



## A conversation with illustrator

# John O'Brien



Credit: Hannah Hoogerwoerd

John O'Brien talks about his new book  
*Washington, D.C.: Our Nation's Capital  
from A-Z.*

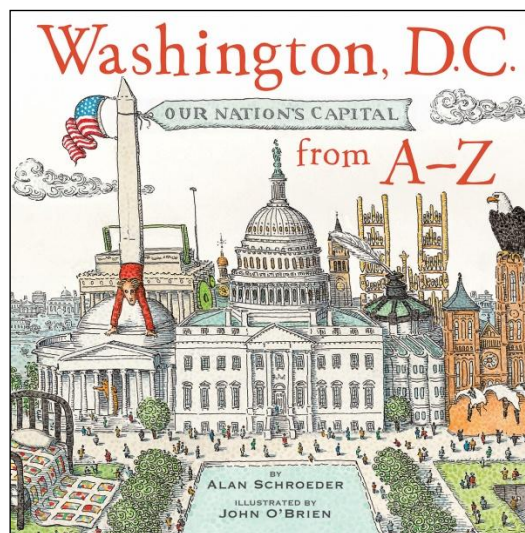
Humorous cartoons accompany this offbeat guide to the District of Columbia. It is filled with intriguing details about important landmarks and the people who have come to the capital to run the nation's business, celebrate, protest, live in the thick of it all, or just visit. From the aluminum tip of the towering Washington Monument to the marble bathtubs in the Capitol Building's basement, this book offers a top to bottom look at Washington, D.C., and its eclectic history. The book's endpapers feature a map of the District.

**John, please tell us about *Washington, D.C.: Our Nation's Capital from A-Z*.**

*Washington, D.C.: Our Nation's Capital from A-Z* is another wonderful book written by Alan Schroeder that I had the lucky opportunity to add humorous drawing twists to, and as in our previous collaborations, *Ben Franklin: His Wit and Wisdom from A-Z* and *Abe Lincoln: His Wit and Wisdom from A-Z*, I found lots of fun material to work with.

**Tell us about your creative process and how you went about illustrating this book. How did you research to make sure your drawings were accurate?**

The first thing I do is read the manuscript over and over again with a sketch pad on hand and jot down notes and quick thumbnail sketches of things that I could twist and turn and make into a humorous image to accompany the text/words. I then go over my notes and sketches and pick out the ones that I think really work and might be funny to the reader, and I eliminate many other ideas that just aren't as good or wouldn't fit on the page. At this point I sketch out each page, arranging the drawing ideas around the text/words. These drawings will also have to be informative so as I'm sketching out the book I research items in the book such as the buildings and clothing. When it's ready I present it to my editor, Mary Cash at Holiday House.



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**You've had a long career as a cartoonist for many publications. How did your background influence your illustrations for this book?**

As a cartoonist as well as illustrator, I try to find humorous situations in everything. If you look hard enough you'll find them. A little humor in the art can make a book more enjoyable for young readers, and with the right details in the drawings they can get information as well. I tried to do this throughout the book.

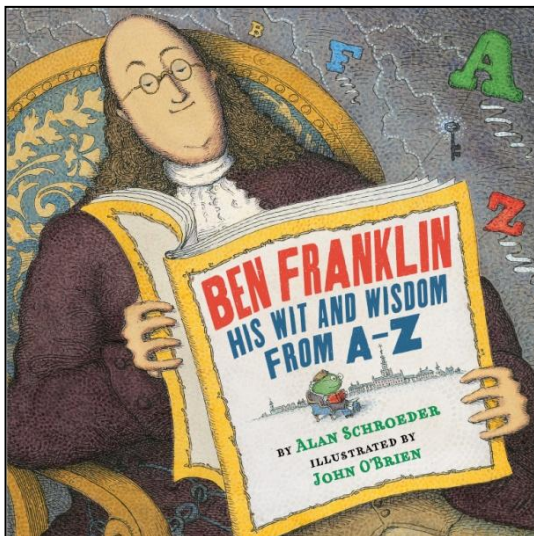
**What were some of your favorite letters to draw illustrations for in this book?**

My favorites are letters that offer me the opportunity draw a big bold idea such as the "Capital Bathtub" under "C is for Capitol" (page 4) and "The White House" under "W is for White House" (page 28).

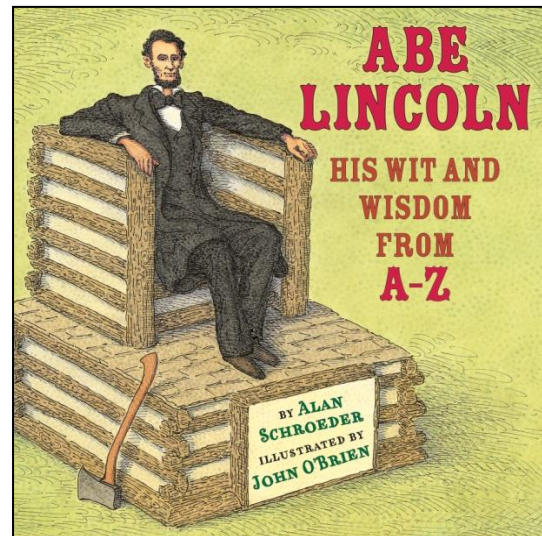
## About the Author

**JOHN O'BRIEN** is an artist and cartoonist whose work appears in the *New Yorker*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and many other publications. He has written numerous picture books and illustrated many more. He lives in New Jersey.

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