLUS Britain's best TV listings guide