

# Story Monsters Ink

ISSUE 9, 2024



The Literary Magazine for Teachers, Librarians, and Parents

James Canty III

Anne Lacourge

Charlie Grandy

Betty Jean Craig

Jamar Nicholas

William Bee

Laura Purdie Salas

From the Mysterious Mind of

## Maureen Johnson



**PLUS**

Judy Newman

Conrad's Classroom

Monsters at the Movies

Fall Reading List

Book Reviews

and More!



## MEET THE TEAM

### PUBLISHER

Linda F. Radke, Linda@StoryMonsters.com

Author: Linda F. Radke

### EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Cristy Bertini, Cristy@StoryMonsters.com

### WRITERS

Julianne Black DiBlasi, Raven Howell

### SPECIAL CONTRIBUTORS

Judy Newman, Olivia Amiri, Deedee Cummings,

Terrel Lefferts, Nick Spake

### DESIGN & WEB MANAGEMENT

Jeff Yesh

### PROOFREADER & CURRICULUM WRITER

Deb Greenberg

### ADVERTISING

Cristy Bertini, Cristy@StoryMonsters.com

### BOOK REVIEWERS

Christine Irvin, Dawn Menge, Cynthia Kern OBrien,

Kimberly Waters, Mark Graham, Rachelle Stanger

Cover photo by Angela Altus

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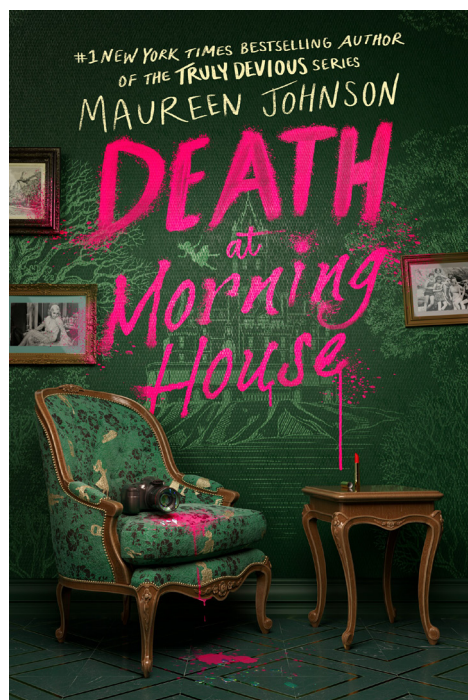
**Named Among the  
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"Best Publisher of a Literary Magazine"  
and "Best Editorial Director"

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## COMMENTS

Tell us what you think of this issue!  
[cristy@storymonsters.com](mailto:cristy@storymonsters.com)  
[linda@storymonsters.com](mailto:linda@storymonsters.com)

# A Towering Tale of Kindness!

**Welcome to Pisa!**  
**I'm thrilled you dropped by.**  
**I'm Bella the Bell Tower—**  
**Eight stories high!**

And so begins the uplifting rhyming tale told by Bella, Italy's famous Leaning Tower of Pisa. For hundreds of years, Bella has been proud of her gravity-defying tilt. But her confidence cracks one day when she overhears mean words on the piazza. Bella responds by changing in a way that leaves residents of Pisa and visitors from around the world worried that the treasured landmark will never be the same again!



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

Available on Amazon.com

# A Sweet Adventure!

Maddy Magurk embarks on an unexpected adventure when she discovers the magic of maple syrup. Starting in her own backyard, Maddy's syrup-making journey faces initial setbacks, but a heartfelt connection with her trees transforms her syrup into a sensation.

How will Maddy fare at the renowned Maple Syrup Festival?  
Will her perseverance pay off?

A charming and well-crafted children's book with a heartwarming story and engaging characters, *The Maple Syrup Maven* will inspire young readers to overcome adversity and chase their dreams.



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From the Mysterious Mind of

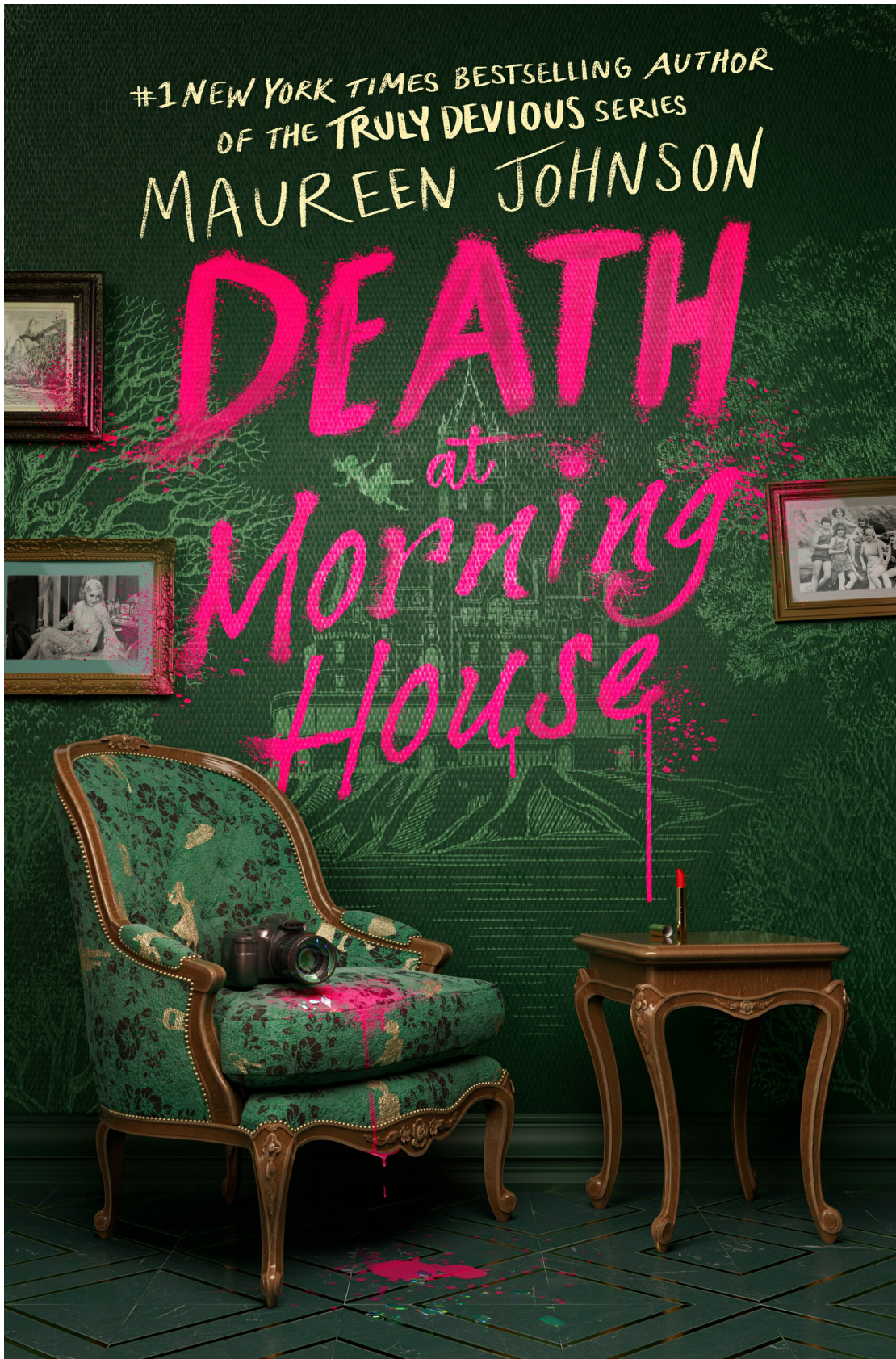
# Maureen Johnson

Comes a new stand-alone YA about a teen who uncovers a mystery while working as a tour guide on an island and must solve it before history repeats itself. With her house-sitting career up in flames, it seems the universe owes Marlowe a new summer job, and that's how she ends up at Morning House, a mansion built on an island in the 1920s and abandoned shortly thereafter. It's easy enough, giving tours. Low risk of fire. High chance of getting bored talking about stained glass and nut cutlets and Prohibition.

Oh, and the deaths. Did anyone mention the deaths? We had to get to the bottom of this, so we went straight to the source....



photo by Angela Altuls



**Tell us a bit about your background/life growing up.**

I'm from Philadelphia, which I use as an explanation for about 50 percent of the things I say and do. I was a non-Catholic who went to a Catholic girls' school. That's my explanation for the other 50 percent.

**Tell us about your career and where you worked before you became a writer. What inspired those career choices? We heard that you worked in a haunted house-themed restaurant. That must have been fun!**

Like a lot of writers, I had dozens of jobs to pay my way through school and to survive before I was published. Restaurant jobs. Temp jobs. Editorial and writing jobs. Working in a haunted house-themed restaurant with talking skeletons was probably the most sensible of them all.

**What inspired you to become a writer?**

It's all I ever really wanted to be, and I have no other marketable skills by design.

### **Tell us about *Death at Morning House*! What inspired the book?**

Between upstate New York and Canada, there is a massive river called the St. Lawrence. Along a stretch of it, there is a scattering of almost two thousand islands. For some reason they decided to call it the Thousand Islands, robbing themselves of hundreds more. The water is glass-bottle green and very pure and clear. It looks like the tropics.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, this was the playground of the ultra-rich. Wealthy families bought up the islands and built mansions and even castles. They'd spend the summer yachting from door to door. *Death at Morning House* takes place on Ralston Island, a recently reopened manor that has been falling apart since 1932, when two of the Ralston family's seven children died on a sunny afternoon and the house was shuttered. There were always questions about what happened that day.

In the present, the house is reopened to tourists—repaired, wallpapers reproduced, furniture removed from storage. Enter Marlowe Wexler, just a girl trying to woo another girl and who accidentally burned down a house in the process. These things happen. Marlowe is brought in from out of town to take an empty post as a tour guide. No one bothered to tell her that she's filling in for a dead guy.

There have been a lot of deaths on Ralston Island. There will be more.

This is a murder mystery and a queer romance. It's a cautionary tale as well. The stories that affect us the most are the ones we refuse to tell or share, the ones we suppress. These are the stories that can heal us if we take the time to listen to them—or could doom us if we try to push them away.

Also, it's about the danger of scented candles. You really have to watch those.

### **Why did you decide to step out of your series and do a stand-alone novel?**

I'm a classic mystery fan, and you basically have two types of classic mystery. You have a series detective (Sherlock, Poirot, Marple, etc.) and you have the stand-alone books, the stories unto themselves. I wanted to do both. There are more Stevie Bell books coming, but this felt like the right time to put a new, stand-alone book into the mix.

### **You are a master of the mystery genre. Have you ever had a real-life mystery to solve?**

No, but I am waiting. Please, if you have one, get in touch at once.

### **What is the best time of day for you to write? Are you a day writer or a night writer?**

Day, really. Nights happen during deadlines, and are often the most productive, but I am generally working during the day.

### **What are some of your interests/hobbies outside of writing?**

I love to cook. When I'm stuck on something I'm writing, I frequently take it to the kitchen and my brain keeps working on it there. I am a vegetarian, so I have lots of vegetable-cutting time to work it out with the knife.

### **What is your favorite writing snack?**

I don't really eat while writing. I do, however, have a minimum of three drinks at all times.

### **What's next for you?**

I'm going right into the next Stevie Bell mystery. And I just finished (literally) a new dossier mystery I'm making with my friend Jay Cooper. It's called *You Are the Detective: The Creeping Hand Murder*. It's a case file—a collection of documents and photographs (illustrated by Jay), and you solve the case. The solution is sealed in the back.

### **What book are you reading now (aside from your own)?**

My TBR is a massive, possibly now sentient mass that lurks in the corner of the room. My current reading pile is its child and is also unwieldy.

### **What advice would you give a first-time author?**

Don't worry about things too much. Things go up and down. Just write.

For more information about Maureen Johnson and her work, visit [maureenjohnsonbooks.com](http://maureenjohnsonbooks.com). ●

# Checkmate.

by Raven Howell

“I have worked with kid students for many years now. Even when I was a kid, I was teaching kids to play chess—and play better chess!” chuckles professional chess player and author of *Become a Chess Champion*, James Canty III. “Therefore, writing a children’s book was super easy and right up my alley. I knew so much about coaching all kinds and levels of players, from young kids to adults. I wanted to write a book to teach kids how to start and play a game of chess successfully, from young kids to the adult kids at heart. And that’s a huge win for me.”



James was only eight years of age when his father taught him the rules of the game. Today, at 32, he's a chess coach, commentator, and content creator for Chess.com. He's also a popular chess streamer and YouTuber. Fans love to watch James play, analyze the game, and study.

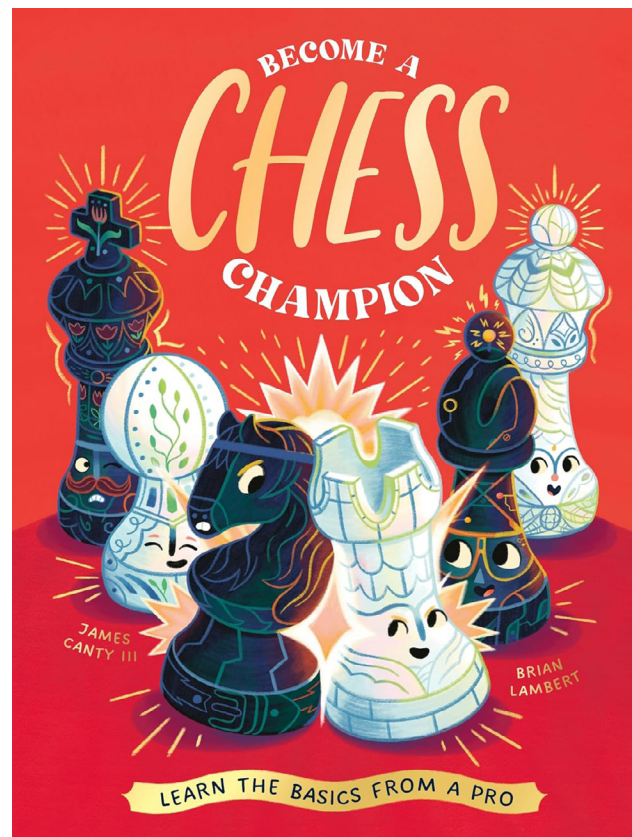
"I grew up in Detroit, Michigan, in a middle-class area, with my mom and dad, married 32 years now. I have three siblings I grew up with, two little sisters, and a younger brother. Childhood was great, to be honest, lots of love and support from my family. My dad taught me how to play, and I loved the game, so it was easy for me to study and train by myself, which is what it takes to get very good at chess," he says.

James was young when he met Harold Steen, a Detroit City chess club Hall of Famer who significantly influenced his life. "Harold Steen was such a great coach. He taught me a chess opening, The French Defense, that I still like to play today. Every time I play it, I think about him. He saw that I had a lot of potential and talent at a young age, passing his level while I was in middle school. With his tutelage, working with my dad, and consistently playing and studying on my own, I got much better at chess very fast."

He remembers his first Harold Steen Memorial Cup tournament win. "Harold passed that year, and going into this tournament I was already close to the master rating. I did the same thing I always did, which is study hard, by myself, studying chess and training in games, even playing online. In this tournament, I beat three very strong players which took me over to the master rating. Two were master players who are legendary in Detroit, and one was master strength but never officially got the title. I won all three games, and these three games boosted me over to the master rating at the Harold Steen Memorial Cup, very memorable for me."

In quirky contrast, when James won his first national championship, "It actually felt like another day in the office for me, like I was happy, but I was already used to it." He cracks, "I think that comes from winning so much and you just get used to it!"

But that winning streak involves a work ethic. "They say that hard work will be talent when talent is not working. I added to this quote and said, "but it is a diabolical combination when talent is working." I developed a whole lifestyle of work ethic, which I still apply today, and even more than I ever have before."



"I remember that I was playing well in the 2014 Millionaire Monday tournament and knowing that I had a chance to make 40k in my section was mind-blowing. What happened was I qualified for the Millionaire Monday in my respective rating range in the highest section of the tournament. There were six of us, and then we had to play to see who made the top four places. I was able to win and take it to the top four places. Doing this guaranteed me 5k, and I was very happy already, but I knew if I could win the next set of matches, I could win 40k. Long story short, I ended up winning enough matches and making it to the final one! Most expensive game I ever played; I was so close to making an extra 20k if I had won my last game! I put this on my YouTube channel titled, "The most expensive chess game I ever played." I ended up walking away with 20k though, so I was happy."

When it came to writing, James found it an easy task. "At first I thought, *This is going to take a long time*, but then I thought about how anything and everything I have done takes time, and I felt a lot better about the project. I always knew the quote, "You build a wall brick by brick," meaning that it takes time, you just have to lay the first brick and keep doing it. I

## Meet the JUMPING KNIGHT

Imagine you are minding your own business when all of a sudden a horse jumps over you! That's what happens to pieces on the chessboard when this pony is on the move. It may look and act like a horse, but this piece is actually called a knight. Let's find out more about it.



### SETTING UP

At the beginning of the game, each player has two knights. If you're playing as white, place your knights on squares b1 and g1. If you're playing as black, your knights go on squares b8 and g8.

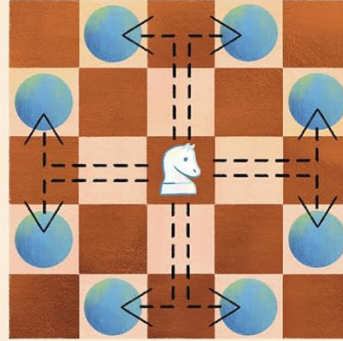


### HOW IT MOVES

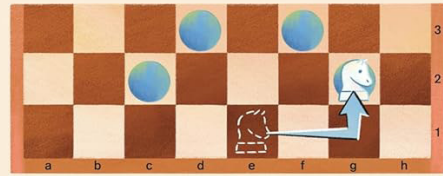
Knights don't let anyone stand in their way! When skipping, bouncing, and jumping all around the board, they move in the shape of an "L". For example, they can move two squares up and one across, or two squares across and one square up. This can be done in any direction, even backward.



A knight is a bit like an octopus with its eight arms. It can jump to eight different squares!



Always try to keep your knights in the center of the board. The closer they get to the edges, the fewer squares they have access to, which means they're less powerful. Repeat after me: knights on the rim are grim!



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### INDIAN BATTLES

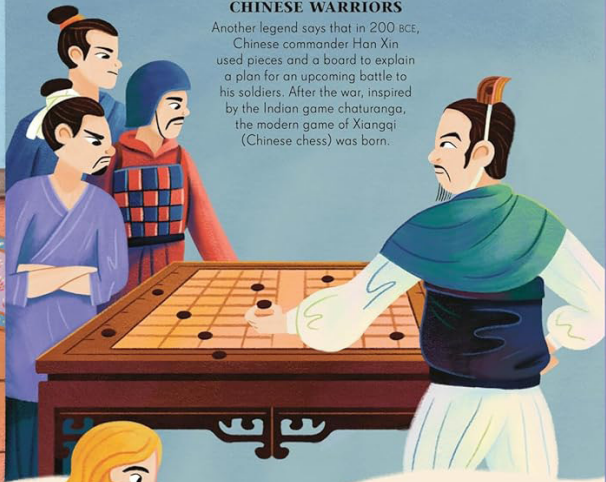
In the 6th century CE, India was governed by the Gupta Empire. When a prince was killed in battle, legend says his brother showed their grieving mother what had happened using a board and pieces. This turned into a game called chaturanga, which later became chess.

This would make a great game...



### CHINESE WARRIORS

Another legend says that in 200 BCE, Chinese commander Han Xin used pieces and a board to explain a plan for an upcoming battle to his soldiers. After the war, inspired by the Indian game chaturanga, the modern game of Xiangqi (Chinese chess) was born.

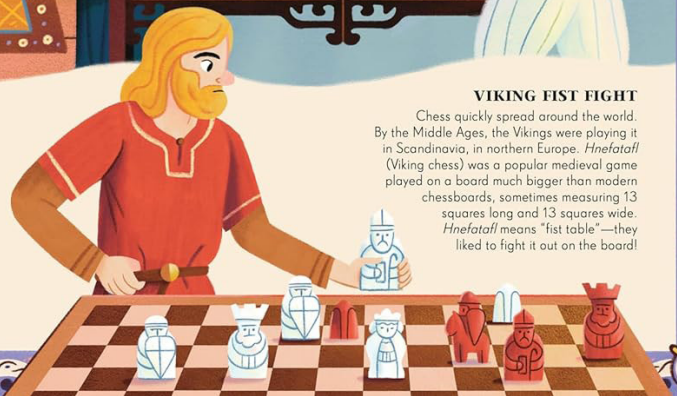


## ANCIENT ORIGINS

The history of chess can be traced back to India nearly 1,500 years ago, making it the oldest board game in the world. Different legends from different parts of the world have tried to explain how chess was invented. Over time, lots of things have changed about the game. Early forms of the game didn't even have a queen, and epic matches could last several days!

### VIKING FIST FIGHT

Chess quickly spread around the world. By the Middle Ages, the Vikings were playing it in Scandinavia, in northern Europe. *Hnefatafl* (Viking chess) was a popular medieval game played on a board much bigger than modern chessboards, sometimes measuring 13 squares long and 13 squares wide. *Hnefatafl* means "fist table"—they liked to fight it out on the board!



20

21

apply this to many things that seem like it will take a long time, and I have been able to write a book, a chessable course with over 100k words, and a recent e-book. I'm also working on my chessable courses so the book I wrote actually helped me come up with even more material."

"The most wonderful thing for me was seeing all the pieces of *Become a Chess Champion* come together in a full book!" James reflects on what it took to make that happen. "The work we put into it as a group, and finally seeing the finished product is the biggest reward. I feel it offers a fresh perspective to learning chess and it does so in a fun way, which is uncommon."

"My book brings a lot of color, flavor, and fun to chess. It is not like reading a college math book that would put you to sleep in seconds. It is more like reading a book that's a party talking about how to play chess, having fun while learning. Readers will learn how to play with each piece individually, one of my favorite parts of the book, like the pawn game, the pawn and knight game, and the pawn, knight, and bishop game."

There's interesting trivia in the book. James says, "The longest game was 269 moves and lasted 20 hours, the longest streak in professional chess not losing a game was Magnus Carlsen at 125 games from July 2018 – October 2020, and the longest Reign of World Champion is held by Emanuel Lasker at 27 years!"

*Become a Chess Champion* is illustrated by Brian Lambert. The artwork is vibrant, whimsically flirtatious, and overall, exudes bright fun. James was happy to collaborate with Brian. "I think that we paired perfectly. My style of chess and life is very creative, flashy, and different. The book, from the cover to every page, to even how it feels, I consider the best one Brian could ever have made."

"I believe that knowledge is nothing really if you're not going to share it at some point!" James says about passing on his skills and knowledge with chess newbies. "I believe as you get new knowledge and grow, no matter what the field is, it's important to give what you know in hopes that they get better."

## KNOW YOUR VALUE

Some pieces in chess are more powerful than others. A good way to remember this is by giving each piece a different value. Below, you can see how much each piece is worth. It's important to know the value of your pieces so you don't accidentally trade a queen for a pawn!

Pawn

Knight

Bishop

Rook

Queen

King

### TRADING TIME

Sometimes in a match you can take an opponent's piece, knowing that they will take one of yours in return. This is called trading pieces. Ask yourself if the value of the piece you are going to capture is more, less, or the same as the one your opponent will capture. It's important you always get a fair trade!

$3 = 3$

A knight and a bishop are worth 3 points each, so this is a fair trade.

$5 + 5$

Two rooks (10 points) for a queen is not a fair trade because...

$> 9$

...the queen is only worth 9!

$3 + 3 = 1 + 5$

A knight and a bishop in exchange for a rook and a pawn is a fair trade because combined each pair is worth 6 points!

The value of all the pieces on the board is known as the material count.

30
31

James continues to positively influence many, and this dynamic chess professional considers himself “energetic, motivational, and inspirational.” He remains active and indefatigable. “If my chess pieces could talk, they would say ‘Let’s go, bro! Time to work until we win.’”

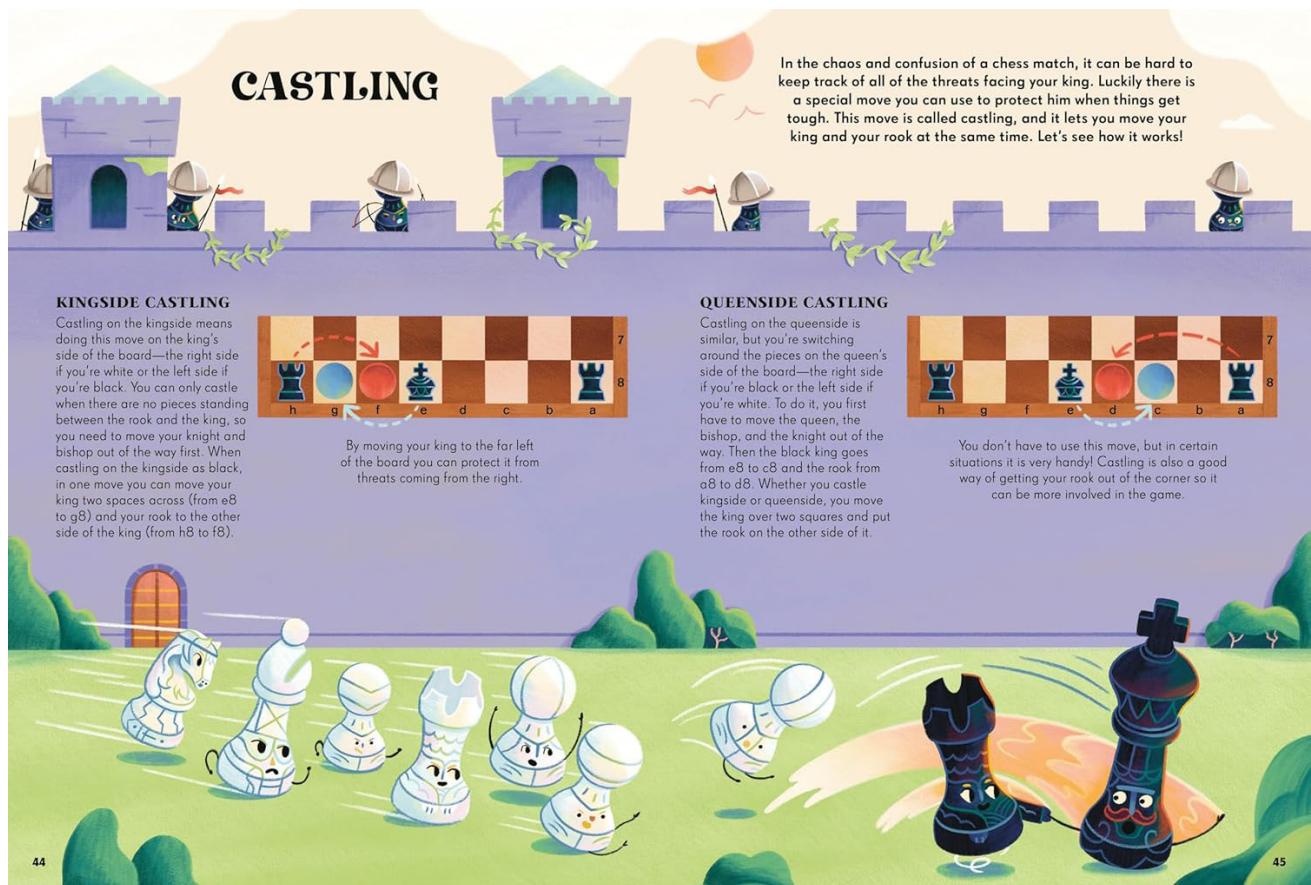
“During the week, I take one to two days off to do other chess work or relax, but generally I stream every night, usually at 8 or 9 p.m. EST! I found a way to study chess while I’m streaming, really been a game changer for me,” he reveals. “And I love working out. Fitness is huge in my life. The famous Bobby Fischer has a quote saying that as the mind deteriorates so does the body, so it’s important to work out in order to play even better chess!”

James is a book collector—chess books of course! “I easily have over one hundred books on chessable.com alone,” he tells me. On a personal note, he finds happiness is being comfortable

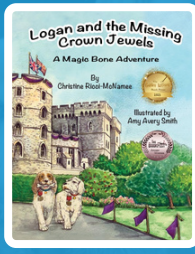
with who he is and what he likes to do. “Accomplishing goals and enjoying the process along the way makes me happy. It takes work and time to get good at anything, not just chess. The more you train and study, the better you will get. I recommend not to worry about the result, focus on the work that produces the result.”

“I currently have five different chessable.com courses I am working on, with essentially five different chess books, which are ten times bigger than *Become A Chess Champion!*” With gratitude and anticipation of fostering further success, James concludes, “I look forward to playing chess, studying, and seeing the fruits of my labor. Hanging out with fans and streaming to hundreds of thousands of people really is a blessing.”

For more information about James Canty and his work, follow him on Instagram @gmcanty. ●



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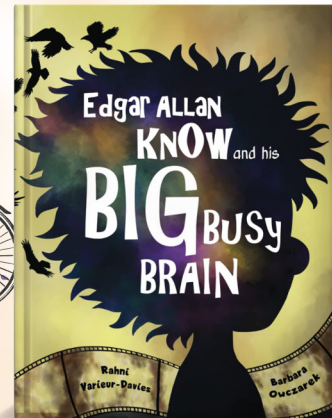
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Edgar Allan Know knows many things, like the perfect temperature for hot chocolate. But there's one thing he doesn't know: how to ride a bike. Edgar's brain is just too busy, and he just can't figure it out.

But when Mom helps Edgar learn how to focus, will it finally be what he needs to master bike riding? And what does hot chocolate have to do with it? Join Edgar in this heartwarming story to find out!



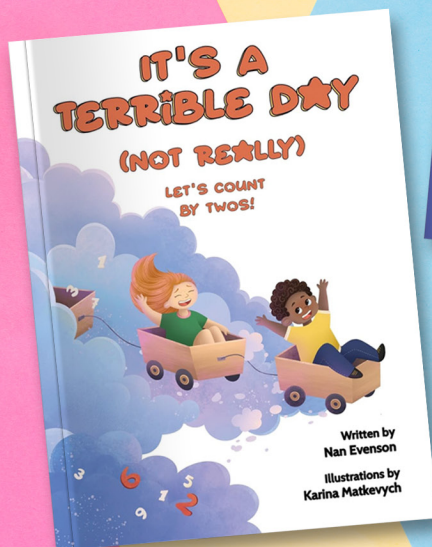
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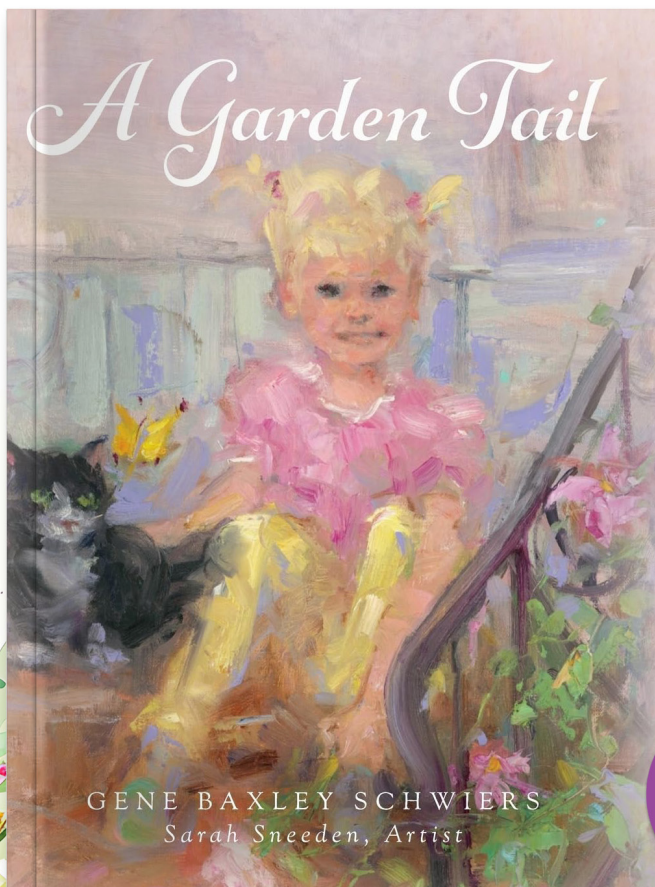
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# Inspire your child to dream...

Baxley dreams of adventures in her beloved family's garden. When she wakes, she sets out to make her dream become a reality. Situated among oak trees, larkspurs, and Carolina pines, the country garden is a sight to behold, and in the eyes of young Baxley, it is a place of enchantment. As Baxley seeks to find its magic, she will come to appreciate the gift of nature.



*“In a world where electronic devices often dominate children's attention, this story serves as a refreshing escape, inviting young readers to explore the great outdoors.”*

*—Laura Robles, Amazon.com*

*“Whether you're a child or an adult, this book is a heartwarming and enchanting read that will leave you with a smile.”*

*—Sam Moore, Amazon.com*



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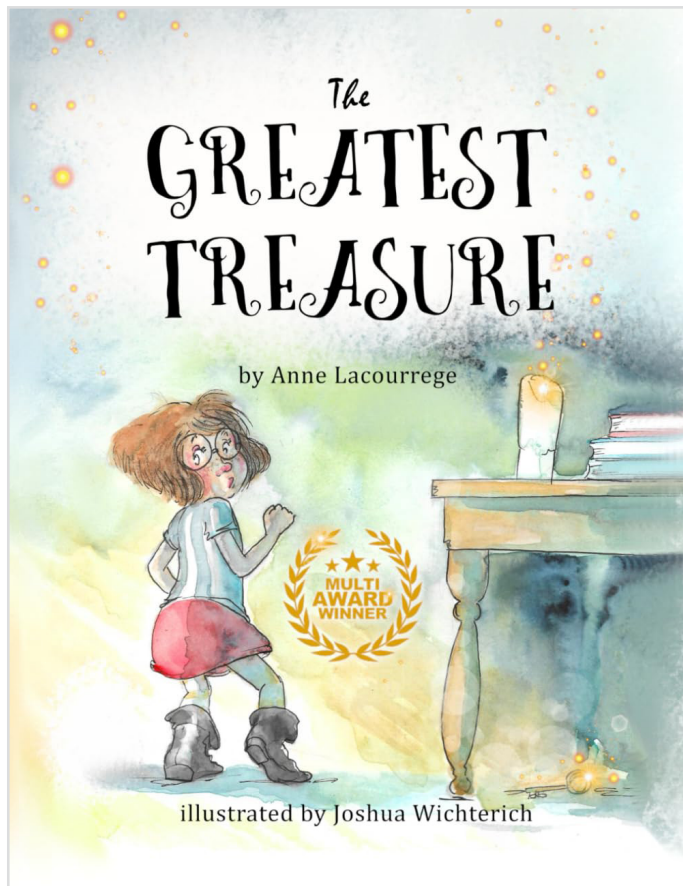
**Available on Amazon.com, BarnesandNoble.com, Walmart.com, and most major retailers.**

# Anne Lacourrege

Offers Young Readers a Literary Treasure

A lonely child lives in a house by the banks of the Mississippi River. The house is mysterious with a closed door between two apartments. The child hears a voice encouraging her to open the door, but it is locked. Finally, the key is found. The child is scared to open the door, but at the same time, her curiosity is piqued. What is trapped behind the door? We wanted to find out, too, so we asked author Anne Lacourrege to tell us more!





**Tell us about *The Greatest Treasure*! Is the book based on your own experiences?**

*The Greatest Treasure* story is about a little girl who is very curious about a door that is forever locked. No one can tell her what is on the other side of that door. Truthfully, that was me as a child, which sparked all kinds of dreams about possible things behind the door. As I grew up, I put all that behind me. However, when my dad was diagnosed with Alzheimer's, I started to remember all the fun my dad and I had when I was little in that house. My dad was always the happy-go-lucky Irishman who always had a smile and high hopes. One night I sketched out the story, but put it away for 20 years until Hurricane Katrina hit. I showed it to my husband, and he was the one who encouraged me to publish it. It really is a tribute not only to my parents but also to New Orleans. It was written from the heart rather than literary art.

**Tell us a bit about your background/life growing up.**

I was born and raised in New Orleans, Louisiana. Originally from the lower ninth ward of the city, which was really

devastated during Hurricane Katrina. I was an only child in an elderly area so I was very lonely sometimes. The house in the story is about the one that I grew up in. We could go up the levee in front of our house and see all the tug boats going through the locks at the St. Claude Avenue Bridge. There was one parade that actually went across the bridge when I was growing up. It was the Arabi parade. It was so cool to just walk out of the house and go to a parade right on the bridge. I was very close to my parents, both of whom were deaf. They really were my inspiration for everything that I did.

**Tell us about your career and where you've worked before you became a writer. What inspired those career choices?**

I'm a businesswoman, more specifically an accountant. Basically, I went into accounting since every company needs accounting staff so I was more assured of a job. I've enjoyed it and it has taught me a lot. I wrote a few pieces in high school that won awards. I guess at some point, the writing creativity wanted to come back out again. As this is my first writing endeavor, it is more of a sideline/hobby currently.

**This was your first book and you've won numerous awards! Do you have plans for another book?**

Actually I do have plans for another book using the same characters, plus some new ones. This one starts in New Orleans but goes abroad to Greece for new adventures. My mom always wanted to travel but was never able to do so. I have two sons. The oldest has been in Greece for two years now. I never imagined being able to go to Europe, but I did last year to see my son. It was the trip of a lifetime. Through this book, I want to share what we saw and experienced with children. Children are our future and I hope this book piques their interest in adventures here and abroad.

**What is the best time of day for you to write? Are you a day writer or a night writer?**

I do better at night writing. It is calmer and I have more time to think after a long day at the office. I find it best to just capture the ideas. Once that is done, I like to let it sit for a while and then get to really cleaning up the story. I always get feedback from both my sons and husband. They provide really great ideas and suggestions that I find helpful to firm up the story.

### What are some of your interests/hobbies outside of writing?

I absolutely love family time with my husband, sons, mother-in-law, and our little dog, Smokie. Family first is my focus. Beyond that, I love to walk with my sons when they visit home. That is great quality time for us to talk about the day, life, or issues. I also love to clean my house with some Gloria Estefan playing in the background. My favorite Estefan song is "Rhythm Is Gonna Get You." Cleaning the house is great exercise, but also is a great stress reducer. I particularly love to decorate for the holidays from Easter to July 4th to Christmas to Mardi Gras. When I have extra time, I also enjoy cross-stitching, too. Since I work with computers all day, I love to do anything not accounting- or computer-related in my downtime.

### What is your favorite writing snack?

Chocolate. I love chocolate with some hot tea. It gets me in the right mindset to really create.

### What are one or two of your proudest moments in life, whether personal or writing-wise?

The first moment would be finding the best husband. He is the best as he helped me with my parents to provide a better quality of life than what we had in the lower ninth ward (growing up, we had AC window units and a floor heater; there is nothing like central heating/AC when you first have the chance to have it). My husband is my best friend and advocate. The second would be being a mom. It is one of the hardest jobs in life, but the ultimate rewarding one. As my sons have grown into men, they make me very proud to be their mom. Our family motto has always been teamwork. It truly does take a family (blood relations or not) to get through life. My family has been my inspiration throughout my life. Together we can do more and we always support one another no matter the distance between us.

### What was the most challenging aspect of writing the book?

The challenge was getting myself to believe anyone else would be interested in it. As said, it was written from the heart. I just figured it was something to just keep in a scrapbook. If it wasn't for my husband's belief in me, I would have never published it. As it was, it took me 20 years to work up enough nerve to do it. I was fascinated by the whole process of seeing my book come to life with my great illustrator, Joshua Wichterich. He did a wonderful job capturing the characters



and the story. The book has received nine awards including the Mom's Choice, The Royal Dragonfly, The Readers' Choice. It has been an amazing journey that has given me more faith in my writing capability.

### What advice would you give a first-time author?

Believe in yourself. Not everyone will love what you write, but there are those who will love your work. You have something to offer and there are folks out there who want to hear what you have to say. Also, one needs to be open to comments. I have found any feedback, either positive or negative, has some merit to consider and has helped me improve the book.

### What's next for you?

I really want to write more stories that put a happy spin on life's adventures and sometimes mishaps. The world has such negativity. I just want to put some positivity out there. If I can give an opportunity for a smile or some happiness, I feel like I accomplished something really special.



In addition, I want to get an audiobook format available. Every step of book production has been fun and extremely educational.

**What book are you reading now (aside from your own)?**

I love a good whodunit book. Right now I'm reading Agatha Christie's *Hickory, Dickory, Dock*.

**If the book had a soundtrack, what are some songs that would be on it?**

New Orleans is all about music. So three songs come to mind:

Dr. John singing "Down in New Orleans" (from Disney's *The Princess and the Frog*)

Main theme from Disney's *Pirates of the Caribbean*

"Secret Garden" from *A Secret Garden* movie



**What is one thing you hope readers take away from reading the book? How do you envision your perfect reader?**

Adventure is found in unlikely places and to treasure the special people you have here and now. Also, a little curiosity may not be such a bad thing after all. It is hard to say who is a perfect reader for my book. I have had adults (especially folks expecting their first child) enjoy it as much as younger children. Basically, if you love a good old-fashioned tale with a twist of mystery, you are a perfect reader for my book.

Reading is important. It is sad that folks are getting away from leisure reading. It is relaxing and sometimes insightful. If nothing else, books can transport you to another time/place that makes you forget for a time whatever it is that is bringing you down. There is something about holding a book that just puts a smile on your face. Bring positivity into your life and read a good book.

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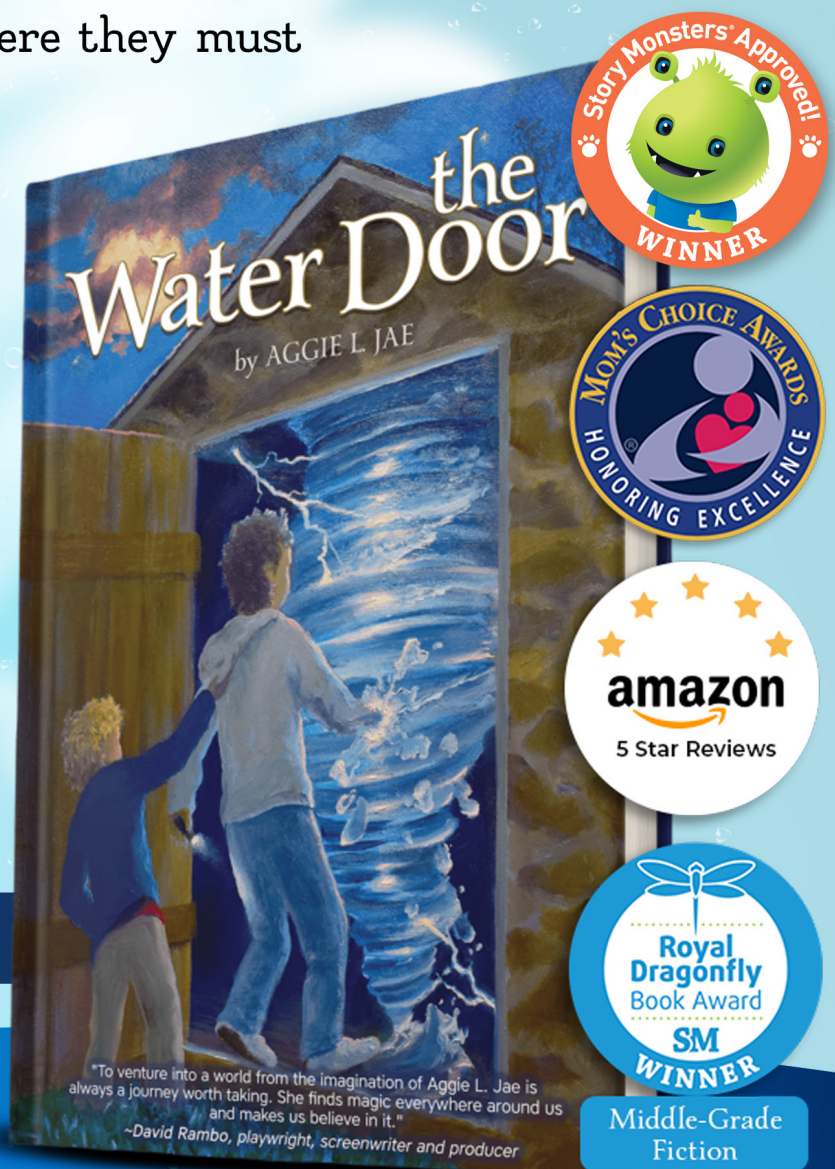
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# Charlie Grandy's

## New Book Has Flown the Coop

You might think talking like a chicken is all clucking and bawking and flapping your arms, but according to Charlie Grandy, it's actually far more complicated than that. Like all languages, it has many intricacies. For example, chickens also peep and ruffle their feathers. Very complex. We asked Charlie to tell us more (in chicken speak, of course).

**As an Emmy and Peabody Award-winning television writer and producer for shows such as *Saturday Night Live*, *The Office*, and *The Mindy Project*, what made you decide to write children's books?**

During the pandemic when Hollywood shut down, I had a lot of spare time on my hands and my wife's cousin who is in publishing suggested I try writing a funny children's book. I'm friends with B.J. Novak who wrote *The Book with*

*No Pictures* and he'd actually workshopped it on my kids before publishing it (they loved it, of course!), so that was my jumping-off point as I started to think about the kind of book I'd want to write.

What's so fun and different about writing children's books as opposed to scripts is that the writing goes much more quickly. I can sit down and write a full draft in a day, so if it stinks, it's not as hard to throw it out and start over. Also, in



photo by Robin Aronson

my experience, book editors are nicer and way more relaxed than TV executives.

### Tell us a bit about your background/life growing up.

I was born in New York, then lived in LA until I was 12, at which point my mom moved to Cambridge, MA and my dad moved to Sioux City, IA (and then Bethesda, MD), and I'd spend the year going back and forth between the two (school in Cambridge, summers in Iowa). My dad was an actor until he entered politics while my mom was a writer and is now an ordained Presbyterian minister. Looking back, it seems like a lot of moving around, but at the time I thought it was exciting! Also, having two parents undergo big midlife career shifts was very inspiring and definitely helped motivate me to start writing children's books a little later in life.

### Tell us about your career and where you worked before you became a writer. What inspired those career choices?

I always loved comedy and for a long time figured I'd be a stand-up comic. But in college, I started writing shows and performing a lot with friends and realized I enjoyed writing much more than performing. This realization continued through a brief attempt at stand-up in the early 2000s. Thankfully, I had some success writing for late night TV at that time (*The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and *SNL*) and decided to make a go of it as a career.

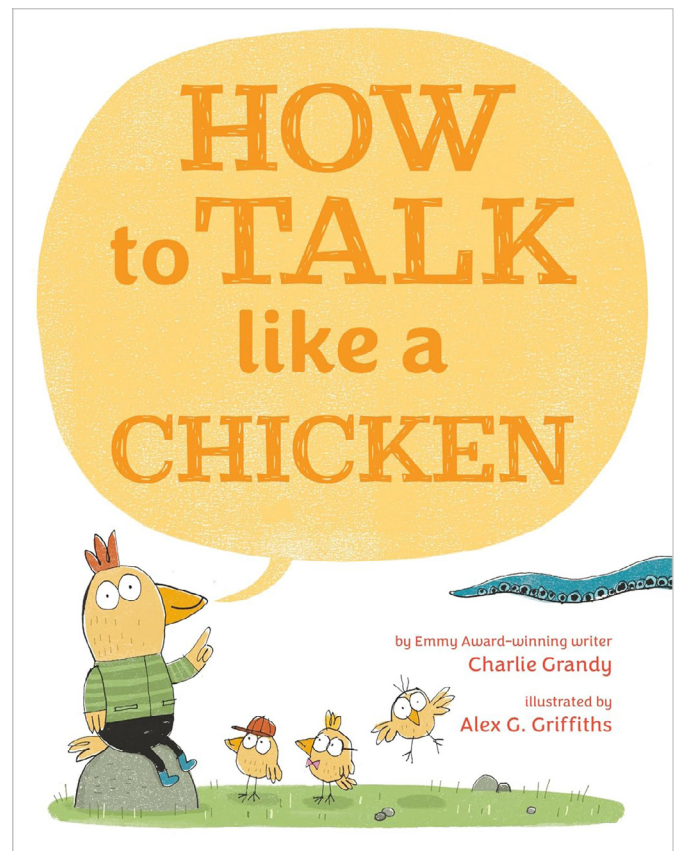
### What inspired *How to Talk Like a Bear* and your newest, *How to Talk Like a Chicken*? And how did you become so well-versed in animal languages?!

It is possibly the only time in my career an idea sprang fully formed into my head. I was sitting at my desk, zoning out, passively trying to think of a fun idea for a book and a little bear appeared and said "I'm going to teach you how to talk like a bear!" and it went from there.

A chicken felt like a good follow-up because they make a lot of different sounds, and it's on a farm which felt different than the bear and is also a little nod to my Iowa past.

### What is the best time of day for you to write? Are you a day writer or a night writer?

Early morning. I like to wake up before the sun, grab a coffee, and just start writing before my brain has a chance to say,



"Wait! What are you doing!? I wanted to go to the movies today!"

### What are some of your interests/hobbies outside of writing?

Since I write for my day job, writing children's books is probably my biggest hobby! Between work and three teenagers, there isn't much time for anything else. But I love being outdoors and hiking around Southern California whenever possible.

### What is your favorite writing snack?

Cashews and beef jerky all day long.

### What are one or two of your proudest moments in life, whether personal or writing-wise?

Personally, it's my family. No specific moment; just every day I get to spend with my wife and children makes me feel very lucky. Professionally, it was getting my first job on *The*

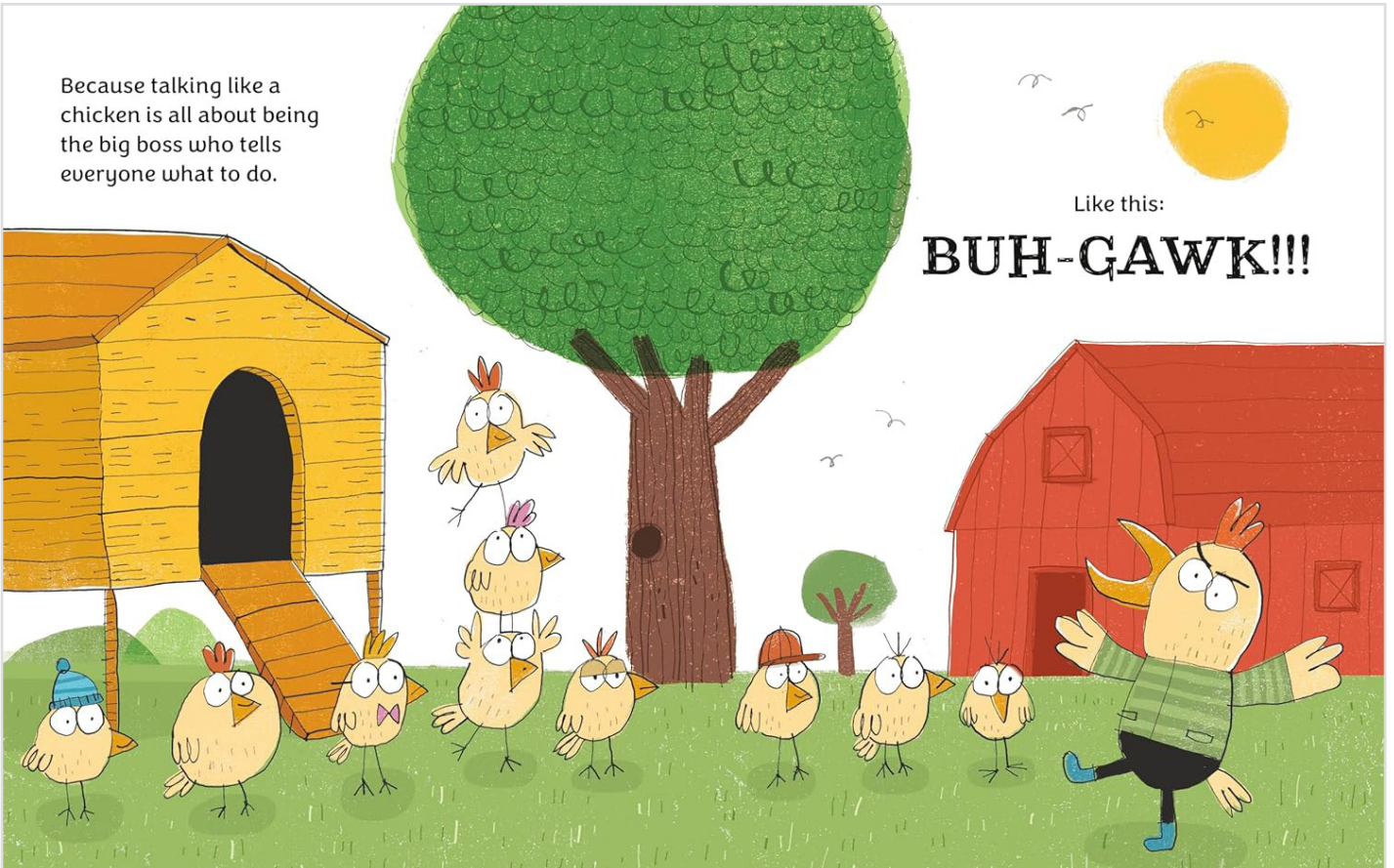
I am going to teach you  
how to talk like a chicken.



Great! I love chickens.  
Is it easy?

Is it easy? Uh, no. But it is worth it.

Because talking like a  
chicken is all about being  
the big boss who tells  
everyone what to do.



Like this:

**BUH-GAWK!!!**



*Daily Show.* I'd been night wtemping in New York and doing stand-up at nights and wondering if I'd made a huge mistake career-wise. Then that job came through and I just couldn't believe it was happening.

**What are the most challenging aspects of your writing when you start a project?**

Keeping momentum. Starting is easy, but finishing is so hard, especially first drafts. Ideas that seemed so concrete just kind of fall through my fingers as I try to get them down. Every day there is at least one moment of sheer panic that the project won't work. Thankfully, I've never been a "Eureka!" kind of writer where it all appears. Every day has always been a grind. So when it's not flowing or all falling apart, I know now to just take a deep breath and step back and figure out a way forward instead of throwing in the towel. And as long as I make some forward momentum each day, even if it's just one joke that I like, I'm satisfied. So work, panic, work, panic, work, panic, and eventually a first draft gets done. Rewriting is so much more enjoyable, as at that point I'm finally able to think about the project as a whole piece instead of just the little part that's right in front of me driving me crazy.

**What advice would you give a first-time author?**

I have two pieces of advice—neither of which is groundbreaking but have worked well for me. First is to set a time to write every day. Even if it's just minutes. Don't make it too daunting like "I have to write for eight hours today!" Or "Stephen King says you should write ten pages a day!" You might do that out of the gate but it's hard to maintain. I think I read that Colleen Hoover started writing to pass the time during her daughter's dance lessons. Start small so it's something you look forward to, a break from your regular routine as opposed to just more work. Stick to it and the length of time will grow organically.

The second piece, which is more important, is to be nice to yourself. Of course you should be critical of your work to some degree but when you're starting out, just lower the volume on your critical mind and bang away for the fun of it. Again, if your body associates writing time with emotional distress and self-flagellation, you will be less likely to stick to it. Just keep going until you get that first draft. Finish it. Feel the weight of the pages in your hand. Be proud of that. Eat some cashews. *Then* revise and repeat until you have something to show someone and/or submit somewhere. And if it's not great, who cares? You're better than when you



started, and a writing career is definitely a marathon. You WILL get there, you just have to keep moving forward at a sustained pace. Again, nothing revolutionary here, but it works!

A bonus third piece is to read a lot. Great writers are great readers as they say.

**What's next for you? Which animal will we learn to talk like next? Maybe a donkey? Or a pigeon!**

I have some thoughts but I'm always looking for an excuse to visit the Santa Barbara Zoo.

**What book are you reading now (aside from your own)?**

I just finished *Our Kind of Game* by Johanna Copeland which I really enjoyed. I also just finished *Barbarians at the Gate: The Fall of RJR Nabisco* which is one of the best nonfiction books I've ever read. It almost made me wish I'd gone into finance. Almost. ●

Hey, that's not nice.



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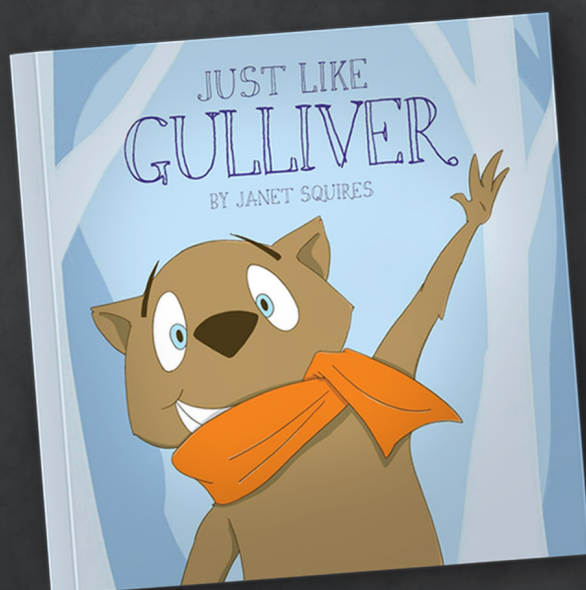
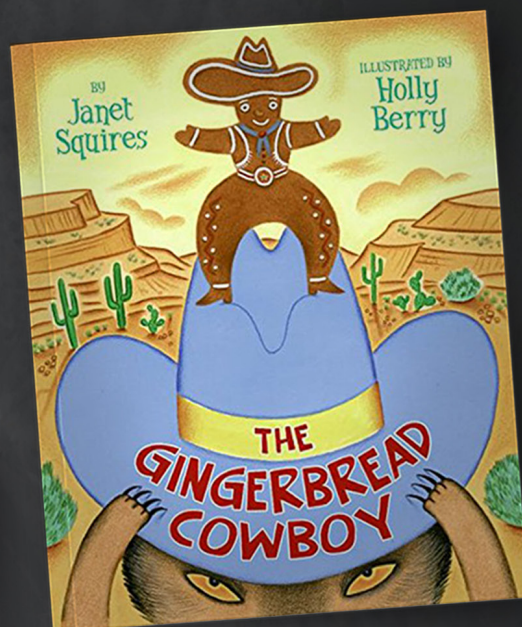
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# Betty Jean Craigie

Offers a Bird's Eye View of Her New YA Mystery

Dr. Betty Jean Craigie has written a story of kidnapping, parrot trafficking, cocaine trafficking, and murder—and the rescue of the wild-caught parrots transported in burlap sacks, crates, and tiny cages from Honduras through Mexico to north Georgia. In the course of events, readers meet Scarlet macaws, Hyacinth macaws, Blue and Gold macaws, an Indigo macaw, and a yellow-headed Amazon—all highly intelligent, and all in need of sanctuary at Zoo Arroyo. We wanted to learn more about this whodunit for young adult readers!



**Tell us about *Parrot Sanctuary: A Witherston Murder Mystery!***

I loved writing *Parrot Sanctuary!* And that's because I love parrots and hate the "business" of parrot trafficking (smuggling wild-caught parrots across the Mexican border). The avian stars of the mystery are Scarlet Macaws poached in Honduras, transported in burlap sacks, crates, and tiny cages from Honduras through Mexico to north Georgia, and sold to unscrupulous dealers in the Southeastern United States.

In a nutshell, *Parrot Sanctuary* is the story of kidnapping, parrot trafficking, cocaine trafficking, and murder—and the rescue of those unfortunate wild-caught parrots. The sleuth is a handsome 15-year-old Mexican American boy with curly black hair, black eyes, and brown skin who travels to the border town of Matamoros, Mexico, to solve the mystery.

**Tell us a bit about your background/life growing up.**

I grew up in El Paso, Texas, then went to Pomona College in Claremont, California, for my B.A. in Spanish literature, and the University of Washington for my PhD in Comparative Literature.

In 1972, while in graduate school at the University of Washington, I sold the car my parents had given me for my birthday and bought an airline ticket to Madrid, Spain. I spent 364 days in Spain, giving English lessons to businessmen, preparing for my PhD prelims, becoming fluent in Spanish, traveling throughout the country, and learning as much as I could about the country. My year in Spain was a pivotal experience in my life. It gave me two worlds to live in: my English-speaking world, and my Spanish-speaking world. It affected the art I collected, the style of my cooking, my travels, and my understanding of the world.

I urge young people to spend time abroad while they are young, before they have families, jobs, mortgages, and kids. I urge them to have an adventure.

I came to the University of Georgia in 1973. Soon thereafter, I met ecologist Eugene Odum and spent the rest of my academic career thinking about ecosystems—how in a system, whether a biological system or a social system, everything influences the whole. Gene Odum’s ideas permeate everything I write. I wrote his biography *Eugene Odum: Ecosystem Ecologist and Environmentalist*.

**Tell us about your career and where you’ve worked before you became a writer. What inspired those career choices?**

For four decades I served on the Comparative Literature faculty of the University of Georgia, where I wrote scholarly books about holism, including a biography of the ecosystem ecologist Eugene Odum, and translated Spanish poetry. After I retired in 2011, I let my imagination loose and began writing a series of murder mysteries set in the fictitious north Georgia town of Witherston. Along the way I published two nonfiction books about Cosmo, my African Grey parrot: *Conversations with Cosmo* and *Ruminations on a Parrot Named Cosmo*.

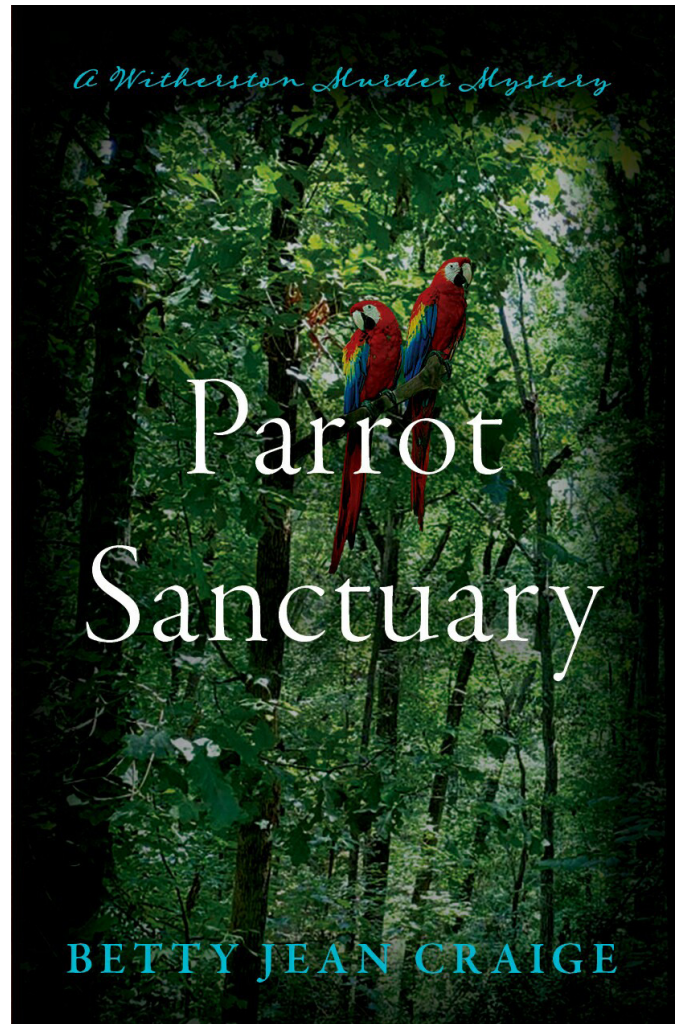
**What first inspired the *Witherston Murder Mysteries* series?**

For two years I had been writing a column in the local paper focused on my African Grey parrot Cosmo. When the paper changed editors and discontinued my column, a novelist-friend said to me, “Write fiction!” I said, “I don’t know how.” (I was an academic nerd.) He said, “It’s easy! I do it.”

That was on a Thursday. By Saturday I had started writing *Downstream*, a murder mystery. In the letter of inquiry to a publisher, I said that *Downstream* was the first in a series of murder mysteries set in the Blue Ridge mountains of north Georgia. By the time I had created the characters for *Downstream* (a novel I still really like), I had ideas for other books in the series. I had to continue. What inspired the series? My love for the north Georgia mountains.

**Did Cosmo offer advice for writing *Parrot Sanctuary*?**

Cosmo is the smart, talkative, funny African Grey parrot who has shared my life for 22 years. After I got Cosmo, I learned



all I could about parrots: African Greys, macaws, cockatoos, lovebirds, parakeets, and parrotlets.

Cosmo inspired my decision to write a mystery about parrot trafficking. I got Cosmo in 2002 when she was six months old. I didn’t *teach* her to talk, as I tell friends; rather, she *learned* to talk through our conversations. By the time she was three years old, she had acquired a vocabulary of some 165 words, which she used fluently in sentences and questions, such as “Cosmo wanna watch television” and “Cosmo gonna have company?” (She’s a bit Cosmo-centered.)

When asked why I got Cosmo, I said “Getting a parrot seemed easier than getting a gorilla or a dolphin.” I wanted to learn how non-human animals think. By the way, I feed not only birds, but also squirrels, chipmunks, raccoons, and occasionally opossums, and I pay attention to their mischief.

I know they have thoughts and feelings because I have looked into their eyes.

I am convinced that the many creatures with whom we share our planetary ecosystem have a sense of humor. Why do I think that? I live with Cosmo. Cosmo's first joke, in response to the phone ringing, was "Telephone for bird!" She had heretofore said "Telephone for Betty Jean." Last week she said, "Telephone for good good good birdy!"

**What are some of your interests/hobbies outside of writing?**

Cooking. Collecting art. And—most importantly now—traveling. Since my retirement in 2011, I have traveled with a

friend to Europe (many times), India, South America (Peru and Ecuador), the Caribbean, and much of the United States.

**What advice would you give a first-time author?**

Write about what you want to learn about.

**What's next for you?**

Writing more mysteries.

*Parrot Sanctuary* is available on Amazon.com. ●

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illustrated by Bonnie Lomax

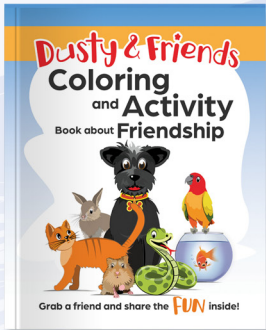
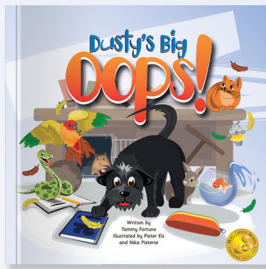
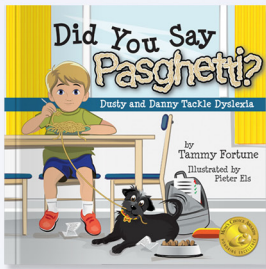
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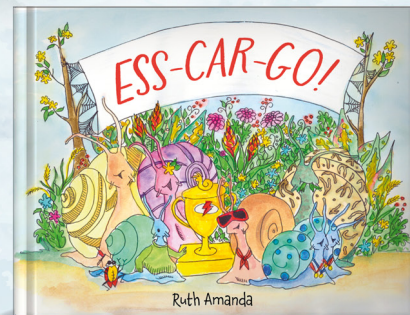
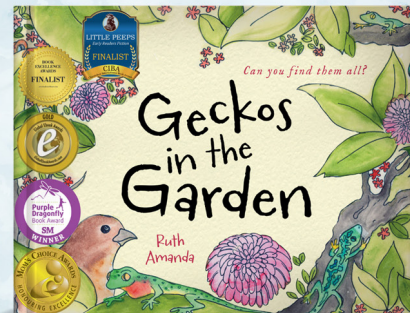
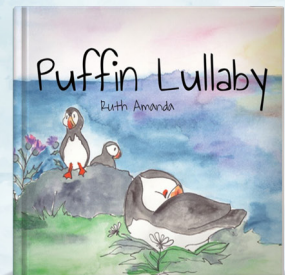
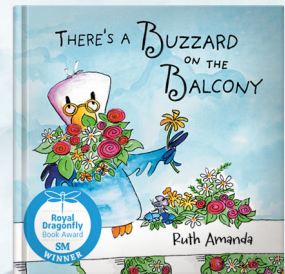
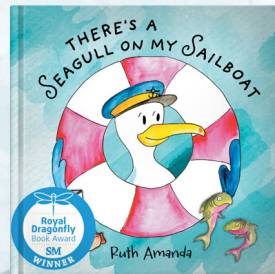
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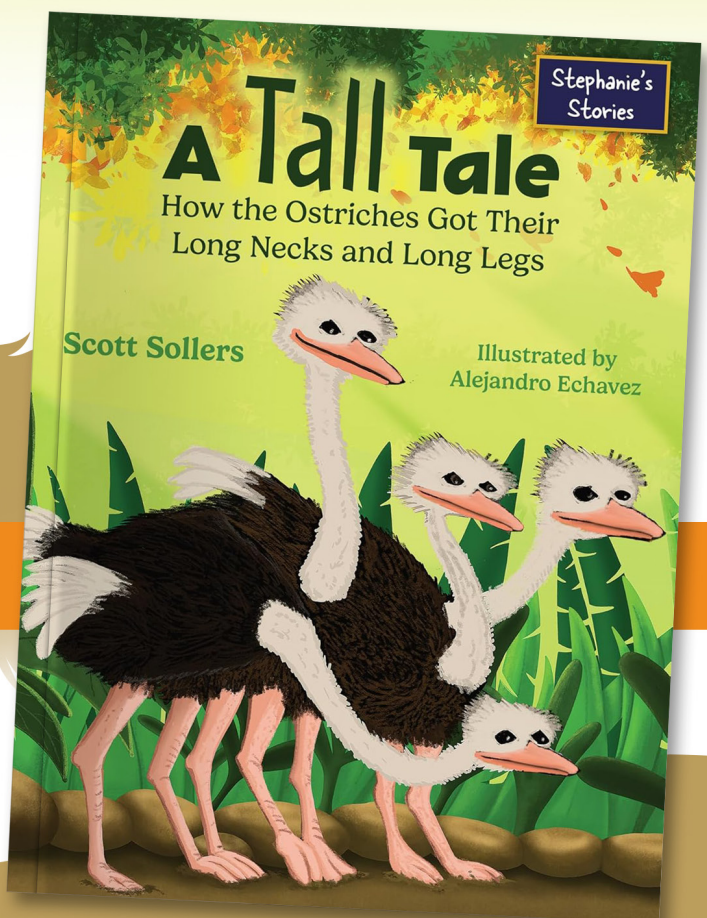
In the other valley, one more desolate and barren, live the No-Haves and their leader, Chief Nobody. The No-Haves, always jealous of the Have-Alls' pets, decide to gather the Squatz for themselves.

What results is a fierce tug-of-war that changes the two communities—and the Squatz—forever!

**Check out the  
author's interview  
in our August issue!**

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# Jamar Nicholas

Inspires Kids to Find Their Superpowers

by Raven Howell

“Knowing that there are kids out there who may make better decisions after reading my books ... that means the world to me,” says Philadelphia-based artist, author, and educator, Jamar Nicholas.

Jamar has been a professional cartoonist for over 25 years. “My biggest career breakthrough may have been when I was tapped to adapt educator and activist Geoffrey Canada’s memoir, *Fist Stick Knife Gun*, into a graphic novel. This was some time ago when there weren’t a lot of them in the mainstream consciousness. It opened a new generation of readers up to

different ways of storytelling that approach difficult topics. Since I can remember, I wanted to be a cartoonist, and I’m fortunate to have followed my goals to where I am today.”

Partnering with Scholastic Graphix, Jamar’s current graphic novel series, *Leon the Extraordinary* and the new follow-up,



*Leon: Worst Friends Forever*, promotes friendships, kindness, and good common sense powered by visual narrative. “I’ve been excited by the kids and families who have picked up *Leon the Extraordinary* and fallen in love with the book and its characters, along with the world I’m creating within. *Worst Friends Forever* brings us right back for more as we dig deeper into Leon’s wants and needs—and what happens when Leon gets what he wanted in the last book, he may be surprised to find out what he’ll get in this new one!” Jamar says enthusiastically.

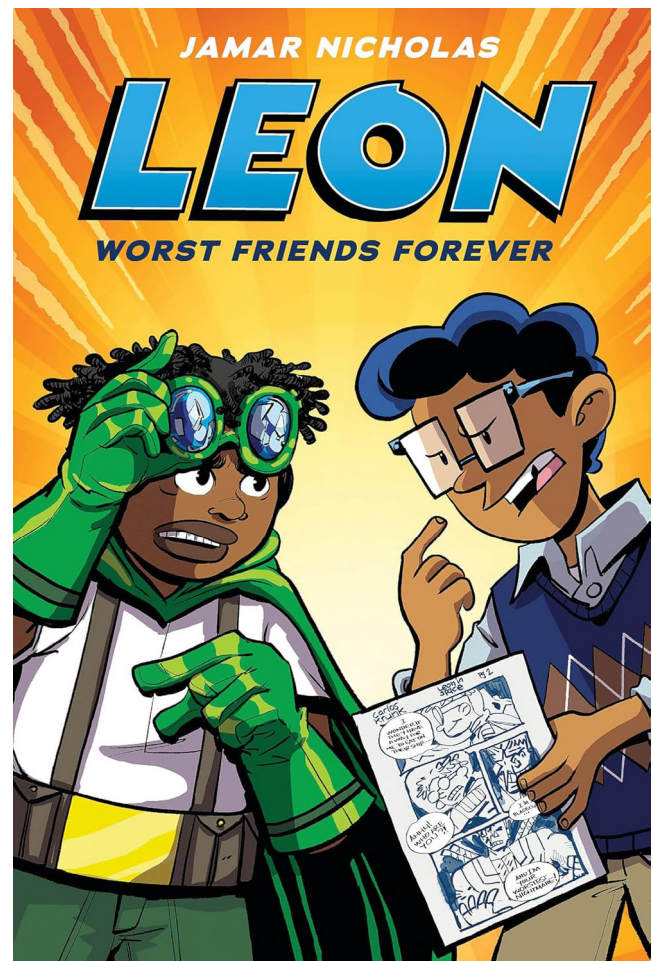
Jamar was inspired to write about Leon because he wanted to see a hero who overcame adversity by using his smarts and not his fists. Leon, considered “ordinary” compared to many of his classmates, uses courage and good judgment to solve dilemmas. Standing up to bullies and knowing when to walk away is one of Leon’s superhero traits. And it’s Leon’s hard-working single mother who encourages him to be heroic by being himself.

“I take a deep look into what makes friendships tick—especially from a kid’s lens—where you’re still learning who you are and what kind of friend you’re supposed to be. That’s at the heart of this series, and we see how Leon, and other characters, Carlos and yes, even Clementine, deal with it.”

Both author and his character, Leon, grew up being raised by strong mothers. Jamar says, “I came from the era of childhood when kids were supposed to be ‘seen and not heard’ when adults were present—nobody cared what I thought! But if anyone would have asked, they would have found that I would play scenarios out in my head way before I committed to acting on them. That’s the genesis of my books’ COMMON-SENSE FLOWCHART. I thought that would be helpful for kids to forecast difficult decisions, and make good choices.”

“I was a big reader as a child. I was lucky to have a family that encouraged my drawing, and my mother was at one time a commercial artist (you may call that graphic design, now) and she taught me about the professional side of creativity. I don’t think I’d be here, if not for things like that.”

“I became a professional in the early ’90s doing freelance illustration, and in 1998, I self-published my first comic book, *The Jamar Chronicles*. I’ve created stories in almost every style of sequential art and have enjoyed for over decade so far, creating work in graphic novel form.”



Sharing key elements to writing children’s stories, Jamar advises authenticity. “Never talk down to kids, and don’t try and be ‘cool’ if it doesn’t come naturally. They can sniff out phoniness and will call it out immediately. I also try to make my characters feel as real as I can. Leon makes mistakes, can be selfish and is still figuring it all out, but he has a good heart and that makes us want to root for him,” he says.

As for another significant character in *Leon: Worst Friends Forever*, Leon is excited about going deeper into and learning more about Clementine’s family. “We finally find out why she behaves the way she does—maybe she really is misunderstood. I hope young readers will find out that everyone has a story and perhaps there’s a lesson about judging people unfairly. Clem is a very special part of Leon’s story.”

“My partnership with Scholastic and the Graphix imprint is earth-movingly important to me,” Jamar says. “Having kids and families in the U.S. and abroad access my books and fall in



love with Leon says it all. If my work sticks out to you, speaks to you on a shelf full of other books, that’s great! And I can give you a hint about the next *Leon* book—it’s going to be a BIG adventure!”

Jamar’s method of creating his stories and books has worked well. “Usually it starts with a question: What if? Then I start dropping in the pieces like a mental Tetris game. I see scenes in my head visually, then it’s up to me to craft the story and hopefully make those scenes pay off by the end.”

“The writing process is the longest and probably the most submerged part of my creative iceberg. As the artist, people are attuned to wanting to see the comic pages, but writing and crafting the story is equally important! We try to clear out as many things that don’t move the story along in the script phase, so by the time I’m drawing and inking the final art, I have a clear stretch of road ahead of me.”

Regarding the final product, he confides, “It takes so long before you get to read it! I love making books, and it’s hard holding it in and looking at the calendar, counting down the days until you get to hold it in your hands.”

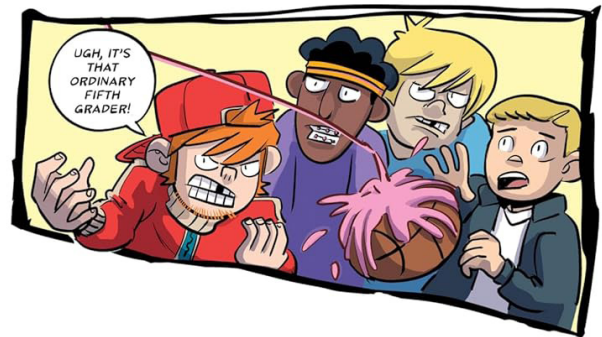
Jamar passes on suggestions for young student artists. “Draw every day, and finish things you start. Finishing things is the most important component to getting better and moving forward. With technology the way it is, efficient, accessible, and with a low barrier to entry, it’s easier than ever to get your work or ideas into the world. You still must work hard, but as I like to say, nothing is impossible.”

He has found being true to his voice has been most helpful to a successful career, and if he stumbled upon a superpower, he hopes it would be “the power to go to bed at a decent hour! Or teleportation.”

Aside from illustrating and writing, Jamar sits down weekly with friends to talk about the comics industry on the podcast, Pencil to Pencil. “I’ve been podcasting since the early aughts. Pencil to Pencil is a creative livestream I do with two other expert cartoonists, Mike Manley and Steve Conley. Between the three of us, we have almost 100 years of experience. That math doesn’t seem right, but it’s rare to get conversations with cartoonists by cartoonists. All of our episodes are insightful and full of great pieces of advice.”

“Doing what you love and at the same time, being able to share your positive gifts with the world is the best feeling there is!” Jovially, Jamar reminds us, “Nothing is impossible!”

For more information about Jamar Nicholas and his work, visit [jamarnicholas.weebly.com](http://jamarnicholas.weebly.com). ●



# Darkness threatens the enchanted land of Sturgus...

Eleven-year-old Jack knew the old lady down the street was kind of weird. But things get even stranger when she sends him a gift that transports Jack and his cat, Lucky, into the wondrous world of Sturgus, a land of prophecies, pirates, magical creatures, and talking cats.

Aided by Abigail, a student of magic, Jack and Lucky must evade a cursed assassin and find the three stones that will wake Ebon, king of the flying horses and rightful protector of Sturgus before the evil wizard Pale corrupts the land forever.

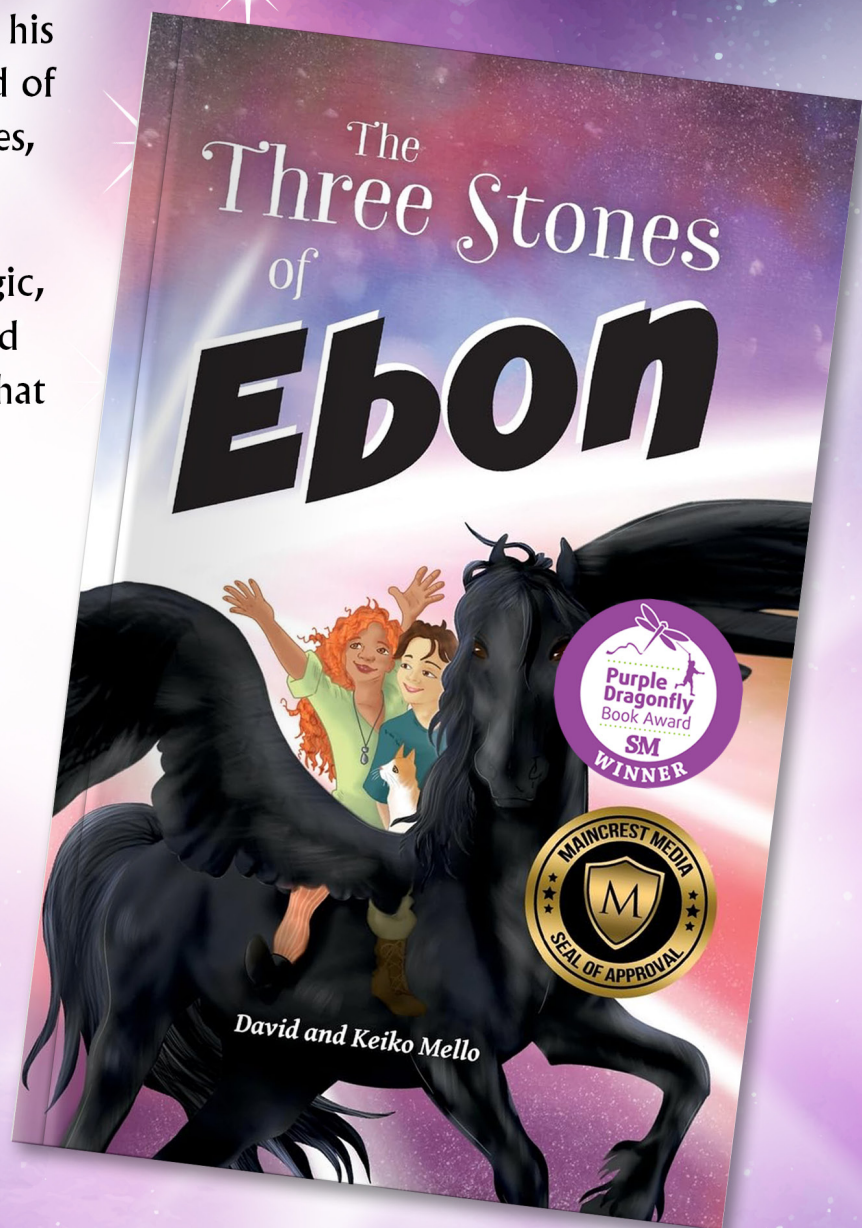
Can two kids and an opinionated cat save the day?

*"The Three Stones of Ebon is well-written, exciting, and absorbing, perfect for middle-grade and pre-teen lovers of fantasy adventure."*

—The Children's Book Review

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

Available on Amazon.com, BarnesandNoble.com, and Walmart.com



FALL  
READING  
LIST



**¡Fiesta for Me!**

by Valeria Mar

What does honoring yourself, your family, and your culture look like to you? ¡Fiesta for Me! is about accepting and celebrating everything that makes each of us special and unique! Follow

along with Zac as he celebrates himself, his family, their traditions and Latino culture. A great book to teach your children or classroom about diversity, being proud of who you are, and learning to be bold.

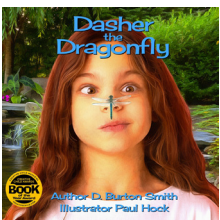


**Our Diwali: Humaari Diwali**

by Aditi Wardhan Singh

Taran just wants to party and have fun with friends on Diwali. All the cleaning, shopping, and cooking feels boring to him. Will his sister Sejal and friends be able to help Taran see the meaning

and diversity behind the festival? Join Taran as he discovers why Deepavali belongs to everyone. The Hindi translation and English transliteration are great for those looking to learn Hindi. Also includes a bonus activity with paper puppet cutouts.

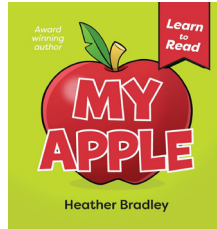


**Dasher the Dragonfly**

by D. Burton Smith and Paul Hock

After hatching I spent five years underwater feeding on small minnows, tadpoles, and mosquito larvae. Then I climbed up a reed into the air and went through my pupa stage before emerging

from my cocoon as a beautiful Blue Dragonfly. My adult stage won't last long, but while I am in it I will eat hundreds of blackflies every day before moving on to eating mosquitoes. To read more about me, go to [critteraweek.com](http://critteraweek.com).



**My Apple**

by Heather Bradley

What kind of apple do you have? Is it shiny or crunchy? Is it juicy or red? *My Apple* teaches toddlers new words using a fun pattern and bright, engaging visuals. With its fun twist ending and

great visuals, the book is sure to delight young readers while helping them grow their understanding of adjectives. It will have kids excited to read the story again and again and again.



**Musical Soul Mates**

by Cindy B. Witty

Eleanora loves music and always wears her zebra boots for the perfect tapping sound. Whether happy, sad, soft, or loud, she joins in when there's a beat. But when it's her turn for Show-and-Tell

in kindergarten, Eleanora loses her confidence, and the music fades. Can she overcome her fear and rediscover her rhythm? With a little help from a close, mysterious friend, Eleanora might find her way back. Find out in this heartwarming story!

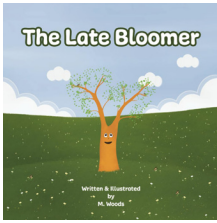


**Curious Chris: Why No Flamingos?**

by Cindy B. Witty

Chris, a curious boy full of questions, always keeps his parents on their toes. From "Why is the sky blue?" to "Why can't it rain cotton candy?" his endless inquiries leave them exhausted. To

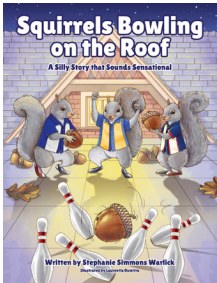
channel his curiosity, they decide to adopt a pet. For once, Chris knows exactly what he wants. But on adoption day at the animal shelter, he faces a big decision: will he find the perfect pet he's been dreaming of?



### **The Late Bloomer**

by M. Woods

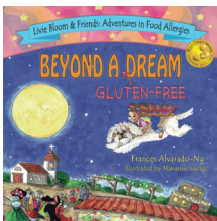
Spring is here and all is in bloom, except a young walnut tree, who is filled with gloom. Walnut wants to grow leaves like all of its friends, but it is still bare as spring comes to an end. With patience and time, Walnut comes to know: there's nothing wrong with growing slow.



### **Squirrels Bowling on the Roof**

by Stephanie Simmons Warlick

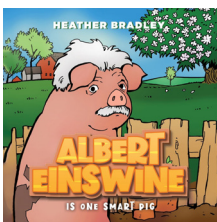
Embark on an adventure where fears disappear in the face of an inventive imagination. *Squirrels Bowling on the Roof* is perfect for children who need a nudge to conquer their fears and embrace the power of creativity. With its thoughtfully chosen fonts teaching proper lettering alongside the narrative, it seamlessly blends fun with learning. Includes invaluable tips on how to engage with children about their fears and transform them into joyful mental images.



### **Beyond a Gluten-Free Dream**

by Frances Alvarado-Ng

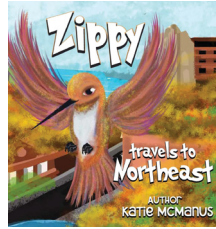
*Beyond a Gluten-Free Dream* is an award-winning story of a young girl's journey where she overcomes a difficult diagnosis through perseverance, resilience, and optimism. After her multicultural journey around the world, she discovers that despite the need to be on a strict gluten-free diet, her dietary options were limitless. She finds new and positive ways to cope with her condition along the way. Now available in French, Spanish, and Italian!



### **Albert Einswine is One Smart Pig**

by Heather Bradley

Meet Albert Einswine, a clever pig with a big heart and an even bigger plan! When Farmer Harold is taken away in an ambulance, the animals must figure out how to care for themselves. But no one is sure what to do. Albert comes up with a plan for all the animals to work together to keep everyone happy and full. But will Albert's plan work?



### **Zippy Travels to Northeast**

by Katie McManus

A tough-though-tiny hummingbird's captivating and inspirational story that illustrates the tenacity of a small creature and the profound impact it can have on the lives of those it touches.

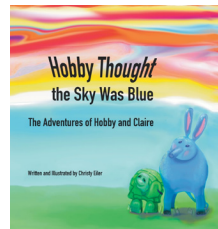
*Zippy Travels to Northeast* is not just a tale of survival in freezing Massachusetts; it is a story of friendship, resilience, and the extraordinary bond between humans and nature. The book underscores themes of adventure, the importance of family, and the power of perseverance.



### **Can You Imagine: What Would Happen If...**

by Pamela Cannalte

IMAGINE! This book inspires the imagination and thoughts of everyone who reads it, encouraging reflection about our world and contemplation about our actions. Both fun and honest, it gently reminds us that we are all connected.



### **Hobby Thought the Sky Was Blue**

by Christy Eiler

*Hobby Thought the Sky Was Blue* celebrates acceptance and friendship as Claire, a wise tortoise living in a Wildlife Rescue Center, teaches Hobby, an orphaned aardvark, that there is often more than one answer to a question. Once Hobby is older, he is released into the woods and gets to experience all the things Claire had told him about. There is only one problem...Hobby misses his friend. 2024 Purple Dragonfly Winner.



### **Milko**

by Samuel Narh, and Freda Narh

Milko misses his mother. She has been living in Ethiopia for a year. Each turn of the season reminds him of his mother. Walk into Milko's world and see how this story unfolds from the hills in Bolivia to the Mountains in Ethiopia. *Milko* is a story that every family can relate to because it is a story about all of us.



**When We All Get Together**

by Heather Bradley

From a mischief of mice to a loveliness of ladybugs, groups of creatures have beautiful, descriptive names. Join the Canadian wildlife in the maple tree forest. They're all gathering together one by one—until unwanted pests arrive!



**We Both Speak English but...**

by Heather Bradley

Two cousins. Two countries. One language—sort of. Cousins living over three thousand miles apart (five thousand kilometers) enjoy many of the same things though they say them differently.

One cousin wears a slicker, Wellingtons, and carries a broolly to splash in the puddles. The other cousin wears a raincoat and rubber boots and carries an umbrella to play in the rain.

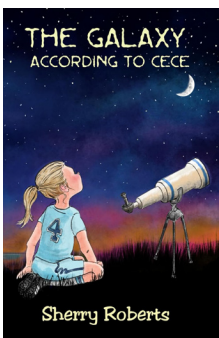


**Under the Golden Rain Tree**

by Eileen Hobbs

Ten-year-old Lily lives in a serene village in Northern Thailand, however, her life is anything but peaceful. One rainy afternoon, Lily is caught in a storm and seeks shelter in the forest. She wakes to discover a sacred white elephant under the golden rain tree and names him Rambu. A special

friendship blossoms between Lily and Rambu and through their bond, Lily learns to let go of her insecurities, thus turning her adversities into strengths.



**The Galaxy According to Cece**

by Sherry Roberts

Cece was excited about her first year of middle school until the BIG announcement. Her family was moving across the country. Her dad called it the 'great adventure,' but to CeCe, it was the 'badventure.' Now she was starting middle school with no friends. What if she never makes friends? Do

they have girls soccer? Why move now and to an unusual house? Cece has so many questions.

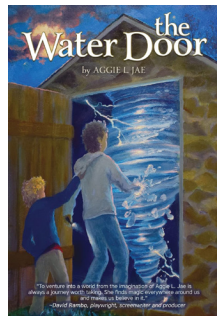


**The Mysterious Dr. Pruitt**

by Sherry Roberts

Cece thought she had finally begun to settle into her new home, school, and town. Until the unexpected happened. The ghost of Dr. Pruitt, the scientist who built her house, appears and turns her life upside down. Why can only she see him?

With the unwavering support of her new friends Analise, Gia, and Jaxon, Cece learns to build friendships and negotiate middle school while also unraveling the mysteries of her haunted home.



**The Water Door**

by Aggie L. Jae

Jeremy and Joshua are staying at their grandparents' farm when they discover The Water Door: a hydro-portal that transports them to the distant planet, Tetherae. Once there, the brothers embark on an exciting adventure through the Wilds of Tetherae that

includes a fabulous treehouse, fierce dinosaurs, enormous giants, underground caverns, and mystical castles. Using their new Tetherae abilities, they must find a legendary heirloom diamond to rescue their parents from their evil uncle who has kidnapped them before time runs out.

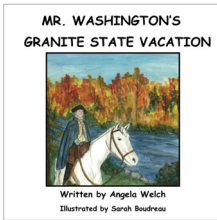


**My Real Name Is Hanna**

by Tara Lynn Masih

Multi-award-winning. Recommended by School Library Journal to "help students process the invasion of Ukraine," by Penrith City Library–Australia to "engage young boys in reading"; listed in Better with Books: 500 Diverse Books to Ignite Empathy and Encourage Self-Acceptance in Tweens and Teens. "Hanna's story ...

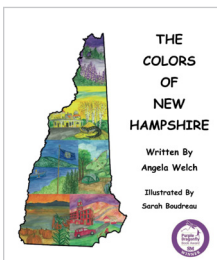
uncovers an astonishing, rich vein of hope in a world gone utterly dark. Both timeless and timely." —Elizabeth Wein, *New York Times* bestselling author, *Code Name Verity*



### **Mr. Washington's Granite State Vacation**

by Angela Welch

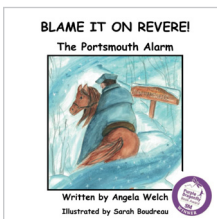
In the fall of 1789, George Washington decided to visit the northern states to talk about the new Constitution. He wanted to meet and listen to the people he met along the way. During his trip, he crossed the Merrimack River in Massachusetts, heading for Portsmouth, New Hampshire, the capital of the state at that time. Come along as President Washington takes his Granite State vacation.



### **The Colors of New Hampshire**

by Angela Welch

If you've ever visited New Hampshire in the fall, you've seen all the beautiful vibrant colors everywhere you turn. It looks like nature painted the landscape with deep reds, yellows, oranges, and browns. Yet, all through the year, New Hampshire displays crisp vivid colors whether it be ordinary objects or spectacular landscapes. Read about our state and its colors. Maybe it's time to plan a visit.

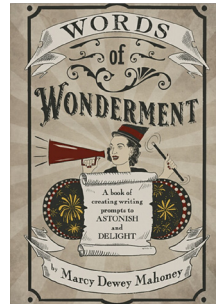


### **Blame It On Revere!:**

#### **The Portsmouth Alarm**

by Angela Welch

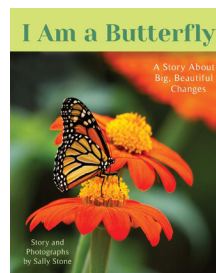
Paul Revere's famous ride in April of 1775 is well known by many. However, his first ride took place on a cold, stormy day in December of 1774 where he headed to the quiet coastal town of Portsmouth in the colony of New Hampshire. What message was so important that led to this journey? Read about the ride that led to the first shots of the American Revolution before those at Concord and Lexington, Massachusetts. [www.lunabooksnh.com](http://www.lunabooksnh.com)



### **Words of Wonderment**

by Marcy Dewey Mahoney

Marcy Mahoney's *Words of Wonderment* prompt book series helps writers get inspired or unblocked with quirky, whimsical, and idea-fueling story starters. *Words of Wonderment* evokes the spectacle of the circus, the mystery of magic shows, and some weird and wondrous occurrences set in everyday life. The books contain more than 90 writing prompts for writers of all experience levels. The series also includes *Words of Whimsy* and *Words of the Odd & Eerie*.



### **I Am a Butterfly: A Story About Big, Beautiful Changes**

by Sally Stone Ed.D.

This lovely children's book captures the science and splendor of the monarch's miraculous adventure from egg to butterfly. The author's own dazzling color photos guide the reader on the fascinating journey of metamorphosis and serve as a metaphor for the beauty to be found on the other side of surprising life changes. —Tierra Curry, Senior Scientist, Center for Biological Diversity. 1st Place, Purple Dragonfly Book Awards

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MONSTERS  
AT THE  
MOVIES

**Transformers One**  
**Grade: B+**  
reviewed by Nick Spake

There have been good *Transformers* movies (Bumblebee) and bad *Transformers* movies (every sequel directed by Michael Bay). Either way, the focus has always gone to the human characters with the Transformers serving as glorified extras, save the 1986 animated feature. *Transformers One*, which brings the franchise back to animation, doesn't have a human in sight. Yet, the robots here feel more human than the likes of Shia LaBeouf or Mark Wahlberg. The narrative is also more adult, exploring themes of brotherhood and betrayal. While the film doesn't forget to be silly here and there, it's the rare *Transformers* movie that's more than meets the eye.

Although there aren't any humans, *Transformers One* does follow the trend of celebrity stunt casting. It's distracting hearing anyone other than Peter Cullen voice Optimus Prime, which is one casting choice the live-action movies got right. That said, Chris Hemsworth is hard to dislike as a more youthful, quippier Optimus, or Orion Pax as he's originally called. The standout performance comes from Brian Tyree Henry as D-16, who's bound to become Megatron. Looking up to Sentinel Prime (Jon Hamm), Orion and D-16 dream of rising above their mining bot ranks. When Orion sees an opportunity to prove his worth, he drags D-16 along with him. As is often the case with *Transformers*, things aren't as they seem.

Orion and D-16 stumble upon a conspiracy, reshaping how they view Cybertronian. To get the word out, they team up with the no-nonsense Elita (Scarlett Johansson) and the wisecracking B-127 (Keegan-Michael Key). Even if they thwart those at the top, an even more powerful enemy might be created. Fans familiar with the *Transformers* lore will know which character ultimately turns traitorous. If this is your introduction, we'll keep spoilers to a minimum. While this character's transition to the dark side is well-executed, it's a tad rushed. The film could've used one or two more scenes to truly make this character's decisions feel vindicated. By the film's conclusion, though, this tragic origin story ultimately feels earned.

*Transformers One* will inevitably draw comparisons to *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Mutant Mayhem*, taking a nostalgia property and turning in a surprisingly character-driven story.



It may share even more in common with *X-Men: First Class*, exploring the rise of two leaders destined to take different paths. *The Prince of Egypt* even comes to mind with one character's fate having biblical overtones. Although rated PG, *Transformers One* isn't afraid to tackle mature concepts. As heavy as some moments are, it's balanced with vibrant visuals, a sharp sense of humor, and the old-school fun of a Saturday morning cartoon.

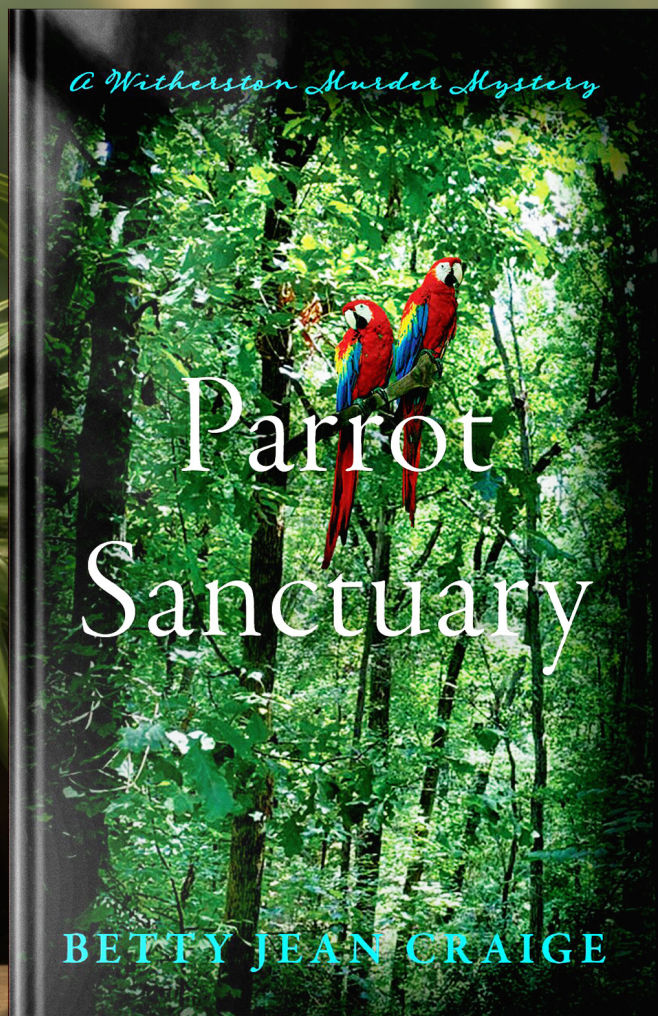
Director Josh Cooley previously helmed *Toy Story 4*, another film with toyetic roots that had no business being good. Against all the odds, *Toy Story 4* lived up to its predecessors, winning the Oscar for Best Animated Feature. It's unlikely that *Transformers One* will achieve the same levels of success. For those who've written this franchise off as mindless escapism, though, you may be caught off guard by how artistically pleasing and dramatic the film is. With a strong emotional core, this is *Transformers* at its prime. ●

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**Nick Spake** is a member of the Hollywood Critics Association and Phoenix Film Critics Society. Follow him on Twitter at @NSpake and everywhere else at Nick Spake.

# Follow These Teenage Sleuths on Their Rescue Mission!

*Parrot Sanctuary* is the story of parrot trafficking and murder—and the rescue by teenage sleuths of the wild-caught parrots smuggled from Honduras through Mexico to north Georgia.



Betty Jean Craige is Professor Emerita of Comparative Literature at the University of Georgia. *Parrot Sanctuary*, a Young Adult novel, is the seventh book in her Witherston Murder Mystery series, which includes *Downstream*, *Fairfield's Auction*, *Dam Witherston*, *Saxxons in Witherston*, *Death in Potter's Woods*, and *Life and Death at Zoo Arroyo*.



[www.bettyjeancraige.org](http://www.bettyjeancraige.org)  
Available on Amazon.com



# SCHOOL'S IN!

by Judy Newman

I had a hate/love relationship with going back to school each fall. On the one hand, I hated the end of summer: shorter, chilly days; not being able to go out to play after dinner; and having to wear stuffy school clothes and tight Stride Rite leather shoes that gave me blisters.

On the other hand, I loved the fresh start of a new school year: seeing my friends from other neighborhoods; meeting my new teachers; picking up a tray in the cafeteria and eating American Chop Suey for lunch.

And, because I was (and still am) a true book person, I loved finding new books to read when I went back to start a fresh school year at the John Ward Elementary School in Newton, MA. Back in school, I discovered new books at the Book Fair and through the Scholastic Book Services flyers my teachers passed out; at the school library with the help of our school librarian; and on weekends at Louis Strymish's New England Mobile Book Fair, and at the Newton Free Public Library.

It sounds corny but books truly were my friends. Biographies of famous women such as Clara Barton and Molly Pitcher inspired me; historical novels like *Johnny Tremain*, *The Incredible Journey*, *Old Yeller*, *Misty of Chincoteague*, and all kinds of animal stories; fantasy novels like *A Wrinkle in Time*; and just plain reads-for-fun like my *Archie* comics and tie-in novels such as *Meet Corliss Archer* (based on the short-lived TV show I never actually watched).

I loved *Blueberry Summer* and stories about orphans like *Anne of Green Gables* and *Pollyanna*. And I devoured anything by Frances Hodgson Burnett, including *The Secret Garden* and *A Little Princess* (for some reason which I have been meaning to research, my Scholastic edition was called *Sara Crewe*). I pored

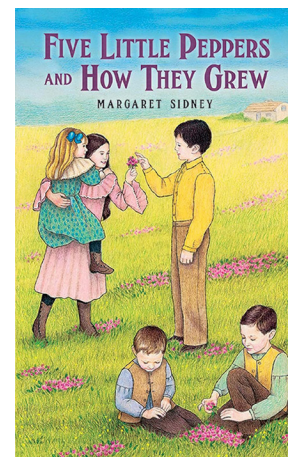
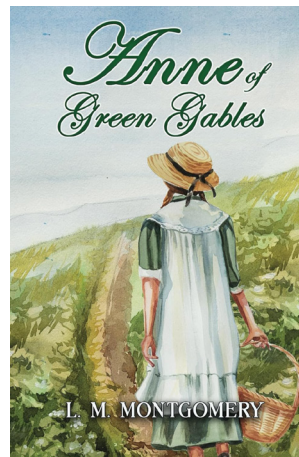
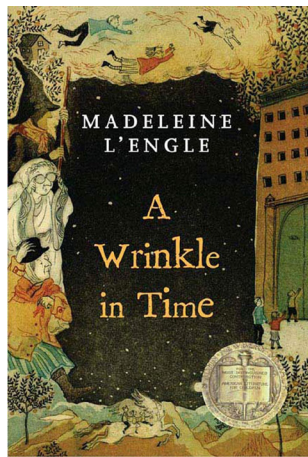
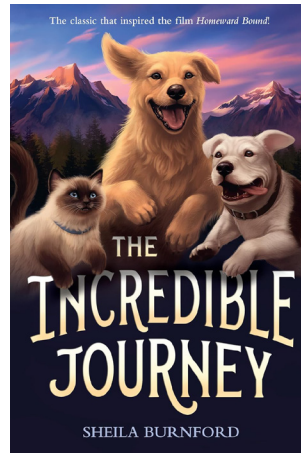
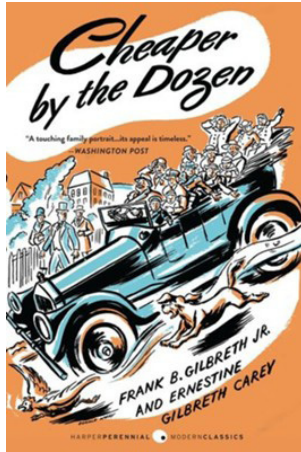
over the latest edition of *The Guinness Book of World Records*; and the book that would become my efficiency manifesto: *Cheaper by the Dozen*. And on and on. Every one of them taught me, inspired me, and entertained me.

My identity as a book person started on my mother's lap as she read aloud to me, was nurtured by my teachers and family, was shared with my friends, and to this day, I feel slightly off-kilter if I am not in the middle of a good book. No matter how busy my day is, I always read before going to bed.

Books and reading were deeply embedded in my life, and going back to school each fall ended that period of the year called "summer reading" and opened a whole new chapter of new books to read and love and add to my bookshelves and embed the characters and their real and fictional worlds into my brain.

Today, in my professional role as Scholastic's Chief Impact Officer, wherever I go, people tell me about their favorite books. Last week, I attended a School Committee meeting in Western Mass. to share our new literacy program, The United States of Readers. As we discussed the importance of ensuring all children have access to choose and own their own books, the chair of the committee remembered, with true emotion, how much she loved *The Five Little Peppers and How They Grew* and *All of a Kind Family*. Immediately, everyone else in the room started remembering their own favorite titles. Books and the stories inside them have the power to bring people together.

But not all kids have the same access to books that I did. And for so many kids in this country (we estimate at least 3 million who have no books in their homes!), going back



to school does not mean that kids will find books they can choose to read and own and build their home libraries.

Many, many kids in the U.S. today (particularly kids attending under-resourced schools and living in poverty) do not have access to choose books they want to read and are blocked from being able to experience the joy of remembering a favorite book and identifying as readers.

Literacy rates in the U.S.—as measured officially by the government—prove it: only 30 percent of kids in the U.S. can read proficiently today. That means 70 percent cannot read well by third grade and it only gets worse as kids get older.

No matter what we each think about how our country and our communities should be governed, I believe we can all agree that we do not want to live in an America where only 30 percent of the population can read. That means we won't have a vital workforce; our prisons will be overcrowded since there is a direct link between illiteracy and incarceration;

and our collective pool of future leaders, visionaries, and entrepreneurs will shrink. It's pretty difficult to realize your dreams and ambitions if you can't read.

As passionate Harvard Graduate School of Education literacy educator Catherine Snow says, "Every other initiative that leaders might undertake is less important than making sure that the students in the schools learn how to read."

For many kids, the happy book memories I had are not available to them. Families don't have the resources to purchase books for their children from Book Clubs or Book Fairs or bookstores. The internet is filled with memes of "I Was That Kid" who couldn't participate in book programs which should have been a joyful celebration of books and reading for every single child in the school.

In many schools, teachers do not have robust classroom libraries, and despite the best efforts of many school librarians, school libraries are under-resourced and often

“Every other initiative that leaders might undertake is less important than making sure that the students in the schools learn how to read.”

— *Catherine Snow, Harvard Graduate School of Education, literacy educator*

filled with musty-smelling old books kids are not motivated to read.

Choosing and owning their own books that they are motivated to read is an essential ingredient for every child’s literacy development. There are two components to becoming a reader: learning to read, through Science of Reading or whatever pedagogical approach individual school districts decide is best for their students; *and* practicing reading with motivating books that relate to kids.

But this is the beginning of a fresh new school year, filled with hope and promise, and I do not want to be a downer and present a problem without a solution. Making sure all kids have access to choose and own books they want to read and build their home libraries *is possible*. It is the driving force behind the United States of Readers: a new book club program that we successfully piloted for two years with seed funding from author and philanthropist, James Patterson, to 48,000 students in every state in the U.S. We proved it worked: teachers, kids, and families love the program, and now we are rolling out across the nation.

Through a simple, easy-to-administer program, teachers will give every child in their class equal access to choose and own two books, five times a year (that’s a total of 10 books)

from colorful flyers curated by Scholastic editorial experts. Teachers also get a special box of 25 free books to share with students. Families and caregivers get relatable resources to help their children with their literacy development. And the whole school gets the opportunity to meet authors and illustrators and engage in a nationwide community of kids who have growing self-confidence to embrace their literacy and see themselves as readers.

This back-to-school season, let’s all agree on the imperative to make a real difference in all children’s access to choose and own books that will motivate them to read. With the United States of Readers, we’ve started an unstoppable movement.

School’s in! The time is now.

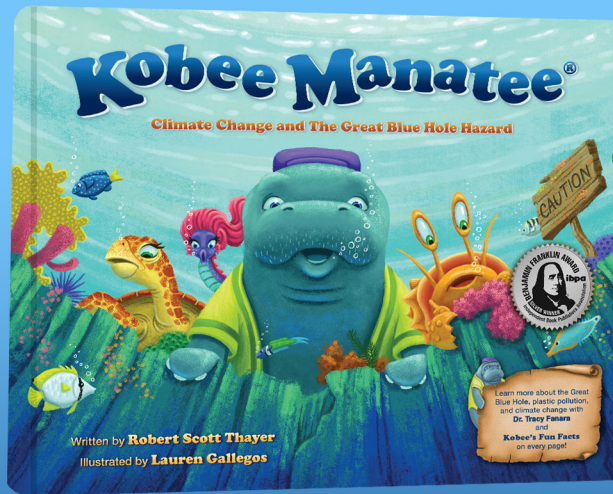
If you are interested in learning about and supporting the United States of Readers and ensuring literacy for all children, please get in touch. I can always be reached at [JNewman@Scholastic.com](mailto:JNewman@Scholastic.com) or on LinkedIn.

Judy ●

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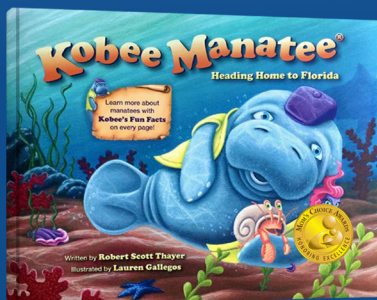
**Judy Newman**, Chief Impact Officer, Scholastic.

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“I read the book to my 6-year-old this morning before school and he loved it! We talked about the characters, what it meant for the pollution to be in the oceans for all the sea creatures, and how fun the story was. Thank you so much for writing such a great story for kids that is not only entertaining, but has a message!”

–Jessica Vilchis, Host NBC California Live

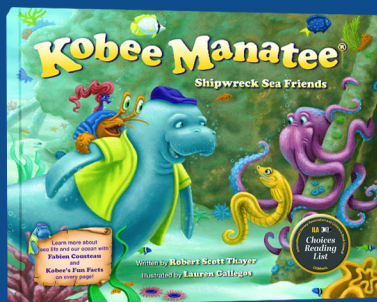


“...well-crafted, thoughtful, and well-illustrated...”

–Kirkus Reviews

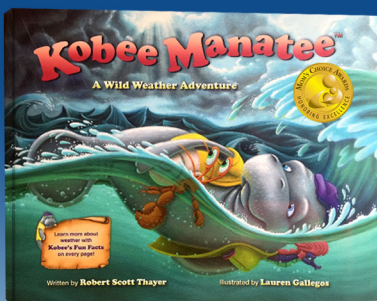
“...presents an important environmental message in an engaging story with wonderful characters.”

–Reader's Favorite



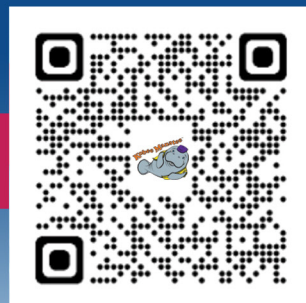
“Our panel of judges really felt this book merited a place on our list of the best in family-friendly products that parents and educators can feel confident in using.”

–Dawn Matheson, CEO, Mom's Choice Awards

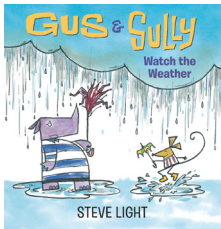


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## BOOK REVIEWS



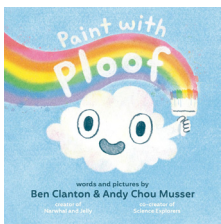
### ***Gus and Sully Watch the Weather***

by Steve Light  
(Candlewick)

Reviewer: Lindsay Moretti

Gus and Sully discover various types of weather in this delightful board book.

Through simple text and humorous illustrations, Steve Light demonstrates perspective; although the two friends observe the same weather patterns, they experience them differently. This book would be a great addition to the morning routine in a preschool classroom, and a home library. (Ages 1-3)



### ***Paint with Ploof***

by Ben Clanton, Andy Chou Musser  
(Tundra Books)

Reviewer: Cynthia Kern OBrien

Ploof is a little cloud who's eager to make their first rainbow! But how?

Cheer Ploof on through the ups and downs of trying something new, follow along with some calming breathing exercises, and find a new perspective! Ploof is cute, fun, interactive, and engaging. Great for toddlers. (Ages 2-5)

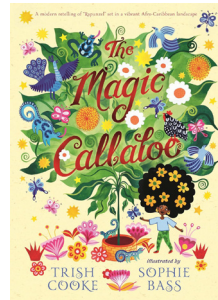


### ***I Love You, My Cuddle Bug***

by Nicola Edwards, Natalie Marshall  
(Silver Dolphin Books)

Reviewer: Deb Greenberg

As part of the *You're My Little* board book series (and based on the best-selling board book *You're My Little Cuddle Bug*), this sweet story expresses the love parents have for their children as they watch them grow and learn. Rhyming text and super adorable illustrations accompany the heartwarming message. (Ages 3-5)



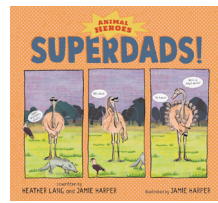
### ***The Magic Callaloo***

by Trish Cooke, Sophie Bass  
(Candlewick)

Reviewer: Cynthia Kern OBrien

Stunningly beautiful artwork brings this book to life. Set in a vibrant Caribbean landscape, this modern retelling of "Rapunzel" melds stunning art with a story inspired by

tales of enslaved Africans following secret paths to freedom. A wonderful tale. (Ages 3-7)



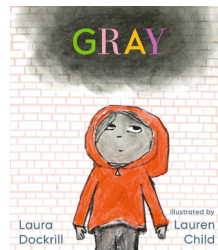
### ***Superdads! Animal Heroes***

by Jamie Harper, Heather Lang  
(Candlewick)

Reviewer: Christine Irvin

If you thought only the females of any species were tasked with helping to raise

babies, think again. Authors Heather Lang and Jamie Harper show readers how a number of male animals help with their youngsters. The book is written in a comic book-type format and is filled with fascinating tidbits about a wide range of animals. This is great for budding biologists and those interested in animals. (Ages 3-7)



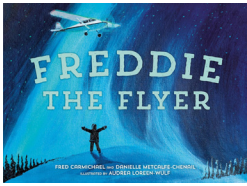
### ***Gray***

by Laura Dockrill, Lauren Child  
(Candlewick)

Reviewer: Dr. Dawn Menge

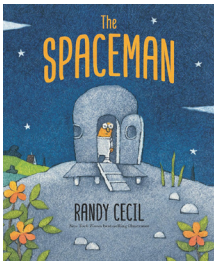
Our emotions all have colors. We always talk about the bright colors that we feel as if we were in a rainbow. What are our gray feelings? When we feel lonely, sad,

or a little depressed, we feel gray. This is a wonderfully written book to help children identify their not-so-happy feelings and the underlying causes. (Ages 3-7)



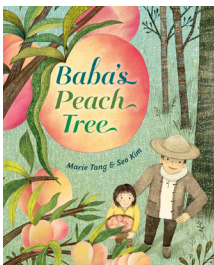
**Freddie the Flyer**  
 by Danielle Metcalfe-Chenail, Fred Carmichael, Audrea Loreen-Wulf (Tundra Books) Reviewer: Dr. Dawn Menge  
 A gorgeous picture book that pays homage to aviator Freddie

Carmichael—the first Indigenous commercial pilot in the Arctic—with each month of the year highlighting moments from his life, the beauty of the North, and the power of dreams. The illustrations are amazing. (Ages 3-7)



**The Spaceman**  
 by Randy Cecil (Candlewick) Reviewer: Dr. Dawn Menge

The little spaceman found himself stranded on a new and intriguing planet. It had beautiful flowers, flying butterflies, big wonderful creatures, and ponds filled with lily pads. What a great time the little spaceman had with his new friends. A lovely book that teaches children about changing perspectives in a new environment. (Ages 3-7)



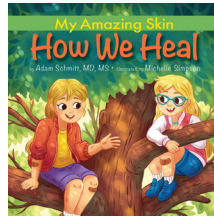
**Baba's Peach Tree**  
 by Marie Tang, Seo Kim (Random House) Reviewer: Christine Irvin

There is a peach tree growing behind Tao Hua's house. Her father prunes the tree, allowing it to flourish. He tells her the tree is a blessing, as it will give them fresh fruit for many years. But one year, the tree does not blossom. This leads to a major change in Tao Hua's life. The family must leave its home and the old peach tree. They return years later and find something very special. This is a poignant story about life, change, hope, blessings, memories, and new beginnings. (Ages 4-8)



**Somewhere In Between**  
 by Laan Cham (Random House) Reviewer: Lindsay Moretti

A charming story about a little girl who is stuck in the middle. Fireball and Snowball are rivals, but Pink just wants her friends to stop bickering ... how to solve this predicament? Using her imagination and creativity, she devises a plan to find common ground. A whimsical story that helps navigate those big feelings in relationships, teaching the importance of a little compromise. (Ages 4-8)



**My Amazing Skin: How We Heal**  
 by Adam Schmitt, Michelle Simpson (North Star Editions) Reviewer: Lindsay Moretti

After Charlie gets a scrape from a nasty fall, her sister, Alex, explains the healing process of our skin; from clotting to scabbing, and our important role in keeping germs at bay to prevent infection. This would be a great companion to empower children to learn about the resilience of our own bodies and assure them that those painful scrapes will get better with a little love and care. (Ages 4-8)



**The Ever-Changing Earth**  
 by Grahame Baker-Smith (Templar) Reviewer: Dr. Dawn Menge

A scientific view of the creation of our world amazingly illustrated by Grahame Baker-Smith. Ferocious dinosaurs, crashing comets that created our moon, a fiery earth now filled with beautiful oceans, and magnetic fields that light up the Northern skies. Children will gain a new perspective of our growing planet within the pages of this book. (Ages 4-8)



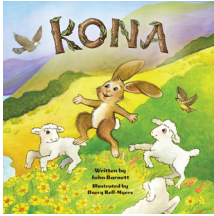
**The Secret Elephant**  
 by Ellan Rankin (Random House) Reviewer: Dr. Dawn Menge

A remarkable friendship between a baby elephant and her keeper shows that kindness is never forgotten. Inspired by a true story, this uplifting picture book is a perfect read for animal lovers of all ages. What a heartwarming story about the unknown effects war has on everyone, including the animals in the zoo. Your children will love this very heartfelt story and gain inspiration for their friendships. (Ages 4-8)



**The Make-Believers**  
 by Ryan Seacrest, Meredith Seacrest Leach, Bonnie Lui (Simon & Schuster) Reviewer: Cynthia Kern OBrien

A lovely and beautifully illustrated book. It immediately reminded me of being kids, gathering our friends together to imagine and create different worlds and adventures. Backyard sleeping bags staring at the stars, treehouses, using sheets for snow, putting on plays, endless hours of fun. Using our imaginations to create our dreams and believe. (Ages 4-8)



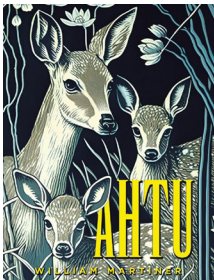
**Kona**

by John Barnett, Darcy Bell-Myers  
(Beaver's Pond Press)

Reviewer: Deb Greenberg

While growing up in a family of 15, little Kona the bunny would wonder: "Do I even matter?" ... until he meets Abel

the Shepherd, who offers to make him any animal he desires in exchange for leading his stranded sheep across the divide. That's when Kona learns an important lesson: no matter how big or how small, we are all unique and we all have a purpose. With playful illustrations, soothing rhymes, and a priceless message, this is a story for everyone. (Ages 4-8)



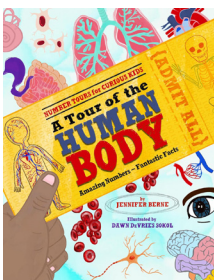
**Ahtu**

by William Martin  
(Archway)

Reviewer: Lindsay Moretti

*Ahtu* is an inspirational and compelling story, based on an old Zen parable called "The Move." Huma, a grandmother deer, lovingly tells her grandchildren the

story of how they came to live in the forest; a story of timeless wisdom passed down for centuries, cultivating understanding, happiness, and resilience. Combined with unique illustrations, this delightful tale is multi-layered, making it enjoyable for children and adults alike. A beautiful and peaceful read for families to enjoy. (Ages 5-8)



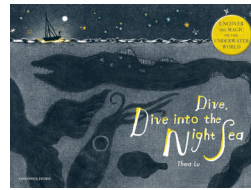
**A Tour of the Human Body: Amazing Numbers—Fantastic Facts**

by Jennifer Berne, Dawn DeVries Sokol  
(Kane Press)

Reviewer: Kimberly Waters

Just when you thought numbers and anatomy don't mix, Jennifer Berne proves us wrong by creating a delightful and fascinating book about the human

body. Kids will love the illustrations and the intriguing vocabulary in this creative nonfiction work. If you want to learn something about human anatomy on an elementary level, read this book! (ages 5-9)



**Dive, Dive into the Night Sea**

by Thea Lu (Candlewick) Reviewer: Christine Irvin

Using gentle rhymes and moody illustrations, this award-winning author/illustrator takes readers on

a journey through the sea as it appears at night. Readers will be introduced to manta rays, whales, coral reefs, and even bioluminescence. The book is interactive with some lift-the-flaps scattered throughout. And the pages have been printed in such a way as to create two-page vertical spreads to showcase the highlighted creatures. (Ages 6-9)

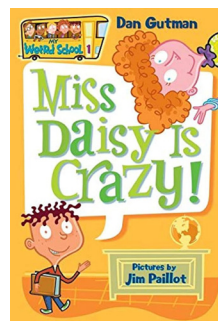


**What's an IV?**

by Melissa Fatal, Rosemary Peng, Edward Ernest (Yorkshire Publishing) Reviewer: Deb Greenberg

This book offers a wonderful educational tool that breaks down the process of

having an IV. Simple text teaches about the reasons for needing an IV, the items used, and the steps taken. The back of the book includes a glossary, review questions, and a game to provide a more engaging experience. (Ages 6-12)



**My Weird School: Miss Daisy Is Crazy!**

by Dan Gutman, Jim Paillot (HarperCollins) Reviewer: Deb Greenberg

Join A.J. and the gang in the first book in the *My Weird School* series, as they learn that their teacher Miss Daisy can't read or do math, and would rather eat bonbons and watch TV. It gets weirder when Principal Klutz says if the kids read a million pages, they can turn the school

into a video-game arcade for one night ... and he'll even dress in a gorilla suit. With repetitive phrases and simple vocabulary, this silly story is ideal for kids learning to read. (Ages 6-9)



**The Wishkeeper's Apprentice**

by Rachel Chivers Khoo, Rachel Sanson (Candlewick) Reviewer: Christine Irvin

Just like many 10-year-olds, Felix drops a penny into a fountain in the town square and makes a wish. What happens next completely turns his life upside down, when he is approached by the Wishkeeper and is appointed his apprentice. An engaging story with

humor and creativity, one sure to please a whole range of readers, both young and old alike. (Ages 7-10)



**Cocoa the Pony: Found His Path**  
by Barbara Ann Rittenhouse Benninger  
(Archway)

Reviewer: Cynthia Kern OBrien  
Cocoa is the biggest small pony people have ever seen. He embarks on an ambitious weight loss plan and exercise routine. He works hard every day, but unfortunately, he doesn't lose any weight. Cocoa is resigned to stay in the corral alone.

Then one day, a boy has an idea and Cocoa finally gets to join his friends on the trail. This is a wonderful book about teaching children to embrace their differences and shine. (Ages 7-10)



**Kloe's New Start**  
by K. M. Selvidge, Kateryna Meleshchuk  
(Independently Published)

Reviewer: Deb Greenberg  
Adorable animal characters teach about making friends in this heart-warming tale. It's challenging enough to start at a new middle school, but with a brother who acts out and gets in a fight, can

Kloe the cat avoid being stuck in his shadow? After best friends Terry Turkey and Ginger Goat talk her into trying out for cheerleading, Kloe wins the highlighted cheer spot for the big game. Join this cast of animal characters, and see what Kloe learns from her enlightening experience. (Ages 7-13)



**Finding Lila**  
by Lisa Chenoweth  
(Orange Hat Publishing)

Reviewer: Deb Greenberg  
The world of Raini Fraser is about to get interesting when she gets a call that her estranged mother, Lila, wants to see her, but she can't tell anyone about it, especially her father. As she prepares for the rendezvous, she's whisked away

to New York City to be with her dad. Raini's daring mission, as she sets out to locate her mom, will have you on the edge of your seat ... you won't want to put this one down. (Ages 8-12)



**The Princess Protection Program**  
by Alex London, James Firnhaber  
(Greenwillow Books)

Reviewer: Deb Greenberg  
When Rosamund flees her prince, she steps through a Door of Opportunity to the Home Educational Academy (the HEA) and the modern world. While there, she encounters Rana, Sirena, Cindy, Charlie, and many others who

take control of their own stories once they learn the truth about the Princess Protection Program. This action-packed fantasy adventure offers a unique twist on fairy tales with a message about figuring out your place in the world. (Ages 8-12)



**The Long Way Around**  
by Anne Nesbet  
(Candlewick)

Reviewer: Christine Irvin  
Cousins Owen, Vivian, and Amy are geared up for the adventure of a lifetime. After they hike through the mountains of California with their parents, they are left by themselves for just two nights while the adults are

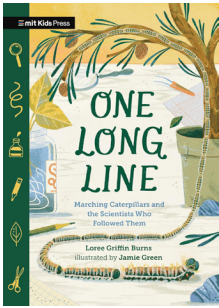
camping on the other side of the hill, close enough to be there if there's a problem, but far enough away so that the three youngsters get a taste of independence. What could possibly go wrong? Author Anne Nesbet not only tells a good story, she educates readers about survival and shows them how to overcome their fears. (Ages 8-12)



**Team Park**  
by Angela Ahn  
(Tundra Books)

Reviewer: Christine Irvin  
Unlike his dad, Evan Park does not like team sports—no matter how hard he tries. And when an accident causes Evan to break his wrist, he is determined that once he heals, he'll work on finding his thing. Alone. Author Angela Ahn writes

in a lively style, one that encourages turning the page to find out what happens next, while also delivering a few life lessons to middle grade readers without them realizing that they're learning something. (Ages 9-12)



**One Long Line**

by Loree Griffin Burns, Jamie Green  
(MIT Kids Press)

Reviewer: Kimberly Waters

Everything you want to know about the pine processionary caterpillars is cleverly written in this book. It's a fun and fascinating read and one that encourages kindness and awareness of these beautiful creatures! The author

captivates her readers by using simple words and explanations about not only the caterpillars, but the researchers as well. Nicely done! (ages 9-13)



**Tig**

by Heather Smith  
(Tundra Books)

Reviewer: Christine Irvin

Tig is short for Tigger. It's a nickname the main character's mother gave her. But now, Mom is gone and left her to fend for herself, which she did, until her Uncle Scott showed up to offer her his home. It's a story about addiction,

abandoned children, survival, imaginary friends, love, and family. The reader will be subjected to lots of new vocabulary words, as one of Tig's interests is reading the dictionary, learning new words, and using them in sentences. (Ages 10-13)



**Monster vs. Boy**

by Karen Krossing  
(Charlesbridge)

Reviewer: Deb Greenberg

Dawz and Jayla were adopted by their uncle. In their ramshackle home, a monster with gray fur and purple scales named Mim resides in Dawz's closet. No one other than Dawz can see or hear Mim. One day, Mim is forced to emerge

from the closet and goes on a mission to uncover the magic of books. An entertaining fantasy for middle-schoolers with important themes of accepting yourself and others, the power of friendship, and the magic of reading books. (Ages 10-12)



**The Lamplighter**

by Crystal J. Bell  
(North Star Editions)

Reviewer: Deb Greenberg

In the nineteenth-century foggy seaport whaling village of Warbler, Connecticut, people start disappearing in the nightly fog. Tempe the lamplighter is responsible for keeping the streets lit to ensure the town is safe in the eerie

fog and mists, while providing for her family. When she learns unsettling information about famous Warbler figureheads and her own father, she's faced with choosing to speak out or look the other way. Creepy, gripping, and filled with mystery and suspense. (Ages 14-18)

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

**STRING THEORY**

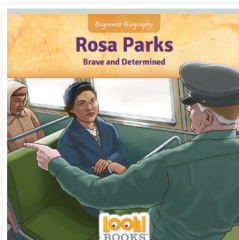


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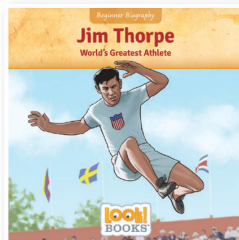
# Role Models for all young readers.

The new Fall 2024 set of *Beginner Biographies* continues to feature role models from all underserved communities. A role model can be someone who makes life better for others, or it can be someone who shows us how to overcome challenges, stand up for others, and never give up. Introduce young readers to some of history's most inspiring, diverse role models in this biography series for young readers.

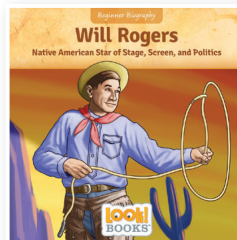
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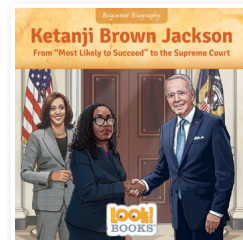
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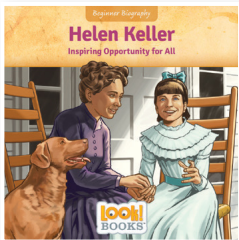
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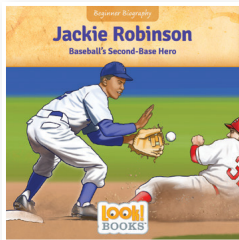
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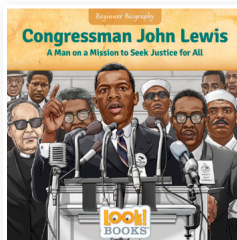
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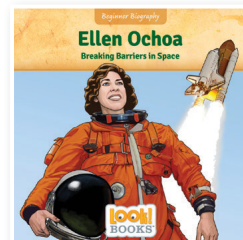
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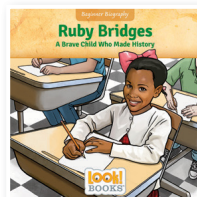
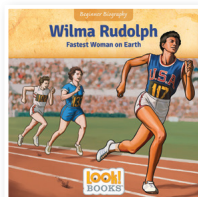
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## Making a Sundial

### Materials Needed

- A straight stick about 6-12 inches long.  
*Trick: This page is 11" tall so you can use it as a length guide.*
- A paper plate
- A compass (to find true north)
- A protractor (to measure angles)
- A marker or pen
- Tape or glue to attach stick to plate

### Steps to Make the Sundial

Attach the stick to the center of the plate and tilt it to match your latitude

*Trick: Latitude and Longitude Finder: <https://www.latlong.net>*

Using a protractor, set the stick at an angle equal to your latitude.

For example, if your latitude is 40°, the stick should be at a 40° angle.

Use your compass to find the true north.

Put the sundial in a sunny spot outside.

**NOTE:** Make sure the stick points directly north. Adjust it so the shadow falls on the hour markers correctly.

Mark each hour where the shadow falls, starting with 12 noon.

*The first day, you might need to use a watch to set it up, after that it will work by itself!*

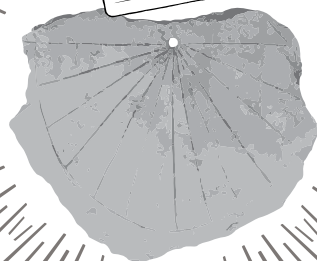
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 LATITUDE  
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 STICK  
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 LIMESTONE  
 HOUR  
 ANGLE  
 PLATE  
 SHADOW  
 NOON



### Did You Know...

People have always found ways to keep track of time. They use calendars, watches, and even the sun's movement across the sky.

About 3,500 years ago, workers in the Valley of the Kings in ancient Egypt made a sundial from a piece of limestone to mark the time. It's one of the oldest sundials ever found in Egypt.



# A whimsical story featuring a child who loves reading!

The story reinforces emerging reading skills of alliteration and repetition in a relatable setting. It's sure to be a favorite!

## Wilda Reads at Recess



Story by: Karen Georgiev  
Illustration By: Emily Hopkins

*"This is a sweet story that my grandchildren love! The artwork is beautifully done and "Wilda Reads At Recess" is a welcome addition to our home library."*

*-David, Amazon.com*

*"My granddaughter is just learning to read and this delightful story was a great way to encourage her to read for fun, anytime, anywhere!"*

*-Wendy, Amazon.com*

**Available on Amazon.com**

Q&A  
WITH

# WILLIAM BEE

by Julianne Black DiBlasi

The *Stanley* series continues to be a huge hit in the land of picture books. With an almost yearly new release, these imaginative and visually engaging editions by author and artist William Bee cover various occupations and activities, engaging young minds with the details and intricacies of each topic presented. If you aren't already familiar with the adorable Stanley the Hamster character, *Stanley's Boat*, *Stanley's Park*, *Stanley's Library*, and the over two dozen other Stanley picture books, the titles are available in English and Spanish from Peachtree Publishing.

The reason kids love these books is easy to understand. The quiet and static visuals keep new concepts from overwhelming the reader while delivering ideas as easily digestible bites, and vibrant primary color choices paired with two-dimensional shapes help to reiterate the message as it moves along. Each page has the perfect balance of detail without clutter and involvement without distraction.

The happy and straightforward narrative style is fabulously accessible to a wide age group and helps give the viewer positive, clear-cut direction throughout each new scene. Stanley is calm, helpful, and capable as he works, enabling the viewer to feel a similar emotional investment in the activity. Kids get to participate in the excitement of the task without the wild ride first-day scenario, which can cause anxiety.

Today, we are talking with William Bee about the latest installment, *Stanley the Baker*, which came out to rave reviews in May of this year. Going in-depth again into the equipment, tools, ingredients, and processes involved with baked goods, and ending with Stanley's famous dinner and bath routine, making these books a favorite for parents at bedtime!

**Q: *Stanley the Baker* is adorable! How do you decide which topics to cover with Stanley, and how far out have you planned? Are you getting fan feedback that helps steer that direction, or is it more based more on your interests?**

**A:** Thanks for getting in touch. Good question. The first few books were easy and later, my editor and I discussed options. I always like to hear people's suggestions. But some don't work in the format, I prefer "process" jobs, like a builder where you start with a plot and end with a house.

**Q: What was finding a working rhythm for a straightforward series like *Stanley* compared to your quirkier personal projects? Did you approach the concept and production the same way?**

**A:** It was always going to be a series—once I'd hit upon the job theme. I tend to think of the books like you would a TV series. Title sequence, scene setting, and some sort of repeat ending. There was an American TV series called *The Waltons* which famously ended with lights out and the family all saying goodnight grandma/father etc. The cover—always with a vehicle—and the tool pages were our title sequence. Just a bit different each time. Every book except *Builder* starts with a building that sets the scene, and then we are off! The really nice thing about a series is you get to know your characters, and sometimes add a new one.



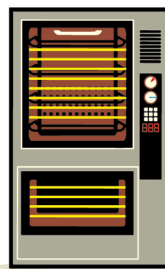
After the dough has risen, Hattie mixes in nuts, olives, seeds, and dried fruit.



Then she squashes the dough into pans and stacks them on the trolley.



After the cake has baked, it has to cool down. Then it's ready for decorating with icing, cherries...



and sprinkles!



But they aren't all here just to buy bread.





**Q:** The illustration of *Stanley* is more outlined and clean compared to other projects like *Whatever*, which have texture and varying line styles. How did that choice come about?

**A:** I like both, but being from a graphics background, I admire the clean outlined look of Dick Bruna. I wanted to do something a bit like that.

**Q:** I read in an interview that you felt it was a pretty natural transition from being a commercial designer to being an illustrator. How has your style morphed between the two types of projects?

**A:** Although I studied graphic design at college, I was always more interested in what people call “image making.” With my commercial clients, each job is fresh, meaning it can be tackled in many ways. Illustration is just one of them. In truth, anyone who has a graphics or illustration background can design and illustrate a children’s book. I’d argue the biggest challenge/opportunity is writing them too. If you do that, you really are in charge of your little world.

**Q:** Currently, I see the *Stanley* series is available in English and Spanish. Are there any plans for additional languages or special editions?

**A:** The early books were published in Danish and Swedish, and most of them have been published in Chinese. It’s the publishers who sort all that out. I’d like them to sell in Japan, as I like their design language.

**Q:** Are you doing anything special to celebrate Stanley’s 10th anniversary?

**A:** I had no idea! It seems so much longer than that....

For more information about William Bee and the *Stanley* series, follow @stanleythehamsterbooks. ●

*Stanley the Baker* by William Bee. Text and Illustrations

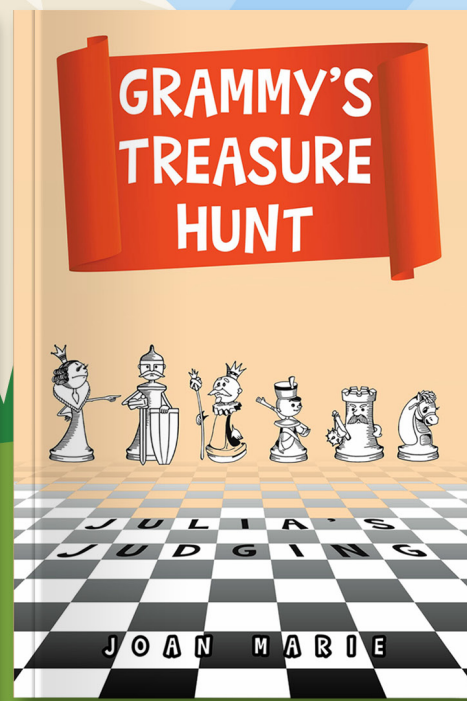
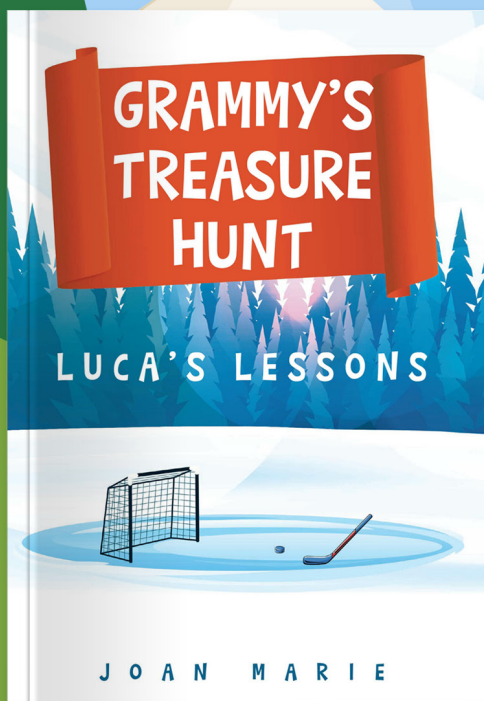
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Julianne Black DiBlasi • Mom, wielder of pixel, paint, and pen. [krakenSky.com](http://krakenSky.com)



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# Laura Purdie Salas

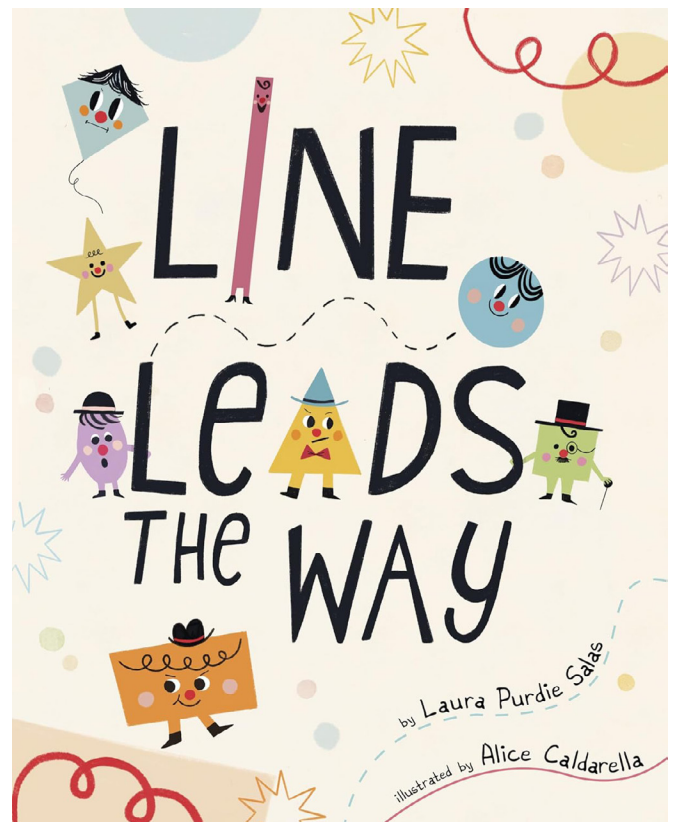
## Leads the Way

by Raven Howell

“Picture books are the bomb!” exclaims seasoned children’s writer and poet Laura Purdie Salas. “They’re a time-space warp that draws a reader into a new world in just a few minutes. They’re also a beautiful portal into other people’s lives and even into a reader’s own heart. And that doesn’t even begin to cover the reading, writing, and thinking skills kids gain from having picture books read to them.”

Laura is now adding the inspirational new book, *Line Leads the Way*, to her bountiful catalog. A former teacher, her publications have covered various genres including fiction, informational fiction, STEM, poetry, SEL, and nonfiction. She estimates, “I’m up to around 138 books now, I think. Many of those, though, are nonfiction series written for educational publishers. They choose the topic, plan, etc., and hire me to write them.” A moment later, she exclaims, “Oh! I’ve done eight more of those recently, so I guess I’m up to around 146 total. Of those 146-ish books, 20 of them are the books of my heart. The ones I conceptualized and poured myself into. Those are the ones that count, even though I enjoy some of my series nonfiction too.”

“I love to share *Finding Family: the Duckling Raised by Loons*,” she says, noting a favorite as an example. “This lyrical nonfiction book tells the true story of a family created by two waterbird species that usually don’t get along. The duckling learns amazing behaviors that scientists thought a mallard shouldn’t really (anatomically speaking) be able to do. That is such an inspiring thing! And it also emphasizes how many mysteries there still are in the world. I wrote it during lockdown in 2020. I didn’t realize it then, but I was reassuring myself. Telling myself that we can find joy and meaning every day, even when we don’t know what’s going to happen next. Just like the duckling and two loons did. I’m thrilled that this book has received some lovely honors, including a Charlotte Zolotow Honor, CCBC Best Books, Junior Library Guild selection, a CRA Eureka! Gold Medal, and a Minnesota Star of the North nomination.”



Additionally, Laura has garnered the Bank Street Best Books Award, NCTE Notable, starred Booklist and Kirkus reviews, as well as others. Still, she confides, “Book sales are down, and making a living as a writer is really hard. When readers, kids



or adults, or awards committees respond to your book in some beautiful way, that can power another month of writing!”

“It’s a really tough industry. Finding editors who love your work and who will work with unagented writers is a slog, honestly. So having books come out that I hope will touch readers is incredibly satisfying. But it’s not much like a fairy tale. Oh, how I wish I had a fairy godmother who could match each manuscript to the just-right editor and publisher!”

Laura surmises it’s been stubbornness and refusing to give up that has helped her most along the way. “I work every day—well, not usually weekends. And every good workday includes writing. But some days are filled with contracts and emails and presentations and things like that. I usually actually *write* an hour or two each day, and the rest of my workday is filled with “business stuff.”

“Usually, my biggest struggle is figuring out the best structure,” she says about starting a new book project.

“There are so many options—and many of them could lead to awesome books. But figuring out the best one for me to write at that moment is generally a lengthy trial-and-error process. On the other hand, the biggest reward is hearing people’s reactions! Hearing that my words meant something to someone makes it all worth the effort. And sometimes readers point out lovely themes in my work that I didn’t even realize. I love those aha moments.”

Laura spent her childhood in Florida, and recounts those years as stressful. “I don’t remember much of the day-to-day of it anyway. I’d love to walk in the shoes of a happy six-year-old for a week. I would try to carry all that emotion and wonder forward into my writing.”

“I loved *The House on East 88th Street* and all the *Lyle the Crocodile* books even though I was terrified of alligators in real life. And *The Snow Queen*. And *Richard Scarry*. And then I loved John Bellairs’ books—especially *The Figure in the Shadows!* I loved reading my mom’s Reader’s Digest books—



big, thick volumes full of all kinds of stories and nonfiction. I loved all the Oz books and all the Agatha Christie books. I'll stop here before I get really carried away!"

"As a writer, when I read Dav Pilkey's *God Bless the Gargoyles*, I knew I wanted to write picture books. It's so beautiful and haunting—not *exactly* like his *Captain Underpants* books."

Laura also applauds many fellow authors, mentioning Joyce Sidman, Douglas Florian, J. Patrick Lewis, Rebecca Kai Dotlich, Linda Ashman, Barbara Esbensen, Melissa Stewart, and Irene Latham.

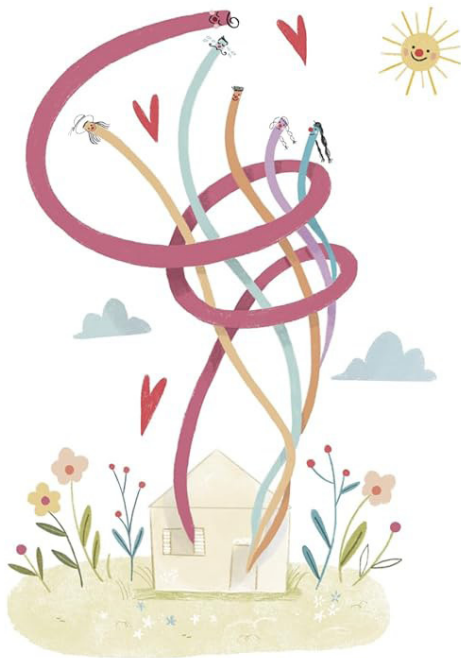
"When my husband and I moved to Minnesota, I'd been writing for grown-ups. When our daughters were small, I fell in love with picture books. A conference for children's writers sealed the deal. At one conference, then-Lerner editor Jill Braithwaite critiqued my work. That led to my first published book for kids."

"Minnesota has definitely affected my book topics. If I still lived in Florida where I grew up, my season-based books probably wouldn't exist. I'm obsessed with the seasons, and Minnesota displays them gorgeously!"

Laura has found her writing evolved over time. "I feel like I write with more emotion than I used to—even if I'm writing nonfiction. I'm getting braver at showing my own heart in the books and poems that I write."

"Poetry is my number one love. I think it's because the words themselves are of primary importance in poetry. I'm a word hound, and I love to play and experiment with words. Also, because a poem is short, I can venture deeply into emotion or a difficult topic, and I never get lost. Plus, when a poem fails utterly, so what? It's a relatively short block of time invested in it, and it's all practice. That's not nearly as intimidating as crafting a novel and discovering, "Hey, that doesn't actually work."

And then there was **Line**.  
He hugged his family for a long time.



When he left, a bit of himself  
stayed behind.



She finds exceeding inspiration and just plain joy in “the fact that the sun glitters on little lake waves at sunrise each morning, in Cinnabon Delights at Taco Bell, a back rub, the word “bamboozle,” a notebook that’s just the right size, a book I want to step inside ... SO many things,” she says, and playfully notes, “I have an admittedly unhealthy obsession with donuts, cupcakes, toffee, and more. I would hate to live without buttercream frosting or sticky toffee pudding. When my favorite donut shop, Mojo Monkey Donuts, changed to just an occasional pop-up offering, my husband feared they’d go out of business, and I’d drift into depression. I survived, but it was a big deal. I mourned those donuts and my donut routine.”

Laura’s new book, *Line Leads the Way*, is about a group of shapes, all competing for a special job at the library. Subtle math and reading curriculum teachings are cleverly folded into the theme of resilience and self-worth. Laura says, “The story acknowledges that kids face hard things. They say difficult goodbyes and encounter mean people, but they still persevere.”

The story also celebrates shapes, puns, self-worth, the value of imperfection, and a big old dose of library love!”

“I hope it helps readers recognize that everybody’s carrying baggage they don’t necessarily talk about. And that our hurts, failures, and insecurities help make us strong, caring, empathetic people. Of course, it doesn’t spell all of that out, so I hope if they don’t get that message, they’ll just think it’s a fun story.”

She’s enthusiastic about her upcoming projects. “I can’t wait for my 2025 books! I’ve got two gorgeous board books coming from Creative Editions: *A Home Like This* and *Butterfly Goes to School*. And then *Flurry, Float, and Fly: the Story of a Snowstorm* is coming from Bloomsbury. It’s a companion book to *Zap! Clap! Boom!* The illustrators of all three of these books are doing stunning work in totally different styles.”

“I’m focusing on tiny, concrete things,” she says about her personal life. “My favorite thing is the deck on our townhome.”





The flowerboxes overflow despite my notorious brown thumb, the trees shade it, and the catbirds and red-winged blackbirds offer interesting background music.” Playing games like *Scrabble*, *Five Dice*, and *Angry Birds Star Wars* is a favorite pastime for her, and happiness is “a deep breath, an ocean or Great Lake, a mountain view, and so many trees. Throw in a filled cupcake, and I’ll pass out from happiness.”

Laura has a knack for sharing that happiness with young readers, and her new book, *Line Leads the Way* offers a

heartening message. “It’s okay to share your hard times and imperfections. Those are the things that connect me to you—all of us to each other. Be proud of who you are. Know that you’re perfectly imperfect!” she assures us.

For more information about Laura Purdie Salas and her work, visit [laurasalas.com](http://laurasalas.com). ●

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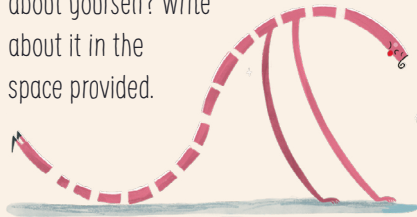
**Raven Howell** is an award-winning children’s author and poet. [ravenhowell.com](http://ravenhowell.com)

# Writing Prompts

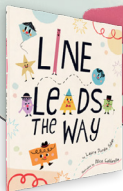
In the story, Line becomes broken and chipped on his long journey to the library. But Line has a determination and resilience that is unmatched.

**Think about a time when you faced a tough challenge or obstacle.**

How were you able to overcome the obstacle? What did you learn about yourself? Write about it in the space provided.



**What are your favorite things about yourself?** Write a list of all of the things that make you special and uniquely you.



*Line Leads the Way* by Laura Purdie Salas, illustrated by Alice Caldarella

# A Heartwarming Tale of Friendship and Redemption...

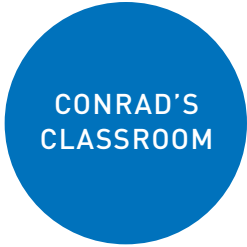
Join Olyn on a thrilling adventure to the heart of a mysterious dragon's lair, where he discovers the true meaning of friendship and treasure far beyond gold and jewels!



*"Undeniably sweet, thoughtful, and appealing. This enchanting picture book makes the perfect child's gift for any special occasion. Young readers will be enchanted by the friendship and adventure captured in it."*  
– Emma Megan

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# IS A TORTOISE A TURTLE OR IS A TURTLE A TORTOISE?

by Conrad J. Storad

For years, regular readers of this column knew that my young grandchildren were often story idea generators. The kids are a lot older now, but I still smile when I think about our many walks to the pond or through the woods. Their questions about the natural world were usually right to the point, with no wiggle room.

Hadley, my youngest granddaughter, is a fifth grader now. She has new interests. But her deep pool of questions always included potential column fodder. You might remember her inquiry about toads and frogs. I dealt with that one year ago. Now it's time to finally tackle her follow-up question:

“Topsy (my Grandpa name), is a tortoise a turtle, or is a turtle a tortoise?”

Once again, the little girl's question wasted no words. And once again, the answer would not be as simple or direct. Do you know the answer? I had to do some reading and a bit of video viewing. A novel way for me to do research.

The easy answer to Hadley's question is as follows: Every tortoise is a turtle. But not every turtle is a tortoise. Got it?

Herpetologists are scientists who make their living studying reptiles. Turtles and tortoises are reptiles. In fact, they are

among the oldest reptile group living on Earth today. They are much older than lizards and snakes.

Turtles were alive on our planet more than 200 million years ago. They roamed the land and swam the seas long before T-Rex, triceratops, brachiosaurus, velociraptor, or most of the other best-known dinosaurs first appeared.

Many frogs and toads look similar, but they often act quite differently. So do tortoises and turtles. Again, don't be too quick. Some of these shelled creatures look alike as well. One key is the habitat in which you find them.

For herpetologists, the terms “turtle” and “tortoise” often refer to the differences in where the animals live. “Turtle” is often used for both turtles and tortoises. But not the other way around. The only real difference is that tortoises always live on land. Turtles can live on land. But they live near or in the water some or all the time.

There are many large groups within the broader family of turtles. There are side-neck turtles and hidden-neck turtles. The names describe how the reptile retracts its head into the safety of the protective shell.



A Midland painted turtle, one of the most common turtles in Ohio.



Common map turtles and painted turtles catch some rays along the Ohio-Erie Canal in Barberton, Ohio.

Pay attention to how the creatures walk. That is a great way to tell the difference. A tortoise moves like a ballerina. Well, sort of. It always walks on its clawed tippy toes. When not swimming, a turtle plods along on the flatness of its webbed feet.

Scientists estimate there are still about 300 different kinds of turtles and tortoises alive today. Many are endangered. Tortoises have a life span similar to humans — about 60 to 80 years.

In contrast, a turtle's normal life span is just 20 to 40 years. Sea turtles live longer—on average, about 60 to 70 years. But they don't reach maturity and the ability to reproduce until they are 40 or 50 years old.

The giant tortoises found on the Galapagos Islands in the Pacific Ocean are thought to live 150 years or more. The oldest known tortoise lived for 188 years. Charles Darwin, the famous naturalist, met the big creatures during his famous voyage around the world on HMS Beagle in the early 1830s.

Like other reptiles, turtles and tortoises are ectotherms. That is a fancy word for “cold-blooded.” The body temperature of a turtle or tortoise depends on the temperature of the air or water around them.

Both turtles and tortoises must breathe air to live. Sea turtles must surface at regular intervals to fill their lungs with air.

Of course, there is plenty more to learn about turtles and tortoises. A curious youngster of yours might ask, “What about terrapins?”



The Eastern box turtle is a popular reptile pet.

## Turtle or tortoise? Some common ways to tell them apart:

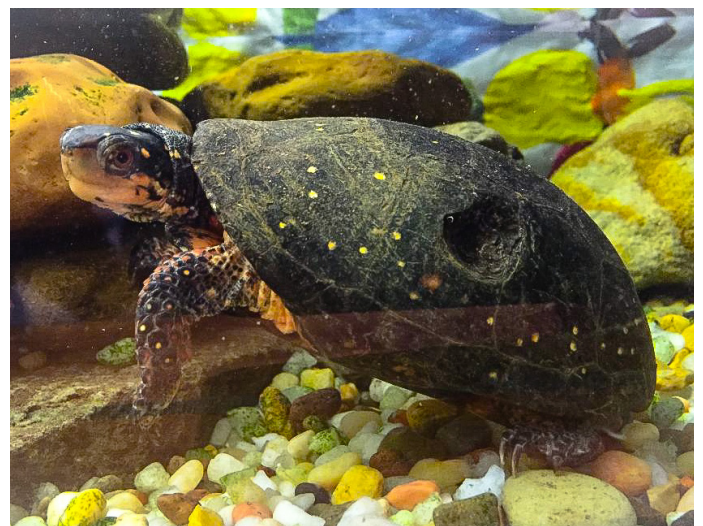
### Turtles:

- Must live in or near water to survive
- Mostly have flat, lightweight, streamlined shells
- Webbed feet with long claws. Some have flippers.
- Omnivores. Some eat meat and fish. Also eat fruits, vegetables, and leafy vegetation.
- Hatchlings stay in their nest on their own for 90 to 120 days

### Tortoises:

- Live on dry land
- Most have large, heavy, dome-shaped shells. Some are bumpy.
- Sturdy, stubby feet with short, bent legs. Front feet are shovel-like, and clawed for digging
- Most are herbivores. Some prefer live food.
- Hatchlings move from a nest to mother's burrow soon after birth

To answer that one, be ready to put your research skills and available technology to use. No, the answer does not involve athletic teams at the University of Maryland.



A spotted turtle relaxes behind glass at the Akron Zoo.



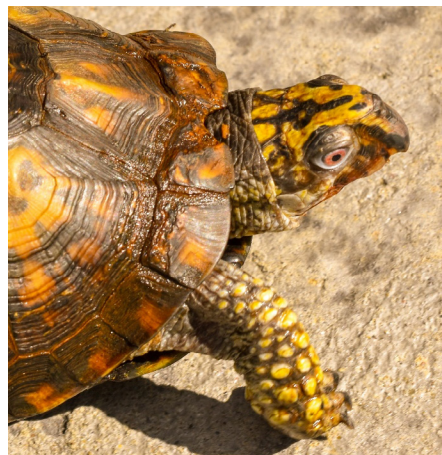
The snapping turtle is Ohio's largest. They can weigh up to 35 pounds.



A Giant Galapagos Tortoise at the Akron Zoo.



Snapping turtles have powerful jaws.



Franklin, a pet Russian tortoise, demonstrates the tip-toe walking style.



What a face...prehistoric looking, but kissable?

## Learn more about turtles and tortoises:

### Books:

- *Turtles and Tortoises (Rookie Read-About Science: What's the Difference?)*  
—by Lisa M. Herrington
- *Life in the Slow Lane (A Desert Tortoise Tale)*  
—by Conrad J. Storad
- *Bubby's Puddle Pond (A Tortuga's Tale of the Desert)*  
—by Carol Hageman

### Websites:

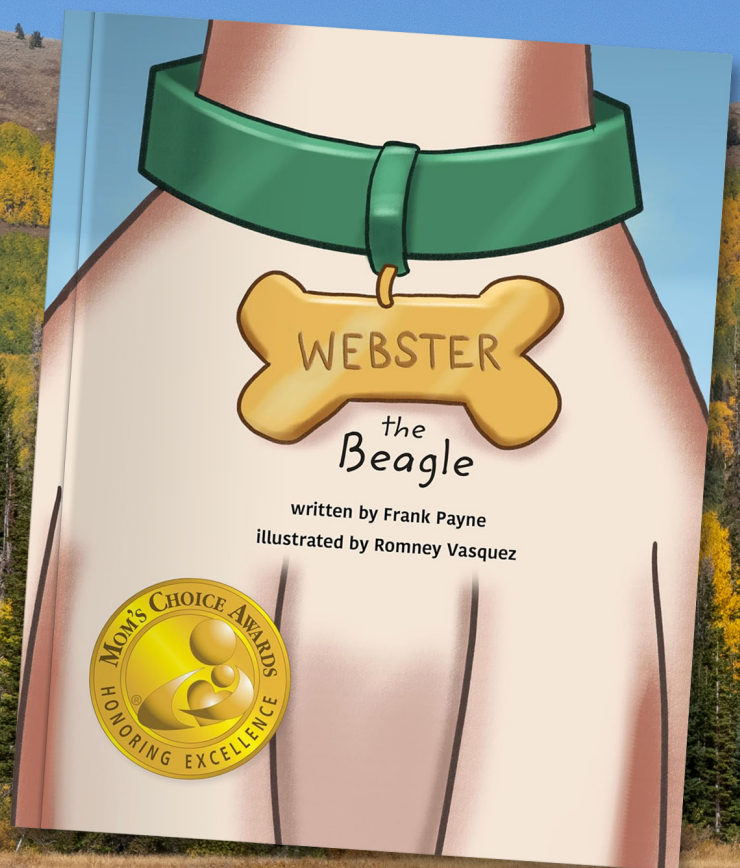
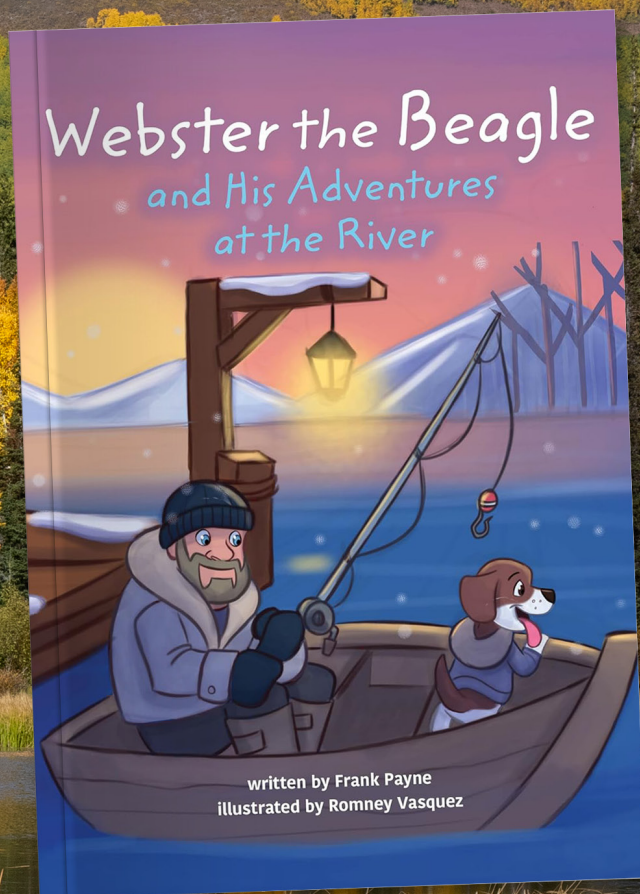
- **Clint's Reptiles: Turtle, Tortoise, or Terrapin?**  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=nKr6uTNI23A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nKr6uTNI23A)
- **National Geographic: How to tell a turtle from a tortoise**  
[www.nationalgeographic.com/news/2017/12/shell-game--how-to-tell-a-turtle-from-a-tortoise/](https://www.nationalgeographic.com/news/2017/12/shell-game--how-to-tell-a-turtle-from-a-tortoise/)

**Conrad J. Storad** is the national award-winning author or editor of more than 50 science and nature books for children and young adults. His first book in a new series, *Night Watchers: Nocturnal Creatures of North America*, is out now. [conradjstorad.com](http://conradjstorad.com)

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

# ChatGPT: Is it Valuable or Not?

by Olivia Amiri, age 16

Recently, ChatGPT has been an extremely controversial subject among both students and teachers. While there are softwares to detect it, many students have started to use the AI tool to streamline their written assignments. But while ChatGPT's capabilities seem endless, in reality, abusing the software comes with its dangers. With the first and most obvious being plagiarism, ChatGPT and other AI softwares can also give misinformation or untrue estimates. Its operations allow it to organize information fairly well, but in terms of what it generates, often the content is subpar.

While most teachers are banning the use of AI entirely for their students inside and outside the classroom, we are overlooking a possible beneficial use of the technology. Instead of relying on ChatGPT as a generative tool for essays or written work, it can be used as an organizational tool. AI doesn't need to give us everything—we can give it our ideas to organize instead. Using the software to list, order, organize, or compile can be a healthy and helpful change. Instead of asking for it to do the work, we can give it the simple but moral task of making sure our own work is organized how we would like it to be.

For example, instead of asking the software to come up with a week of meal-planning recipes, we can give it the meals and ingredients we would like and have it arrange and schedule them throughout the week. For essays, we could ask it to list all of the research we have collected from most to least recent, that way it is easy to include that information chronologically. Our relationship with AI doesn't have to be all or nothing; we can use it as an aid, not as a replacement for original work. ●

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**Sixteen-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. [livonlife.com](https://www.livonlife.com)

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