

Story Monsters Ink

OCTOBER 2021



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CHRIS COLFER

CREATES A MAGICAL MIDDLE GRADE SERIES

GAYLE FORMAN

PENS A POWERFUL STORY OF FRIENDSHIP AND FAMILY

CHRISTIAN MCKAY HEIDICKER

SCRIBES A SCARY NEW TALE

CHANGEMAKER:

JULIANA MARSTON

CHRIS SKINNER

INVITES KIDS TO GO
WHERE NO SWEET HAS
GONE BEFORE

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RESPICIO'S**
NEW MIDDLE GRADE
NOVEL IS GOOEY FUN

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**DREW
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INVITES YOU
TO WISH
ON A STAR



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CHRIS COLFER

CREATES A MAGICAL MIDDLE GRADE SERIES

by Melissa Fales

Chris Colfer is best known for his TV role as Kurt Hummel on *Glee*. His portrayal earned him legions of fans and major accolades, including three consecutive People's Choice Awards (2013, 2014, and 2015) for favorite Comedic TV Actor and a spot on the 2011 *Time* 100 as one of the most influential people in the world. Lately, Colfer has been focusing on writing, and the latest book in his popular *A Tale of Magic* series, *A Tale of Sorcery*, is due out Sept. 28. It promises to be another nonstop, action filled adventure for Colfer's fans to devour. "There is so much going on in this book I don't know where to begin," he says. "So, buckle up!"



As a child, Colfer struggled with reading due to dyslexia and ADHD. “Every so often I’d miraculously discover a book that held my attention,” he says. “I had to read each line two or three times, but I became addicted to *Harry Potter*, *Narnia*, and the books by Eva Ibbotson and Bruce Coville, among others.” Despite the effort it took for him to read, Colfer counted the children’s section of his local bookstore as one of his favorite places. “I would spend hours sitting in the aisles, smelling the fresh pages, and imagining myself in the adventures that the covers depicted.”

For Colfer, the books on the shelves of that bookstore provided a much-needed escape. “I remember thinking at a very young age about how unfair and mundane the world seemed,” he says. “My family didn’t have much money, my younger sister was always ill, and I was constantly harassed at school. And in-between the financial woes and family tragedies, I was plagued with a perpetual boredom I couldn’t seem to shake. (This was before iPads and Netflix.) If I didn’t have stories to stimulate me, as a reader and writer, I don’t know how I would have survived. Imagination is the ultimate life raft.”

Colfer’s creativity began bubbling up early. “I tried writing *The Wishing Spell* when I was seven,” he says. “It was very difficult to write a novel and finish second grade at the same time, so I decided to wait until I was older to pursue it,” he says.

When he was 19, Colfer wrote a screenplay for *Struck By Lightning*. “It was inspired by my time running the Writer’s Club in high school,” he says. “I never related to teen movies where all the characters were motivated by sex and popularity. I wanted to create a movie for the kids who were motivated by goals and making a difference in the world.” The independent film premiered at the 2012 Tribeca Film Festival. “It still has a very passionate following,” says Colfer. “Not a day goes by when someone doesn’t send me a quote, image, or tattoo inspired by the film. My publishers from Little, Brown were at the premiere and asked me to adapt the screenplay into a YA novel, so I wrote *Struck By Lightning: The Carson Phillips Journal* as a companion piece to the movie.”

In 2012, Colfer published *The Wishing Well*, the book he had started in second grade. It became a #1 *New York Times* bestseller and launched his six-book *The Land of Stories* series. “At its core, I’d like to think *The Land of Stories* series is a celebration of storytelling,” he says. “The protagonists,



12-year-old twins Alex and Conner Bailey, go on adventures through the worlds of fairy tales, classic literature, mythology, and creative writing ... I’m so grateful I had the opportunity to bring it to life and it’s been an amazing privilege to see my readers grow up with the Bailey twins.”

Colfer says both Alex and Conner are based on himself. “I’m a Gemini and have always felt like I had two people living inside my mind,” he says. “Alex represents my analytical and nerdy side while Conner represents my humorous and creative side. Most of the arguments they get into throughout the series are discussions I’ve had with myself.”

Readers may notice a shift between Colfer’s *The Land of Stories* series and his *The Land of Magic* series. “*The Land of Stories* series is based entirely on the adventures I wanted to have when I was a kid,” he says. “However, when I sat down to write *A Tale of Magic* in 2017, the world was very different from the world I grew up in. Like most people, I felt completely helpless whenever I watched the news. I was desperate to make the world a kinder place and figured writing was the best weapon in my arsenal. So, I went a little

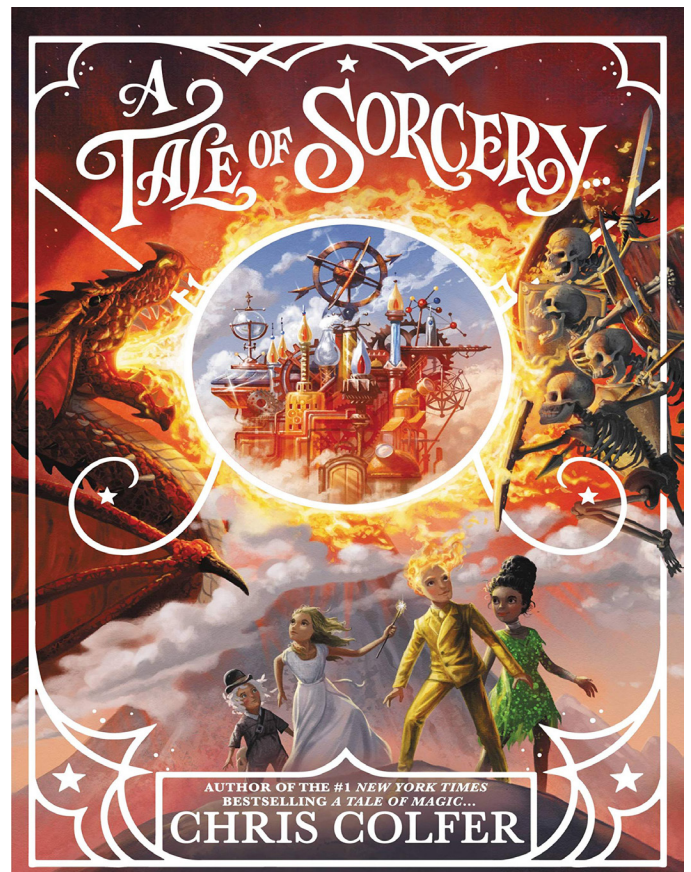
deeper with the plot and tried to install as much compassion and common sense in my young readers as possible.”

In 2019, Colfer released *A Tale of Magic*, the first book in the eponymous series. “It’s a magical adventure through a world of witches, fairies, trolls, and dragons, but each book is also an allegory for a social issue that’s close to my heart,” he explains. “In *A Tale of Magic*, the characters’ journey from secrecy and shame to a place of inner and outer acceptance is based on the journey that many members of the LGBTQIA community face.” Book two, *A Tale of Witchcraft*, was released in 2020. “The curse that torments Brystal Evergreen and fills her head with destructive thoughts is based on the struggles of depression and the importance of mental health,” says Colfer. “And finally, in *A Tale of Sorcery*, the story is an allegory for the unfortunate war against science that we’re seeing today and the dangers of valuing pride over the truth.”

Right from the start, *A Tale of Sorcery* delivers readers straight into calamity. “The witches and fairies are at war with an oppressive clan called the Righteous Brotherhood, a mysterious and powerful fire begins to destroy the world from the inside out, and we’re introduced to a secret society of Alchemists who’ve perfected the practice of combining

“I REMEMBER THINKING AT A VERY YOUNG AGE ABOUT HOW UNFAIR AND MUNDANE THE WORLD SEEMED. MY FAMILY DIDN’T HAVE MUCH MONEY, MY YOUNGER SISTER WAS ALWAYS ILL, AND I WAS CONSTANTLY HARASSED AT SCHOOL.... IF I DIDN’T HAVE STORIES TO STIMULATE ME, AS A READER AND WRITER, I DON’T KNOW HOW I WOULD HAVE SURVIVED. IMAGINATION IS THE ULTIMATE LIFE RAFT.”

magic with science,” says Colfer. “And to make matters worse, the only way Brystal Evergreen can save herself, her friends, and the world is by retrieving an ancient spell book called *The Book of Sorcery* from a dangerous temple.”



Colfer is also known for his 2017 book, *Stranger Than Fanfiction*, which was loosely based on his own experiences with instant celebrity. “I had a pretty wild adolescence,” he says. “I had just turned 18 when I was cast on *Glee*. Overnight, I essentially went from a closeted kid in a small conservative town to the most famous gay teenager in the world. There were many incredible and horrifying moments along the way. I thought those experiences would make an interesting story and give readers a unique perspective on fame, so I wrote *Stranger Than Fanfiction*.”

Colfer seamlessly shifts back and forth from being an actor to being an author. “For me, acting and writing come from the same place because they’re both forms of storytelling,” he says. “When I was younger, I didn’t understand the difference between the two. I thought actors were making up the story as they went along, like kids on a playground.

Now, with a little more experience under my belt, I’d say actors are passengers and writers are the drivers. But if you’re lucky, sometimes you get to be both.”

While he’s unable to offer any details just yet, Colfer says he has some acting projects in the works. “Writing wise, I’ve decided to take a little break so I can decide what’s next,” he says. “I have another series I’d like to start that’s completely separate from the *The Land of Stories* universe. There are also some interesting properties I might be developing into novels or graphic novels soon, or I may just continue with the *A Tale of Magic* series. We’ll see!

For more information about Chris Colfer, *A Tale of Sorcery* and his other books, visit thelandofstories.com. ●

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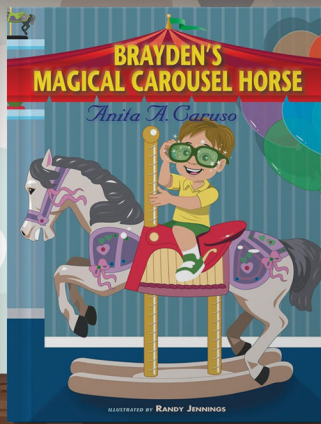
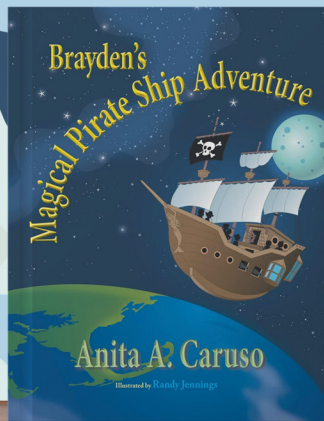


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GAYLE FORMAN

PENS A POWERFUL STORY OF FRIENDSHIP AND FAMILY

by Melissa Fales

In her first middle grade book, *Frankie & Bug*, *New York Times* best-selling author Gayle Forman presents a story about childhood friendship with a timely twist: One of the main characters is trans. At first, Frankie and Bug might seem an unlikely duo, but they bond over the course of the summer as they follow the case of a serial killer on the loose. “When crime hits closer to home, the pair winds up learning much more than they bargained for about love, family, allyship, and how we need to all help create a more just world,” says Forman.

F*rankie & Bug* is set in Southern California in 1987. Eleven-year-old Frankie, a trans boy, lives in Ohio, but he's sent to Venice Beach to stay with his gay uncle for the summer. There, he meets his uncle's neighbor, 10-year-old Bug, who wants to spend her summer playing on the beach. "Bug's mama always tells her that life isn't fair and that the most you can hope for is that it's just," says Forman, but Bug doesn't understand what that means until after that summer.

Forman said she set the book in the past in order to demonstrate how far society has come in terms of acceptance in some areas and how static things have remained in others. "The inspiration for the book was when I began thinking about how social progress that seemed inconceivable to me as a kid—like marriage equality—was now a reality, while other injustices seemed mired in place, or stuck on a repeat cycle," says Forman. "In examining that idea, I realized the book needed to be told looking over my shoulder, so I wrote a 'historical' novel set in 1987."

Forman says she hopes setting the story more than 30 years ago will help readers put the struggles that are still facing our society today in context. "I wanted young readers to see, through Bug's eyes, what the world looked like then, what injustices we were fighting, and which ones we are still fighting, so they might realize that it's on all of us to keep pushing together for a more just world," she says.

"THE INSPIRATION FOR THE BOOK WAS WHEN I BEGAN THINKING ABOUT HOW SOCIAL PROGRESS THAT SEEMED INCONCEIVABLE TO ME AS A KID—LIKE MARRIAGE EQUALITY—WAS NOW A REALITY, WHILE OTHER INJUSTICES SEEMED MIRED IN PLACE, OR STUCK ON A REPEAT CYCLE."

Bug is an extremely relatable character. "I loved Beverly Cleary's *Ramona* books as a child, and rediscovered them as a parent, so maybe it's not surprising that Bug and Ramona share some DNA," says Forman. "Bug is feisty and opinionated and curious about the world—a world that, like many 10-year-olds, she assumes revolves around her needs." Bug's flaws make her all the more likeable. "I love Bug because of how hard she works to be better, even when she sometimes does not succeed," says Forman. "She stumbles, apologizes, and tries again. She has a huge heart, full of love. Also, she cracks me up."

Frankie, on the other hand, "is brave, circumspect, and curious," says Forman. "Despite the world he's in not

knowing what to make of him, he knows what to make of himself." Over time, the two come to earn each other's trust and learn how to support each other. "Like Bug, Frankie is a true and loyal friend," Forman says. "He tries to show up for her the way she needs him to, the same way Bug learns to show up for Frankie in the way he needs. They are both friends, and allies."

The fact that Frankie is trans isn't the most important aspect of *Frankie & Bug*. According to Forman, that's merely one aspect of his personality and there are other characters in the novel who are also often invisible in books for this age group. "All representation is important in middle grade books, including trans kids like Frankie, biracial kids like Bug and her older brother, Danny, gay adults like Phillip, single mothers like mama, and refugees like Hedwig, Bian and Bug's father," she says.

According to Forman, she didn't decide to include a trans main character. "When I started this book in 2013, before authors like Alex Gino were publishing stories about trans kids, before TV shows like *Transparent* and *Pose* featured trans characters and actors, I didn't set out to have trans representation," she says. "It was just that when Frankie came to me, he was trans."

Forman acknowledges that writing about the trans experience was challenging. "I'm cis, and while I spoke

to many trans people of all ages while writing this book, I'm not pretending that I fully can inhabit how it feels to be trans, then or now," she says. "But by telling the story through Bug's perspective, I hope to spotlight just how arbitrary our intolerances and prejudices are, and how we 'move past' some and move on to others. We must recognize this cycle to stop it."

While Forman has written a number of books, she's best known for her 2009 YA novel, *If I Stay*, which was not only a *New York Times* bestseller but was made into a 2014 Warner Brothers feature film starring Chloe Grace Moretz as 17-year-old Mia Hall. Mia, a cellist with hopes of studying at Juilliard, has everything going for her until a horrific car crash changes

everything. “As she hovers between life and death, she reflects on her life as it was, and as it will be trying to decide if she will live, if she will stay,” says Forman. A sequel, *Where She Went*, was released in 2011.

Forman has a hunch as to why *If I Stay* has been so well received. “I think because it is a story about all kinds of love: family love, romantic love, friendship love, music love, and even though it is also a story about dying, love is what gives grief its potency,” she says. “This is something we don’t talk about much in our culture, so I suspect a book that honestly depicts grief, as love left behind, resonates and creates a universal and cathartic read.”

Earlier this year, Forman released her latest YA novel, *We Are Inevitable*. “It’s set in a failing indie bookstore and is a hopeful, funny book about the importance of books, booksellers, and of community,” she says.

Next, look for a novel by Forman about a 105-year-old man and his relationship with a teenage girl who is a volunteer at his nursing home. “It’s another story of redemption and found family that I love,” says Forman. “And I just started working on my next middle grade novel, set in present day, told over a different life-changing summer.”

Frankie & Bug is due to be released Oct. 11. For more information about Gayle Forman and her other books, visit gayleforman.com and find her on Twitter/FB/Insta: @gayleforman and on TikTok: @gayleformanbooks. ●

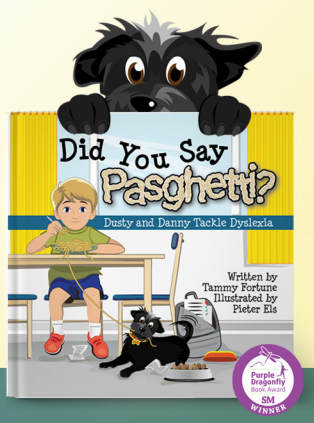


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CHRISTIAN MCKAY HEIDICKER

SCRIBES A SCARY NEW TALE

by Melissa Fales

Before he became a children's author, Christian McKay Heidicker held a variety of jobs, including teaching positions in locales as varied as Beverly Hills, Utah, and Japan. His newest book, *Scary Stories for Young Foxes: The City*, is the follow up to his 2019 release *Scary Stories for Young Foxes*, a Newbery Honor book. Earning the prestigious award validates the choice that Heidicker made to leave his other interests behind to pursue a literary career. "All it took was 12 solid years of tears and fear and prioritizing my art over absolutely everything else," he says. "I do not recommend this approach because it's really unhealthy, but it seems to have worked out in the end."

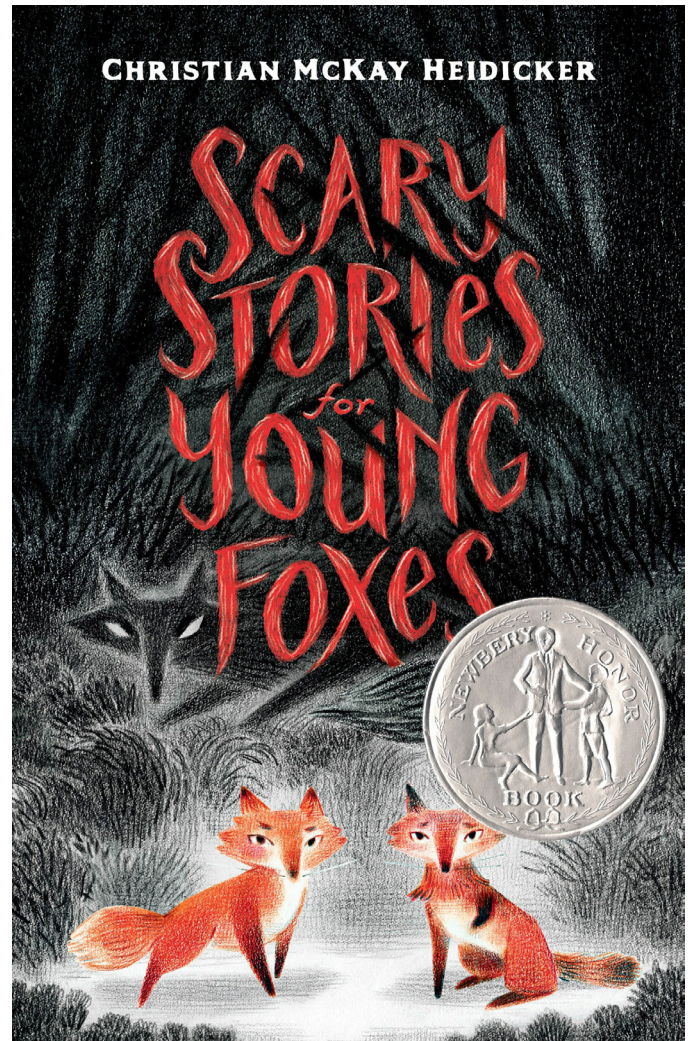


Heidicker specializes in stories that provide young readers with thrills and chills. It's a sensation he recalls seeking out as a child, watching horror movies that would sometimes have long-lasting effects on his psyche. "I avoided the guest bedroom for three years because it looked too much like one of the rooms in *Pet Sematary*," he says.

The appeal of being scared by a movie or a book, according to Heidicker, is that the human body's response to the fictional threat is the same as if it were real. "Whenever you discover a truly chilling story, your senses grow electric as if you're in *actual danger*," he says. "If you can reassure yourself that you are in fact perfectly safe, it's exhilarating. If not ... it's miserable."

Some people may also enjoy a good scare to rehearse how they might respond to a scary situation. "I think there's a lot of value in allowing our nervous systems to ride the terror rollercoaster to prepare for those *actual dangers* should they come along," Heidicker says. "I also believe each genre of scary story speaks to a different part of our deep selves. Ghost stories are about the past coming back to haunt us. Everyone knows that feeling. It's nice to exorcise it through a scary story sometimes."

Scary Stories for Young Foxes gives young readers plenty of scares. "It's a retelling of classic horror tropes (vampires, zombies, witches, ghosts) but with scientifically accurate fox experiences," says Heidicker. "So, a rabies outbreak is a



"IT'S A RETELLING OF CLASSIC HORROR TROPES (VAMPIRES, ZOMBIES, WITCHES, GHOSTS) BUT WITH SCIENTIFICALLY ACCURATE FOX EXPERIENCES.... THE BOOK ALSO EXPLORES THE REASONS WE TELL SCARY STORIES. WHAT HAPPENS IF WE PROTECT OUR KIDS/KITS FROM THE TERRORS OF THE WORLD? WHAT HAPPENS IF WE TELL THEM TOO MUCH?"

zombie story. A white-furred thing that camouflages with the snow and is therefore invisible to fox eyes is a ghost story. The book also explores the reasons we tell scary stories. What happens if we protect our kids/kits from the terrors of the world? What happens if we tell them too much?"

Now, *Scary Stories for Young Foxes: The City* provides more goosebumps, but this time in an urban setting, which Heidicker says is logical. "Red foxes thrive in cities," he says. "It's a major part of their lives today because, well, it has to

be. They den in garages and basements, find food in trash bins instead of hunt it, and tune their senses to different threats like poison and exterminators and cars. Not including a city setting would mean not capturing the full red fox experience."

Heidicker's inspiration for the *Scary Stories for Young Foxes* books were the classic *Berenstain Bears* books like *The Spooky Old Tree* and *The Spooky Old House*. "I swapped in foxes because I didn't want to rip off the Berenstains entirely, and foxes looked pleasant in my head," he says. "When

my agent told me my approach was too anthropomorphic, I tried making the stories more scientifically accurate, finding parallels between foxes and horror tropes. The kit heroes, Mia and Uly, gradually manifested out of that wilderness of ideas.”

During the writing process, Heidicker discovered that the characters featured in *Scary Stories for Young Stories* had their own ideas for the storyline. “When I wrote Mia into the first story, Miss Vix, I didn’t think she was going to be in more than that one scene, let alone become a main character,” he says. “I wanted one of the siblings to be funny, and Mia stepped up. When I reached the end of that very dark story, I brought the funny kit back to lighten things up a little. I was so relieved to discover Mia had survived that I followed her and her mom to see what would happen next.”

In addition to its winning the 2020 Newbery Honor, *Scary Stories for Young Foxes* will be adapted into an animated miniseries. When asked why he thinks his book about two fox kits has been so well received, Heidicker credits his “incredible editor and publishing team” and praises “Junyi’s incredible” illustrations. “In my mind, telling scary stories to fox kits feels unique yet strangely familiar,” he says. “That helped the story stand out, I think. I wasn’t interested in writing a dark book for darkness’ sake, so I dug deep into the heart of each story to discover what certain subgenres of horror really mean (to me, at least). Zombies, for example, could be about what happens when someone you know and trust suddenly turns on you. I wanted to provide a fun, spooky outlet for kids to explore these difficult but universal emotions.”

Speaking of emotions, Heidicker shares how he felt when he learned *Scary Stories for Young Foxes* was a Newbery Honor book. “My face went numb, I started to cry, and I told the committee I loved them,” he says. “It was an absolute dream come true. It meant my work meant something and I would get to continue to do the best job in the world. I still get goosebumps thinking about it.”

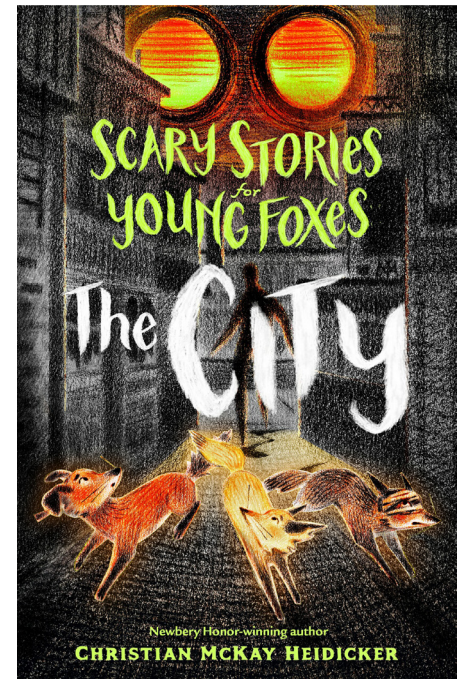
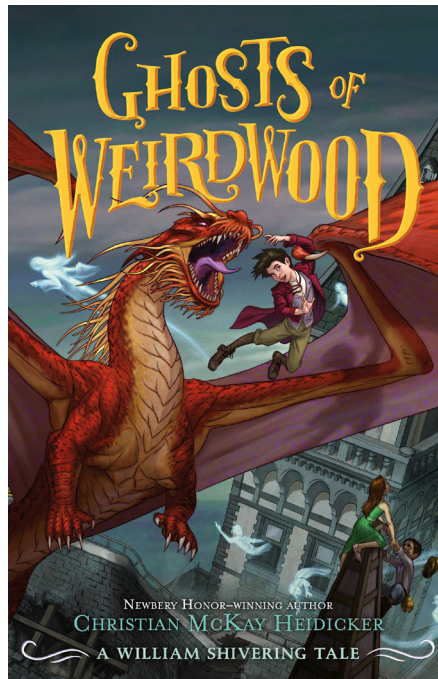
Heidicker also writes *The Thieves of Weirdwood* trilogy under the pen name

William Shivering and is currently finishing the final book in the series, *Nightmares of Weirdwood*. The trilogy has one message: “Art is magic,” says Heidicker. “That’s the whole setup.” The books follow two 12-year-old thieves, Arthur and Wally, who unwittingly end up in the middle of a battle between two groups with vastly different ideologies: “One that wants to tear down the Veil between reality and imagination and one that wants to protect it at all cost,” he explains.

The Thieves of Weirdwood trilogy is tied into the globally popular children’s storytelling app, *Weirdwood Manor*, which is consistently ranked as the most popular kids’ app on iTunes. “This trilogy takes place 100 years before the app,” says Heidicker. “It tells the origin story of Arthur Weirdwood, the architect of *Weirdwood Manor* in its current iteration. Although, I will say that the story ends up being more about Arthur’s good friend Wally Cooper and how his selflessness ends up shaping Arthur’s legacy.”

Looking ahead, Heidicker is eager to jump into his next project. “The moment *Nightmares of Weirdwood* is finished, I’ll start work on a graphic novel about loneliness,” he says. “I am soooooo excited. It’s my favorite idea since *Scary Stories for Young Foxes*.”

For more information about Christian McKay Heidicker and his other books, visit cmheidicker.com or find him on Facebook or on Twitter @cmheidicker. ●





CHANGEMAKER

JULIANA MARSTON

by Melissa Fales

Young environmentalist Juliana Marston felt so strongly about preserving clean water, she started her own non-profit organization, Clean Lakes Education and Research (CLEAR), to help educate young people about the environment. Currently a freshman at Northeastern University where she's studying Biochemistry, Marston has not only submitted an application for a patent for a water filtration device she invented, but she also recently published her first children's book, *Something in the Water*. It's based on her own story and her own environmental research about algae and its harmful effects on water quality. "The book not only teaches kids about algae but is meant to inspire them to take an interest in the importance of clean water," says Marston.



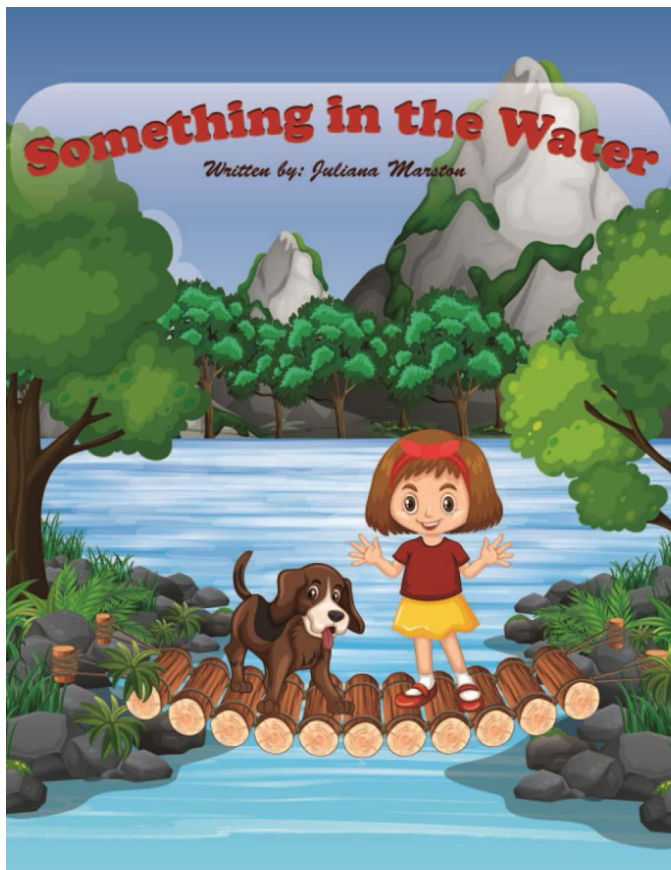
Marston has been aware of Harmful Algae Blooms in water since she was a kid. “My local lake has been prone to algae blooms every summer for as long as I can remember,” she says. “These blooms take over the water, making it murky and brown. I would wonder what it was and where it came from. As a kid, I used to find it gross. Coming out of the water after swimming I would have algae stuck all over my skin and clothes. My friends and I used to avoid the lake when this happened, which took away our main source of entertainment.”

Instead of just complaining about the lake’s condition, Marston took action. “I became incredibly interested in algae bloom prevention,” she says. “This prompted me to research algae blooms in high school. I wrote a research paper on algae and the toxins they produce, “Potassium Permanganate: a Possible Solution to Cyanotoxin Removal” and it was published in the International Journal of Modern Agriculture this year.

Marston also wanted to share the experience of the algae-ridden lake as a children’s book to get them thinking about the environment. “Beyond that, I wanted to inspire kids to look at problems they see in the world, environmental or not, and explore innovative solutions to them,” she says. “Sometimes all it takes is a little inspiration for great ideas and stories to start.”

“I WANTED TO INSPIRE KIDS TO LOOK AT PROBLEMS THEY SEE IN THE WORLD, ENVIRONMENTAL OR NOT, AND EXPLORE INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS TO THEM. SOMETIMES ALL IT TAKES IS A LITTLE INSPIRATION FOR GREAT IDEAS AND STORIES TO START.”

Something in the Water introduces a narrator named Juliana who has found an algae monster called HAB (standing for Harmful Algae Bloom) in her town’s lake. “She and her dog work to tame the monster and make him friendly,” Marston



says. “In researching algae bloom prevention, Juliana discovers how aquatic plants, reducing agricultural runoff, and more can make our aquatic ecosystems healthier.”

Marston says writing *Something in the Water* wasn’t all that different from writing a research paper. “It’s all about capturing your audience’s attention, whether that be through scientific studies or a fun narrative,” she says. “What are you writing about and why is it important? How can the topic be used to inspire others? These are questions you have to answer both as a researcher and children’s book author.”

Soon, Marston will be releasing an activity/coloring book for children. “This activity book was designed to be a companion book to *Something in the Water*,” she says. “There are science experiments that correspond to different parts of Juliana’s journey in the first book. It also has fun coloring, crossword, and matching activities that help kids learn about HABs and clean water in an engaging and creative way.”

Marston says she does hope to write more books. “I really enjoyed taking my story and turning it into a children’s book,” she says. “I hope it inspires kids to pursue STEM and become innovative problem solvers in society. While *Something in the Water* is aimed at a younger audience, I



envision branching out to older audiences as well in the future.”

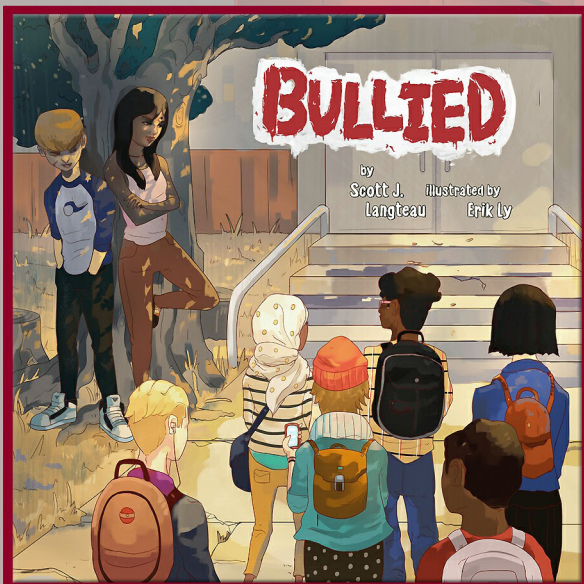
While at Northeastern, Marston plans to continue her research into cyanotoxins and build up her non-profit organization. “Clean water is a growing issue across the globe and educating students about this topic as well as encouraging innovative solutions to water purification are important goals of this nonprofit,” she says. She also plans to move forward with her water filtration device once she acquires the patent on it, which uses aquatic plants to absorb excess nutrients in water, preventing harmful algae blooms. “These plants can also be harvested to be used as livestock feed, biofuel, and more, making the system I created applicable in multiple areas from renewable energy to food science,” she says.

Marston says she is eager to spread the word about clean water to children. Not only because they will someday run the world, but because she wants them to be inspired to learn more about water and its preservation at a young age, like she was. “I think that kids are incredibly creative; encouraging



their innovation and problem-solving skills is an important goal for me as an author and as someone whose inspiration as a researcher stems from her childhood experiences,” says Marston. “It is my hope that younger students will be inspired to take on the challenge of understanding and remediating the damage that has been done to our world’s complex aquatic ecosystem.”

For more information about Juliana Marston, *Something in the Water* and CLEAR, visit cleanlakeseducationandresearch.com. ●



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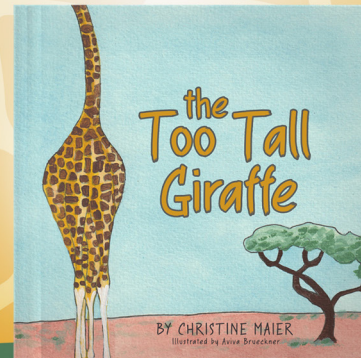
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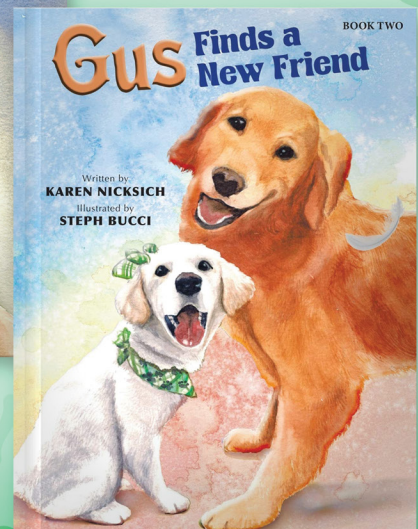
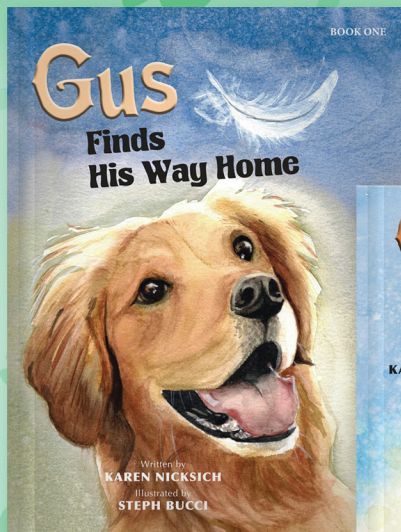
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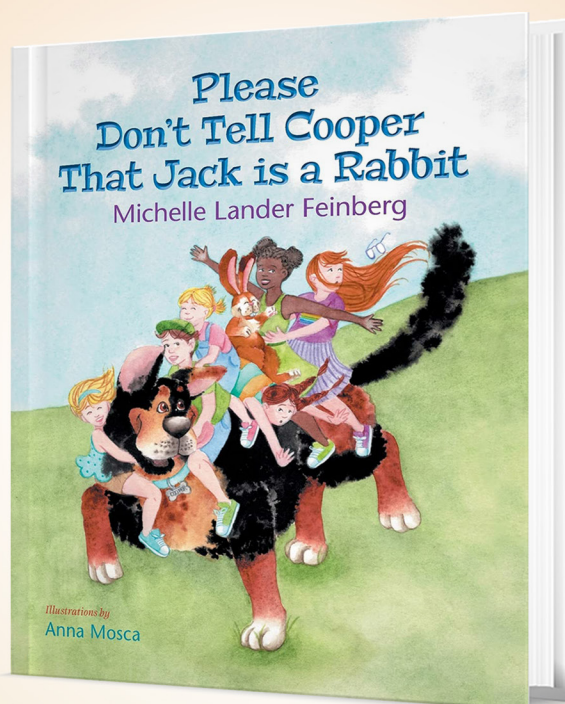
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CHRIS SKINNER

INVITES KIDS TO GO WHERE NO SWEET HAS GONE BEFORE

by Melissa Fales

Bestselling author Chris Skinner is known for his expertise in the area of financial technology, most notably with his books, *Digital Bank* and its popular sequel, *Digital Human*. Now, the father of twin boys is branching out into children's books with his new book, *Meet the Candy Crew*, the first in his new *Captain Cake* series of books for kids. "At the end of the day, the main lessons of the *Captain Cake* series are about friendship and teamwork," says Skinner. "The message for children is that everyone has their own set of strengths and weaknesses. The books equally try to demonstrate that we need to learn to respect everyone's differences."



The inspiration for the *Captain Cake* series came from Skinner's twin sons, Freddie and Eddie, who are now age five. "I don't know if other parents have had the same problem, but when they were four, it was hard to find appropriate books that they would enjoy," says Skinner. "They got fed up with Beatrix Potter and they wanted something more exciting. I was struggling to find something between *Winnie the Pooh* and *Batman*." Skinner's efforts to find a happy medium evolved into the adventures of *Captain Cake and the Candy Crew*.

Skinner tailored the concept to exactly the type of tale his 4-year-old twins would enjoy. "They loved the idea of sweets," he says. *Meet the Candy Crew* offers young readers an introduction to the capable crew of the spaceship, The Sweet Candy. General Rock has assembled a strong team that includes Captain Cake, Lieutenant Chocolate, Private (Sweet) Potato, and Sergeant Jelly. "I wanted to have a diverse group of characters," says Skinner. "It was important to show that each of them has a special skill that makes them invaluable to the team."

Captain Cake is the fearless leader. "He's always willing to jump into battle," says Skinner. Sergeant Jelly is the bravest member of the team. "She always rescues Captain Cake when he gets into trouble, which is often," says Skinner. Lieutenant Chocolate is always logical when it comes to solving problems. "Most of the crew has special superpowers, like being able to throw sweets," says Skinner. "Private Potato has no special powers, but she might be the most important member of the whole team because she's the only one who knows how to fix the engines. And that's someone you definitely want to have on your team when you're flying through space."

Although the description for *Meet the Candy Crew* featured on Amazon suggests that the book is for kids ages 9 to 12, Skinner says he's designed the books for parents and teachers to read to children ages three to five, and for kids ages five to seven to read on their own. "It's all very silly," he says. "These are superheroes they can relate to. Most children like the idea of sweets."



“AT THE END OF THE DAY, THE MAIN LESSONS OF THE CAPTAIN CAKE SERIES ARE ABOUT FRIENDSHIP AND TEAMWORK. THE MESSAGE FOR CHILDREN IS THAT EVERYONE HAS THEIR OWN SET OF STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES. THE BOOKS EQUALLY TRY TO DEMONSTRATE THAT WE NEED TO LEARN TO RESPECT EVERYONE’S DIFFERENCES.”

Throughout the series, Captain Cake and the Candy Crew have a whole universe to explore, and as they do, they provide an early introduction to our solar system. “As the Candy Crew flies through space, kids will learn about the different planets the spaceship flies by,” says Skinner. “It’s learning, but it’s learning while they are having fun.”

The next book in the *Captain Cake* series, *Commander Pickle is in a Pickle*, will be released at the end of the year. Again, Skinner promises that it will be a silly adventure

that kids will enjoy. “Commander Pickle is always in some kind of trouble,” he says. “Commander Pickle and General Rock are part of a fleet led by Admiral Mousse.”

In *Commander Pickle is in a Pickle*, General Rock makes a jar of pickles come to life while playing with a special ray gun presented to him by Admiral Mousse. When the pickles start running around the room, General Rock feels guilty about playing with something he shouldn’t have. Skinner asks the readers if they’ve ever experienced that feeling. “Throughout all of the books, I regularly ask questions,” he says. “I ask, ‘Do you ever get into trouble?’ and ‘What would you do if you were in this situation?’ I think these are good questions for parents to ask their kids, to help build personal skills and social understanding.” Skinner says he’s tried to present these themes in a way that children will welcome. “The messages are there in a subtle way,” he says. “It’s not an obvious lesson that children will feel is being forced upon them.”

There are at least three more books on the way, with the potential for more. “Each book builds on the last,” says Skinner. “I’ve had many reviews from mothers who say that these are the types of books that they can read to their children over and over again.”

In addition to writing for adults and children, Skinner is a co-founder of The Portrait Foundation, a non-profit organization, created to help children develop their creativity. The Portrait Foundation has been active in Europe since 2019 when Skinner joined with Basia Hamilton, a leading portrait artist, to form it. “Now we’re launching a competition in the United States,” says Skinner. The contest invites children to paint a portrait of their mother. Prizes, such

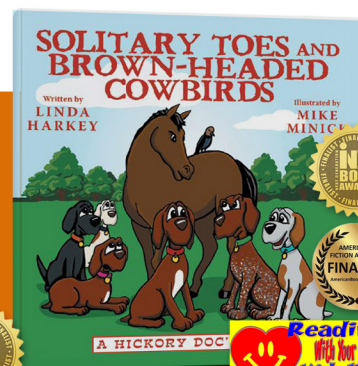
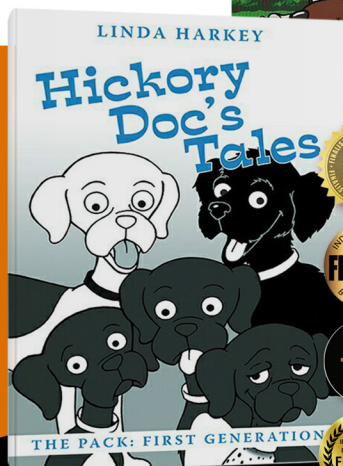
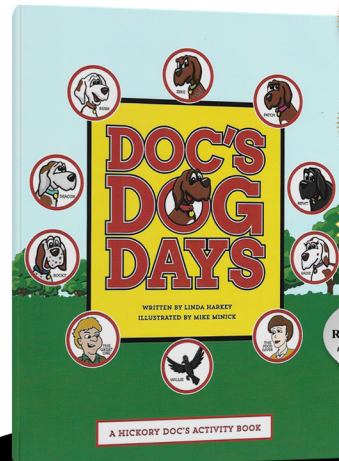
as art sets, bikes, and even iPads, are awarded to celebrate these burgeoning artists and encourage them to continue to explore art as a way to express themselves. Skinner asks anyone interested in donating to the Portrait Foundation or participating in the contest to visit portraitfoundation.com.

For more information on Chris Skinner and his books, visit captaincake.com. ●

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MAE RESPICIO'S

NEW MIDDLE GRADE NOVEL IS GOOEY FUN

by Melissa Fales

photo by Katherine Emery Photography

In her new middle grade novel, *How to Win a Slime War*, author Mae Respicio continues her tradition of featuring Filipino main characters in a nod to her own heritage. *How to Win a Slime War* introduces 12-year-old Alex, who moves back to Sacramento with his father to help operate their family's struggling Filipino market. The book also explores the rift between Alex and his dad over Alex's general disinterest in sports and other traditionally "male" activities. "Ultimately Alex learns what his passion is and what winning really means with the help of some (literally!) sticky situations along the way," says Respicio. "I had a ball writing this book, and I hope kids will have as much fun reading it as I did taking Alex and his friends through this journey."

Respicio credits her mother, an elementary school teacher, with instilling her with a love of reading. “I still have very vivid memories of her taking me to the library and my elation in getting to browse through books ... then checking out a tall tower,” she says. “I try to do that with my kids now and I let them pick out whatever they want, which is usually graphic novels. It’s been my way of trying to instill a love of reading in them as well. We’re a huge reading family. We make a trip to the library almost once a week.”

Some of Respicio’s favorite authors as a kid were Judy Blume and Beverly Cleary. “I read their stories over and over,” she says. “I’m sure their books planted a seed in me of wanting to explore kids who are discovering the world around them while still having fun, with very real moments of emotion and everyday life sprinkled in. That’s what I always aim for in my own writing.”

For Respicio, there was never any doubt as to what she would pick for a career. “I’m one of those people who has always known that I wanted to be a writer,” she says. “When I was a kid, I spent a lot of time writing stories and poems and I’ve always carried that passion with me, even into college and my professional life.”

Respicio says she’s done many kinds of writing over the years. “I’ve pretty much done the gamut of writing gigs; everything from copywriting to writing for magazines and news stations,” she says. “Writing a novel was always a big dream though, and something I chipped away at in the background through workshops and fellowships.” Once she had children, Respicio had to put her dream of writing on hold temporarily. “When my kids were finally older and in school, I started carving out time again to try and write a book,” she says. “That’s when I wrote my first middle grade novel, *The House That Lou Built*.”

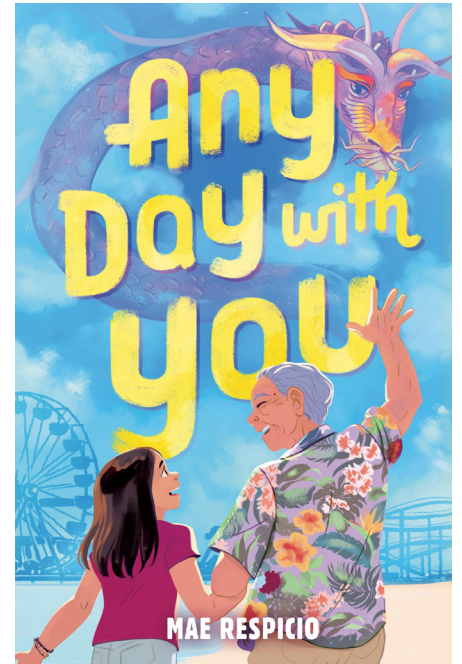
The House That Lou Built, released in 2018, won the Asian/Pacific American Library Association Honor Award for Children’s Literature and was named an NPR Best Book of the Year. “It’s about a girl named Lou who has the big dream of building a tiny house,” she says. “She’s a persistent kid and while not everyone believes she can accomplish her goal, she rallies her friends and family to help. As she’s physically building her house, she’s also building the confidence inside her, and learning what a ‘home’ can mean.”



Despite being a bookworm, Respicio says she always felt something was missing in the books she read. “I never saw myself or my culture as a mirror in the books I read as a kid in the 1980s,” she says. “Books with Filipino American characters simply didn’t exist back then. When my own kids were born, I started filling our shelves at home with kids’ books and I thought, ‘There have to be books out now with Filipino American characters!’ Sadly, there were not, but that was one thing that sparked *The House That Lou Built* ... I wrote that book for my boys. I wanted them to have a story where they could see themselves and their culture; a book that had both windows and mirrors. I didn’t know if that story would ever see the light of day, but it was still important to me to write it for them. I’m so glad that I did.”

In 2020, Respicio released *Any Day with You*. “It’s a bright and tender story about a girl named Kaia whose life is turned upside down when her tatang (grandfather) decides that he’s ‘returning home’ to the Philippines after living with Kaia for her whole life,” says Respicio. “Kaia decides to convince him to stay by making a movie about the Filipino folklore he loves to tell and entering it into a big contest.”

The Tatang character isn’t based on Respicio’s own grandparents. “I think I put a little bit of the very most positive people in my life into that one character,” she says. “He’s the type of person who knows how to live life and how to find the best in



“I NEVER SAW MYSELF OR MY CULTURE AS A MIRROR IN THE BOOKS I READ AS A KID IN THE 1980S. BOOKS WITH FILIPINO AMERICAN CHARACTERS SIMPLY DIDN’T EXIST BACK THEN... THAT WAS ONE THING THAT SPARKED *THE HOUSE THAT LOU BUILT* ... I WROTE THAT BOOK FOR MY BOYS.”

situations—he’s undoubtedly got a growth mindset—and I find him really inspiring in that way.”

Tatang’s storyline of wanting to return to his homeland was loosely based on an experience of Respicio’s. “My maternal grandparents, who lived in California for decades, decided to go back to their homeland and heart-home of the Philippines,” she says. “I was an adult by that point, but I thought it would be interesting to look at that common type of immigration story through the eyes of a kid.”

In *How to Win a Slime War*, Respicio writes about the slime trend that children have recently embraced. The main character, Alex, competes in a slime war to see who can make and sell the most slime. “Alex is like so many kids I’ve had the pleasure of meeting during school visits,” says Respicio. He’s a dreamer and a doer—one of those kids where once he has an idea in his head, he won’t let it go until it’s accomplished, and he’s given it his all. He’s a kid who learns a lot about himself that way.”

All Respicio’s books have one thing in common. “I realize how much I love writing about creative kids with big dreams,” she says. “They are all kids I would have loved to be friends with!”

According to Respicio, her next project will be another middle grade novel. “It’s still untitled, but it’s about a 12-year-old girl whose summer is turned upside-down when she discovers some mysterious poems hidden behind a wall, and she and her friends try to track down the owner,” says Respicio. “The poems tell the story of another 12-year-old girl from 1999, who’s unexpectedly separated from her mother.” Yes, the story is suspenseful, but it will also elicit a wide range of reader emotions. “There’s a lot of heart-filled adventure in this book, but just as many ‘get your tissues ready’ moments,” says Respicio. “Of all my books this is my favorite so far ... and I can’t wait for readers to connect with it.”

For more information about Mae Respicio and her other books, visit maerespicio.com or follow her on Twitter @maerespicio and on Instagram @maerespiciobooks. ●

ONE TO READ:

LISI HARRISON

by Melissa Fales

Author Lisi Harrison knows exactly what middle grade girls want to read. Harrison's books are about the most important things in these young girls' lives: trying to do well in school, having fun with best friends, and experiencing crushes on cute boys. The second and latest book in Harrison's new *Girl Stuff* series, *Crush Stuff*, to be released on September 28, brings readers into the daily lives of seventh-grade pals Drew, Fonda, and Ruthie. "In this one, each of the girls has some severe boy drama—serious and funny boy drama," says Harrison.



In the early 1990s, Harrison started a job at MTV. She would remain at the network for over a decade. “It was a special place in that it was entirely run by young creatives, not middle-aged men like most of the other TV networks at the time,” says Harrison. “There were very few rules and endless opportunities. In the 12 years I was there, I was a casting director, a production assistant, a segment producer, a sportswriter, a head writer, and a development executive.”

During her time at MTV, Harrison wrote what would become novels *The Clique* and *Best Friends for Never*. “I didn’t set out to be a middle-grade writer,” she says. “I wanted to write about life at MTV. The social climbing, the insecurity, the on-again-off-again romances, the dysfunction, the hysterical laughter, and the life-long bonds. Then I figured, why not take those emotions and themes, and set them in a universally relatable time and place: middle school.”

The Clique, released in 2004, set Harrison apart for her captivating portrayals of frenemies: girls who act friendly to others, but are only out for themselves. “*The Clique* series focused on materialistic best friends who competed for social status,” says Harrison.

Harrison’s *Girl Stuff* series differs from *The Clique* in that the characters are supportive of each other and have each other’s best interest at heart. “I wanted to explore female friend groups in a way that celebrated female friendship,” she says. “I wanted these characters to have each other’s backs instead of stabbing them. Life is hard enough these days without social drama. On the surface, this new book is a series about the challenges of growing up. Below that surface, it’s about the power of female friendship. We can survive anything and even laugh about it if we pick the right friends.”

Harrison says she set out to write a book that would represent the way female friendships are today. “Our culture has changed a lot since I started writing and the *Girl Stuff* series reflects that change,” she says. “Portraying girls as catty, manipulative, materialistic, and status-obsessed perpetuates false stereotypes. Girls are also supportive, strong, self-assured, ambitious, funny, and brave. I wanted to focus on that.”

Crush Stuff picks up where book one in the series, *Girl Stuff*, left off. In this volume, the girls each have something going on. “Fonda is competing with Henry for control of the annual seventh-grade sleepover,” says Harrison. “Drew thinks another girl is moving in on Will. And Ruthie starts tutoring her sort-of-cute neighbor only to discover he has a shocking secret. It’s a fun one!”



Harrison’s writing breathes verisimilitude into the *Girl Stuff* series characters who aren’t based on specific real-life people but are heavily inspired by the girls who attend middle school in her community. “My son is in eighth grade, so I’m in it,” says Harrison. “I have always been impressed by how intelligent, down-to-earth, and supportive his female friends are... ”

The *Girl Stuff* series characters are relatable and not perfect, and neither are their friendships. “There’s still drama, hurt feelings, and broken hearts,” says Harrison. “Their struggles, however, aren’t born out of social climbing and backstabbing. They are born out of being human.” Not only are Harrison’s characters believable, they’re extremely likeable. “They are also sporty and goofy and have that laid-back Laguna Beach, California, style that I constantly reference,” she says.

Other books by Harrison include *Alphas*, *Pretenders*, and *Monster High*. Her popular *The Pack* series is set at a boarding



school for middle grade girls who possess various animal powers. “They are there to learn how to hide their gifts so they can eventually blend into society ... a society hunting them to be studied,” says Harrison. “So, in addition to dealing with the usual friend drama, crushes, and social pressures, these girls have wild animal instincts they need to control. It’s all a metaphor for puberty, individuality, and the question that so many young women face: Do I want to stand out, or do I want to fit in?”

Harrison’s next project will be *Graveyard Girls*, a partnership with horror author Daniel Kraus. “It’s about a secret club of middle-grade girls who meet up at the local cemetery and tell scary stories,” she says. “The stories they tell reflect the real-life drama they’re experiencing. It’s fun, funny, spooky, and will introduce young readers to another group of girls who do friendship well.”

Female friendships have become Harrison’s bailiwick. By the end of this year, she will have 40 novels on the topic under her belt. “I know these relationships well and love

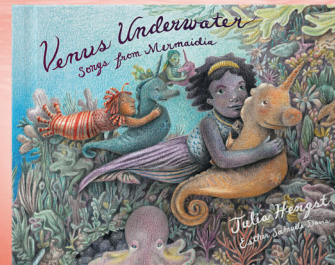
helping young women navigate them,” she says. “Our culture is overflowing with content reflecting the challenges of romantic relationships. And yet, little is dedicated to the challenges of female friendships—a profoundly nuanced, complicated, and painful topic for so many. I want to play a more significant role in advising young women.”

“OUR CULTURE HAS CHANGED A LOT SINCE I STARTED WRITING, AND THE *GIRL STUFF* SERIES REFLECTS THAT CHANGE. PORTRAYING GIRLS AS CATTY, MANIPULATIVE, MATERIALISTIC, AND STATUS-OBSESSED PERPETUATES FALSE STEREOTYPES. GIRLS ARE ALSO SUPPORTIVE, STRONG, SELF-ASSURED, AMBITIOUS, FUNNY, AND BRAVE. I WANTED TO FOCUS ON THAT.”

To that end, Harrison invites readers to post a question or issue on which they’d like her advice on her website, LisiHarrison.com. Harrison will respond to her readers in her blog.

For more information about Lisi Harrison and her books, visit her website or find her on Instagram [@authorlisiharrison](https://www.instagram.com/authorlisiharrison). ●

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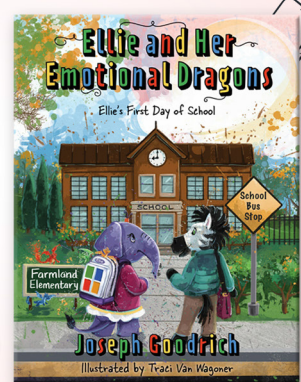
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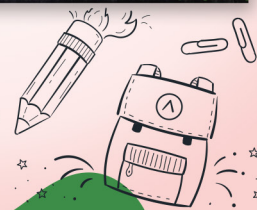


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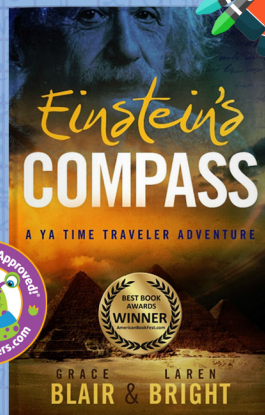
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Join the Bogerman brothers on their exciting adventures in this award-winning series and learn step-by-step how to defeat pirate zombies, bloodthirsty mermaids, killer robots, and even circus werewolves!



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Available from Baker & Taylor, BN.com, booksamillion.com,
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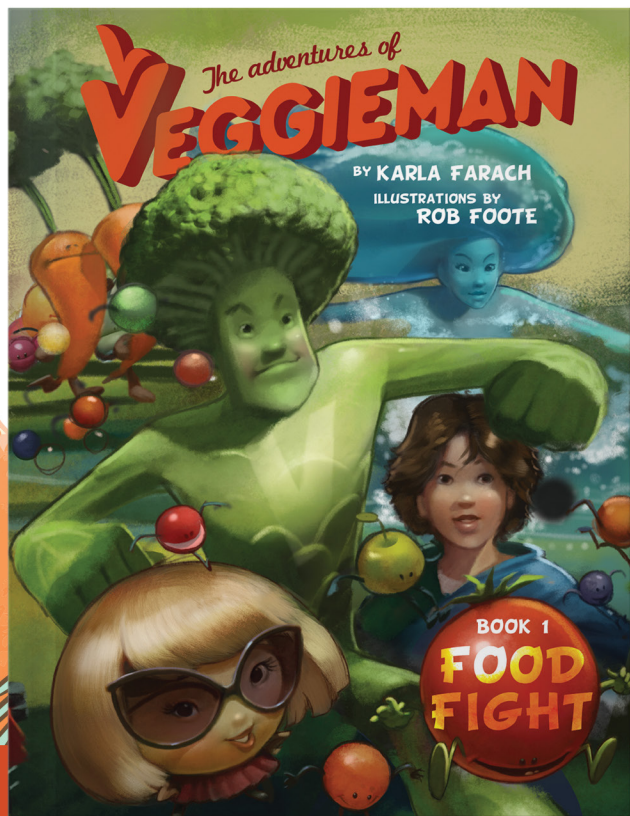
[f](#) [t](#) [i](#) [s](#) [p](#) slugpiestories slugpiestoriesllc slugpiestories

A sticky villain. A powerful superhero. A courageous boy.

When they meet for an epic battle at school, the outcome is by no means clear. Who will win the battle for wellness? Will the students discover their own superpowers before everything unravels?

Parents, children, and educators will discover an empowering, uplifting journey where every child will learn how to use their own superpower to make healthy choices.

Get to know the characters! One side creates chaos and confusion, and the other stands for health and vitality.



For kids ages 6-9.

Available on Amazon.com

www.veggieyman.com

 VEGGIEMAN_KIDS

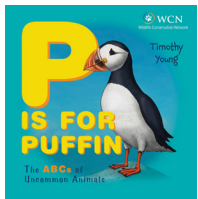
FALL READING LIST



I'm Going To Outer Space!

by Timothy Young

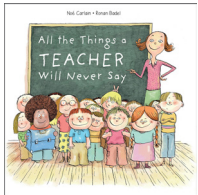
It's almost time for bed, but Luis is staring out the window at the starry sky. Any minute now, he's expecting a spaceship to pick him up and whisk him to outer space. Get lost in outer space as you pore over pages filled with dozens and dozens of robots and aliens. Join Luis to find out all the incredible things he expects to see and do on his daring journey to a distant planet.



P is for Puffin

by Timothy Young

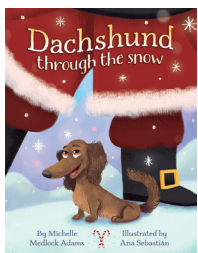
Young readers learning their ABCs and animal lovers of all ages will enjoy the simple facts presented about each unusual animal.



All the Things a Teacher Will Never Say

by Noe Carlain, Ronan Badel

No math today; it's too hard! Said no teacher ever! Can you imagine your teacher saying this or suggesting you keep your gum and not to forget to stick it under the desk? In this comical look at all the things a teacher is never likely to say, kids, parents, and educators alike will laugh out loud at what might happen if the school day was turned upside down.



Dachshund Through the Snow

by Michelle Medlock Adams

The size of your stature is not the measure of your heart. For one tiny Dachshund, this was a mighty big lesson. Crosby was teeny, but he was also the best burrower in the North Pole. He couldn't wait to enter the Arctic Animal Olympics and go for the gold! But when Crosby registers, he encounters bullying. Embarrassed, Crosby burrows fast and far away, running smack-dab into a stranded Santa and his destiny.



Something in the Water

by Juliana Marston

Something in the Water is a motivating true story that inspires your child to pursue a career in STEM. Have you ever looked at a lake only to find brown, murky water? Juliana discovers the HAB monster in her town. She and her dog work to tame the monster and make him friendly! Join her on her journey. Who knows what problems you'll solve as a young scientist! More information can be found at www.cleanlakeseducationandresearch.com.



Shine Bright: A Tale of Courage

by Melanie Ann

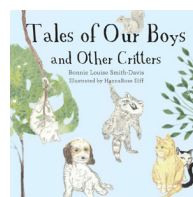
Ann is a new Frog mother, excited to begin the journey of raising her offspring until she soon discovers one of them has stopped growing (or so we think)! But through a twist of fate, Ann's little one unintentionally breaks free from its egg and is forced to confront reality as a frog. Instead of nervous apprehension, this fantastic amphibian dives headfirst into its beautiful new world and emerges with the confidence and self-assurance to SHINE BRIGHT!



Rupert's Snowman

by Phillippa Warden

Rupert's Snowman is a heartwarming Christmas story about a snowman rescue! Young children are sure to love the magic and wonder of a winter wonderland highlighted throughout by beautiful full-page illustrations, with a story written in a dyslexic-friendly font. With its melodic prose and family theme, *Rupert's Snowman* is a perfect holiday gift this season.



Tales of Our Boys and Other Critters

by Bonnie Louise Smith-Davis

Tales of our Boys showcases our four-footed, furry family members and neighborhood critters! Previously unwanted adopted Humane Society boys and their friends provide constant joy and adventure with their incomparable personalities. They are always ready to lend a paw, a lick, a cuddle, or a voice in the safe, fur-ever place we all call home. Simply. Always. Love.



Jazzy and Kettle

by Rick Quinn

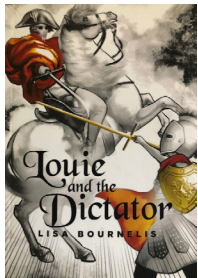
Jazzy and Kettle, two curious children in a new neighborhood, meet, become friends, and decide to go on an adventure into the woods. They find flowers, birds, and other wildlife, all with their own springtime jobs. Their adventure gets them in a tough situation, but that's where they make their most important discoveries: about themselves! They come to understand friendship, the fun of exploration, and how to overcome their fears. They triumph!



Now What?

by Brenda Faatz, Peter Trimarco

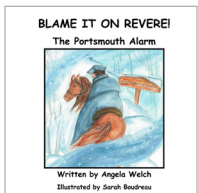
Curiosity, frustration, imagination, and a unique perspective are at the heart of this tale about Lizzy, the protagonist from the "It's Just So" book series. Written in lyrical rhyme, we are taken on a journey through a day that brings personal growth and the meeting of Luna, who just moved from the Caribbean. Together, the two color their way through adventures and embrace the concept of "living in the now" while being creative with what life presents. Releases October 12, 2021. Available through IPG, Ingram, Follett. ISBN 9781733354820.



Louie and the Dictator

by Lisa Bournelis

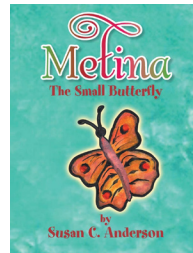
An uplifting children's or tween novella perfect for those feeling anxious about school, life, and the 'new normal'. Inspired by her child's experiences with mental health challenges during the pandemic, "Louie and the Dictator" is a rollicking adventure of a boy, his dog, and the battles he faces with an authoritarian mastermind who is never far away. A great read to incorporate into classrooms to explore how shifts in mindsets can transform individual circumstances. Perfect for children struggling with anxiety or mental health challenges to see themselves as heroes of their own stories.



Blame It On Revere! The Portsmouth Alarm

by Angela Welch

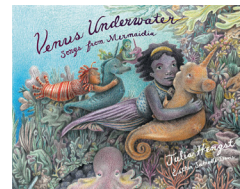
Paul Revere's famous ride in April of 1775 is well known by many. However, his first ride took place on a cold, stormy day in December of 1774 where he headed to the quiet coastal town of Portsmouth in the colony of New Hampshire. What message was so important that led to this journey? Read about the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



Metina the Small Butterfly

by Susan C. Anderson

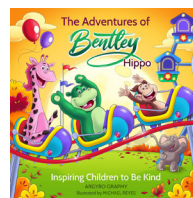
Metina the Small Butterfly enhances a positive sense of self, by increasing self-awareness and fostering a healthy self-image in young readers. Metina is so small, she doesn't feel anyone will notice her. However, before she knows it, she is helping other animals solve their problems and even saves a baby calf from the bottom of a large pit! But how? She's so small and a butterfly on top of it!



Venus Underwater: Songs from Mermaidia

by Julia Hengst

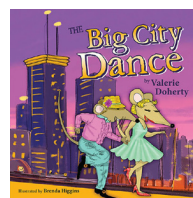
Venus Underwater: Songs from Mermaidia introduces the underwater world of Mermaidia. This humorous and whimsical collection of poems and songs reveals how baby mermaids are made, what mermaid families are like, and how mermaids study magic at School of the Fish to become Sea Witches. Created by family therapist Julia Hengst, the *Venus and Her Fly Trip* series is a mind bender that promotes self-esteem, confidence and social/emotional/mental health in a fun, playful way.



The Adventures of Bentley Hippo: Inspiring Children to be Kind

by Argyro Graphy

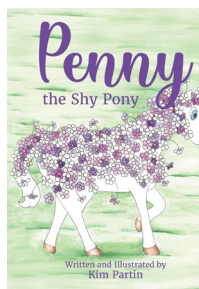
What happens when the bully becomes the victim? There is chaos at the back of the bus. Children are pointing fingers and calling Toby the elephant all sorts of names. The bus stops and Toby's glasses are taken from him. Bentley hippo and the others help look for his glasses when a cry for help is heard in the distance. Will Bentley and the others help, or ignore the cries and continue with their search?



The Big City Dance

by Valerie Doherty, illustrated by Brenda Higgins

Moe Doodle is a country mouse that decides to move to the Big City in search of excitement and adventure. Although he finds plenty of fun, he soon realizes he is homesick and missing his friends. Told in bouncing rhyme and rhythm with incorporated dance movements for young listeners and readers, discover how Moe solves his problems while exploring and living in the Big City. Ideal for children of three years and older.

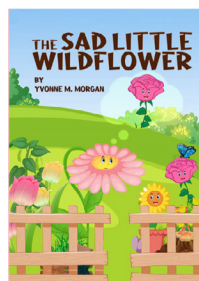


Penny the Shy Pony

by Kim Partin

For Penny the Shy Pony, being different means being an outcast. Afraid that the other ponies will make fun of her or call her weird, she decides to conceal who she really is. This leads her to hide in some pretty creative and silly places around the farm. But when her true self

is finally revealed, Penny realizes being different isn't so bad after all. In fact, maybe what makes her unique is also what makes her the most special pony of all!



The Sad Little Wildflower

by Yvonne M. Morgan

Do you ever wish you were someone else? The *Sad Little Wildflower* wishes she could be a beautiful pink rose instead of just a weed. But, after she meets Jesus, the sad little wildflower learns that she does have a purpose. Our sad little wildflower discovers she can be happy just

the way God made her. Jesus turns her into a sunny pink lady. God reminds us in Psalm 39:14 that "I am wonderfully made."

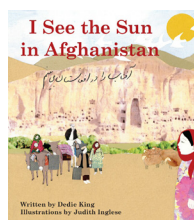


Cowgirl and the Ghost Horse

by Rae Rankin

She's back and this time she's on a quest to find the legendary ghost horse. It will take courage, bravery, and a little bit of luck. Come along and see if maybe, just maybe the legend

is true. *Cowgirl and the Ghost Horse* is a fun, hair-raising, not too scary ghost story your kids are sure to love! *Cowgirl and the Ghost Horse* is recommended for ages 2 and up.



I See the Sun series

from Satya House

Explore the world! Life in different countries seen from a child's point of view. Each of the 10 bilingual picture books in this award-winning series focuses on one country and one day in

the life of one child with a story told from the child's perspective. Learn about different cultures, family life, and languages in a way that is sensitive to each culture. Age-appropriate (5+) country facts, a glossary for extended learning, and more are included in each book. Titles include *I See the Sun in ... Nepal, China, Afghanistan, Russia, Mexico, Turkey, Myanmar (Burma), India, USA, and Botswana*. satyahouse.com

Whether you're coming of age or young at heart...

Orphaned by a rival warlord and bewitched by a ghost, young Taro must reclaim his birthright and discover his destiny as the legendary boy samurai and hero of Japan.

"... an extraordinary coming-of-age saga and highly recommended especially for connoisseurs of ancient legends retold. Highly recommended!"

– Midwest Book Review

"Engaging and fun samurai adventures with a captivating cast."

– Kirkus Reviews

"An exciting, magical coming-of-age adventure book that draws from Japanese folklore and history."

– BookLife by Publishers Weekly



Available in Print, Ebook & Audiobook on www.Amazon.com

www.Taro.fan

B.R.A.G. Medallion Honoree and CIPA Book Award Winner

taro.book

Lavandula is a colorful friend who keeps the bad dreams away!

It all began when Frannie was snuggled in her purple bed, in her purple bedroom, in her purple polka dot pajamas, under her purple bedspread. She had a really bad dream that there was no more purple!

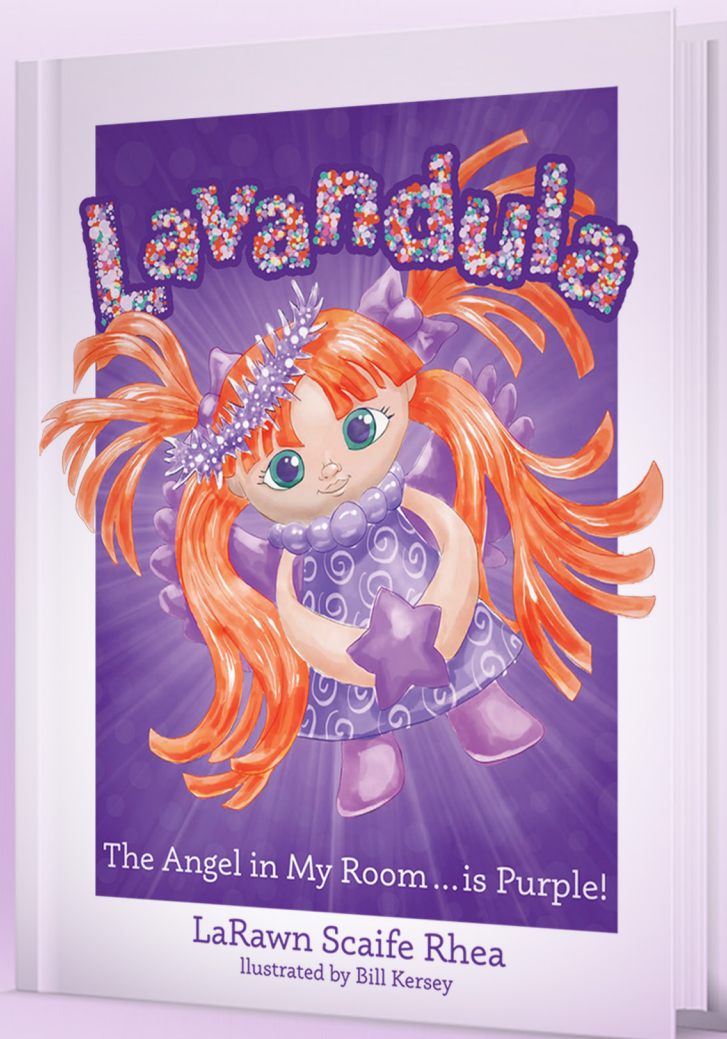
Then the best thing in the whole wide world happened. Her mom introduced her to Lavandula, a purple angel doll. Now when Frannie is afraid, she knows she always has Lavandula looking over her and it makes everything all better!

"This book is absolutely precious in its message and beautifully illustrated!"

- Melanie Perdue-Pace, School Psychologist

"Angels follow us all day long, and during the night time, too! How wonderful that LaRawn has written this delightful book that inspires children to find their angel! They will never be afraid at bedtime again!"

- Janine Turner, Actress & Author



mylavandula.com

The Boss Baby: Family Business

Grade: B-

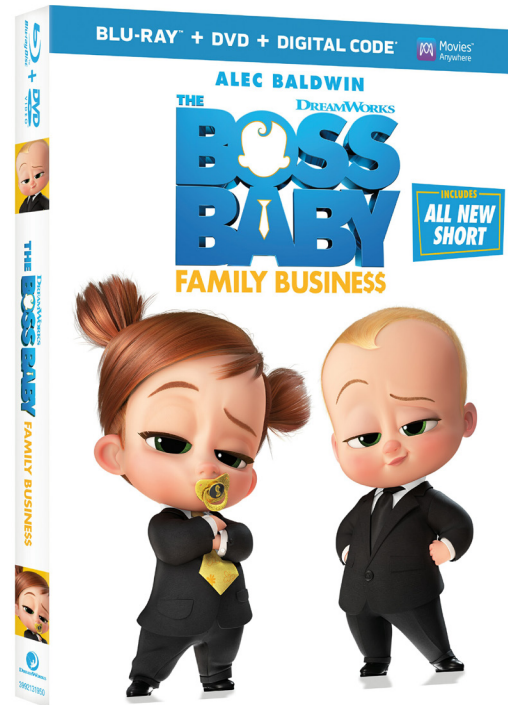
reviewed by Nick Spake

The original *Boss Baby* scored an Oscar nomination, although it's not the first animated feature that comes to mind when most people think of "high-brow art." *The Boss Baby: Family Business* kind of acknowledges this early on. Tim Templeton is now an adult, trading Tobey Maguire's voice for James Marsden's. His first-born Tabitha (Ariana Greenblatt) is getting older as well, questioning the tall tale that Tim told her in the last movie. It made no sense, but the jokes were funny, right? Tabitha responds to that question with a shrug. The sequel doesn't make a ton of sense either, but it is more self-aware and vibrantly animated than its predecessor. While the film has its heartfelt moments, the filmmakers know not to take things that seriously.

Despite being a grown-up now, Tim still has an active imagination. Either that or he's enduring a mid-life crisis and has gone off the deep end. Or maybe talking babies and sentient wizard alarm clocks actually exist in this world. The line between reality and fantasy in this franchise is blurrier than ever. After a while, the audience stops trying to guess whether this is all in Tim's imagination or not. It's best to give in to the sheer silliness and go along for the ride.

Alec Baldwin is back, although the Boss Baby (now named Ted) isn't in diapers anymore. There's a new Boss Baby in town, and her name is Tina, Tim's younger daughter. Amy Sedaris voices Tina with the pizzazz of her Princess Carolyn character. The animation complements Tina's motor-mouth with rapid-fire body language, moving across the screen like a caffeinated Powerpuff Girl. Tina also works for BabyCorp, enlisting her father and Uncle Ted for a mission. Jeff Goldblum naturally slips into the role of Dr. Erwin Armstrong, a school principal who seeks to turn children against their parents. Tina tasks Tim and Ted with going undercover at Armstrong's school for gifted youngsters, which entails turning the brothers into children again.

Armstrong's plans are more devious than BabyCorp anticipated, as they involve eradicating all parents. If you read between the lines, there might be some clever commentary here about Gen Z rebelling against Gen Y and X for the state of the world they'll eventually inherit. Was this the filmmakers' intention? Probably not. Any film with ninja babies and a pony named Precious isn't aiming to be provocative. There are some



interesting generational themes between Tim and his mature children, however. Tabitha and Tina are like grown-ups trapped in little girl bodies. Tim is like a kid trapped in an adult body who's suddenly turned back into a little boy. It's not exactly like *Freaky Friday*, but it does create a similarly intriguing dynamic.

The story really isn't the focus here, however. *Boss Baby: Family Business* is a showcase for cartoon slapstick, and while it doesn't reinvent the wheel, the animators go the extra mile. There's an especially fun city chase that keeps building momentum and insanity, literally snowballing out of control. The animators also bring warmth and whimsy to the occasional quiet scene, most notably the song *Together We Stand* by Gary Barlow of *Finding Neverland*. The DVD includes a lyric video of the sweet tune, along with behind-the-scenes featurettes, a gag reel, and the short *Precious Templeton: A Pony Tale*. For fans of the first film and the *Boss Baby* Netflix series, this sequel is a worthwhile addition to the family business. ●

Nick Spake has been working as a film critic for ten years reviewing movies on his website: nickpicksflicks.com.

A DOG LOVERS' MUST-HAVE!

Dogs are people too! At least, that's what Cooper the rescue dog believes! This hilarious, delightful dog adventure helps to teach young readers about kindness to animals and pet adoption. Children will also learn about a few European places as they follow Cooper on his solo adventure!

"An engaging, lighthearted tale of a beloved canine." - Kirkus Reviews

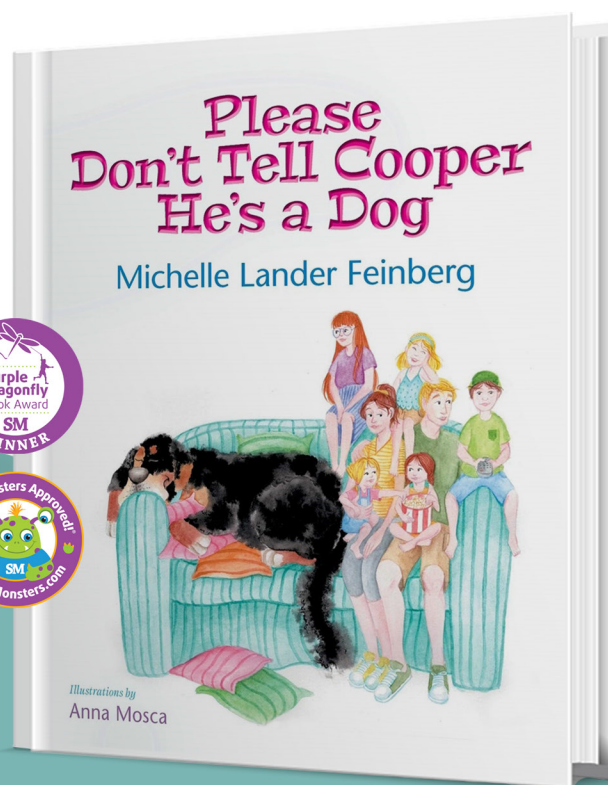
"A grand selection for storytime, Please Don't Tell Cooper He's a Dog is also written at a level that will enable young readers to enjoy reading it on their own. It's most highly recommended."

- Jack Magnus for Readers' Favorite



www.cooperthedog.com

Available to purchase at Amazon.com
and BarnesandNoble.com



 CooperTheDog2020

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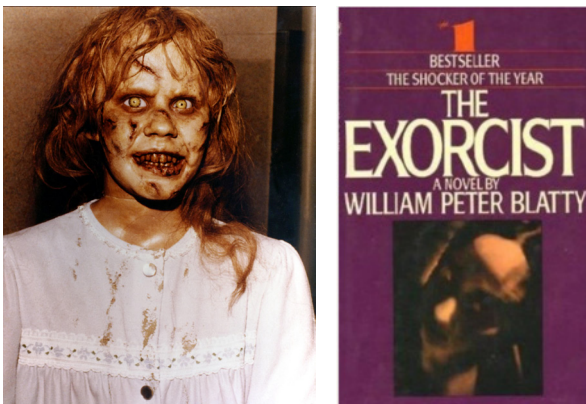
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(NEVER) TOO SCARED TO READ!

I hate reading scary books. Or seeing scary movies. (I am still recovering from reading the 1971 novel *The Exorcist* by William Peter Blatty—which I had to bury on my nightstand so I wouldn’t see the scary cover before bed and Linda Blair’s over-the-top head-turning in the movie version, which I saw the week it came out in 1973 at the Cleveland Circle Cinema outside of Boston.) I never follow true-crime blogs or podcasts or engage with pretty much anything with blood—fake or real.



Still recovering from this!

photo credits, from left to right: © AF archive/Alamy Stock Photo; ©CBW/Alamy Stock Photo; ©Pictorial Press Ltd/Alamy Stock Photo

I’ll take a happy ending or a nice rom-com any day! The ending of *Because of Winn-Dixie* when Opal is reunited with her beloved dog, or the scene in the new movie *Coda* when Ruby sings Joni Mitchell’s “Both Sides Now” to her family (who are deaf) sitting in the balcony during her Berklee College of Music audition, are my kind of moments.

I don’t mind complicated psychological plot twists and deep puzzles, but if things get too frightening, I am out!

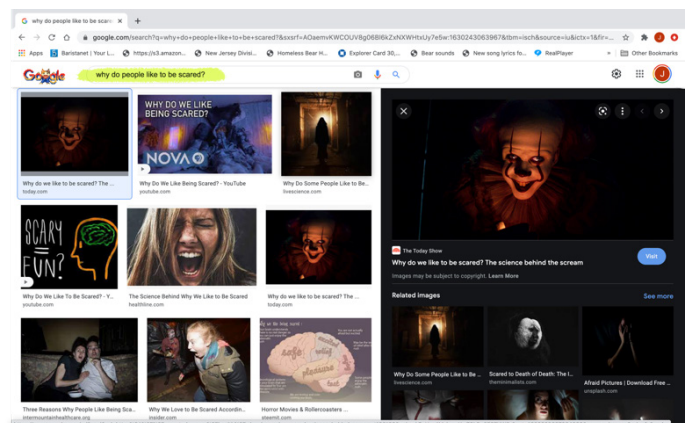


My kind of happy endings

photo credit, right: © Apple TV Plus

My nightstand hosts a teetering pile of books I really loved reading until they got too scary (usually involving a child in peril) and then I had to stop. Email me privately if you want to know what titles are on that broad list.

But, paradoxical as it sounds, many people I know and love really enjoy being terrified. I don’t get it personally, but in my ongoing pursuit of empathy, I’m trying to pay close attention to the issue. I started out to do some research and I got as far as this:



Alana Pedalino, my colleague at Scholastic Book Clubs, is both brave and resourceful, so I asked if she wouldn't mind taking over as researcher on this project. Here's an excerpt from our download:

Me: Thanks for stepping in. Those Google images were too scary for me. So what did you find out? Why do people like to read scary books?

Alana: There are lots of theories out there, but the one I think is most relevant for *Story Monsters Ink* readers comes from award-winning super-scarer Neil Gaiman, bestselling author of *Coraline* and *The Graveyard Book*, among so many other hugely popular titles. Neil's theory is that "fairy tales are more than true: Not because they tell us that dragons exist, but because they tell us that dragons can be beaten."

Me: Well, that makes sense.

Alana: Neil also started this really cool tradition called All Hallows' Read, which reminds me of what we and Scholastic Book Clubs do at your house on Halloween.

Me: What's All Hallows' Read?

Alana: It's Gaiman's initiative that encourages everyone to give each other a scary book to read for Halloween. Neil declares from a cemetery in his [YouTube video](#) that you can see here. "We're not saying 'Don't give candy.' Candy is important, fake blood is important! The point is: Give somebody a scary book. Give kids scary books that kids would like."

Judy, I know you get scared easily, but even you can probably make it through this video.

Me: That is very cool! I will watch the video. It's funny, because of COVID and global supply-chain issues, and the news I read in Montclair Local that they found a rabid raccoon in Montclair—and all kinds of other scary things going on in the world—I was going to cancel our annual Halloween Trick-or-Read event, but you're making me realize it's important to keep going, to give kids the chance to choose a frightening book, and to spread the love of scary (and not so scary) reading. Especially now.

RACCOON FOUND DEAD IN MONTCLAIR TESTS POSITIVE FOR RABIES

August 12, 2021

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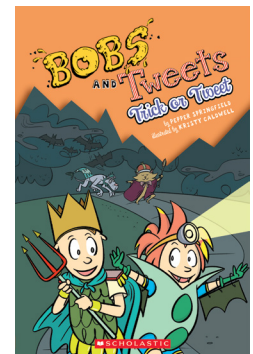
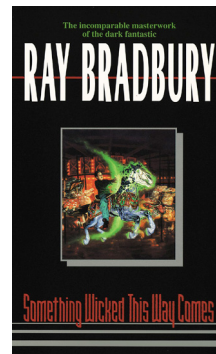
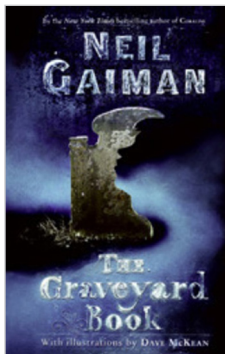
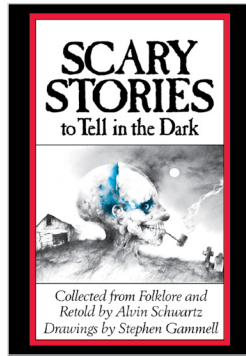
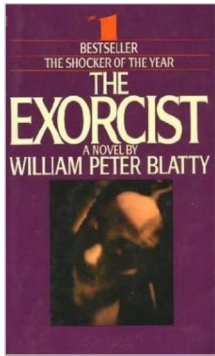


Nothing like Meeko from Disney's *Pocahontas*.

Alana: Yes, we really should. Plus there are other people out there doing this, so you need to stay in the game. In 2018, South Carolina cardiologist [Manisha Patel](#) created a Books for Boos campaign in which she gave away more than 1,500 books to trick-or-treaters. [Books for Treats](#) is a nonprofit started by Rebecca Morgan of California, who first gave away books at her home during Halloween in 1995. According to the Books for Treats site, one 7-year-old girl was pleased as punch when she received a book instead of a chocolate bar. She said, "I like books better than candy. A book lasts a long time and candy is gone in a bite! And I can sit on my daddy's lap and read the book over and over with him."

Me: That 7-year-old in 1995 might be reading books to her own children right now. I hear that all the time. Trick-or-Readers who came to our house when they were kids are now reading to their own children. Okay, you're right, we'll have our Montclair Trick-or-Read again this year at the Book House.

Alana: Great! I am already pulling together a list of scary books:



Me: Let's ask readers to contribute their favorite scary reads to our list by emailing me at judy.newman@scholastic.com.

Alana, remember: Only some of the books we offer will be scary books. The others will be funny and sad and nonfiction and graphic novels—all the types of books that make all types of readers love reading.

Alana: Getting lost in a story—scares or no scares—is one of life's greatest essential pleasures. Owning a book only makes the experience that much sweeter because a kid can read the book over and over again—and when they're done, they can keep it forever or share it.

Neil Gaiman predicted that in 10 years' time, giving each other scary books for Halloween could become the norm. Let's start the decade clock now and join Neil Gaiman—and you and Books for Treats and all of us at Scholastic Book Clubs—in celebrating Halloween by spreading the love of books and reading.

Me: You're right, Alana! And thanks again for stepping up to do all that super-scary research. You saved me from having to sleep with the light on!

Happy reading, everyone! On Halloween and every day.

xx
Judy ●

Judy Newman is President and Reader-in-Chief of Scholastic Book Clubs. For more information, visit judynewmanatscholastic.com.



Revisit the Critically Acclaimed World
of *THE BRIDGE HOME* with
Padma Venkatraman's New Novel



BORN BEHIND BARS

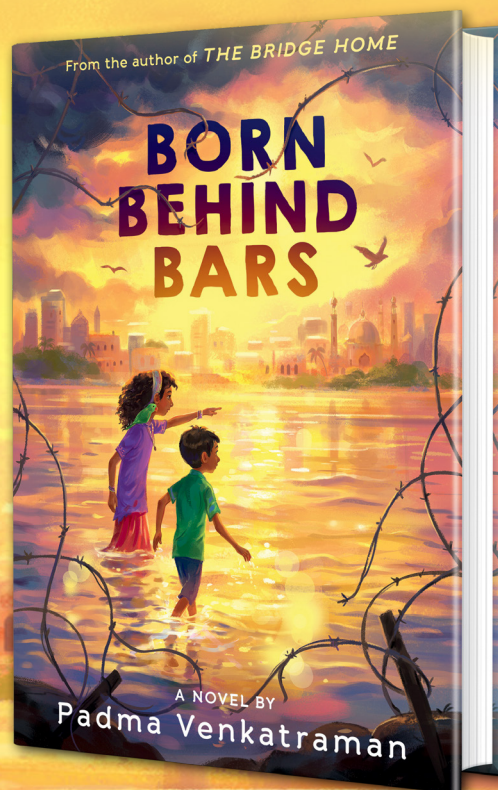
BORN BEHIND BARS is a gripping novel set in Chennai, India, featuring a boy who is unexpectedly released into the world after spending his whole life in jail with his mom.

★ “A gritty story **filled with hope** and idealism.”

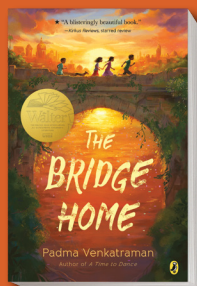
—KIRKUS REVIEWS, starred review

★ “Venkatraman **thoughtfully** and **gently** explores a troubled justice system, interstate conflicts over increasingly common water shortages, and a frustrating caste system.”

—BOOKLIST, starred review



THE BRIDGE HOME



Four determined homeless children make a life for themselves in Padma Venkatraman's stirring middle-grade debut.

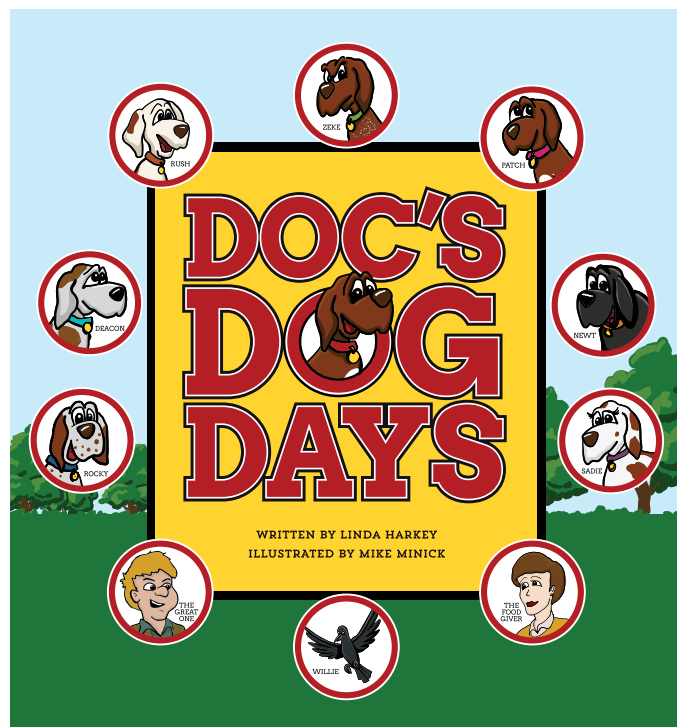
- Winner of the Walter Award
- 5 Starred Reviews
- On 18 State Award Lists and Counting
- Global Read Aloud Selection

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@PENGUINCLASSROOM
PENGUINCLASSROOM.COM



Download FREE Resources to
Padma Venkatraman's Books at
bit.ly/BornBehindBars

Art © 2021 by Jennifer Bricking



BY LINDA HARKEY

DOC'S DOG DAYS

Teachers, Librarians, Parents, and Students! Elementary children will love Doc—the smart, kind dog—as he gets his fellow dogs out of their messes.

Doc's Dog Days activity sheets include portions of humorous and educational stories from the Hickory Doc's Tales book series. These stories portray various life lessons as teachable tales about the lives of hunting dogs and the animals they encounter.

The worksheets can be used as stand-alone projects or as monthly activities for the series. Students can finish each story by writing paragraphs, drawing their own illustrations, or coloring the existing pictures.

Doc's Dog Days (A Hickory Doc's Activity Book) has received several book awards. They are:

- » 2021 Next Generation Indie Book Award – Winner: Activity Books All Ages
- » 2021 Next Generation Indie Book Award – Finalist: Animals/Pets

- » 2020 Eric Hoffer Award – Book Category – Finalist
- » US Review – Recommended.

Written by Linda Harkey and Illustrated by Mike Minick.
www.harkeybooks.com

CHARACTERS FOR THIS STORY

DOC: German Shorthaired pointer – The oldest and wisest hunting dog in his pack. His coat is brown with a stripe of white on his chest.

ZEKE: German Shorthaired pointer – Doc's younger annoying brother. His coat is a ticked color (brown and white small spots).

THE GREAT ONE: The dogs' human hunter and owner.

ZEKE AND GOATHEAD STICKERS

Hunting in Oklahoma can be a challenge unless your hunter makes sure you are wearing boots on your paws. My name's Doc. I'm the oldest and wisest in my pack. If you're not wearing boots, you'll get goathead stickers stabbed into your paws and legs! The yellow flowered thorny sticker patches are everywhere. They have creeping stems with sharp spiny burrs.

Take for instance the hunting trip my annoying, younger brother Zeke and I were on just a few weeks ago. He was very proud of his new shiny, orange boots. Zeke howled, "Doc, notice how nice my new boots look! One does love a touch of color. They were definitely made for the royal side of our family. Naturally, that's where I came from."

I rolled my eyes. "Brother, we're both from the same family!"

Zeke yipped. "Hey, there's thorns in my boots. I need to yank them out. They're hurting me!"

I continued sniffing those quail smells. "Zeke, quit worrying about your boots. We need to find birds for the Great One."

Zeke bent over and started to grab the goathead stickers with his teeth. He should have paid attention to his surroundings. Zeke lost his balance and . . .

- » Finish this story with one or two written paragraphs.
- » Draw an illustration to go with your story.
- » Color the illustration for this story.

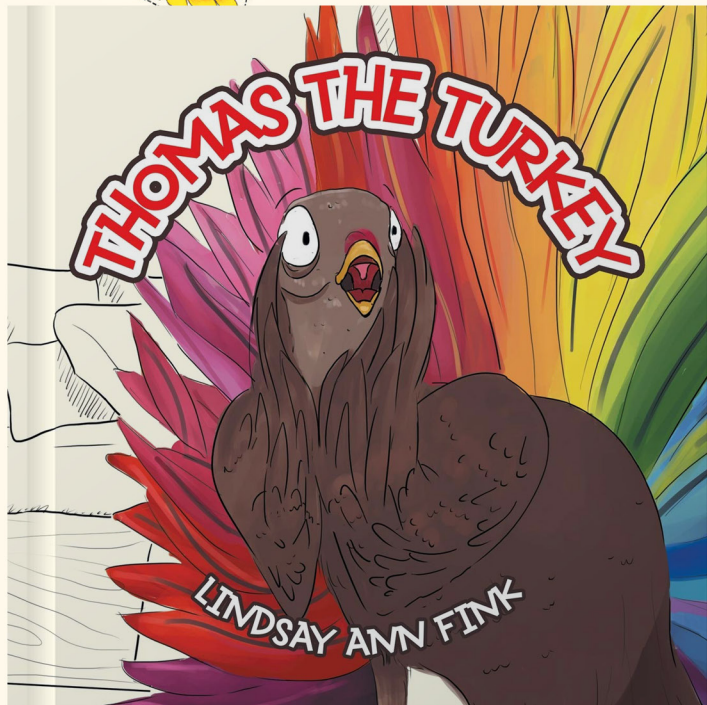
Teachers, Librarians, Parents, and Students—Send your paragraphs or illustrations to: lindaharkey@sbcglobal.net.

I will show one each month for 12 months under *Doc's Dog Days* article. ●

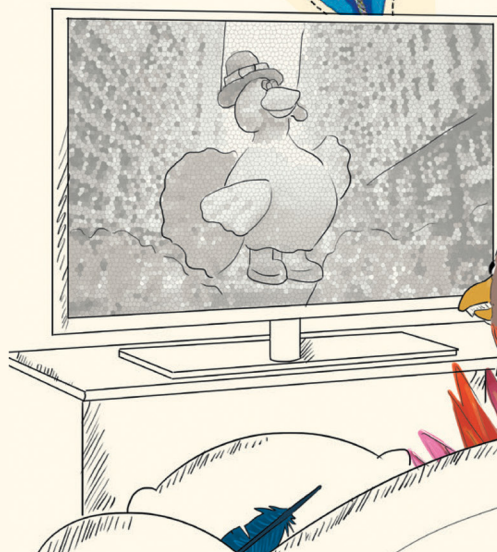
Linda Harkey loves dogs and loves teaching children. Her experiences as a mother, school teacher, volunteer docent, and hunting dog owner have inspired her to write the award-winning children's book series, *Hickory Doc's Tales*. HarkeyBooks.com



GET READY FOR SOME FEATHER-FILLED FUN!



Help Thomas retrace his steps around the house, picking up a feather at each location until you have found all seven of his brightly colored feathers! (The secret of this book is this: The child's parents or older siblings must first hide the feathers for the child to find, making the hunt easy or hard depending on the child's age.) The child will love taking part in this feather hunt, and families will adore this new Thanksgiving tradition.



AVAILABLE ON [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

Attention Middle Grade Mystery Fans! This series is for YOU!

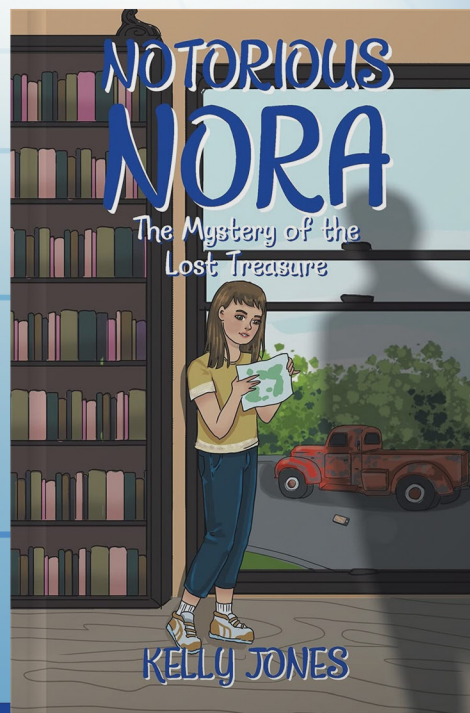
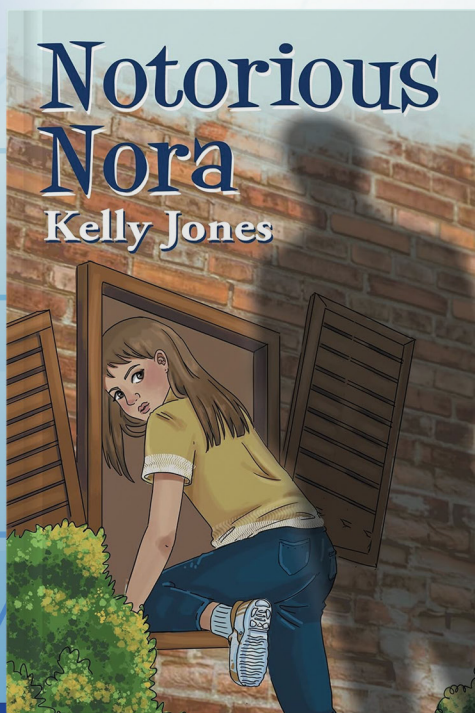
Nora loves a good mystery- particularly when she can solve it.

Bright and fun-loving, Nora lives her 6th grade life worrying about tests, asthma, friends, and cheerleading tryouts. Of course, she's always on the lookout for the next mystery and this time she's found it!

Meet her friends Pep, Diva, and her archnemesis, Candice, the most popular girl in the school. And let's not forget the ghostly Mr. Meeds who works with the team to try and stop the threat and solve the mystery...before it is too late.

"A classic 'who done it' with a twist!" – Amazon reviewer

"Nora is Nancy Drew for a New Generation! I was drawn into the story immediately and read the entire book in one day!" – Amazon reviewer



From the author of *The Adventure Tree* series!

www.theadventuretree.com

Available on Amazon, Barnes and Noble, and Xlibris.com



notorious.nora



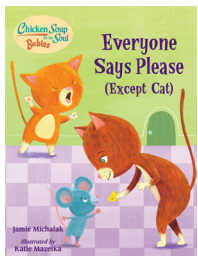
My Big Birthday Party: Early Concepts
by Jeffrey Turner (Schiffer Kids) Reviewer:
Christine Irvin

Poodle's special day is full of surprises, friends, and a little bit of science. Colorful illustrations combine lovable animals and hilarious situations for a simple introduction to opposite word pairings, building vocabulary skills, and strengthening early concepts. (board book)



Count On Me 123
by J.B. Frank, Ela Smietanka (Familius)
Reviewer: Christine Irvin

In this colorful board book filled with adorable, diverse characters, children count the everyday heroes around them, from 10 crossing guards and 9 firefighters down to 2 parents, and of course, 1 you! (board book)



Everyone Says Please (Except Cat)
by Jamie Michalak, Katie Mazeika
(Charlesbridge) Reviewer: Diana Perry

Little Cat forgets his manners and demands cheese from Mama, but he's missing the magic word. After an outrageous meltdown, he sees Mouse receive cheese after asking politely and remembers to ask for what he wants using his best manners. Sweet and silly, Chicken Soup for the Soul Babies makes lessons easy and fun for the littlest readers. (board book)



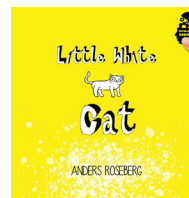
Everyone Shares (Except Cat)
by Jamie Michalak, Katie Mazeika
(Charlesbridge) Reviewer: Diana Perry

All the animals at the playground like to share—just like the characters in their favorite book. All except Cat, that is. Why won't Cat share the seesaw? Maybe he can be convinced to give it a try? Maybe sharing can be even more fun than being top dog ... er, cat? Parents will find this a great book to encourage reading and the perfect bedtime story. (board book)



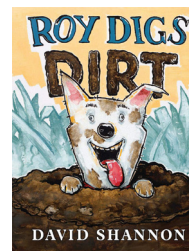
"Not That Pet!"
by Smriti Prasadam-Halls, Rosalind
Beardshaw (Candlewick) Reviewer:
Christine Irvin

Any kid who has ever longed for a pet will identify with Mabel as she tries to pick out a pet that will work for her and her family. Of course, she has to try out some rather exotic pets—an elephant, a snake, and a skunk (among others)—which are all rejected before she settles on the perfect one. Colorful, expressive, kid-friendly illustrations, coupled with rhyming verse and humor, make this a sure-to-please story for all. (Ages 2-5)



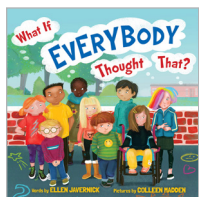
Little White Cat (Interactive Animals)
by Anders Roseberg (Independently
Published) Reviewer: Diana Perry

What a great book to bring out the young artist in every early reader! A white cat is presented. Instructions are that if you want to change your cat, you dip your fingers in the imaginary paint and then a different color cat is shown. This book encourages little ones to use their imaginations in lieu of an electronic device. (Ages 2-7)



Roy Digs Dirt
by David Shannon (Blue Sky Press)
Reviewer: Christine Irvin

Do you have a dog like Roy? Roy digs dirt! He really does. He not only digs in the dirt, he really, really likes dirt. He spends his whole day outside, playing in the dirt, burrowing in it, rolling in it, and digging in it where he often finds buried "treasures." Although it's great fun to dig in the dirt, sometimes things get a bit messy. Kids will love watching Roy's antics as he digs through the dirt. (Ages 3-5)



What If Everybody Thought That?

by Ellen Javernick, Colleen Madden (Two Lions) Reviewer: Christine Irvin

What do you think when you see someone confined to a wheelchair? You probably think they can't compete in a race. But you might be wrong if you think that. What would you think if someone in your class has a hard time reading? You might think they are not very smart. But you might be wrong if you think that. The author and illustrator show kids several scenarios where it's easy to judge a person's character just by a quick observation, but they make it clear that by doing so, you may be shortchanging that person and yourself. (Ages 3-7)

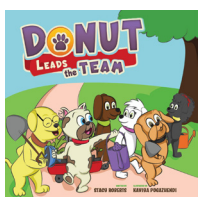


Pirates Don't Go To Kindergarten!

by Lisa Robinson, Eda Kaban (Two Lions) Reviewer: Christine Irvin

Pirate Emma has finished preschool and is headed for kindergarten. This is a big step for her as she loved her preschool teacher and the teacher's pirate-themed classroom.

The kindergarten teacher's room has a spaceship theme. Emma is not sure if she is ready to cross the plank from preschool to kindergarten, because pirates don't go to kindergarten ... but maybe astronauts do. (Ages 3-7)

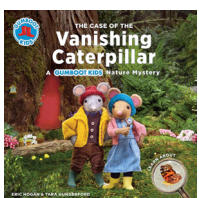


Donut Leads the Team

by Stacy Marie Roberts, Kaviya Pugazhendhi (Skylight Books) Reviewer: Christine Irvin

It's class project time at Poochton Elementary School. The students are going to plant their

own garden, and everyone is eager to help. Their teacher, Ms. Sunshine chooses Donut as the project leader. It's an important job, and Donut does her best, but she soon learns how difficult it can be to be a good leader. This is a good introduction for young readers about the value of working together as a team. (Ages 3-9)



The Case of the Vanishing Caterpillar (Gumboot Kids)

by Eric Hogan, Tara Hungerford (Firefly Books) Reviewer: Christine Irvin

Scout and Daisy search for clues in *The Case of the Vanishing Caterpillar* when Scout notices

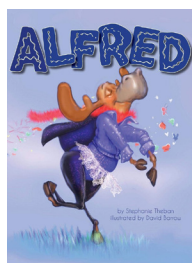
that his caterpillar friend has disappeared. Where did she go? Will they be able to find her? Kids will learn about the lifecycle of a caterpillar as they watch Scout and Daisy solve the mystery. And there is an easy-to-do craft project at the end of the book where readers can make their own butterflies using flower petals. (Ages 4-7)



Maia's Mermaid Friend

by Lois Wickstrom, Ada Konewki (Gripper Products) Reviewer: Christine Irvin

Maia has a new mermaid friend that her human friend can't see. Maia's human friend thinks Maia is just pretending to have another friend, putting the two at odds with each other. Any child who has an imaginary friend will identify with Maia's problem. (Ages 4-8)



Alfred

by Stephanie Theban, David Barrow (Doodle and Peck Publishing) Reviewer: Christine Irvin

Alfred the moose wants to take dancing lessons, but he is awkward and clumsy and doesn't fit in with the rest of the class. He's too big to fit in the studio, he doesn't know

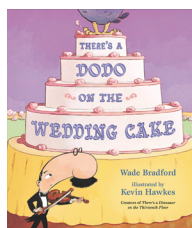
the right moves, and he doesn't have the right clothes. The rest of the students in the class make fun of him and he runs away in shame. But will Alfred give up or will he do whatever it takes to learn to dance? (Ages 4-8)



No Dinosaurs Allowed

by Deborah Hunt, Ashleigh Heyns (Hurnpubkids) Reviewer: Darleen Wohlfeil

Bobby tries to take his friend Teddy the Dinosaur to a party, the library, and the zoo, but unfortunately, dinosaurs are not welcome. Finally, they go to the park but there are no swings or slides and only one little boy. But Teddy saves the day by allowing the little boy and Bobby to use him as a swing and slide. A good lesson for all little readers to remember. Following the story is a fun Q&A with the author and illustrator that kids may enjoy. (Ages 4-8)



There's a Dodo on the Wedding Cake

by Wade Bradford, Kevin Hawkes (Candlewick) Reviewer: Christine Irvin

A misunderstanding by the musician hired to play at a wedding leads him to heroic measures to save the wedding cake that is being defaced by a dodo. Lively illustrations, humor, and a surprise ending make this a delightful story. (Ages 4-8)



Faraway Things

by Dave Eggers, Kelly Murphy (Little, Brown) Reviewer: Christine Irvin

Lucian lives in a lighthouse where he collects things the tides leave on the beach each day. His father called them “faraway things.” One

day, Lucian finds a magnificent cutlass on the shore, a real one, one he wants to keep forever. Beautiful artwork, lyrical prose, and a great storyline combine perfectly to make this book a real keeper. (Ages 4-8)



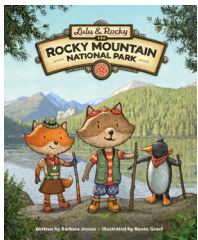
The Magical Underwater Activity Book

by Mia Underwood (Button Books)

Reviewer: Christine Irvin

Do you wonder what types of creatures live under the water? Author/illustrator Mia Underwood has created a “magical” activity book that takes a look at the underwater world. The pages are filled with a variety

of activities for children as well as facts about underwater sea creatures. There are several pages of colorful, life-like stickers in the book that correspond to various pages, with some extra ones just for fun. (Ages 4-8)



Lulu & Rocky in Rocky Mountain National Park

by Barbara Joesse, Renée Graef (Sleeping Bear Press) Reviewer: Christine Irvin

This is a great way to introduce kids to a well-known tourist destination as the characters in the book share their adventures in the park,

highlighting the fun that can be had in Rocky Mountain National Park in Colorado. Other books in the series explore the cities of Milwaukee, Detroit, Nashville, and Indianapolis. (Ages 5-8)

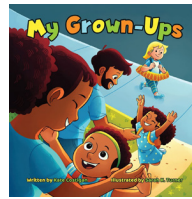


Facts vs. Opinions vs. Robots

by Michael Rex (Nancy Paulsen Books) Reviewer: Christine Irvin

It can be difficult to learn the difference between a fact and an opinion. This very kid-friendly book gives easy-to-understand examples of each with the help of very lovable robots. The illustrations are great, the text is

simple to understand, and the examples given are ones that kids can relate to. (Ages 5-8)

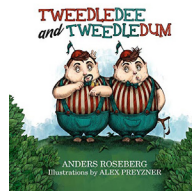


My Grown-Ups

by Kate Costigan, Sarah Turner (Halo Publishing) Reviewer: Diana Perry

Come take a look at one neighborhood, where everyone is welcome, and no two families look the same. This heartwarming story celebrates

differences in family and teaches children that love is what makes a home. Early readers can relate to this book as it's told through the point of view of a little one. I hope it makes them appreciate and realize all the many things that the grown-ups in their lives do. (Ages 5-10)

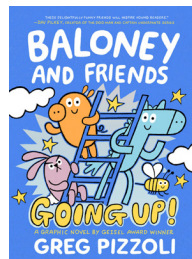


Tweedledee and Tweedledum

by Anders Roseberg, Alex Preyzner (Independently Published) Reviewer: Diana Perry

Tweedledee and Tweedledum look so much alike that it really is hard to tell them apart.

They look the same and dress the same, but are they really the same? We now get to dive into the private lives of our beloved twins to find out how different they really are! A very fun book to read. (Ages 6+)

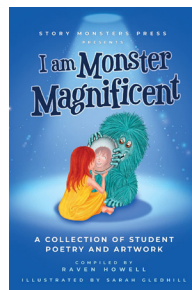


Baloney and Friends: Going Up!

by Greg Pizzoli (Little, Brown) Reviewer: Diana Perry

Another great *Baloney and Friends* graphic novel that early readers will enjoy. This time, Baloney is up to many things—like writing a song and finding out what happens to a sneeze when it doesn't come out. Baloney has

many more funny adventures in this story. I really loved the drawing tips in the back. (Ages 6-9)

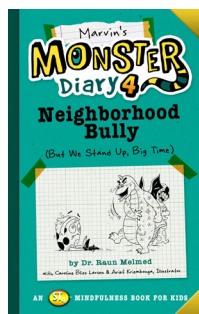


I am Monster Magnificent: A Collection of Student Poems and Artwork

by Raven Howell, Sarah Gledhill (Story Monsters Press) Reviewer: Darleen Wohlfeil

As an appreciator of poetry, I found the works in this collection as promised, magnificent! This collection of poetry written by our amazing youth gives us quiet moments to think, and

to see our future develop. It is not only filled with awareness and creativity but hope and inspiration as we peek into the minds and hearts of our future generation on the rise! A perfect book for any coffee table. Perfect for continual perusing! (Ages 7+)

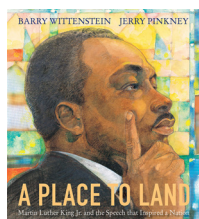


Marvin's Monster Diary 4: Neighborhood Bully

by Raun Melmed, Arief Kriembonga (Familius) Reviewer: Diana Perry

All Marvin and his friends want is to enjoy their turf—the park across the street—and play superheroes to their hearts' content. But when bullies arise, so does conflict. Suddenly a power struggle erupts over playground

dibs. It's Marvin and his band of Super Scarers versus Drake the Dreadful and his too-cool-for-school henchmen! Early readers will love reading about all of Marvin's plans and learn that if you don't succeed, try, try again. (Ages 7-9)

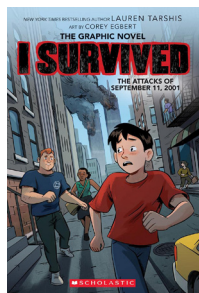


A Place to Land

by Barry Wittenstein, Jerry Pinkney (Neal Porter Books) Reviewer: Christine Irvin

Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream Speech" is well known and many books have been written on the subject. But author Barry

Wittenstein takes a new approach to the topic by providing readers with a peek at the timeline of the speech—how it evolved and what happened the night before King presented it. The author's lyrical text and the illustrator's detailed pictures make this an engaging book for a young audience. (Ages 7-10)



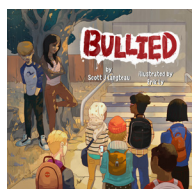
I Survived the Attacks of September 11, 2001

by Lauren Tarshis, Corey Egbert (Graphix) Reviewer: Diana Perry

This is the story of a young boy in New York City named Lucas. This graphic novel takes young readers throughout Lucas's daily life, much like that of any other young boy, until on September 11, 2001, the unimaginable happens. Includes a

timeline on how the events unfolded as well as descriptions of how our first responders were true American Heroes. (Ages 8-12)

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



Bullied

by Scott J. Langteau, Erik Ly (Shake The Moon Books) Reviewer: Darleen Wohlfeil

Bullying has escalated to new heights in our present time. Our personal opinions and

preferences are held emotional hostages to the loudest voice on the scene. A voice often shouting to drown out its own shame. In his thoughtful reflections, the author takes his stand. Not with harsh shoutings or shaming demands, but with the gentleness of understanding, he offers an enlightened hand. May it sink in like rain on dry land! (Ages 8-12)



Sunshine

by Marion Dane Bauer (Candlewick) Reviewer: Christine Irvin

When Ben goes to a remote island to spend the summer with his mom, he dreams of being able to bring his divorced parents back together. Author Marion Dane Bauer tackles a heavy subject with insight and compassion,

giving Ben an imaginary friend he can rely on when his parents fail him. This is a great book for teens coping with issues that are out of their control. (Ages 8-12)

From one ending comes a new beginning...

Ruby was murdered on Earth 18 years ago and reincarnated on Zadok as a Pastel Zeek named Harlow. To be born at the bottom of her race's caste color system to a middle-class family of Magentas has made Harlow a source of conflict amongst the ruling Purples, and a source of derision from all three colors...

Available on Audiobook October 15!



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This Picture Book Will Give Wings to the Hopes and Dreams in Every Child's Heart!



"A whimsical, engaging, beautifully illustrated celebration of imagining the future—obstacles and all."

—Kirkus Reviews

"A timeless and visually stunning story that will inspire the boundless potential within readers of all ages."

—Reedsy Discovery

"This whimsically illustrated book offers a myriad of fun answers to the age-old question: 'What do you want to be when you grow up?'"

With diverse characters and positive affirmations, this inspiring read will delight any hopeful youngster."

—BookBub



Available on Amazon and Barnes & Noble

For bulk order discounts, visit www.juniawonders.com.

A NORTHWOODS ADVENTURE MYSTERY!

During a trip to Moz Hollow, Emma Sleigh and her friend Laura discover a 60-year-old unsolved scavenger hunt.

The two girls and their new friend Raza face danger in the northern wilderness and from those who want the treasure for themselves...



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SandraBennettAu

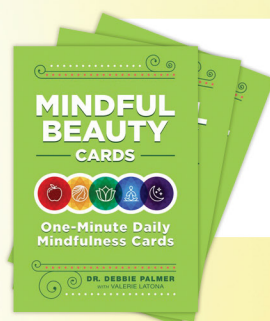
In the drought-stricken present of the Queensland outback, the only hope to save the family farm is buried in the past. Join the Adamson siblings as they find themselves lost in the Cretaceous Period.

Followed by a Zaglossus Hacketti (giant echidna) and a Demon Duck of Doom, they must battle megaraptors in surprising and entertaining ways before they have any chance of returning safely home...

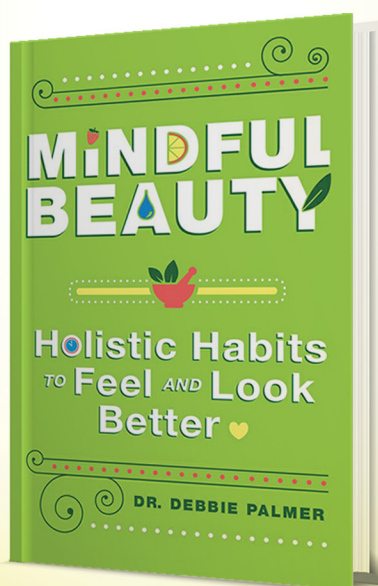
Cultivate Inner Peace And Outer Radiance— let *Mindful Beauty* show you how.

Written by a board-certified dermatologist and doctor of osteopathy, *Mindful Beauty* is a practical guide to looking and feeling more beautiful in the modern-day world.

drdebbiepalmer.com



Mindful Beauty Cards are companion cards to the book. Each card offers inspiration for one-minute daily mindfulness moments.



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Q&A

KORRIE LEER

by Julianne Black DiBlasi

While heading home, do you ever just feel like you want to keep driving right past your house, down the road in no particular direction, and simply disappear for a while? Or maybe drive to the beach and listen to the waves for a minute? Or escape to a shady spot in a park just long enough to slow down your thoughts and get it all back in line? Me too. But how do you do that as a child, especially as a child who finds their living space crammed full of the unpleasant sounds of a new crying baby brother?

The *Big Sibling Getaway* chronicles exactly that: namely, a creative mental escape from a new addition to the family. Beautifully illustrated and written, the book reads like a wistful, dreamlike collage of events following a young girl and her box beyond the audible reach of her new sibling's cries.

I reached out to Korrie Leer, the author and illustrator to learn more about this beautiful story of escape and acceptance.

Q: *The Big Sibling Getaway* is absolutely stunning! The illustrations have such a beautifully dreamy quality. As the illustrator and the author, can you tell us how the process evolved? Was it drawings first, text first? A bit of both?

A: Thank you! This is such a great question because it's one I still have to ask myself every time I start a new project! I always think, "Oh no, how did I do this last time?"

For *The Big Sibling Getaway*, I started with the text, but only for the first few pages. I knew I wanted to write about a little girl escaping from her baby brother's crying, but the specifics of where she would go and how she would get there only came to me when I started drawing. It took some doodling and imagination to discover what the box could evolve into.

Since *The Big Sibling Getaway*, my process has been the same for the most part—usually I have a little bit of the text in mind and then I let myself draw out the rest of the plot. Sometimes this can take a little longer than intended, but I've learned that I'm a very visual person and I just can't seem to get the text right without seeing first what the illustration could bring to the story!

When I get to the revision stage, things can get messy. I often find myself changing one little word, then realizing that the illustration could be updated to go along better with the new text. Revising ends up being a cycle of this process—changing the text, then changing the picture, over and over until it feels complete.

Q: How did this particular idea about creating something for new siblings evolve? Did you have a specific family or new baby in mind while creating?

A: I did have a specific family in mind—mine! I am the oldest of three children and when the youngest was born (my brother), my sister (the middle child) cried for three days. She did NOT want another person in the house. As the oldest, I got to observe this child and a new baby dynamic. It's clearly very stuck in my mind!



The memory came back to me as an adult when I was working as a nanny. The little boy I worked with welcomed a baby sister into the family shortly after I began the job. I felt like I was experiencing my childhood all over again.

Q: From the Amazon reviews, it seems to be really well received! Some reviewers even posted pictures of children who made their own getaway box! Have you been receiving feedback at schools as well? It seems like this would be a great book on validating negative and positive emotions in all areas of change for young audiences.

A: Those reviews featuring homemade getaway boxes have been my favorite to see! I have been receiving some great feedback from schools, too. It's funny because while I was writing this book, the goal was for it to be an escape. It was only when I looked back at the finished project that I realized it was also validating negative feelings for children. I think it's been such a well-received book by parents, teachers, and children because it shows the main character angry, stomping away, sulking alone, etc. and she doesn't get in trouble, she doesn't get scolded or told to "be nice" to her new brother.

She also doesn't get coddled and no one solves her problem for her. Instead, she's given the space to feel her feelings and return to earth when she's ready. I've had a few parents reach out to tell me that asking their children to "go to their getaway box" has been a tool for them when emotions are high. I think everyone could use a getaway box in their house after this past year, I know I could!

Q: The whole book just screams of an imagination celebration, reminding me a lot of the classic *Harold and the Purple Crayon* in its simple joy and open dreaming. What are the childhood favorites that you feel have influenced your style?

A: I have been told before that *The Big Sibling Getaway* reminds people of *Harold and the Purple Crayon*, and while that is such a high compliment and I do love Crockett Johnson, I actually felt drawn to the idea of escaping through imagination because of *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak. (A personal favorite of mine.)

The concept of being able to "get away" and go to another world was always the coolest thing to me as a child, especially when the character made up the world themselves. I always wanted to tell a story like that.

Q: I especially love the image of Cassie lying on the moon with her head in the box. I feel like we can all relate to finding what we thought we wanted and then realizing it wasn't so great after all. Can you deconstruct that scene a bit for us? Did it go through many variations or edits as you drove for that one specific climactic image and feeling?

A: While every other (seriously, EVERY other) illustration went through at least one round of revisions, this one made it from sketch to final image with little to no changes! A lot of other ideas shifted as I edited the text and the story: what the box turned into, where Cassie was going, what Cassie saw in each new place, etc. But one thing that remained the same was the emotion that I wanted Cassie



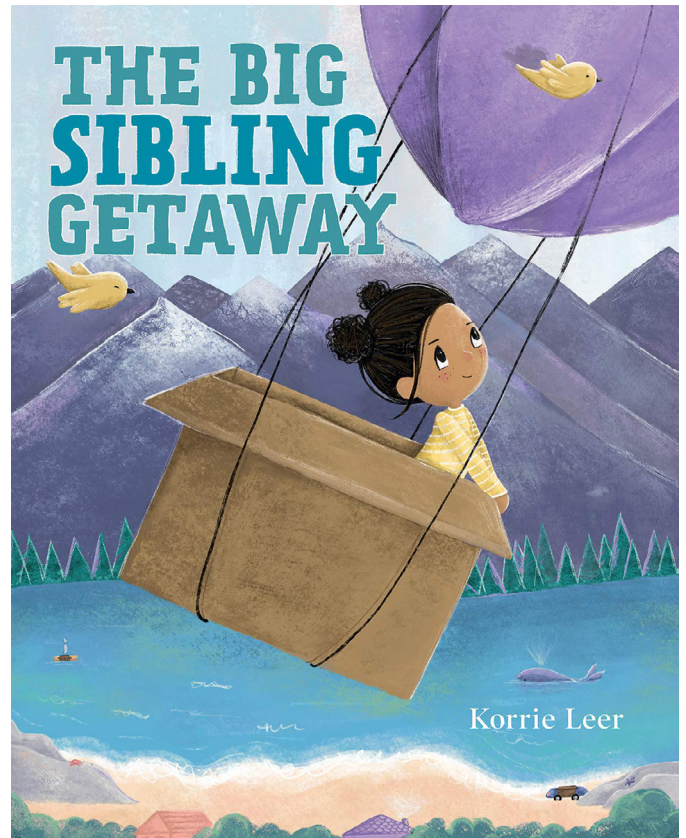
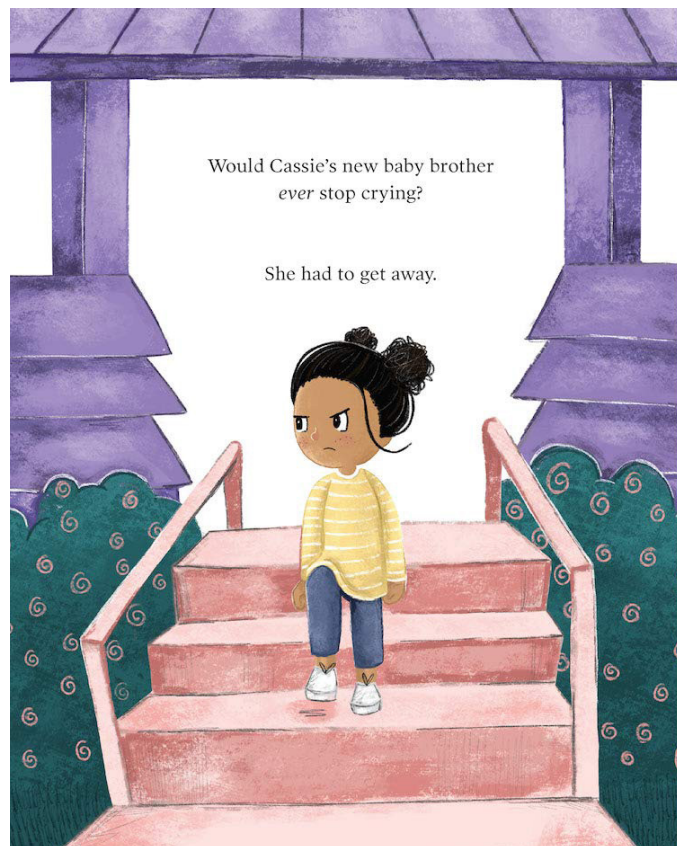
to have when she realized she was no longer happy about where she ended up, and that image was the best way I knew how to portray that feeling.

I didn't want her to be sad necessarily, but I did want her to be contemplating her choices and thinking about what she left behind. To me, her head in the box represented her not wanting to look at the view any longer and also hiding her face from the audience.

I was attached to this scene since the beginning of the writing process so I was super excited when my agent and then my art director felt the same way about it!

Q: I always like to ask—where were you and what was your reaction the first time you saw the book in print?

A: When I first saw my book in print, I was at my local bookstore here in San Francisco. Because of Covid, my author copies were delayed in the mail so I was getting pictures sent to me from friends and family. Even strangers online had it in their hands before me! I ran to the bookstore to get my hands on a copy. It was a surreal feeling seeing it for the first time, not just in print, but on an actual bookstore shelf! I ended up

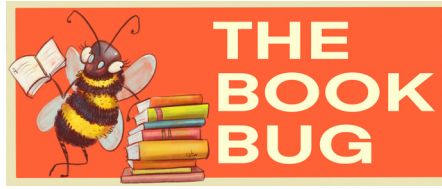


signing the bookstore's copies and then even bought one for myself to bring home.

Q: Are there any hints about future projects you can give to our Story Monsters?

A: I can give a few hints! While my first two books, *The Big Sibling Getaway* and *Zoo-mate* focused on sibling dynamics and how to live with others, the new projects I'm working on are a little ... goofier. I still have an endless amount of ideas inspired by growing up with my brother and sister, but recently I had a pretty hilarious experience with one of my cats that I can't stop thinking about for a children's book. I've also been playing with new drawing styles and began taking a fine arts painting class, so I'm excited to see how I can incorporate these into my illustrations. ●

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



DREW DAYWALT

INVITES YOU TO WISH ON A STAR

by Raven Howell

It may have been a sad day when “the crayons quit” but leave it to author Drew Daywalt to evoke giggles with his picture book as we read letters from the complaining crayons about their assorted gripes.

The Day the Crayons Quit spent a long time on the NYT’s bestselling list, as did the follow up, *The Day the Crayons Came Home*, and Drew’s third book, *Rock, Paper, Scissors*. I’m just scratching the surface. This award-winning author has many books in his rich catalog and lots of new ideas bouncing around in his head. Look up his website, find his titles in bookstores. What you see from his writing is what you get in his good-humored, charismatic, and well ... *colorful* personality.

BB: Drew, what three words would you use to tell us something about who you are?

DREW: Father. Friend. Storyteller. In that order. I know, that’s six words. Now 13! Ugh!

BB: Oh, no! STOP! Ugh is 14, and before you know it, you’ll be off writing a new story. Instead, tell us what feels like your biggest reward from writing and publishing your books.

DREW: That answer is twofold. One is seeing my own children open one of my books for the first time and light up. They’re always there at the beginning, at the kitchen table, or on a walk with me, when I’m telling them what I’m working on, and more often than not, I’m getting their input! So, when they finally get to see the ideas come to fruition and hold a real, actual, physical book in their hands, there’s magic in that. So much magic. I want them to know their ideas can manifest change and lead to the creation of good things.

The second half of this answer is when I get to sit down and read my book to children, whether it’s during a school visit or a bookstore event ... that’s the greatest feeling. It really is. I work so hard to get from, “I have this idea for a book,” to sitting down with a completed book in hand with excited kids sitting before me for storytime. I’ve read to two thousand kids at once and I’ve read to one, when no one else has shown up. And it’s all the same. Amazing.

BB: I’m wondering—is your imagination or inspiration still active when you sleep?

DREW: What a cool question! Actually, when I sleep, I’m out cold. I rarely dream either. I think I must spend so much time and energy trying to be creative all day, that when bedtime comes, I just collapse like a bag of potatoes. My mind turns completely off. But come morning, I’m up and ready to write again. With a little help from my dear friend and long-time writing partner, coffee.

BB: What was your favorite picture book growing up?

DREW: “*What Was I Scared Of*” by Dr. Seuss. I loved it because it combined funny and spooky and sweet in a perfect narrative swirl. I didn’t realize it at the time, but it was a great primer on empathy and trying to see things from other people’s perspectives. I still make a lot of mistakes. I think we all do, but it’s in the ‘trying to be better’ that makes the measure of a person. I feel like the world could use more empathy and less division these days, and that book illustrates what a shame it is to fear someone because they’re different or hate them because they’ve made mistakes.

BB: Who’s your favorite children’s author?



DREW: I have a few. It's hard to pick, isn't it? When I was little, my mom used to read me a lot of Bil Keane, Dr. Seuss, Roald Dahl, Charles Schultz. One of my other favorite books is by Barbara Dana and it's called *Rutgers and the Watersnouts* and it's brilliant. It's so funny. It's like what would happen if Monty Python had written *Winnie the Pooh*. I read it to my kids every couple years and we howl with laughter. It's also poignant. You gotta read it! I recommend it to everyone I can, even though it's out of print now. It was written in 1969 I believe, and I buy copies when they show up in used bookstores and give them out as gifts. Barbara Dana is such a brilliant writer. I hope I get to meet her someday.

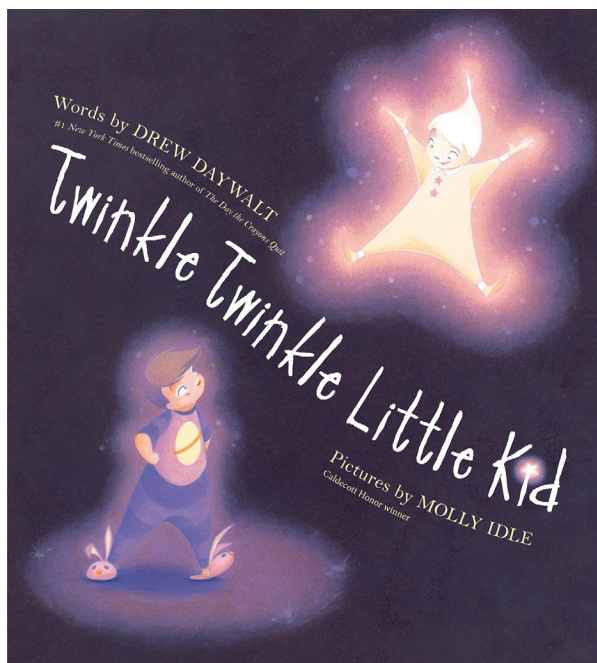
BB: What's one trait from another creative person you admire?

DREW: There are too many to name, really. Anyone creative who has been rejected or told that they're untalented and yet they kept with it and stayed true to themselves and succeeded, despite the resistance. Actually, I take part of that back. They don't have to succeed at all for me to admire them—just staying true to themselves and their art is what's so admirable. It's easy to cave or quit or change who you are to be accepted.

I admire the people who never do that and keep on creating. I was always inspired by people like that, and it helped me with my first book. I spent six years trying to get *The Day the Crayons Quit* published. Every publisher in town had rejected it, and in some cases, several times. And not always very politely either. But I believed in it. And I believed in my kids, who had been laughing at it when I read it to them long before it was published. I knew if they liked it, even without any art yet, then other children would enjoy it too. Being creative is hard, and I admire everyone who sticks with it when the system is telling them they're wrong.

BB: What do you own the most of?

DREW: Shoes. Sounds strange, probably, but shoes. And I think I figured out why. When my mom passed away in 1992, I was in college, and we were broke. Really broke. And I didn't have dress shoes to wear to her funeral. I had a cheap suit to wear, but the only shoes I had at the time were a ratty pair of black Chucks. My girlfriend's dad saw me in them and took me to Kmart and bought me a nice \$20 pair of black dress shoes to wear. I'll never forget that kindness he showed me. I never wore the dress shoes again. It made me cry to even see them



and I ended up donating them to Goodwill, I think. But once I could afford to buy my own shoes, I always bought too many. It's a little compulsive, I guess. A little fear based, a little celebratory... like, "Yay I can afford shoes, and Boo, I hope I don't ever find myself without any again." That kind of thing. I don't ever want to be that broke again, but I also don't ever want to forget what it felt like to not even have dress shoes for my mom's funeral.

BB: What's something others may find ordinary, but you think is interesting?

DREW: Ants. Kids get it, but most adults don't give ants a single thought. When was the last time you got down on the ground and just watched ants? It's good for you. You should try it. They're amazing and beautiful and they're like, right there under our feet! When I was little, I used to watch them for hours. And then when I had kids, I was reminded how much fun it was to stop all the grown-up business and just sit with my little ones and watch bugs.

BB: What's your favorite thing about right now?

DREW: As I write this in the late summer of 2021, Covid has been, and continues to be, a terrible nightmare, but the silver lining for me, over the past year and a half has been some of the wonderful bonding time with my children. We've played board games, card games, read books together, taken walks on the trails, learned to bake, eaten every meal at home, together as a family. The world outside our home has been fearful and worrisome, but I'm proud of my kids and how they've handled it and how close we continue to be throughout this period in our lives. Right now, my favorite thing is the love that everyone in my family has for each other. My sincere hope is that other people find this in their lives too.

BB: What's in your writing space?

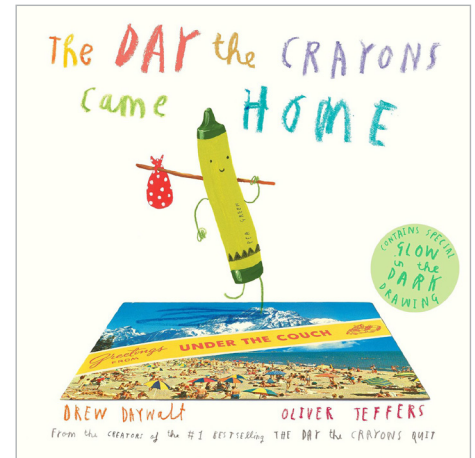
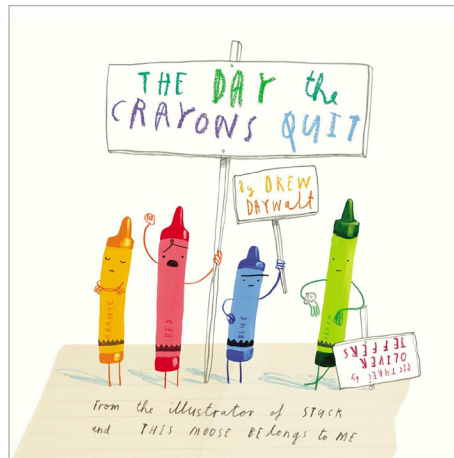
DREW: Let's see. There's original art from the talented illustrators I work with, stacks of loose paper notes, a bazillion post-its, an old table made from a wine barrel that's now covered in coffee mug stains, a Yoda Pez dispenser, Dungeons



and Dragons modules I plan on using in my kids' D&D campaign, a replica Luke Skywalker light saber, my snoring pug Sam, and my three legged chihuahua-greyhound mix named Agnes who's staring at me right now because she wants the pretzel in my hand.

BB: What's one thing you never like to go without?

DREW: Smiles.



BB: If you had to pick one crayon's life to live for a week, which would you choose? Why?

DREW: Green. Green is so well adjusted and able to shrug off his problems. I admire that. For the past year I think many of us have felt like Peach, stuck in the crayon box, under-dressed and over-anxious!

BB: What do you most look forward to these days?

DREW: The end of Covid. Or at least the beginning of a fully vaccinated, spiritually balanced, scientifically educated society.

BB: How would you respond if the green crayon, although delighted about your upcoming book, *Green is for Christmas*, complained to you about not being featured in a St. Patty's Day picture book?

DREW: I'm working on it, Greenie, 'ol pal.

BB: *Rock, Paper, Scissors* have basic characterizations of strength, skill and speed. Which one are you most proficient at?

DREW: Snacking.

BB: Little Clyde, from your new release, *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Kid*, is surprised when after he makes a wish upon a star, Star shows up in his bedroom to reveal she's made a wish as well. What's the main message you'd like children to learn from your new book?

DREW: Wishes come true. They really really do. So, keep wishing. But also, pray, dream, and meditate on good things. All of this positivity and focus can bring wonderful things to fruition.

BB: What motivation can you offer children about reading books?

DREW: I was a reluctant reader when I was little. But then I found the book that turned it around for me. The one by Barbara Dana. That was, for me, historically important. I always tell kids, read what *YOU* want to read. We read to educate ourselves and that's all very noble and important and all that, but *MOSTLY* we read to make ourselves *happy*. Read books that make you happy. And if you can't find one, then write it, and make someone else happy.

BB: Do you ever wish upon a star?

DREW: Always. And also, birthday candles, wishbones, and coin fountains. I remember once when my son Reese was very little, I had explained that when he made a wish, he had to keep it a secret for it to come true. Well, we were standing at this coin fountain outside a Barnes and Noble by our house, and he closed his eyes and tossed in a penny. Then, suddenly he panicked, spun around, and grabbed my leg and yelled, "Dad! I wished Godzilla was real!" And I reminded him that now his wish wouldn't come true and he said, "I know! That's why I told you, so Godzilla wouldn't step on our house!" I chuckled, but after I thought about it, I realized how real it was to him and how he'd very bravely saved our house. Which is good because I'd just gotten it refinanced.

BB: What's your one wish for the world?

DREW: If I tell you, it won't come true. Let's just say I'm hopeful. ●

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

WHAT WOULD YOU PUT IN A TIME CAPSULE?

by Olivia Amiri

I always love when I come across an old photo or memento, and I had an idea to make a time capsule. This is what I would put in it:

1. My favorite book (right now) is *A Little Life*, because how timeless it is and how special it is to me.
2. My family photo because I think if someone looked at it a hundred years from now, it would give a lot of information about families in the past, the clothing worn, hair styles, etc.
3. A few textbooks and notepads so people can see what we were studying at school during this time.
4. A few outfits to show what fashion was like and maybe something a bit trendy so they could see what styles were in.
5. One of my scrapbooks with tons of photos, letters, receipts, tickets to shows, and travel items. I think that if someone found it, they would love to see a little bit of what our times were like.

6. A photo or an actual piece of artwork from this time.
7. Music. I would print out the lyrics and stick a recording in hoping they still have the technology to be able to play it.
8. My diary ... well maybe one that isn't as personal. One where I talk about what our society and culture was like. Someone from a hundred years from now could read about our times and get a better understanding.

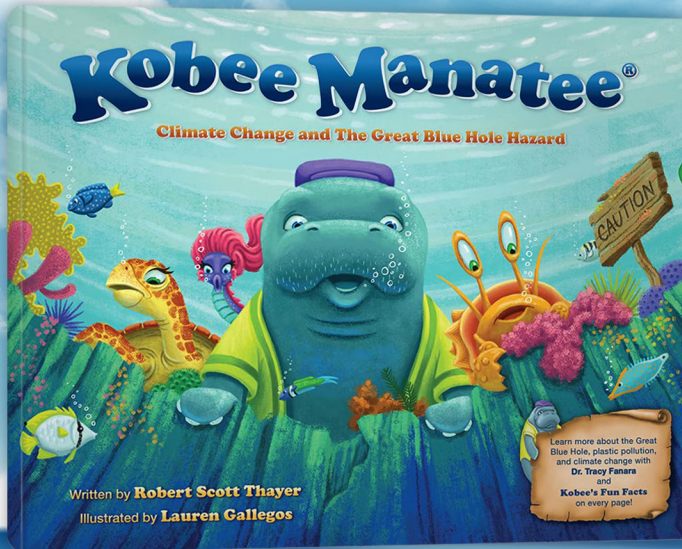
What would you put in a time capsule? It's a fun activity to do with your good friends. You can even bury it in your backyard! ●

Olivia Amiri 14-year-old Olivia Amiri is a little girl with big advice! Sharing insights and observations on the world around us, her message is clear: kids are still the best teachers to remind grown-ups of the simple joys in life. livenlife.com



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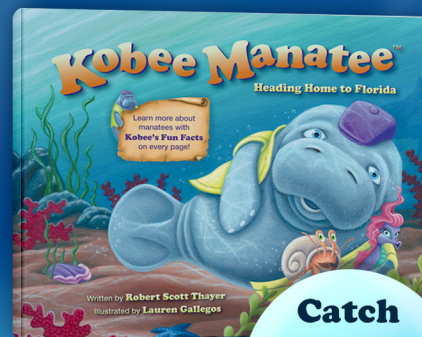
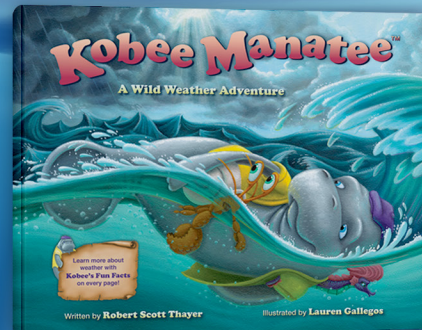
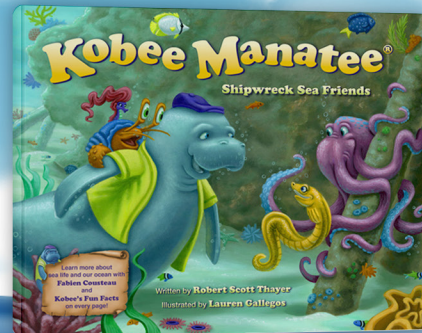
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