

• Meet the Author •

Lisa Wheeler

Interview conducted by Toni Buzzeo, career media specialist and author (visit www.tonibuzzeo.com).



Lisa Wheeler is passionate about children's books. "I love everything about them, including the smell," she says. To date, Lisa has sixteen titles on bookstore shelves, with eight more to follow over the next few years. She's written picture books in prose and in rhyme, an easy reader series, two books of poems, and creative nonfiction for the very young. Her upcoming titles include *Hokey Pokey: Another Prickly Love Story* illustrated by Janie Bynum, *Mammoths On The Move* illustrated by Kurt Cyrus and *Castaway Cats* illustrated by Ponder Goemmel. Lisa shares her Michigan home with one husband, two dogs, three kids and an assortment of anthropomorphic characters.

Old Cricket very much has the feel of an oral story, which makes it perfect for

Reader's Theater. What was the origin of this story?

LW: We lived in the same little house for sixteen years, and right outside my bedroom window was a bush. In that bush lived a cricket that liked to chirp—loudly—every summer. It probably wasn't the same cricket year after year, but in my mind I pictured him as an old cricket. Many nights I would be wakened from sleep because he wouldn't stop cricking. So I decided I would write his story, and then maybe he would be quiet and let me get some sleep.

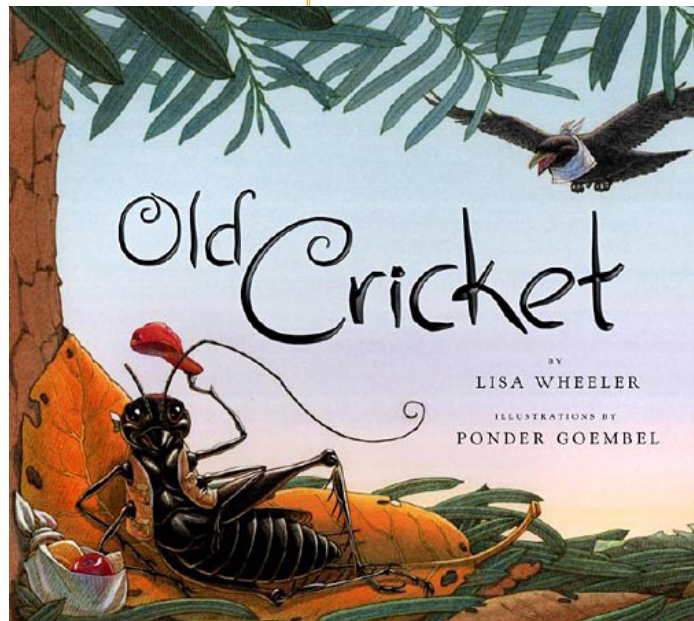
One of the many entertaining aspects of this story is your language.

How did you go about choosing the ear-pleasing vocabulary for *Old Cricket*?

LW: Well, I always heard his song as crick-crick-crick, so that part was easy. I knew this cricket was cranky, because he apparently never slept, so all those lovely C words just kept presenting themselves. Cricket, crow, cantankerous, crotchety, crumb, creak and even "crook in her finger" were perfect for the story. I do love alliteration!

Old Cricket is a crafty old character. What or who was your inspiration for his character?

LW: I loved Aesop's Fables when I was a kid and read them over and over again. I didn't know it



when I was writing this book, but I believe *Old Cricket* was heavily influenced by Aesop. I dedicated the book to my in-laws, because once the art was complete, Old Cricket and his Missus looked so much like my husband's parents, that I was able to see how they influenced the story's directions as well—they were always doing home improvement projects and my father-in-law was usually on a ladder.

There is a long tradition in literature of “trickster tales.” How does *Old Cricket* fit into this tradition?

LW: I never set out to write a trickster tale, so when reviewers and educators started describing it as such, I was surprised. I'd always viewed trickster tales as being Native American stories.

But a trickster is a trickster, and Old Cricket certainly tried to pull a fast one.

You write so many humorous books for children that kids love. What draws you to writing funny books?

LW: My goal as a writer is to entertain. When I was a child, my favorite books were ones that took me away from my troubles and let me be happy and carefree, if only for a few minutes. I love to hear kids laugh when they read my books. I love to hear their parents and teachers laugh as well. Some writers are good at making people think deep thought and some are good at making people get sentimental and weepy. I prefer to crack people up.

I think my funniest book is *Turk and Runt*. I cannot read that book without laughing myself. I tell kids that when I am writing, I have to crack myself up. If I am not laughing at my jokes, chances are my reader won't be. My other funniest (to me) are *Wool Gathering: A Sheep Family Reunion*, the Fitch & Chip series, *Farmer Dale's Red Pickup Truck* and *Porcupining*.

How can readers learn more about you and your books?

LW: They can go to my Web site at www.lisawheelerbooks.com. There, they will find activities to accompany my books. Everything from coloring pages to Teacher's Guides are free to print out.

Books by Lisa Wheeler

- ***Avalanche Annie: A Not-So-Tall Tale*** illustrated by Kurt Cyrus. Harcourt, 2003.
- ***Bubble Gum, Bubble Gum*** illustrated by Laura Huliska-Beith. Little, Brown and Company, 2004.
- ***Castaway Cats*** illustrated by Ponder Goemmel. Simon & Schuster, 2006.
- ***Farmer Dale's Red Pickup Truck*** illustrated by Ivan Bates. Harcourt, 2004.
- ***Hokey Pokey: Another Prickly Love Story*** illustrated by Janie Bynum. Little, Brown and Company, 2006.
- ***Invasion of the Pig Sisters*** (Fitch and Chip) illustrated by Frank Ansley. Simon & Schuster, 2006.
- ***Old Cricket*** illustrated by Ponder Goemmel. Simon & Schuster, 2003.
- ***Mammoths on the Move*** illustrated by Kurt Cyrus. Harcourt, 2006.
- ***New Pig in Town*** (Fitch and Chip) illustrated by Frank Ansley. Simon & Schuster, 2003.
- ***One Dark Night*** illustrated by Ivan Bates. Harcourt, 2003.
- ***Porcupining*** illustrated by Janie Bynum. Little, Brown and Company, 2003.
- ***Sailor Moo: Cow at Sea*** illustrated by Ponder Goemmel. Simon & Schuster, 2002.
- ***Seadogs: An Epic Ocean Operetta*** illustrated by Mark Siegel. Simon & Schuster, 2004.
- ***Sixteen Cows*** illustrated by Kurt Cyrus. Harcourt, 2002.
- ***Te Amo, Bebé, Little One*** illustrated by Maribel Suarez. Little, Brown and Company, 2004.
- ***Turk and Runt: A Thanksgiving Comedy*** illustrated by Frank Ansley. Simon & Schuster, 2002.
- ***Uncles and Antlers*** illustrated by Brian Floca. Simon & Schuster, 2004.
- ***Wool Gathering: A Sheep Family Reunion*** illustrated by Frank Ansley. Simon & Schuster, 2001.
- ***When Pigs Fly*** (Fitch and Chip) illustrated by Frank Ansley. Simon & Schuster, 2003.
- ***Who's Afraid of Granny Wolf?*** (Fitch and Chip) illustrated by Frank Ansley. Simon & Schuster, 2004.