

# Story Monsters Ink

OCTOBER 2020



The Literary Resource for Teachers, Librarians, and Parents

BETWEEN THE PAGES WITH  
**ANNA JAMES**

A FEW WORDS WITH  
**R.L. STINE**

**DAVON MILLER**  
LAUNCHES AN INSPIRING  
CHILDREN'S BOOK CAMPAIGN

**LORIEN LAWRENCE**  
WEAVES A CREEPY TALE FOR  
MIDDLE GRADE READERS

AP GOVERNMENT TEACHER  
**JEFF FOSTER**  
INSPIRES A GENERATION  
OF CHANGEMAKERS

**ANITA IACO**  
HELPS CHILDREN LEARN  
THE VALUE OF VOTING

CONNECTING  
**STUDENTS WITH  
AUTHORS**

**JUDY  
NEWMAN**  
CONFETTI  
MOMENTS!

**TEACHING  
TOOLBOX**  
FAIRY TALES

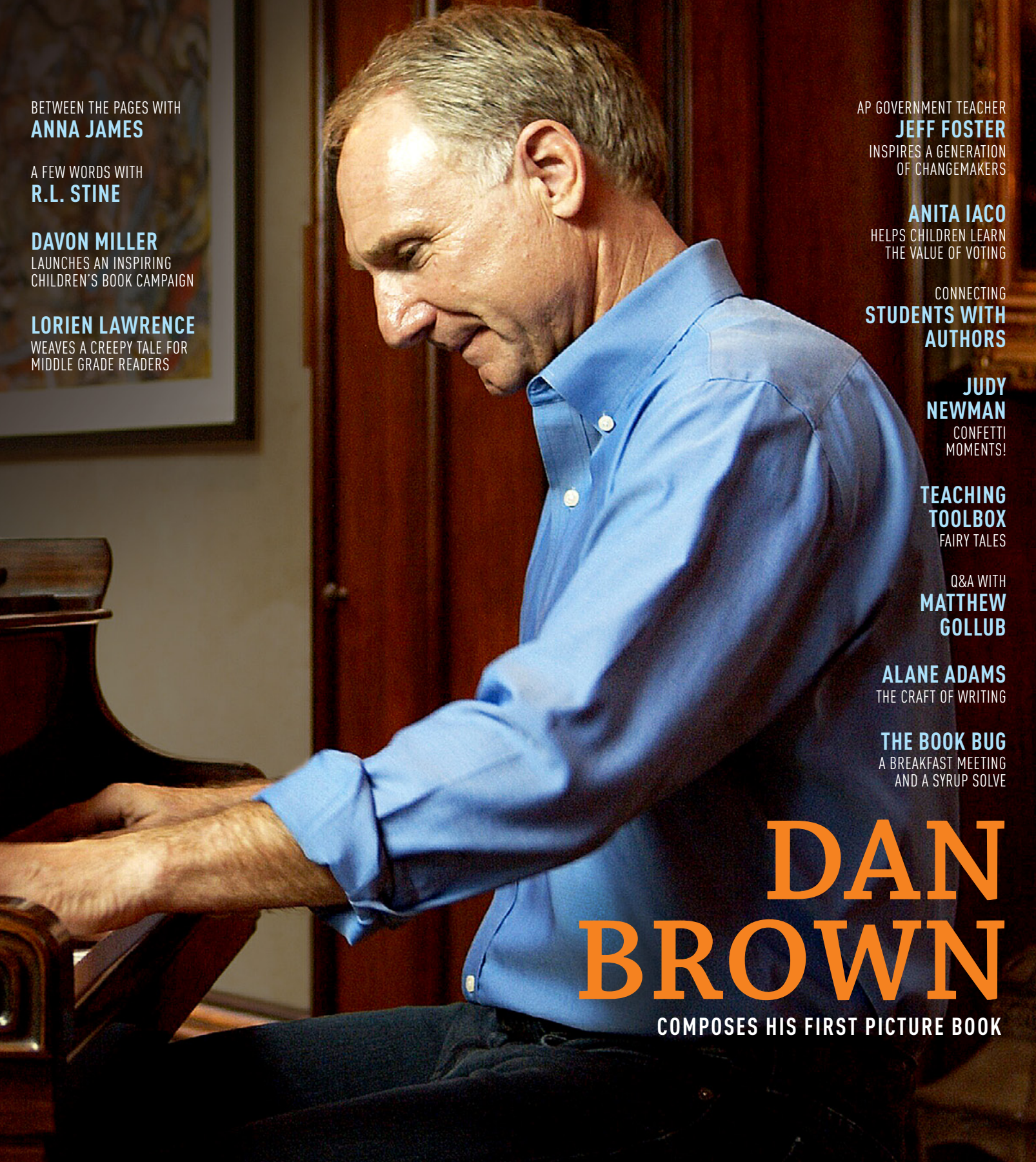
Q&A WITH  
**MATTHEW  
GOLLUB**

**ALANE ADAMS**  
THE CRAFT OF WRITING

**THE BOOK BUG**  
A BREAKFAST MEETING  
AND A SYRUP SOLVE

# DAN BROWN

COMPOSES HIS FIRST PICTURE BOOK





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Story Monsters Ink is published by  
Story Monsters LLC  
Postal mail may be sent to  
Story Monsters Ink  
4696 W. Tyson St., Chandler, AZ 85226  
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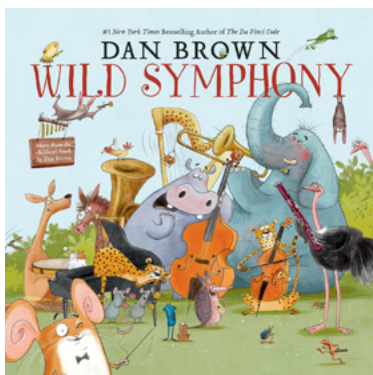
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Literary Magazine" and "Best Editorial Director."

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Email your comments to [cristy@storymonsters.com](mailto:cristy@storymonsters.com).



# DAN BROWN

## COMPOSES HIS FIRST PICTURE BOOK

by Melissa Fales • photo by G.W. Brown

He's had numerous novels top the *New York Times* Bestsellers List, with three of his most popular titles, *The Da Vinci Code*, *Angels and Demons*, and *Inferno* made into movies directed by Ron Howard and starring Tom Hanks. Now, author Dan Brown is debuting his first ever children's picture book, *Wild Symphony*, which has an accompanying soundtrack of 21 songs composed by Brown available through a free app.

**W**hile his legions of fans may be surprised at his significant musical ability, Brown sees many parallels between writing books and writing music. "Music is a kind of storytelling," he says. "Good music requires rhythm and a sense of pacing. I think good paragraphs and sentences do the same thing."

Brown's mother was a professional classical musician and his parents encouraged him to pursue his own artistic interests, musical and otherwise. "We didn't own a television," Brown says. "As a kid, I spent my time reading picture books and simultaneously listening to classical music. I started taking piano lessons when I was four or five years old." He developed an appreciation and affinity for classical music and one of his motivations behind *Wild Symphony* was to encourage children to give it a chance. "Classical music can be a little intimidating for kids, and for adults, too," says Brown. "If parents don't know the difference between Tchaikovsky and Stravinsky, they may feel that classical music isn't for them. Ideally, *Wild Symphony* will be an accessible, fun, and non-threatening way for families to learn more about classical music and get a flavor for it."

Right from the start, readers will know that *Wild Symphony* is not your average book. Maestro Mouse (the tiny critter

conductor) says so on the very first page. "This is not a normal book, you can LISTEN (not just look)," writes Brown. The music for one of the songs featured in the story came to Brown long before the idea for the book did. Strolling by a lake one day, he was serenaded by an army of frogs. "They were all singing together," Brown says. "There were peepers and giant bullfrogs and croakers and it sounded like music to me. It inspired me to write a poem I called 'Happy Frogs.'" It appears in *Wild Symphony* as 'Frogs in a Bog.'"

Brown's poem "Frogs in a Bog" touches on themes of diversity and tolerance. When he started writing *Wild Symphony*, Brown intentionally infused a moral into every page. "I decided I wanted every type of animal to teach something," he says. Brown shares his lessons through various signs Maestro Mouse holds up to readers. On the Frogs in a Bog page, the sign reads, "All of us are different sizes, shapes and colors. If we work together, we can make wonderful music." On the page that features the Anxious Ostrich, Brown's message is, "When you feel overwhelmed, it's okay to take time for yourself." Brown believes that's something more kids need to hear. "We live in a very fragmented society," he says. "It's very different now than when we were growing up. Social media has opened up the whole world and that brings in all kinds of pressure. Kids today are under enormous stresses



that we didn't have. I thought maybe a simple message about taking a cue from an ostrich and taking a time-out when you need it could make a difference in a child's life."

Brown says he's delighted with the illustrations in *Wild Symphony*, done by Susan Batori. "She is such a talent," he says. "She was my absolute first choice." Each spread contains a puzzle for readers—letters hidden in plain sign within Batori's illustrations. "Of course I had to throw some codes in there," Brown says. "Kids can pull all the letters out and rearrange them to spell the name of a musical instrument from the orchestra. There are some codes for adults in the book that are much harder. In fact, there are a few I don't think anyone will be able to crack."

.....

*Wild Symphony* can stand on its own as an entertaining, traditional picture book, but through the magic of augmented reality, readers can take their journey a step further and enjoy Brown's full soundtrack of 21 songs. By simply downloading a free app and scanning a QR code with a Smartphone, readers can hear music that corresponds with each page of the book. "It's very cool and kids will know how to use it instantly," says Brown. "The idea was to use the illustrations, text, and music to create a fully-immersive experience."

*Wild Symphony* features a menagerie of animals, each with its own poem and music that suggests the dominant aspect

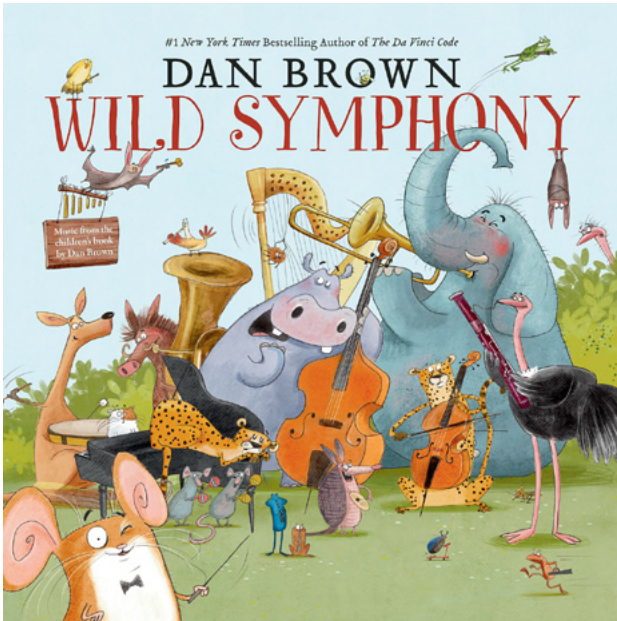
of that animal's personality. For example, listening to the booming timpani in "Bouncing Kangaroo" instantly conjures up a springing marsupial. In the vein of beloved classical works such as Sergei Prokofiev's "Peter and the Wolf," Brown deftly presents melody as character. "I wanted to emulate his usage of leitmotif," says Brown. "I think it's something kids get quickly and enjoy recognizing themes associated with certain characters." Other animals include armadillos, hippos, ponies, cheetahs, and a whale, just to name a few.

Getting the music just right took some time. "Orchestrating it was hilarious," Brown says. "I wrote the pieces on the piano and took them to a sequencer to add synthetic sounds. At some point, I got it to sound like I wanted it to sound. Then, we took it to an orchestra and said, 'Play this.'" Naturally, things had to be tweaked. "We usually did that on the fly," says Brown.

**"MUSIC IS A KIND OF  
STORYTELLING. GOOD  
MUSIC REQUIRES RHYTHM  
AND A SENSE OF PACING.  
I THINK GOOD PARAGRAPHS  
AND SENTENCES DO THE  
SAME THING."**



The Zagreb Festival Orchestra



“We’d say, ‘In measure 37, don’t play the A flat,’ or ‘Play this section faster.’ It was fun to have a wonderfully talented full orchestra to experiment with.” The soundtrack is performed by the Zagreb Festival Orchestra from Croatia.

A thirty-five-city international tour with live orchestral performances of *Wild Symphony* has been postponed due to Covid-19, but will be rescheduled. Recently, the piece premiered in Amsterdam to rave reviews. “I saw a live feed of

the concert and kids were standing on their seats and moving to the music,” says Brown.



Currently, Brown is working on a new Robert Langdon thriller he’s, not surprisingly, mum about. “There’s only one thing I can tell you,” he says. “If you’re familiar with my books, you’ll know that he’s very lucky in that he always meets some lovely woman who happens to be an astrophysicist or holds whatever career happens to have the exact skill set he needs. When this book opens, he’s been in a relationship for a year and the woman he’s with is a character from a previous book.”

For now, Brown is focusing on *Wild Symphony*. The concept of harmonious fusion of illustration, text, and music was a tremendous undertaking that might have intimidated other authors, but Brown says he’s used to thinking big. “I like large projects,” he says. “I go all in. I don’t take anything lightly. Why do my books take four years to write? I have to go and do research and educate myself. That’s how I work.” Brown is donating his proceeds from the sale of *Wild Symphony* to support music education for children. “This isn’t a money-making venture,” he says. “This is truly a passion project for me.”

For more information about Dan Brown and *Wild Symphony*, visit [danbrown.com](http://danbrown.com) and [wildsymphony.com](http://wildsymphony.com). ●







## BETWEEN THE PAGES WITH

# ANNA JAMES

by Melissa Fales • photo by Sarah McKenna

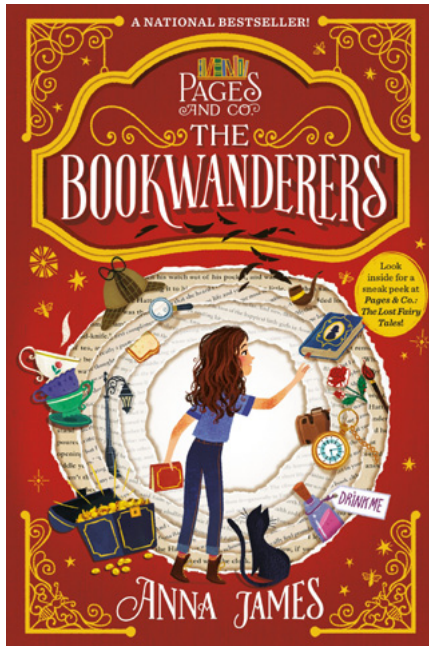
Anna James recently released *The Map of Stories*, the third installment of her popular *Pages & Co.* series. In her books, James has created a world where certain people, known as bookwanderers, are able to travel inside the books they read, interacting with the characters they encounter. It's such a blissful concept for bibliophiles of any age, it's understandable if the boundaries of reality and imagination sometimes get blurred. "Often, when I do events with very young readers, they ask me how they can tell if they're a bookwanderer," says James. "I think that's the best question I get asked. And some little ones come up and tell me that they are bookwanderers and I think that's just so sweet."

Even as a child, James had an insatiable appetite for reading. "The trip to our local library to choose books was the highlight of the week for me," she says. "I quickly finished the selection in the children's section and moved on to exploring the rest of the library. I would read anything I could get my hands on." James delighted in wandering around the stacks aimlessly, flipping through any book that caught her eye. "I love not having anything specifically that I'm looking for and just seeing what I'm drawn to," she says. "The fact that you can serendipitously stumble upon what will eventually become your favorite book is so wonderful."

As an adult, all of James' jobs have been related to writing and/or books. She's a freelance writer, journalist, and worked as a secondary school librarian for five years. "It was hard work but I loved it," she says. "It was hugely rewarding to work with young people and help them develop as readers or become readers in the first place. I think the books we read when we're young shape us in a very particular way into who we want to be. It was a privilege to get to see that happening in real time." Working so closely with young people gave James insight into what they were looking for in a book and that awareness has helped her develop as a writer. "Every conversation you have with a reader, whether they're young or old, makes you a better writer," she says.



James published the first book in the series, *Pages & Co.: Tilly and the Bookwanderers* in 2018. It introduces 11-year-old book lover Tilly, who spends as much time as she can in



**“TO KNOW THAT THESE YOUNG PEOPLE BELIEVE IN THE POWER OF BOOKS AND IMAGINATION IS THE GREATEST JOY. IT’S GOOD FOR THE SOUL TO BE A CHILDREN’S BOOK AUTHOR. I GUESS THE LESS SENTIMENTAL WAY OF SAYING IT IS THAT I AM A HUGE BOOK NERD AND IT’S GREAT TO MEET A NEW GENERATION OF BOOK NERDS.”**

her grandparents’ London bookstore. Tilly realizes she’s a bookwanderer when the characters from the books she reads start appearing to her in person. James says she got the idea for bookwandering from her own longing to meet and have a conversation with her favorite character, Anne Shirley of Lucy Maud Montgomery’s beloved classic, *Anne of Green Gables*. “Anne was definitely a starting point for my thinking about bookwandering,” says James. “Her uniqueness and refusal to be anyone but herself was something I always admired. I was absentmindedly thinking about what I would say to Anne if I ever met her and it grew from there. I loved the idea of a bookshop where you could talk to your favorite characters. And on the simplest level, I’m a redhead, so I always felt a connection with Anne that way.”

James says she’s tickled when young *Pages & Co.* readers tell her they haven’t read *Anne of Green Gables* yet, but want to after reading about Anne in *The Bookwanderers*. “I love to hear that,” she says. “It’s the librarian in me. I’m still recommending books, just in a different way. Once a librarian, always a librarian.”

In 2019, James released the second book, *Tilly and the Lost Fairy Tales*. In it, Tilly and Oskar are horrified when the Underwoods, a rogue group of librarians, take control of the British Underlibrary. Not only are these villains stealing the magic from books, they want to place limits on bookwandering. In order to stop them, Tilly and Oskar head to Paris to the French Underlibrary for help. “*Tilly and the Lost Fairy Tales* left off on a bit of a cliff hanger,” James admits.

*The Map of Stories* finds Tilly and Oskar heading to the American Underlibrary, which is housed under the Library of Congress. In order to stop the Underwoods, the pair is seeking out the help of the clandestine group, the Archivists, but first they have to find them. The two are armed only with a clue that leads them to one particular book housed in the massive collection. “The Archivists are the ones who are supposed to help when things go wrong,” says James. “The thing is, no one has heard from them for generations.” In fact, most of the grownups Tilly and Oskar have talked to don’t believe the Archivists ever

existed, but Tilly is convinced that they’re real, that they can help, and that she and Oskar must find them in order to save bookwandering.

James is in the early stages of developing ideas for more *Pages & Co.* books with her UK publisher, HarperCollins Children’s Books. “When the first book came out, all I wanted was for my book to mean as much as certain books have meant to me for one reader,” says James. “Just one. The fact that so many young people have read my books and see themselves in Tilly and Oskar is amazing. To know that these young people believe in the power of books and imagination is the greatest joy. It’s good for the soul to be a children’s book author. I guess the less sentimental way of saying it is that I am a huge book nerd and it’s great to meet a new generation of book nerds.”

For more information about Anna James and her books, find her @acaseforbooks on Twitter, YouTube and Instagram or email [annajamesauthor@gmail.com](mailto:annajamesauthor@gmail.com). ●

# A HEARTWARMING TALE ABOUT THE POWER OF LOVE AND LOSS...

From visits to the flower shop to breezy rides in Patti's convertible, Cosmo and Patti are inseparable. But dog years don't pass as slowly as human ones. Thankfully, Cosmo has Patti to teach him that even when it's time for his soul to "go cosmic," their friendship will last forever.

Losing a loved one is always a difficult lesson to learn. In this children's narrative, Patti Carpenter teaches young kids that going "cosmic" doesn't have to mean saying goodbye – only goodnight. For when you have an everlasting friendship like Patti and Cosmo's, nothing can ever take that away from you.

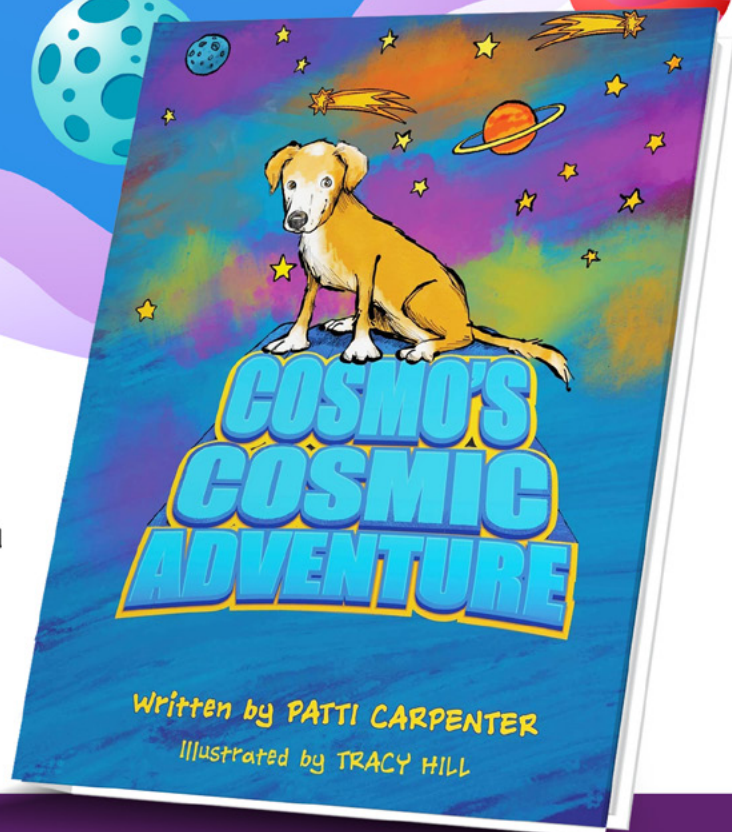
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the author's  
interview in  
next month's  
issue!

Cosmo's Cosmic Adventure is published by Baby Rocks Publishing LLC and is available in a variety of formats, including:

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[www.cosmoscosmicadventure.com](http://www.cosmoscosmicadventure.com)

# A FEW WORDS WITH R.L. STINE

by Melissa Fales

R.L. Stine returns to his comedy roots, celebrating GPK's 35th anniversary with its wacky, fun characters and their adventures. Welcome to the town of Smellville, where 10 kids all live in a big tumbledown house and have as much fun as they possibly can. In this hilarious new illustrated series, the Garbage Pail Kids—from Adam Bomb to Brainy Janey—get into mischief at their middle school, all while battling bullies and their archenemies, Penny and Parker Perfect...

## How did this idea come about?

People have fond memories of the Garbage Pail Kids. Topps thought it might be a good time to try to gross-out a whole new generation.

## Why do you think the Garbage Pail Kids were so popular in the 1980s?

They were disgusting and funny and most parents hated them. A natural appeal for 10-year-old boys.

## Why do you think they still appeal to middle-grade readers today, 35 years later?

For the same reasons they appealed to kids back in the day.

## Do you have a favorite Garbage Pail Kid?

Brainy Janey is my favorite. Janey is so smart, she reads books with no pictures in them.

## What do you think of the R.L. Slime sticker?

I think it's disgusting and an outrage,

and I think my attorneys should look into it.

## What can you tell us about the characters readers will meet in *Welcome to Smellville*?

There are ten GP Kids living together somehow in one house with no parents or supervision. As they say, "We're not bad kids. We just don't know any better!"

## Can you tell us anything about the other two books in the series?

The second book is called *Thrills and Chills*.

## How does your *Garbage Pail Kids* series differ from *Goosebumps* and *Fear Street* and your other books?

It has a lot more garbage.

## What has it been like working with Jeff Zapata and Joe Simko?

I love the art. It's hilarious. I'm a comic book freak from way back, and I admire these guys and mainly, I wish I could draw!



photo by Dan Nelken

## What else would you like our readers to know?

The people at Topps and at Abrams Books have been wonderful to work with. I hope the return of these characters is a big, smelly success! ●

R.L. STINE

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WELCOME TO SMELLVILLE

*Joe Siffka*

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# BE THE FRIEND YOU WISH YOU HAD...

Thirteen-year-old Abby and her father have just moved from a leaky old sailboat in California to an inherited mansion in South Carolina, and Abby does not fit in. This is the story of the summer adventures she shares with new best friend, Hollis, and two boys from their class rescuing an injured heron. But when school begins, Abby is shocked to learn that Hollis is a bullied outcast...who, pushed to the limit, takes her own life—a phenomenon known as bullycide. BFF attempts to portray that being bullied doesn't mean there is anything wrong with you, suicide is not the answer, and to encourage anyone struggling to reach out and tell as many people as necessary until you get help.

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“MY GOAL IS TO SELECT BOOKS THAT AREN’T FROM WELL-KNOWN AUTHORS. THE LIVES THAT WERE LOST TO RACIALLY-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE WEREN’T WELL-KNOWN PEOPLE, EITHER. I WANT TO HONOR THOSE WE LOST BY GATHERING NEW VOICES FOR CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES TO LISTEN TO AND LEARN FROM.”



# DAVON MILLER

## LAUNCHES AN INSPIRING CHILDREN'S BOOK CAMPAIGN

by Melissa Fales

This has been an eventful and impactful year for 18-year-old Davon Miller. As a member of the Class of 2020, the last few months of Miller's senior year of high school fell under the pall of the Covid-19 pandemic. Concurrently, Miller found himself riveted by media coverage of the violent incidents that propelled the Black Lives Matter movement. Eager to do something positive in a year that has seen so much disappointment and injustice, Miller created a GoFundMe campaign, #imagine2020childrenstories.

**H**is goal is to raise \$2,020 to purchase and donate children's books written by black authors to elementary school libraries. "My goal is to select books that aren't from well-known authors," he says. "The lives that were lost to racially-motivated violence weren't well-known people, either. I want to honor those we lost by gathering new voices for children and their families to listen to and learn from."

Miller believes that literacy is the key to success and credits his mother for instilling in him a love for reading and writing. "Reading is so important to her, she started reading to me before I was even born," he says. At just 11 years old, Miller became a published author. His first book, *Mr. Tickety-Toc Clock: Goodnight Mr. Clock*, a story about the importance of getting a good night's sleep, was the first in a series of five children's books Miller wrote and illustrated.

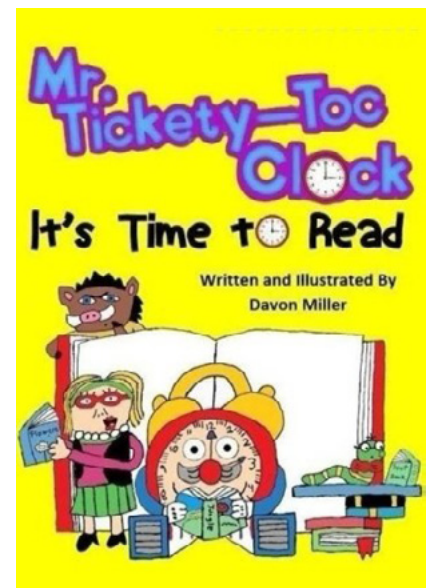
For Miller, his reading and writing offered an escape from asthma, which plagued him as a child. "I was in and out of the hospital as a kid," he says. "It's been years since I had an asthma attack, but I still remember how scary that was. Every book signing I do, I donate a portion of the proceeds to the asthma foundation at Johns Hopkins All Children's Hospital."

Now, Miller is continuing his philanthropy with the #imagine2020childrenstories campaign. "The idea for my campaign stemmed from all that has happened in 2020," says Miller. "All of the protests had a big effect on me, especially after George Floyd's murder. I felt like I had to do something. Some people, like me, aren't comfortable with the idea of protesting, but there are still things you can do."

Miller's first response to the turmoil he saw on the news was to start writing a novel, which is still in the works. "It's my personal story," he says. "It's a mix of fiction and nonfiction and it's based on this whole year in general." While he intends to finish the novel someday, he says he realized he needed to do something that would have a more immediate result and would reach more people. He also wanted to focus on doing something for children.

Initially, Miller's campaign focused on encouraging children to use their time during quarantine to get creative. "I thought it was a good time for kids to spend reading and writing or drawing," he says. "Kids get bored quickly, so I thought it would be a good idea to give them some motivation to use their imaginations." Miller still remembers how his young classmates reacted when they found out he was an author. "They were awestruck that I could do something like that," he says. "Seeing me writing books made them want to write a book, too. When the quarantine started and I was trying to come up with a way to make a difference, my first thought was that maybe I could inspire other kids to read and write like I did back then."

Miller refined the focus of his campaign after a post on Instagram, #blackpublishingpower, caught his interest. He learned about bias in the industry against black authors, which he says is especially apparent in the disparity between what white and black authors are paid for their work. "It was an eye-opener to me that this is a problem," he says. "As a young African-American author, I wanted to do my part to make a difference." Miller's #imagine2020childrenstories



GoFundMe campaign will run through the rest of the year. “I’m grateful for all of the donations I’ve received so far,” he says. “I’m hopeful that I’ll meet my goal of raising \$2,020 to buy books.”

Miller will be attending St. Petersburg College in Florida where he’ll major in theater. He intends to pursue a career in acting and voice acting, but he insists he will always be a writer. “I honestly can’t imagine a world in which I would not be writing,” he says. It’s especially important to Miller that

children of color have role models they can relate to. It’s something he’s seen the impact of first-hand. “I remember I was at an elementary school for an author’s visit with one of my books and I asked the students, ‘Does anyone here love to read?’” he says. “Most of the kids raised their hands, but there was one young African-American boy who said, ‘Not me.’” Miller said he read his book and talked to the class about how he went about writing it and getting it published. “After that, the boy told me he thought reading was pretty

cool after all,” says Miller. “I think it’s because he saw a reflection of himself and that made all the difference. I want other kids to experience that, too.”

For more information about Davon Miller and the #imagine2020children-stories campaign, visit [davonmiller.wixsite.com/author](https://davonmiller.wixsite.com/author). You can also find him on Facebook and Instagram @authordavonmiller. ●

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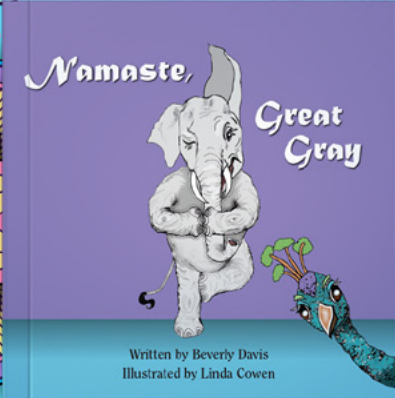
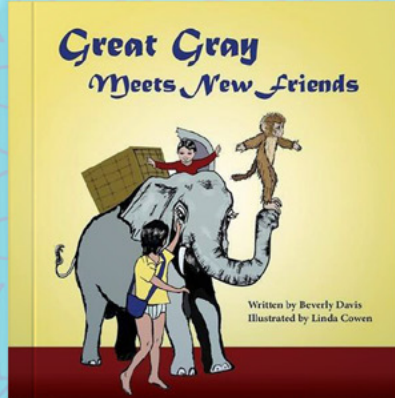
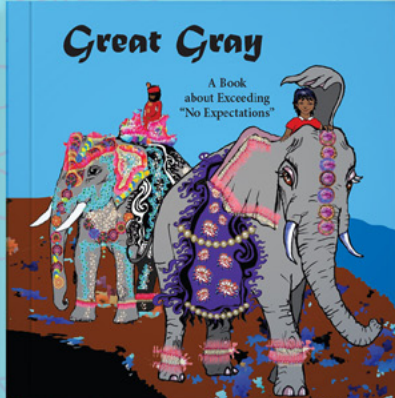
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# LORIEN LAWRENCE

## WEAVES A CREEPY TALE FOR MIDDLE GRADE READERS

by Melissa Fales

Just in time for Halloween, author and middle school English teacher Lorien Lawrence has released her debut novel, a middle grade thriller called *The Stitches*. The first in a series, *The Stitches* follows two intrepid young detectives who suspect that the elderly couple in their neighborhood is harboring a monstrous secret. The pair risks life and limb to investigate their suspicions. “They end up uncovering the truth and it’s horrifying,” says Lawrence. “It’s way scarier than they had even imagined.”

Lawrence has been waiting for this moment, the publication of her first book, for most of her life. “I’ve wanted to be a writer since I was 6 years old,” she says. After earning creative writing degrees from Wheaton College in Norton, Massachusetts and Bath Spa University in Bath, England, Lawrence took a position working in the marketing field. “I fumbled through that job for a while,” she says. “Eventually I decided that I needed to do something that made me feel happy. That wasn’t it.” Lawrence held down the disagreeable day job just long enough to earn her teaching credentials at night school. “It was definitely the right decision,” she says. Now, Lawrence not only has a career she loves but also steady inspiration for more middle grade stories and valuable insight into the minds of her target audience.

*The Stitches* introduces 13-year-old Quinn, whose father has recently passed away. She and her dad used to entertain each other with outlandish theories about why the elderly couple, whom they’d jokingly refer to as “the Oldies,” never seemed to age. “They’d wonder if it was due to Botox, or plastic surgery, or if the Oldies were actually aliens,” says Lawrence. “It was an innocent, fun thing she and her father did together, kind of like a running joke between them.” With her father gone, Quinn feels compelled to delve deeper into the mystery of the Oldies. Suspecting that otherworldly forces may be at work, she enlists the help of her best friend, Mike.

Lawrence and Quinn share several traits. “We both like to run,” she says. “Whenever I’m stressed or anxious,

moving helps me settle my mind. I focus on the things I can control, like my breathing. I thought that considering the circumstances and everything that’s going on in her neighborhood, Quinn would need something like that.”

Quinn is a complex character, whom Lawrence hopes will be relatable to readers. “She’s definitely flawed,” Lawrence says. “She doesn’t always make the best decisions. She and Mike do crazy things like look into the windows of the Oldies’ house. They follow the Oldies to see what they’re up to. They do things that are dangerous and put them in harm’s way. All in all, though, Quinn is brave and I think kids will like reading about her.” Another questionable choice Quinn makes is fabricating a romance with Mike as a cover for their covert investigative work. “She feels that she has to explain why they’re spending so much time together,” says Lawrence. “Quinn essentially lies to her friends, but she does it for noble reasons.”

Lawrence says she wrote *The Stitches* after reflecting on how the seventh-grade students she teaches every day are in such a rush to grow up. “They’re at the age where they just want to be older so they can do more fun things,” she says. “We all know that feeling. But there’s a point where that switch flips and you want to be younger.” The villain in *The Stitches* is actually based on Lawrence’s grandmother (who is not at all evil). “She has this big beehive hairdo and has always been very glamorous and incredibly vain,” says Lawrence. “I have no idea how old she actually is since she’s been lying about her age since I was 5 years old. Kids want to be older

FRIGHT WATCH

# The STITCHERS

"THE CHILLS COME  
GUARANTEED."

—Stephen King

LORIEN LAWRENCE



and elders want to be younger. I was fascinated by that dichotomy.”

Despite how spooky *The Stitches* is, Lawrence isn't a big fan of the horror genre. “I'm actually a big chicken,” she says. She has, however, always been interested in the idea of ghosts and witches and things that go bump in the night. “I think there's something about growing up in New England, where folklore is everywhere, that affects you,” she says. “I'm more comfortable with supernatural horror. I don't necessarily believe in it, so I feel safer with it. Slasher stuff scares me because those things can really happen. I know ghosts aren't real so I can relax and enjoy them more.”

*The Stitches* has already received a rave review from none other than the king of horror himself, Stephen King, who commented that “the chills come guaranteed.” Lawrence admits she's still in disbelief that Stephen King read her book. “We're from the same hometown,” she says. “He lived in Stratford, Connecticut, too.” Lawrence's editor reached out to King to see if he had any interest in reading the book and possibly writing a blurb. “I'm never on my phone during class, but I was using my timer for something when I got an email

with the subject line, ‘Stephen King is reading your book,’” says Lawrence. “I freaked out and my students freaked out.”

Lawrence said she thought the legendary author was just being nice when he agreed to read her work. “I thought it would probably sit on his pile of manuscripts,” Lawrence says. A short time later, Lawrence was using her phone for another timed exercise in class. “Honestly, my editor doesn't email me much during the day because she knows I'm teaching, but that's when I happened to get another email,” says Lawrence. “It said, ‘Stephen King loves your book.’ My class and I freaked out again. I was happy enough just to know that he would take the ARC (advanced reader copy) and that my book would be somewhere in Stephen King's house.”

**“I THINK THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT GROWING UP IN NEW ENGLAND, WHERE FOLKLORE IS EVERYWHERE, THAT AFFECTS YOU. I'M MORE COMFORTABLE WITH SUPERNATURAL HORROR. I DON'T NECESSARILY BELIEVE IN IT, SO I FEEL SAFER WITH IT. SLASHER STUFF SCARES ME BECAUSE THOSE THINGS CAN REALLY HAPPEN. I KNOW GHOSTS AREN'T REAL SO I CAN RELAX AND ENJOY THEM MORE.”**

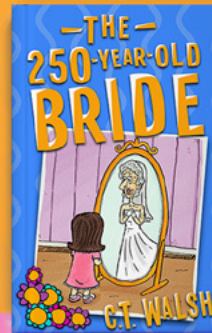
The second book in the series, *The Collectors*, will be released in 2021. “It's a different mystery in the same town with the same characters,” says Lawrence, who promises more creepy settings and hair-raising page turns. Lawrence believes the key to writing a truly terrifying story is providing a healthy balance of the sweet and the scary. “I can't do being hit over and over again with scary things,” she says. “I think having moments of sweetness and lightness make the scary parts even scarier.”

For more information about Lorien Lawrence and *The Stitches*, visit [lorienlawrence.com](http://lorienlawrence.com) or find her on Instagram @lorienlawrence and on Twitter @lorillama2014. ●

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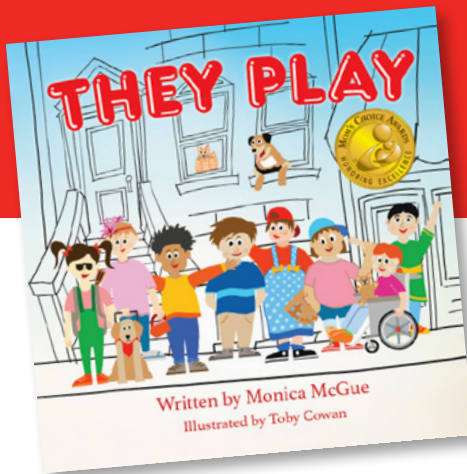
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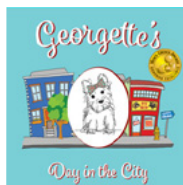
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AP GOVERNMENT TEACHER

# JEFF FOSTER

INSPIRES A GENERATION OF CHANGEMAKERS

by Melissa Fales

With so much political activism underway across the nation and the 2020 presidential election right around the corner, Jeff Foster is releasing his new children's book, *For Which We Stand: How Our Government Works and Why it Matters*, at a very opportune time. Foster, who has spent the last 20 years teaching AP Government at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, says *For Which We Stand* is more relevant today than he could have imagined it would be last summer when Scholastic approached him about writing it. "Obviously, we didn't realize all this was going to happen," Foster says. "Our goal was to inform as many people as possible and as young as possible about how our government works ahead of the election. Now with Covid-19 and all of the protests that are happening and all of the unrest in our country politically, calling this book 'timely' is a huge understatement."

Foster got his start in the academic world as a substitute teacher. "I started coaching sports and getting to know the kids and I liked it so much, I got certified in teaching," he says. After a stint as a geometry teacher elsewhere, he took a social studies job at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. "I got a break my second year there when the AP Government teacher decided she wanted to pursue a career in acting and I took over," he says. Teaching students at the AP level has its advantages. "I've been lucky enough to always have really sharp kids in my class," says Foster. "I've been fortunate to have students who have gone on to hold office and work as ambassadors. Many of them have gotten into the political arena. It's been very rewarding to see their successes."

On February 14, 2018, the school was the site of a horrific shooting that left 17 people dead. Some of Foster's former students became household names when, just days later, they rushed into action and created the #NeverAgain movement.

In March 2018, they organized the March for Our Lives, held in Washington D.C., which drew the largest crowd ever assembled to protest gun violence. Their efforts led to stricter gun control laws in Florida and thousands of people registering to vote. That's something that makes Foster especially proud. "My mantra from day one has been 'You can't complain about government if you don't participate,'" he says. "If there's one thing I tell my students, it's to make sure, as soon as they can, to get out there and vote."

David Hogg and Emma Gonzalez, both former students of Foster, have gone on to become leaders of their generation. "They're actually in the textbook I'm using to teach now," Foster says. "They're galvanizing a whole new generation of political participants. They're young and they have the energy to do it. They've taken advantage of the opportunities they've had to get their voices heard and open doors. It's a shame we needed a tragedy to open those doors, but if it allows them to improve people's lives and make a positive

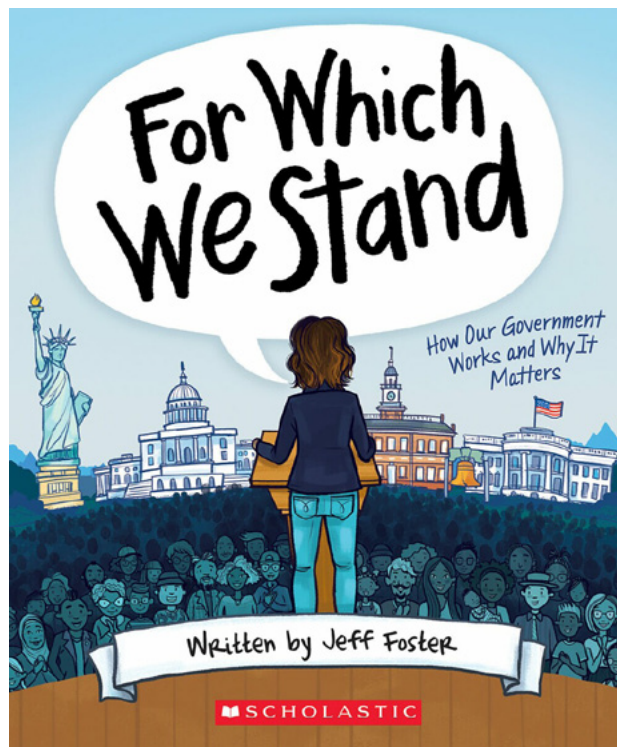


impact on the world, why not take advantage of that?" Foster is quick to deflect credit for all that his former students have accomplished. "I was just there to guide them," he says. "It was a true grass roots movement from the kids. I was lucky to have had the influence of teaching them how the system works."

Sometimes these young activists consult Foster for advice. "I'm in awe of David Hogg," says Foster. "This is someone with a million Twitter followers. Just after the March for Our Lives, my phone rang at 1:30 a.m. It was David and he said, 'I'm meeting with Nancy Pelosi in the morning,' and he wanted to run by me what he was planning to say."

According to Foster, when Scholastic got in touch with him about writing a children's book about the American government, he was flattered. "No one had done this type of book in a long time," says Foster. "I felt the time was right, so I decided to go for it."

*For Which We Stand* is filled with charts and illustrations that help young readers digest the information. Foster is amazed at the results. "As a writer, you sit in front of a word document," he says. "You know you're doing decent work, but you're alone with the words on the page. To see it come to life so seamlessly with Julie McLaughlin's illustrations



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- ★ Senators and representatives can serve unlimited terms, but the president is limited to two terms in office.

## WHY DO PEOPLE RUN FOR OFFICE?

People who run for office vary greatly in terms of their beliefs, goals, campaign strategies, and reasons for running. Most people who run for office are motivated by the fact that they can effect change within their community. Elected officials get to turn their ideas into policies that can impact thousands of people and improve their lives. But running for office isn't easy. It is an enormous commitment that can take lots of time, money, and hard work.

HOW DO YOU RUN FOR POLITICAL OFFICE?



and all the charts has been so gratifying. The book is absolutely beautiful.”

*For Which We Stand* answers questions about aspects of government that might even stump some adults, such as

how the Electoral College works or what the duties of an alderman are. “I know the book is promoted as being for ages 8 to 13, but so many adults who have read it say that adults should read it as well,” says Foster. “I think everyone can learn something.” *For Which We Stand* also looks back on some of the American government’s key moments in history and explains what led up to them. “You don’t have to read it cover to cover,” says Foster. “It can serve just as well as a handy reference book.”

In his introduction, Foster clearly states his primary reason for writing it: to make people better citizens. Foster abhors voter passivity. “I recently asked my students what they thought Congress’s approval rating was,” he says. “Most guessed between 50 and 70 percent. I told them it was actually 18 percent. And the incumbency rate is 90 percent. That means 1 in 5 people don’t like what Congress is doing, yet 9 out of 10 of the incumbents are re-elected. People are just not paying attention. They’re not voting. They’re not making their voice heard. And that’s what I’m trying to change.”

For more information about Jeff Foster and to purchase *For Which We Stand*, visit [Scholastic.com](https://www.scholastic.com). ●

## YOLANDA RENEE KING

My name is Yolanda Renee King. I am eleven years old, and I am an activist, just like my grandparents, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Coretta Scott King.

I am really excited about *For Which We Stand*. Jeff Foster has been teaching so many kids for so many years about how the government works and what our rights are as citizens.

My grandparents helped to change the country—and the world—by standing up and speaking out against injustice and inequality. Because of them, I know just how important it is to understand our nation’s history and how we can use that information to make America the best place it can be for all people.



My grandparents and all the people who protested with them have inspired me to get involved. I give speeches at marches and other events, and I’m passionate about issues like homelessness, protecting the environment, and stopping gun violence.

And I know that just because I’m a kid, it doesn’t mean I can’t make a difference in my community. There is always something we can do to work on a problem, no matter how big or small. And understanding our government and the role we play in it is an important first step to changing the world.

When I give speeches, I always end with a special chant. I ask people to repeat the words after me. It goes like this:

“Spread the word! Have you heard? All across the nation, we are going to be a great generation!”

I hope this book helps you learn more about the government and how we can all be more involved citizens. Together, we can change the world.

Yolanda Renee King

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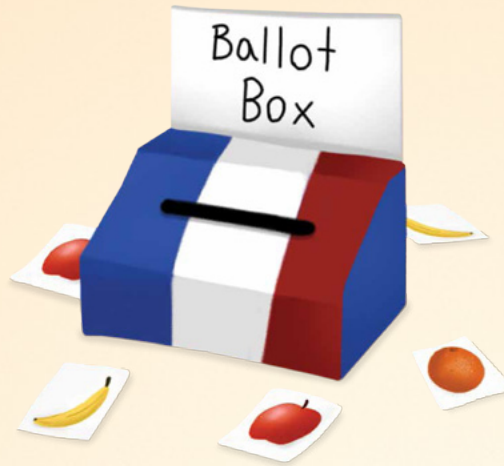
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# ANITA IACO

## HELPS CHILDREN LEARN THE VALUE OF VOTING

by Melissa Fales

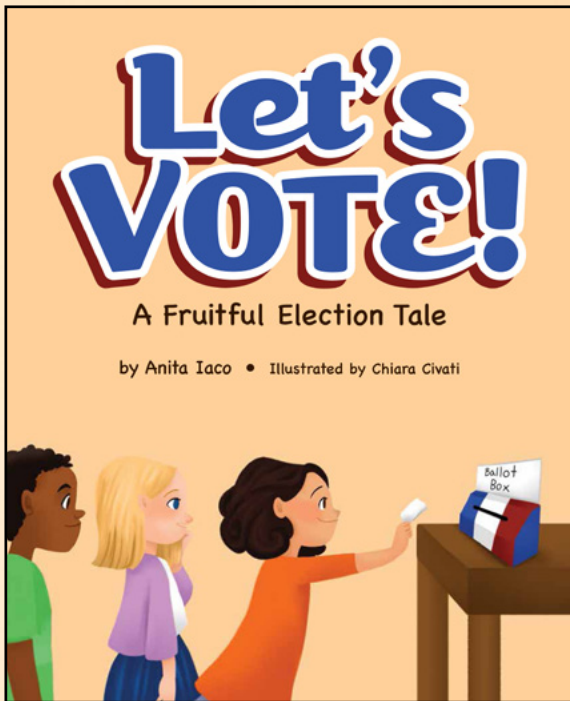
As the 2020 American presidential election draws closer and political discourse increasingly dominates the news, Anita Iaco's book, *Let's Vote: A Fruitful Election Tale* offers an age-appropriate way to introduce the topic of voting to children. "I wanted to write something that would spark a conversation about the election process in a simple way that children will understand," says Iaco.

**L**et's *Vote: A Fruitful Election Tale* was released just ahead of the previous presidential election in 2016. "I wrote it in February and self-published it by September," Iaco says. Iaco got the idea for the book from her daughter, Jenn, with whom she owns and operates a preschool, Jenn's Junction, in North Haledon, New Jersey. "Every November, Jenn would hold an election with her students," she says. "They'd vote on things like their favorite color or favorite snack food. All the kids seemed to enjoy it. I thought maybe I could turn that activity into a children's book."

*Let's Vote: A Fruitful Election Tale* is Iaco's first book. "My background is in marketing and public relations," she says. "I made a career in the editorial department of financial service companies." This fall marks the eighth school year she and her daughter have welcomed students at the preschool. "I love kids and I love being around them," Iaco says. "They always surprise you."

That's one reason, says Iaco, she was particularly looking forward to visiting schools in person this fall to share *Let's Vote: A Fruitful Election Tale* with students. With the Covid-19 pandemic underway, she's taken to Zoom to offer virtual school visits, tailoring her presentation to different grade levels. "I explain to the children how they might not realize it but they vote on things every day," she says. "For example, if their family is going to go out to dinner, they might vote for Chinese or Mexican food. I help the kids realize that that's what voting is; it's making a choice." Iaco has built an election into her school presentations, giving students the chance to vote. "They see it as a grown-up responsibility," she says. "I think children feel special when they're given the opportunity to cast their own official vote, even if it is for something like their favorite fruit."

Iaco has also created a special school presentation she gives during Read Across America month in March. "For that

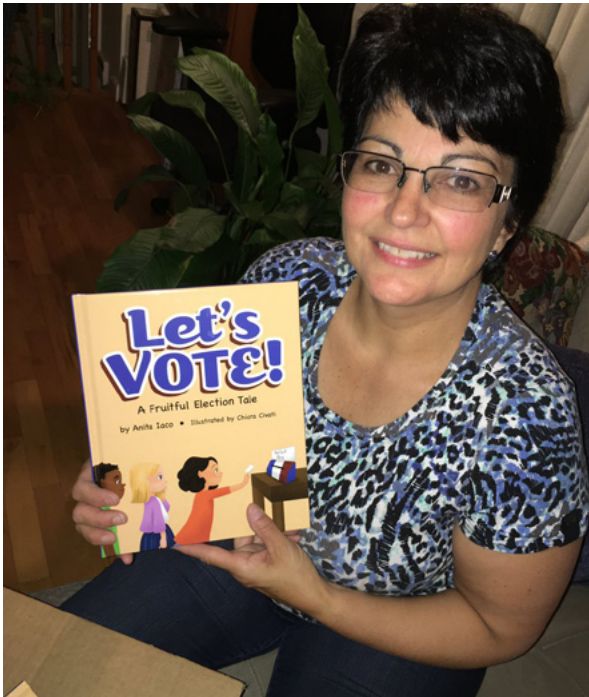


In *Let's Vote: A Fruitful Election Tale*, a girl who wants her classmates to vote for her favorite fruit—the apple—starts off by extolling the virtues of the fruit, namely that apples are crunchy and delicious. But then she announces that if anyone votes for a different fruit, she will no longer be their friend. “She’s a bully,” says Iaco. The girl who is touting the banana as the best fruit promises that if the banana gets the most votes, she’ll bring in bananas for everyone the next day. “That’s when the teacher, Miss Jenn, slips in a lesson,” says Iaco. “She shouldn’t make promises she can’t keep. What if she goes to the store and it’s out of bananas? Then she would have broken her promise.” And finally, the boy who stumps for the orange focuses on the fruit’s beautiful exterior and points out that apples and bananas often have spots and don’t look as appealing. “Miss Jenn uses that as an opportunity to point out that it’s what’s on the inside that really matters,” says Iaco.

occasion, I talk about what it takes to write a book,” she says. “I explain to the children the different types of genres, talk about the revision process and what it’s like for an author to work with an illustrator. I also like to show the students before and after versions of the book. We compare my original draft for the book with the finished product.” Iaco always ends her author presentations, both virtual and in-person, with a question-and-answer session. “That’s my favorite part,” she says. “I’m always impressed with the questions the students come up with. I try to keep it very interactive.” In advance of a virtual or in-person presentation for school groups, Iaco accepts multiple orders for *Let's Vote: A Fruitful Election Tale*. “I’m happy to autograph and personalize each copy,” she says.

In the book, a classroom of children is voting on their favorite fruit. “There are three choices; apple, orange, and banana,” says Iaco. Students take turns playing campaign spokesperson, making their case for why the others should vote for a particular fruit. “I came up with three challenging scenarios,” says Iaco. “Each of the students says some nice things and some mean-spirited things. This way, I’m able to include some valuable life lessons for the children, too.”



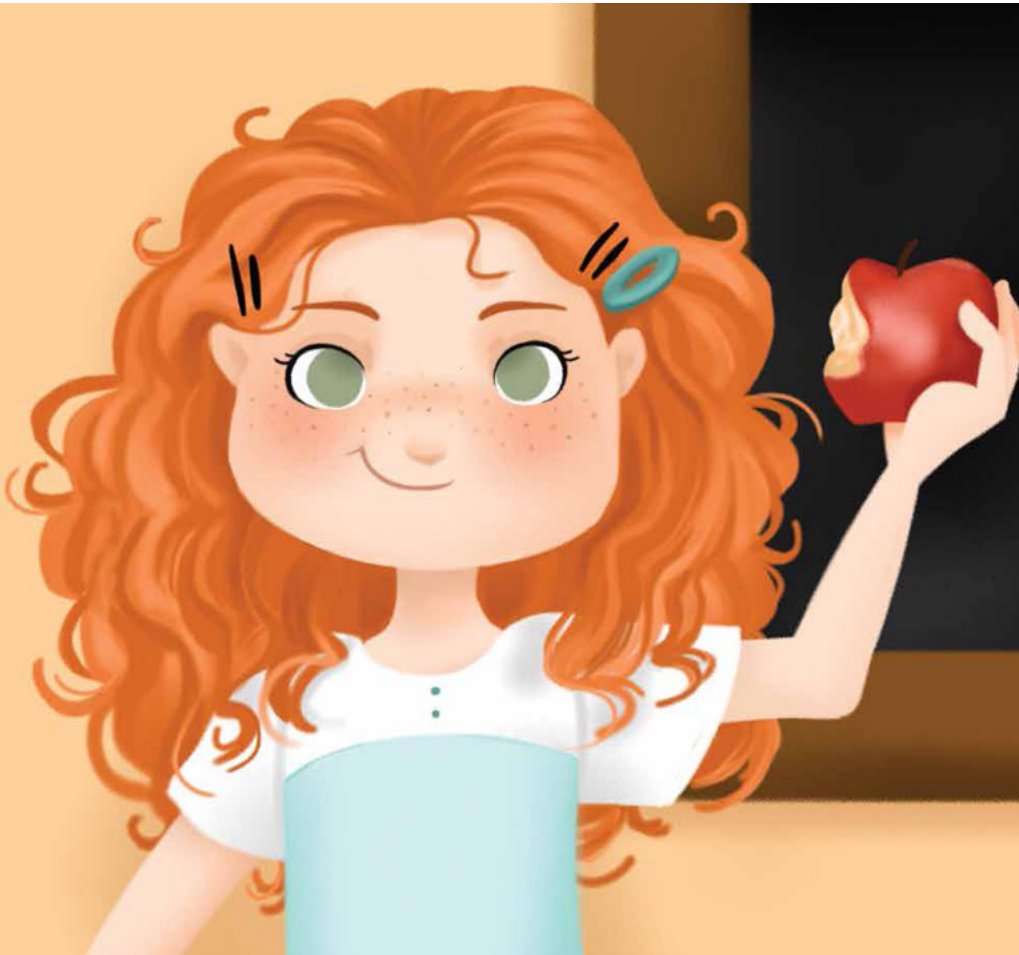


Iaco says she wrote the book to be more than just a cute story with appealing illustrations by Chiara Civati. She wrote it to be a valuable resource. “It’s more than just a story you read and put on a shelf,” she says. “It’s a book with a purpose. It encourages readers to take action. I think it would be a good

“THEY SEE IT AS A GROWN-UP RESPONSIBILITY. I THINK CHILDREN FEEL SPECIAL WHEN THEY’RE GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO CAST THEIR OWN OFFICIAL VOTE, EVEN IF IT IS FOR SOMETHING LIKE THEIR FAVORITE FRUIT.”

tool in a classroom.” With so much volatility in the political arena, Iaco says kids are more intrigued by the concept of voting now more than ever. “When I talk to students, my tagline is ‘Your vote counts,’” she says. “I want them to know that being able to vote is an important privilege and not something to take lightly.”

For more information about Anita Iaco, *Let’s Vote: A Fruitful Election Tale*, and to learn more about hosting a virtual classroom visit with her, visit [anitaiaco.com](http://anitaiaco.com). ●



Kristyn got up next.

“Apples don’t need to be peeled to be eaten,” she said, taking a big bite out of her apple. “They are good for your body too because they have fiber. *And* if you vote for the other fruit, I will *not* be your friend!” she said, her voice turning grumpy. “So, you better vote for the crunchy apple!”

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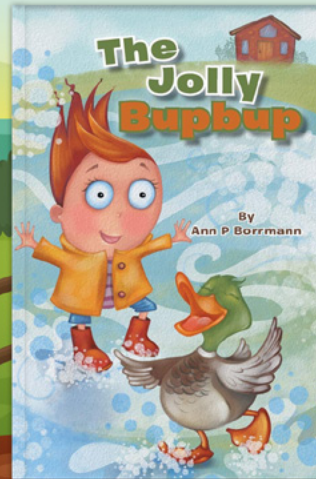
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# CONNECTING STUDENTS WITH AUTHORS

by Elizabeth Jorgensen & Nancy Jorgensen

Students of all ages read—in bean bag sacks, at stations, and in school libraries. But have your students interacted with the author who penned their favorite poem, children’s book, novel, or short story? Have they met face-to face with that author, asked him or her questions?



**A**s a teacher and author, I share my own writing with students. I provide insight into my processes and themes. When my co-written memoir, *Go, Gwen, Go: A Family's Journey to Olympic Gold*, was published, Nancy Jorgensen and I presented to several classes. Students responded on the memoir's themes, the writing and publishing process, and about what they learned that applies to their lives.

## THEMES

- » "While I might not choose to write a book, you encouraged me to have strong dedication and passion for the goals I love."
- » "I took it to heart when you said if someone says you're good at something, then listen to them and do it!"
- » "As I sat there, I was encouraged to get involved more with what I love. You showed me how I can take risks."
- » "It's cool how you didn't stop even after getting rejected by many publishers."

## WRITING & PUBLISHING

- » "I learned from you both that writing is a very long, continuous process and rejection is necessary. I also learned that feedback is very important from numerous people to make you a better writer."
- » "I learned that you don't have to write from the perspective of the main character to get the story across."
- » "I learned that you can't give up right away because you are going to get turned down by many people and publishers but you have to just keep making revisions and believing that your work deserves to be published."
- » "The big thing I learned is that writing takes time. If it took almost seven years to complete your book, that means I should be spending more time on my essays."

- » "I truly appreciated learning about what goes on behind the scenes to publish a book. I learned about how long it took to write and publish and the amount of people actually involved in editing. I learned that you may go through hundreds of rough drafts and ideas before you even show anyone and then after you get feedback, there's still more to do."

## LIFE

- » "I learned many themes from the journey, such as you might be overlooking what is in front of you that is meant to be. I have also learned that you can never have too many people edit your writing."
- » "You taught us that it is OKw to fail but it is important to learn from it and continue what you started."
- » "I loved hearing about the way you guys worked together because it is similar to what I do with my music."
- » "My life can be completely changed on a certain day of the week because of the opportunities and the people I meet."
- » "What I learned is that hard work is a good thing. If you put in hard work, a positive outcome is more of a possibility."

Revealing your own process, or inviting professionals into your classroom, makes learning personal and purposeful. And it may even inspire students to write and publish their own stories. ●

**OCTOBER IS BULLYING PREVENTION MONTH!**

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Let's Read!



## CONFETTI MOMENTS!

**T**his week, I recorded a podcast with Courtney Hinshaw, @Ramonarecommends, third grade teacher extraordinaire, picture book expert, and the host of the Confetti Moments podcast.

You can listen to my interview with Courtney (beginning 9/21/2020 on Spotify) and tell me if I sound as nervous as I felt. No matter how many interviews I do, I still worry I'll get tongue-tied (or go on way too long describing a character I love in a book!)—so I like to be super prepared.

Butterflies aside, I really enjoyed chatting with Courtney about picture books—past favorites such as *The Rabbit Listened* by Cori Doerrfeld; *Miss Nelson Is Missing!* by Harry Allard and James Marshall; *Ruby Finds a Worry* by Tom Percival; and *Make Way for Ducklings* by Robert McCloskey. I also shared some upcoming Spring 2021 picture books that our team and I at Scholastic Book Clubs are particularly excited about, like *Milo Imagines the World* by Matt de la Peña, pictures by Christian Robinson; *Meesha Makes Friends* by Tom Percival; *Wishes by Mượn Thị Văn*, illustrated by Victo Ngai; and *There Was an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Cactus!* by Lucille Colandro, illustrated by Jared Lee.

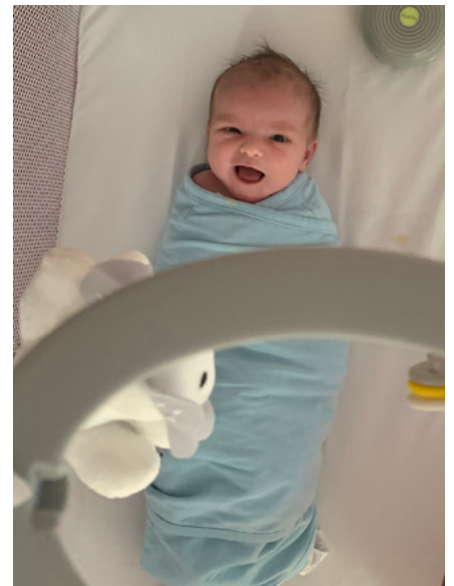
After we oohed and aahed over all these wonderful titles, Courtney asked me about my own “confetti moments.”

To be completely honest, I usually don't think in terms of confetti moments! I do love a good moving-up ceremony, a (now-virtual) publication party, a great sports victory, or an academic accomplishment—but somewhere, deep in my DNA, I get superstitious if I celebrate too much. I will take a moment to recognize happy moments, but then I quickly move on to the next hurdle, an upcoming challenge, or a new problem to solve.

But as I get older and hopefully wiser, and I meet more people and talk with teachers and families in my work and read lots more books—including all kinds of wonderful picture books—I am learning that it is very important to take our confetti moments when we get them. Good things and bad things happen. They don't necessarily have anything to do with each other. Confetti moments are awesome. We all need to be able to feel free to throw confetti in the air, have some fun and pure enjoyment, and celebrate when we can.

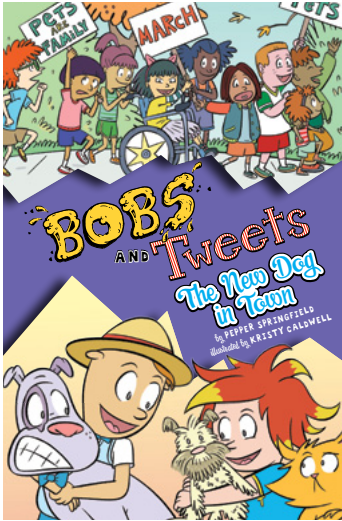
In that spirit, I am going to share some of my recent personal confetti moments:

» **The birth of Sophie Rae, born September 4, 2020, at 1:45 a.m.** There is barely enough confetti on the planet to express the joy and hopefulness of the arrival of my daughter and son-in-law's first child.



» **The publication of a new book in the *Bobs and Tweets* series of rhyming chapter books written by me (under the pen name Pepper Springfield) and illustrated by Kristy Caldwell.** I am gradually, book by book, overcoming my shyness at being a published author, and

as each new title in the series comes out, I throw a little more confetti. Book five in the series, *Bobs and Tweets: The New Dog in Town* will be published by Scholastic next month.

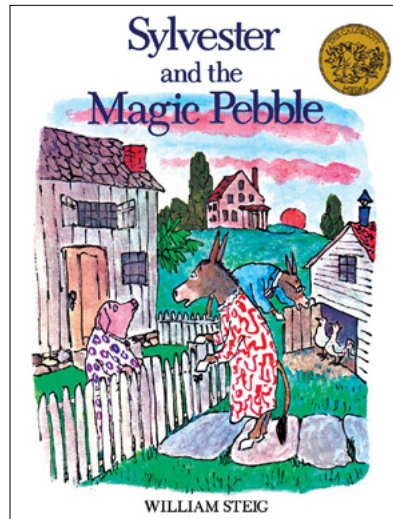


If you email me at [judy.newman@scholastic.com](mailto:judy.newman@scholastic.com), I'll be happy to send you a free copy in exchange for an honest review wherever you share your book feelings: on your blog, on social media, or at your dinner table.

- » **The first Scholastic Book Clubs order of each new school year.** All of us who work at Scholastic Book Clubs get a very specific and unique thrill when the first class book order is received and shipped from our distribution center in Jefferson City, Missouri. Just like every school year (since 1948!), as soon as that first order arrives in August, we begin partnering with hundreds of thousands of classroom teachers all across the country to help kids choose, order, read, love, and have pride in owning their own books. It is magical and truly important work.



- » As you can imagine, I have hundreds of “favorite” books, but the one that still gives me a real confetti moment after reading it at least a zillion times is William Steig’s *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble*. I grin from ear to ear every time I get to the page where Sylvester’s mother and father pick up the magic pebble and turn their son, who had wished himself into a rock to escape a lion, back into his old self.



- » I throw a lot of confetti each year on Halloween when I turn into the Book Lady and give out thousands of books instead of candy to kids who trick-or-treat at our house in Montclair, New Jersey. It is so much fun! (I am trying to figure out how to do this safely this year—stay tuned.)



Times are tough right now, for everyone—and our hearts go out to all teachers, students, and their families. We are all in this together, and we all have to make very difficult choices each day. Great picture books can’t solve all our problems, of course, but they can help take the edge off and give kids—along with their teachers and families—an opportunity to see themselves in beautiful pages, learn about the world around them, and escape into a good story. I urge you to join me and take (and read!) a page from Courtney Hinshaw, dive into some great picture books, and celebrate your own confetti moments.

Please feel free to share them with me through Instagram @JudyNewmanAtScholastic—it will be so much fun to celebrate and throw some confetti along with you!

As always, happy reading!

XX,  
Judy ●

Judy Newman is President and Reader-in-Chief of Scholastic Book Clubs. For more information, visit [judyneumanatscholastic.com](http://judyneumanatscholastic.com).



## TEACHING TOOLBOX: **FAIRY TALES**

by Larissa Juliano

I love old stories. Stories with good and evil characters, clear-cut problems and solutions, mystical settings, underdogs, talking animals, romance, and happy endings. I also love stories that surprise and delight and have lessons and purpose to the writing. All of these elements are found in fairy tales, folktales, or what I usually refer to as “traditional literature.”

I like this term, because so often I would read some fantastic books from the beloved 398.2 section of our library, and the classic fairy tale elements were not all present: heroes, heroines, happy endings, royalty, etc. So then I did some exploration (and more reading, of course) and felt like my students (kindergarten to fourth grade) could absolutely discuss and differentiate between all types of traditional literature ... specifically tall tales, pourquoi tales (a personal favorite), folktales, legends, myths, trickster tales, and even fractured fairy tales.

Not only is it imperative for children to learn about these timeless tales as they grow in their literary journey, but they

also provide teachers with opportunities to engage them in rich conversation about personal traits and qualities and what it means to be a good person—something that is more important to stress in their early childhood education than ever before.

The context of traditional literature showcases so many different types of characters, from evil witches, crafty tricksters, naïve princesses, flawed but faithful heroes and heroines to trusty sidekicks and greedy gold diggers. With my older elementary readers, I also delve into the research component of where stories take place and specifically what we can infer about cultures around the world and values that are of importance to them.

For my traditional literature unit—which can be adapted for any age at any grade level depending on the chosen book and level of questioning—I focus on these four traits for discussion: kindness, empathy, bravery, and persistence. For younger readers, traits can be modified to include respect and responsibility.

Often times, it is fun to create a bulletin board and include covers of the story under the traits, plus students love looking at it and remembering books that we have shared together. We discuss what elements in our stories give us evidence of the aforementioned traits. The responses are amazing!

In addition, teaching students social skills and cues to have friendly debate and banter about literature is an absolute must. What an essential skill for the real world and there's no safer place to grow in this experience than the classroom alongside a teacher and classmates.

I always ask the following starter questions to guide initial discourse and then students will take off from there. Which theme fits this story and why? How did the character show \_\_\_\_\_? (theme) Do you think the character made the right choices? What did they learn at the end? What does family mean to this character? Would you want this character as a friend? Why or why not?

To change things up, it is also fun to put these questions in a "theme box" and have students choose one for the group to ponder or in small literature circles. Bonus: add a dramatic, kinesthetic component and have kids act out examples of bravery, kindness, empathy, and perseverance.

Incorporating a traditional literature unit into your classroom and instruction infuses literacy skills, character education, and social skills with quality literature. It is absolutely worth the time to peek into this section of the library and find some new and old tales to add in the reading rotation.

Approaching literature and discourse from different backgrounds, lifestyles, and experiences creates such an eclectic and enlightening mélange of perspectives. This is what learning is all about. ●

**Larissa Juliano** is an elementary school teacher, reading specialist, and children's book author. Follow her on Twitter @larissajuliano or visit [larissajuliano.com](http://larissajuliano.com).

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# THE CRAFT OF WRITING

by Alane Adams

Every time I step into an Uber, the drivers invariably ask me what I do. When I say I am a writer, an excited look will come into their eyes, flicking back and forth from the mirror to the road, as if I am a magical creature they have snared. Next, in a somewhat hushed voice, they will confess that they, too, have a great idea for a book. Generally this idea is the most amazing and unique idea in the history of ideas but they really can't talk about it much because, you know, they don't want me to steal it, no offense.

## None taken.

I am sure this happens to writers on a daily basis. And what is the most head-scratching part is the notion that the idea is the hard part, and the whole writing it into a book is the easy part. But those of us on the other side know that the idea is the simple part. The thing that makes an idea special is called execution.

Here's an idea that in itself sounds silly: make a Broadway musical about cats. Who would predict it would become one of the longest running shows ever and earn seven Tony awards. Now, take the same musical and turn it into a movie filled with A-list stars and watch it earn six Razzie awards.

## Execution is everything.

So how do authors execute ideas into best-selling novels? In place of execution, we use the word "craft." There are entire novels written just about the art of craft. It seems like there should be a simple playbook to follow, a set of rules that, once made clear, would guarantee success but unfortunately that's

not how it works. As Somerset Maugham once said, "There are three rules for writing a novel. Unfortunately, no one knows what they are."

## So what is this EPHEMERAL INVISIBLE THING we call craft?

Craft is the ability to create a novel that quite simply the reader is unable to put down, whose life is forever changed or touched by it, or is simply swept away by the words on the page. Craft is invisible, seamless, the thing which is not there. It works in the background, helping the writer elevate their story to that plane of effortless reading. Craft is the discipline that comes after the first draft is finished and the author wakes up to the sobering reality that the hard work of editing is about to begin.

## On First Sentences

Craft begins with the first sentence. Undoubtedly, an author will spend more time on the first sentence than any other sentence in the book. It must set the tone for the entire novel in a few short words. It must capture the readers interest so that they continue reading past the end of the sentence. Some authors will rewrite their first sentence hundreds of times. It's like trying to craft the perfect pickup line—you want the person you're crushing on to be immediately captivated by you. Probably the most famous of all is from Melville's *Moby Dick*:

**Call me Ishmael.**

How is it these three little words can carry so much power? He could have said, “My name is Ishmael,” or “They call me Ishmael.” Why these words? I think the most powerful reason is that it immediately establishes a first-person relationship with the reader. It’s an invitation to be closer. Like a hand has been extended in greeting. Here’s another favorite of mine from Tolkien’s *The Hobbit*:

**In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit.**

These words came to Tolkien while marking school certificate papers in his role as Professor of Anglo-Saxon at Oxford in the early 1930s. He was hit by sudden inspiration and wrote them down on a blank sheet of paper. The first thing I think is: what on earth is a hobbit and why does it live in a hole in the ground! By 1932 when the story was finished, *Middle Earth* was introduced to the public to such acclaim, a sequel was requested which became the famed *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Now here’s one from my book *Kalifus Rising*:

**The red sun hung on the horizon like a blister.**

I love the visual picture painted by this! Blisters are painful, swollen, red. It immediately evokes a sense of pain and foreboding in the world we are entering.

## On Creating Memorable Characters

There are some literary characters we can never forget. Harry Potter. Katniss Everdeen. Atticus Finch. What makes these characters so memorable is the fact that the reader is able to connect with them on a deep level. In spite of the fact the characters appear to be entirely different than the typical reader, in reality we share a common bond.

Take Harry Potter. On the surface he is completely different than the average kid. He has a magic wand, goes to wizarding school, and he’s got this powerful enemy out to kill him. Nothing like us, right? But the truth is, Harry is every kid I meet. He endures what every kid endures. Bullying, trouble with teachers, making and keeping friends, learning to believe in himself. He’s vulnerable, abandoned, and we immediately feel sorry for his situation and root for him.

Katniss is another surprisingly relatable character, in spite of her prowess with a bow. In a past interview, Suzanne Collins talked about writing *The Hunger Games* and creating a main character that was relatable to her reader. With a young adult audience in mind, she wanted her readers,

teens struggling with fitting in and acceptance, to instantly connect with her main character. To do this, on the very first page of *The Hunger Games*, Katniss is introduced to us as a hard-working girl who hunts for her family and takes care of them after her father dies. Quite heroic. But she absolutely, completely, and totally hates her sister’s cat Buttercup. So on page one, Collins allows us to peek inside the mind of Katniss as she wakes up and sees the cat watching her.

*He hates me. Or at least distrusts me. Even though it was years ago, I think he still remembers how I tried to drown him in a bucket when Prim brought him home.*

**Yikes!** Our beloved heroine tried to drown the family cat in front of her little sister. I don’t know about you, but my heroes don’t go around drowning cats. Collins purposely did this so that her readers would connect with her character from the start, to realize she’s entirely human in spite of her heroic deeds. The ability to know your audience and what it is they want to see in a character, what they want to feel when they read about that character on the page, is an essential part of crafting a memorable story that will leave an indelible mark.

## On Creating Conflict

**“Houston, we have a problem.”**

Who can forget these words (paraphrased here) spoken by astronaut Jack Swigert from the Apollo 13 mission. They capture in a nutshell the heart of what it takes to craft a great story. Conflict drives the characters into action. No conflict, no action, no story. Would we remember the crew of Apollo 13 if they hadn’t had to heroically restore their spacecraft to working order or die? Maybe as a footnote in history but not with any great detail. It’s somewhat surprising to realize that books are nothing more than a container that holds a story about a character that has a problem and has to solve it. Character. Problem. Solution. The bigger the problem, the better the story. You can have compelling characters but if they aren’t given a problem to solve, the reader will quickly fall into a coma.

Crafting conflict that is relevant to the story and drives the main character into action and captures the interest of your reader is the most important task the writer undertakes. It is the backbone of the story, the frame that holds it upright, and the reason for the story to exist.

## On Less is More

Writing is like trying to escape quicksand. The harder you try the faster you sink. It feels effortless when the author's mind is left to speak freely. As you're drafting that manuscript, use the power of less. There's no need to overdescribe your characters or scenery. Choose your words carefully and let the reader use their imagination. Cut out unnecessary words. Strip your sentences down to bare bones. Search for that signature line that will make the reader's hair on the back of their neck stand up. Avoid using an adjective to describe dialogue. "Let the dialogue speak for itself!" she said angrily. Sprinkle the flowery stuff in here and there and it will be a welcome relief, a treat for the reader, instead of a gluttony of words written to fatten your manuscript. If you are sparing in

your descriptions, your character's actions will be the muscle that drives your story.

**Next Month:** Writing Series—Including a sneak peek at *Witch Wars*—Book Three of *The Witches of Orkney* out October 13! ●

**Alane Adams** is an author, professor, and literacy advocate. She is the author of the *Legends of Orkney* fantasy series for tweens and picture books for early-grade readers. [alaneadams.com](http://alaneadams.com)

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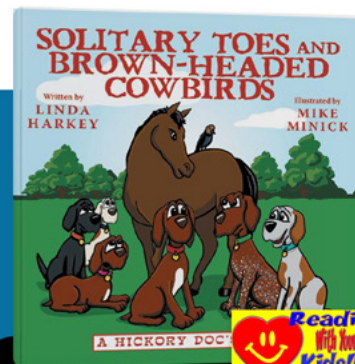
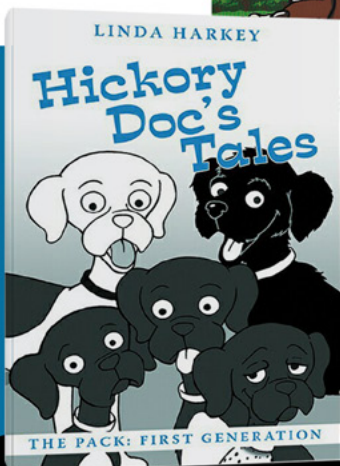
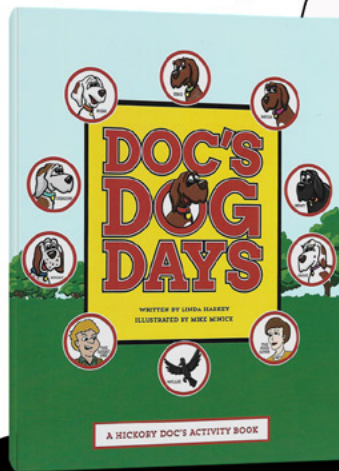


# Get ready for some tail-wagging adventures!

Teachers, Librarians, Parents, Grandparents & Kids will enjoy this series!

Deacon always barked. "Doc, you can learn a lot about a book by eating its binding." Deacon called that a shortcut to reading. I have my doubts about that.

Color and finish the story!



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READING LIST

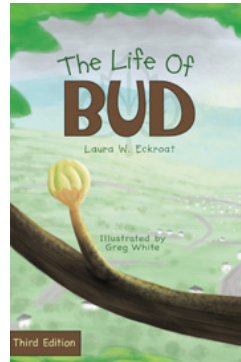


## *Stan's Frightful Halloween*

by Sandra Sutter

When clumsy werewolf Stan breaks his leg on the eve of Halloween, he's heartbroken when everyone leaves without him for what's sure to be a scary good time. But Stan isn't one to stay home. Maybe he can try ghosting? Or ride with the witches?

After all, it can't be that hard. Join Stan with his heart full of determination on this frightful Halloween adventure that leads to a surprisingly scary and satisfying end.



## *The Life of Bud*

by Laura W. Eckroat

Bud starts out as a tiny bud—small and insignificant—yet he arrives into this life with a feeling of purpose and hope. Soon he grows into a beautiful, vibrant piece of the Mighty Oak Tree, taking his place in the circle of life, and thrives as he recognizes his part in something greater. *The Life of Bud* teaches acceptance and celebration of a

life well-lived. It is a valuable addition to the reading shelves of children 8 and up, and a meaningful family bedtime tale.

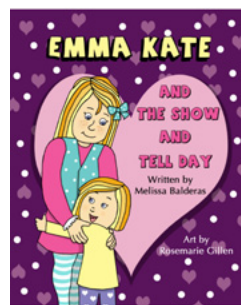


## *Pirates and Spooks, Beware!*

by Susan Weiner

Shiver me timbers! Pirates and parrots, mummies and mermaids—get ready for these fun and funky poems to tickle your funny bone and send a chill down your spine. A collection of refreshingly funny and sometimes rascally poems, sure to delight elementary and middle

school readers (and their teachers). Watch out for slightly spooky ghouls and rollicking, rambunctious pirates. Arghhh Matey! You'd better get started, for it's all hands on deck. Pirates and spooks, beware!

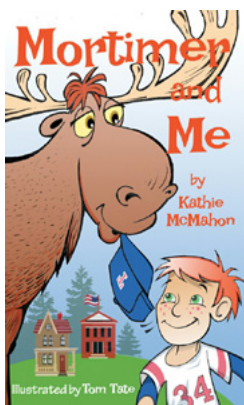


## *Emma Kate and the Show and Tell Day*

by Melissa Balderas

Emma Kate is excited about Show and Tell Day at school and wants to bring something very special to show her class. She faces a dilemma about deciding what to bring, and her messy baby sister keeps getting in the way. Will Emma Kate ever find something

for Show and Tell? This is a beautiful children's picture book that focuses on family relationships between sisters and promotes the idea of sharing.

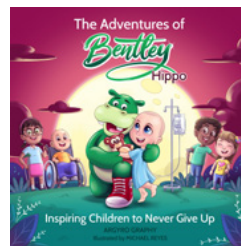


## *Mortimer and Me*

by Kathie McMahon

Eight-year-old Jimmy is the new kid in school and he's already been labeled a troublemaker. After his first attempt to make a friend has disastrous results, the only one who seems to care about him is Mortimer—a big ole clumsy moose who wanders into town causing problems of his own. Jimmy and Mortimer face one obstacle after another in

this first book of a chapter book series for ages 6-9.

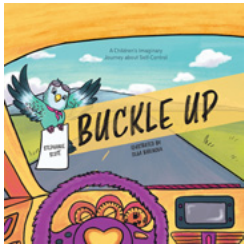


## *The Adventures of Bentley Hippo: Inspiring Children to Never Give Up*

by Argyro Graphy

Bentley Hippo meets children facing daily struggles and challenges when he finds himself in the courtyard of a children's hospital. With the help of

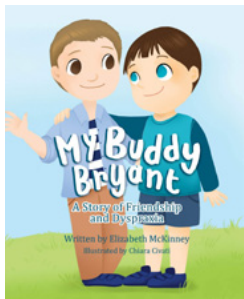
his new friends, Bentley comes up with a plan to help convince a little girl Julia, stuck in a hospital room to Never Give Up. Inspiring Children to Never Give Up has the most adorable hippo around, teaching one of the biggest and most important lessons.



### **Buckle Up**

by Stephanie Scott

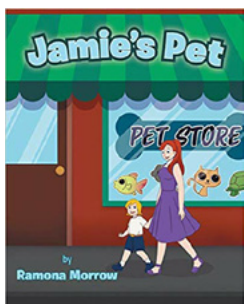
Life can be challenging at times and unpredictable, with all sorts of things we can't control. With Nini the bird as your special guide, you will take a driving journey in your imagination, with you in the driver's seat. You will "Buckle Up" and learn how to face life's obstacles and disappointments with healthy, positive "green thoughts" and learn how to control your actions and wait patiently for the rainbow that will surely follow the rain.



### **My Buddy Bryant: A Story of Friendship and Dyspraxia**

by Elizabeth McKinney

Carson narrates the story with a simple moral in the end. We need to accept other's differences so we don't miss out on a friend. This heartwarming story teaches its reader about friendship and acceptance of differences. Did you know that 1 out of 10 individuals have Dyspraxia? There isn't much awareness about this lifelong neurologic disorder and the author is trying to change that for her son Bryant. Book proceeds go to the national nonprofit organization, Dyspraxia Foundation USA. Check out [flappingoodtale.com](http://flappingoodtale.com) for more information.



### **Jamie's Pet**

by Ramona Morrow

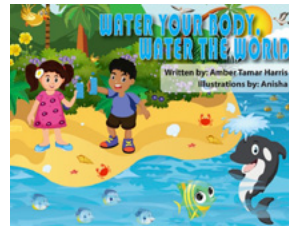
*Jamie's Pet* is about a typical little boy who would like a pet. Jamie and his mother stroll down to the nearest pet store. Once Jamie and his mother are in the pet store, Jamie sees lots of different animals available for pets. Jamie has a tough choice ahead of him. Jamie cradles an animal and quickly makes up his mind that this is the animal he would like to get as a pet. Jamie finds his perfect pet, his perfect friend. Available at Amazon, Barnes and Noble, Books-A-Million, IndieBound, Powell's, and Target. [ramonamorrowbooks.com](http://ramonamorrowbooks.com)



### **Libby the Lobivia Jajoiana**

by Regan W.H. Macaulay & Kevin Risk

Libby is a lonely cactus plant who has trouble believing in herself. However, when lovely, confident Violet moves in next to her on the windowsill, Libby learns that the things that make her different also make her special.



### **Water Your Body, Water the World**

by Amber Tamar Harris

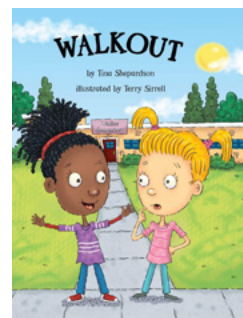
This book is a great educational reading source for teaching children about water, and right now books have become an even more important source of learning for children all over during these trying times as parents and teachers prepare for home education. A story about learning how water keeps everything alive, including ourselves. Water has so many benefits and it's good for your child to know about them with this colorful book. Water is life! Perfect for children ages 2-8.



### **Brayden's Magical Pirate Ship Adventure**

Anita A. Caruso

Brayden is happily playing pirate in an old boat in his great-nana's backyard one day, when he puts on his magical green sunglasses and decides to see if he can become a real pirate! Yaar! In *Brayden's Magical Pirate Ship Adventure*, readers join Brayden as they take a fantastic, high-flying journey to find buried treasure with real pirates, like him, and have a swashbuckling good time!



### **Walkout**

by Tina Shepardson

Inspired by a true story, *Walkout* shows democracy in action as Maddie organizes a safe school's anti-violence walkout. Other kids throughout the states are walking out. But Maddie's principal has announced that only older grades can participate. At the same time, Maddie's best friend Stella is too scared to help. Can Stella find her courage and join Maddie in walking out?



**A Firefly Tale**

by Janet Toonen

Have you ever wondered what the life of a firefly is like? *A Firefly Tale*, tells about the little lightning bugs and their interesting start. Science and adventure combine in this new

rhyming tale about Sparks, Lumen, and Surge the fireflies. Find out how Surge got his signature blue glow and how they came to live in Firefly Cave. For ages 3-8. Visit [www.staytoondpublish.com](http://www.staytoondpublish.com) or [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com).



**My Aunt Zoe**

by Pete Ross

A young boy is studying various life cycles of animals in school. The boy expects his aunt coming to visit to be like the “anteater” in his textbook. He relays to the reader facts about anteaters and connects them with his very own auntie. When Aunt

Zoe arrives, they do a few things together and take a nap entwined in each other’s arms. The boy realizes that he is special too, even if he’s not in a book.



**Kind Soup**

by Jean Petersen

Kate and Mommy are busy in the kitchen making soup full of ... fruit! Wait a minute, isn’t soup usually made of vegetables? Well, not this soup! *Kind Soup* is

a balanced blend of the Fruits of the Spirit wrapped in prayer and ladled out with love. Follow along with the recipe page by page to recreate the same soup at home! Enjoy sharing this delicious soup with someone you love. Soup made with fruit? Yes, please!



**Cesar Chavez: Friend to Farm Workers**

by Look! Books

As a child, Cesar Chavez worked on farms with his family. He felt workers were treated badly. Cesar used his voice to become a leader

in making sure farm workers were paid better and treated better. Do you have a favorite role model? Your role model may be a parent, grandparent, or sibling. Some people who do things to make life better for others can be a role model. And some people are role models because they show us how to overcome challenges. Ages 5 to 8. LB \$25.32 list/ Softcover \$6.99.



**Rain Shaker**

by Elizabeth Mary Cummings

*Rain Shaker* transports readers into a world where dreams come true and hope rides high on the rising tides of global warming. When Erin finds a snow shaker, her imagination is ignited and she

embarks on a magical journey of possibility of what if? In a world of droughts and floods where water won’t behave, Erin’s imagination shakes things up and leads her to help make a better world.



**Elephant, Please!**

by Maureen Kauzlarich

A train, a plane, and a kid on a mission. In *Elephant, Please!* by Maureen Kauzlarich, a young boy wants an elephant for a pet, but after traveling afar, he soon

realizes that elephants should be free in the wild. Funny, adventurous, and sweet, this rhyming picture book will teach children empathy toward nature’s biggest land animal. The perfect bedtime read!



**Mommy's Big, Red Monster Truck**

by Alison Paul Klakowicz

Every kid knows that mommies are the greatest. They feed us, care for us, and love us with all their hearts. But did you know they are also so cool? One little boy sure

does. His mommy drives a big, red monster truck, and it’s awesome! It bounces, smashes, and takes them on amazing adventures across the country and world. In her truck, they can do anything, go anywhere, and best of all ... they do it together—making precious memories!



**My Dad is a Mad Scientist**

by Matthew S. Cox

Saving the world isn’t easy. It’s even harder when you’re only 9. Seemingly benevolent aliens litter the Earth with gigantic crystals to save its magnetic field. Kelly discovers her wildest fantasy comes to life: she’s gone from bullied nerd to superhero and adopts the name Übergirl. However, she has one

major problem: Her dad’s turning into a mad scientist. It’s difficult to be a hero, especially when your father’s a bad guy. 2020 Readers’ Favorite Gold Medal winner!

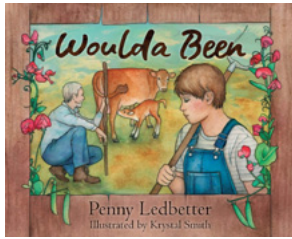


### **The Little Apple (Allie's Adventures)**

by Deborah Smith Ford

A child's take on the daily work, play, and other responsibilities of a farm. Intimate details are lived and remembered—every scent, sight, touch, and sound form such lasting

memories for this child as well as for the readers. Experiencing *The Little Apple* will help to either bring back days of ole for some, or conjure up ideas of what it would be like to live on a farm.



### **Woulda Been**

by Penny Ledbetter

When Paw, the hardworking farmer and patriarch, passes away, Jess and his family struggle to move on. They keep thinking about how Paw woulda

been tending the fields and gardens, how he woulda been at Jess's 10th birthday party to help him blow out the candles, and how he woulda been readying the farm's newest Jersey calf for the county fair. In this heartfelt and inspiring story, Jess learns how to overcome his grief through community, remembrance, and giving back.

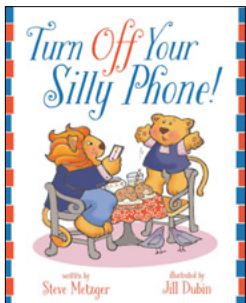


### **Jazzy and Kettle**

by Rick Quinn

Jazzy and Kettle, two curious children in a new neighborhood, meet, become friends, and decide to go on an adventure into the woods. They find flowers, birds, and other wildlife, all with their own springtime jobs. Their adventure gets them in a tough situation, but that's

where they make their most important discoveries: about themselves! They come to understand friendship, the fun of exploration, and how to overcome their fears. They triumph!

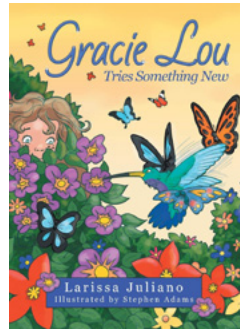


### **Turn Off Your Silly Phone!**

by Steve Metzger

On Sale October 20! Someone you know needs this book! The places that you've shown me, are all I've ever known. But now I'd like to see much more, turn off your silly phone! Laugh-out-loud rhymes and delightful illustrations show how

children really feel when parents and caregivers spend too much time on their phones! "I love, love, love this book!" —Dawn Gallis, Preschool Director. Available on Amazon.

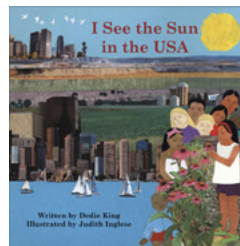


### **Gracie Lou Tries Something New**

by Larissa Juliano

Gracie Lou is nervous. She's starting soccer camp tomorrow, but she has never played soccer before. What if she can't kick the ball, or if everyone runs faster than her? What if the snack is yucky or the coach is grouchy? Luckily, she has her shooting star to help her. In

the night, it takes Gracie Lou off on a special adventure that tickles her five senses. Along the way she meets five baby animals who need her help. Gracie Lou helps each of them try new things, and when she does, she discovers for herself that trying something new can be good for you!



### **I See the Sun in the USA**

by Satya House

Explore the world! Life in different countries seen from a child's point of view. Each bilingual picture book in this award-winning series focuses on one country and one day in the life of one child with a story told from the child's perspective. Learn about different cultures, family life, and language in a way that is sensitive to each culture. Age-appropriate (5+) country facts and a glossary for extended learning are included in each book. NEW in 2020: *I See the Sun in Botswana*. Other titles are *I See the Sun in ... USA, Mexico, China, Nepal, Afghanistan, Russia, Turkey, India, and Myanmar (Burma)*. [satyahouse.com](http://satyahouse.com)

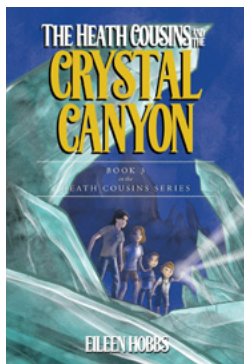


### **Wizard and the Lizard**

by Katie Reed

FIRE BREATH! GIGANTIC WINGS! ENORMOUS SHARP CLAWS! Becoming a dragon would fulfill all of Buddy's dreams...or so he thinks. Buddy the lizard wishes to become a dragon fierce and strong. His best friend Wizard thinks he is perfectly

perfect just the way he is but agrees to help him transform into a dragon. Will Buddy become the dragon he yearns to be? Or will Buddy realize that he was perfectly perfect all along?

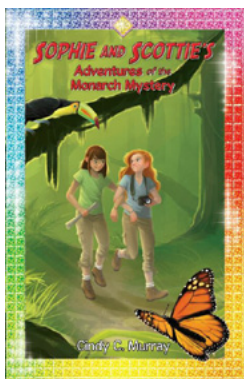


### **The Heath Cousins and the Crystal Canyon**

by Eileen Hobbs

In book 3 of the *Heath Cousins* series, the four courageous cousins travel back to the magical land where they first met their friends Gemma and Jumani, the white wolf. This time they must find their way under a dangerous waterfall and enter the land through the Crystal Canyon. There they must

face a dangerous enemy, Arach the crystal-spewing dragon, in order to save their friends Mai Li and Jadira, the smelly buffalo creature, from a terrible fate. Only the cousins can break its evil spell. But what they discover in the dragon's lair could endanger their journey home.



### **Sophie and Scottie's Adventures of the Monarch Mystery**

by Cindy C. Murray

Join Sophie and Scottie on their journey to solve an epic mystery in the 5-star-rated chapter book *Sophie and Scottie's Adventures of the Monarch Mystery*. The monarchs have vanished in Mexico and the sisters are up to the task of finding the butterflies. Full of action, adventure,

a touch of science, and a bit of magic! Perfect for kids ages 7 to 12 and is available on Amazon and where books are sold. [cindycmurray.com](http://cindycmurray.com)



### **Dragon, Book 1 of Enchanted Sacred Garden**

by Angie Rooker

Adopted by gnomes when she was born, Dragon has never met another dragon, not until she attends Breezewillow Academy. When other dragons begin bullying her, Dragon must choose to stay silent and hide her pain from others or find her

voice and stand up for herself. A powerful story about being true to ourselves, Dragon takes us on a journey of self-acceptance—illustrating how the choices we make impact the magic we wield.



### **Crime Busters, Inc.: The Alligator Alibi**

by Kiki Houser

Who is kidnapping the pets of Highland Oaks housing development? Detective Chim Chim Tanner, five pounds of fierce feline courage, and partner Simone at Crime Busters, Inc. must solve the mystery and prove the innocence of their newest client—an ill-tempered alligator named Calvin.

As another victim is nabbed right under their whiskers, the Crime Busters detectives find themselves in a race against the clock. Can they crack the case before more lives are lost? For ages 7-12. Available on Amazon.com. First Place Winner, 2020 Purple Dragonfly Awards!



### **Gray Horse at Oak Lane Stable**

by Kerri Lukasavitz

What will 13-year-old Cassie do when she unexpectedly finds a note buried in her show trunk from an unknown informant ... warning her to watch out or face serious consequences? Will she cave-in, or will she achieve her riding goals? *Gray Horse at Oak Lane Stable* (Book 2) is a YA novel filled with secrets, friendships, and

the unfortunate consequences of being bullied—how people's selfish motives affect the choices we make, even as early as 8th grade.



### **The Hard Way**

by Selma P. Verde

Paul Jones started his freshman year of high school without his best friend, Desmond Peterson, who moved away during the summer. His parents wanted him to make new friends. He meets Anik Hatcher who plays *Tankgorka*, the video game Paul is into. Anik introduces him to his friends who like to pull pranks.

Little did Paul know by staying loyal to these friends he would become a key player in their most violent prank yet.

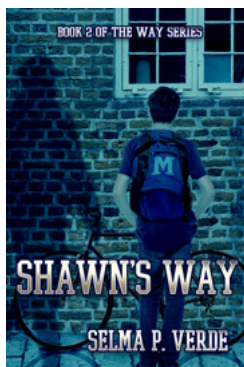


### **Love at the Center of Grief**

by Cindy McIntyre

First year of high school. First love. Hayden wears Summerfort Eagles' jerseys, but not every team member accepts this loner's sensitive nature. Gretchen's a blend of childish maturity, spouting off unique words, and Constitutional factoids—neither talent solves hoarding odd memories. Raw emotions pour

into grief diaries written to their moms, explaining how grief factors into everything. With hefty layers of grief and widowed dads in tow, the novel is equal parts heartache and laughter.



### **Shawn's Way**

by Selma P. Verde

Publishing in the Fall of 2020, book two of *The Way Series*. Shawn Townson is a freshman at Mulston High School. His older brother, Caleb, is a hot shot senior on the school's varsity baseball team. His team mate, Josh Alberts, learns his last year of varsity baseball will not happen because he spent the past year in

juvenile detention. How does Josh deal with his anger? He makes Shawn a target of his bullying.



### **Everything All At Once**

by Ivy Cayden

Nearly 16, Kila Lorens showers herself in music and lives in plush corduroys. Ethan Lorens, her cautious but optimistic older brother, focuses on his indie band's potential. Mixing their friends together on a parentless weekend induces irreversible crushes and

stinging heartache. With an elaborate, 67-song playlist to embed you in every magnetic moment and missed connection, you'll experience the rush of *Everything All At Once*, the award-winning first book in the *Chorduroys and Too Many Boys™* series.



### **Nutmeg Street: Egyptian Secrets (Book 1 in the Botanic Hill Detectives Mysteries series)**

by Sherrill Joseph

World-famous Egyptologist Dr. Winston Thornsley died suddenly two months ago in disgrace. His widow, Ida Thornsley, knows her husband was falsely accused of stealing an ancient burial urn he discovered in Egypt last summer,

but local and federal law enforcement officers are stumped. Mrs. Thornsley hires 13-year-old neighbors, the Botanic Hill Detectives—Lanny, Lexi, Moki, and Rani. A roomful of venomous snakes, the poisoned Egyptian pond, and Dragon Pit Man challenge the teens. As they unravel the sinister plot, mystery spins to danger!

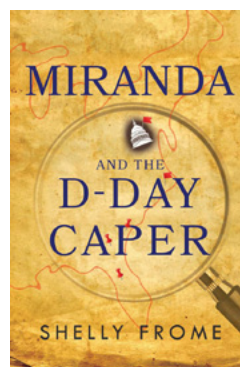


### **Eucalyptus Street: Green Curse (Book 2 in the Botanic Hill Detectives Mysteries series)**

by Sherrill Joseph

In 1945, Isabela de Cordoba's great-grandfather, silent movie actor Lorenzo de Cordoba, mysteriously hid a legendary, multimillion-dollar emerald somewhere on the family's sprawling estate. Nicknamed the "Green Curse," the emerald is blamed for the family's numerous, untimely

deaths. Enter, the Botanic Hill Detectives—Lanny, Lexi, Moki, and Rani. Using a cryptic puzzle poem for the hunt, they face eerie footsteps, secret passages, and unexplained occurrences in the adjacent cemetery. The perilous race for the de Cordoba treasure is on!

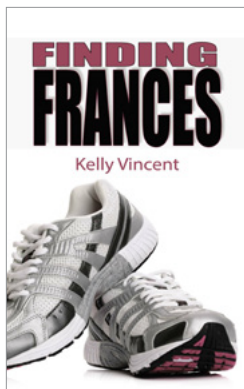


### **Miranda and the D-Day Caper**

by Shelly Frome

When her childhood confidante comes back into her life spouting conspiracy theories and showing her the collar of his lost cat, real-estate agent turned amateur sleuth Miranda Davis sets out on a mission to prevent the destruction of the country as they know it. "A fast-paced novel that will keep you on the

edge of your seat. I loved the writing style of Shelly Frome and the manner in which this novel has such an old school vibe with a trendy underlying plotline." (Five Stars) —Amy Koller, top Amazon reviewer



### **Finding Frances**

by Kelly Vincent

This authentic look at the far-reaching impact domestic violence has on its victims takes an average 15-year-old girl on a journey that helps her find strength she never knew she had. One late night, Retta Brooks returns home to find that her whole world has been tragically altered, and now she has to figure out who she is, who she can trust, and why her mom lied.

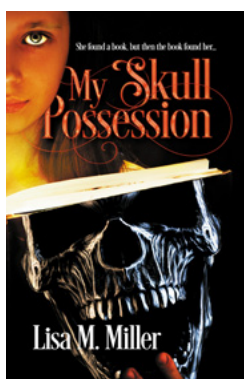


### **Signs in the Dark**

by Susan Miura

Blindfolded, gagged, and tied to a chair, 17-year-old Haylie Summers has only one goal: stay alive. Deaf since birth, she can't hear her captors and wonders if she's heading into the dark abyss of human trafficking. As Haylie plots her escape, Peruvian-born Nathan Boliva finds himself in the role

of suspect for a crime he didn't commit. Worse, anything could be happening to Haylie as he's questioned by the FBI. Anything.

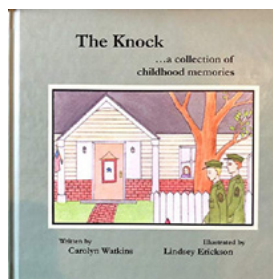


### **My Skull Possession**

by Lisa M. Miller

First Place in 2020 Purple Dragonfly Award for YA Fiction! Book-loving thrill seekers scramble to get their hands on a novel that people are dying to read. Curious 16-year-old Brighton Corley teams up with the new girl in school to discover if the mysterious book possesses supernatural power responsible

for scaring readers to death. They embark on a journey to discover the truth behind the book paralyzing their town with fear and fascination.

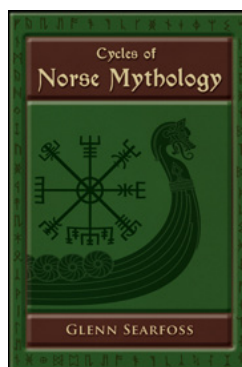


### **The Knock: A Collection of Childhood Memories**

by Carolyn Watkins

How do you handle "silence" when a parent leaves the house? *The Knock* is your springboard to help with that unknown. This story comes alive with thought-

provoking illustrations and real depictions of military life. Your family will talk together about their feelings while reading this book. This current health crisis causes the same anxiety as the "silence".

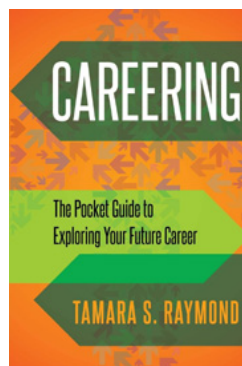


### **Cycles of Norse Mythology**

by Glenn Searfoff

*Cycles of Norse Mythology* captures the passion, cruelty, and heroism of an ancient world. From the creation of the nine worlds to the final battle of Ragnarök, this lyrical re-imagining of the Norse myths presents the gripping adventures of the Norse gods and their foes in a style to delight modern readers

of all ages. "Thrilling stories of fire and ice, love and savagery, retold in an accessible, comprehensive package."  
—Kirkus Reviews



### **Careering: The Pocket Guide to Exploring Your Future Career**

by Tamara S. Raymond

The award-winning *Careering* pocket guide offers a seamless step-by-step process to help teens avoid career traps. Topics include exploring career options; networking effectively; applying for jobs; developing interview skills; and transitioning at a new job. Engaging workbook

format lets students write plans, interests, and aspirations. Also offers advice on college immersion programs, summer camps, competitions, seasonal/entry-level jobs, internships, and even social media use—so it won't hurt their chances of finding work. [TheCareeringBook.com](http://TheCareeringBook.com).

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(Amazon reviewer) ★★★★★  
"An extremely timely message for today's readers." (Amazon reviewer) ★★★★★  
"Wouldn't I just love to have the skill!"  
(Goodreads reviewer) ★★★★★  
"Government agents hunting down a boy with alien powers; how cool is that!!!"  
(a Wishing Shelf reader) ★★★★★

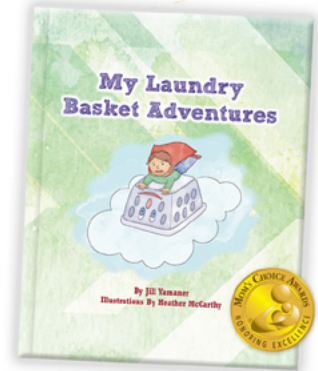


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# It's the 65<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY

**GUNSMOKE** 65<sup>TH</sup> ANNI<sup>VERSARY</sup>  
An American Institution



**Celebrating 50 Years of Television's Best Western**

**By Ben Costello**

Foreword by Jim Byrnes • Preface by Jon Voight

## of America's beloved western

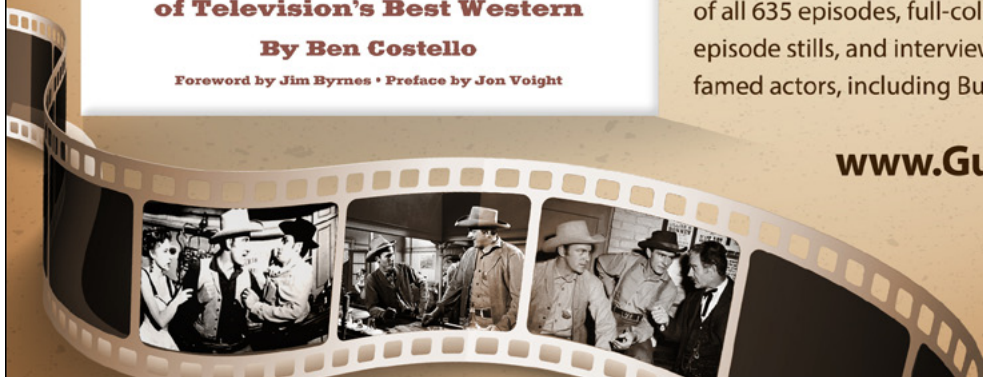
To mark the occasion, Book Street Press, an imprint of Story Monsters LLC, returns to Dodge City with a special 65th anniversary printing of the 672-page commemorative tome, *Gunsmoke: An American Institution: Celebrating 50 Years of Television's Best Western*.

Author Ben Costello provides fans with a detailed account of all 635 episodes, full-color, behind-the-scenes shots and episode stills, and interviews with some of the show's most famed actors, including Burt Reynolds and Dennis Weaver.

[www.GunsmokeBook.com](http://www.GunsmokeBook.com)



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## MONSTERS AT THE MOVIES

reviewed by Nick Spake • Grade B-



The live-action remake of *Mulan* has had a rocky road to the screen. Originally intended to release theatrically in March 2020, the film's release was continually delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In the end, it was decided that the film would go straight to the Disney+ streaming service with a premium fee of \$30. While *Mulan* looks great on an HD flat-screen television, this is a movie that would've benefited from the theatrical experience. The cinematography is sweeping, the locals are breathtaking, and the production as a whole is epic in scale. If only its visuals were reflected by an equally epic script.

At its core, *Mulan* is still about a young Chinese woman who takes her father's place in the Imperial Army, posing as a man. Where some of the other live-action Disney remakes have copied their animated predecessors almost verbatim, *Mulan* admirably aims to shake things up. There are no musical numbers or Mushu the dragon, telling a more adult story. This proves to be

the remake's greatest strength and weakness. On one hand, the emphasis on action and Chinese culture gives the film its own identity. On the other hand, much of what made the 1998 animated film special is lost, especially when it comes to *Mulan* herself.

In the original, *Mulan* was strong-willed, yet also funny, relatable, and full of passion. Here, *Mulan* remains as strong-willed as ever, although she can come off as overly serious. Granted, you could argue that this matches the serious tone that the filmmakers were going for, but she doesn't possess the energy of Disney's other action heroines like Rey from *Star Wars*, Black Widow from the MCU, or the animated *Mulan* voiced by Ming-Na Wen. Actress Liu Yifei isn't to blame, as she more or less does what was asked of her. All of the actors turn in solid performances, but the standard writing doesn't allow many of them to stand out.

What the film lacks in writing it compensates for in Niki Caro's direction. Following a slow first half, *Mulan* picks up in the second when the Imperial Army heads into battle against the Rouran invaders. The fight choreography is beyond inventive, defying gravity while also mixing in a grounded sense of realism that earns the film's PG-13 rating. The colorful sequence is full of atmospheric images that'll remain in your subconscious long after the credits roll. The climax is also an impressive feat of action that serves as a brilliant showcase for Mandy Walker's photography and Grant Major's production design. All that's missing from the final fight is a truly compelling rivalry.

The weakest element of the original *Mulan* was the by the numbers bad

guy. Here, we get another basic villain in Jason Scott Lee's Bori Khan, but a pretty cool henchwoman in Gong Li's Xian Lang. A shapeshifting witch, Xian Lang reflects who *Mulan* could become if she took a less honorable path. The parallel between these two could've gone in such a fascinating direction, but they needed more screen time together. Without giving anything away, Xian Lang's character arc comes off as incomplete and ultimately builds to an unsatisfying conclusion.

*Mulan* seems like Disney's answer to *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. When it comes to its direction, martial arts, and cinematography, *Mulan* lives up to that comparison. Whenever the characters spoke in *Crouching Tiger*, though, the dialogue always felt grand and important. Here, it feels like the characters are trying to sound grand and important, but the dialogue mostly sounds generic. *Mulan* is at its best when it shows rather than tells.

The script was rewritten by Rick Jaffa and Amanda Silver, who previously co-wrote *Rise of the Planet of the Apes*. That film was another visual extravaganza, but it fell kind of flat whenever the characters talked. As the *Apes* series progressed, however, they became less reliant on dialogue, resulting in two of the best modern action sequels. Here's hoping that *Mulan* goes in this direction, as a follow-up is already in development. For now, we have a launching point that's not on par with the animated classic, but it is honorable enough to justify the \$30 price tag. ●

**Nick Spake** has been working as a film critic for ten years reviewing movies on his website: [nickpicksflicks.com](http://nickpicksflicks.com).

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# BOOK REVIEWS



## **How to Take Care of Your Dinosaur**

by Jason Cockcroft (Nosy Crow)

Reviewer: Diana Fisher

Cleverly written, *How to Take Care of Your Dinosaur* teaches children how to take proper care of and show kindness toward their pets—and tangentially

they learn a few things about themselves. From scooping pet poop to a good bedtime routine, all bases are covered and the reward is a pet friend for life. The story and illustrations are charming. (Ages 2-5)



## **What is a Family?**

by Annette Griffin, Nichola Cowdery

(Familius) Reviewer: Darleen Wohlfeil

This sweet and interesting early reader board book echoes of the famed Shakespeare's query. What is in a name? Whether geese are found in

gaggles or dolphins in pods, a family by any other name is still as warm and loving! From A to Z, children will learn the many ways family is called to be. (Ages 2-5)



## **Becca's Big Decision**

by Jam Media (Candlewick) Reviewer:

Christine Irvin

There's a special delivery in the mail for Becca today: tickets to see the Firefly Flyby in Uncle Ned's hot-air balloon! It's the perfect adventure for the Bunch, as Becca and her friends Pedro,

Sylvia, and Russell like to call themselves. But excitement turns to worry when Becca realizes she has only *three* tickets but that there are *four* of them all together. Oh, feathers! How will Becca choose which of her friends to take on the Firefly Flyby? Based on *Becca's Bunch*, the acclaimed stop-motion animated series on Nick Jr. (Ages 2-5)



## **Grandma's Halloween Stories**

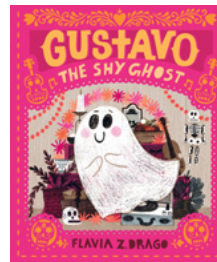
by Joan Tenner, Jesus Lopez (Wisdom

House Books) Reviewer: Dr. Dawn

Menge

Halloween is such a fun time of year. This delightful book filled with Halloween poems is a must-read to your child for the fall. "It's time for Grandma

to write another theme. To tickle your fancies about Halloween!" Pick up your copy of *Grandma's Halloween Stories* to read to your own grandchildren during the Halloween season. I guarantee they will have a sudden love of the holiday and of reading poems. (Ages 2-10)



## **Gustavo, the Shy Ghost**

by Flavia Z. Drago (Candlewick)

Reviewer: Christine Irvin

How do you get people to notice you when you're a ghost and you're shy? Gustavo loves playing his violin. He wants to make friends and share his music, but in order to do so, he has to

figure out a way to make other ghouls and goblins see him. And, he needs to do it soon, as the town will soon hold their annual Day of the Dead celebration. (Ages 3-7)



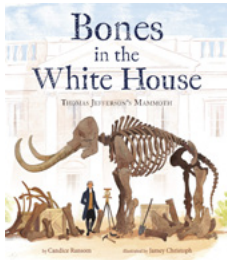
## **The Paper Kingdom**

by Helena Ku Rhee, Pascal Campion

(Random House) Reviewer: Darleen Wohlfeil

When circumstances change, a young couple has to stir their child from his warm bed to accompany them to their janitorial positions at a large office building. The unfortunate change

could have presented an unpleasant situation had it not been for the love and imagination of Daniel's parents! The story offers a look at family and the magic it can bring to any situation. It also fosters consideration with building blocks of self-development. (Ages 3-7)

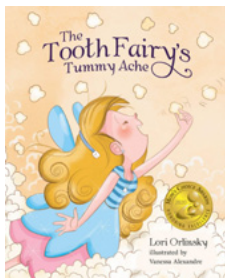


### ***Bones in the White House: Thomas Jefferson's Mammoth***

by Candice Ransom, Jamey Christoph (Doubleday Books) Reviewer: Darleen Wohlfeil

History can be like tuning into a great new gossip show. There are so many fun, little-known facts

just waiting to tickle a curious ear! Did you know our third president, Thomas Jefferson, was a collector of prehistoric bones? He was obsessed with the thought of monstrous creatures that roamed our lands. Our land was new and held many mysteries. Today, we go to museums anywhere and enjoy common finds that once just lived in the minds and imaginations of men driven to discover! Very interesting book! It opens that portal to the past and lets us discover men who dared to wonder, to seek and find, and to leave its rewards for all who came after them. (Ages 3-7)



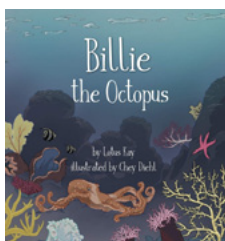
### ***The Tooth Fairy's Tummy Ache***

by Lori Orlinsky, Vanessa Alexandre (Mascot Books)

Reviewer: Darleen Wohlfeil

A sweet way to make an important point. In this very relatable story, all children will be able to process a lesson of honesty. Sometimes, circumstances

can offer an easier option when things don't go just as they should. When faced with things we don't know what to do about, we must remember that pretending or lying will never do. Honesty is the one sure way to get us through. (Ages 3-9)



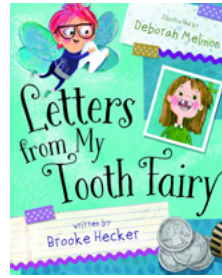
### ***Billie the Octopus***

by Lotus Kay, Chey Diehl (Eifrig Publishing)

Reviewer: Darleen Wohlfeil

*Billie the Octopus* invites you to explore the wonders of the ocean, become aware of the threats to it, and how

you can make a difference. An important message to educate children on the beauty of nature, and the endangerment of our world's balance. Fostering awareness to those rising up in the generational ranks. Connected to the Jane Goodall Institute's youth program, Roots and Shoots, it delivers a powerful plea for change. (Ages 3-10)

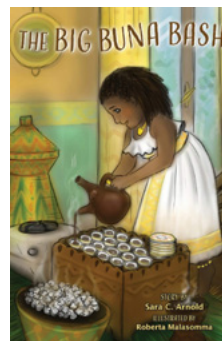


### ***Letters from My Tooth Fairy***

by Brooke Hecker, Deborah Melmon (Sleeping Bear Press)

Reviewer: Darleen Wohlfeil

What a cute story! And, an even cuter idea for all you tooth fairies out there. Through those young and often intimidating years, where our smile shifts and gaps appear, Natalie and her tooth fairy navigate a safe journey through it all. This sweet confidant teaches, assures, and brings comfort all along the way. A truly enjoyable read! (Ages 5-7)



### ***The Big Buna Bash***

by Sara C. Arnold, Roberta Malasomma (Brandylane Publishers)

Reviewer: Dr. Dawn Menge

Cultures and customs are quite different for each country. Moving to a new one can be exceedingly difficult for young children. When Almaz makes a mistake in school, she's really embarrassed! Other kids tease her

because they don't understand her Ethiopian culture. How can she use her family's traditions to make friends? This is an intriguing book that not only teaches us about an Ethiopian ceremony, but also gives children and adults a coping skill to help introduce new customs to their friends. This book is a great teaching tool for a diverse classroom. (Ages 5-8)



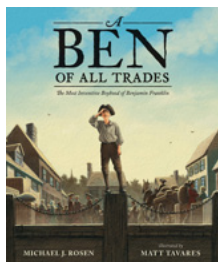
### ***Chip and Curly: The Great Potato Race***

by Cathy Breisacher, Joshua Heinsz (Sleeping Bear Press)

Reviewer: Diana Fisher

This cleverly written, spud-tacular story is entertaining and downright

funny. Meet Chip, an ambitious potato who wants to win the Spud City Festival sack race. The competition is high, especially when fast and springy Curly shows up. But kindness overrides the thrill of competition in the end, and winning gains new meaning. Prepare to laugh and cheer with the potato crowd as Chip races toward the finish line. (Ages 5-8)



**A Ben of All Trades: The Most Inventive Boyhood of Benjamin Franklin**

by Michael J. Rosen, Matt Tavares (Candlewick)

Reviewer: Dr. Dawn Menge

Did you know what Benjamin Franklin wanted to do during his life? He wanted to be a sailor. His father said, “No,” and had him apprentice at many different crafts. All the while, Benjamin kept practicing his skills as a sailor in hopes his father would change his heart. After many attempts, his father made him an apprentice in a press shop. He flourished and soon become a skilled publisher. “Not one job was exactly like the one before, but he excelled at each career by applying the diverse knowledge he’d gained and the insightful curiosity that seemed insatiable.” A beautifully illustrated book that teaches your child about Benjamin Franklin and his experiences as a child that helped him grow into who he became as a man. (Ages 5-9)

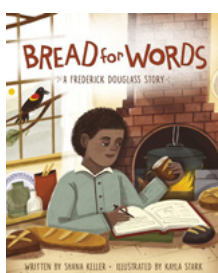


**The Little Ouch**

by Katherine Picarde, Khalima Murzina (Mascot Books)

Reviewer: Darleen Wohlfeil

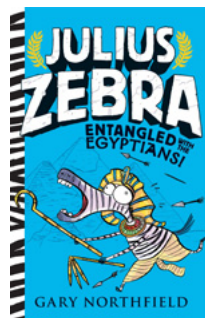
We have all been there—when our reaction was far more painful than the situation we faced. Penelope does NOT want to have her flu shot, but learns a valuable lesson in the end. This is a great story to calm the fears of little ones facing those dreaded events of life that can’t be avoided. (Ages 6-8)



**Bread for Words: A Frederick Douglass Story**

by Shana Keller, Kayla Stark (Sleeping Bear Press) Reviewer: Christine Irvin  
Frederick Douglass was born a slave. As such, he was not permitted to learn to read and write. But he learned anyway. His first teacher was Mrs. Auld, the

wife of his new owner. When she taught her own son to read, she taught Frederick, too. When her husband forbade her to teach him anymore, he found other teachers. He was sent on many errands for his new owner. When he went, he took extra bread with him. If he saw hungry boys on the streets, he would offer them his bread in exchange for their help in learning to read. It took a long time, but he finally learned to read. With that knowledge, he was able to break the bonds of slavery and eventually become a free man. Author Shana Keller has included more information about Douglass’ biography in the back of the book. (Ages 6-9)

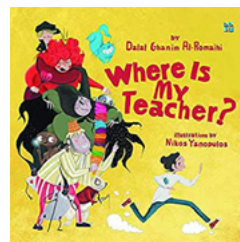


**Julius Zebra: Entangled with the Egyptians!**

by Gary Northfield (Candlewick)

Reviewer: Diana Perry

This is a cute graphic novel about the wild and crazy adventures of Julius Zebra and his jungle animal friends. They nearly sink the ship they’re on in the high seas and crash onto the shores of Egypt. Julius resembles a god predicted to come one day and the Egyptians worship him. They all lead a grand life until one day, Felix (the rock-collecting antelope) steals a sacred rock from a royal tomb. Now the same Egyptians who pampered them are out to get them. How will they escape when they’re so vastly outnumbered? This is a fast-moving, funny, and dangerous story that young mid-grade or early readers will love to read. This would make a great kids’ movie or TV pilot; these characters are great. (Ages 7-10)

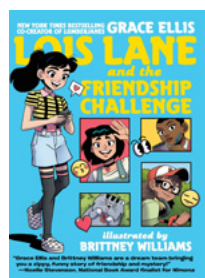


**Where Is My Teacher?**

by Dalal Ghanim Al-Romaihi, Nikos Yanopoulos (HBKU Press)

Reviewer: Darleen Wohlfeil

Anyone who has ever experienced the mounting exhilaration as their imagination breaks free and gains the momentum of a runaway train is sure to find a chuckle or two in this story. When the teacher is late, a young student has no trouble searching her mental literary database for probable cause. (Ages 7-10)

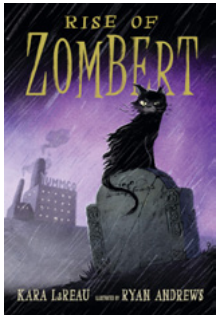


**Lois Lane and the Friendship Challenge**

by Grace Ellis, Brittney L. Williams (DC Comics)

Reviewer: Christine Irvin

This graphic novel is a story about 13-year-old Lois Lane, the same Lois Lane who later grows up and falls in love with Clark Kent, aka Superman. In this story, though, she is just a teenager. Like all teenagers, she has to make her way through life, navigating the perils of friendship and social connections. There is going to be a big bike race in Lois’ neighborhood and Lois is determined to win. She has started a new video channel to promote herself and her adventures. Her bike needs some work before the big race, so she takes it to the local bike shop. But she runs into a problem when the bike store is robbed and her bike, along with the town’s stash of fireworks, is stolen. Lois must figure out a way to find the missing fireworks, recover her stolen bicycle, and keep her friendship with her best friend intact. Can she handle all of that? (Ages 8-12)

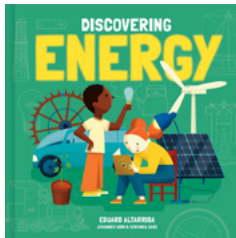


### *Rise of Zombert*

by Kara LaReau, Ryan Andrews

(Candlewick) Reviewer: Christine Irvin

When Mellie finds a scraggly looking cat behind a dumpster, she hides him in her room and names him Bert. But Bert has a bizarre way of tearing the heads off of animals, including the stuffed animals in her room and the birds and mice he catches. Mellie's best friend, Danny, thinks Bert is a zombie, because zombies eat the brains of their victims. So Danny calls Bert, "Zombert" and the name sticks. The two of them try to figure out why Zombert acts so strangely, and in the process, learn other strange things are happening in their town. This is the first book in the *Zombert* series. The author sprinkles the narrative with some cat facts and trivia, and illustrator Ryan Andrews provides some detailed black-and-white illustrations throughout the book. (Ages 8-12)

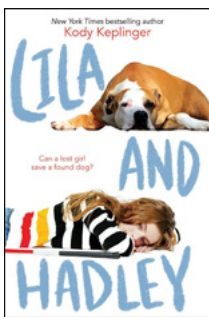


### *Discovering Energy*

by Eduard Altarriba, Johannes Hirn, Veronica Sanz (Button Books)

Reviewer: Dr. Dawn Menge

Teaching the different forms of energy can be a complex and puzzling concept for a teacher or a parent. This beautifully illustrated book covers many forms of energy and how we've come to understand its origins. What exactly is energy? "Aristotle, the clever ancient Greek, realized that sometimes nothing is happening, but it might." How did sailors learn to harness the wind? Centuries of sailing. "As far as we know, the first sails were used about 5,500 years ago on the River Nile." If your child is intrigued by how energy works, this is a wonderful book to add to your library. (Ages 8-12)



### *Lila and Hadley*

by Kody Keplinger (Scholastic)

Reviewer: Christine Irvin

Hadley has a lot to be angry about: Her mom was sent to jail and she has to move in with her older sister who lives in another state. She has to leave her friends and her school behind. And, if that wasn't enough, she is going blind and there's nothing she can do to stop it. Hadley does a lot of feeling sorry for herself until she meets Lila. Lila is a pit bull mix that has been abandoned at the local dog rescue where Hadley's sister works. Lila hasn't found a forever home because she is extremely anti-social. But, the two strike up a friendship of sorts. Lila comes to live with Hadley so Hadley can train her, and in the process, the two learn valuable lessons together. (Ages 8-12)



### *300 Minutes of Danger*

by Jack Heath (Sterling Children's Books)

Reviewer: Christine Irvin

This book contains 10 short stories, each featuring a different teenager in immediate danger. The action in each story takes place within a 30-minute time range, hence the title for the book. George finds himself in a failing airplane with no pilot, no engine, and a ripped parachute. Milla gets covered in radioactive waste as her Hazmat suit runs out of air. Nassim is poisoned and has only 30 minutes to live before the poison kills him. Each story is fast-paced. (Ages 8-12)



### *The Light at the Lake*

by Sarah R. Baughman (Little, Brown Books for Young Readers)

Reviewer: Diana Perry

Twelve-year-old Addie should stay away from Maple Lake. After all, her twin brother, Amos, drowned there only a few months ago. But its crisp, clear water runs in Addie's veins, and the notebook Amos left behind—filled with clues about a mysterious creature that lives in the lake's inky-blue depths—keeps calling her back. This story is heart-warming, is laced with scientific facts, and teaches how to overcome challenges. (Ages 8-12)

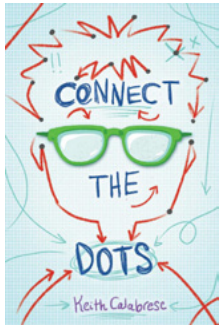


### *The Ice Garden*

by Guy Jones (Chicken House)

Reviewer: Diana Perry

Allergic to the sun, Jess sets out to explore the world she longs to be a part of by night. One night, tired of peeking at the other children beyond her curtained house, she sneaks out to explore the empty playground she's longed to visit. Beyond, she discovers a garden made entirely of ice. This is her place: a Narnia with flying elephant mice and ice apples with shining gold liquid inside. But Jess soon discovers that she's not alone. And her presence there could be destroying its very existence. Young readers will find danger, courage, and perseverance in this heart-warming story of overcoming pitfalls of life. (Ages 8-12)



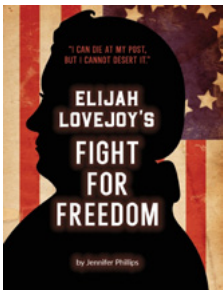
### **Connect the Dots**

by Keith Calabrese (Scholastic)

Reviewer: Christine Irvin

Is there anything more random than middle school? Sixth graders Oliver and Frankie don't think so. Their first few weeks have been full of weirdness—lunchtime thievery, free beef jerky, and Matilda, the mysterious new girl who knows everything about them

but has a lot to learn about making friends. *Connect the Dots* is an intricately plotted story about the power of human connection and a chain of “coincidences” so serendipitous they must be destiny at work. (Ages 8-12)



### **Elijah Lovejoy's Fight for Freedom**

by Jennifer Phillips

(Independently Published) Reviewer: Darleen Wohlfeil

Life flows in circles and cycles, and history tends to repeat itself. Hopefully, as we grow as a people, and develop as communities, we will one day begin to learn and outgrow the smallness

of times that preceded us. Elijah Lovejoy, a white newspaper editor of the 1800s, believed in the freedom his newly found country proclaimed. He lived and he died for those beliefs. It was freedom he cherished. Whether freedom for all men, for women, for the right to believe and voice that belief freely. That's what made these new United States powerful. Lovejoy's death turned slavery into a national debate and helped mobilize the abolitionist movement. (Ages 9-12)



### **Remembering Green: An Ojibwe Girl's Tale**

by Lisa Olson, Lauren Rutledge (Eifrig Publishing) Reviewer: Darleen Wohlfeil

*Remembering Green* features Wenonah, an Ojibwe girl from the Lac Du Flambeau tribe in northern Wisconsin in

the early 1900s during the forced assimilation period of Native American children into the white culture. Often, we cannot prevent what comes, what demands are laid upon us. But we all have the power over our responses. Times, circumstances, and people can force conformity, but no one can possess who we are. That can only be lost by our own forfeit. We are not defined by our outward situations or circumstances, but by the heart that beats within us. (Ages 10+)



### **Legend of the Storm Sneezer**

by Kristiana Sfirlea (Monster Ivy

Publishing) Reviewer: Christine Irvin  
Thirteen-year-old Rose Skylar sneezed a magical storm cloud at birth, and it's followed her around ever since. But when Stormy causes one too many public disasters, Rose is taken to Heartstone, an asylum for unstable magic. Its location? The heart of a

haunted forest whose trees have mysteriously turned to stone. They say the ghosts are bound to the woods ... then why does Rose see them drifting outside the windows at night? Guided by her future selves via time traveling letters, Rose must solve the mystery of the specters and the stone trees before the ghosts unleash a legendary enemy that will make their own spooks look like a couple of holey bed sheets.... Kristiana Sfirlea incorporates some imaginative literary devices in the telling of the story, interrupting the story with input from both the past and future Rose. (Ages 10-12)



### **Pippa Park Raises Her Game**

by Erin Yun (Fabled Films Press )

Reviewer: Christine Irvin

Readers will cheer on Korean American Pippa Park in this compelling middle grade reimagining of *Great Expectations*. Navigating friendships and cyberbullying at a new school, Pippa reinvents herself and discovers who she really is. Author Erin Yun

includes several extra items in the back of the book: a list of 12 Discussion Questions about events in the story; a Question-and-Answer segment with the author; and a glossary of Korean words that are used throughout the text. (Ages 10-12)

To submit your book for review, email Cristy Bertini at [cristy@storymonsters.com](mailto:cristy@storymonsters.com) for submission guidelines.



# New this fall from OC Publishing!

**Hambone: Why Pigs Have Curly Tails**  
by Jackie Arnason

"Rich in vocabulary development with a storyline that is both enduring and layered in depth and lessons."

- Linda Whittle, Elementary and Special Learning Support Teacher

"A unique and exciting tale about perseverance, kindness, and a search for excitement in our lives."

- Laura Shepherd, Literacy/Numeracy Specialist



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[www.ocpublishing.com](http://www.ocpublishing.com)

Join Jazzy and Kettle on an adventure of discovery, friendship, and **FUN!**

"Absolutely wonderful children's book! Two appealing young folks manage to 'see tomorrow'! Don't miss this one if you have little people who want inspiration!"

- Bestselling Author, Naomi Wolf

"A great diverse read that explores themes of friendship, racial and gender equality, and respect. Such a great book for young readers ages 5-8, where friendship and exploration collide."

- Kimicia Byrd, M.Ed.,  
Primary School Teacher



[www.jazzyandkettle.com](http://www.jazzyandkettle.com)

Available at Amazon, Barnes & Noble,  
and Archway Publishing

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**TEACHER**

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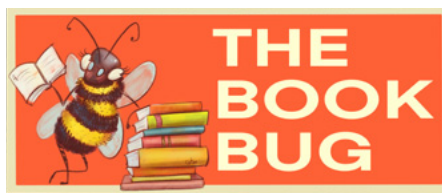
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Story Monsters wants to know about a special teacher, administrator, or support staff member who has positively impacted your life. Submit an essay (500 words or less) telling us why your teacher is special!

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# A BREAKFAST MEETING AND A SYRUP SOLVE

by Raven Howell

**M**y husband and one of my sons have the habit of meandering randomly to the refrigerator, opening it, and then lingering there for a minute in what I call a visual food raid. Often it gets to the point where I ask, “Is there something in particular you want?” as the cooled air slowly, continuously drifts out into the warm kitchen. The answer is along the lines of, “Not really, just looking...” but that will snap them out of it, and the fridge door gets shut again.

Still, there are times snacking hands quickly reach in for that leftover breakfast pancake or cinnamon French toast I wrapped up. Those are devoured as a late night snack, often with a smear of strawberry jam on top. And that reminds me of the zany adventures children’s author Josh Funk has been writing about in his *Lady Pancake and Sir French Toast* book series. I decided a Pancake and French Toast invitation to The Book Bug was overdue.

Before I’m directly in touch with Lady Pancake and Sir French Toast themselves, I sneak in a few questions just between Josh and myself.

**The Book Bug:** What’s always stashed in your refrigerator that you haven’t gotten tired of munching on?

**Josh:** Hummus. And something to dip into it. Carrots, celery, crackers—pretty much anything that starts with the letter C. Candy corn. I’ll dip anything in hummus.

**The Book Bug:** What’s usually stashed around your writing area when you’re working there?

**Josh:** Coffee. Which I realize also starts with the letter C. But I never mix coffee with hummus. Although maybe I should...?

**The Book Bug:** No. I’m thinking that may be a food and beverage clash! Share with us one of the funniest questions from a student.

**Josh:** I wrote a book called *Dear Dragon*, illustrated by Rodolfo Montalvo. It’s about a boy and a dragon who are pen pals, but neither realizes they’re writing to a different species. I recently read it for a virtual story time—I’ve been streaming them during quarantine—and a child asked me: “Why didn’t they just Zoom?” It took me a second to process the question,





Still in the fridge and behind the Swiss chard,  
in their apartment on Crust Boulevard,  
prepping a tea party, ready to host,  
stood Lady Pancake beside Sir French Toast.

Just as they finished the boiling and baking,  
Pancake said, "All of my muscles are aching."  
"Also," said Toast, "my complexion is pale."  
Pancake then screamed, "Are we both going stale?"

but once I realized what he meant, I cracked up. But frankly, it's a totally valid question (although it would have ruined the entire premise of the book).

**The Book Bug:** Very funny! And you're right. It's a valid question, and a practical one. What are your favorite activities outside of writing?

**Josh:** I like to read (obviously). I play video games (the best ones have the best stories). I like movies and TV, too. I also drink coffee and eat hummus.

**The Book Bug:** Corn chips! That's what I like with hummus, and it happens to start with the letter C also! Ha! Okay, moving on. The latest in the *Lady Pancake and Sir French Toast* series is titled *Short & Sweet*. You can't use the words "short" or "sweet" in describing it. Instead, what other three words would you use?

**Josh:** Adorable. Silly. Delicious.

**The Book Bug:** Perfect! That wraps up the time I have with Josh before the pancake and toast crew arrive. They look, well, rather scrumptious, and assure me I am free to ask anything I'd like. With nothing off-limits, we begin.

It's wonderful to meet you both.

**Lady Pancake:** It's delightful to meet you, too.

**Sir French Toast:** Likewise.

**The Book Bug:** Lady Pancake, you look divine! What do you do to keep in shape?

**LP:** To stay flat, I follow one simple rule: Never Do Crunches.

**The Book Bug:** Sir French Toast, what do you consider your strangest habit?

**SFT:** I once fell into a jar of jam. Ever since then I've loved the smell, so I sometimes dab a little jam in my moustache so I can smell it all day. But please don't share that detail ... it's rather embarrassing.

**The Book Bug:** Sorry, we love silly shares! I understand you both enjoy reading books as well as starring in them. Your thrilling experiences, as documented by your author, portray mysteries to be solved, adventures to be had, and plenty of drama. What are your favorite book genres?

**LP:** Anything picture books, of course!

**SFT:** I couldn't agree more. I recently read *Don't Let the Pecan*



*Drive the Bus*. It was hilarious. *Wolfie the Gummy* was also a hoot!

**LP:** I like the classics like *Sylvester and the Magic Pepper* and *Amelia Vidalia*.

**SFT:** And *The Book with No Pickles*. Brilliant!

**The Book Bug:** What cookbooks would you recommend?

**SFT:** We love *VegNews* magazine.

**LP:** Yes. Anything from *VegNews* is delicious. And our favorite show is *Sweet Potato Soul* on YouTube!

**SFT:** Because we're vegan, of course!

**LP:** And we're sweet.

**The Book Bug:** What books should teachers expect you to share during a classroom visit?

**SFT:** I'd probably go with *The Great Pasta Escape* by Miranda Paul and Javier Joaquin.

**LP:** Or maybe *Peanut Butter and Brains* by Joe McGee and Charles Santoso.

**The Book Bug:** These days, we may feel a bit more stressed than usual. As written about in your new book, *Short & Sweet*, you both had to deal with the fear of going stale. What advice could you share with us about getting out of a slump?

**LP:** Try to act young again. Pretend to be a kid. Get out and play!

**SFT:** Yes. Like in the book, imagining ourselves as toddlers certainly rejuvenated us.

**LP:** It was just our imagination, right?

**SFT:** It must have been.

**LP:** Maybe we should check with Baron von Waffle?

**The Book Bug:** Hmm ... I suppose it can't hurt to check with a waffle for some sage advice. Let's discuss with Professor Biscotti who, though good intended, uses a faulty gadget, creating more problems.

**SFT:** Well, sometimes experiments don't go as planned. That's why they're called experiments and not expermanents.

**LP:** I don't think expermanent is a word.

**SFT:** I know. I said that's why they're called experiments and not expermanents.

**LP:** But expermanent doesn't actually mean anything.

**SFT:** Then maybe I just need to experiment more with the word expermanent.

**LP:** There is no word expermanent!

**SFT:** Ugh. Now I've said expermanent so many times it's lost all meaning.

**The Book Bug:** If you both had a gadget to use for everyone in the world in a kind and loving way, what would it do or what message would it send?

**LP:** An automatic—

**SFT:** Syrup dispenser!

**LP:** That's exactly what I was going to say!

**SFT:** That way the world will—

**LP:** NEVER run out of syrup again!

**SFT:** Precisely!

**The Book Bug:** Lady Pancake and Sir French Toast, it's been a treat to meet you! Thanks for joining me.

**LP:** It's truly been our pleasure.

**SFT:** Hopefully we'll be able to expermanent again someday....

**LP:** \*eyeroll\*

After that meeting, I'm a little hungry. Still, I'll stick to my oatmeal and scrambled eggs this morning with a cup of jasmine green tea and honey. ●

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**Raven Howell** is an award-winning children's author and poet. [ravenhowell.com](http://ravenhowell.com)

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# CHOOSE YOUR WORDS!

by Olivia Amiri

I don't know about you, but I grew up learning about the history of racism, and how far it dates back. I recently read an article about a fight between someone who believed a name was derogatory, and a town that didn't. Slurs, and derogatory names, have an effect. Words are so powerful that they can repress, empower, and scare people. Some words have such a history of terror, repression, and even genocide that they aren't spoken often. Essentially it's not the vowels, or even the letters that create discrimination, it's what they mean. What people are saying when they say them. So many of us are educated to repress and discriminate by our family of origin, religion, and sometimes even our schools.

You could say poor people with no education don't know better because, most of the time, they are taught by their parents, who were taught by their parents (and so forth)

what's right and wrong, etc. Some are simply afraid of new ideology and philosophy, and would rather keep on believing the same things because changing or evolving is too fearful for them. This is a time for new thinking. A time to educate yourself, speak your voice, and connect to your heart. Now is a time to think and be aware of the words you choose to use and the names you pick for people, places, and things. By being kind to all humans and showing respect, you will surely get the same treatment! ●



**Olivia Amiri** 13-year-old Olivia Amiri is a little girl with big advice! Sharing insights and observations on the world around us, her message is clear: kids are still the best teachers to remind grown-ups of the simple joys in life. [livelife.com](http://livelife.com)



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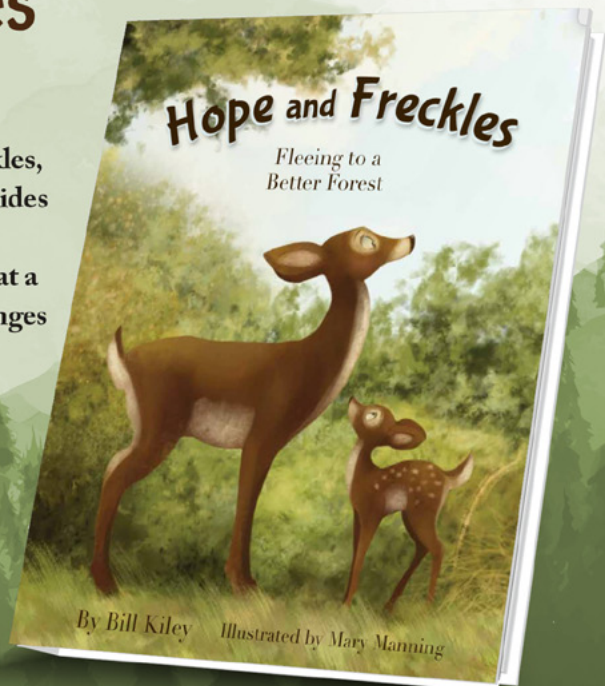
Hope, a white-tailed deer, and her spotted fawn, Freckles, are facing hunger and danger in their forest. Hope decides that they must leave their home and go in search of a better place where they will be safe. When they arrive at a new forest, Hope and Freckles face unexpected challenges that will force them apart. Will they be reunited?

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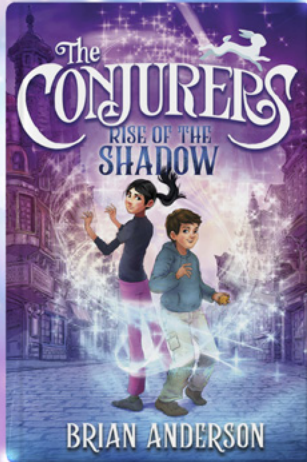
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# MATTHEW GOLLUB

by Julianne Black DiBlasi

Have you ever wanted to ask an author a question? You read an amazing book or get lost in a series that becomes a part of your daily thought patterns and you just have to know ... what were they thinking? How did they come up with that? Was someone in their real life ever as mean/smart/funny/romantic as that character they wrote so convincingly about? Sometimes we weave our own idea of what we think may have happened and leave it there. But still other times ... we just have to know, right?

**E**very now and again, we fall innocently into a picture book that really has it all. Motion, color, rhythm, education, imagination, and boundless energy. And then we read it again. And again. And then yet again with the soundtrack. *Jazz Fly 3* is an amazing, multi-leveled, bilinguistically delicious party, but I'll let the author fill you in!

**Q:** I'm in love with *Jazz Fly 3* on so many levels! The text winds deliciously around rhythms, color, and different languages. How do you juggle these concepts in your head as you create?

**A:** It's really gratifying to hear that you appreciate the more adventurous elements of this book. Believe me, there were times I had serious doubts as to whether a book this unique would "fly" (pardon the pun). *Jazz Fly 3* is an extension of many previous works, some set to music, some traditional books. It also stems from my lifelong passions for writing, jazz drumming, and speaking foreign languages. Even so, over the course of writing 17 drafts, I needed some tricks to keep those things straight. In the margins, I'd write cues like "Swing!" or "Reggae!" as reminders of which rhythms to use in the musical score. And I color-coded the phrases in languages other than English: blue for French, cinnamon for Spanish, and green for jazz scat (which the *Jazz Fly* speaks). I figured the colors would be interesting for young people and help them look up unfamiliar words in the glossary.

**Q:** So much of your work has color kind of bursting through the rhyme, it reminds me of the concept of synesthesia (senses that cross and combine so a person might see a color associated with a letter or smell a sound). Did you have a hard time working with the illustrator or did it all just come together as a pleasant surprise?

**A:** Now "synesthesia" is a word no one has asked about in my assemblies! We do make a point to coordinate the pictures not just with the written word but with the audio that readers hear at each juncture. If seven musicians back my narration at one point, those musicians must appear in the drawing. If the rhythm or trumpet solo is alluring, the lighting and mood of the illustration should reflect that.

The illustrator Karen Hanke and I actually began *Jazz Fly 3* as a traditional 32-page book, same as the original and *Jazz Fly 2*. After months of wrestling with sketches and trying to fit the text into that format, I realized I'd either need to cut major scenes—or expand the book to 40 pages. (In printing, 40 pages is the logical step up from 32 since picture books usually consist of 8-page "signatures," or page groups.) Once we settled on 40 pages, we felt we could make *Jazz Fly 3* really distinctive. Fortunately, Karen both designs books and illustrates. And we happen to live in the same town. During the two-plus years we worked on *Jazz Fly 3*, many times we were able to sit down in person—in my office or





a coffee house—and carefully think through the drawings for each scene.

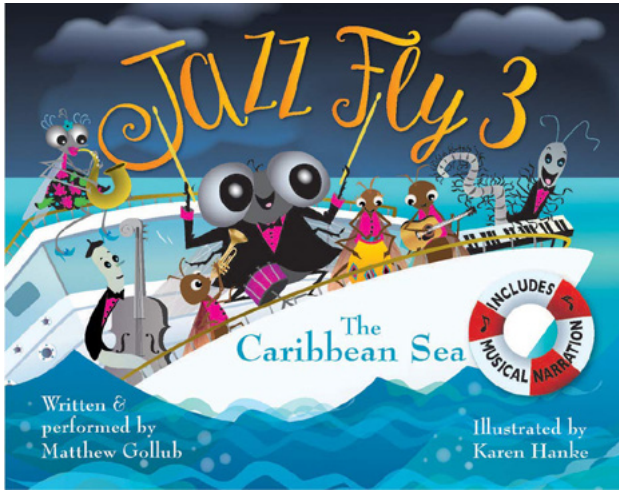
**Q:** When I first wrote the book review for *Jazz Fly 3*, my initial reaction was “This book is like a Spanish lesson, French lesson, music lesson, and Creative Writing course had a wild party and woke up with matching tattoos....” Do you feel like instructors are missing out by teaching those disciplines individually?

**A:** Such a funny image about the matching tattoos! On a Caribbean cruise, you’d really experience passengers from different cultures, musicians from different islands. Yummy foods, zippy dance steps. Here, the characters just happen to be insects. But scratch below the surface of anything

and you find a kaleidoscope of interconnected disciplines. I think young people do miss out when we teach “language arts,” “math,” and “music” etc., without encouraging them to explore the connections.

That’s one reason I wrote detailed Author Notes at the end of each book in the series. It’s valuable to enjoy the musical stories. But it can shape a child’s outlook to also appreciate the genius of African-Americans who invented jazz. And to see how rainforest flora and fauna and the history of the Caribbean region have contributed to some of the world’s most popular music.

The beauty of picture books is you can invite exploration while keeping a child focused on what happens next.



Sometimes, I have to remind myself that the story itself is what matters most. My wife, a scientist, is good at letting me know when something isn't quite making sense!

**Q:** I feel like the book could be used in an elementary music class—the language, the musical education, the song component, you even have a quick overview of the geography! What is your educational background and do you ever see yourself releasing this as an instructional unit download for classes?

**A:** Oh, yes, these books are made with teachers in mind! I post free lesson plans to all my books on my website [matthewgollub.com](http://matthewgollub.com). I've even posted coloring sheets of the fly and Nancy the Gnat, etc. One lesson plan for *Jazz Fly 3* includes a vocabulary chart of words borrowed from French, like Menu, Bouquet, Restaurant, and Depot. In my assemblies and family night talks, I'm always pushing vocabulary. Knowing more words makes it easier to read, and reading makes it easier to know more words!

My educational background (B.A. degree from The University of the Pacific) involved majors in International Studies and Japanese language. My years of study and work overseas also made a huge impact. Through my own slow starts, I realized kids should start learning foreign languages early on. When you think of it, middle school, when I first studied Spanish, is probably the worst time imaginable to start. You're dealing with growth spurts, acne, hyperawareness of peers, and here's the French teacher asking you to hold your lips forward and pronounce the "eur" in ordinateur (computer). Good luck with that!

**Q:** What was the creation road map like for this series and how does *Jazz Fly 3*, in your opinion, compare with the first two *Jazz Fly* books?

**A:** The basic road map for each book has been to write scads of drafts of the manuscript first. I "test drive" the story, performing it for live audiences. Then I begin working with Karen on sketches. I also sit down with audio whiz Tim Gennert, my co-producer of the musical narrations. I lean heavily on Tim for planning and organizing the recording. About this time, I'm also rounding up professional musicians who I feel would be just right for the project. Special shout-outs to Ylonda Nickell, the "Queen of Saxophone," who played on the audio of all three books and to Rubén Valtierra (keyboardist for Weird Al Yankovic) who appeared on *Jazz Fly 3*! Other "heavy cats" on *Jazz Fly 3* that jazz-loving readers may want to check out: Randy Vincent (guitar), Carlos Caro (percussion), Kendrick Freeman (drums), and Pierre Archain (bass).

The original *Jazz Fly* was the simplest production. It's about a fly that speaks "jazz" but succeeds in the end by also learning to speak like a pig, a donkey, and other animals. I wrote it as a sort of commentary on the benefits of learning to speak more than one language. The fly also demonstrates improvisation, his hallmark.

In *Jazz Fly 2: The Jungle Pachanga*, the fly's (now successful) band is on tour. They have to communicate in Spanish with animals they meet in the rainforest: a sloth, a spider monkey, and a macaw. The story and music are a bit more sophisticated as the book introduces Spanish words and Latin jazz.

In *Jazz Fly 3: The Caribbean Sea*, The Jazz Bugs' international tour continues. This story is a tad longer and more varied than the first two, probably ideal for ages 6 through 9. The twists and turns of this ocean adventure feature phrases in





Spanish and French, as mentioned, and Caribbean music styles like reggae and cha-cha-chá. Face to face with creatures of the deep, the fly pulls out all the stops linguistically—then finally breaks through by counting to seven in French! "Language, rhythm, color, life!" That's been my mantra and common thread through the series.

**Q:** Can we ask what is coming next? Any ideas for *Jazz Fly 4*?

**A:** I do have some ideas for *Jazz Fly 4*, also a prequel to the original *Jazz Fly*. At the moment, I'm putting together an English/Spanish bilingual edition of my book set in Mexico, *The Moon Was at a Fiesta*, illustrated by the renowned Oaxacan artist Leovigildo Martínez. We were psyched when that book was recently published in Japanese.

**Q:** How can people follow your work and contact you?

**A:** I welcome readers to explore [matthewgollub.com](http://matthewgollub.com). Click "Contact" to get in touch or to inquire about my school assemblies (virtual or live) or to sign up for my occasional emails. Also, let's connect on social media! I'm more active on some platforms than others: Facebook @Matthew-Gollub-Author-Storyteller-Bilingual-Presenter, Youtube: @MatthewGollub, Twitter: @MatthewGollub. ●

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**Julianne Black DiBlasi** • Mom, indie author, illustrator, fine artist, graphic designer, SCBWI member • [krakensky.com](http://krakensky.com)

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