

• Meet the Author •

Katherine Applegate

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



Photo courtesy of <http://cdn.harpercollins.com/harperimages/author/10991.jpg>

Katherine Applegate is the author of dozens of books for children and young adults. With her husband, Michael Reynolds, she wrote *Animorphs* (Scholastic), the best-selling middle reader series. Her first free-standing novel, *Home of the Brave* (Feiwel & Friends / Macmillan), won the 2007 Golden Kite Award for best fiction from the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators, the 2007 Josette Frank Award from Bank Street College of Education, and was selected as a Best Book of 2007 by School Library Journal. Last year, her chapter book series for young readers, *Roscoe Riley Rules*, debuted with HarperCollins. *The Buffalo Storm* (Clarion Books) is her first picture book.

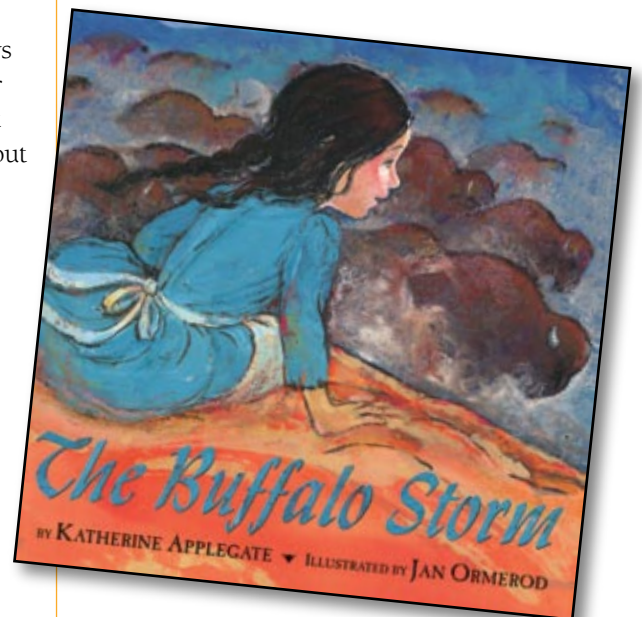
Historical fiction always begs the question: is this story based on a true fact? If so, how did you encoun-

ter it? If not, where did your inspiration come from?

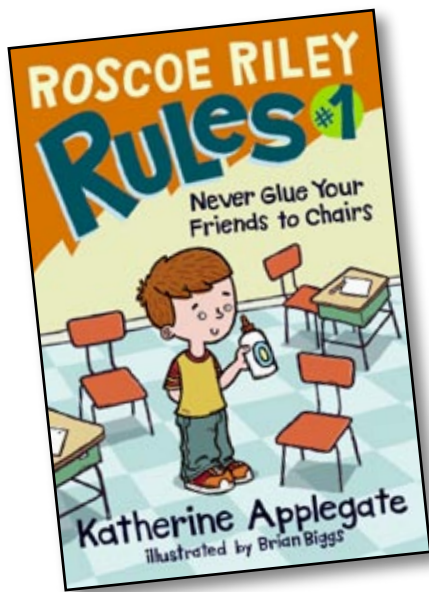
KA: I'd read a fascinating book by Lillian Schlissel called *Women's Diaries of the Western Journey*, and I was awed by the resilience and bravery of travelers on the Oregon Trail. I have a hard time packing for a few days at Disneyworld. How could these folks pack up their entire lives, leaving so much behind, and head for a place they'd never seen before? I'd moved a bit as a child, enough to know how emotionally wrenching it can be, and those memories helped me imagine the anxiety and sadness Hallie would be feeling. On the other hand, I've always loved to travel. As hard as it would be for Hallie to leave the world she'd always known behind, it was easy for me to envision the excitement and exhilaration she'd feel about heading westward.

I suspect that you did a lot of research into time and place before you wrote *The Buffalo Storm*. What can you tell us about your research process? And what were some of the most interesting facts you uncovered?

KA: I love doing research. I always tell children to think of it as a treasure hunt: you can get a little messy and confused in the process, but it's such a rush when you find that nugget of gold! Of course, there are the obvious places to start your search, such as the Internet and the library, but you can often find real treasures in used bookstores and old newspapers. One of my favorite used bookstore finds was an old reprint of the actual book pioneer families used in preparation for their journey, and it was full of useful tidbits. Who knew you could pack eggs in flour barrels? Or that gathering dried cow paddies (manure) to burn as fire fuel would turn out to be a vital daily chore for young children?



Meet the Author



The relationship that speaks to us most clearly in your book is that between Hallie and her grandmother. Is this relationship modeled on a relationship from your own life?

KA: You know, I never knew my own grandmothers particularly well, but I've always been very close to my mom, even though we've often been separated by many miles. It's always hard to be far apart from someone you love, and to try to bridge that distance with letters and phone calls and e-mails. I do think you bring that sort of emotional touchstone into your writing, sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously.

Often, the main character in a children's book is like the author in some way. Is Hallie at all like you? Were you both brave and fearful when you were young? Tell us more about yourself as a child.

KA: Much more fearful than brave, for the most part. I was very shy, a good student, a real animal lover. It's both challenging and rewarding—and a great deal of fun—to write about characters who are not necessarily like you in every way. Hallie is more physically brave than I was, and I loved exploring that. She's actually much more like my daughter, who is quite the athlete and wonderfully resilient.

You are well known as an author of novels for older readers, so *The Buffalo Storm* is quite a departure for you. How was the experience of writing a picture book different from your novel writing?

KA: Oh, it's so much fun! I love the economy of language. Every word has to count. And some of the work you would usually do—the visual component—is the job of the illustrator. I adore Jan Omerod's work on this project. I think my favorite scene is the spread with the buffalo stampede. It's just exquisite.

Your text in *The Buffalo Storm* is quite lyrical and evocative, making it delicious to read aloud. Are you trained as a poet?

KA: [Laughing heartily.] I do love poetry, but I honestly don't know much about it. I hope children take this lesson to heart: sometimes the most fun happens when you try something brand-new!

How can readers learn more about you and your books?

KA: Visit my Web site, www.katherineapplegate.com.

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Toni Buzzeo, MA, MLIS, is an author as well as a career library media specialist. She is the author of eight picture books, most recently *The Library Doors* (UpstartBooks, 2008) and many professional books and articles. Visit www.tonibuzzeo.com or e-mail Toni at tonibuzzeo@tonibuzzeo.com.