

Story Monsters Ink



FEBRUARY 2025



The Literary Magazine for Teachers, Librarians, and Parents

David Shannon

Megan McDonald

Martellus Bennett

Andrea Beatriz Arango

Kaitlyn Sage Patterson

Nikki Shannon Smith

Terry Pierce and
Nadja Sarell

Changemaker:

Amanda Gorman

PLUS:

Judy Newman

Conrad's Classroom

Monsters at the Movies

Winter Reading List

Book Reviews
and More!



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Changemaker:

Amanda Gorman

by Raven Howell

What better way to celebrate the vibrancy and strength of girls than with world-renowned poet Amanda Gorman's new book, *Girls on the Rise*? The rousing text captures the female spirit in innate beauty and grace, as it boldly marches forward from the history it helped shape.

Amanda wrote the poem, *We Rise*, in 2021 to commemorate the power of daring to raise our voices. The response she received was overwhelming. She reveals *We Rise* was inspired by Christine Blasey Ford's testimony in 2018. "As time went on, I came to recognize that it could also encourage young people to step into themselves and honor their power through community, which ultimately became *Girls on the Rise*."

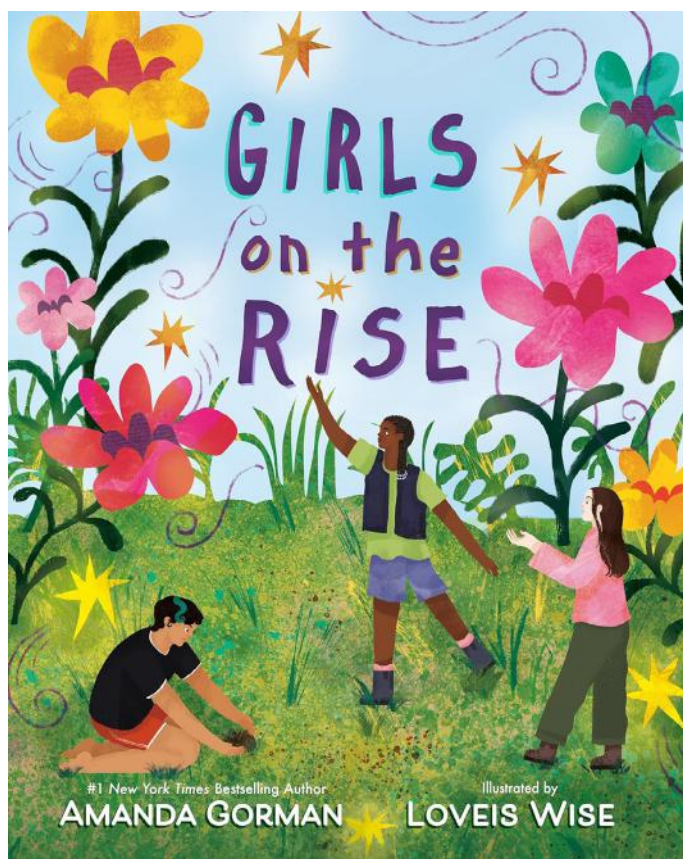
Born in 1998, Amanda grew up in Los Angeles and began writing at a very young age. She's a *New York Times* bestselling author, poet, and activist. She's also the youngest presidential inaugural poet in U.S. history. Her past publications include *The Hill We Climb*, *Call Us What We Carry*, *Change Sings*, and *Something, Someday*. She's written for the *New York Times*, has performed commissioned poems for *CBS This Morning*, and spoken at countless events across the nation. Amanda has received a Genius Grant from OZY Media and recognition from Scholastic, YoungArts, College Women of the Year, and the Webby Awards.

In 2017, Amanda was honored as the first-ever National Youth Poet Laureate by Urban Word. She's the recipient of the Poets & Writers Barnes and Noble Writers for Writers Award and is the youngest board member of 826 National, a U.S. youth writing network.

She considers how *Girls on the Rise* is distinct from her past publications. "This book is different in so many ways from my other picture books," she tells me. "I have been blessed with very diverse illustrators, each with their own beautiful art styles. Loveis Wise did an incredible job on *Girls on the Rise*. From my end, this book was a little different not only due to its conception from an existing poem but also due to its focus on themes of community, girls, and their allies."

"I hope *Girls on the Rise* brings courage to young people everywhere and relays the message that we are strongest when working together. I like to imagine readers at this moment connecting to that empowerment and the importance of working together. This is a book for girls but also boys, gender non-conforming children, and anyone who wishes to engage with the history and future of girls."

"The perspective I'd like to convey is that of children as valuable members of their communities. Kids are so perceptive, imaginative, and honest, and I wanted to honor them and their allies with this book. Also, my own life is reflected in this poem through the girls and women who have inspired and empowered me to become who I am today, as well as the hope I have for today's girls."



Amanda's day-to-day life as an author and activist involves a lot of writing, reading, and a lot of revision. She says, "Writing is transformative, reading is freeing, and you can usually find me reading a new book!"

"My revision process involves a lot of reflection on cadence, rhythm, and word choices. For me, it's always a process of questioning and fine-tuning each element until it's just right. I typically like to work on one project at a time, however, if inspiration strikes, I will sometimes work on multiple at once."

"I'd like to think my writing style has evolved—every poem is a little different from the last. I do my best to speak to new concepts while still honoring my own voice as a poet. And the best reward is seeing my book being read to and by others. It's still so surreal that my words can reach so many."

As an author for kids, there's one bottom line she always keeps in mind. "It's treating the child as an intelligent and thoughtful individual. Instead of dumbing down concepts, I find new ways to frame the world and challenge the child."

“Books and poetry are essential for kids. They can teach children so much about belonging, empathy, and history. Not only do they have the power to transport and transform the reader, but they also show us where we have been, what we have done, and what we have experienced.”

“With young audiences, the question I most often get is: ‘What advice do you have for aspiring young writers?’ My answer tends to be that there is no such thing as an aspiring writer; if you write, you ARE a writer, even if you’re not famous or published yet. And the best thing you can do as you learn and grow is read and write as much as possible and find fellow writers to bond with.”

Girls on the Rise is rich with encouragement and enforces the idea that girls are strong on their own, but even stronger when they work to uplift one another. One verse affirms, “*We are beautiful not because of who we may appear, but how we look straight into the face of fear.*” Amanda’s favorite line is, “*When one girl stands up, she is never alone.*”

“I wish the book could travel to the home and school libraries of every young person!” she says enthusiastically. “And I am

absolutely blown away by Loveis Wise’s illustrations. I love that they depict the girls together in each spread because community is a central theme of the book. And the colors and textures they use are so fun and inviting!”

“I’ve come to understand that it is a partnership between the written word and illustration! Just as Loveis Wise is not in the room when I am writing the poem, I am not in the room when they are illustrating. This allows for more freedom of interpretation without stifling either artist. It’s always exciting to receive the first versions of the illustrations to see how my words are interpreted.”

Amanda feels the biggest risk she’s ever taken was deciding to speak at the presidential inauguration in 2021. “After January 6th, it was challenging to feel safe speaking at the Capitol, but I’m so glad that I did. Otherwise, the biggest challenge in my career thus far has been my struggle with burnout. It’s tough to find the right balance between work and life, but I think I’m starting to learn how to put myself and my health first,” she confides. “These days, I most look forward to time spent with my loved ones.”



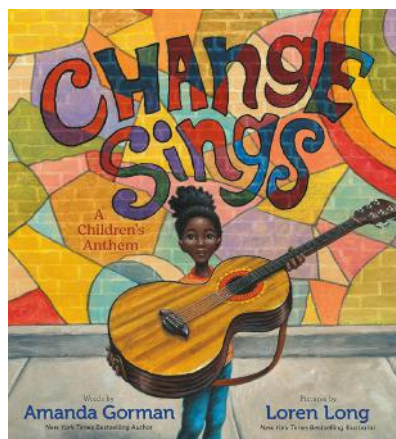
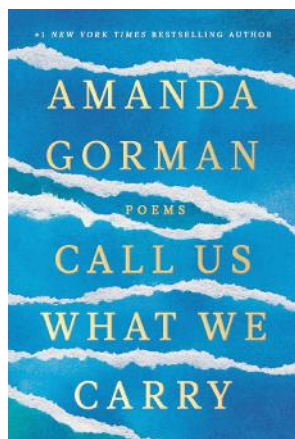
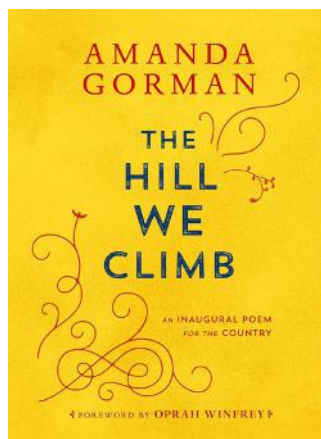
“My mom is my hero because she always celebrated moments when I have spoken up for myself and others and taught me the importance of doing so from a very young age. Essential characteristics of a hero for me include honesty and advocacy.”

During downtime, she enjoys “watching the night sky when walking,” and finds constellations extraordinary. She likes to play the game “Spot It,” exclaiming it’s “lots of fun!”

“We’re living in an incredibly global and interconnected world, where events in one area can be felt an ocean away. I hope that it draws us together as a people on this planet.”

“I hope readers will remember that having courage is not about being fearless but rather acknowledging that our fear directs us to what is truly important to us. Once we can step beyond that fear, we are then able to conceive that something wonderful might lie beyond what scares us.”

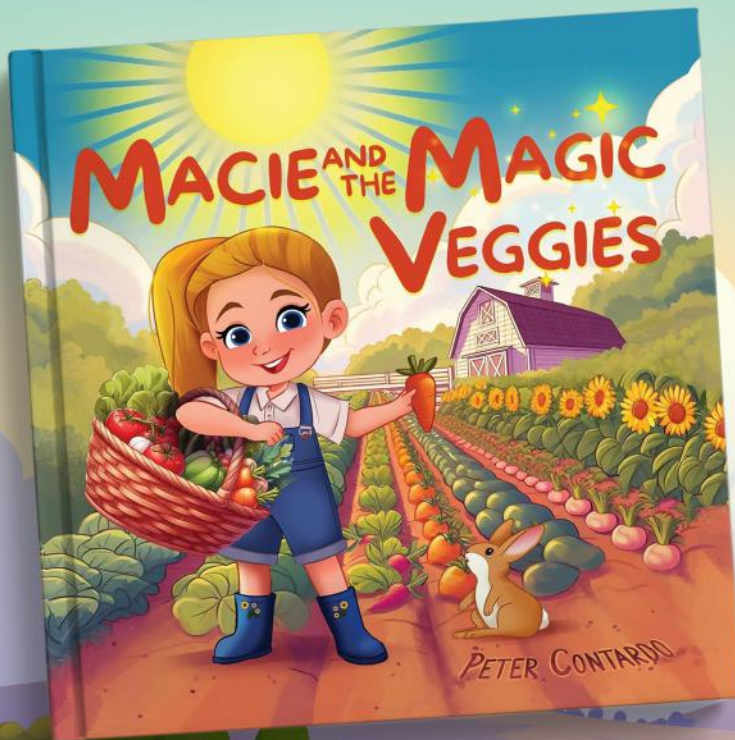
For more information about Amanda Gorman and her work, visit theamandagorman.com. ●



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David Shannon

Is Up to Something....

by Raven Howell

"I *always* wanted to be an artist," declares David Shannon. "I have no idea what I first learned to draw by myself, but I've been drawing since I could hold a crayon—longer than I can remember."



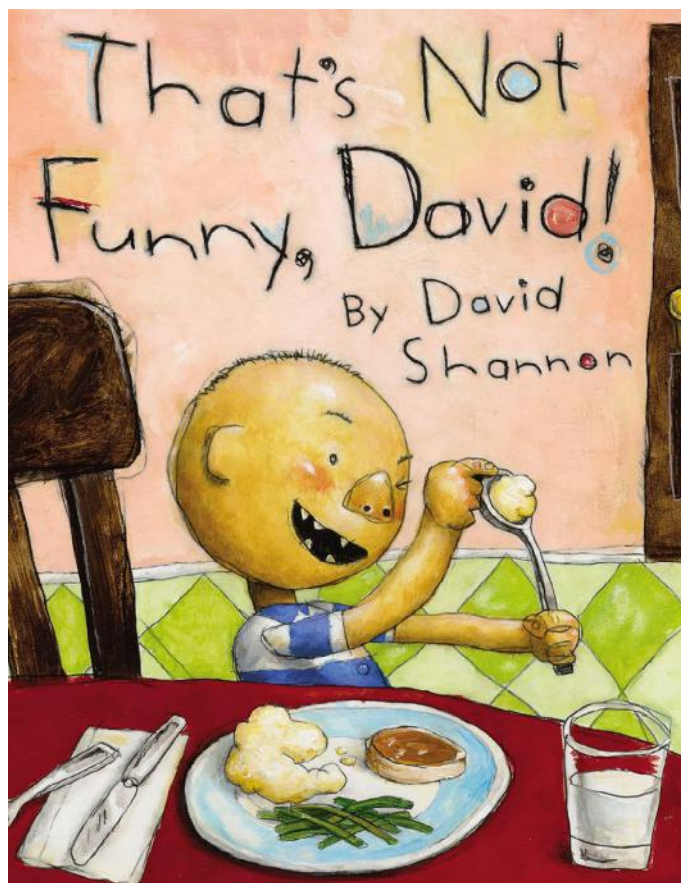
Born in Washington, D.C., David grew up in Spokane, WA. During high school, he was already creating his own illustrations for the books he was reading. Vowing at a young age to pursue a career in art, he attended and graduated from the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena and later moved to New York City to work for various magazines and papers.

He illustrated his first book in 1989, Julius Lester's *How Many Spots Does a Leopard Have?* After illustrating several more books by other authors, he decided to tackle writing his own stories. David's first book, *How Georgie Radbourn Saved Baseball*, released in 1994, was promptly accorded the *New York Times* Best Illustrated Book. But it was a few years later that his picture book, *No, David!* won him the coveted Caldecott Honor Book Award. From then on, the popularity of the *David* books exploded as he continued the collection with *David Goes to School*, *David Gets in Trouble*, *It's Christmas, David!*, *Grow Up, David!*, and the *Diaper David* board book trio.

Round-headed, shark-toothed David is the quintessential mischievous child whose mother is always telling him "No," except when it's about how much she loves him. Then it's a resounding "Yes, David, I love you." The stories are lighthearted and funny, with a zing of delightful goofiness that parents, grandparents, and kids can easily relate to.

That's Not Funny, David! is the latest in the hilarious collection. In the new book, little David is still a comedian and troublemaker. This time he's determined to get everyone laughing at his crazy antics. He tells jokes in the classroom and cannonballs into the pool. He succeeds in his silliness but also learns some limits to his shenanigans.

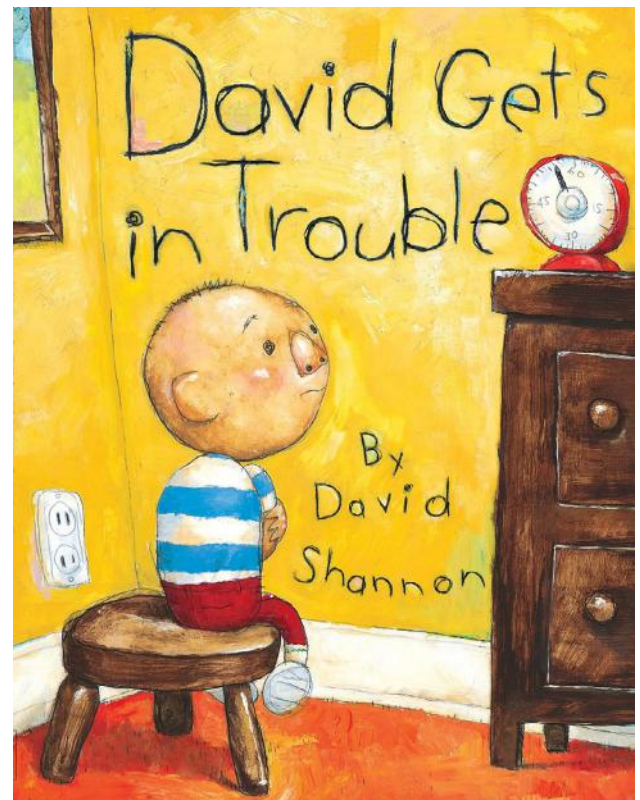
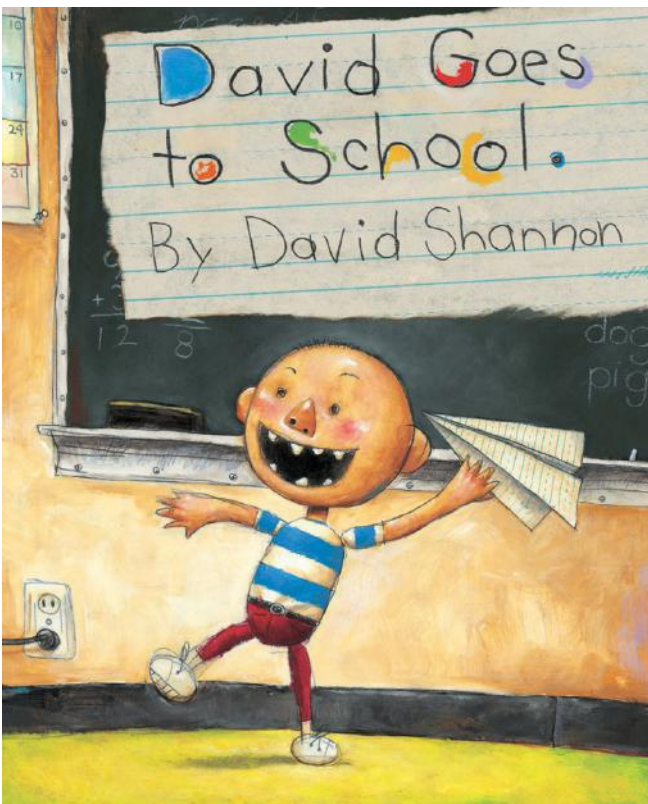
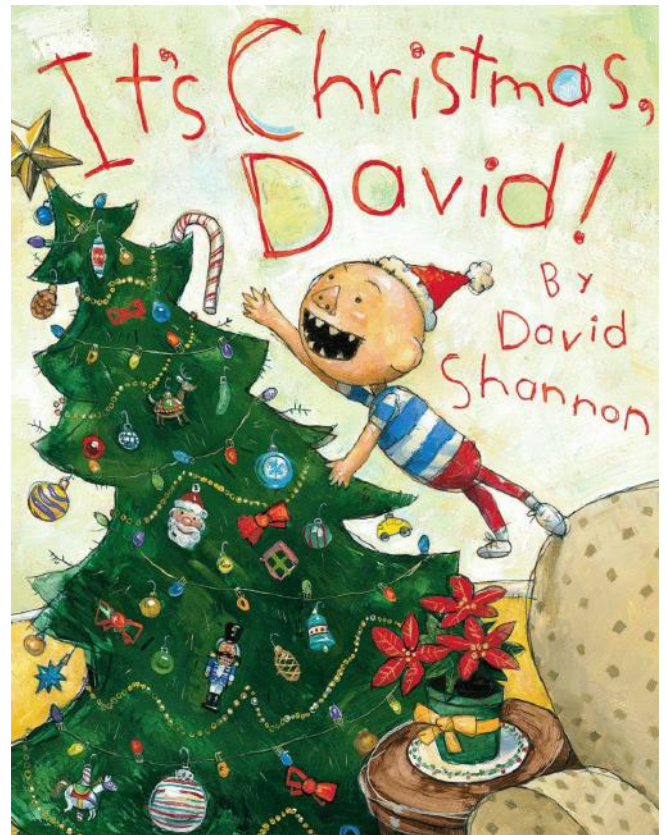
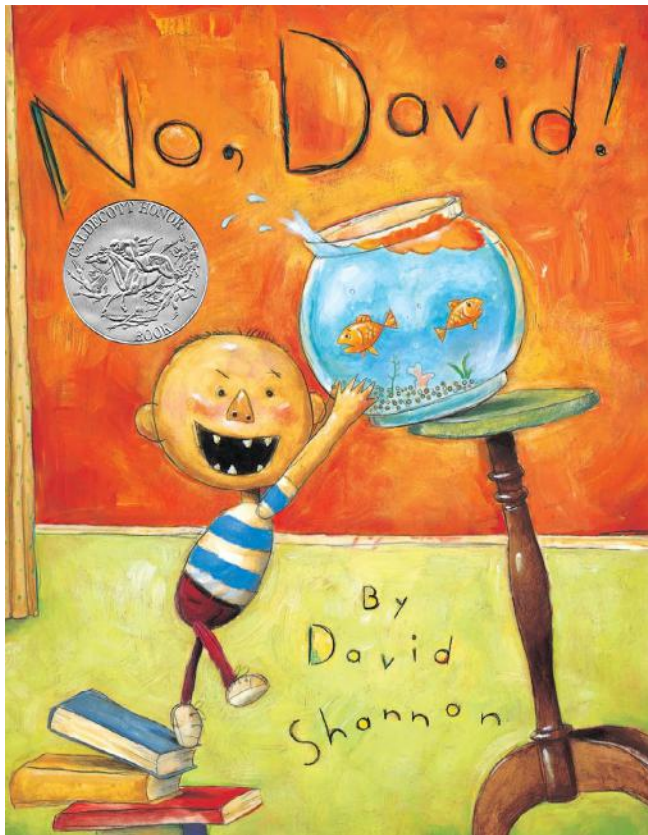
David reveals, "I honestly didn't think I'd ever make another *David* book—I wanted each one to be about something different and not keep going over the same ground. But then a couple of things happened. A few years ago, I was texting with some friends, and I made a crack about something. They both texted back, *That's not funny, David!* I jokingly replied that that was the title of my next book, but it kind of stuck in my brain (perhaps because I'd heard it throughout my entire life!). Then last year we celebrated the 25th anniversary of *No, David!*, so I was thinking about him more than usual. I got to thinking that an awful lot of trouble that kids get into revolves around trying to be funny. They're exploring where that invisible, ever-changing line is between funny and not funny, and testing its boundaries—often with unexpected results. That seemed like a perfect subject for a new *David* book."



"The biggest challenge was how to make David funny and not funny at the same time," he explains. "That's kind of what the whole book is about. I try to illustrate aspects of the story that aren't in the text—I refer to it as "drawing between the lines." I think, ideally, the words tell part of the story, and the pictures tell a different, overlapping part. When you put them together with the reader's imagination, you get the whole story. Another thing, don't underestimate kids. They understand a lot, and if they don't get something, it often piques their curiosity."

A couple of new craft tools and artistic techniques were implemented for the new book. "I used markers on a few pieces so it would look like a drawing on a whiteboard. Oh, and a Sharpie on the picture where David has drawn a beard on his face. Yes, David, that's permanent ink!"

David's artistic expression delightfully varies from project to project, yet as an illustrator, he has a recognizable style. His own stories come to life with childlike, expressive paintings in books like *Gold!*, *Roy Digs Dirt*, and *A Bad Case of Stripes*. The



visual landscape changes with *Hiawatha and the Peacemaker* written by Robbie Robertson or Jane Yolen's *Encounter*.

He says, "I've always tried to let the story dictate how the art should look. What "style" is going to best tell the story. I might paint fairly realistically for a folktale or draw like a 5-year-old if it's a *David* book. A more whimsical story could be better with zanier drawing. I guess somehow it always ends up looking like my stuff, though!"

He considers authenticity important in writing a children's story. "Even with a story that's completely made up, there needs to be a certain genuineness. Kids are pretty good at spotting a fake."

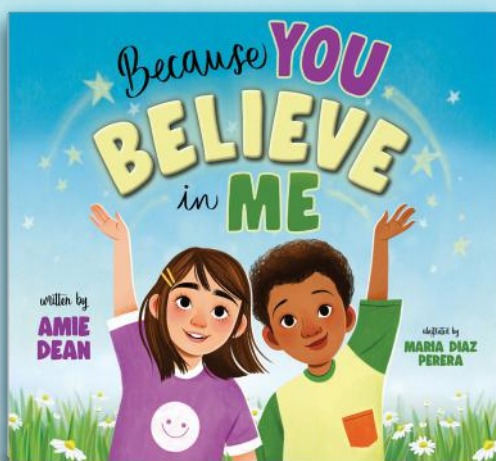
David is prepared for a national book tour, crisscrossing the nation and coinciding with the new book's release. That means he's also prepared for the question most often asked: *Did you really run down the street with no clothes on!*? (a classic scenario from *No, David!*). "They go about it in a roundabout way," he

smiles. "First they ask if David is me (not exactly), then they ask if I did all the things David does (I didn't—some of them are things my family or friends did). Then we get down to the thing they really want to know (that was something my nephew did)."

This award-winning author/illustrator will continue to bring much joy and many giggles to children, parents, and book lovers. "People have written entire books on the subject of the role children's books play in our communities!" David exclaims. "Literacy is probably the most important thing—making it fun for kids to learn to read. It empowers them and helps their little brains develop, too. Storytelling has always been something that a community can gather around to express points of view, to bond, to solve problems, and to help understand the world."

For more information about David Shannon and his work, visit nodavidshannon.com. ●

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Megan McDonald

Starts a New Chapter

Bestselling author Megan McDonald is celebrating two major milestones! Her incredibly popular and enduring series *Judy Moody* turns 25 this year, and she is releasing a brand-new chapter book series. We needed to find out more!

Judy Moody is turning 25 this year! How?! It seems like just yesterday she was in third grade. How does it make you feel?

Old! I can't believe Judy Moody has been in third grade for 25 years! I now meet Judy Moody fans who are college students or young parents who read *Judy Moody* when they were 8 years old! I just can't seem to stop thinking up ideas for Judy and Stink. Each time I write a new book with one of these characters, it's like coming home.

Tell us a bit about your background/life growing up. Are Judy's experiences based on your own?

I grew up with FOUR older sisters. When I first created Judy Moody, she was a younger sister, like me. Then I thought it might be fun to turn real life on its head and get to experience what it's like to be a big sister for once. So I wrote the novel from the older sister's point of view. In order to make it different from my own life, I gave her a younger *brother*. Enter, Stink! But the antics and adventures, squabbles and sibling dynamics are universal.



What's next for Judy?

Look for Judy Moody graphic novels in the future. Yikes. I hope I didn't just give away a big secret! Sorry, Candlewick Press.

And now you have a new *Fairy Door Diaries* chapter book series! What inspired it?

When I was visiting family in Minneapolis, I took a walk around Lake Harriet and discovered a fairy door at the base of a giant ash tree. It intrigued me. Was this a fairy tree? What kind of fairy folk lived behind that door? I only found out much later that you can leave a note for the elf who lives there, and Mr. Little Guy will answer your note or letter.

The idea of a teeny-tiny door that leads to a magical world pulled me right in.

I start each book this way:

*Imagine a door.
A teeny-tiny fairy door.
Now imagine it is magic.
Open the door.*

My hope is that the fairy door will draw readers into a world of magic, inhabited by a different type of fairy or elven creature in each adventure.

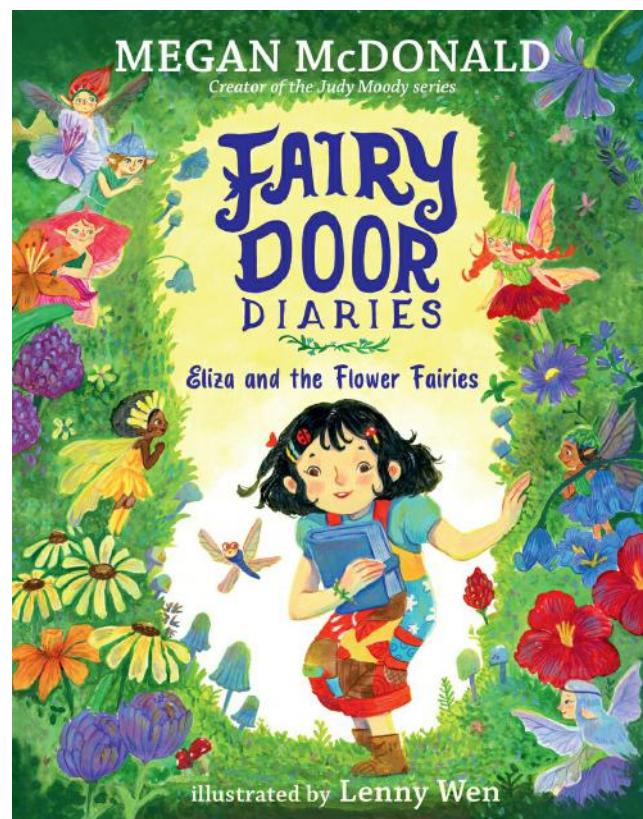
What is the best time of day for you to write? Are you a day writer or a night writer?

I am definitely not a morning person. Late at night seems to be when I do my best writing. It's quiet. Oh-so-quiet. For me, nighttime is more internal, with less distraction. I can hear frogs singing, or an owl hooting, but it feels like I'm the only person awake in the whole world.

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

Reading! And jigsaw puzzling. Taking walks. Baking pies. Growing zinnias. Talking on the phone with my sisters for hours. I live near the Pacific Ocean, so looking for starfish or agates or sand dollars or beach glass at the beach is one of my favorite things to do when I'm not writing.

What is your favorite writing snack?



Popcorn! And anything chocolate. Guess what?! This is the same food that Mr. Little Guy prefers. I guess you can say I eat like an elf.

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

My proudest moment has to be when I found out that my first book, *Is This a House for Hermit Crab*, would be published, 35 years ago! Then just last year, the picture book was re-published with beautiful new illustrations by Katherine Tillotson.

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

Organizing my ideas. I always have WAY too many ideas than what will fit into one story or book. So I tend to overwrite. Then I have to go back later and cut whole chapters. Ouch!

What advice would you give a first-time author?

Read! Read anything and everything, from the cereal box to the newspaper to poetry to big fat novels.

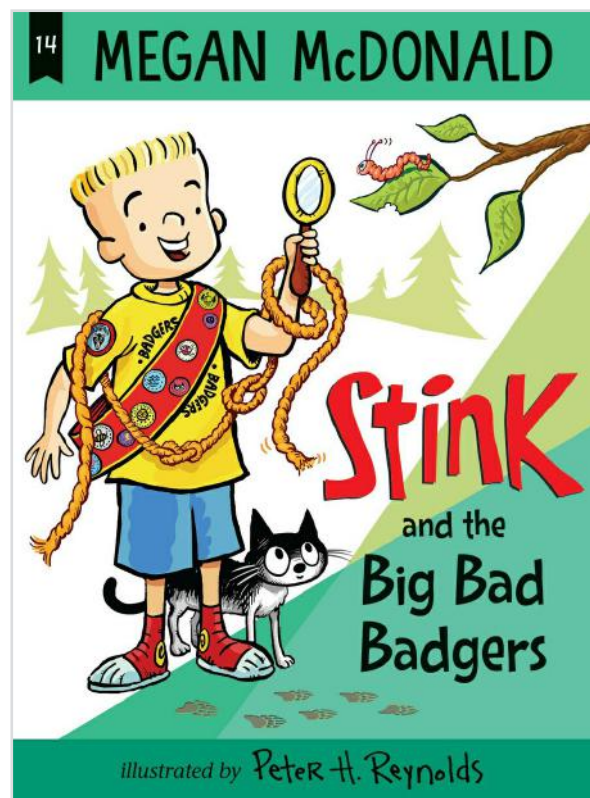


What book are you reading now (aside from your own)?

My new favorite is *Lone Wolf*, a hilarious easy-to-read series by Kiah Thomas. Lone Wolf is me. Lone Wolf is every kid at some time. The books are laugh-out-loud funny. I don't often say this, but I wish I had written those books!

What's next for you?

I'm writing a new series of short chapter books called *Bunny and Clyde*, illustrated by Scott Nash. Bunny and Clyde are two bad bunnies (except one's a chipmunk) who think it's going to be great fun to learn to be bad. But somehow, "bad" keeps turning out good! ●



Martellus Bennett

Inspires a Generation of Winners

by Raven Howell

Frances Lincoln Children's Books, an imprint of the Quarto Group, is celebrating the launch of *Dear Black Boy*, written and illustrated by former professional football tight end and NFL Super Bowl Champion, Martellus Bennett. The book's encouraging text, coupled with captivating images, offers children motivation to take on their passions, and in boundless creativity, seek potential as future leaders.



Martellus has dedicated his life to promoting the possibilities of the Black imagination when it works outside of the boundaries of societal beliefs. In addition to his famous athletic feats, he's a successful writer, animator, film director, game designer, educator, and entrepreneur.

"When you follow your dreams, you give others permission to follow theirs," he says, explaining that with the right preparation and empowered imagination, every Black boy can win. "Inspiration is the greatest gift that a Black man can give a Black boy. It's an inspiration of how to live, how to achieve a dream, and how to dream louder. Seeing is believing. When Black boys see men who look like them achieve their dreams, it reinforces the belief that they too can succeed. It breaks down barriers and broadens the scope of what is possible. *Dear Black Boy* is me dreaming out loud on paper. I hope this book brings the possibilities of dreams to the reader."

Martellus compels his book readers to think for themselves. "I suppose I have a chance to encourage readers to think about something, right here. I encourage readers to think for

themselves, think about others, think about things, think about stuff, think about nothing, think about everything, think just to think, think about thinking, think about love, think about change, or changing the way that you think."

He looks back on his childhood as adventurous. "If we saw it in a movie, we tried it. It's amazing we're still alive," he chuckles. "I enjoyed everything as a child." Then he smiles, adding, "Ah, to be a kid again!"

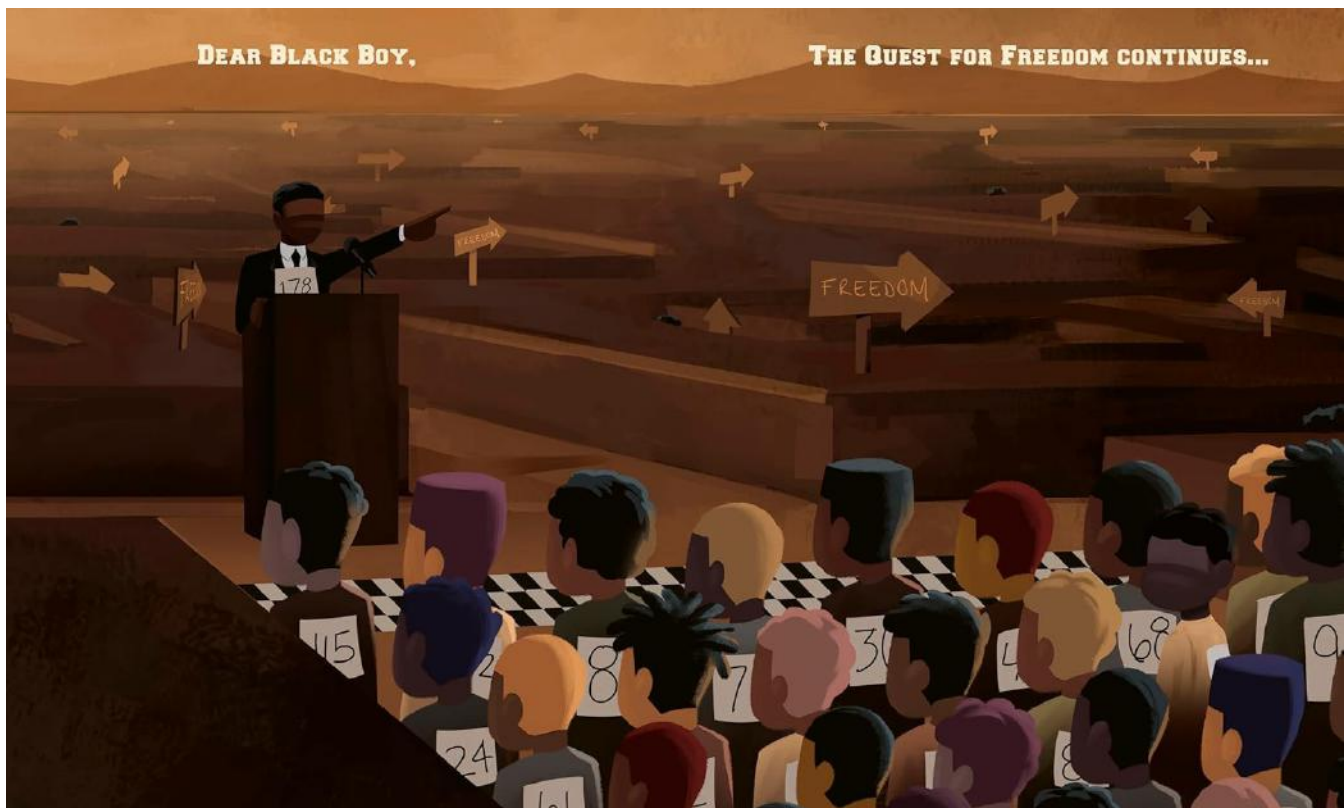
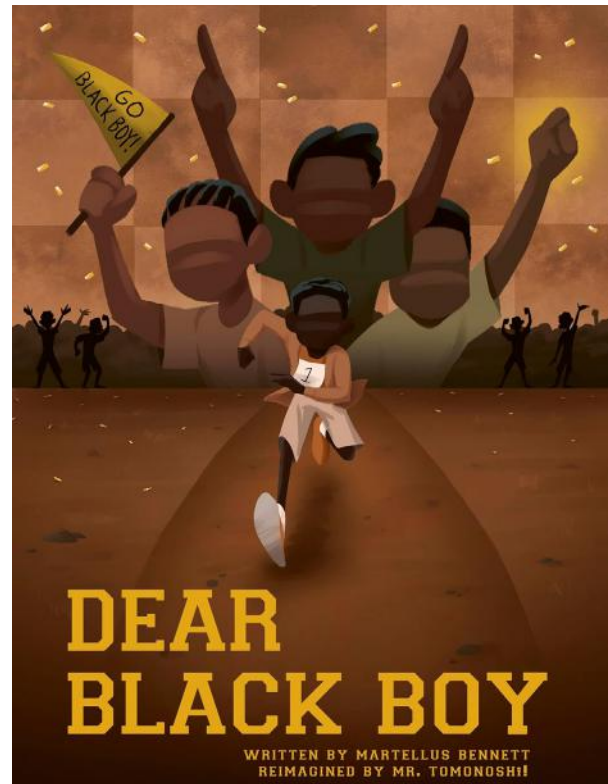
Growing up, Martellus's family supported his creativity. "My mom is creative. I worked with my mom a lot around the house. I hung wallpaper, I sponge-painted walls, I planted plants. However, I was never a momma's boy. Me and mom laugh a lot when we're together. I love that about us. She starts laughing as soon as she picks up the phone. I don't have to say anything. It's the anticipation of the laugh that makes us laugh."

"My dad is pretty creative too, but it's different. He's a great storyteller. All of the men are, but I think my dad is the best—

well, second best after me. Even my mom, his wife, agrees with that,” he laughs. “We were encouraged to be ourselves. We are definitely a household of independent thinkers.”

“I knew I’d write my first book when I realized that anyone could write a book. Well, there was a time when we couldn’t write a book; I couldn’t read or write because I am Black. It was illegal. ILLEGAL. Isn’t that the most ridiculous thing in the world!? It goes to show you just how important books are, the advantages that being able to read gives you, and the disadvantages that not being able to read gives you. I’ve always wanted to be read ... I’ve always wanted to be heard.”

Martellus points to the power of belief as the trait most helpful in his successful endeavors. He started The Imagination Agency, a storytelling studio, while still playing for the Chicago Bears. The agency’s objective is to inspire kids’ imaginations through books, apps, interactive games, and animated videos. “Now I spend the majority of my time at TOMONOSHI!, my newer company,” he says. “But I guess I started The Imagination Agency for the same reason I start anything that I do: possibilities.”



"All of my work is personal. I believe in the idea that creativity is spiritual if you're doing it right. So, I feel that all of my work reflects my life—the places I've been, the friends I've made, the food I've eaten, the games I've played. That's kind of why I reject the term 'representation.' My work isn't a representation. It's more of a reflection."

He considers the best thing about writing the newly released "reimagined version" of *Dear Black Boy* was the ability to edit and optimize a younger version of himself. "The first edition of the book that I self-published came out six years ago, and since then, I've grown in so many ways. I can draw better now, I can articulate my thoughts with a tad bit more clarity, and I understand color much better—I've even developed my own color theories!" he says, cracking up. "But truly, it has felt like teaching my old self new things and seeing how far I've come. That was a wonderful experience," he concludes.

"I do love writing. I actually prefer to write things out. I feel that when we speak, the breeze catches our words, and they end up all over the place, but when we write, the words stay right where I put them. I like that. My days are much like visiting a theme park: lots of fun, lots of waiting, lots of ups

and downs, and lots of games. Every project is a different ride. I just try to hold on and not scream too loud at the top or the bottom. When it's over, I get off and get on the next ride. And if it's really fun, I'll ride the same roller coaster again and again."

The illustrations in *Dear Black Boy* are invitingly dreamlike, impeccably mirroring the uplifting words of wisdom. "I feel that a book is a child's first art gallery experience; every children's book is a museum. These days, it's hard for a book to compete with an anime or cartoon, so I lean into trying to make my books feel like you're watching a cartoon with closed captions—a paper cartoon. I love movement. When illustrating this book, I wanted the boys to always be moving forward. The only time they're looking back is to help another boy. And when a kid is spending too much time looking back, another kid pulls them forward."

Martellus's color theory is rooted in nature. "Brown is the starting point of my color palette because it represents the foundation upon which everything sits. Dirt, in its many shades of brown, is the bedrock from which life grows. This foundational color allows other colors to pop and stand out,





creating a vibrant and dynamic visual experience. Once I pull my browns, I start adding in colors I pull from flowers and beetles, moths and butterflies—things I see in nature.”

“The removal of the boys’ eyes and mouths in the paintings symbolizes running by faith, not by sight. My intention with the illustrations of this book was to paint the very images that empower and inform not only this generation of Black boys but the generations of Black boys to come to follow the path that leads to their dreams. Everyone’s path is different, and I wanted every Black boy to be able to see themselves in this book.”

Thoughtfully, he says, “I like the idea that someone, anyone, can stumble across my work now that it is out in the world. A lot of ideas, drawings, concepts, and stories are trapped in notebooks. What a terrible life for a character—to be stuck in a notebook with no chance of making it out into the world. It is my dream to die with no ideas. I would like for my tombstone, or whatever they put me in, to say: *Here lies a man with no more ideas... oh yeah, one more thing.*”

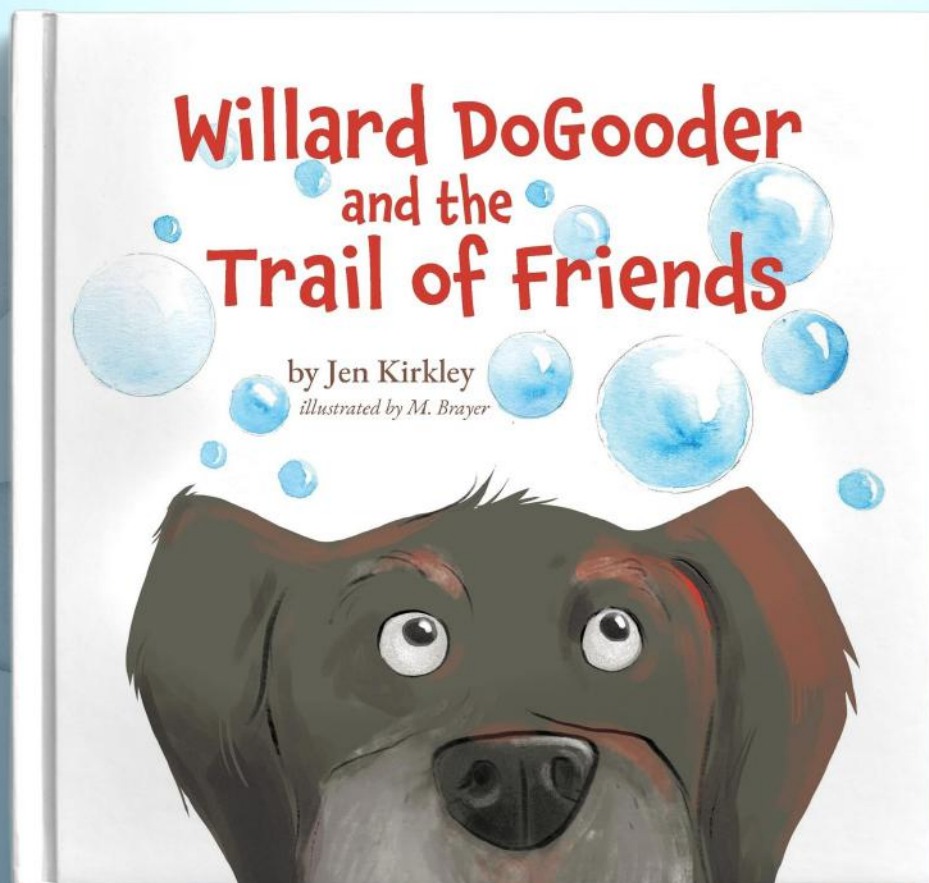
But for the present, Martellus looks forward to “Waking up. I love waking up. I never complain about waking up. And besides my family, I would say the one thing I can’t live without is the space to make things—blank paper, raw materials, and tools to make the things I am imagining. I don’t think I can live without the ability to make things, learn about making things, or have conversations about making things. I really am here just to make things, and I hope the world is a more playful place because I have dedicated my life to the act of making things.” He’s excited about his new mobile game titled *Knuckle Sammiches* available on iOS, and says, “It’s really fun and only going to get better.”

Martellus finds inspiration in many things. One of those things is clouds. “The freedom they have to go where they please, morph into what they want to be when they want to be, cry when they want to cry, and disappear when they want to disappear. There’s something extraordinary about clouds.” ●

An award-winning book to celebrate kindness, encouragement, and acceptance!

Willard DoGooder has trouble making friends in his new class. Things are just ... different. One day, Willard spots a magical trail that leads him on an adventure filled with curiosity, fun, and new friends, as he learns how to think through and celebrate differences.

Parents, caregivers, and teachers will appreciate the book's straightforward and simple message that shows kids how to approach differences and start conversations about appreciating and encouraging each other.



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One to Read:

Andrea Beatriz Arango

No one knows hard work and dedication like Valentina Camacho. And Vale's thing is fencing. She's the top athlete at her fencing gym. Or she was ... until the accident.

After months away, Vale is finally cleared to fence again, but it's much harder than before. Her body doesn't move the way it used to. The harder Vale fights to catch up, the more she realizes her injury isn't the only thing holding her back. If she can't leave her accident in the past, then what does she have to look forward to?

In this moving novel from the Newbery Honor-winning author Andrea Beatriz Arango, one girl finds her way back to her life's passion and discovers that the sum of a person's achievements doesn't amount to the whole of them. We asked Andrea to tell us more!

Tell us about *It's All or Nothing, Vale!* What inspired the book? Is the story based on any of your own experiences?

A little bit, yeah! At least in the sense that I wrote it during a time in my life during which I was going through an identity shift myself. I had just stopped teaching after a decade in the field, and I was trying to figure out who I was outside of education. So, although Vale and I are very different, I did relate to her struggle to figure out who she was now that she couldn't rely solely on fencing to give her purpose.



Vale loves fencing—why did you choose that sport for her? Have you ever tried fencing yourself?

I haven't actually fenced myself, but my sister was a competitive fencer in Puerto Rico when we were growing up. She would fence for hours every day after school, and then spend weekends either in competitions or in specialized training. I tell students during school visits that this book is my apology to my sister because I wasn't always the most supportive sibling when it came to tagging along to all her competitions.

This is your third novel-in-verse. Why is this your preferred medium?

I love poetry. I also really love it when books are accessible to a wider range of students. When I taught English Language Learners, it was hard to find books that were at their grade level thematically but didn't require as high of a reading level to decode. Novels-in-verse let me write in a medium I enjoy while also reaching more students.

What do you hope readers take away from the book?

That sometimes our dreams/plans change, and that's ok! We are not only one thing, and having to pivot and adapt can be a good thing.

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

I am definitely a morning person! I am useless after 4 p.m. I chalk it up to all those teaching years, ha ha. I still keep a similar schedule.

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

I love swimming and anything that takes place outside in the sunshine. I also love love love to read.

What is your favorite writing snack?

I can be a messy eater, so I usually refrain from eating near my computer. I love to sip on iced coffee or iced matcha while writing, though! (It's very hot in Puerto Rico.)

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

Probably the years I spent fostering teens. It's the most concrete good I think I've ever done.

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

Publishing a book takes a long time. So what often happens is I'll be drafting something new while finishing up the end steps of my forthcoming story. That makes drafting extra hard because I tend to compare my very rough, unpolished draft to the very polished final version of the book that's about to come out. It can be hard to remember that that polished story was once a rough draft too.

What advice would you give a first-time author?

Don't compare your journey to other authors! Books are so subjective and success is very much tied to unpredictable things like trends, timing, and just pure luck. If you focus on what other authors are doing or what's happening with their careers, you'll just make yourself miserable.

What's next for you?

I'm currently working on my next book, which will be my first middle grade with a boy protagonist. It's set in Yellowstone National Park, and I'm excited to be writing a story in which the setting really plays a big role in the book (unlike my previous three novels).

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

MG: *Sing It Like Celia* by Mónica Mancillas

YA: *Needy Little Things* by Channelle Desamours

So far, I really recommend both!

For more information about Andrea Beatriz Arango and her work, visit andreabeatrizarango.com. ●

ANDREA BEATRIZ ARANGO

Newbery Honor winner for *Iveliz Explains It All*



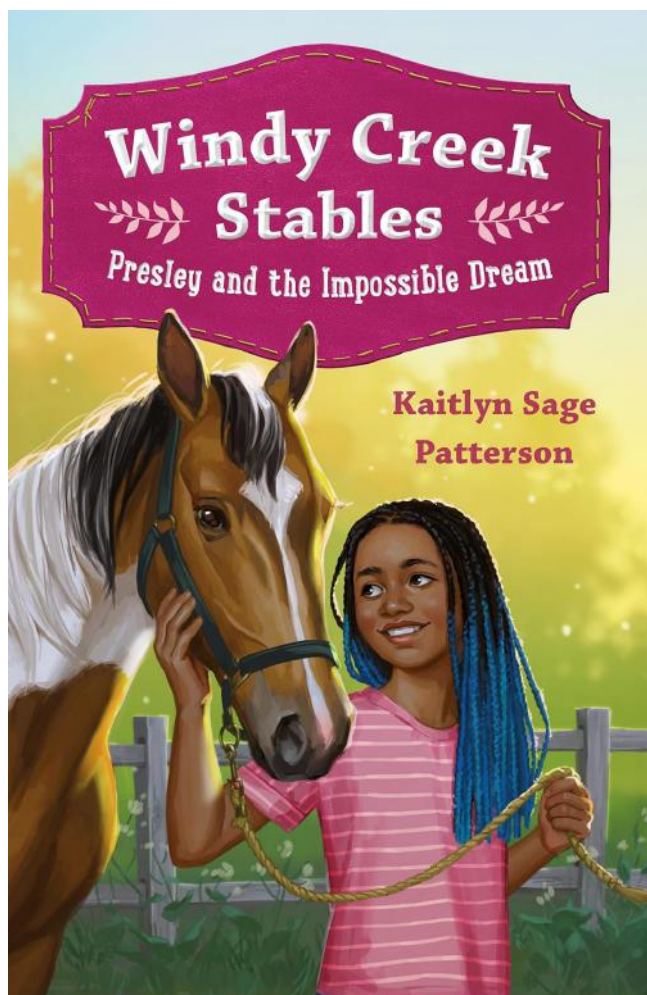
Kaitlyn Sage Patterson

Debuts New Middle Grade Series

by Raven Howell

"I love Appalachia, and I love East Tennessee. Growing up at the foot of the Smoky Mountains was a magical experience in a lot of ways. There's a history of community building, resistance, and resilience here that is often overlooked in the portrayal and discussion of Appalachia in media. There's a tradition of storytelling and mythologizing that had a massive impact on the way I think about story," says author Kaitlyn Sage Patterson.





Kaitlyn's stories include YA fantasy books, Harlequin Teen's *The Diminished* and *The Exalted*, and her new middle grade book, *Presley and the Impossible Dream*, the first in the *Windy Creek Stables* series. She's been an avid reader her whole life. "I've always been a voracious reader, and I pursued my love of reading and writing through college and graduate school. But it wasn't until I had finished my MFA program that I got back to the roots of what I love reading and writing—fantasy and children's literature. Rediscovering that love helped to ground me in my pursuit of a career in writing."

"I was the kind of kid who got in trouble for reading under their desk and scribbling stories on the backs of quizzes. I was a barn rat and a library rat growing up—I don't think I loved anything more than horses, books, and writing."

Kaitlyn credits Bonnie Bryant's *Saddle Club* series, Tamora Pierce's *Song of the Lioness* series, and Patricia C. Wrede's *Dealing with Dragons* as books that have impacted her writing.

"I think that my writing has also been massively influenced by poets I love: Lucille Clifton, Emily Dickinson, Effie Waller Smith, and Nikki Giovanni. And many modern-day authors have generously given their time and energy to discussing writing in depth with me: Katherine Locke, Natalie C. Parker, Ashley Poston, Tessa Gratton, Dhonielle Clayton, Caroline Richmond, and Ellen Oh. Their guidance and influence on my work cannot be overstated, nor can my gratitude for them."

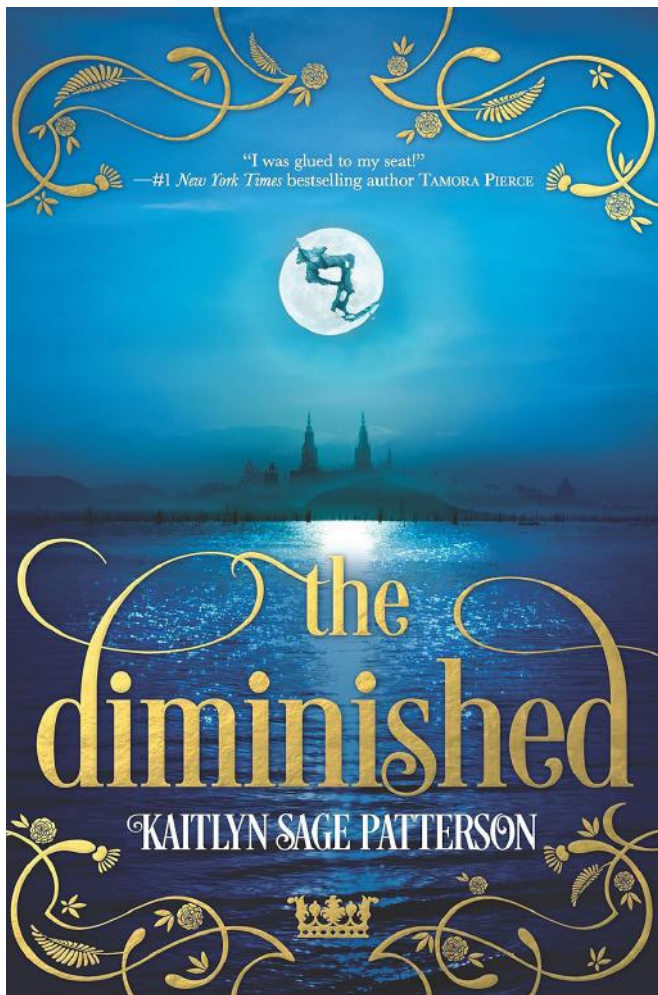
Kaitlyn's first two books, *The Diminished* and *The Exalted*, received critical acclaim and are a strong choice for YA collections. "I'm very proud of those stories and their reception. As much as I love those characters, Vi and Bo, their stories are complete—those kids deserve a break after everything I put them through! That said, I'm certainly not out of the fantasy game, and you can expect to hear more from me very soon," she grins.

"I'm a huge nerd with a massive interest in history, and the history of humanity is peppered with strange and interesting events and details. Much of what happens in my fantasy work is a commentary or reflection on what happens in the real world—with a fantasy twist. In the world of *The Diminished* and *The Exalted*, that major twist is the idea that everyone is born with a twin, and a lot of the myth and legend in that world revolves around and is born out of my reflections on sibling relationships."

Kaitlyn's favorite part in developing a story is getting to know the characters. "I especially love it when I'm revising and come across something I forgot I wrote that's particularly good or funny."

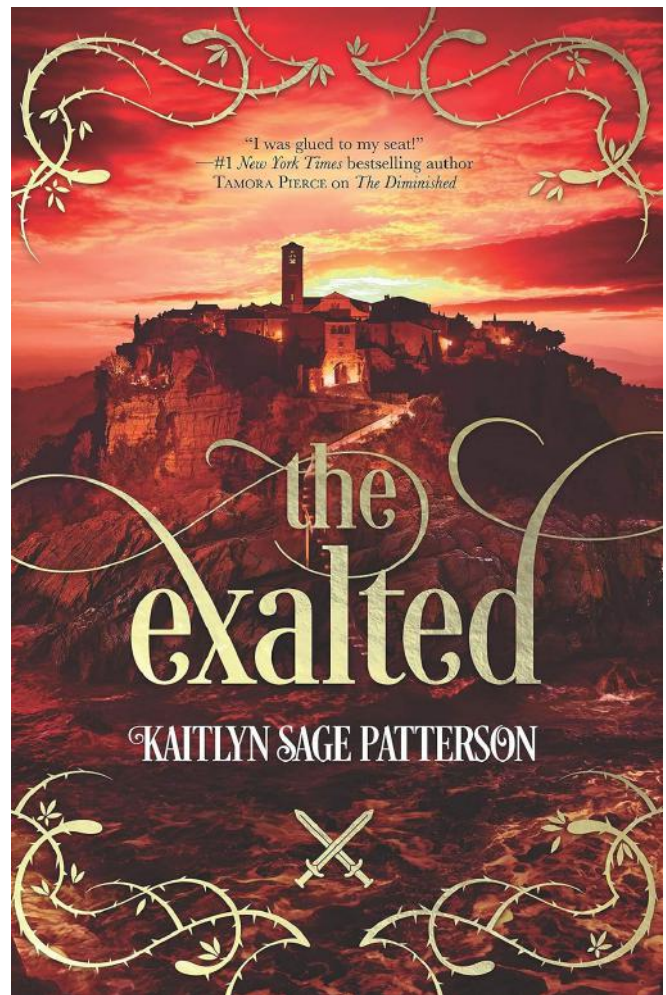
But book writing comes with its challenges, too. Kaitlyn says, "I have a really hard time getting past the 30,000-word mark. For some reason, my brain really, really wants to quit at that point in almost every book. I think that a part of that instinct is how much I'm keeping in my head, but I also have to convince myself that what I'm writing is actually good! That self-doubt is something I'm constantly working on, but it's a daily reality in my writing work."

Kaitlyn started writing her new book, *Presley and the Impossible Dream* from the *Windy Creek Stables* middle grade series during the pandemic. "I really needed a panacea for all the pain and suffering surrounding us. I wanted to reconnect with my inner horse girl and find my way back to the peace and contentment that horses bring me—and so many others. Along the way, I found that I really enjoyed writing in the voices of these middle school kids! It's been a real treat," she says.



"This novel revolves around Presley's quest to fulfill her lifelong dream of riding a horse. Along the way, she has to convince her reluctant mother to let her chase this goal, confront the reality of what it's like to be around horses as opposed to reading about them, and learn that people aren't always exactly as they seem. The growing friendship between Presley and Harper at the center of this book also helps to showcase some of the challenges of the equestrian world and the magic that can happen when you find a way to see past your own perceptions of what others seem like and start looking at who they are."

"I loved starting this series with a story about a kid dragging her family into the horse world through sheer force of will. This sport is expensive, and there is a degree of elitism that comes with the expense and history of the sport. I wanted to find a way to talk about that while also breaking down and finding ways around some of the barriers to entry in this sport."



Kaitlyn is writing the *Windy Creek Stables* series to bring the stories she enjoyed about friendship and horses into the modern world. "I also wanted to talk about some pieces of horse history that are often overlooked. Presley's point of view also allowed me to highlight some of the Black equestrians who have made a big impact on the sport. Other books in the series deal with access and wealth inequality and body positivity in the horse world while, hopefully, remaining fun and approachable for young readers."

"It's always different writing for other age groups, but this series was the first time I've written in a contemporary, non-magical world! It's a lot harder to solve problems without magic!"

Kaitlyn finds that she and her main character, Presley, are a lot alike. "We're both big old nerds who love facts and nonfiction books, and we both had to do a lot of convincing

to get ourselves into the saddle. I was lucky that my parents were able to find the money to give my sister and I weekly riding lessons growing up, but I didn't buy my first horse until I sold this series! Presley and I also share mothers who are a little nervous about us riding—my mom still gets anxious about it, especially jumping!”

“Riding has been a keystone for my mental and physical health for most of my life, and books have always been a way for me to explore that interest when I couldn't spend as much time at the barn as I wanted—all day, every day. When I was a kid, I wore out my local library's copies of the *Saddle Club* series, and I devoured any other book I could find that heavily featured horses.”

These days, she says, “A surprising thing that helps me work is going to the barn before I sit down to write. Helps me get the wiggles out!” On a more sober note, she adds, “I have a fairly demanding full-time job in addition to writing and my two horses, so it's pretty busy! I make it work with the help of my wonderful partner and patient friends who don't see me all that often.”

Hearing from her readers is important to Kaitlyn. “It's so humbling and incredible that my work gets imagination space in so many children's lives. More than ever, access to books and a wide variety of diverse stories is critically important to our youth. Not to get too dark, but there has never been a political party or government that restricts access to information or story with *good* intentions. Book bans target diverse books—books that teach empathy, understanding, and a broader perspective on the world—something that is vital to the growth and safety of our youth. There is scientific evidence that proves the empathetic benefit of reading diversely, and I can think of few traits or skills that are more important to the well-being of society than empathy.”

“Books are an escape, a safe place to explore challenging ideas and circumstances, and a way to learn more about ourselves and each other. Books have saved me and countless others again and again, and I am passionate in my defense of the right of youth to access books of all kinds.”

Kaitlyn enjoys school author visits, and was a teacher for several years. “I've devised several different presentations to appeal to different crowds: the path to publication and the life of an author, how to turn your special interest into a

story, and some more specified presentations for the horsey crowds about equestrian history, horsemanship, and horses in books and film.”

At home, she keeps a couple of things within arm's reach: “a book, a few bags of emergency tea (black and herbal!), and my water bottle (gotta stay hydrated!)” When she's not reading or writing, she's riding. “And I still really enjoy spending time in the kitchen. I just perfected a chocolate chip pistachio cookie recipe that's pretty excellent if I do say so myself.”

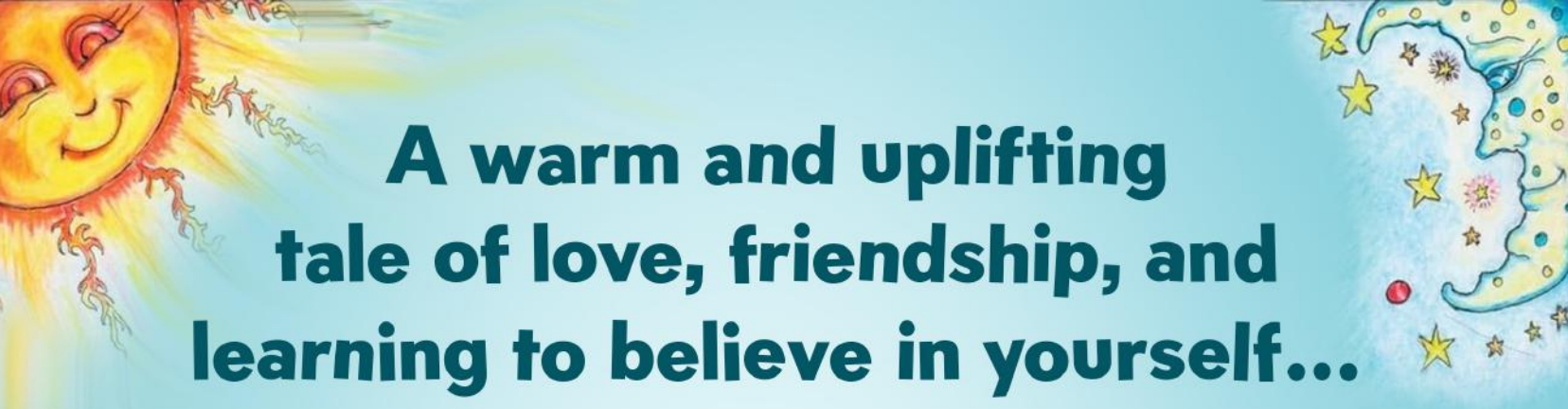
“Someday I'm going to buy a couple acres of land with an old farmhouse and a nice little barn. I'll wake up every morning, feed the animals, ride for a bit, and spend the rest of the day writing before it's time to do my evening chores, make dinner, and spend time with my partner. It's simple, but that's truly the life I look forward to, and the glimpses I get when I'm out at the barn bring me immeasurable joy.”

At the time of our interview, it's snowing outside, Kaitlyn has a cup of tea at her elbow and a cat snoring in her lap. An appropriate time to ask, if horses had rules, what would they be? Kaitlyn responds:

- Murphy's law: anything that can go wrong will go wrong. We'll make sure of it. Sorry not sorry. We walk on our fingertips and stomachaches can kill us, but we sure are pretty.
- Be a menace. Break those fence boards. Get trapped in your own blanket. Rub mud all over your body right before a show. If you don't have ulcers, maybe your owner needs some. If you do have ulcers, your owner DEFINITELY has them, too from all the stress.
- It's more expensive because it's for horses. Don't ask questions. We deserve it.

“I hope that *Presley and the Impossible Dream* offers readers who don't necessarily have access to horses the same kind of joy that the *Saddle Club* books brought me in my youth. Beyond that, I hope that kids are able to learn some horse basics and connect with Presley's determination, creativity, and her big heart!”

For more information about Kaitlyn Sage Patterson and her work, visit kaitlynsagepatterson.com. ●



A warm and uplifting tale of love, friendship, and learning to believe in yourself...

Come with Sally through the mysterious red door to an enchanted land where the sun and the moon dance together in the sky, and you can be what you wish if you believe in yourself.

Full of unexpected twists and turns, Sally's adventure in the Land Of Imagination takes you to an enchanting world of wonderful characters: Tender-hearted Claire, the opera-singing rabbit.

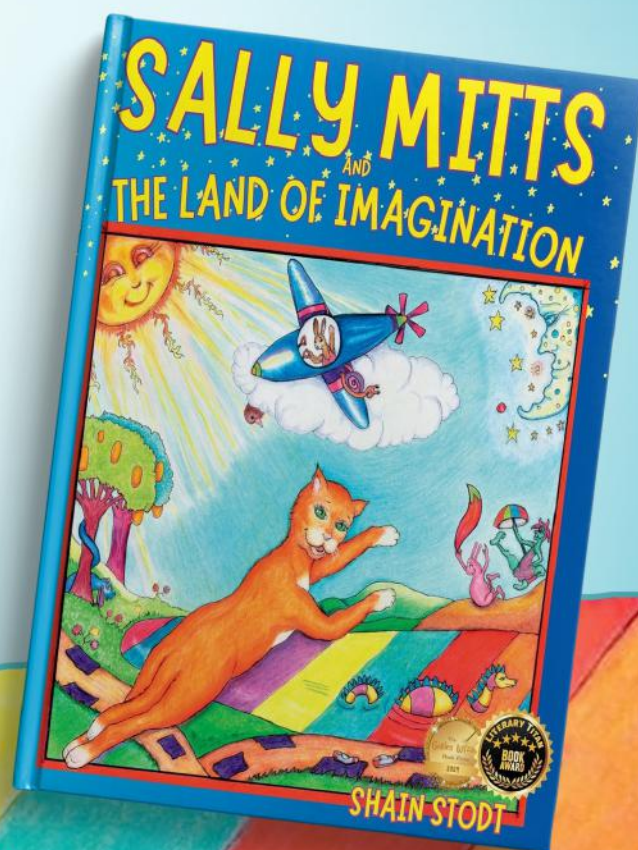
Jack the star-gliding snail. Art, the bossy mole. And the dastardly fog monster who steals hopes and dreams!

"With its positive messages, imaginative storytelling, and heartfelt illustrations, this picture book is sure to inspire young minds and nurture their creativity."

—Literary Titan

"Another gorgeous Sally Mitts story, beautifully illustrated by the author. What a whimsical world she weaves! A book that will travel among the generations of tomorrow!"

—H.s.i. Merrilot, author, The Frogilly series

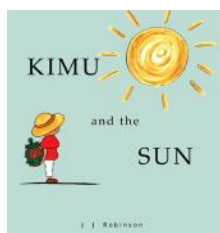


Winner of The Golden Wizard Book Prize for Excellence in Children's Literature, a Readers Choice Award, and The Literary Titan Book Award.

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WINTER READING LIST



Kimu and the Sun

by J.J. Robinson

How do you catch the sun? Or an invisible fairy? How about a cloud? Or the moon? Or even the sky itself? The clever Kimu knows how! And with the help of the mighty sun that's exactly

what he'll do! But when his ego grows a little too big, Kimu just might find he's not as clever as he thought. This award-winning picture book will quickly become a bedtime favorite for children and parents alike!



Hunting Orange:

A Mixing Colour Adventure

by Moza A. Himid

Hunting Orange: A Mixing Colour Adventure invites you on a magical journey. This multi-award-winning children's book sparkles with inclusivity. Join Charlie and Max in the vibrant Land of Colours,

learning teamwork and perseverance. With Smarty Symbols, it welcomes all young readers, including those with autism and ADHD. Award-winning: Bronze (Global Book Awards), Honorable Mentions in two categories (Royal Dragonfly), and finalist (Wishing Shelf Award). For ages 3-7, this colorful tale captivates hearts and inspires minds!

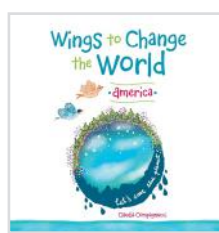


Mabel Menichetti Makes the Best Spaghetti

by Eileen Groome

The author tells the story of food and friendship across generations. It is based on real people and a special person in one child's life. Puddin waits patiently every week for spaghetti day to help

Mabel create her masterpiece! Puddin has a dilemma. Gourmet Diversity Day is approaching. Her mom can't participate so she asks Mabel for help. In the process, Puddin and her friends learn that their differences make the world a better place.

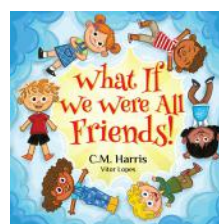


Wings to Change the World: America

by Claudia Compagnucci

This original story is based on the damage man is inflicting on the Earth and retold through the point of view of the animals. Two little birds, an ovenbird, and a swallow plan to protect the environment.

Ray, the swallow, witnesses the disaster on her migration route to the south. There, she meets Wind, the ovenbird. Following their determination they seek their objective in an attempt to make a change.

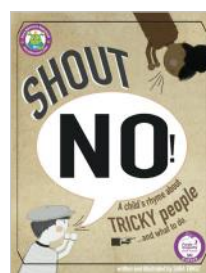


What If We Were All Friends!

by C.M. Harris

What if friendship could change the world? Through lyrical rhymes and vibrant illustrations, this heartwarming picture book celebrates the magic of friendship across cultures, abilities,

and differences. Join the delightful characters as they discover that being a good friend isn't about being the same—it's about standing together, helping each other, and celebrating what makes us unique. It is a must-have for teaching empathy and inclusion. Ages 4-8.

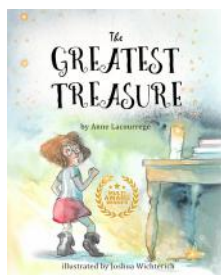


Shout NO! A Child's Rhyme About Tricky People ... and What To Do

by Sara Ernst

Sara Ernst has taken her internationally heard song, "Shout No" and turned it into an award-winning book that can be used for a read-along/sing-along experience. With simple illustrations for

visual learners and plenty of large sight words for early readers, caregivers and teachers will find this book the perfect tool for helping little ones understand what a tricky situation could look like ... and how to react. The corresponding song, "Shout No" can be heard on all music platforms, and free activity sheets can be found at wildpicklepress.com.

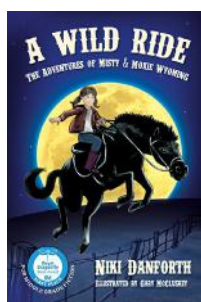


The Greatest Treasure

by Anne Lacourge

A lonely child living 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. Ultimately, 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?

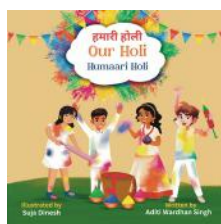


A Wild Ride: The Adventures of Misty & Moxie Wyoming

by Niki Danforth

2024 First Place Royal Dragonfly Winner in Middle Grade Fiction! Upon waking on the morning of her tenth birthday, Moxie Wyoming embarks on a summer of magic, mayhem, and adventure. Her new partner? The old

broken-down mare Misty, whom Moxie will discover is uniquely special! Readers are saying: "It is a real page flipper ... a great book for any girl who likes horses." "An instant classic ... adventure, mystery, and even some magic." "This book is for ages 8 to 80."



Our Holi/Humaari Holi

by Aditi Wardhan Singh

Celebrated in March, the festival of colors brings people together. But Taran doesn't want to play Holi with some of the kids in his neighborhood. They boss him around. They make fun

of him. Why then does his grandmother ask him to celebrate the Holi festival with them? Read this story about how Holi is about raising confidence, the joy of togetherness and fighting colorism. The Hindi translation, English transliteration, and bonus activities make this a wholesome reading experience.

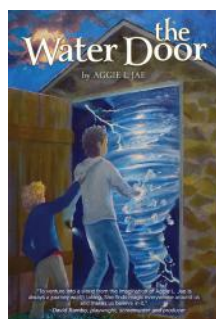


Kreativity Krewe

by Twinimation Studios

Twinimation Studios' *Kreativity Krewe* activity book series teaches school subjects through an artistic lens. *Kreativity Krewe: Journey Across the United States of America* provides information on the 50 United States through the use of comics, games, and

other tools! Each page focuses on a different state, with unique fun facts such as the respective capitals and notable icons. The book pages can also be colored, so learners can unleash their artistic skills as they learn!

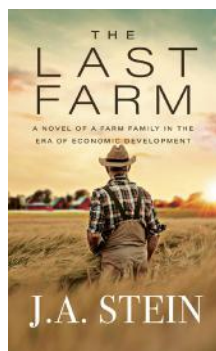


The Water Door

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.

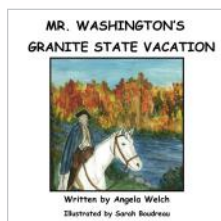


The Last Farm

by J.A. Stein

When farmer Bill Fogel gets an offer to sell his farm to a warehouse developer, the decision is far from straightforward. It is interlaced with the family's careers, their relationships, and the contents of the very ground they stand on. They will have to decide what matters most: financial security, the family, or the

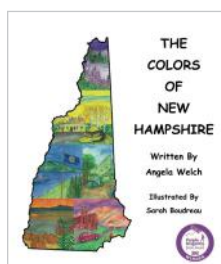
farm. Follow them in this fast-paced novel that brings to light an issue so many farmers are facing today. For ages 16+.



Mr. Washington's Granite State Vacation

by Angela Welch

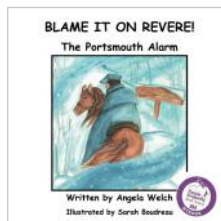
In the fall of 1789, George Washington decided to visit the northern states to talk about the new Constitution. He wanted to meet and listen to the people he met along the way. During his trip, he crossed the Merrimack River in Massachusetts, heading for Portsmouth, New Hampshire, the capital of the 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

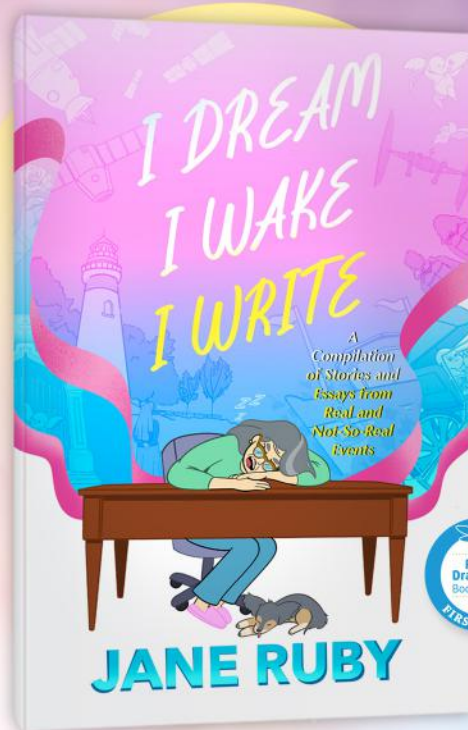
by Angela Welch

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

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Sometimes reality doesn't differ much from dreams...



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stemming from the real-life
and not-so-real-life
experiences of award-winning
author Jane Ruby.

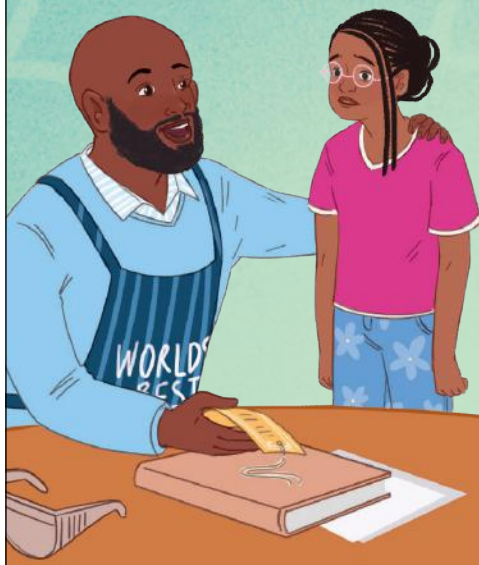
YA & Up Fiction

ISBN: 9798868039980

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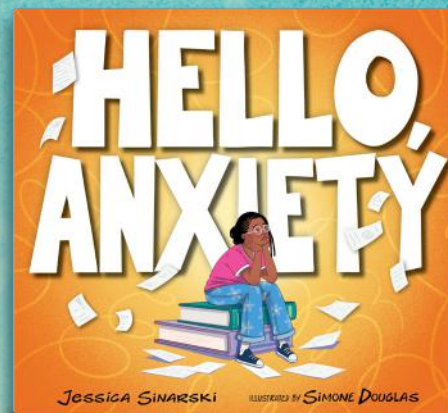
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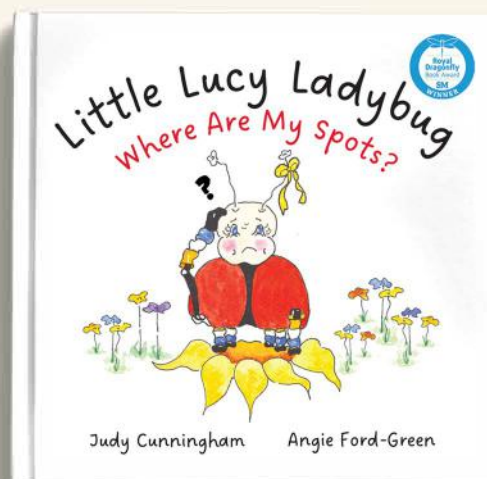
Feeling different, Little Lucy is worried, and in a hurry to get her spots.

The lyrical rhyming encourages language development for Level One readers as they begin to learn and understand words, sounds, and phrases. This is a must-read for children, parents, teachers, and librarians. It's on the way to being a timeless classic!

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**MONSTERS
AT THE
MOVIES**

Paddington in Peru

Grade: B+

reviewed by Nick Spake

With a new director, one of the key stars not returning, and the infamous third movie curse, some may have lowered expectations going into *Paddington in Peru*. If there's one thing this franchise is known for, though, it's catching audiences off guard. Despite the first film's underwhelming marketing, Paul King delivered a timeless classic. *Paddington 2* somehow surpassed that high bar, instantly achieving legendary status. *Paddington in Peru* might not top its predecessors, but it maintains the charm, humor, and whimsy we've come to anticipate. The film keeps the series fresh with some inspired casting choices and the atmospheric landscapes of Peru. Paddington himself is as delightful as ever.

Once again voiced by Ben Whishaw, Paddington has officially become a British citizen. The Brown family, meanwhile, has undergone some changes, with the children looking more like adults and Mary looking like Emily Mortimer. Sally Hawkins chose not to reprise her role as Mrs. Brown, and although she's missed, Mortimer has yet to give a bad performance. She naturally blends into the Brown family alongside Hugh Bonneville's Henry. The film also brings a change of scenery as Paddington receives word that his Aunt Lucy (Imelda Staunton) has vanished from the home for retired bears. Paddington thus heads to Peru with the Browns coming along for the ride.

In the first two films, director Paul King made London feel like a character. Dougal Wilson does the same for Peru, creating a sense of adventure and culture that helps the film stand out from previous installments. In many respects, *Paddington in Peru* is a better *Jungle Cruise* movie than the actual *Jungle Cruise* movie starring Dwayne Johnson and Emily Blunt. Wilson replicates King's eye for visual humor even if *Paddington in Peru* isn't as polished. Considering that this is his first feature, though, Wilson makes a truly impressive debut. Up until this point, Wilson had primarily directed commercials and music videos. Speaking of music, Olivia Colman gets a scene-stealing song I'd love to see performed at next year's Oscars.

Just as she did in Paul King's *Wonka*, Colman eats up every moment of screen time here. She has a ball as a reverend mother with something suspicious up her veil. Antonio Banderas plays another eccentric wild card as Hunter Cabot, a riverboat captain searching for the lost city of El Dorado. As over-the-top as the performances are, nobody ever goes overboard. Everyone



knows when to reel it in, showing just enough restraint to keep these characters grounded. The success of *Paddington in Peru* largely lies in its characters, who win us over, whether wicked or wholehearted. There's an abundance of heart to go around, building to a resolution that may not reduce you to tears like the last film's ending but will still hit you in the feels.

Paddington in Peru has few problems aside from simply not quite matching the first two movies, which had a few more laughs and tear-jerking moments. Still, the film will leave you laughing and emotionally invested every step of the way. It isn't merely a retread of what we've already seen, either. Returning Paddington to his birthplace creates plenty of fun scenarios, as well as a sense of mystery. The fish-out-of-water angle is also preserved, although in this case, the Browns are taken out of their natural environment. You can tell that everyone has the utmost admiration for Paddington, striving to tell a story that honors the bear's cherished legacy. It won't go down as the trilogy's best installment, but you'll be hard-pressed to find anyone in the theater giving a hard stare. ●

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.



Color me! ↴



Can you guess which?
Sheep • Raccoon • Fox • Eagle
Bear • Rabbit



View wildlife from a distance and never feed the animals!



* Leave rocks, plants, and all nature as you find them.

How long does an aluminum soda can take to decompose (turn to dirt)?



- ☐ A. 5 years
- ☐ B. 50 - 11 years
- ☐ C. 100 - 200 years

Pack it in, pack it out!
If you brought it in, please bring it out!
For added awesomeness, pick up and pack out any extra trash you find!



DID YOU KNOW?

The four **cardinal** directions are north (N), east (E), south (S), and west (W) at 90° angles.

The four **intercardinal** directions are in the middle: northeast (NE), southeast (SE), southwest (SW), and northwest (NW).

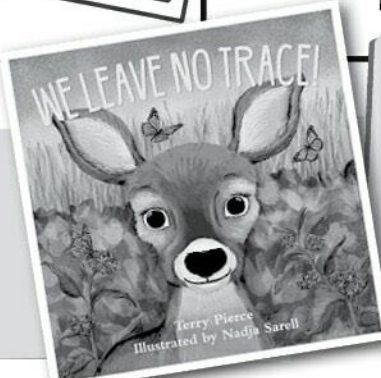
Can you fill in the two missing intercardinal directions in the compass?



Be kind to visitors and make room for other hikers on the trail.

This month's activity page was inspired by
We Leave No Trace
by Terry Pierce & Nadja Sarell

Part of the revenue from book sales directly supports Yosemite National Park and Leave No Trace!



There is more to learn!
Leave No Trace:
www.LNT.org
Yosemite Conservancy:
www.Yosemite.org
National Park Service:
www.NPS.gov

1. Bear, 2. Fox, 3. Eagle, 4. Sheep, 5. Raccoon, 6. Rabbit / C. 100-200 years / Compass: top: NE, bottom, SW



JUDY NEWMAN LIFE OF A READER

STUFFIE POWER

by Judy Newman

I never had a stuffie when I was a kid. I did have a blanket deep into the middle of elementary school that I clutched before bed and at assorted times of stress, but for some reason, a stuffed character was not in my retinue.

Years after I gave up on my blanket, I did take my teddy bear, Hubie, with me to Connecticut College. But to be honest, that was more of a holdover teenager thing. My very sophisticated roommates—one had lived in London, and one was an accomplished modern dancer—made fun of Hubie, but I didn't care. He was a badge of my suburban lifestyle, and he was fun to prop up on the top bunk where I slept because I was the last entering freshman to get to our triple, so I drew the short straw. Margaret got the single bed, and Corey got the bottom bunk. That dynamic would play out for the entire semester we lived together until Hubie and I moved out second semester into a single.

But many kids I know—including my two granddaughters—today have stuffies that are important figures in their lives. Their stuffies have names and personalities, and they are always packed up and brought along on trips. They are clearly comforting for my grandchildren. And I meet many other small children in their cohort who are similarly attached to their stuffed animals or creatures.

Here is Nina with Moo.



Here is Nina with Hop.



According to their parents—neither of whom had a stuffie themselves when they were small—18-month-old Nina is a real snuggler with Moo and Hop, who she named. Sophie, now age 4 ½, brings Tita with her, packed in the outside of her unicorn suitcase, and definitely looks to hold Tita when she goes to sleep, but she doesn't seem to have the same attachment her sister does.

Clifford the Big Red Dog isn't a stuffie—he's Emily Elizabeth's big red best friend, but I do have a very large stuffed version of him in my office. Sophie loves snuggling with Clifford and attending to his needs.

And Sophie with Tita.

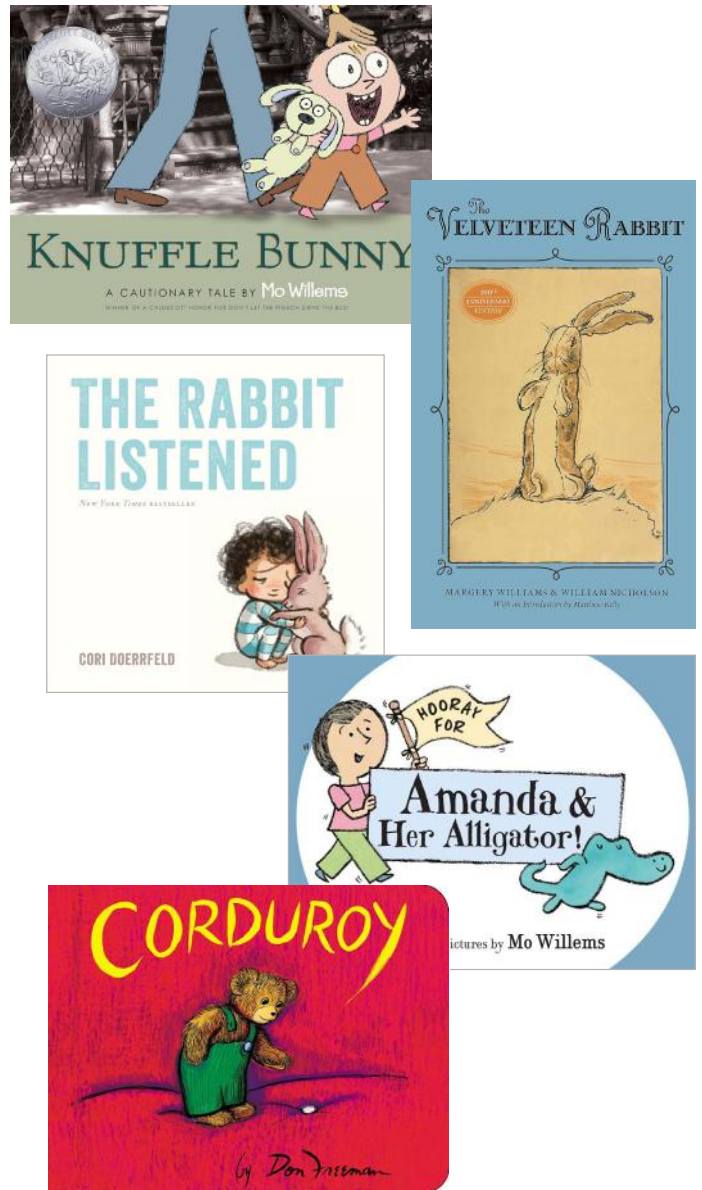


I was traveling recently and saw that some distracted mom or dad had left a stuffie at the security checkpoint, and I was very worried about that child.



There's a lot to be anxious about for kids these days, and I applaud children who can divert some of their stress and need for comfort to a cherished stuffed animal.

There are also lots of books about stuffies from the point of view of the child and the stuffed creatures themselves. Here are a few:



Some days I wish I, too, had a stuffie who could soothe my worries. For now, the best I can do is try to share—and help all kids get access to—books that are affirming and comforting to help ease the pressure on them and their grown-ups.

As always, if you have any favorite books about stuffies—or other ways kids can find comfort—please share with me at jnewman@scholastic.com.

Judy ●

Judy Newman, Chief Impact Officer, Scholastic.

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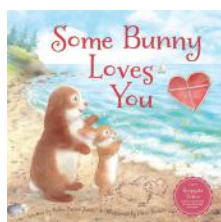
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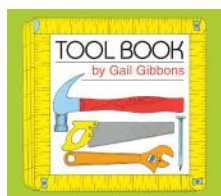
Some Bunny Loves You

by Helen Foster James, Petra Brown
(Sleeping Bear Press)

Reviewer: Deb Greenberg

A cuddly little bunny ventures outdoors with someone special for a playday, filled with arts and crafts,

hide-and-seek, a picnic, and much more. Warm and cozy artwork completes this sweet rhyming story that'll have you snuggling with your little ones. (Ages baby-5)



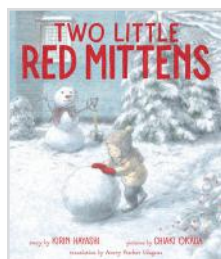
Tool Book

by Gail Gibbons (Holiday House)

Reviewer: Christine Irvin

Teach your budding builders about tools by introducing them to a myriad of household tools—hammers, rulers,

saws, drills, and more—that are included in this updated board book by Gail Gibbons. The board book style will ensure the longevity of the book while youngsters pore over the brightly illustrated pages of tools. (Ages 1-3)



Two Little Red Mittens

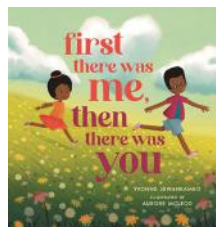
by Kirin Hayashi, Chiaki Okada
(Amazon Crossing)

Reviewer: Dr. Dawn Menge

It isn't just a little red mitten that keeps little one's fingers warm while she makes snowballs and snowmen.

The lucky little red mitten becomes

so much more for the animals in the forest. A beautifully illustrated world filled with snow awaits the young reader in the adventure of the red mitten. (Ages 3-7)



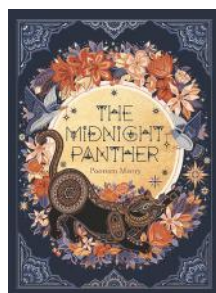
First There Was Me, Then There Was You

by Yvonne Sewankambo, Aureore McLeod
(Candlewick)

Reviewer: Dr. Dawn Menge

How wonderful it is to have a new little sibling joining your family. Sometimes, it can be a period of anxiety for older

children. Yvonne's story highlights all the positives that come with having multiple siblings. They are your built-in friends! (Ages 3-7)



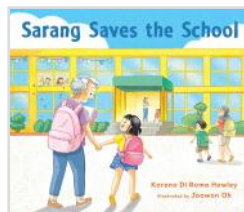
The Midnight Panther

by Poonam Mistry (Candlewick)

Reviewer: Cynthia Kern OBrien

The beautiful artwork is masterfully woven into the storyline in a unique way. As the panther attempts to change his looks, the artwork tells the story in a way I have not seen before. The story and the artwork are literally one.

As the panther comes to understand his uniqueness and magnificence, so does the artwork. (Ages 3-7)



Sarang Saves the School

by Korena Di Roma Howley, Joowon Oh
(Candlewick)

Reviewer: Christine Irvin

Many people have moved out of Sarang's fishing village, and enrollment in the local school is down.

Without more students, the local school will be forced to close. Sarang doesn't want to move and she doesn't want her school to close. But what can just one little girl do about it? This story was inspired by true events that happened in South Korea. It's a story of tenacity and creativity that is sure to inspire others. (Ages 3-7)



Isabella and the Pink Flamingos

by Mary Blakeslee (Nightingale Books)

Reviewer: Deb Greenberg

Tag along with little Isabella on her walk as she meets Gertrude and Aloysius, pink (her favorite color) flamingos who offer to help her decide who to invite to her party. Can the two flamingos work their magic and solve Isabella's problem? An engaging and inviting story with a lesson about making choices, filled with bright and cheerful artwork. (Ages 4-5)



A Draw & Erase Adventure:

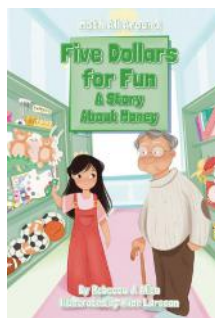
This Pirate Needs Your Help!

by David LaRochelle and YOU

(Candlewick)

Reviewer: Deb Greenberg

Are you ready to fend off sharks and a sea serpent to locate a treasure chest? Grab the included dry-erase marker and embark on a pirate's ship, drawing your way to Crocodile Island. When you're all done, wipe the pages clean and jump on board for more adventures. Another clever book from award-winning author LaRochelle. (Ages 4-6)



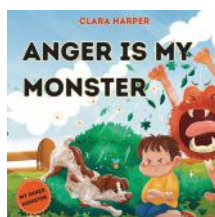
Five Dollars for Fun: A Story About Money

by Rebecca J. Allen, Alice Larsson

(Jolly Fish Press)

Reviewer: Kimberly Waters

A fun way of learning about money! The interaction between a girl and her grandpa makes it feel real as he teaches her about counting and comparing pennies to dollars. Nicely done! And great job on the illustrations! (Ages 4-7)



Anger Is My Monster

by Clara Harper (Published Nerd LLC)

Reviewer: Kimberly Waters

This is a cute children's book to help curb anger. Putting anger into an imaginary monster and dealing with it is a clever way to help the anger go away. Children and adults alike will get a kick out of Yoshi's solution to getting rid of the anger by getting rid of the monster. Pictures are very colorful and creative! (Ages 4-7)



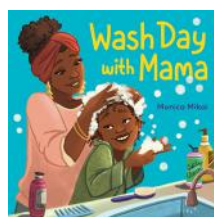
My Cat Can't Tell Time (But I Can)

by Rebecca J. Allen, Alice Larsson

(Jolly Fish Press)

Reviewer: Kimberly Waters

Any time a child talks to their pet, a world of young readers can relate. And demonstrating the hours of the day from waking up until it's bedtime again puts the concept of time into a very familiar venue for all children who wake up and go to school each day. Great writing! (Ages 4-7)



Wash Day with Mama

by Monica Mikai

(Crown Books)

Reviewer: Deb Greenberg

A special bond between mother and daughter is highlighted in this joyous look at "wash day" ... an intimate ritual of the hair-washing routine in the Black community. A little girl loves Sundays for this very reason, it's the day she gets to spend with Mama sharing every step of the process. Colorful and warm illustrations accompany the detailed steps, inviting the reader to see the wonderful connection that wash day offers families. (Ages 4-8)



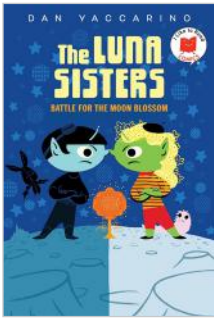
Super Magic Boy: I Am a Space Tiger

by Jarod Roselló

(RH Graphic)

Reviewer: Deb Greenberg

In Book 2 of the *Super Magic Boy* series, Hugo and his bestie Dino are on a mission to get a special birthday gift for Hugo's mami. Where can they get an out-of-this-world present . . . why, outer space, of course. Zoom through the universe with Hugo as he transforms into a space tiger and goes on an adventure with Dino, meeting new alien friends who need their help. Can the pair solve the aliens' problems and bring back the best gift ever? Simple text and a silly storyline combine for an entertaining graphic tale. (Ages 4-8)

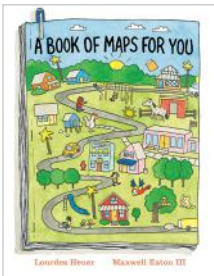


The Luna Sisters Battle for the Moon Blossom

by Dan Yaccarino (Holiday House)

Reviewer: Christine Irvin

Lucy and Nera are sisters, but they're opposites in nearly every way. When they discover a Moon Blossom, they both want it. Lucy uses butterflies and a polka-dotted elephant to try to counter Nera's grabby claw and robotic tarantula. While they battle things out, along comes a Galactic Green Goat who threatens to eat the Moon Flower. Can the sisters band together (for once) to save the Moon Flower or will neither side let the other win? This is a delightful comic-book-style story of sibling rivalry and creativity, complete with humor and vibrant art. What's not to love? (Ages 4-8)



A Book of Maps for You

by Lourdes Heuer, Maxwell Eaton III

(Neal Porter Books)

Reviewer: Christine Irvin

Before moving out of their home, an anonymous cartographer draws a series of maps and leaves them in their home for the new occupant. The book contains maps of the neighborhood, including the local school and a park, as well as the best places to find fresh baked goods, art supplies, and books. It's important to acknowledge children's feelings about moving, helping them remember where they came from and preparing them for their new home. Having a book like this would be an incredible gift for a child moving into a new home. (Ages 4-8)



The Moving Book

by Lisa Brown

(Neal Porter Books)

Reviewer: Christine Irvin

Moving can be traumatic, but maybe it doesn't need to be. When a young girl's family is getting ready to move—again—her big brother reminds her of all the times they have moved in the past and how everything worked out. Expressive illustrations and short sentences make this book appealing for young readers (and listeners). (Ages 4-8)



Everyone Starts Small

by Liz Garton Scanlon, Dominique Ramsey (Candlewick)

Reviewer: Dr. Dawn Menge

A beautifully illustrated book about spring and growing. Liz's book explains how we are all connected, and we help each other in this world. I really love how it explains the roots of the tree. "Tree feels a little lonely, but deep underground, the roots and seeds and threads of life tangle and twist together, fed by soil and wind and water, by sun and rain and even fire." Highly recommend. (Ages 4-8)



The Ocean Blue and You

by Suzanne Slade, Stephanie Fizer Coleman (Sleeping Bear Press)

Reviewer: Dr. Dawn Menge

While you are quietly sleeping, the ocean continues to ebb and flow around the world. In the beautifully illustrated book, your child learns all about the oceans around the world. It's very important to learn that the environment continues to function even when you are not watching. (Ages 5-8)



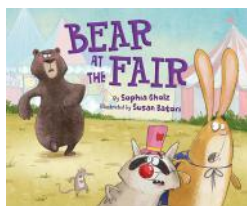
Full Circle: Creation, Migration, and Coming Home

by Elisa Boxer, Vivian Mineker

(Sleeping Bear Press)

Reviewer: Cynthia Kern OBrien

A great read! Kids will love the bright colors and beautiful illustrations as they follow along while the tuna, puffins, sea turtles, and salmon travel through their life cycles. The stories are presented in a simple yet fun and educational way about each animal's habits, including mating, birth, and tendency to return home. All the while, it parallels humans' tendency to do the same. (Ages 5-8)



Bear at the Fair

by Sophia Gholz, Susan Batori
(Sleeping Bear Press)

Reviewer: Dr. Dawn Menge

A hangry bear goes on a rampage through a local fair--pushing friends aside, roaring, and generally doing all the nasty things we do when we're hungry. Finally, sweet Shrew identifies the problem and Hare conjures up a quick snack. Satisfied, and a little ashamed, Bear apologizes and insists on fixing the damage he's caused. Until Shrew gets a bit hangry herself... A very cute book explaining how our temperament changes because we are hungry. (Ages 5-8)

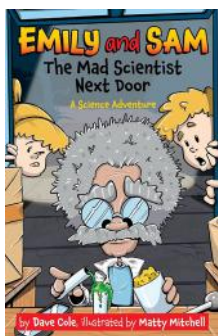


A Sky That Sings

by Anita Sanchez, George Steele,
Emily Mendoza
(Lee & Low)

Reviewer: Dr. Dawn Menge

Mia has a visual impairment and uses her other senses to feel the world around her. She loves to listen to the music of the sky. Being a teacher of students with severe cognitive delays, my students have multiple disabilities. I loved how Mia is presented with her strengths and that she is teaching others how to interact in the world from her perspective. (Ages 5-10)



Emily and Sam: The Mad Scientist Next Door

by David Cole, Matty Mitchell
(Common Deer Press)

Reviewer: Christine Irvin

When the new neighbor moves in, Emily and Sam are disappointed. They were hoping for some new kids to play with. Instead, all they see is a weird-looking man who wears a white lab coat.

As the days go by, numerous large boxes are delivered to the man's door, where he promptly takes them and stores them in the garage. Emily and Sam try to look in through the garage windows to see what's going on as they are sure he is up to no good (most likely he is a mad scientist), but the windows are blacked out. Just who is this man and what is he doing? Readers can help Emily and Sam solve the mystery in this second installment of the series. (Ages 6-9)



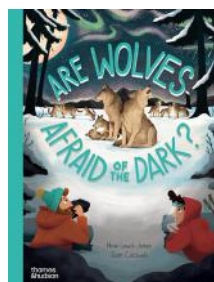
What Happened on Thursday?

A Nigerian Civil War Story
by Ayo Oyeku, Lydia Mba

(Amazon Crossing)

Reviewer: Kimberly Waters

This is a great way to relate the history of the Nigerian Civil War on a child's level of understanding. It's written simply with facts that happened to a family, which is something children can relate to. The moral of the story is that families can do hard things together, even in challenging times. Read this for an eye-opening example of what really went on during wartime. (Ages 7-10)

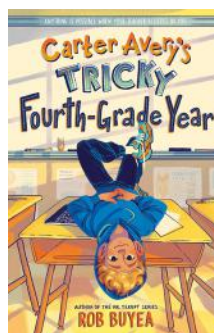


Are Wolves Afraid of the Dark?

by Huw Lewis Jones, Sam Caldwell
(Thames & Hudson)

Reviewer: Dr. Dawn Menge

In this worldwide adventure, readers get up close and personal with one of nature's most misunderstood creatures: the wolf. Packed with little-known facts about wolves' family lives, eating habits, and their connection to domestic dogs, readers will discover the secret lives of wolves and how to protect them. (Ages 7-10)

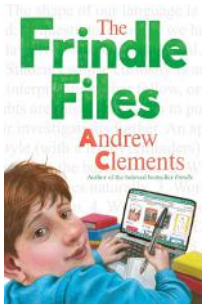


Carter Avery's Tricky Fourth-Grade Year

by Rob Buyea
(Delacorte Press)

Reviewer: Christine Irvin

Carter Avery finds it nearly impossible to sit still, especially in school. His previous teachers tried and failed to reign in his energy. His teachers have labeled him as a problem student. Just before the start of fourth grade, Avery hears rumors that his new teacher is mean. To Avery, that just means another year of getting in trouble at school. But, to his surprise, his new teacher turns out to be very different. The story is so entertaining and informative that young readers won't realize they are learning as they are being entertained. Bravo! (Ages 8-12)



The Frindle Files

by Andrew Clements
(Random House)

Reviewer: Christine Irvin

In the long-awaited follow-up to the beloved classic *Frindle*, a new generation of kids discovers the power of words and imagination—and yes, even screens—to solve a mystery and change

their world! In addition to being intriguing due to the origins of the story, the tale is a good one and well worth reading even if you're not familiar with the original book (which I wasn't). Enjoy! (Ages 8-12)



Operation: Happy

by Jenni L. Walsh
(ZonderKidz)

Reviewer: Mark Graham

As World War II enters her backyard, a young girl tries to cope with the war and keep her family together by completing a bucket list with her best friend: her dog Happy. Featuring a dog's POV and inspired by the real-life

experiences of a young Pearl Harbor survivor, this historical middle grade novel will inspire readers to find courage in any situation. (Ages 8-12)



Country of the Birch Trees

by Kristin McGlothlin, Kristina Swarner
(Sourland Mountain Books)

Reviewer: Mark Graham

For River, understanding her community—and how she fits in—will take some investigating. The third book in the *Sourland Mountain* series, *Country of the Birch Trees* follows a kind, persistent 13-year-old as she deals with crucial questions of identity, family, and community. A mystery with a message to readers that we must not be afraid or ashamed of who we are. (Ages 8-12)

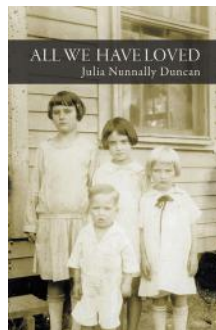


Spoon

by Stephanie Peters (Jolly Fish Press)
Reviewer: Deb Greenberg

After being a starter on her high school's varsity volleyball team, Macy accepts her backup role to the standout new girl Alliya in this fast-paced sports fiction. But everything changes when the students start playing a game called Spoon ... decorate a plastic spoon,

always keep it with you, and if someone asks to see your spoon, show it within five seconds or you're out. When Alliyah begins pulling increasingly dangerous stunts to win at Spoon, Macy must make some decisions that could affect her team and their playoffs. Horizon's Hi-Lo books offer short chapters, simple sentence structures, and an accessible format, making them ideal for teen reluctant readers. (Ages 8-12)



All We Have Loved

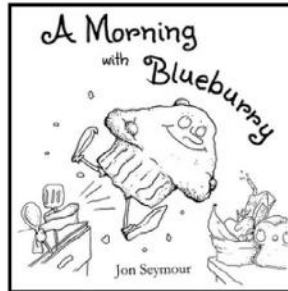
by Julia Nunnally Duncan
(Finishing Line Press)

Reviewer: Deb Greenberg

A fascinating book filled with personal essays detailing what it was like in a cotton mill village in the western part of North Carolina during the Great Depression, and with a look into the author's own 1960s upbringing in rural

Western North Carolina. Readers will be not only entertained but educated on the way these families persevered. A compelling and captivating read for all. (Ages 12+)

To submit your book for review, email Cristy Bertini at cristy@storymonsters.com for submission guidelines.



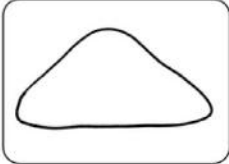
Do you love muffins?
A MORNING WITH BLUEBERRY
is the perfect pastry tale.



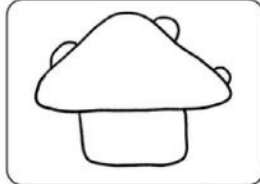
Tielmour Press

Draw a Muffin Like Blueburry!

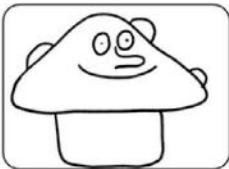
FOLLOW THE INSTRUCTIONS BELOW TO LEARN HOW TO DRAW YOUR VERY OWN MUFFIN—JUST LIKE BLUEBERRY! USE THE SPACE PROVIDED ON THE FOLLOWING PAGE TO DRAW YOUR MUFFIN.



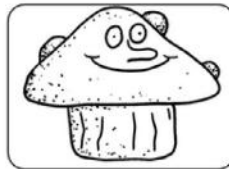
1. START BY DRAWING A LARGE TRIANGLE SHAPE WITH ROUNDED CORNERS.



2. ADD A LONG LETTER "U" AT THE BOTTOM, AND A FEW SEMI-CIRCLES ON THE TOP FOR THE BLUEBERRIES!



3. ADD TWO CIRCLES FOR THE EYES (WITH DOTS INSIDE), A FINGER SHAPE FOR THE NOSE, AND LONG CURVED LINE FOR THE MOUTH.



4. ADD THE FINAL DETAILS LIKE WAVY LINES FOR THE MUFFIN LINER, CHEEKS, AND LOTS OF DOTS!

*ADDING DOTS FOR SHADING OR FORM IS CALLED "STIPPLING".

Draw Your Own Muffin HERE!





LEAVING NO TRACE WITH YOSEMITE CONSERVANCY

by Julianne Black DiBlasi

Ready for spring? Who isn't?! I wasn't in the loop on Punxsutawney Phil and his most recent weather prediction. Still, I think it's safe to say I'm ready for the warmer weather, no matter how adorable that little *Marmota monax* is!

So, as we get ready to pack up our lunches and head for the great outdoors, let's review the Leave No Trace principles, as promoted by the National Park Service (NPS). These seven principles encourage visitors to respect wildlife, protect natural spaces, and ensure that parks remain beautiful and undisturbed for future generations. These guidelines help people enjoy the outdoors while minimizing their impact on nature so visitors can enjoy national parks and natural areas while keeping them unspoiled for future adventurers!

You haven't heard of them?

Then it's a good thing this month's Q&A article is with author Terry Pierce and illustrator Nadja Sarell, who have just released the educational, fun, and beautiful board book, *We Leave No Trace!*, in conjunction with the Yosemite Conservancy!

Grab your hiking boots and your explorer's spirit—it's time for an adventure! In *We Leave No Trace!*, young nature lovers will discover how to enjoy the great outdoors while protecting the plants, animals, and special places we all love.

With playful rhymes, fun facts, and colorful illustrations, *We Leave No Trace!* teaches kids the magic of "leaving only footprints" and how small actions—like picking up litter, staying on trails, and respecting wildlife—can make a big difference. Whether you're a budding conservationist or just love a good outdoor adventure, *We Leave No Trace!* will inspire you to be a hero for the planet!

So please welcome Terry and Nadja!

Q: Hi Terry! How did *We Leave No Trace!* initially come about, and were you able to collaborate with any environmental experts or organizations while writing the book?

A: Terry: First, thank you for inviting us to chat about our upcoming board book, *We Leave No Trace!* I always love speaking to *Story Monsters Ink®* readers.

How did *We Leave No Trace!* come about? After *Hello, Meadow!*, our second book, was published in spring 2023, Yosemite Conservancy and I began working on a third book to complete the series. We tinkered with initial ideas but finally landed on a broader environmental stewardship theme (because the first book, *Eat Up, Bear!*, was about wildlife conservation, and the second was about meadow conservation). We used the principles of Leave No Trace to determine which tenets we wanted to focus on—those that very young children could understand and be able to implement themselves (maybe with a little help from parents or siblings), such as leaving things in their place, proper trash disposal, being respectful of other people and animals, etc.

Another key point we wanted to make was that good stewardship applies to all nature. So, the story begins in the mountains and ends at a duck pond in a city park. Nadja Sarell's illustrations show a progression from the mountains to the city.

For the two previous books, we collaborated with the National Park Service and experts from Yosemite Conservancy; naturally, we did the same for this book. I highly value their opinions. This time, we also requested that Leave No Trace review the text. I'm proud that this book represents a team effort among like-minded people who care deeply about the environment.

Q: Nadja, what's the most challenging part of illustrating a story about environmental responsibility? Do you use specific methods, colors, textures, etc., to make the outdoors exciting for kids through your art?



A: Nadja: As *We Leave No Trace!* is an independent part of the three board books on a similar subject of nature, I aimed at keeping the style quite consistent with the other two books. The one thing that has developed since the first book is that I got even more into the details.

Q: Terry, how has your connection to nature influenced your storytelling? Do you have specific places you love visiting or adventures that inspired you for the theme?

A: Terry: I've always loved being in nature, hiking, exploring, and watching wildlife. Upon college graduation, I even spent five weeks backpacking the John Muir Trail in the Sierra backcountry. I'm fortunate to live in a small town cradled by pine trees and gorgeous mountains. In the latter part of my writing career, I've strived to write books that would help young children appreciate nature, mostly by creating stories that engage a child's mind and use enjoyable, inviting language. I want my words and the concepts they represent to stay with children for a long time.

I've always called Tuolumne Meadows in Yosemite National Park my "happy place," so it has greatly influenced me. Its beauty, grandeur, and wildlife-watching opportunities are abundant. And I'll admit when I'm there—or in any wild place—I observe how other people interact with the environment. So many people have discovered the great outdoors since the pandemic, so now more than ever, we all need to be mindful of how we interact with nature. I hope that *We Leave No Trace!* delivers a positive message for little ones and their families in this regard.

Q: Nadja, what was the process involved with deciding the animals and scenery to include? Did you have a list of natural scenery or creatures to include before getting started?

A: Nadja: My editor, Nicole, gave a list of animals, trees, and flowers that the author or the publisher wanted to show in different scenes. It was quite a season and habitat-specific project. But otherwise I was given a lot of freedom to play with the compositions and people's interaction with nature.

Q: The tactile experience of the paper and drawing texture in your illustrations is a lovely pairing with the sensory nature focus of the book, but if you could go back (and had no deadline) would you do anything differently or use any different materials?

A: Nadja: Thank you! I might have given more attention to the human characters. They are not as detailed and realistic as the animal species.

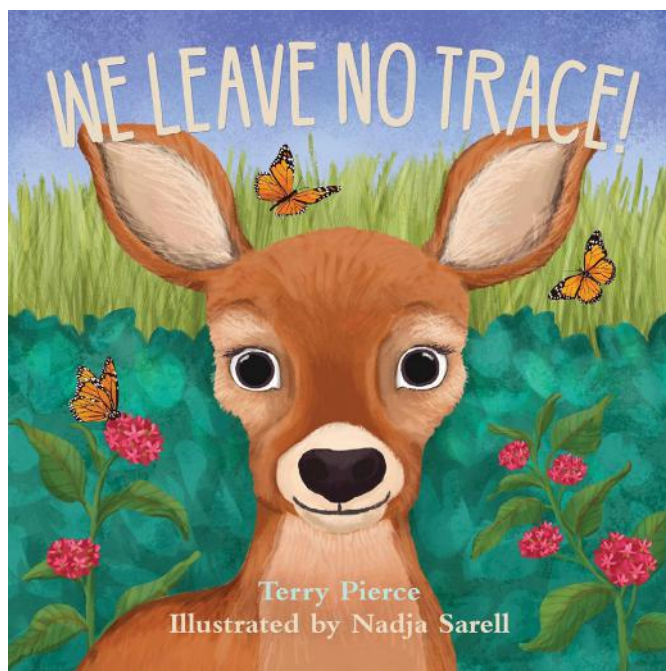
Q: Terry, what specific strategy or technique was used to balance educating kids about the environment while keeping the story fun and entertaining? How do you make the general theme engaging and relatable without getting preachy or pressured?

A: Terry: Great question! Writing a book with a message while keeping it engaging has its challenges, but for me, it was all about the language. Once I had a visual storyline, I allowed myself to write a “sloppy” draft. The point was to get what I wanted to say down on paper and give myself the broad strokes of the book. With the subsequent drafts, I focused on specific word choices to enhance the reading experience. One thing I knew from the start was that we wanted to keep the rhythm consistent with the two previous books in the series. So, it was a matter of finding the right word choices (age-appropriate for babies and toddlers) that worked with the established rhythmic pattern.

I often collaborated with my fabulous editor, Nicole Geiger, during the revision process. It took months of fine-tuning the text! Board books typically have a lower word count, so each word is scrutinized so a toddler can understand it, and it must fit into the rhythm for an enjoyable read-aloud experience.

I'd like to add that the illustrations contribute to the educational and entertainment value of the book. Nadja Sarell is a rock star to me. We could suggest adding a specific animal to a scene or other changes, such as a different ground cover or a type of plant, and she came through every time. Her artwork is scientifically accurate, colorful, and inviting to young children. We're so fortunate that she illustrated all three books!

Q: Nadja, so much of your illustration work is character-driven and on a more intimate scale. For *We Leave No Trace!*, was it fun to pull back a bit to incorporate a wider visual scene, changing the weight of the visual storytelling from facial expressions to the environment as a whole?



A: Nadja: Yes, absolutely! This book's biggest challenge was to create enough variety between the spreads, showing forests, mountains, waterfronts, parks, and so on. But at the same time, it was very different from my “usual” style and work I create.

Q: Was there anything else about *We Leave No Trace!* that required you to push your illustration skillset boundaries or organize the workflow differently?

A: Nadja: I normally work so that I create the line art first and kind of fill that in with color, textures, shadows, etc. With *We Leave No Trace!* and the other two books in the series, I had to think in a new way by illustrating the shapes instead of approaching everything through line illustration. So I basically had to retrain my brain when I started the final artwork.

So, what's been the most rewarding feedback you've received from young readers or their families about *We Leave No Trace!*? How about from the conservation community as a whole?

Terry: At this time, the book hasn't been released, so we've yet to receive feedback from readers. However, we're hearing very positive things from salespeople and distributors. For example, REI, the largest outdoor equipment retailer, has agreed to sell the book in all 192 of their stores. I'm sure the book will also sell in various national parks, as has *Eat Up, Bear!* and *Hello, Meadow!*

Q: Nadja, I have to point out that the color scheme is gorgeous! After checking out your website, color is definitely your superpower, and you don't need me to tell you that! One of your online images shows a sketch in the process, are you using watercolor paper and pastel pencils? Is that how you generally work and what you used for *We Leave No Trace!*?

A: Nadja: I'm quite flexible and happy trying out different techniques and styles. And yes, color has always come very naturally to me. It's an intuitive thing for me. I do love traditional media like pastels, pencils, and gouache, for example. I have a library of hand-painted or drawn textures on my computer. A lot of times I draw on paper, and then scan the work in to finish the illustration on the computer. With *We Leave No Trace!*, I drew everything on the computer, but I used a lot of my textures for things like grass, rocks, water, and so on. A lot of it I created specifically for these books by using gouache, crayons, and monoprint techniques.

Q: What role do you feel children's books (and entertainment in general) play in fostering respect for animals and shared natural spaces?

A: Terry: Children's books can play a huge role in this. Young children's minds are like sponges, soaking up everything in their environment. A child's senses absorb his surroundings and communicate to his developing brain. So, think about a little one sitting on a parent's lap, having a book read to them. They hear the words and see the pictures, catching every little detail. If a book shows a particular message, a child will absorb that message. In this case, he or she will hear and see how to respect nature. If you couple that with families modeling the Leave No Trace principles, children will learn these behaviors and become good stewards of the environment.

Q: What advice would you give to families who want to teach their kids about respecting nature?

A: Terry: Model the behavior you want your kids to have. For example, if you want your child to be respectful of others while out on the trail, use quiet voices and move thoughtfully as you hike. Kids will pick up on this! Or, if a child discovers a beautiful feather on the ground, acknowledge its beauty and uniqueness but leave it where you found it. You might explain to your child that an animal might use that feather to line its nest or burrow.

Other examples of modeling respectful behavior toward wildlife are resisting taking selfies with a wild animal in the

background, feeding an animal, or trying to touch it. Wild animals, even the smallest and cutest, are wild and can bite or otherwise harm a person.

How to respect natural habitats? Remember to walk and camp on durable surfaces (a trail, rock slab, snow, gravel). We all know how tempting it is to step out onto a gorgeous meadow, for instance, but trampling a meadow can harm it. So, enjoy the meadow from afar with your child. Notice the plants, flowers, and any animals you might hear or see, and take a photo to treasure the memory.

Q: Do you have any favorite resources you like to share? Are there companion materials for *We Leave No Trace!*, or any plans to make them available in the future?

A: Terry: For adult readers, I'd recommend visiting the Leave No Trace website at www.lnt.org. There, you can read about why it's important to consider the seven principles for which they advocate. For kids, the National Park Service offers Junior Ranger programs at its parks and has online activities for kids. You can check it out at nps.gov/kids/become-a-junior-ranger.htm. And lastly, Yosemite Conservancy hosts activities for young children, kids, and teenagers. You can learn more at yosemite.org/impact/youth-in-yosemite/.

Q: And what can we look forward to, and how can readers and educators contact you for school visits or to follow your work?

A: Terry: I'll be doing some interviews and book giveaways to celebrate the release of *We Leave No Trace!* Educators and parents can follow my work at any of the following sites: website: terrypiercebooks.com; Facebook: @TerryPierceAuthor; Blue Sky: @terrycpierce.bsky.social; Instagram: @tlcpierce.

Nadja: I'm currently working for publishers in Finland, illustrating more books! I've also started an educational book project that is a huge undertaking. The upcoming books will have porcupines, quirky neighbors, babies, and theatre! And hopefully somewhere in the future I get to focus on a picture of my own.

I have an Instagram account @nadjasarell where I post from time to time. I'm not very regular there, though! My website is nadjasarell.com. ●

Julianne Black DiBlasi • Mom, wielder of pixel, paint, and pen. krakenSky.com



NIKKI SHANNON SMITH

on Why Children's Books are a Necessity

by Raven Howell

"Children are always trying to make sense of the world around them," notes author Nikki Shannon Smith. "They use their observations, knowledge, and experience to begin to understand themselves and others."

Nikki has had a career in education spanning three decades. "I understand the various age groups really well, developmentally, socially, and emotionally. I also understand their humor and what they find interesting. It's easy for me to write for a target audience for that reason."

Nikki has written books for a variety of age groups, from board books to YA. She says, "When I began writing, I saw myself solely as a picture book writer. I think having young children and being a second-grade teacher at that time influenced my thinking. What I've learned as I've developed my craft, is that I don't have a favorite age range. What I write is usually guided by a combination of what I'm passionate about and what I'm sometimes asked to create. I was fifteen years old when I began working at a preschool and went on to work in elementary schools and even short term at a secondary school, so I've been around a wide age range of young people my whole life!"

When Nikki first began her writing journey, she says, "I pulled favorite books from my daughter's bookshelf, and among them was *Meet Danitra Brown*, by Nikki Grimes. I visited her website, and she had a list of things for aspiring authors to do. I love a good checklist, so I followed it, beginning with joining the Society for Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI). Starting by surrounding myself with other writers in a learning community was key to my success."

"Part of the fun of being creative is letting myself be free to follow my ideas and imagination. The beauty of that is if I start to feel burned out with historical fiction (which can be sad), I can switch to something bouncy and fun, like *Our Beautiful Colors*. One thing I'm especially enjoying right now is writing poetry."

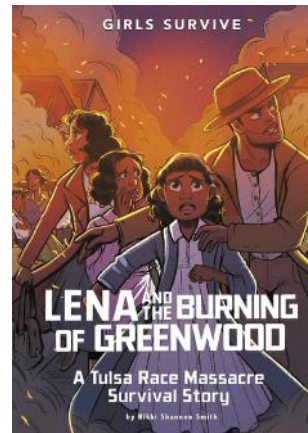
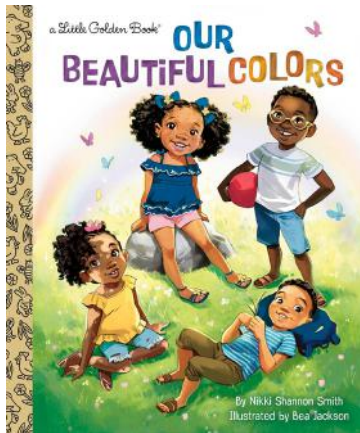
"Including all of the books that are both published and forthcoming/contracted, I've written 25 books. I'm proud of all of them—they're like my children! That's why so many people call them "book babies." There are a few I'm especially proud of, though."

"*Our Beautiful Colors* was my first book in rhyme, and it's a joyful, beautiful book that was born out of an immense amount of sadness during 2020. *Lena and the Burning of Greenwood: A Tulsa Race Massacre Survival Story* is hands-down the hardest book I've ever written. It was emotional and important to me that I not sensationalize something so tragic. I wanted to do the topic justice and still make sure it was developmentally appropriate for young readers. I wanted to tell the truth. I wanted to honor the people of Greenwood. I wasn't even sure I wanted to write it initially. Then it went on to win the 2023 Oklahoma State Book Award in the Young Adult category!"

"*Stranded* has been a dream come true, because it was published by Scholastic, and is available in Scholastic Book Fairs. I grew up ordering books from Scholastic, and then as a teacher, I did monthly class book orders. Our school also hosted annual Scholastic Book Fairs. To have my book in the book fair and have former students buying it is surreal!"

She feels books allow children to explore, question, wonder, experience emotions, make connections, and relate the characters' actions to their own, without the fear of making mistakes or suffering consequences. "In addition," Nikki says, "If all children can find books that are just right for themselves, they will love reading. And reading is a crucial skill. Reading is power. Reading is freedom. And our children deserve to be free."





Nikki believes readers come to books looking for different things. “Some want to learn or experience something new through the content or characters. Some want to escape into an imaginary world. Some love to follow the plot and predict what will happen or see themselves in the characters. Some simply want to be entertained. I hope readers take from my books whatever they came to find, or whatever they discover they needed or wanted.”

“My earliest childhood memories were around books, specifically learning to read and enjoying bedtime stories read to me by my father,” she recalls. “Those memories made me love reading and books. I was an avid reader—so avid that I got in trouble for not doing chores and homework because I was too busy reading. I used to sneak-read when my parents thought I was doing whatever I was supposed to be doing. By the time I was about twelve years old, my favorite authors were Nikki Giovanni and Stephen King. I learned that words were powerful, and that authors were not just creative, but brave. Books were a place to raise one’s voice. I think these early experiences led me to be a children’s author. In terms of the role of books in communities, literacy is crucial to the success of the people in a community. This has always been true. That’s why enslaved people were not taught to read. Illiteracy makes oppression easier. It stalls progress. Books are necessary and revolutionary.”

“In the beginning, I set out to only write picture books in prose, so the biggest evolution has been in my experimentation with category and genre. When I think about what’s behind that change, it’s probably confidence and authenticity. I’m no longer afraid to be myself as a writer,” she reveals.

Recently Nikki had the incredible opportunity to co-write a book with Misty Copeland, *Letters to Misty*. In the book, the talented first black female American Ballet Theatre principal dancer, Misty Copeland, offers advice to young readers based on letters she’s received over the years from fans. “Writing with Misty Copeland was delightful!” exclaims Nikki. “She’s creative and full of experience and ideas, while also being very open and flexible. She’s extremely multifaceted and interesting. We brought our common experiences as Black women in two different professional worlds where we were often the only (or one of a few) to the book. Our hope is that all children will find universal, helpful, actionable advice in the book, and that young readers of color will also see themselves.” The book releases in May.

Prior to the *Misty* book, Nikki’s *Easter Fun* is being published in the *Brown Baby Parade* board book collection. She says, “There are six books in the *Brown Baby Parade* Series: *Love is All Around*, *Halloween Friends*, *Countdown to Christmas*, *On the Farm*, *Easter Fun*, and *In the Neighborhood*. All of the *Brown Baby Parade* books are written in rhymed text, so it’s a fun, energetic read-aloud. Young readers can help read/predict the rhyming words. The words and illustrations play nicely together to create opportunities for young readers to find the Easter eggs before the characters. It’s a happy book that also highlights a family’s celebration.”

As a morning person, Nikki tries to write first thing, sometimes as early as 5 a.m. She usually has at least two projects at some stage of development, and recently, as many as three or four writing projects at a time. Her crucial ingredient is silence, and when she feels stuck, she alternates between taking a break completely, taking a break where she



does something else but keeps her idea in an “open tab,” or she moves to pencil and paper instead of computer typing.

When Nikki is not writing, she enjoys “sitting in the stillness, being in nature, listening to music and dancing, traveling, having new experiences, and going to Disneyland. For me, happiness is a feeling of contentment at a spiritual level. It lives and lingers there, in your spirit. It’s made out of knowing you’re loved and that you give love. It’s a feeling that your existence matters. It feels like endless possibility and following your dreams and passions and considering yourself so important that you are willing to take risks to keep yourself safe and in that state of happiness.”

“Writing each book feels like starting all over again—learning something new—so the biggest reward is finishing the story, being happy with it, and having it bought and published. Going through that process repeatedly is a good reminder that the last book wasn’t a fluke. After that, the biggest reward is having a reader say they enjoyed it, especially if they can tell you exactly why.”

“I get to do what I love every day. I believe when you work hard, produce your best work, and are creatively honest, your dreams will be realized. Being a full-time author, educator, and presenter also allows me to combine what I love about writing and what I love about teaching into the perfect job. I’m extremely fortunate.”

“My message to young students is to be yourself. You are wonderful just the way you are. Surround yourself with people who accept you for you. There are extraordinary elements in everything around us: the resilience of nature and of the human spirit, our willingness to grow and change, friendship and love, the imagination of children, laughter, and ripples on the water. We just have to open our eyes, minds, and hearts so we can notice it.”

For more information about Nikki Shannon Smith and her work, visit nikkishannonsmith.com. ●



Raven Howell is an award-winning children’s author and poet. ravenhowell.com

FALLING ROCKS FROM OUTER SPACE

by Conrad J. Storad



Tonight, weather permitting, step outside your home and take a look up. The night sky is beautiful. It's mysterious. It can be scary. The sky is also filled with wonders. Always has been.

Feel lucky? Make a wish if you see a falling star. Of course, the colorful streak of light you watched flashing across the sky was not really a star. What you saw was a meteor, the bright trail in the sky left by a tiny bit of rock or dust's final seconds of existence. It vaporized as it plowed into Earth's atmosphere. That bit of space debris is called a meteoroid.

However, more interesting is the fact that the meteoroid you watched possibly had been traveling through outer space for

millions of years, or more, before meeting its fiery end as a meteor in the night sky.

ABOVE: A meteoroid is a chunk of stone or metal, or both, zooming through outer space. It becomes a meteor once it enters Earth's atmosphere. It is called a meteorite if it impacts on the planet's surface. The majority of meteoroids are the size of dust flecks, grains of sand, or pebbles. But every so often... Shutterstock image



The Canyon Diablo meteorite impact site located at Meteor Crater, Arizona. Shutterstock photo

Before we go any further, to avoid confusion, a few definitions are necessary.

Scientists define a meteoroid as any solid object moving through interplanetary space that is smaller than a planet or asteroid. Most meteoroids are the size of flecks of dust, tiny slivers of rock, pebbles, or grains of sand. A rare few are the size of rocks and boulders. Chunks of rock or metal that weigh thousands of tons are very rare.

A meteor is the fiery bright trail in the sky left when a falling meteoroid burns up. The piece of space debris is incinerated due to friction as it flies through the layers of Earth's atmosphere.

A meteorite is a meteoroid that crashes on the surface of a planet or moon.

More than 34,000 meteorites of various sizes have been found on the Earth ... and documented as real. Scientists say they come from a huge swath of rocks that orbits the Sun. It's called the asteroid belt. That massive band of space debris is located between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter.

However, some meteorites found on Earth have been analyzed and determined to be actual fragments of the Moon or Mars. Massive meteoroid impacts millions or billions of years ago blasted the material into space.

More than 100 meteorites are known to be pieces of the Moon. More than 70 are thought to be bits of Mars.

Flashback to late January 1982. The place, Meteor Crater, is located on the high desert plateau just south of Interstate 40, a few miles west of Winslow, Arizona, and about 30 miles east of Flagstaff. A few miles to the north is a place called Canyon Diablo.

I'm on a cross-country road trip with Terry, my best friend. He's moving there to start a new job in Nevada. I'm still months away from starting graduate school at Arizona State University. As we pass Winslow, Arizona, the signs for Meteor Crater and the Barringer Space Museum tempt us to make a tourist stop.

The spot we visit is a dusty bit of desert not far from what is now called Canyon Diablo. What we will see is described as the youngest meteorite impact site on Earth. More than 150 such sites are known to scientists.

We park in front of the museum, a small, unimposing building. The lip of the crater rises more than 150 feet above this dry, barren piece of Arizona. The crater itself stretches almost 4,000 feet from rim to rim. The big hole in the ground is more than 600 feet deep.

Meteor Crater is also known as the Barringer Crater, named for geologist and mining engineer Daniel Barringer. He formed a company in 1903 to excavate the site in search of the object that created the crater.

The answer to that question is part of a story that begins more than half a billion years ago in the asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter. Scientists now conclude that a titanic collision of space debris sheared off a huge piece of iron and nickel. One chunk weighed 63,000 tons. It may have measured up to 150 feet in diameter.

For millions of years, that huge chunk of metal traveled through the cold and darkness of outer space. The journey went on for hundreds of millions of miles. Off in the distance, Earth's gravity continually pulled at the huge meteoroid.

Same spot on this planet. Roll back the clock to a day about 49,000 years ago...



Only a small number of humans have actually held a piece of Mars. My wife, Laurie, is lucky enough to be one of them. Years ago, she attended a lecture by Professor Phillip Christensen at Arizona State University's Mars Space Flight Facility. A geologist and geophysicist, Christensen is one of the world's leading experts on the physical properties of Mars, the Earth, and other planetary surfaces. Only 70 or so documented meteorites are known to be actual bits of Mars. Most were recovered from the icy valleys and glaciers of Antarctica.

Meteorites and Meteor-wrongs:

- Tens of thousands of meteorite fragments have been discovered in and around Meteor Crater, Arizona. To date, more than 30 tons of bits and pieces have been recovered. The largest piece weighs more than 1,400 pounds.
- There are several broad categories of meteorites. Scientists classify them by the materials of which they are made. Iron meteorites are mostly made of iron and nickel. Stony-iron meteorites are made of iron and hard rock. Stony meteorites are mostly rock.
- Scientists are not sure how many meteorites actually crash into the Earth. The published results of a study in 2020 guessed the number of impacts at more than 17,000 per year, or 47 per day. The exact number is not known. Most meteorites are never seen or found because they land in the oceans or in desolate, uninhabited places.

It's not documented that any human was looking up at the sky all those centuries ago near the spot Terry and I were standing in 1982. Probably not. To date, archeological evidence shows that the first humans didn't arrive in North America until more than 20,000 years later. However, if someone had been there, what they saw and heard in their final moments would have been spectacular and scary. It would have been fatal.

An ear-splitting roar fills the air. Sonic booms shake the ground. High above, a fiery object streaks through the layers of our planet's atmosphere. At impact, the meteoroid is moving at a speed of close to 40,000 miles per hour. That's five times the speed of sound.

Most of the meteoroid vaporizes as it falls through the atmosphere. But a big chunk and thousands of tons of bits and pieces do hit the ground. The explosion is massive.

(Scientists calculate that the impact of the largest piece of the object caused an explosion with the force of more than 20 million tons of TNT.)

Resources to learn more:

Books:

- ***Killer Rocks From Outer Space***
by Steven N. Koppes
- ***Meteoroids, Meteors, and Meteorites: Know the Difference***
by Baby Professor

Websites:

- **Buseck Center for Meteorite Studies**
– Arizona State University
<https://meteorites.asu.edu>
- **Ask An Earth And Space Scientist**
– Arizona State University
<https://askanearthspacescientist.asu.edu>

In only six seconds, the explosion ejects millions of tons of limestone and sandstone into the air. Molten rock is spewed for miles. Flaming shards and fragments of iron and nickel meteorite are also scattered for many miles around the crater site.

After impact, it takes a long time for the debris and dust to settle. The crater sits quietly for tens of thousands of years. The arid climate helps to preserve the impact site.

(Flash forward again to January 1982, inside the museum...)

Terry and I checked out photos and exhibits. On display were many large pieces of what is now called the Canyon Diablo meteorite. We learned that NASA's Apollo mission astronauts trained at this site during the 1960s before their trips to the Moon.

But what I remember most was a large mural. The painting was an artist's rendition of what this lonely bit of Arizona desert might have looked like 49,000 years ago, moments before impact. The timeline near the mural was clearly marked.

Standing a few yards away were two older women. (Heck, they were probably only in their 50s or 60s, but I was just a young sprout of 24.) I couldn't help but overhear their conversation as they looked at the mural and read the description.

Their banter back and forth went something like this:

"Gosh Helen, look at this. It sure is a good thing that big rock hit way out here in the middle of nowhere."

Helen just shrugged and said, "Oh my gosh! No kidding!"

"Sue, can you imagine the mess it would have made if it had hit closer to a big city."

As I look back, I realize that moment was just one of many in my young life that convinced me to study science journalism. Today, more than 43 years later, I know that my quest to help promote science literacy is a never-ending task ... and needed more than ever. ●

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



Toxic Beauty Standards

by Olivia Amiri

In my poem, I address the unrelenting chase of beauty, showing it as a weapon and a martyr in the fight for approval and recognition as a woman and teenager in today's world. It highlights how contradictory beauty is. I used writing to highlight the contradictory feelings and social pressures associated with outward appearance. This poem explores our ideas of "beauty" and the unattainable expectations that are placed on people, especially women, in an effort to subvert conventional ideals of beauty. Through the portrayal of "gift surgeries" and the fruitless attempts to buck the inevitable course of aging, it criticizes the commercialization and normalization of toxic beauty standards.

A Weapon and Martyr Named Beauty

Seventeen using anti-aging creams, to fix perfection
Aunts pull at each others' sides to prove each other ugly
Mom puts her palm flat on my forehead to stop time
Friends on the bathroom floor exchange dream surgeries
like gifts
Spots given like punctuation by the sun or God are both a curse
We learn at five to stave off the storm with a buoy called beauty.

Weakness and smoothness and we christen it beauty.
Mother wraps daughter in insecurity she might achieve
perfection
In the wake of living, we freckle and fold, destined for a curse
Evidence of a long walk of adventure we name ugly
Every candle lit and dark is now a sad event without gifts
It's an alarm that soon you will crease and bloat and lose to time.

We can love times cradling of nature and watch it in reverence
every time
But when others make it sharp, making it the convicted killer
of beauty,

We can't admire the bone-white tree trunk without leaves and
no more gifts.
Repulsed by any woman who believes that without leaves it is
still perfection.
You must be the virgin sapling, unsuspecting in its virtue
against ugly.
but when the bullying rain beats on its frail frame, it succumbs
to its curse

For a moment you could say it was beautiful, but the soil only
shows its curse.
Soon girls will dread not the great rain but to grow into the oak
and grow towards time.
We weep to have a legacy, to live and to show it. To have a
name and earn it is ugly.
Dry your eyes, or the salt will dry your cheeks—always crown
beauty over peace.
To be frail and light without roots is to be desirable; to be living
as perfection.
An unfair hand we play. To live strong, to open life's presents,
or leave them pretty: gifts.

The morning before defeat, when age can be killed, we open
the gifts.
Inside they are rife with rot, left to the motives of a curse;
All sounds of laughter had nowhere to go, smile lines ironed to
perfection.
Again, we are cheated; to be revered we must outrun time.
Inevitably our lungs give out, and out spills our "beauty."
Like a ceramic woman, we break, and shards are always "ugly."

But when will we outrun our body and eyes—when can we
change ugly.
When will palms fisted and held and clasped be a gift?
When can women escape their wrapping and burn your idea of
beauty?
When will we be worth more than our shine poison and our
curse?
Why is it we welcome spring and not the spare change left on
our skin by time?
It's rotting us from the inside to preserve the outside; to
preserve perfection.

Beauty brings split ends and makes us familiar with ugly
To keep perfection, you must suffocate and think it a gift.
Not a curse after all; just another season. An oak blessed
with time. ●

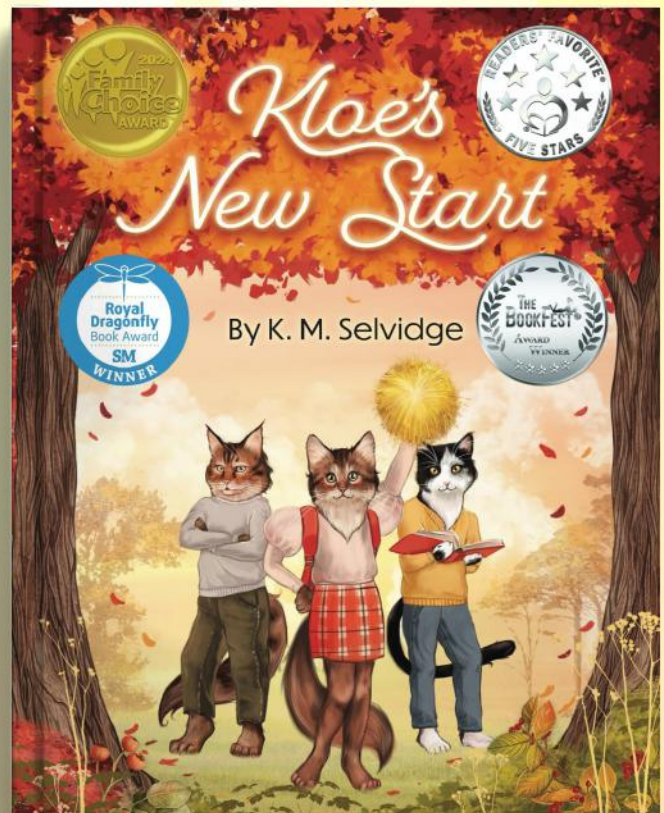
Seventeen-year-old Olivia Amiri is a little girl with big advice! Sharing insights and observations on the world around us, her message is clear: kids are still the best teachers to remind grown-ups of the simple joys in life. livamiri.com

An award-winning story about *making friends* and *fitting in*

Kloe can't wait to get started at her new school ... but when her brother starts acting out, will she end up stuck in his shadow? Or will she be able to make her own way and make others see her for who she truly is?

"This heartwarming tale is more than just a story. It covers subjects like mental health, learning to be your own person, and not allowing others to label you or treat you in a certain way because of something someone else has done. The struggles the characters go through are very real, and this book will teach kids a lot of new coping skills. This is perfect for young children and adults alike."

—Anne-Marie Reynolds, Readers' Favorite



www.kmselvidge.com

Available on Amazon.com and BarnesandNoble.com