47 Charming Facts About Children's Books - mental_floss on YouTube (Ep.206)

List Show
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Hi, I'm John Green. Welcome to my salon. This is Mental Floss on YouTube and did you know that among all of the drawings of Norton Juster's original *The Phantom Tollbooth* there is not a single drawing of Milo in a tollbooth?

Anyway that's the first of many facts about your favorite children's books I'm gonna share with you today.

[Theme song plays]

When E.B. White was once asked why he wrote *Charlotte's Web*, he responded with a two and a half page letter about spiders in his barn and pigs-

Wait did someone say pigs? Time to put a quarter in the staff pork chop party fund! Man, that's some pig.

Anyway, at the end of the letter he wrote, "I haven't told why I wrote the book, but I haven't told you why I sneeze, either. A book is a sneeze."

Katherine Paterson, on the other hand could tell you exactly where she found the inspiration for *Bridge to Terabithia*. One of her son's best friends, Lisa, was struck by lightening and killed when she was just eight years old.

As for *the Mixed-up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* it was based in part on a 1965 story from *The New York Times* in which the Metropolitan Museum purchased a genuine Italian Renaissance statue for just $225. So it was that combined with, you know, our universal human desire to hide in bathrooms until museums close.

Maurice Sendak based the *Where the Wild Things Are* monsters on his Polish relatives who came to live with his parents in New York after surviving the Holocaust. Sendak described them as "cheek-pinchers with crazy faces and wild eyes."

Before he became a famous author, by the way, Sendak illustrated *Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle's Farm* which I bring up entirely because somebody just said pig.

Two quarters in one video! What is it, my birthday?

Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle is one of the many now famous children's stories that started out as an attempt to lull the author's small children to sleep. Others include *Babar*, *Winnie the Pooh*, and *The Hobbit*.

Sick, neurotic, and masochistic are just a few of the words that critics have used to refer to Shel Silverstein's *The Giving Tree*.

Dr. Seuss' *Green Eggs and Ham* is a little less controversial. It was written after Seuss' editor bet him that he couldn't write a book using fifty words or less. The fifty words are a, am, and, anywhere, are, be, boat, box, car, could, dark, do, eat, eggs, fox, goat, good, green, ham, here, house, I, if, in, let, like, may, me, mouse, not, on, or, rain, Sam, say, see, so, thank, that, the, them, there, they, train, tree, try, will, with, would, and you!

I did it.

Speaking of Seuss, he wrote *The Cat in the Hat* because he thought that kids need a more interesting way to learn basic words than the boring *Dick and Jane* series.

Also, to make sure his publisher was paying attention, Dr. Seuss inserted this line into a first draft of *Hop on Pop*.

"When I read, I am smart
I always cut whole words apart.
Con Stan Tin O Ple, Tim Buk Too (Constantinople, Timbuktu)
Con Tra Cep Tive, Kan Ga Roo." (Contraceptive, Kangaroo)

His publisher, of course, was paying attention. The line was later changed to:

"My father can read
big words, too.
Like... Constantinople
and Timbuktu."

Margaret Wise Brown had no children. She left all future proceeds of her book *Goodnight Moon* to a neighbor who was nine years old at the time. He has since made, and mostly spent, more than five million dollars off of it.

Mo Willems, best known for *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus* and *Knuffle Bunny*, started his career as a writer and animator for *Sesame Street* where he won six Emmy's.

Not easy working for *Sesame Street*. For starters, you gotta know how to count.

Since it was first published in 1969, Eric Carle's *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* has sold a copy every minute.

Beatrix Potter, who wrote *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, was notorious for disliking children. It's actually pretty common among children's book writers.

Not me. Others.

According to fellow kids author, Roald Dahl, he convinced his mother to take him to see Beatrix Potter at her farm when he was just six. And Beatrix happened to be working outside when they arrived and she asked Roald what he wanted. He told her he wanted to meet Beatrix Potter to which she responded, "Well you've met her. Now buzz off."

Ugh. Such a Mr. McGregor move.

The grown-up Dahl used to tell his daughters stories about one of his most famous characters,the BFG, long before the book existed. And after he told his kids BFG stories at bed time, he would climb a ladder outside of their bedroom window and use a bamboo cane to blow dreams into their room, just like his big friendly giant.

One more Roald Dahl tidbit. An early draft of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* featured a sixth child in addition to Augustus, Mike, Violet, Veruca and Charlie. Her name was Miranda Piker and she met her untimely demise when she was ground into powder by one of Willy Wonka's candy machines after refusing to listen to him.

So the next time you read *The Polar Express* or anything illustrated by Chris Van Allsburg, keep an eye out for a white bull terrier. He sticks one into most of his works, an homage to his brother-in-law's dog Winston, who served as a model for his first book. In *The Polar Express*, you can find a Winston puppet on the bed post.

Margaret and H.A. Rey fled from France on bicycles during World War II. They escaped the Nazis by mere hours and included among the few possessions they took with them was a manuscript for the book that would eventually become *Curious George* which would then go on to become an epically bad movie.

Pippi Longstocking's full name is Pippilotta Delicatessa Windowshade Mackrelmint Ephraim's Daughter Longstocking.

Ramona Quimby came about when Beverly Cleary noticed that every kid in her book *Henry Huggins* was an only child, so to remedy this she tossed in a little sister for Beezus.

Speaking of which, people often ask me why most of the kids in my books are only children. It's a joke that I have with my brother.

Robert F. Kennedy has said that he was inspired to become a falconer by Jean Craighead George's *My Side of the Mountain.*

In all of R.L. Stine's *Goosebumps* series, no one actually dies. How is it still so scary?

The author of *Frog and Toad*, Arnold Lobel was father-in-law to Mark Linn Baker, a.k.a. Cousin Larry on *Perfect Strangers* which may help explain why Linn Baker later played Toad on Broadway. So look for Hank Green playing Augustus Waters in *The Fault in Our Stars* on Broadway later this year.

That is a joke. Just in case like *EW* wants to take that out of context or something.

Audrey Penn was inspired to write *The Kissing Hand* when she saw a mother raccoon rubbing her nose in her baby raccoon's paw then the baby would rub its paw against its own cheek and the two would repeat the process over and over. A park ranger explained that the mother was marking her baby with her scent so they could find each other if they got separated. Penn wrote the story and I've been "awning" ever since.

Other names considered for Nancy Drew:
Diana Dare
Stella Strong
Helen Hale
and Nan Nelson.

The names for the houses at Hogwarts came to J.K. Rowling while she was on a plane so she jotted them down on airsickness bag, which she still has by the way. Presumably, it's otherwise unused.

The look for Anne of Green Gables was based on Evelyn Nesbit. One of the it girls of the 1900s. It's kinda like if Kim Kardashian had inspired the look of Katniss Everdeen, which maybe she did. Probably not.

Stan and Jan Berenstain didn't just write about their namesake bears. Among their other credits, *How to Teach Your Children About Sex*.

The first incarnation of Corduroy the Bear appeared in a story by author Don Freeman called *Cordurey: The Inferior Decorator*, about a little boy who insisted on painting all over the walls of his parent's house. Now that book never saw the light of day but Freeman liked the name so he kept the name when he created his popular teddy bear character.

Corduroy's a good name for a bear but not as good as Mark Cellophane.

In 1956, author Michael Bond saw a toy bear sitting alone a shelf on Christmas Eve and he felt bad for the bear so he bought it. He named it Paddington because he and his wife lived near Paddington Station in London at the time and it was only later that he started writing stories about a marmalade sandwich loving bear.

Talking animals like Paddington once had no place in China. In fact, for a time even classics like *Alice in Wonderland* were banned in parts of the country because, according to a 1931 statement by General Ho Chen, "Bears, lions, and other beasts cannot use a human language. To attribute to them such a power is an insult to the human race."

That's a little overly sensitive. It's almost like he secretly new that animals could talk. Like sometimes I hear this donkey whisper, "Why are you making me wear a party hat and a tutu?"

Despite the fact that the cover of *Strega Nona* declares that it's an old tale, retold and illustrated by Tomie dePaola, the author actually invented the character. It was his publisher's idea to brand it as an old folktale.

Norman Bridwell almost called his famous big red dog "Tiny" until his wife suggested "Clifford", the name of her childhood imaginary friend.

Louis Sachar's *Holes* was originally supposed to be called "Wrong Place, Wrong Time, Wrong Kid".

Strangely enough, that's kind of how I feel about Shia LaBeouf who of course plays Stanley"Caveman" Yelnats in the film adaptation.

The author and illustrator of *Madeline* Ludwig Bemelmans painted a mural of Central Park at a bar in the Carlisle Hotel and he decided to include a Madeline cameo in the mural. That's right, Madeline is chilling at a bar in New York City. Something is not right indeed.

Between 1986 and 2000, Scholastic published 213 novels in the *Baby-sitters Club* series, each of them classics!

In total there are more than 176 million copies of the *Baby-sitters Club* books in print.

A Wrinkle in Time was rejected by at least 26 publishers. Among their arguments were that it was too different because it deals overly with the problem of evil and was it a children's or an adult book anyhow?

There are many persistent rumors that the title character from Kay Tompson's Eloise was inspired by her goddaughter, who grew up in hotels. But the god daughter, who just happens to be Liza Minnelli, says that's not true.

The *Olivia* book series came about when author Ian Falconer decided to make a present for his niece, Olivia.

After two decades of writing children's books, *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*'s author Judith Viorst turned to Freudian psychology.

When *The Boxcar Children* was first published there were some upset adults who thought that children shouldn't be enjoying themselves so much without any adult supervision. To which I say, is being a kid hobo living in a boxcar really that fun?

A quarter of a million copies of *Pat the Bunny* are produced every year. Enough to cover six football fields with those tiny squares of peak-a-boo cloth.

And lastly I return to my salon to tell you that S.E. Hinton was just seventeen when her novel *The Outsiders* was published in 1967, and yes she is a she. S.E. stands for Susan Eloise. And even though *The Outsiders* came out almost fifty years ago, S.E. Hinton is still writing books and they're still very good.

Thanks for watching Mental Floss here on YouTube, which is made with the help of all of these nice people.

Every week we endeavour to answer one of your mind-blowing

questions. This week's question comes from Lucy who asks, "How many organs do people have?"

Well Lucy, it depends on your definition of organ, I mean most people don't have any organs at all. Other people have bought, you know, one or two from a church or something.

Right,but we have to define what an organ is. The most widely accepted definition is that an organ is collection of tissues that work together to do something. But by this definition it means that like each individual bone and muscle counts as an organ and we quickly reach like a thousand.

So it depends. Maybe as few as sixty, maybe as many as seventeen hundred. Anyway, if you have a mind-blowing question you'd like answered, please leave it below in comments. We'll try to answer it.

Thank you again for watching and as we say in my hometown, don't forget to be awesome.

P.S. Me from the future here to tell you that today's episode of Mental Floss was brought to you by audible.com a leading provider of audiobooks and other forms of audio entertainment. Audible allows you to download audiobooks from a massive library of 150 000 titles. You can download, for instance, *The Fault in Our Stars* for free by signing up now at audible.com/mentalfloss. Or any other book you want but you know, mostly *The Fault in Our Stars*.

[Theme song plays]