

Holiday House AUTHOR 360

- ❖ ASK THE AUTHOR—
THE INSIDE SCOOP
- ❖ CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

MARY AMATO

As a child, Mary read *Harriet the Spy* and knew she wanted to become a writer.

Mary Amato grew up scribbling in her diaries in Libertyville, Illinois, and graduated from Indiana University with a teaching degree. She taught in public and private schools, worked as a dance teacher and choreographer, and wrote many magazine articles. As soon as she became a mother, she turned to her first passion: writing for children. Mary attended the graduate writing program at Johns Hopkins University, where she received her MA in fiction.



"I always wanted to be a writer, but it took me a long time to believe that I could actually become one. I started writing at the age of seven when my mother handed me a little spiral notebook and told me to keep a journal of our trip to California. I liked the fact that I could record something in my journal and then read it later. My favorite book as a child was Harriet the Spy by Louise Fitzhugh because Harriet was a terrific journal keeper."

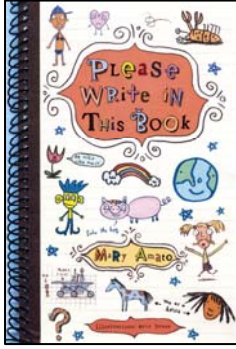
"I love to write. Not all writers love to write. I wake up every morning and can't wait to sit at my dining room table and write. (I write on a laptop computer with a cup of tea nearby.) I especially love to write books for children. I think that's because I needed books when I was a kid. I turned to books when I was lonely or sad or confused or bored. It is extremely fun to think that kids are reading my books."

Mary divides her time between writing children's books and teaching dance. She lives in Silver Spring, Maryland, with her husband, Ivan, and their two boys.

For more on Mary Amato, check out her website at www.maryamato.com.



HOLIDAY HOUSE
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PLEASE WRITE IN THIS BOOK

illustrated by Eric Brace • Ages 7 - 10 • ISBN-13: HC - 978-0-8234-1932-6

When a teacher leaves a blank book in the Writer's Corner for her students to find, with the instructions "Please Write in This Book," she hopes it will encourage her students to talk to one another in its pages. They do, and the result is an epic classroom battle.

ASK THE AUTHOR—The Inside Scoop

Where did you get the idea for this book?

I volunteered to help in my son's second-grade classroom. To get kids excited about reading and writing stories, I started writing stories in little books that I made by cutting and stapling paper together. I pretended that the books were written by children in a fictional class. I had fun writing these stories and decided to try to get them published as a series of little books. At first, the stories were rejected. Instead of giving up, I revised. I imagined that all the students were writing in one book—a classroom journal. I rewrote the whole thing and had fun all over again. The idea worked much better as one journal.

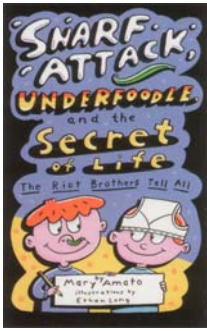
QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

The characters in this book have different ideas about what should be written in the book. Why does this cause a problem? What are some of the rules that Lizzy tries to make? Why don't Lizzy's rules work? What do you think is the worst thing that happens? How do they finally solve the problem? Can you think of any other ways the class could have solved the problem?

TRY IT OUT!

Start a Collaborative Journal: Ms. Wurtz's class creates a collaborative journal by adding entries in one blank book. You can start a collaborative journal with your family, your class, or a group of friends. Pick out a blank book, talk about rules, write down any rules on the first page, and see what develops.

Lizzy wants the book to be nice and pretty. Luke wants the book to be funny and disgusting. Think of two characters with opposite goals or personality traits and write a story about the problems (funny or serious) that occur when they collaborate on a journal or another kind of project.



SNARF ATTACK, UNDERFOODLE, AND THE SECRET OF LIFE: THE RIOT BROTHERS TELL ALL

illustrated by Ethan Long • Ages 6 - 10 • ISBN-13: HC - 978-0-8234-1750-6, PB - 978-0-8234-2062-9

Orville and Wilbur Riot have no shortage of daily adventures. Sometimes they are undercover detectives. Other times they challenge each other to see who can get the most underwear on his head. Having trouble keeping up with Wilbur and Orville? Follow the Riot Brother Rule #4: *Run, do not walk, whenever possible.*

ASK THE AUTHOR—The Inside Scoop

Are the Riot brothers based on your own kids?

I write stories for my kids, not about my kids. My two sons do funny things, but they didn't do the wacky things in these stories.

How do you think up funny stuff—like the Riot brothers games?

When I write, I imagine myself as a kid and try to make myself laugh first. Then I test it out by reading it to my own kids.

Did you have to revise it?

Yes! I enjoy revising because it makes the book better. My editor loved the stories overall, but she didn't like the ending of my draft. She also wanted me to make certain parts of each book funnier. I have a trick for revising. I don't try to come up with the perfect solution. I brainstorm and write down a whole bunch of ideas. After I'm done, I see which idea I like best.

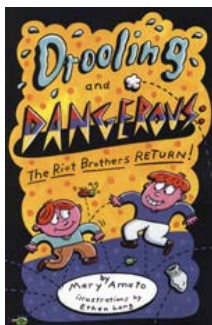
FAMOUS BROTHERS

I named my main characters after two famous brothers: Orville and Wilbur Wright. The Wright brothers were brilliant inventors. Read more about them and then figure out how the Riot brothers and the Wright brothers are alike.

DO IT YOURSELF

- ❖ If you were going to give a lesson on how to be annoying, what would you teach?
- ❖ What chore do you hate to do? Invent a machine to help you do it. Draw a sketch or make a model of your invention. Make sure you think of a fun name for it.
- ❖ The Riot brothers found a "treasure" tucked away in a closet. Imagine that you find a box in your house. What treasure could be inside?
- ❖ Make your own list of ways to make fake snow. Are there any problems with your ideas?
- ❖ Invent your own game that you can play at home when you are bored. Make sure that it is something you can play without any special materials.

More RIOT
BROTHERS
Fun!



DROOLING AND DANGEROUS: THE RIOT BROTHERS RETURN!

illustrated by Ethan Long • Ages 6 - 10 • ISBN-13: HC - 978-0-8234-1986-9

Orville and Wilbur are back with more games, more missions, and loads more fun. One day they are spies, the next they are movie stars in the making. One thing is for sure: You'll never catch these brothers with nothing to do!

DO IT YOURSELF

Try a Tongue Twister

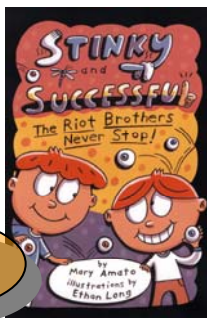
Orville invents this new tongue twister: I like Lulubelle Lippi's Lollipop Lipstick. Try to say it ten times. Now make up your own tongue twister. Hint: Use alliteration to make your tongue twister tricky. What is alliteration, you ask? Good question. Ask a terrific teacher.

Try a Switch Twister

Wilbur and Orville switch letters around in the phrases that they say on Dwitch Say (Switch Day). *Dirty socks* become *sirty docks*, etc. Try making up a tongue twister that has a few switches in it, such as: Put your sirty docks in the carbage gan!

Write Now!

Orville pretends he is an alien from Planet Crud. Write a story about what happens when Orville is abducted by aliens and taken to Planet Crud. What do the aliens look like? How does the planet smell? How does Orville get back home?



Coming
this fall!

STINKY AND SUCCESSFUL: THE RIOT BROTHERS NEVER STOP!

illustrated by Ethan Long • Ages 6 - 10 • ISBN-13: HC - 978-0-8234-2100-8

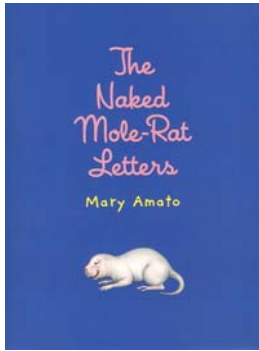
Just when you thought the Riot brothers couldn't get any wackier or more hilarious, along comes the third book in the series, chock full of even more eye-popping, mouth-foaming missions, games, and sayings. Whether Orville and Wilbur are playing Sock Me a Story, trying to boil macaroni in their mouths, or pulling off the best April Fool's joke ever, one thing's for sure: They certainly will never be

accused of being boring.

"Think about it. Socks never get starring roles. It's always about the shoes." —Mary Amato

Have your students use their noodles!

Ready to play Sock Me a Story just like Orville and Wilbur in *Stinky and Successful*? Roll a pair of socks into a ball. You may use stinky socks, but clean ones work too! Hold the ball and start telling a story starring a sock. (If you're stuck, ask yourself, "What might a sock want?") At an exciting point in the story, throw the socks to another player, who must add on to the story. Keep going until everyone has had a turn. There's no right or wrong; just have fun and exercise your imagination. Think about it. Socks never get starring roles. It's always about the shoes. So, give your socks a thrill and make up a story about them. They'll love you for it.



THE NAKED MOLE-RAT LETTERS

Ages 8 - 12 • ISBN-13: HC - 978-0-8234-1927-2, PB - 978-0-8234-2098-8

When her father begins a long-distance romance with a Washington, D.C., zookeeper, twelve-year-old Frankie sends fabricated e-mail letters to the zookeeper in an attempt to end the relationship in this story about family, friendship, and growing up.

MARK TWAIN AWARD MASTER LIST

SEQUOYAH CHILDREN'S BOOK AWARD MASTER LIST

VOLUNTEER STATE BOOK AWARD MAST READING LIST (GR. 6-8)

WILLIAM ALLEN WHITE CHILDREN'S BOOK AWARD MASTER LIST (GR. 6-8)

ASK THE AUTHOR—The Inside Scoop

How much of the book is based on your personal experience?

Although I based the book on my experience of reading my father's secret love letters to the woman who eventually became my stepmother, Frankie Wallop is not me. A work of fiction is made up of bits and pieces of an author's world, but it is a new invention. Here are some of the ways Frankie and I are different and some of the things we share in common:

- ❖ I play the dulcimer now. But I didn't grow up playing the dulcimer like Frankie.
- ❖ I am the baby of four girls whereas Frankie is the oldest and has two brothers.
- ❖ My father's secret love was a kindergarten teacher, not a zookeeper.
- ❖ I have kept a journal since the age of seven. Writing in my diary was an important way for me to express my feelings.
- ❖ I had two cooking fires in my house, but nothing was destroyed.
- ❖ Like Frankie, I auditioned for *The Miracle Worker*. I wanted to play Helen and didn't make it. My interest in Helen Keller came much earlier than Frankie's. We had a family friend who was blind. I learned Braille from her when I was in the second grade.
- ❖ I grew up in Illinois, not Indiana. But I did go to college in Bloomington, Indiana.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- ❖ Sometimes Frankie tells lies. In what other ways is she dishonest? In what ways is she honest?
- ❖ Talk about other characters in the book and in what ways they are either honest or dishonest.
- ❖ When does Frankie begin to like Ayanna? Why?
- ❖ Ayanna teaches Frankie about the behavior of naked mole-rats. What else does she teach Frankie?
- ❖ How does her father change? What forces him to change?

SPRINGBOARDS FOR YOUR OWN WRITING

- ❖ Write a story about a lie that gets your main character in trouble.
- ❖ Create two characters who have a hard time communicating with each other in person. Write a story that is entirely made up of letters that they write to each other. (Note: A story that is told in the form of letters is called an epistolary novel.)



THE WORD EATER

illustrated by Christopher Ryniak

Ages 8 - 12 • ISBN-13: HC - 978-0-8234-1468-0, PB - 978-08234-1940-1

A sixth-grade loner finds a magic worm that has the power to make things disappear. Will she use this power wisely or to get revenge at her new school?

ARIZONA YOUNG READERS' AWARD

ASK THE AUTHOR—The Inside Scoop

Where did you get the idea for *The Word Eater*?

I read an article about tiny wormlike creatures that ruin books by eating the glue in the binding. (As you can imagine, librarians hate these “bookworms.”) I thought it was interesting and funny that something so small could have power, so I jotted down a note in my journal about these creatures. Many months later, I began to think about the idea. What if a worm liked ink instead of dirt or glue? What if the worm had a magical appetite? What if things disappeared from the world when the worm ate words? What if a girl found the worm and realized that she had the power to delete anything? The more I thought about it, the more I thought it would make a great story.

PLOT AND THEME

Plot and theme are two important elements of every book. The plot is what happens. The theme is what the story is really all about.

The plot of *The Word Eater* is about a magic worm that eats words. The theme of *The Word Eater* is about the struggle for power and the consequences of having it.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

In the book, each character either has power or wants power. Get your brain in gear for these powerful questions.

- ❖ In the beginning, what about Lerner's situation makes her feel particularly powerless?
- ❖ What cliqué at Cleveland Park Middle School has the most power? Why does it have power?
- ❖ Talk about the power teachers have over students in the book. What kind of power should teachers have? What kind of power should students have?
- ❖ If you have power, you can use it wisely or you can abuse it. Which characters abuse their power?
- ❖ How do Lerner and the SLUGS become powerful?

CLASS PROJECT

Start your own class newspaper. Interview one another and your teacher. Write stories and print them out on a computer.