

In Her Own Words

5 Questions with Jennifer Plecas, Author and Illustrator of Pretend

Imagine a world where your couch becomes a boat, your staircase transforms into a mountain, and your dad acts as the best adventuring companion you could ever find. In children's book *Pretend*, anything is possible! Playing make believe, a father and son bond and learn appreciation for each other. Because of the amusing illustrations, the story appeals to elementary grade students and captivates early learners. Model Life Magazine interviewed author and illustrator Jennifer Plecas to learn more about her writing.



MLM: Did you feel that you had more creative freedom being the author and illustrator of the book?

JP: Being author/illustrator is a nice place to be, since I can develop the art and the words together, and if I find I'm stuck with writing, sometimes I can work things out through in the art, and vice versa.

MLM: How did you develop your characters?

JP: With the illustrations for *Pretend*, I wanted the art to capture the imaginary play that was unfolding, but I didn't want the imaginary story scenes to overpower the everyday scenes too dramatically. To me, as much as the story was about imagination and play it was also about the relationship between the father and son, and the give-and-take that takes place as people navigate creative play. I also felt that keeping the art somewhat loose kept the concept of play and pretend simple, lighthearted, and open.

MLM: Did anything specific inspire the story?

JP: Having my own children certainly inspired the story and characters. I played a lot this way with them myself, but also watching my son (in particular) and his

friends swoosh around the living room with capes and light sabers, making up various scenarios and negotiated agreed-upon superpowers or dilemmas.

MLM: Do you have any upcoming projects?

JP: I have several projects underway. Recently, another book I wrote and illustrated about three kittens and their growing friendship was released—*Olive's Perfect World*, with Philomel Books. I'm finishing art for another book for Philomel which I've also written, called, "Bah! Said the Baby!" which is a humorous look at a family working to understand their youngest member's early speech. I'm also completing artwork for *I Fly by Bridget Hoot* for Henry Holt—a book about flies. But cute! And funny. The main fly character looks kind of like a little Columbo, without the cigarette. I'm also working on other various writing/illustration projects, and trying to get up to speed on animating digitally.

MLM: How can your readers connect with you and find out more about your work?

JP: Readers can connect with me through my website at jenniferplecas.com.



BOOKS TO INSPIRE CREATIVITY



As the season of spring begins, ignite your child's imagination with some lighthearted, creative stories. Children will love being able to escape this world and experience another. Bringing whimsical ideas to life, the following books have humorous illustrations and imaginative story lines that captivate readers. Imaginative writing describes the unusual as normal, which is entertaining for children of all ages. While participating in the spring book club, read aloud to your child to help them develop literacy skills and strategies important to their learning.

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll

Classic chapter book *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* whimsically describes a girl's experiences when she falls down a rabbit hole. If you choose the traditional version of the book written by Carroll, do a read aloud for your child using dramatic voices for the characters to help your child's comprehension of the story. As an entertaining activity after reading, watch the movie version to compare the book with the movie. Although adaptations of the book are appropriate for babies and early learners, the traditional version is excellent for children who have a long attention span.

Every Thing On It by Shel Silverstein

As a collection of poetry appealing to early elementary students, *Every Thing On It* is the newest book by Silverstein. Silverstein's gift as an author is to bring imaginative tales to life with humorous short poems and entertaining illustrations. Your taste buds will beg you for a tasty meal as you read the poem "Italian Food," which celebrates some of the best Ital-

ian dishes. When your child reads the poetry aloud, they can develop improved fluency in their reading. Although Silverstein died years ago, the book contains previously unpublished poems.

Stand Tall, Molly Lou Melon by Patty Lovell and David Catrow

Celebrate the underdog with a heartfelt story about an unusual girl who accomplishes extraordinary feats. Listening to a grandmother's advice, character Molly Lou Melon shows that real confidence comes from the inside as she reacts to the bitter words of a bully. Because the story describes a girl moving to a new school, the picture book can successfully help early learners in making difficult transitions in their lives.

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