

Story Monsters Ink

MARCH 2026



The Literary Magazine for Teachers, Librarians, and Parents

One to Read:

Lauren Sánchez Bezoz

Sarah E. Pearsall

Adam Wallace

Brittany Petish

Annette Bay
Pimentel

Sandra Neil
Wallace



PLUS:

Judy
Newman

Conrad's
Classroom

Monsters at
the Movies

Liv on Life

Spring
Reading List

Book Reviews
and More!



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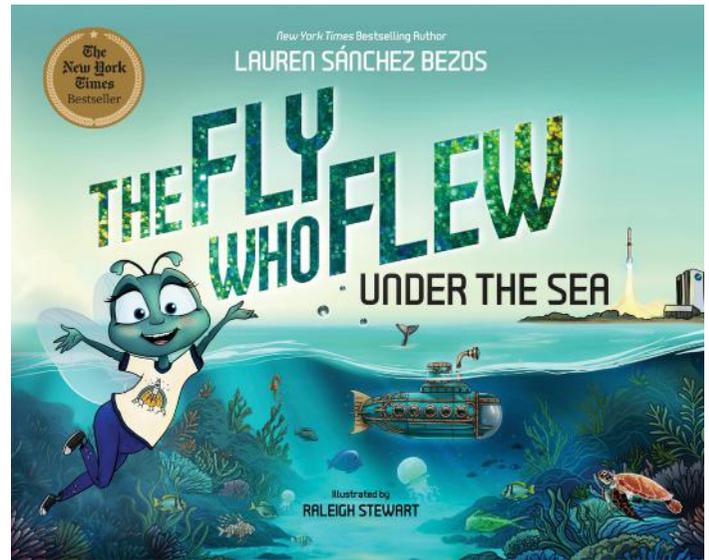
One to Read:

Lauren Sánchez Bezoz

by Raven Howell

When Lauren Sánchez Bezoz released her 2024 children's book debut, *The Fly Who Flew to Space*, it quickly became a *New York Times* bestseller. Lauren was already an accomplished, award-winning journalist and philanthropist. As a licensed helicopter pilot and founder of the aerial film and production company, Black Ops Aviation, she is the epitome of girl power. She's come a long way from the little girl growing up in Albuquerque, New Mexico, with big aviation dreams.





The Fly Who Flew to Space was inspired by Lauren’s personal experience with dyslexia. The story is about Flynn, a fly who doesn’t find much success in school, but with an inquisitive nature, accidentally gets stuck in the cockpit of a rocket that heads into space.

“Flynn is me, completely,” Lauren confides. “I was the kid in the back of the classroom who couldn’t make the letters stay still on the page. I thought I wasn’t smart. It took years for me to understand that my brain just worked differently, and that different was not the same as less.”

“And then I watched my own son go through it. That is a whole different kind of pain. Watching your child’s confidence drain

and feeling like you cannot stop it. Writing these books was my way of saying what I needed someone to say to me. And to him. You are not behind. You are just on a different route.”

“The inspiration for the book started in a helicopter,” she explains. “I was flying with my kids, and a tiny fly somehow made it into the cockpit. Before we even took off, we started imagining where this little fly might end up and what she might see. That moment became Flynn.”

“The first book, *The Fly Who Flew to Space*, follows Flynn as she accidentally ends up on a rocket ship and blasts off into space. It’s about chasing big dreams and being brave enough to go somewhere you never expected to go. It is also about what it feels like to struggle in school and still believe you can do something extraordinary. That part is personal. That part is me.”

This year, Lauren is celebrating another chapter in Flynn’s adventures. Her second *New York Times* bestselling book, *The Fly Who Flew Under the Sea*, is a journey to undersea life, exploring nature’s marvelous biodiversity. Aside from the story, the book features a unique STEM-themed “Undersea Glossary,” and the book jacket turns into a pull-out, glow-in-the-dark poster page.

“A conservationist I was working with through the Bezos Earth Fund said something that I couldn’t get out of my head,” Lauren says. “They told me that we know more about the surface of Mars than we do about our own ocean floor.





I have such a loooooong way to fly,
but I love looking at all the rivers and forests.
And mountains touching the clouds . . .

And I thought, that is exactly where Flynn needs to go. Somewhere vast and mysterious and a little bit intimidating. Because that is where the best adventures happen, I wanted kids to discover that world through curiosity instead of fear. The ocean felt like the perfect place for that.”

Curiosity is what saves Flynn every single time. “She doesn’t always get it right. She takes wrong turns. She ends up in places she didn’t plan to be. But instead of shutting down, she leans in. She asks questions. She looks closer. And that is what turns her mistakes into the most extraordinary discoveries.”

Lauren says she thinks curiosity is actually one of the most underrated things we can teach a child. “Not just how to get the right answer, but how to stay open when things don’t go the way you planned. That is what Flynn models, and it is what I try to live, too.”

Flynn’s character evolves throughout the storyline. “At the beginning, Flynn is frustrated and disoriented. She took a wrong turn, and she knows it. That feeling, I know it so well. That moment where you think, *Why can’t I just get it right?* But by the end, she’s a completely different fly. She is confident. She is curious. She stops seeing her mistakes as failures and starts seeing them as the whole point. That shift, from shame to wonder, is the heart of the book. And it’s the shift I want every child to feel reading it.”

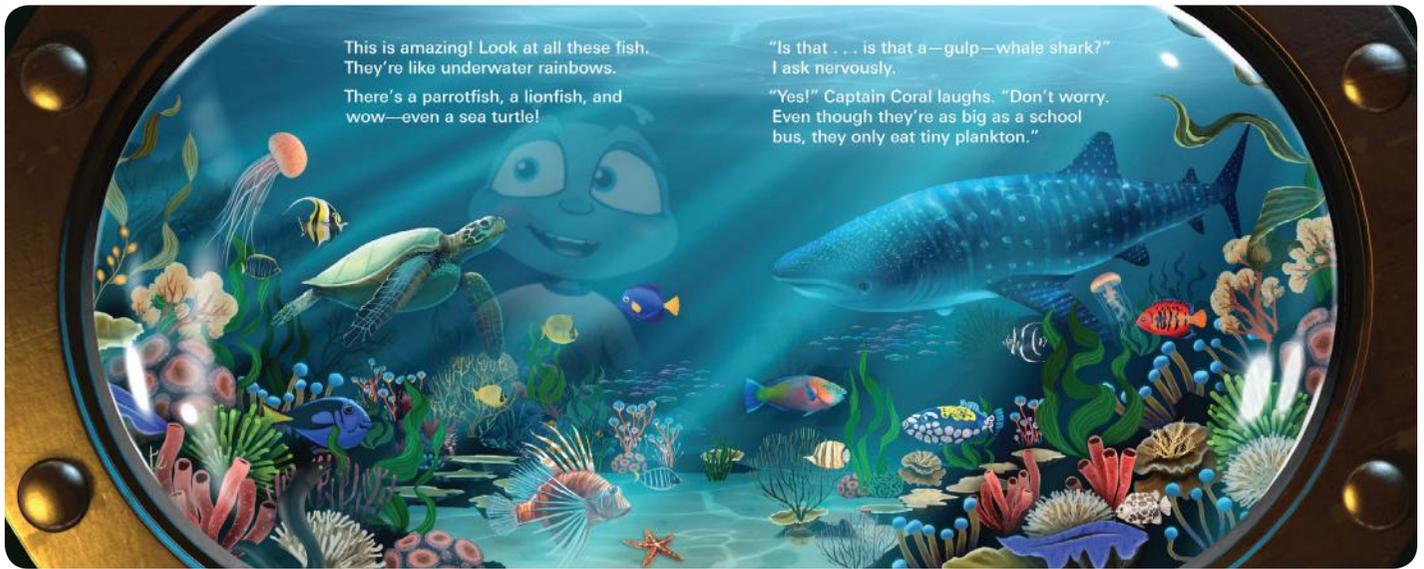
Lauren says that, in many ways, both the first book and the second are mirrors of each other. In the first book, Flynn

“Flynn is me, completely. I was the kid in the back of the classroom who couldn’t make the letters stay still on the page. I thought I wasn’t smart. It took years for me to understand that my brain just worked differently, and that different was not the same as less.”

doesn’t plan to go to space. In the second book, she doesn’t plan to go under the sea. Both adventures start with a wrong turn.

“But this book feels closer to home in a way,” she says of the new story. “Space is out there. The ocean is right here, on our own planet, and most of it is still completely unknown to us. That felt important. We don’t have to go to another world to find something extraordinary. Sometimes we just have to look at what is already beneath the surface.”

“I think a lot of kids are going to recognize Flynn immediately. That feeling of being a little off course. Of wondering if your wrong turn means something is wrong with you. One in five kids has a learning difference. That is a lot of children sitting in classrooms right now who feel exactly the way I did growing up.”

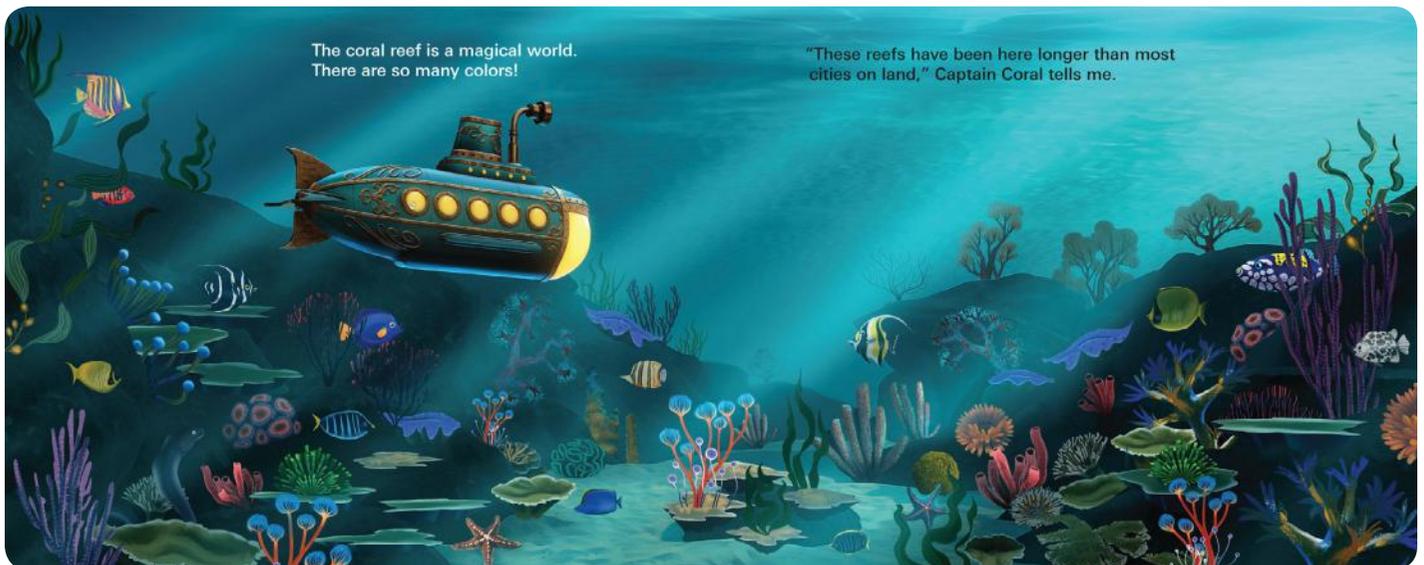


"And for parents, I hope this is something you read together. Sit down, open the book, and get lost in it together. That time matters more than most people realize."

Readers will additionally relish the creative artwork by Raleigh Stewart, who has over 25 years of experience in the entertainment industry. "Working with Raleigh Stewart is one of my favorite parts of this whole process. He doesn't just illustrate Flynn; he brings her to life. There is movement and emotion and wonder on every single page. He captures things I couldn't even put into words."

"The glow-in-the-dark element was something we developed together, and I love it so much. Because the deep ocean is dark. And the fact that there is beauty glowing down there in all of that darkness felt like exactly the right metaphor for this book. Light in unexpected places. That is Flynn."

Lauren hopes readers are encouraged to understand that the unknown doesn't have to be scary. "That's the biggest thing. There is a moment in the book where Flynn meets a whale shark, and she's terrified. And Captain Coral helps her see that what felt threatening is actually something extraordinary. That moment where fear becomes admiration,





that is real. That happens in life all the time. And I want kids to know they can get there. You just have to stay curious long enough to find out what something actually is.”

In 2025, Lauren became a Literacy Champion for Impact Reading, a new literacy nonprofit organization determined to give all children the opportunity to choose and own their own books—and is happy to be a part of it. “I was so honored to be named Literacy Champion,” she shares. “Impact Reading works with amazing partners to deliver incredible programs like the United States of Readers that create book choice and ownership for PreK through 8th grade students in under-resourced schools across the country. In many cases, these children have no other access to books they are motivated to read. Plus, Impact Reading connects teachers and families in relatable, meaningful ways.”

“As a mom, I know how powerful it is for a child to have books of their own. Not borrowed, not school copies. *Theirs*. Something about choice and ownership changes the relationship a child has with reading. And as an author who grew up struggling with exactly that, getting books into kids’ hands feels personal to me.”

Both Flynn books—available in English and in Spanish—are included in the United States of Readers flyers sent to participating Title 1 schools, which means kids can choose them as part of their selections. “Students pick two books five times a year, so ten books total at no cost to their families. Their own library, built by their own choices.”

“And in September, we launched a year-long ‘Dear Flynn’ class project where students write to Flynn about their own hopes and dreams. Flynn is the official spokesfly (*portamosca*) for Impact Reading, and I love that so much. Because Flynn gets it. She knows what it feels like to be off course and still believe something great is waiting on the other side.”

“Children’s books are where wonder begins. Kids are naturally bold and curious and full of enormous questions. Books are what keep that alive. And the research backs this up. Ten minutes of shared reading between a parent and child strengthens trust, builds vocabulary, and creates connection in a way that nothing else does. Not a screen, not an app. Just two people and a story.”

“Reading with your child is the quietest, most powerful thing you can do. The world disappears, and it is just the two of you. That is not small. That is everything.”



The Fly Who Flew to Space and *The Fly Who Flew Under the Sea* are published by The Collective Book Studio. For more information, visit flywhoflew.com. ●

Sarah E. Pearsall

Turned Her Love of Reading into Award-Winning Writing

by Raven Howell

“I am really enjoying the post-publication journey right now,” author Sarah E. Pearsall says cheerily. “I love meeting my readers at book fairs and festivals, doing podcasts and TV interviews. Book clubs are so much fun, and I really enjoy talking about *The Summer Knows* and hearing what readers have to say. I’m gearing up for a busy spring of book events after taking a break this winter, and I’m super excited!”



Sarah's emotionally charged novel, *The Summer Knows*, is a coming-of-age story that portrays how family dynamics and secrets can both impair and enhance lives. When single mother Adrienne is faced with reconciling the long-lost relationship with her estranged grandmother, the past she left behind many years ago starts to unravel.

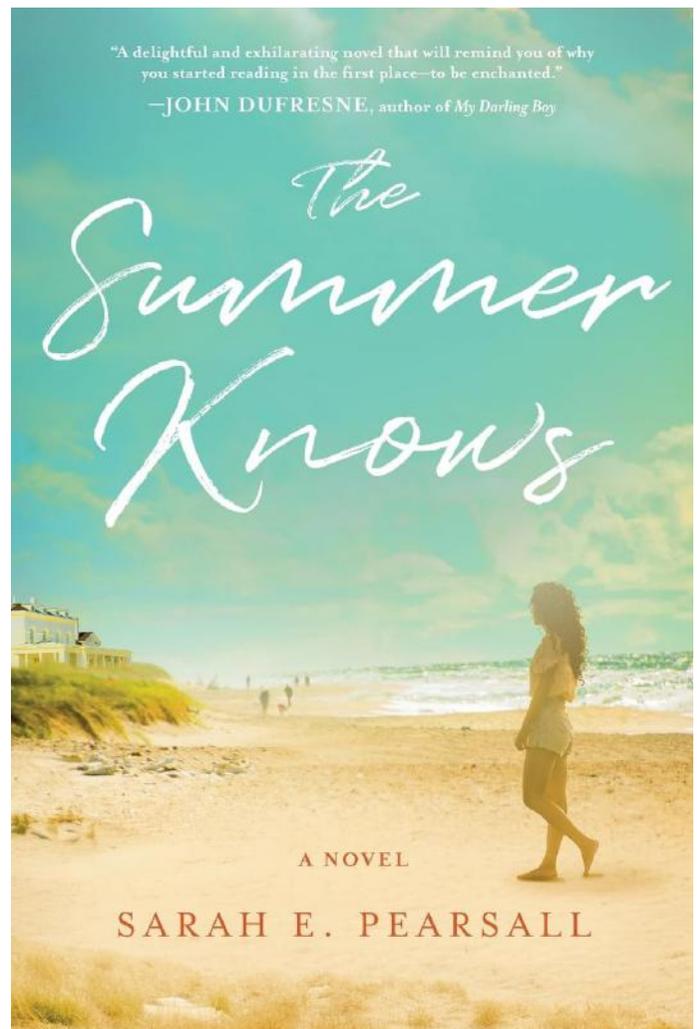
The book won several awards, including Kirkus Reviews Book of the Month for November 2025, a Best Book of 2025, and was named the 2025 Royal Dragonfly Book Awards grand prize winner.

Currently, Sarah is an Assistant Professor of Writing & Inquiry at Michigan State University. She has 16 years of teaching excellence in higher education, and she's been the summer interdisciplinary creative writing instructor at the world-renowned Interlochen Center for the Arts for the past 10 years.

She received her MFA in Creative Writing from Florida International University and is currently writing her dissertation on the writer's identity for her doctorate in writing education at the University of Central Florida.

"I've always been someone who does many things at once," she says when I inquire about her busy schedule. "I kind of see it as my superpower, I can juggle lots of tasks at once and make it look easy (at least, many of my friends tell me that!). But it really comes down to being meticulous at organizing my time. I am a person who makes lists. In fact, I probably have a list of lists somewhere on my desk. I also use multiple planners and calendars. I have strong spatial reasoning and can envision, organize, and plan my time in my head very clearly. I also take each aspect of my professional life, professor, writer, and student, seriously and make sure I can tend to each as needed."

"I was a total book glutton as a child. I have an essay published on my blog (sarahepearsall.com). I wrote about my voracious reading habits and how they led me to realize I wanted to be a writer at the tender age of seven. The gist of the story is I burned through all the children's fiction one summer at my small-town library, and the librarian suggested I move on to "YA". I was so enthralled with Christopher Pike's YA Thrillers that I plagiarized his novel, *Chain Letter*, and turned in my version for a second-grade class assignment. That little serial killer story won me a trip to the school psychologist. Instead of being bummed, I was absolutely thrilled that my words had scared my teacher that much. I was a goner after that. The writing life was for me."



Sarah grew up in a small, sleepy beach town in South Florida, Boynton Beach. The environment had a deep impact on her, especially when writing *The Summer Knows*. "Harbor Point, the town in the novel, is modeled after Boynton Beach and Ocean Ridge. I was a total water rat, just like Adrienne is in the book. I was always swimming, shelling, fishing, and sculking around in the mangroves."

"My childhood was entwined with the Florida landscape, which is why many of my stories feature coastal environments. For me, the Florida landscape works like a character in the story. My next novel, *Ten Thousand Islands*, also focuses on the beautiful yet harsh natural world of Southwestern Florida, another place where I spent a lot of my childhood and love dearly."

"*The Summer Knows* began with the inspiration of my two best friends, who are brothers. They would come to visit their

grandparents, who lived down the street from me in Florida, in the summers from Michigan. We never lived in the same state, but we were deeply bonded for our whole childhood, for nearly twenty years. In fact, they were both at my wedding party. Though they are wildly different from the Merritt brothers in the novel, our unique friendship was the seed that grew into the story.”

“I dedicated the book to them, which they find very amusing. They taught me what family isn’t, and how unconditional love can be. I cherished every one of our summers.”

When Sarah composes her material, her characters always drive the plot. “They are the heart, and everything else builds from them,” she reveals. “I’m laser-focused on my characters from the moment of inception. Every story, for me, begins with a person with some kind of trouble they need to get out of. The world builds around that core element. Adrienne came to me as a woman who would do anything to avoid going home but had no choice but to go.”

“I’m a big Judy Blume fan. I love how she always crafted such layered women characters, filled with strength and flaws, and so Adrienne was brought to life with an amalgamation of Judy’s characters in mind. I’m also a big fan of women in general. I really love showcasing how complex and beautiful women are, so I draw on the amazing women in my life when creating characters.”

“Adrienne has a lot of me in her, which I think probably happens in many debut novels. The parts of me that live in her are her sassy, spitfire moments, like when she gets angry or lets go to have fun.”

“I want the book to show how finding understanding can set you free and lead to a path of healing. In the plot, Adrienne gets a chance to understand her grandmother, which helps her start to heal parts of herself. She also gets the chance to understand where others are coming from. All these moments of revelation help her begin to stitch herself back together into a functional human being who is open to love.”

“My wish is that readers find satisfaction in an ending that’s not perfectly happy, because it’s not an ending, but a new beginning. And that they’re encouraged to note what they are avoiding in their lives in order to see how avoiding it is shaping them right now. I don’t want to play ‘armchair therapist,’ but I’m a big believer in working through your stuff, and though it’s hard to face, you’re better for it,” she affirms.

“I hope the role of books remains a space where we find connections and the human spirit. To read something and know you are not alone in the world is such a powerful experience. I wish that to happen to every person on this planet. Books are a safe space where we can wrestle with the human condition. Stories help us build empathy, and sadly, we are seriously lacking that emotion these days. You are always better for reading a book, no matter what the book is about. Story is such a human necessity. They bind us together and make us face who we are.”

“I feel what’s wonderful about writing is the same reason why reading is wonderful. You lose yourself and enter new worlds. As I type, I am not really there, looking at words on the screen; I am in that world, experiencing what my characters are. It’s even better because I am creating that world as I go.”

While many authors need absolute quiet while writing, Sarah’s approach is the opposite. “I must have a playlist of specific songs I select that fit the mood and theme of the story I’m working on, and that music must be on when I’m writing. I have a very hard time writing without music, and, unfortunately, it’s specific songs that put me into the story.”

“For *The Summer Knows*, funny enough, I listened to Frank Sinatra’s version of *The Summer Knows*, by Alan and Marilyn Bergman, written for the movie, *The Summer of ‘42*. That was the only song on my playlist, and I listened to it over and over while I wrote the book. My whole family is sick of the song now! But that song, the music, and the lyrics just spoke to me. It’s the same for every story I write. My playlists are titled after the stories I’m working on.”

“My second novel, *Ten Thousand Islands*, is set on the Southwest coast of Florida at the lip of the Everglades. It’s more of a thriller with a murder mystery, a first for me. I liken it to Delia Owens, *Where the Crawdads Sing*. I just finished the first draft, so I am diving into revisions now.”

“My characters keep me motivated,” she confesses. “They literally never leave me alone, so when I’m not writing, they’re always there in my head, telling me new things to write. My readers also keep me motivated. I love how excited they are for the new book, and that keeps my butt in the seat and writing.”

For more information about Sarah E. Pearsall and her work, visit sarahepearsall.com. ●

Adam Wallace

Pens an *Egg-citing* Easter Tale

So ... chocolate bunnies, gooey eggs, squishy neon ducks ... all good there. But for me, the Easter Bunny itself was a bit “out there.” I never really bought into it. Which is weird because I’m on fabulous terms with the tooth fairy.

by Julianne Black DiBlasi

Was he cuddly? Sure! Cute? Absolutely! I really just think he had bad marketing back in my Peeps days. Sometimes he was represented as tall, sometimes bunny-sized. He was realistic on one candy wrapper and sketched in another. In one cartoon, he could talk; in others, not so much. Kids notice that stuff.

But I do know, up, down, and sideways, that kids today will not suffer cacophonous cotton-tail messaging! This adorable race to save Easter by Adam Wallace is sure to become the Easter Industry Standard for identifying mystical hares.



Did that fluffy tail just hop by? Wait ... was that a wiggle of bunny ears? Hold on a second—I'm pretty sure I just spotted the Easter Bunny!

In *I Think I Saw the Easter Bunny*, the laugh-out-loud rhyming picture book, young readers will have a blast following Alex and the Easter Bunny on a hilarious adventure to save Easter.

Adam Wallace is an Australian author best known for his wildly popular *How to Catch* series. His books have sold more than 15 million copies worldwide, with seven reaching the number one spot on the *New York Times* Best Sellers List.

When he's not writing stories that make kids laugh and love reading, Adam enjoys a few unique hobbies—like turning his backyard into an 18-hole mini-golf course and sneaking in the occasional afternoon nap. Adam's mission is simple: to entertain and inspire millions of children and get them excited about books and reading.

So, back to this bunny business, I was lucky enough to catch up with Adam and get some details on his latest creation, *I Think I Saw the Easter Bunny*!

Hi Adam, thank you so much for your time!

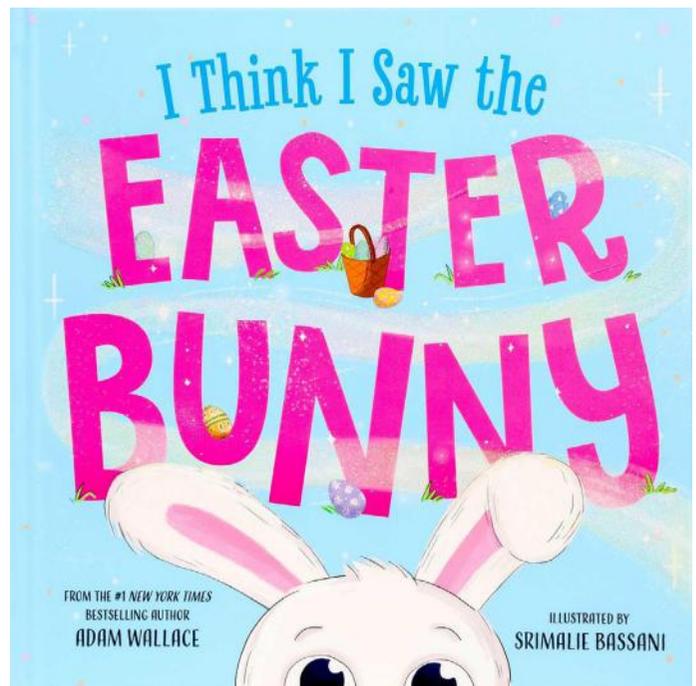
It is my pleasure! I am very excited to be a Story Monster today.

Can you give us the scoop on how *I Think I Saw the Easter Bunny* came to be? Was it a storyline you held on to for a while, or did it just hop into your head and come together quickly?

Ha ha! *Hop* into my head, that's *eggcellent*! This is a really cool question, and there are 724 different ways I could answer ... the story itself, once I started, really flowed out easily and quickly. I loved Alex and how he changed over the story.

As for the idea itself, there are a couple of different ways ideas come. One is that I have the idea myself and send it to the publisher, the other is that the publisher has the idea and sends it to me, asking if I would like to write it. That's what happened this time, so the idea came to me quickly in an email!

Then once I wrote it, I worked on it with my wonderful editors, and it actually did come together quite quickly compared to some other books I have done.



How were your egg-hunting skills growing up? Was Alex a part of you, or did he remind you of someone else? Did you have any personal Easter traditions that may or may not have made it into the pages of this book?

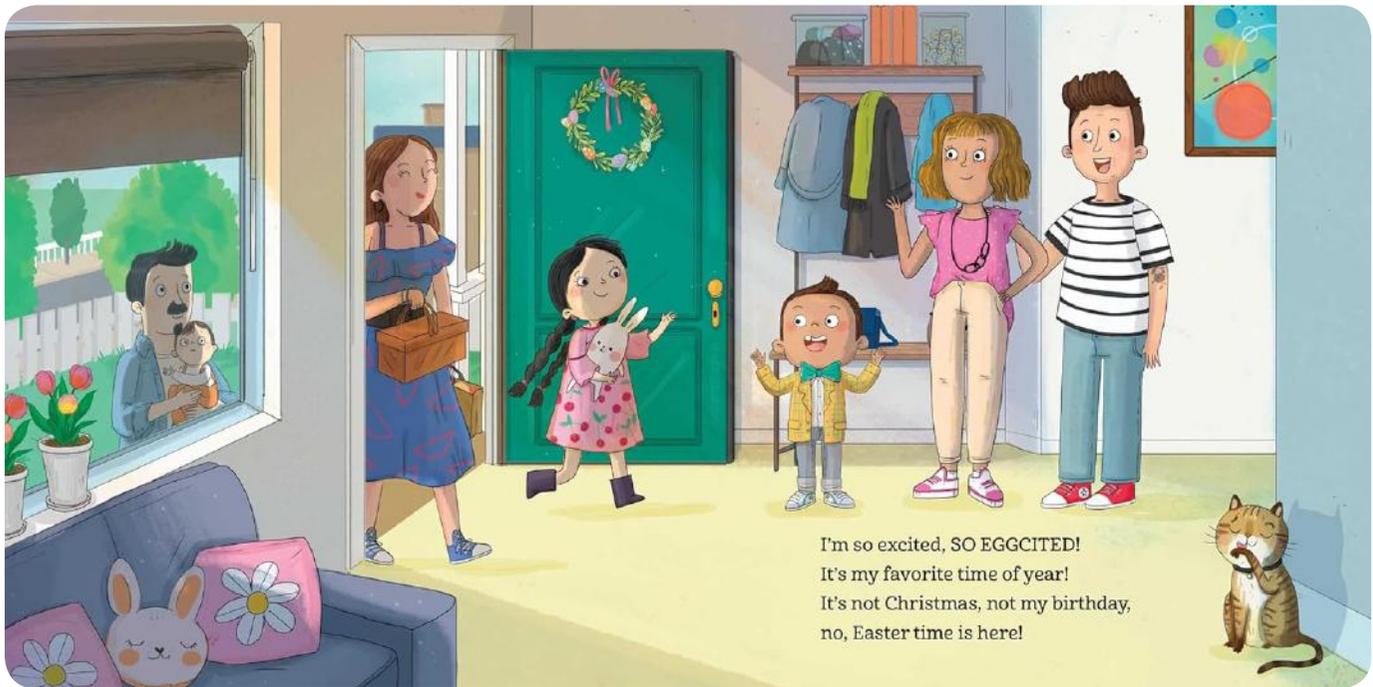
Oh man, this is bringing back memories! So, I can't eat dairy or chocolate, so chocolate Easter eggs were out. I also don't eat sugar anymore. I did as a kid but not a lot, so I was often given an apple at Easter time. Yep, an Easter apple. I can't quite remember, but I feel like maybe I got to do the Easter egg hunt, I just couldn't eat the eggs I found!

So in a way I guess Alex is like that when he gives the eggs away, even if it is for a different, less allergic-to-food reason.

The rhyming in this book is so fun and has great read-along energy! Did you make your family crazy working it through while trying to finalize phrasing? Did the editing process make rhyming difficult?

Thank you so much, writing in rhyme is such fun, I do it all the time and love getting it done! Luckily, I live in my little castle alone, so when I read the story out loud 40 or 50 times as I worked on the rhyme, no one was here to hear it.

What is funny about the rhyming though is that I am in Australia, and my accent is different to an American accent,



I'm so excited, SO EGGCITED!
It's my favorite time of year!
It's not Christmas, not my birthday,
no, Easter time is here!

so some stanzas I wrote that rhymed for me didn't rhyme in an American accent!

Beautiful work by your illustrator, Srimalie Bassani! The visual layout and color selection throughout the book make it so fun to explore. Did you have much influence on the artwork? Were you surprised by the end result?

Ohhhhh aren't they wonderful? This is one of my favorite parts of writing, seeing the story come to life in the pictures, and Srimalie has done such an incredible job. I didn't have any influence on the artwork, which is great, because then I was surprised in a good way because I had no idea what it was going to look like.

And what I love about these pictures are the little extra bits that aren't in the text, like the cat and her journey through the story.

One of the key takeaways from the book is kindness, and it seems to be a theme for you! I've been following you on Instagram, and I love that you are sharing your kindness book aloud with your audience! Can you tell our story monsters a bit about the project and how it began?

Oh yay, I am so glad you're watching my kindness book! That book started when I had been to a gathering of amazing, incredible inspiring authors who write mostly nonfiction

books, personal development or business for a lot of them. They are so successful and yet so humble and kind, and I came away buzzing, and feeling so inspired that when I was on the plane home, I started writing, and *HumanKIND* came out.

It was a time in the world, and that is continuing at the moment, when it felt like kindness wasn't at the forefront, and so I wanted to write out my thoughts. It just flowed out and I kept writing and writing. I usually write books for children, and this was going to be aimed at adults, so it was a real step out of my comfort zone.

That was two years ago, and so this year I wanted to try something different, and to challenge myself a little, so I decided to read a section a day online, to put a little kindness into the world, my thoughts on it at least.

And that is what I am doing.

If you were doing a virtual school visit with us right now about *I Think I Saw the Easter Bunny*, what key concepts from the book would you want the audience to walk away with? How can they practice at home during their own Easter celebrations?

Ooooooh that would be so fun!!! I do love doing school visits. But that's not the question. What key concepts would I want

Time with family, time with friends,
but if I'm being up front,
the part I like most of all
is the Easter egg hunt!



the audience to walk away with? Firstly, I think there are a couple of almost contrasting things. I would love people to see how generous Alex is, and how it doesn't matter to him that he comes last in the egg hunt because he wins by giving so many eggs away, and the feeling that fills him makes him so happy.

But I also love that Sophie tries so hard and wins, because I think it is really important to recognize that if we try really hard at something, we can be rewarded.

So they both win, but in different ways, so another takeaway is that winning, or success, doesn't always have to look the same for everyone. Sometimes just being part of something is a success.

And I would also love to get across that even in a story with a message, it can still be fun and colorful and lighthearted.

With Alex's fresh perspective, if he were to rewrite the whole competitive egg-hunting activity going forward, what might it look like?

I don't think he would change it! Because, like I mentioned above, there are different ways you can succeed. So the egg hunt can stay exactly the same, but how everyone approaches it can be the thing that changes.

I usually like to ask authors where they were when they saw the book in its final format and who the first person they shared it with was, but since you've created so many titles, I'd like to morph my question into: What was a memorable moment for you seeing your work and experiencing the elation of accomplishment?

Oh my gosh my head is buzzing with this question! I will answer your usual question though, I was here at home in Australia and I had two books sent to me, and when I opened it I was SO excited. It's funny, I get just as excited now as I did with my first book. It's a different excitement, but the buzz I feel is just as strong.

Another memorable moment was my very first book, *Better Out Than In*. It was the first time I held a published book in my hand (I had self-published it), and I did a launch and to have everyone there celebrating that with me was a thrill I will never forget. I still get the buzz of a new book, but I have never felt the excitement at a launch that I did that first time.

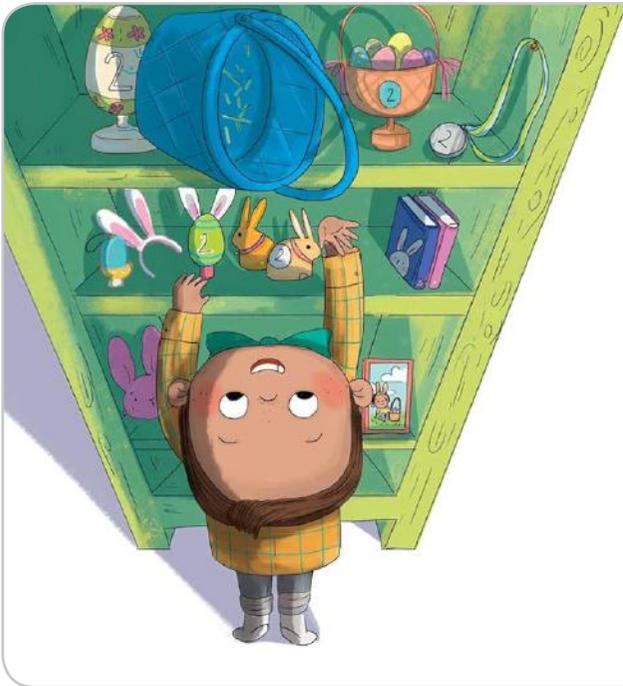
And what is the best way for our readers to keep up with your work?

My website is adam-wallace-books.com and I have my other brand new musical-in-a-book at hatman.com.au which is where

people can sign up to get a newsletter and updates on what I am doing (I try to send it regularly but am not very great at that).

I am on social media as well for parents and teachers at Instagram (@adamwallacestuff) and Facebook (adamwallacebooks).

Otherwise just yell really loudly and if I hear you, I will answer your questions. ●



Every year the egg hunt winner
gets an awesome trophy.
I've never won it—
I always get second place to Sophie.

But today I have my basket;
I'm wearing running shoes.
My eyes are open wide,
so I won't miss any of the clues.



The hunt begins—we're on our way.
I'm off to a great start!
But I collect so many eggs
that my basket falls apart!

I gasp and start to pick up eggs,
then see behind a tree . . .
Is that . . . no, surely not . . .
wait . . . could it really be?

Changemaker:

Brittany Petish

by Raven Howell

“At heart, I would say I’m a storyteller who tries to leave the world a little better than I found it.”

No one would argue with multi-talented Brittany Petish’s contributions to the world. She has made a profound impact with children and working with wildlife, while fostering a love of reading.



Brittany is the creator of the award-winning *True Heart Tails* series, a collection of children’s books inspired by real animal stories that help children explore courage, kindness, resilience, and belonging.

She’s also an Acting Creative Director working on public health and energy campaigns with organizations such as the CDC and NIH, as well as energy clients including Exelon Corporation.

“My work focuses on translating complex information into stories and visuals that help people make informed decisions about their health and communities,” she tells me. “If even one person gets tested earlier, finds treatment sooner, or understands their options better because of something we created, then the work is worth it.”

“Alongside that career, a huge part of my life has always been working with children with special needs and with animals. For nearly twenty years I’ve been involved in programs supporting children on the autism spectrum and other unique abilities. Today, my books bring those two worlds together—animals and children—because both have an incredible capacity to heal.”

“The *True Heart Tails* series has grown into something larger than books alone—connecting children with wildlife, conservation, and the healing relationships that can exist between people and animals.”

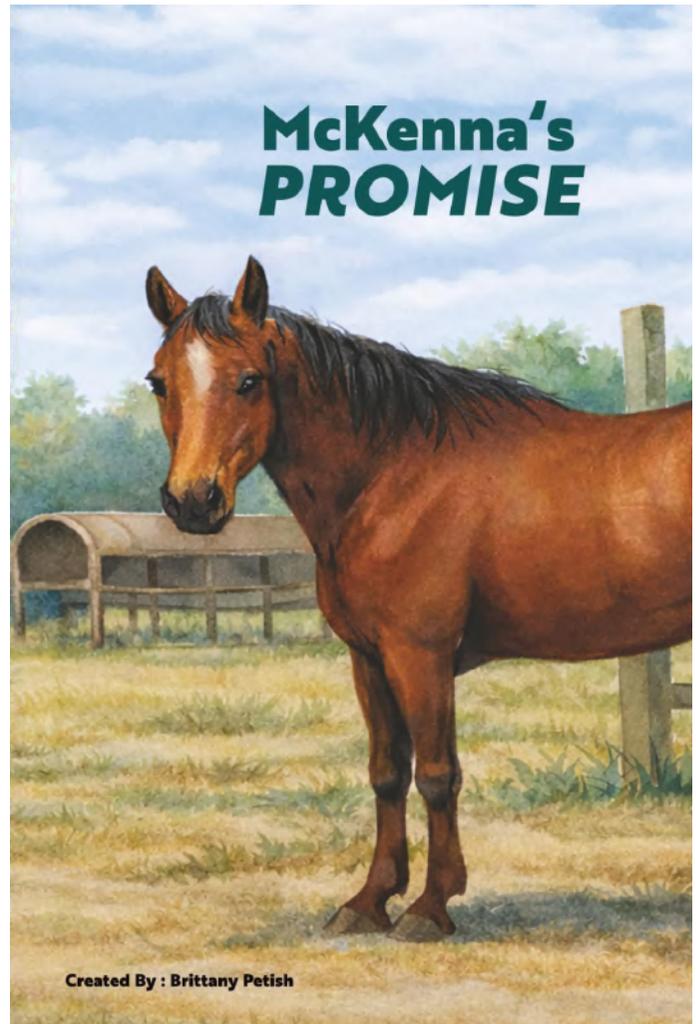
Brittany grew up in Georgia, in a wonderful environment of nature, animals, and creative encouragement. Apparently, this backdrop influences her passion and work today.

“From an early age I loved art and storytelling. Drawing and painting were always ways I processed the world around me. At the same time, I spent a lot of time outdoors and developed a deep love for animals.”

“Looking back now, those early passions—art, animals, and empathy—ended up shaping the direction of my entire life.”

Her love of horses, particularly, started at an early age. “There’s something incredibly powerful about the connection between humans and horses—their intuition, their calm presence, and the way they respond to people emotionally.”

“As I grew older, that love expanded to wildlife and conservation. Animals have a remarkable ability to meet us exactly where we are emotionally. They don’t judge, they don’t



rush us, and they often help people feel safe in ways words sometimes cannot.”

Brittany’s newest release in the series, *McKenna’s Promise*, depicts the story of a young girl named Ellie and a therapy horse named McKenna whose calm presence helps Ellie discover confidence and strength.

Many of the *True Heart Tails* stories focus on wildlife and conservation. *McKenna’s Promise* focuses on equine-assisted therapy, particularly hippotherapy, where the natural rhythmic movement of a horse is used as a therapeutic tool to help children develop balance, coordination, and speech rhythm.

“The book is inspired by the real work happening every day at McKenna Farms Therapy Services, where children receive physical, occupational, speech, and equine-assisted therapy

in a supportive environment. Seeing that connection play out in therapy environments like McKenna Farms is incredibly moving,” Brittany adds, affectionately.

“At its heart, my story is about trust and connection. Through the rhythm of riding and the gentle bond between horse and child, Ellie begins to find her voice and confidence.”

“It’s a deeply human story about healing, inclusion, and trust. I hope readers walk away understanding that everyone deserves a place where they feel seen, supported, and believed in.”

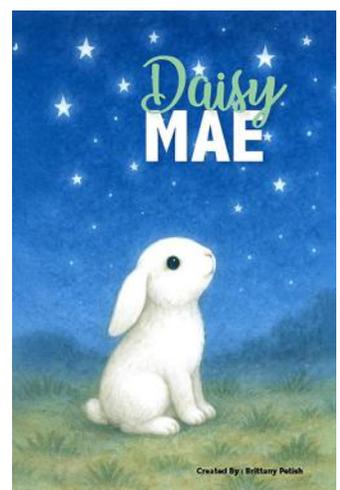
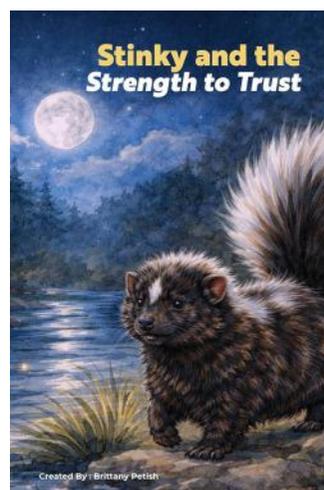
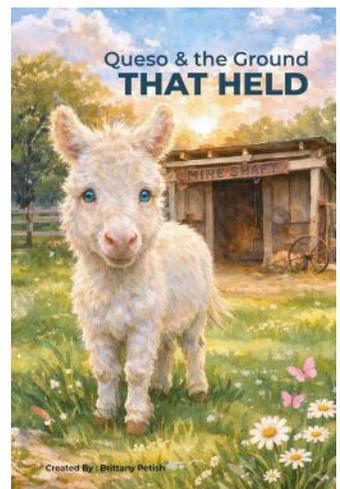
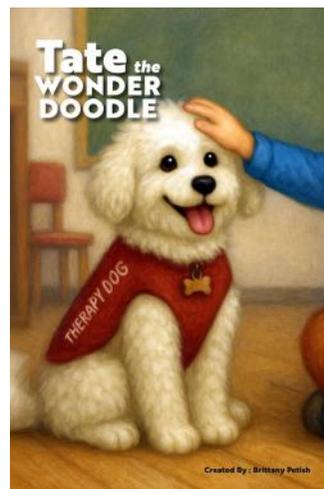
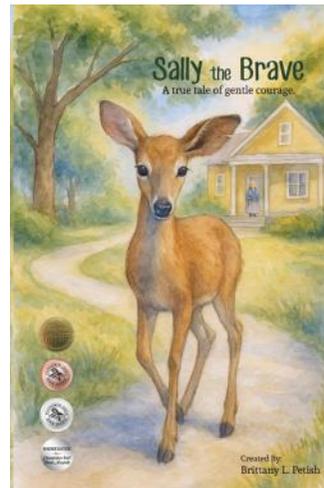
The series continues to grow. There are now more than fourteen stories in the *True Heart Tails* collection, with several more planned to release this year. Each story is inspired by real animals and real experiences. Some focus on wildlife conservation, others on therapy animals, and many explore social-emotional themes like fortitude, patience, empathy, and belonging.

Brittany says the goal is to help children connect with both the natural world and their own emotions, while encouraging a lifelong love of reading and curiosity about wildlife.

“For *McKenna’s Promise*, I spent time learning directly from the team at McKenna Farms to understand their therapy programs and how horses play such an important role in helping children develop confidence and strength. The organization has been serving children with special needs for more than two decades through therapy and equine-assisted programs. And proceeds from the book will go back to the farm to help them continue providing these life-changing services.”

“From the moment I stepped onto the farm, I could feel how special it was. The therapists, volunteers, children, and horses all work together to create a place filled with hope. I wanted both the storytelling and the illustrations to authentically reflect the real environment, the therapists, and the emotional journey children experience there. Authenticity matters deeply to me because these stories represent real people, real animals, and real healing.”

Brittany has found animals to have a special sensitivity to human emotion. “Horses, in particular,” she says, “are deeply intuitive. They mirror energy, calm nervous systems, and create trust in ways that can be life-changing for children who struggle with communication or sensory processing. Watching a child slowly gain confidence while interacting with a horse is one of the most moving things you can witness. It reminds you how powerful quiet connection can be.”



“No matter what the story is about, I always return to the emotional moment at the center of the story. Whether it’s a child discovering courage or an animal offering comfort, those quiet turning points are what make a story meaningful. Illustration and writing work together to create that emotional experience.”

Another type of emotional moment happened to Brittany at her very first book fair. “A woman came to my table and shared that she had just lost her best friend and was attending the wake the next day. She picked up my book, *Goodbye Blue*, started reading it, and began to cry. Soon I was crying too. She ended up buying seven copies to bring to everyone attending the service. In that moment, I think she felt seen. At least I hope she did,” she says.

“Since then I’ve had a little girl tell me she lost her dad. A little boy who had just lost his dog. A woman searching for the right gift for a friend who had lost both her husband and her dog to the same cancer only a month apart.”

“At events like these, people often open up and share their stories with me. Parents of children with special needs tell me why certain books resonate with their families. Kids share the animals they love most. People talk about grief, healing, courage, and hope. Getting to listen to those stories, to connect with people in those moments, and to know that something I created helped someone feel understood—that’s the best feedback I could ever receive.”

The series has won many awards, and Brittany’s books are noted for their illustrative beauty as well as authorship. “I’ve come to see the written word and the artwork as two voices telling the same story,” she contends.

“The words guide the narrative, but the illustrations carry so much of the emotional weight. Sometimes a child’s expression, the way an animal leans in gently, or the quiet space in a scene can communicate something that words alone never could.”

“When writing and illustration work well together, they create a layered experience for the reader. The text moves the story forward, while the art invites children to pause, observe, and feel what’s happening.”

“For young readers especially, illustrations often become the doorway into the story. They help children connect emotionally before they fully understand every word. As both the writer and illustrator, I try to let each element do what it does best—allowing the words to guide the journey and the artwork to hold the heart of the moment.”

Brittany’s work continues to grow. She’s working with Project Learning Tree and connecting with scientists, wildlife rehabilitators, rescue organizations, and sanctuaries across the country. Those collaborations help ensure the stories are grounded in real science and real conservation work. That evolution—where storytelling meets science, education, and compassion—is something she continues to be excited to keep building.

She’s eager to launch *McKenna’s Promise* on Kentucky Derby Day—the perfect time to celebrate a story about horses and healing. “It will be a celebration of the farm, the children, and the incredible animals that help make their work possible,” she exclaims. “Derby Day is also one of McKenna Farms’ biggest fundraising days of the year, and I’m grateful that this book can help support the meaningful work they do.”

“For me, happiness feels like connection. Connection to people, to animals, and to the small moments that remind us how much kindness and hope still exists in the world. More than anything, I’m looking forward to living life fully, continuing to make a difference where I can, and discovering new ways that stories can touch lives.”

For more information about Brittany Petish and her work, visit truehearttails.com. ●

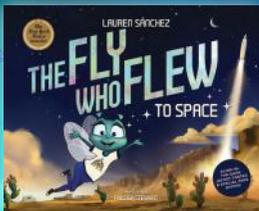
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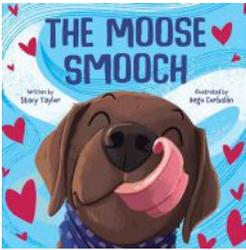


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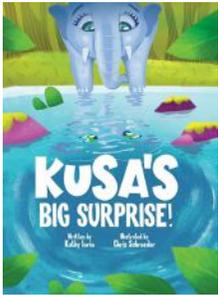


The Moose Smooch

by Stacy Taylor

Join Moose on a flavor-filled adventure! Moose, the friendly chocolate labrador, greets everyone he meets with a big SMOOCH and gets a taste of his favorite foods along the way—because nothing makes Moose

happier than friends and yummy treats! Read along to see who Moose will find and what flavors he will taste next! Children will enjoy the rhyme, repetition and engaging illustrations. Moosetrackstales.com. Instagram: @stacytaylorbooks



Kusa's Big Surprise!

by Kathy Iorio Snow

A heartwarming story that teaches young children the lifelong values of healthy self-esteem, being yourself, and treating others with kindness. Kusa, a young elephant who wants to be like her loving sister, sets off on a jungle journey to help her friends. Along the way, she

encounters a problem that leaves her worried and unsure of what to do next. What problem upsets her? How does she solve it? What does she learn?



Bobby Bunny's Special Surprise Day—2nd Edition

by Carol Mueller

When the children find themselves bored on the Tiny Farm, Mommy shares stories of her childhood imaginary friend—Bobby Bunny. Hearing the story sparks their curiosity, and soon Mommy challenges them to head outside and

discover imaginations of their own. What begins as an ordinary day quickly fills with fun, excitement, treats, and surprising discoveries. *Bobby Bunny's Special Surprise Day* celebrates creativity, family storytelling, and the joyful magic children can find when they open the door to imagination.



I Can Save the Day

by Carol Mueller

When Mommy loses her keys, everyone in the family steps in to help and discovers that anyone could save the day—if they tried—even the smallest among us. This gentle story of something that could happen in any home celebrates problem-solving, the confidence to step

up and try, and the special bond within a family. With warm and hilariously expressive illustrations and a reassuring tone, *I Can Save the Day* shows little readers that everyday moments can become big victories filled with kindness and love.

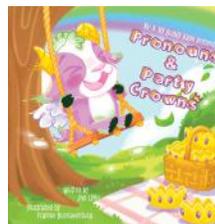


The Greatest Treasure

by Anne Lacourge

This story follows Lily, a curious young girl living in a historic home built by a sea captain. Intrigued by a mysterious locked doorway in her bedroom, Lily discovers an old silver key hidden in the basement. Encouraged by a gentle, unseen voice, she bravely decides to unlock the door, eager to

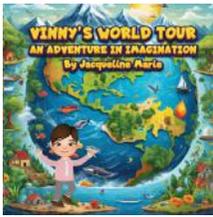
uncover the secret that has captivated her imagination for so long.



Pronouns & Party Crowns

by Jho Lynn

In *Pronouns & Party Crowns*, the reader adventures with Baph as they introduce you to some of their friends. From mermaids to Mothman and beyond, learn how different kinds of people are addressed and which pronouns they use.

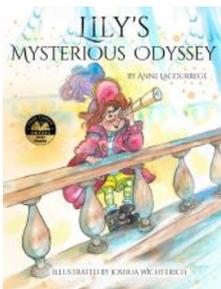


**Vinny's World Tour:
An Adventure In Imagination**

by Jacqueline Marie

Have you heard of the secret map? If you're looking for a children's activity book that goes beyond coloring pages and inspires kids to dream big, *Vinny's*

World Tour is a standout. What makes this book special is the "Secret Map" activity, where kids create their own secret map of dreams and adventures. The book encourages imagination, goal setting, and creativity. Perfect as a birthday tradition, classroom activity, or something families can bond over together.



Lily's Mysterious Odyssey

by Anne Lacourge

Lily, a young girl in New Orleans, discovers artifacts in her historic home and is swept into an imaginative journey with Anne, Captain Harry's daughter. This leads Lily on a magical adventure across the ocean, where she encounters amazing places and

meets fascinating people. Together, they explore Greek cities, myths, and Olympic games, forming bonds that bridge generations. The story emphasizes the connection between past and present found within old homes.

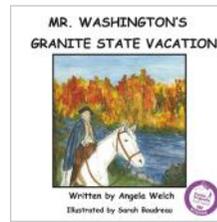


**Feathered Light:
The ABCs of Haiku**

by Deborah Burke Henderson

This 185-page haiku writing handbook is a great resource for teachers and students alike. "*Feathered Light* is

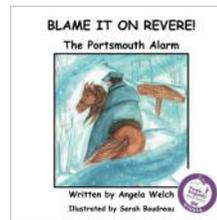
a mindful and joyful celebration of the haiku form. Deborah Burke Henderson generously shares her knowledge and offers helpful writing exercises in an eager and heartfelt way. Her avian illustrations are delightful, her haiku are playful, and her enthusiasm is contagious!" —Brad Bennett, author of four collections of haiku. Available on Amazon.com.



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

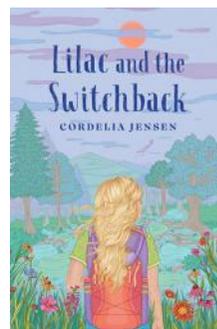
the Merrimack River in Massachusetts, heading for Portsmouth, New Hampshire, the capital of the state at that time. Come along as President Washington takes his Granite State vacation.



**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

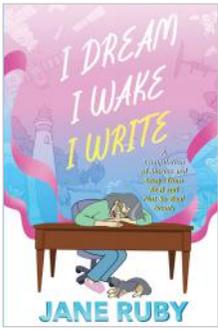
he headed to the quiet coastal town of Portsmouth in the colony of New Hampshire. What message was so important that led to this journey? Read about the ride that led to the first shots of the American Revolution before those at Concord and Lexington, Massachusetts. www.lunabooksnh.com



Lilac and the Switchback
by Cordelia Jensen

A riveting middle grade novel in verse for any kid who has ever felt unwanted, uncomfortable, or unsure of where they fit in. Called a "winning tale" by School Library Journal, a "tender story" in a starred review from Booklist and "well paced" by The Horn Book, *Lilac and the Switchback* will blaze a

trail into your heart. A Junior Library guild Gold Standard Selection, available now wherever books are sold.

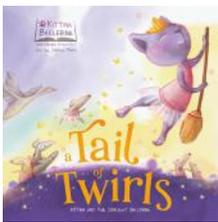


I Dream I Wake I Write

by Jane Frances Ruby

This book contains stories that began as writing exercises for a creative writing class. Stellar grades from the instructor indicated merit to the writing, so they and additional works were composed and compiled into a book. Most came from real life experiences while others came from dreams. All story characters

came from people the author had the pleasure or pain of meeting in real life.

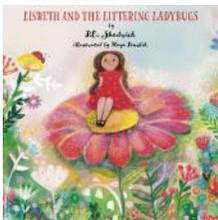


A Tail of Twirls

by Once Upon a Dance

Join the Dance! A curious cat. A mysterious mirror. A swirl of magic... When Kit stumbles upon an abandoned dance studio, she discovers a magical mirror and a world of twirls! With

inspiration from Ballerina Konora, young readers will twirl and dance along in this enchanting adventure. From award-winning creators of interactive ballet stories, A Tail of Twirls debuts Kittina Ballerina's Dance-Along Adventures, a delightful series to inspire imagination, joyful movement, and interactive fun.

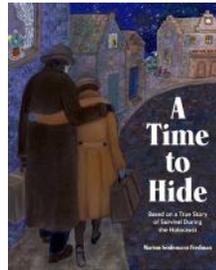


Lisbeth and the Littering Ladybugs

by P.E. Shadrick

Lisbeth, a lively six-year-old, wakes up one morning to discover a tangled mess in her hair. Her grandmother tells her the story of how a group of playful ladybugs is the cause of all the knots in her hair.

Through Grandma's fanciful story of the ladybugs' glorious grand gala, Lisbeth learns the lesson of how shared responsibility can be both necessary and fun. Join Lisbeth and her friends in this delightful, Story Monsters Approved fairy tale!

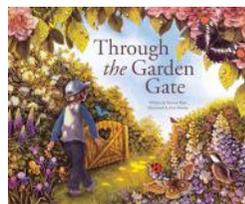


A Time To Hide: Based on a True Story of Survival During the Holocaust

by Marion Seidemann Fredman

When Grete and Julius fled Nazi Germany, they never imagined they'd be forced into hiding in a Dutch attic. While in hiding, their daughter

Marion was born—a moment of light amid the darkest of times. Years later, Marion Seidemann Fredman shares her family's courageous story of love, loss, and resilience in this visually rich, nonfiction picture book. ISBN: 9781685556280.



Through the Garden Gate

by Sharon Rose

When Miles stumbles upon a neighbor's mysterious gate, he steps into a world of wonder—where talking animals, fluttering fairies, and extraordinary plants await. Inspired by native ecology and brought to life through lush, timeless illustrations, this gentle

adventure encourages children to look more closely at the natural world around them. ISBN: 9781685552022.

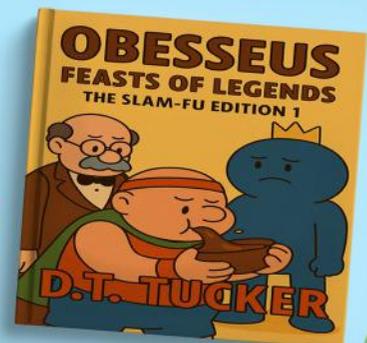
One Hungry Hero Must Battle Buffet-Level Chaos!

When the fruit-powered Juice Regime, led by Monica Mango, vows to "detoxify" the land, the gluttonous yet good-hearted Obeseeus the Mighty Muncher must master the mysterious art of Slam-Fu to save his home.

With allies like Conflicted Tomato, Crusty the Breadstick, and Professor Math, Obeseeus begins a quest for the legendary Snack Stone, discovering the power of friendship, flavor, and second helpings.

"A messy, chaotic, and wonderful book... I loved watching it all stick."

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**MONSTERS
AT THE
MOVIES**

***The AI Doc: Or How I
Became an Apocaloptimist***

Grade: B+

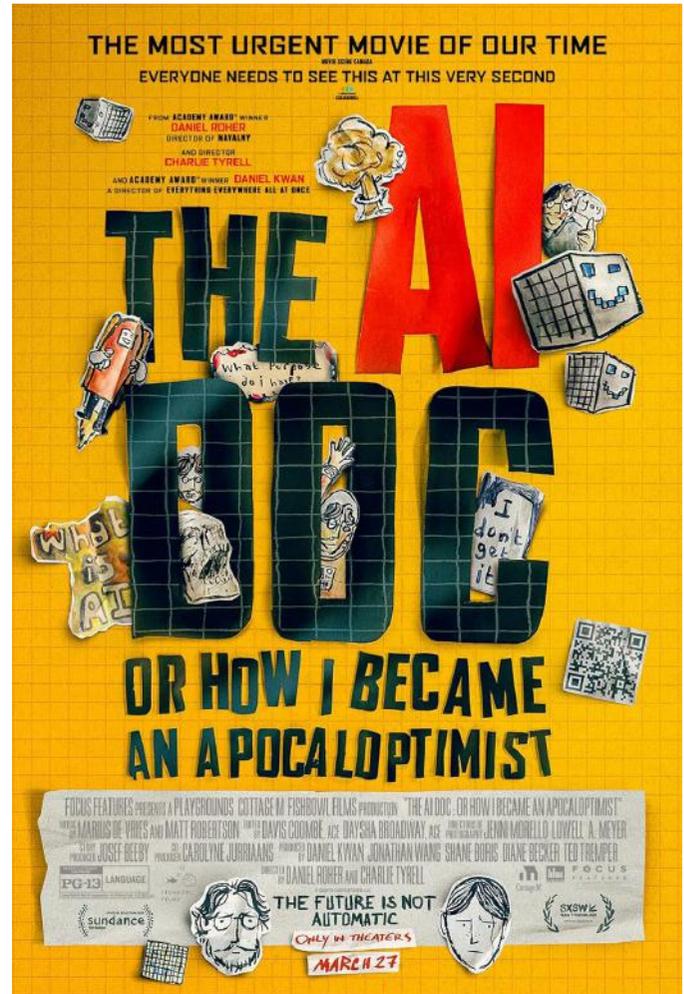
reviewed by Nick Spake

Will AI destroy the world or benefit humanity? Yes. *The AI Doc: Or How I Became an Apocaloptimist* doesn't have all the answers. The ones it does have aren't straightforward. It's too early to say definitively whether AI will do more bad or good for us in the long run. By the time we do have a clear answer, this documentary may be seen as obsolete. One of the interviewees even echoes this to the filmmakers. Even so, *The AI Doc* will be remembered for capturing a turning point in society. Beyond its nuanced commentary, the film is about a man gaining insight into the world his firstborn child will enter. That's what gives *The AI Doc* a human touch no machine can replicate.

The AI Doc is a collaboration between directors Daniel Roher and Charlie Tyrell. Roher takes the lead in front of the camera. I'm not always a fan of documentaries that work their own directors into the narrative. It works here, though, as artistic expression is an important theme of *The AI Doc*. Up until a few years ago, artists seemed like one of the few professions that machines couldn't replace. Then one day, Roher learned that there are AI programs that can generate entire scripts and even imagery to go with them. AI art is of extremely low quality, but that doesn't mean it won't improve. Should we allow it to improve, however?

The film isn't merely about an artist fretting over whether AI is going to take his job. He's even more concerned about how AI will affect global security, our mental health, and the spread of news (real or fake). Although AI isn't anything new per se, programs like ChatGPT seemed to crop up overnight, perhaps marking the most notable societal shift since the creation of the social network. With so many people going all-in on AI without any guardrails, could we be setting ourselves up for machines to take over? Even if AI can be controlled, the people in charge may enable its worst elements.

Throughout the documentary, Roher interviews a range of professionals, some believing we're dooming ourselves, while others argue that a brighter future is on the horizon. Roher identifies the most with those in the middle, emerging as an "apcaloptimist." He has little choice other than to be an apcaloptimist, for the sake of his expecting wife. Caroline Lindy, Roher's significant other and fellow filmmaker, tells her husband that he needs to be positive to help her get through this pregnancy. At the same time, Lindy doesn't allow her



husband to blissfully accept the potential apocalypse. She also wants their child to grow up in a stable world, pushing Roher to ask challenging questions. Even if the answers aren't easy, Roher emerges more well-informed.

The same can be said about the audience. In a perfect world, AI would be exclusively used for the benefit of humanity without costing anyone's livelihood. Of course, we don't live in a perfect world. Even in areas where AI can genuinely help people, it may not be easily accessible. While the utopian society that AI promises isn't very practical, the genie is out of its bottle. AI isn't going anywhere, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't resist in some places and accept it in others. In a way, it's like becoming a parent. We have no idea what we're doing. With any luck, though, we'll make the right decisions, ensuring there's still a world for the children to inherit. ●

Nick Spake is the author of *Bright & Shiny: A History of Animation at Award Shows Volume I*. For more information on the book, please visit CartoonContender.com.



Life of a Reader (and a Writer): Never Hide from Your Readers

by Judy Newman

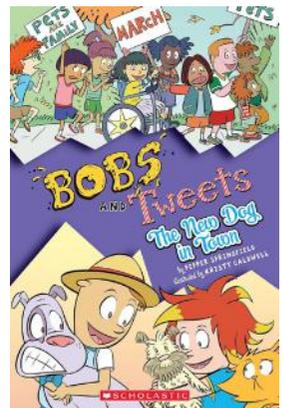
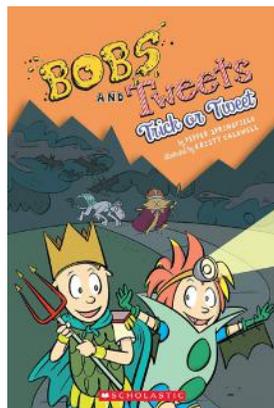
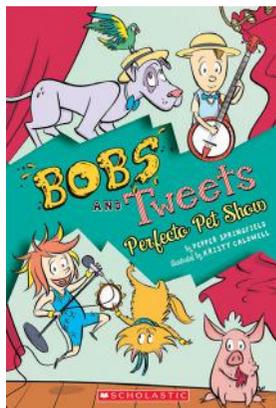
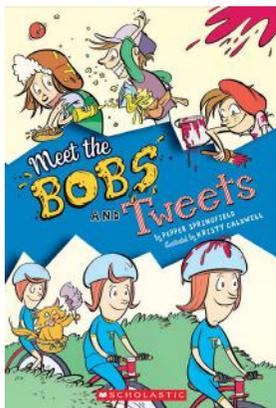
Over the past few years, I wrote a series of children's books that I truly love: *The Bobs and Tweets*. These rhyming chapter books star best friends, Lou Tweet and Dean Bob—who are very different from their respective families: Lou is very messy, living in a family of neat freaks; and Dean likes a tidy and orderly life, but his family of Bobs are truly slobs. Lou has a snarky cat (Pretty Kitty), and Dean has a loyal and boisterous dog (Chopper).

Lou and Dean live on Bonefish Street, a quirky community filled with great teachers, interesting kids and adults of all ages, fun neighborhood activities, assorted pets, and sometimes mayhem!

I believe in listening carefully to children—not talking over them or for them or using them as a mouthpiece to get your

own point of view across—and I think the *Bobs and Tweets* books shine a light on how important it is to hear what kids are saying. The books have an edge and are funny, which I think kids reading alone—and their grown-ups reading aloud—appreciate. I like rhyming books (although they are very hard to write) because the rhythm and cadence help new and developing readers along.

There are five books in the series, published by Scholastic: *Meet the Bobs and Tweets*; *Perfecto Pet Show*; *Trick or Tweet*; *Scout Camp!*; and *The New Dog in Town*. They are illustrated by the brilliant and truly lovely award-winning kids' book illustrator, Kristy Caldwell. I am working on the sixth book in the series, which is taking a while to come together, but I hope to be out with it someday soon.



While I get very small royalty checks from book sales, the *Bobs and Tweets* never became the big hits I wanted—and still want—them to be.

I don't really know why Lou and Dean and their families—the neat Tweets and the messy Bobs—have not yet found a larger audience. The rhyming chapter book format is challenging to market because no one is sure what age group the books are geared toward. I say “all ages” with a focus on first to fourth grade, but I do hear from parents who like reading the books aloud to their children in PreK, and I hear from older kids who feel good about reading them on their own.

Without going too deep into a self-critical black hole, I tried to think of reasons why the books didn't sell well. Maybe because they are printed with full color illustrations, so they are expensive to produce in the “paper over board” (hardcover) format. Maybe the recommended age level(s) wasn't clear. Maybe, despite being professionally edited and published by a reputable publishing company and illustrated by an award-winning illustrator, maybe they weren't as good as I thought. Maybe I didn't get the metadata right. Maybe this. Maybe that.

Or maybe it was a marketing and awareness problem. I was working full-time when these books were published, so I didn't



Kristy Caldwell, illustrator of the *Bobs and Tweets* series and many other wonderful children's books. Visit her at kristycaldwell.com.

really have the bandwidth to go out on the road and do school visits with Lou, Dean, and all the Bonefish Street gang—which is a great way to share your books directly with kids. I have spent most of my career helping authors share their books with students, teachers, and families through classroom book programs and in many other interesting ways ... but I wasn't able to do that for myself.

A big stumbling block for me, and I think the real reason the *Bobs and Tweets* never reached a broad audience, is because I was terrified to publish them under my own name and go out “on the road” and talk about them. I was so worried about no one liking the books. I was worried about being outed as a children's book expert who didn't know how to write good books herself. I was terrified of getting bad reviews and of no child liking my characters and their stories.

So, I leaned into my imposter syndrome and hid behind a pseudonym: Pepper Springfield. And I didn't do all the hard work you have to do to connect your books to real kids.

My first name, “Pepper,” came from my brain, and the last name “Springfield” came from my dearly beloved friend and colleague, the late Betsy Howie, who sent me a video of her then 12-year-old daughter, Callie, performing a tap dance number to a Dusty Springfield song. Callie—now a big TikTok sensation—probably has no idea she inspired my pseudonymous last name, but she did.

So while Pepper provided cover, she also prevented me from being fully committed to sharing my books and my story. I couldn't go out and proudly read and talk about my *Bobs and Tweets* books in bookstores, libraries, and schools ... wherever kids discover books. I did one or two school and bookstore visits (always well received), but I was very tentative.

And it was confusing to readers: “Pepper Springfield?” kids and teachers would ask. Who are you? And kids who really have excellent “BS” meters could sense that I was hiding.

I googled the reason authors use pseudonyms, and this is the answer I got, which sadly, rings true for me:

Authors use pen names (pseudonyms) primarily to protect their privacy, separate personal life from professional work, and manage branding across different genres. Common reasons include avoiding embarrassment with employers or family, adopting a more marketable name, or enabling a fresh start if previous work was unsuccessful.

Recently, a fourth grader whose mom I know came across the *Bobs and Tweets* at the amazing New Orleans Book Festival. She told her mom she loves the series. She even wore a Bobs and Tweets t-shirt on a school field trip to the State House.

Her enthusiasm for the *Bobs and Tweets* got me thinking again about these books I love. I want to re-dedicate myself to the series, get the sixth book done (if Kristy is game), and focus on sharing the stories as broadly as possible—under my own name.

As an author, I realized that sometimes it only takes one vote of encouragement—from one wonderful reader—to get over myself and start talking up the books I love.

I want to send that message loudly to all my fellow authors. I have worked with so many of you for decades (as President of Book Clubs, Direct to Home, and e-Commerce, and as Chief

Impact Officer for 33 years at Scholastic). Keep finding ways to share the books you create with children and their families and teachers. Take a page from Jerry Pallotta, author of the *Who Would Win?*® series—featured in [The Atlantic](#). And embrace storyteller meccas like *Story Monsters Ink*, who lift up and celebrate authors.

Never hide from your readers!

I have a list of ways to connect readers to your books. You can check out some of my ideas beginning in this column on May 1.

Judy ●

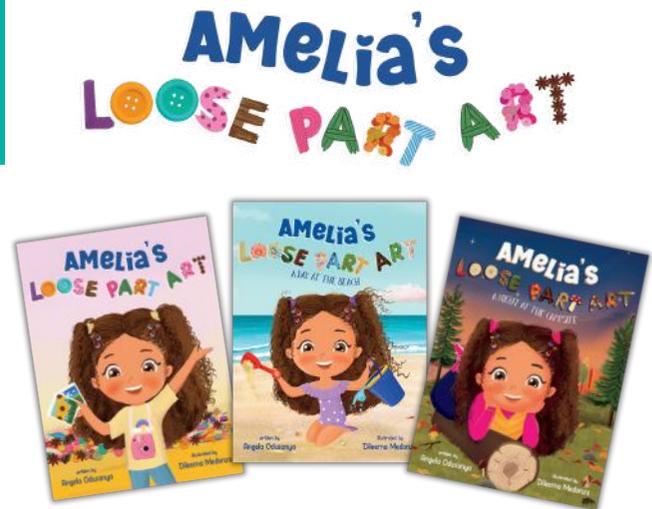
Judy Newman, Chief Impact Officer, Scholastic.

Inspiring STEAM Thinking Through Loose Parts Play!

Finally! A picture book series that empowers children to become capable problem-solvers.

Readers follow Amelia as she discovers the endless possibilities of loose parts — from buttons and rocks to sand and water to boxes and logs. Each story builds creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking in a way that feels natural and engaging.

Parents and educators especially appreciate the “Grown-Up Guides” at the end of every book, offering practical ideas to extend the learning beyond the page.



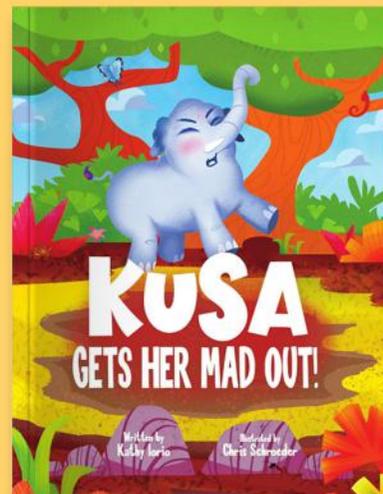
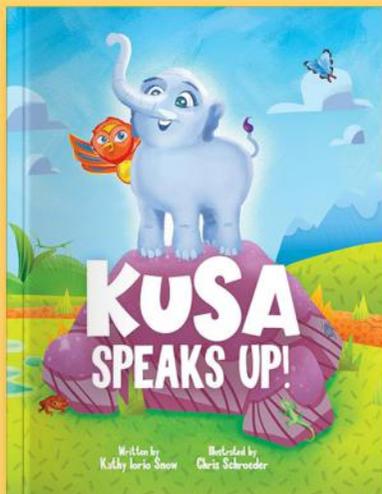
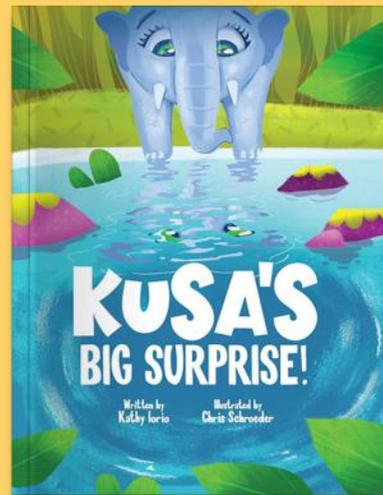
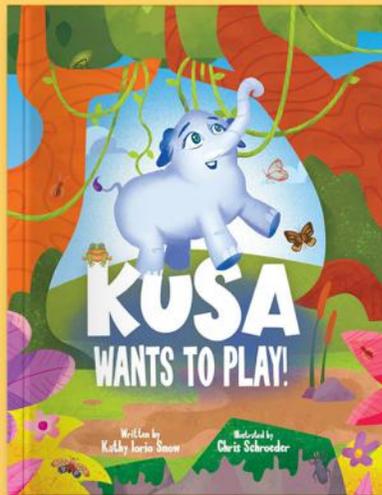
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Join **KUSA** & Her Jungle Friends *on Fun Adventures!*

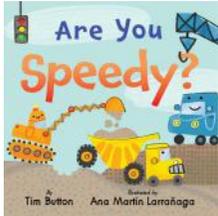
The Kusa and Friends series teaches young children ways to build positive self-esteem, increase confidence, effectively handle stress, be kind and inclusive, help others, and more!



Additional bonus materials included in each book!

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BOOK REVIEWS



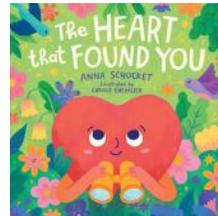
Are You Speedy?

by Tim Button, Ana Martín Larrañaga
(Collective Book Studio)

Reviewer: Deb Greenberg

Take a cheerful tour of construction vehicles with your little one as they learn the functions of each truck while

looking for a speedy one. This interactive board book is playful and educational with each vehicle answering what they do, from mixing to towing and lifting to pushing. Delightful artwork accompanies each page as we figure out the speediest of all. (Ages baby-3)



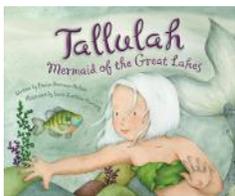
The Heart That Found You

by Anna Schocket, Carole Chevalier
(Collective Book Studio)

Reviewer: Pam Morris

This story is adorable and easy to understand for very young children.

Follow the big red heart while she looks far and wide for the piece that is missing. It is a beautiful story to help a child who was adopted know just how much they were wanted, and are loved in their new family. The illustrations are fun, colorful and simple, creating a narrative in its own right. (Ages 3-5)



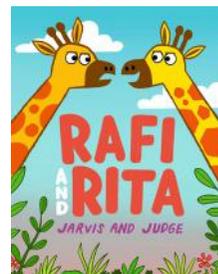
Tallulah: Mermaid of the Great Lakes

by Denise Brennan-Nelson,
Susan Kathleen Hartung
(Sleeping Bear Press)

Reviewer: Christine Irvin

Tallulah is a mermaid with a dull gray

tail. The other mermaids around her have beautiful, colorful, sparkling tails which are colored by special gemstones they find in the water. Tallulah can't find her gemstone anywhere until Turtle tells her to look in the Great Lakes. Mermaids don't belong in the Great Lakes, but when Tallulah finds her stone there, she decides she wants to stay. This story combines fantasy and fact—an interesting way to present a nonfiction idea. The author includes some activities at the end of the book that relate to the text. (Ages 2-7)



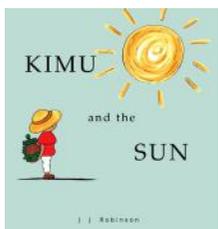
Rafi and Rita

by Jarvis, Chris Judge (Candlewick)

Reviewer: Cynthia Kern O'Brien

A glimpse into the whimsical world of twin giraffes who might seem identical at first glance but will convince you otherwise! Their playful debate and lively personalities are bound to

entertain readers at every turn. The artwork bursts with vibrant colors, bold black outlines, and expressive splashes that bring every moment of their sibling rivalry to life, capturing all the humor and energy that makes their tale so much fun. This is a story that promises both laughter and a visually delightful journey—perfect for anyone who enjoys a bit of friendly competition and a lot of heart. (Ages 3-5)



Kimu and the Sun

by J J Robinson (Montpelier Street Press)
Reviewer: Deb Greenberg

After a little boy catches and traps the sun in a bottle, the sun offers to teach him how to capture other creatures like a cloud and the moon. But that's not

enough for the boy, and he presses on in his quest to catch the sky. This award-winning book offers important lessons about striving for your goals, without allowing greed to overtake your ambitions. A simple story with colorful illustrations to keep the attention of everyone. (Ages 2-8)



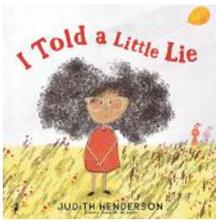
Sweet Rescue

by Alex Friedrich, Kayne Carter
(Yorkshire Publishing)

Reviewer: Deb Greenberg

Craving a snack, Hungry Joe the caterpillar follows the amazing aroma of a sweet-smelling pie ... and manages to

get stuck right in the middle of it! It'll be up to his sister, Becky Butterfly, and their buggy friends to bail him out, as Sir Raven circles overhead eyeing his own snack ... Hungry Joe. Can "everybuggy" work together to figure out a solution to Joe's gooey situation? (Ages 3-6)

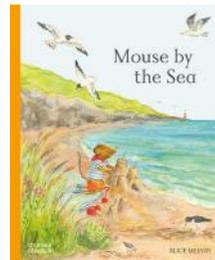


I Told a Little Lie

by Judith Henderson
(Holiday House)

Reviewer: Pam Morris

What happens when everyone makes assumptions about what they see? Poor Antoinetta gets caught up in a little lie with just a nod of her head. See what transpires with a yellow balloon, a little girl, and various insects in this heartwarming story. Follow Antoinetta as she makes amends to her new friends. The illustrations are fun and the language is easy to read. A great book for preschool about the importance of telling the truth. (Ages 3-7)

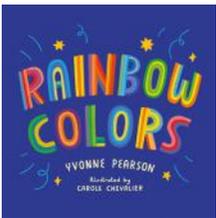


Mouse by the Sea

by Alice Melvin
(Thames & Hudson)

Reviewer: Deb Greenberg

Book 3 of Mouse's adventures takes us to the sea, where he's introduced to tide pools, sand dunes, birds, and other seashore excitement. On a boat trip, he encounters seals and dolphins, diving gannets, and nesting puffins. Inviting illustrations and interactive flaps reveal many plants and animals for young readers to identify. Perfect for getting little ones interested in nature and the outdoors. (Ages 4-8)

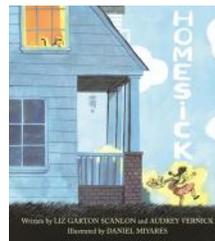


Rainbow Colors

by Yvonne Pearson, Carole Chevalier
(Collective Book Studio)

Reviewer: Pam Morris

What a fun take on teaching colors to children. The descriptive examples will elevate your child's vocabulary and the bright, detailed illustrations will bring these examples to life. Plus the end ties all of this into science, adding another layer to the learning. The book is deceptively simple: perfect for toddlers and up, but elevated vocabulary and science connections give older children their own piece to learn. (Ages 3-7)

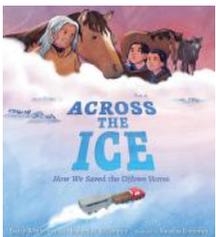


Homesick

by Liz Garton Scanlon, Audrey Vernick,
Daniel Miyares
(Neil Porter Books)

Reviewer: Pam Morris

This is a cute story about a child's first sleepover at grandma and grandpa's house. Its focus on feeling homesick takes a new perspective and puts the sadness on those left behind: her family, her pets, and most of all the house. It is a great story that will help children deal with these feelings of sadness and even their parents too! (Ages 4-8)



Across the Ice

by Darcy Whitecrow, Heather M. O'Connor,
Natasha Donovan (Candlewick)

Reviewer: Deb Greenberg

Learn about the history of the endangered Ojibwe horse and the intervention of the Lac La Croix First Nation in this fascinating account of a little-known story based on true events. Nookomis tells the story that began many years ago, when their people shared the land with herds of wild ponies. But as the herd dwindled to only four, the government wanted to shoot them, and so began the effort to move them to safety, from Ontario to Minnesota ... and many years after, a small herd of indigenous horses returned. Complemented by extraordinary illustrations and an Afterword. (Ages 3-7)



***Unicorn Rescuers:
Adventure in Mermaid Land***

by Ana Punset, Diana Vicedo
(Candlewick Press)

Reviewer: Deb Greenberg

Join mermaids Pippa, Claudia, and Sara on their adventure to Mermaid Land, as they go in search of a unicorn. But in their way are jellyfish, poisonous plants, and grumpy bats ... can they carry out their mission, locate the unicorn, and be unicorn rescuers? The first in a new series set in the magical Unicornia universe features bright and colorful illustrations that make the story inviting and exciting. (Ages 5-7)

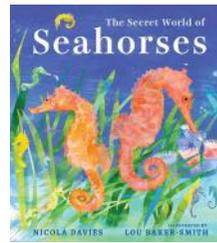


Sometimes Stormy

by Amanda Davis (Free Spirit Publishing)

Reviewer: Deb Greenberg

If a parent struggles with substance use disorder, it can be extremely difficult for their children. Davis provides a gentle approach to guide kids dealing with erratic behavior from a loved one. Ezra tries to understand this troubling storm, “swirling and unpredictable,” that changes his father, even searching for the storm’s favorite thing (alcohol) and thinking he can make it disappear. When it doesn’t go away, he turns to the support of other adults who help him understand and deal with the storm. Support materials, resources, and a message for adults are included in the back. (Ages 5-8)



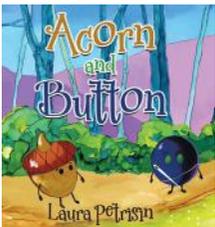
The Secret World of Seahorses

by Nicola Davies, Lou Baker-Smith

(Candlewick)

Reviewer: Deb Greenberg

What is a seahorse? Davies gives the reader an amazing introduction to the world of this fascinating and unique tiny fish. They swim rather slowly, they change color to blend in with their surroundings, and males carry the eggs in a pouch. The reader not only learns about their characteristics, they also learn that their habitats are affected by pollution, fishing, and other human activities, and the effects of climate change. Keep reading to see what we can do to help. Includes informative material in the back. (Ages 5-9)



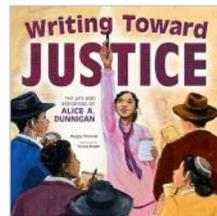
Acorn and Button

by Laura Petrisin

(Booklocker.com)

Reviewer: Christine Irvin

After a rather contentious first meeting, two unlikely characters, Acorn and Button, strike up a friendship. As they embark on an assortment of adventures, they teach each other how to be better individuals and they learn what it means to be friends. The book is divided into several chapters; each chapter tells a short story about the two as they journey through life together. (Ages 5-8)



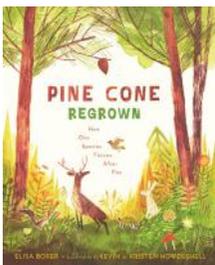
Writing Toward Justice

by Peggy Thomas, Tonya Engel

(Calkins Creek)

Reviewer: Cynthia Kern OBrien

This book beautifully introduces young readers to a trailblazing Black female reporter who broke boundaries from an early age, beginning her writing career at just thirteen. Her remarkable journey and achievements, including earning the respect of President Truman, are brought to life through both engaging storytelling and vibrant illustrations. This would make a fantastic addition to any classroom, providing a valuable resource for sparking meaningful conversations and inspiring future generations. (Ages 7-10)



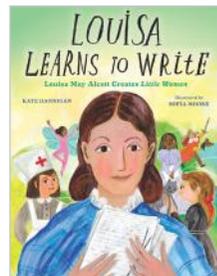
Pine Cone Regrown

by Elisa Boxer, Kevin and Kristen Howdeshell

(Sleeping Bear Press)

Reviewer: Christine Irvin

Have you ever wondered how a pine forest recovers from a devastating fire? Author Elisa Boxer tells the story of a pinecone that has been hanging from a lodgepole pine for 40 years, just waiting for its chance to burst open. Even though the forest may be reduced to ashes during a wildfire, the intense heat from the flames causes the pinecone to open and release its seed. When that happens, the seed imbeds itself into the rich soil on the forest floor, then it sprouts and grows into a new tree. Expressive, colorful illustrations and short, lyrical text complete the story. (Ages 5-8)



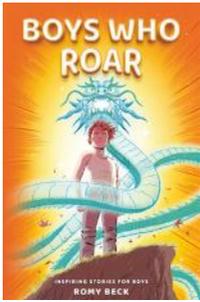
Louisa Learns to Write

by Kate Hannigan, Sofia Moore

(Calkins Creek)

Reviewer: Cynthia Kern OBrien

A fantastic picture book biography, perfect if you have any young readers interested in writing or classic literature. This beautifully illustrated book introduces kids to the life of Louisa May Alcott, focusing in large part on her childhood and the close bond she shared with her sisters—a relationship that famously inspired her beloved novel, *Little Women*. Overall, this is a wonderful resource for inspiring young writers and for anyone who wants to learn more about the life behind one of America’s favorite authors. (Ages 7-10)

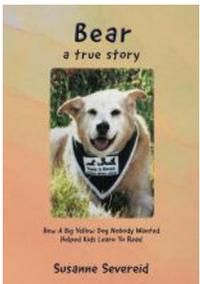


Boys Who Roar

by Romy Beck (Independently Published)
 Reviewer: Deb Greenberg

Meaningful lessons are taught using imaginative stories with relatable characters in this must-have for boys. These adventures address topics like getting anxious about a new situation, standing up to a bully, connecting

with others, learning resilience, gaining confidence, and more, all without lecturing the reader. The motivational short story structure uses metaphors to explain complex emotions. A wonderful collection of fantasy and real-world situations ... a definite keeper. (Ages 7-11)

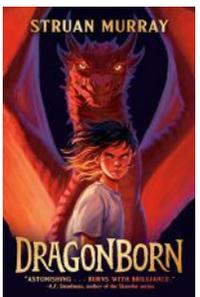


Bear: A True Story

by Susanne Severeid (Windswept Books)
 Reviewer: Christine Irvin

Based on a true story, author Susanne Severeid relates the story of Bear, a big yellow dog that was rescued when she was a senior dog. She was trained to be a therapy dog as part of the “Caring

Canines” organization. As such, she touched the lives of children by being with them as they were introduced to books and learned how to read. After Bear passed away, Severeid wanted to honor her memory by writing this book about her and this organization. This is a touching story of a special canine who deserves to be remembered. (Ages 8+)

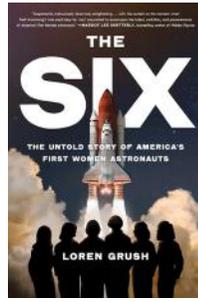


Dragonborn

by Struan Murray (Dutton Books)
 Reviewer: Deb Greenberg

Book one in a new suspenseful, fantasy adventure series follows 12-year-old Alex Evans, who has only recently learned she is a dragon and has joined her fellow Ashlings in school on the island of Skralla. There she will train with other young dragons who are

wild, untamed, and—unlike Alex—skilled at transforming their dragons within. She needs to transform soon, before her ability to do so permanently disappears and Drak Midna, the greatest dragon of all, rises again to wage war against the human world. Filled with twists and turns, and complete with an interior map of Skralla and foil detailing. (Ages 8-12)

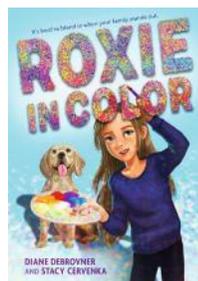


The Six: The Untold Story of America's First Women Astronauts

by Loren Grush (Scribner)
 Reviewer: Christine Irvin

Author Loren Grush tells the stories of America’s first six women astronauts— Sally Ride, Judy Resnik, Anne Fisher, Kathy Sullivan, Shannon Lucid, and Rhea Seddon—who bravely faced the challenges

of space and the challenges of discrimination. Grush includes details of their personal lives, as well as their professional ones, giving readers a well-rounded look at these remarkable trailblazing women. This is a well-written and interesting account of how women were finally able to break the “space/ gender” barrier and leave their mark on history. (Ages 8-12)

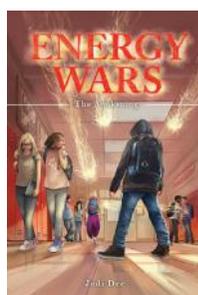


Roxie in Color

by Diane Debrovner, Stacy Cervenka (Candlewick)
 Reviewer: Pam Morris

It is a rarity in children’s literature when a book can create such a detailed world of resiliency, and pride in one’s self. Roxie is the daughter of two blind parents. While the story does focus on struggles and challenges that arise because of this, the

book focuses on typical trials and tribulations of a preteen. Roxie, a talented artist, is a 7th grader who deals with social challenges, friendships, peer pressure, and making mistakes. This is a wonderful, easy story that will endear all readers to Roxie and her family. (Ages 9-12)



Energy Wars: The Awakening

by Jodi Dee (Jodi Dee Publishing)
 Reviewer: Christine Irvin

Myles thinks he’s just a normal 13-year-old until he starts seeing waves of fireballs emanating from his classmates whenever they speak negatively. No one else can see the fireballs, making him wonder if he’s losing his mind. When he realizes he’s

“normal” except for his newfound superpower, he discovers there is so much more to energy than he ever imagined and there are bad guys who want to exploit it. Can Myles stop them? This is the first installment of a new series. The ending of this book will make you want to learn more. (Ages 10-14)

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

Q&A
WITH

ANNETTE BAY PIMENTEL

by Julianne Black DiBlasi

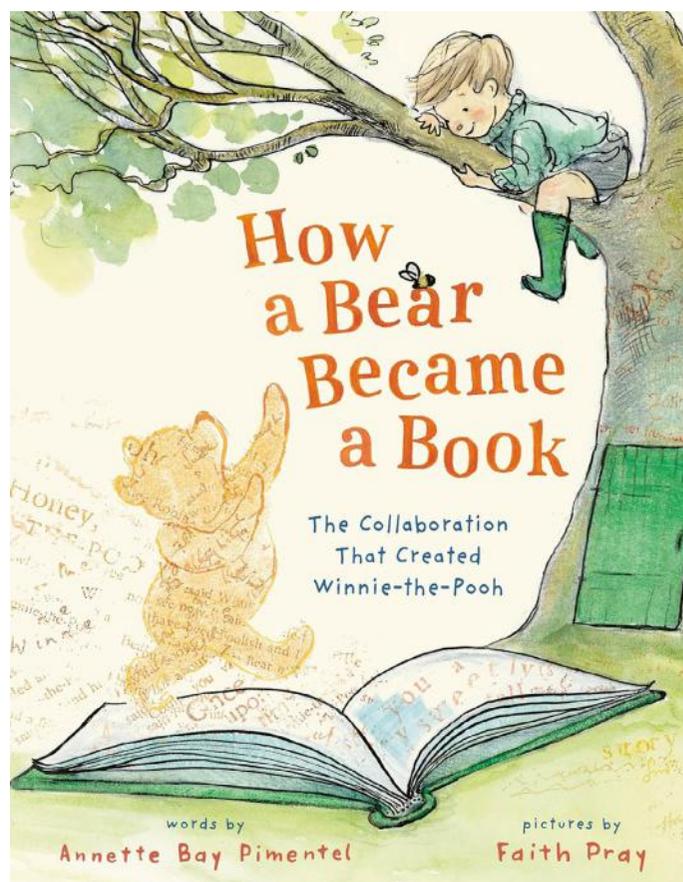
Like many children’s book fanatics, I still have my first copy of *Winnie-the-Pooh*. In my early reader years, it was the catalyst for a lifetime of book appreciation. At the time, the colors and fluidity of the layout kept me coming back, each read finding new details and hidden gems. As I got older, it prepared me for the unspoken language with other children about friendship models and personality types. And in my teen years, it was a fun throwback galavanting around the mall’s Disney store and saying “Aww, I totally want that!” to pretty much everything that adorable little bear was printed on.

While the bath towels, pillow cases, and water bottles eventually disappeared from my world, the spirit of the adventures, the innocence of those friend groups, and the creative artistic formations stayed very much alive in the attic of my mind. In high school, I jumped into *The Tao of Pooh*, by Benjamin Hoff. First published in 1982, it uses the characters from *Winnie-the-Pooh* to explain principles of Taoist philosophy. Again, I was smitten by the stuffed-with-fluff honey guzzler.

I’ve truly felt as though this timeless bear was following me, but clearly, I wasn’t the only one! Nearly a century after *Winnie-the-Pooh* first captured young readers’ hearts, author Annette Bay Pimentel invites us back to the Hundred Acre Wood with a fresh perspective. In *How a Bear Became a Book*, she explores the fascinating collaboration between writer, illustrator, and editor that brought Pooh to life—while also showing young readers how stories themselves begin and grow.

Now, a little bit about Annette Bay Pimentel.... She grew up in a lively Utah family and went on to earn degrees in English literature from UC Berkeley and Brandeis University. She is an award-winning author whose books frequently appear on state reading lists and as Junior Library Guild selections, serves as an elected Library Trustee, and teaches nonfiction writing for McDaniel College.

Blending playful text with rich, evolving illustrations, *How a Bear Became a Book: The Collaboration That Created Winnie-the-Pooh* blends creativity and a thoughtful look at storytelling, imagination, and, of course, a certain bear’s multigenerational love of honey.







Q: Annette, thank you so much for talking to us!

A: Thanks for the invitation!

Q: Do you have a special connection to the *Winnie-the-Pooh* stories you can share with our Story Monsters?

A: I grew up reading *Winnie-the-Pooh* and *The House at Pooh Corner* to myself. I was a very serious kid and puzzled over the humor in the books. I relied on—and adored!—the art by E. H. Shepard to understand the funny bits.

Years later, my father-in-law introduced me to the poetry books Milne and Shepard collaborated on, where *Winnie-the-Pooh* very first appeared. He had received a copy of *When We Were Very Young* when he was five, in the first year it was out. That book sits next to my desk today.

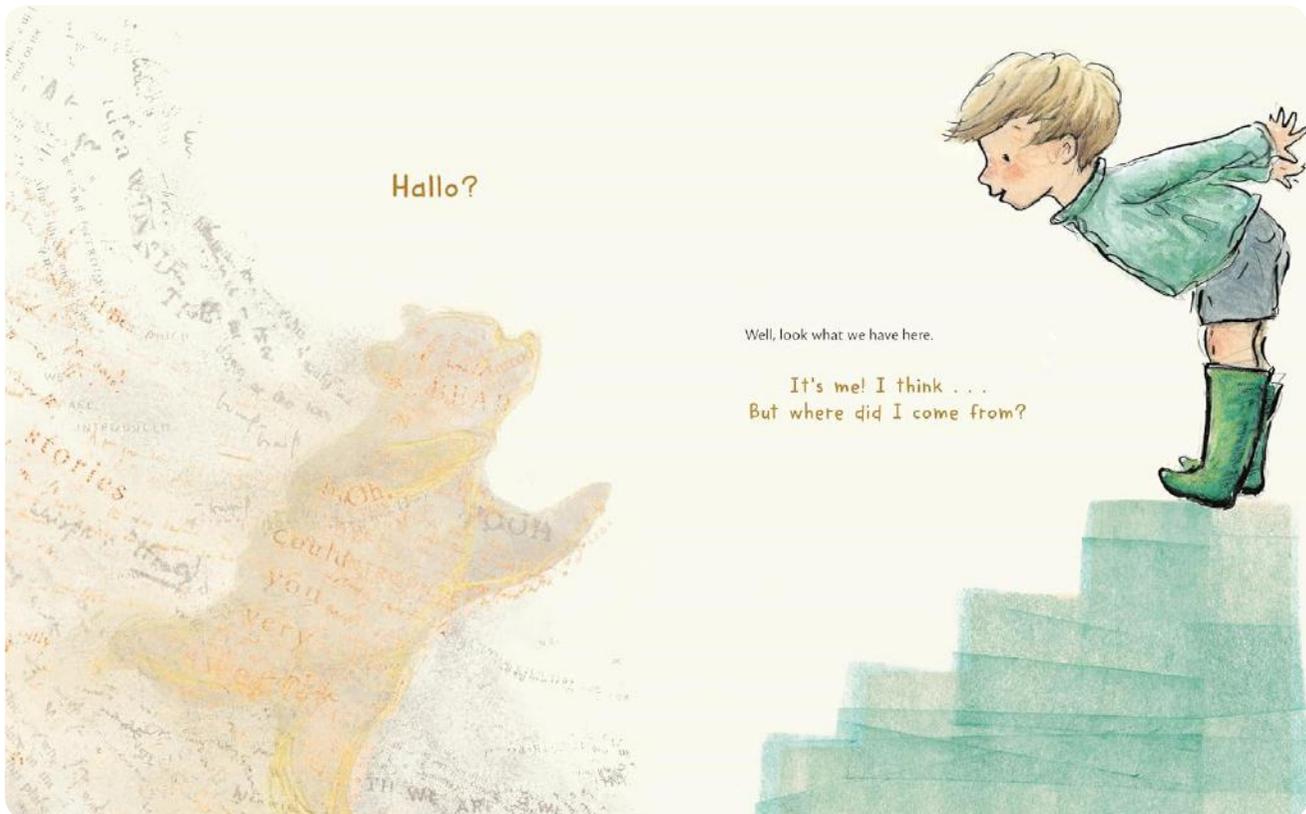
Q: Which came first—wanting to write about *Winnie-the-Pooh* or wanting to write about the process of publishing?

A: Definitely Pooh! Because I have always loved the original illustrations so much, and because they were such an integral

part of my early experience with the books, I wanted to write about E. H. Shepard. Eventually, through doing research and writing drafts, I realized that it was the act of collaboration that created the bear I love so much.

Q: Pooh fanatics are usually well-versed on the different illustration styles the franchise has adopted over the years, but I didn't realize that the original visual organization was vastly different from the style we see today. Can you fill in our readers on how they might view the original designs and what the key differences are?

A: Milne, Shepard, and their editors worked hard on how to lay out the text and the illustrations. It wasn't a common practice at the time, but it led to beautifully designed pages, where the art participated in the storytelling. They did clever things like placing illustrations in the flood chapter so that they appeared to be bobbing in a sea of words. In other spots, they stretched illustrations across the central gutter, or they made the text echo the shape of the trunks of the trees in the Hundred Acre Wood. And when Kanga and Roo appear, they made the text bounce right off the line. Looking so closely at how the art works with the text is a collaborative practice that publishers still use today as they're shaping picture books.



In later editions, perhaps because of different fonts or page sizes, some of the brilliant layouts were lost as illustrations had to be split between pages.

At Internet Archive, you can see the original version of the book with those original layouts. https://archive.org/details/winniethepoohpoo000unse_o5d7/page/42/mode/2up

Q: I loved the review you received from School Library Journal: “A thoughtful, beautifully crafted title that honors a literary classic on the eve of its centennial and introduces ‘The Best Bear in All the World’ to a new generation.” When you began crafting the story, who did you have most in mind—the past, present, or future generations of Hundred Acre Wood fans?

A: I thought I was writing for future fans of Pooh. But as I’ve started talking to kids about the book, I’ve been reminded that everybody knows who Winnie-the-Pooh is. Most kids, however, are not well-acquainted with Shepard’s Pooh. So I think I’m writing for present fans of Pooh who are future fans of E. H. Shepard’s art.

Q: The visual component is absolutely essential for a project about a beloved classic known for its illustrations! What part did you play in the selection and/or evolution of the artwork by the incredibly talented Faith Pray?

A: Faith’s art in this book is amazing! When I sent off the manuscript, I had only a vague idea of what it would look like to have a bear emerge from a cloud of words. The look of the book is all Faith. I love that her art, in this book about the central role of art in telling a story, is absolutely central to how the book works.

I got to see sketches as she worked on the book, and I made comments about ways to make them more historically accurate. But other than that, I just sat back and watched with amazement as my idea became first a bear and then a book.

Q: What was the permission process like for getting approval to mimic the styles, fonts, and formatting of the original series?

A: *Winnie-the-Pooh* is now in the public domain. But I wouldn’t say that we’re mimicking the original series. We are definitely honoring it, but with one foot solidly in 2026. Textually, the book uses the contemporary literary technique of metafiction



to tell the historical story. Illustratively, the pictures use a range of art techniques and media to show the historical layer alongside the story of contemporary publishing practices.

Q: I love to ask this one: Where were you when you first saw a finished copy of the book? Who did you first share it with?

A: I had seen electronic PDFs of the book and even received unbound and uncut pages to look at. But, as you know, that's nothing like holding a finished book. I received my first copy in the mail at the end of February, just a month before launch day. My husband picked it up from our front porch and hid it from me until he had his camera ready. And then I squealed. My kids—who are all grown-up now—got to see it via Zoom.

Q: Can you share what you are working on next, and how our Story Monsters can follow you?

A: I was fascinated to learn that some airports have wildlife biologists on staff. *Turtle on the Tarmac* is a story for very young readers about what happens when both a child and a migrating turtle end up at the airport. It comes out next year with Abrams. *Numbers Tell Stories Too*, a picture book biography about Florence Nightingale's work as a statistician, comes out with Beach Lane in 2028.

I'm on Instagram at [@annettebaypimentel](https://www.instagram.com/annettebaypimentel).

For more information about Annette Bay Pimentel and her work, visit annettebaypimentel.com. ●

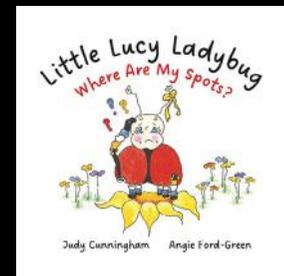
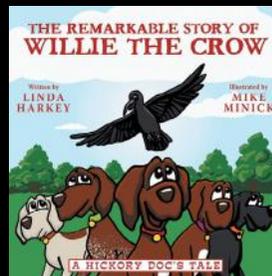
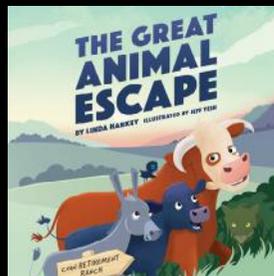
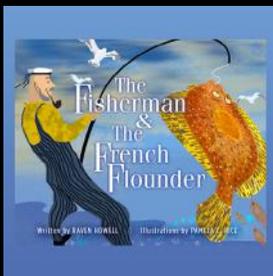
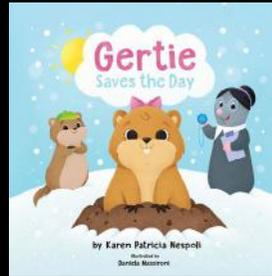
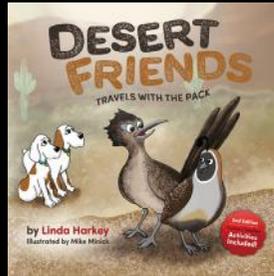
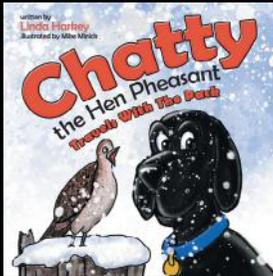
Julianne Black DiBlasi • Mom, wielder of pixel, paint, and pen. krakenSky.com

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SANDRA NEIL WALLACE

Celebrates Ukrainian Heritage

by Raven Howell

Award-winning author Sandra Neil Wallace has written 15 books to date, many of which celebrate the lives of changemakers in our history. Her newest, *Marie's Magic Eggs: How Marie Procai Kept the Ukrainian Art of Pysanky Alive*, is a picture book biography about the life of Marie Procai, a Ukrainian immigrant and renowned artist. Marie revitalized the traditional Ukrainian art of pysanky—the art of decorating eggs. The book unveils her torch-bearing journey using the pysanky as a form of strength and resistance to preserve her culture.

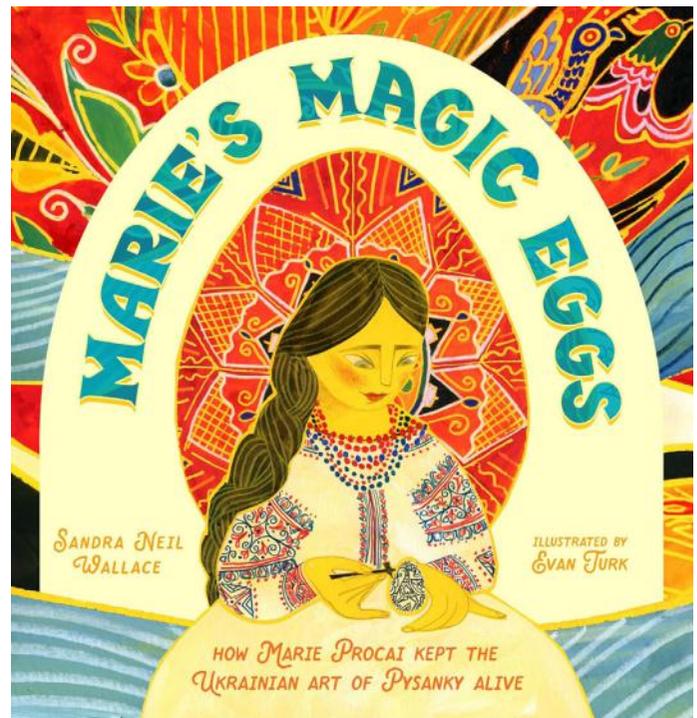
Many of Sandra Neil Wallace's books have received starred reviews and national acclamations. Her popular stories, such as *Love is Loud*, *Race Against Time*, and *Between the Lines: How Ernie Barnes Went from the Football Field to the Art Gallery*, have won numerous awards, including the Orbis Pictus Award for Outstanding Nonfiction, Best Book of the Year by the ALA, Booklist, and the New York and Chicago Public Libraries.

She's a recipient of the Outstanding Women of New Hampshire Award, the *Keene Sentinel* Extraordinary Women Award, and NH's Granite State Award for outstanding contributions to the welfare of the state. Sandra co-founded The Koenig Siddall First Generation Scholarship Fund and The Daily Good, supporting students through literacy programs and free Global Foods pantries at New Hampshire colleges.

Her career took off while studying journalism at university, where she took a job as a receptionist at a radio station and worked her way into the newsroom.

As a journalist, Sandra became the first woman to anchor an NHL broadcast on national TV. She was also among the first journalists to cover the WNBA. Enough said. She's a trailblazer, regarding herself as determined, passionate, and fair-minded.

"Thank you for having me in *Story Monsters Ink*," she leads off graciously. "I'm so grateful to be an author, and I lean into my journalism background whenever I can. I mostly write nonfiction and specifically picture book biographies, which are great for all ages and especially for ages 8 and up."



Sandra grew up in a busy household. During childhood, she says frequent visits to her Ukrainian "baba," who had a huge garden, would incite much joy. "We'd go out and pick food for supper—from corn to tomatoes. The home was also full of cultural pride, from embroidered tablecloths and scarves to egg cartons filled with pysanky. We got to pick out a few as gifts each year, which was thrilling, so I grew up really appreciating where I come from, valuing heritage and respecting family roots."





Customers ordered so many of Marie's Ukrainian eggs that she didn't just make them each spring. Every day, like a perfect kind of magic—steeped in the sweet-honey scent of beeswax—Marie created pysanky as beautiful as her baba's.

"I was more of an avid storyteller than a reader as a child. Since my family moved a lot, I was often the new kid at school, and to make friends, I would tell stories or interview kids, pretending that I was a reporter."

She refers to several talented biographers in children's literature who have influenced her own distinct style. "I admire the works of Barb Rosenstock for her creativity and humor, and Carole Boston Weatherford for her striking poetry. In regard to story composition, I consider a hopeful ending a key element for young readers. For older readers, suspense and anticipation keep the reader motivated to continue with the story."

Inspiration for writing *Marie's Magic Eggs* was sparked by Sandra's ancestry from Ukraine as well as Yugoslavia. "I have a more personal connection to the book because of my Ukrainian heritage. My Ukrainian grandmother, who immigrated from Ukraine as a teenager, shared many cultural traditions with us, including pysanky," she explains.

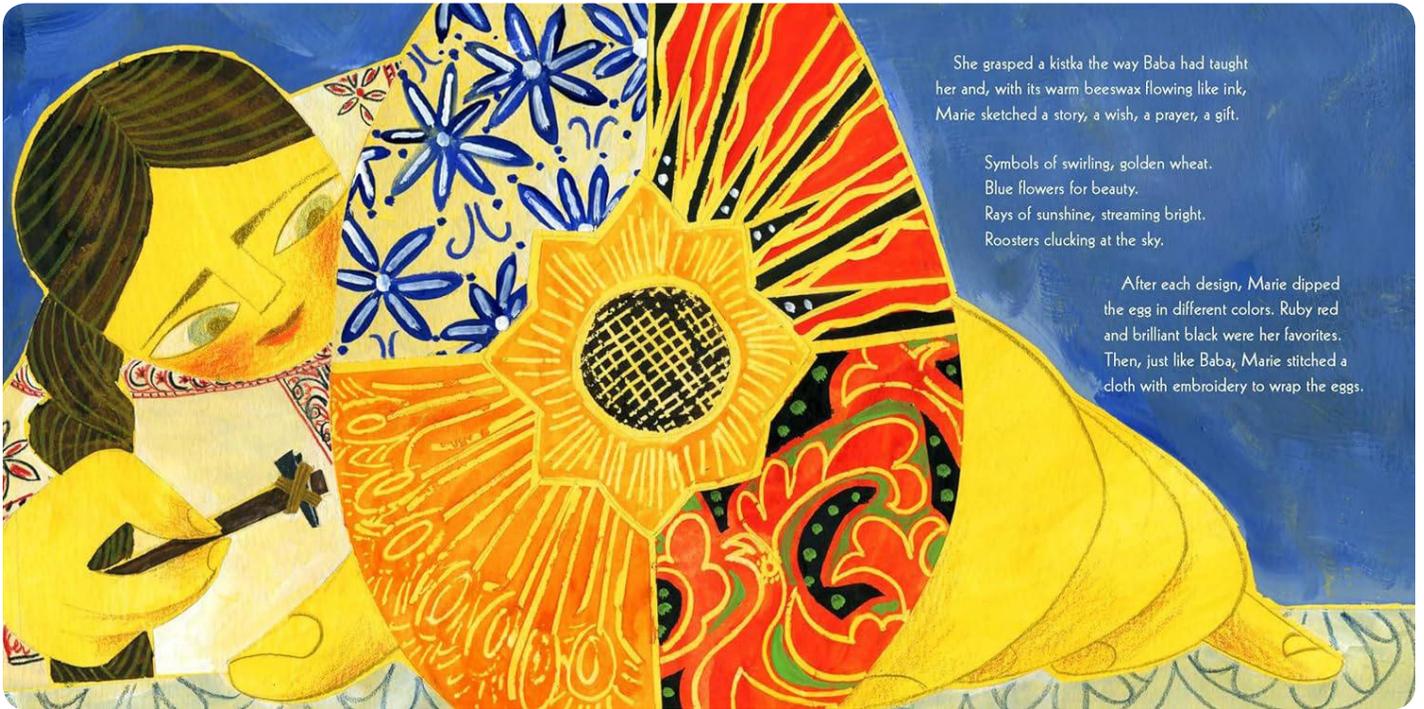
"When Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, I felt a sense of urgency to amplify Ukrainian cultural traditions and found hope in people gathering around the world to learn how to make pysanky in solidarity with Ukraine. Many of their tool kits came from the Ukrainian Gift Shop co-founded by Marie Procai."

The theme of resilience is a prominent aspect of Marie Procai's life, and Sandra composed the book with accessible accuracy. "For Marie, hardship didn't stop her from expressing herself and her Ukrainian heritage through art by making pysanky. When she arrived in this country as a young teenager, she didn't have the tools to make pysanky, so she improvised by using a shoelace from her boot as a writing tool. Over the years and during wartime, she shared her love of the craft by opening a gift shop and giving pysanky demonstrations."

"While researching for the book, I discovered Marie gave the pysanky demonstrations to children at the public library many decades before pysanky workshops existed or libraries were considered third spaces. This both surprised and impressed me."

"The book brings cultural pride, creativity, and community to the forefront. It's a hopeful story of a woman who fought to preserve an essential part of Ukrainian culture—the Ukrainian art of pysanky. I hope the story can nurture the reader's cultural pride and help kids develop a deep respect for their roots."

Vibrant, textured art accompanies Sandra's story, and she's effusive about her illustrator's contribution. "Evan Turk's illustrations are luminous, taking the book to a whole new level. It was exciting to see his vision come to life. The attention to



She grasped a kistka the way Baba had taught her and, with its warm beeswax flowing like ink, Marie sketched a story, a wish, a prayer, a gift.

Symbols of swirling, golden wheat.
Blue flowers for beauty.
Rays of sunshine, streaming bright.
Roosters clucking at the sky.

After each design, Marie dipped the egg in different colors. Ruby red and brilliant black were her favorites. Then, just like Baba, Marie stitched a cloth with embroidery to wrap the eggs.

detail is stunning. Evan poured so much research into it and even created beautiful pysanky while working on the book.”

“For me, writing nonfiction is an opportunity to share a story I’m passionate about and shine a light on a person that the reader may not be familiar with. What’s changed for me over time is the format. I started by writing novels and now focus on picture books, writing about people who break barriers.”

“As an author, my day is either a writing, revision, or research day. I make a tentative schedule, but if the writing isn’t flowing, then that day becomes a revision or research day. I also practice yoga and cook. I really enjoy experimenting with new recipes. And I find happiness in nature walks, either through a forest, along a beach, or around town to savor the community I live in.”

“The biggest reward from my work is having the opportunity to connect with readers. I stay motivated by the kid lit community.

There are so many great and dedicated creators out there writing beautiful stories and educators sharing these stories and advocating for the freedom to read.”

“Nonfiction books and biographies in particular can give young readers clear examples of role models for making a difference, help them become empowered, and gain the confidence and tools to navigate through life.”

For more information about Sandra Neil Wallace and her work, visit sandraneilwallace.com. ●

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

OH DEAR ... SO MANY DEER IN MY BACKYARD!

by Conrad J. Storad



When the deer stop by, it doesn't take long to empty the bird feeders.

Seven white-tailed deer sprinted across the wooded lot behind our house this morning. We always know the deer are there thanks to loud barking from Trixie, our dachshund on duty. She takes her “watch wiener” duties seriously.

Sometimes the deer stroll. Sometimes there are three or four. They pay no attention to Trixie’s annoying alerts.

Sometimes they trot. Once we saw nine. Often, the deer are not in a hurry at all. They hang around the yard and use their large tongues to drain the bird feeders like they were oversized Pez candy dispensers. Or they nibble on whatever greenery they can find, winter, spring, summer, and fall.

We don’t live in the woods or near a forest of any kind. Our northeast Ohio home is part of a typical suburban neighborhood: green grass, lawns and clumps of trees here and there. But we are not alone. Deer walking through a neighborhood yard is quite common, no matter where you live.

The white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) is now one of the most common large wild animals in the United States. The



Hmmm. Wonder what these hostas taste like?



During the winter, any plant, any time is worth a taste.

creatures are showing up in more suburban neighborhoods than ever before.

White-tailed deer get their name from the bright white underside of their tails. When they feel startled or threatened, they lift that tail like a flag to warn other deer and dash away. These animals are built for speed and agility. They can leap fences and run up to 30 miles per hour.

Deer are herbivores, which means they eat plants. In the wild, they munch on grasses, leaves, berries, nuts, and even tree bark. But in our backyard and similar suburban areas, they've discovered a new favorite buffet. To a deer, our gardens, flowers, and leafy shrubs look like a delicious salad bar.

Long ago, deer almost disappeared from parts of the United States. In the early 1900s, there were only about 300,000 left. Millions of people building farms, towns, and cities wiped out huge swaths of their woody habitat.

Overhunting of both deer and their natural predators—wolves, bears, mountain lions—also helped to reduce their numbers.

But times changed. Thanks to conservation laws and wildlife protection, the population of white-tailed deer bounced back—in a huge way. Today, there are tens of millions of white-tailed deer living across North America. Some scientists think the numbers may exceed the population of deer that existed before

European settlers came to America in large numbers during the 1600s and 1700s.

So why are the deer moving into the suburbs?

It turns out that human neighborhoods are actually great places for deer to live. Suburban areas have a mix of woods for hiding and resting. They also have lots of open spaces for feeding.

Most of the natural predators are long gone. And hunting by humans is usually limited to certain areas and seasons for safety reasons. That means deer can live longer and have more babies.

What's really changed is that lots of deer don't just pass through. Like us, they live in our neighborhoods full time. Scientists have found that deer may rest just a short distance from houses during the day. They come out to feed in the early morning or evening.

Having lots of deer so close is not easy. It's not like living in a never-ending Disney movie. One big problem is car accidents. Collisions with cars and trucks happen when deer cross streets and roads, especially at dawn or dusk. Seeing the carcass of a dead deer along the side of the road or highway is more common than ever.

Another issue is the environment. Deer like to eat. When too many deer eat too many plants, damage occurs. Overeating by deer can harm forests and reduce the number of other animals that depend on those plants.

Deer can also spread ticks. Ticks are small arachnids that carry Lyme disease and illnesses that can infect other animals, including humans. That's one reason public health experts keep a close eye on deer populations.

Still, many of us enjoy seeing deer in the yard. We feel a connection to nature when they appear. Communities are working on ways to live safely with deer. We can plant deer-resistant gardens, use fencing, and create other safe ways to manage their populations.

White-tailed deer are a great example of how wildlife can adapt to the world humans have built. They remind us that nature isn't far away. It's often just right outside the back window.

Ooops. Trixie is barking again. I better go check and see what she's spotted in the backyard this time. ●



Trixie, "The Watch Wiener," in her lookout position watching for deer in our backyard.

Tales of white tails, and other facts:

- White-tailed deer are jumping champions. They can jump as high as 8 feet and as far as 30 feet in a single leap!
- Baby deer are called fawns. Fawns are born with white spots that help them blend into the forest. A fawn can stand up within hours of being born.
- A female deer is called a doe. A male deer is a buck. Bucks grow new antlers every year. The antlers can grow up to an inch per day in summer!
- Deer have excellent hearing and can rotate their ears to detect sounds.
- A deer's large eyes are great at spotting movement, especially in low light.
- Yes, deer are very good swimmers!

Learn More About White-Tailed Deer:

BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS:

- *White-Tailed Deer* by Ruth Owen
- *The Amazing White-Tailed Deer* by Madelyn Oster
- *National Geographic Kids: White-Tailed Deer* by National Geographic Kids

WEBSITES AND VIDEOS:

- National Wildlife Federation – Kid-friendly animal facts and activities
- Discoverwildcare.org – Living with deer
- YouTube (search: "white-tailed deer for kids" or "Nat Geo Kids deer video")

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



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A Different World

by Olivia Amiri

Before college, I had never been a morning person, a “yogi,” a stand-up comedian, a digital calendar user, a jewelry wearer, or a minimalist. After serendipitously meeting who I believe will be one of my closest friends for life (who is all of these things), I have started to change.

It’s inevitable to say that college is a place to learn new things—this, I understand to be the entire point—but, I don’t mean academic concepts or skills. While I am learning about Freud’s psychoanalytic theory and constitutional law among other things, I have discovered that I have also enrolled myself in a whole disparate curriculum of habits. This being the lives of other people around me.

In high school, school and home are separate; you aren’t brushing your teeth alongside your friends, and for the most part, late-night studying is a solo endeavor. This all changes in college. Home and school fuse, and with that combination comes the exposure into the “home” and habits of other people around you. My now best friend, whom I met in the first week of orientation, is someone who I spend almost all of my “home” time with. We eat meals together, exchange clothes with each other, do laundry together, and study with each other.

Upon first seeing her closet, I was shocked and confused. It was almost bare: one jacket, one sweater, two pairs of shoes, and a few shirts and pants. In comparison to my dresser, with drawers that refuse to close (due to being overfilled), this was the most bizarre thing I had ever seen. When I asked her about it, she started laughing, saying, “This is my normal! Any more clothes would make me stressed out.”

She explained how she catalogs her closet and keeps track of whenever she buys a new shirt or jacket so that she can get rid of an old one. It seemed sacrilegious. But her unique ways of living didn’t stop there. After sleeping over at her dorm on her

air mattress, I woke up to a supremely strange image. At 7 a.m., she was rolling out a yoga mat in front of the window. She put on *Sex and the City* on her computer and dove into a 30-minute full-body yoga routine. After coming back from brushing my teeth in the bathroom, I found her engrossed in the show watching a breakup scene in the full splits.

The most yoga I do is an abridged form of stretching where I try to touch my toes. I usually can’t get past my calves, and give up after 30 seconds of excruciating torture. She told me that her day has to always start and end with yoga “It’s changed my life” she said. I still felt like I was missing something crucial; how could downward dog magically transform my existence? In these routines among others, she has completely invested herself.

I cannot say that my daily habits are any less mystifying to her. Every morning, I do my makeup, eyes, face, hair, the whole thing. After begging to do her makeup, she finally let me. As I worked, she jumped in the chair, her face not used to the tickle of the makeup brushes. When she looked in the mirror after 30 minutes, she yelped in surprise and happiness at her reflection, and complimented me like I had just painted something beautiful, which I had. She doesn’t wear makeup every day, and I don’t do a full vinyasa flow yoga routine every morning, but she does now wear brown mascara sparingly, and I have found myself seeking child’s pose when I need a release.

In college you will realize for the first time just how little you know about the ways other people think and live, and how an influential friendship can make you more open to things you would never even think of. Seeing someone’s private living spaces, their private self, and their bare faces without their usual makeup or daily accessories will introduce you to a whole new range of possibilities for how you want to be an adult. Some things you will take with you and integrate into your own daily routine, and some things you won’t. Either way, friendship has become an education in possibility. ●

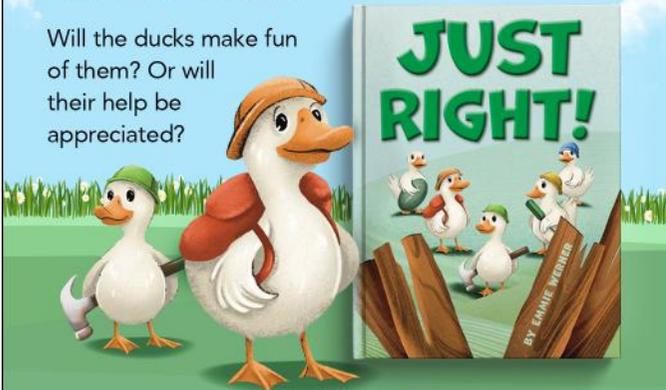
Liv Amiri is a student at Yale University, an author, poet, and activist. She champions literary freedoms by creating a space where students can explore issues together, and hopes that ultimately her work will influence positive change in the world. livamiri.com

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Will the ducks make fun of them? Or will their help be appreciated?

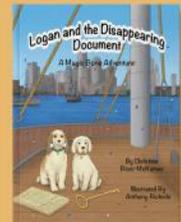
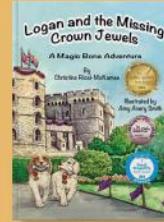


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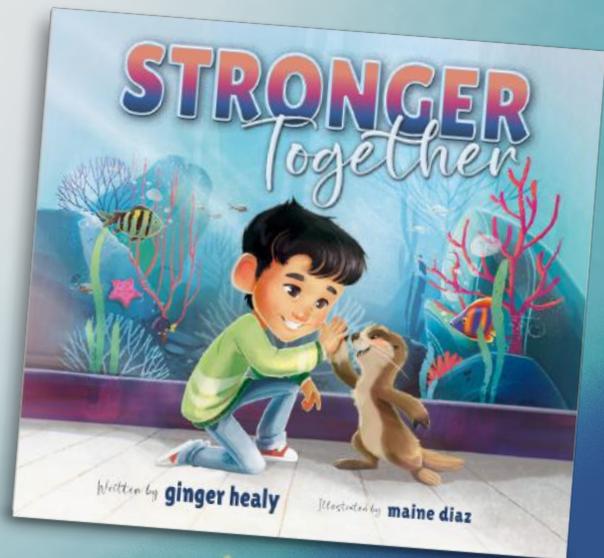


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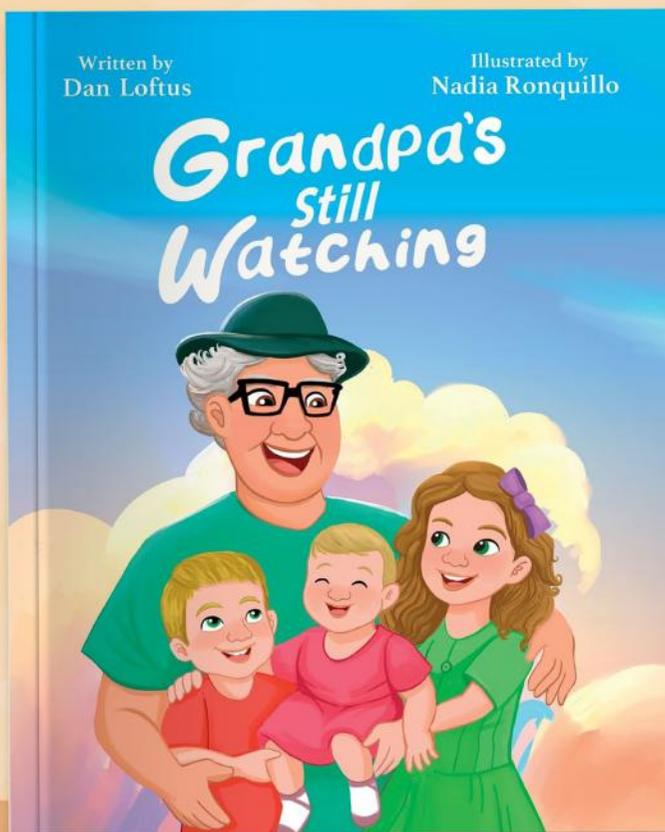
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A Touching Tribute to Lost Loved Ones

Dan Loftus's father passed away just four months after Dan was married, never having the chance to meet his three grandchildren. As they grew older, they began to ask questions about him. That shaped the idea for this book—a way to keep his memory alive and to remind others that those we've lost can still impact who our children are and who they become.



“The book is ideal for anyone with young, inquisitive children who are grappling with understanding death and loss—or wanting to learn more about someone who passed away before they had the chance to meet them. Parents and grandparents will find this story helpful and engaging when explaining loss to the kids in their lives.”

—Publishers Weekly

www.danloftusauthor.com

Available on Amazon.com and BarnesandNoble.com