

A conversation with author and illustrator

Tedd Arnold



In *VINCENT PAINTS HIS HOUSE*, a playful picture book homage to artist Vincent van Gogh, a house gets a brilliantly colorful paint job. Author and illustrator Tedd Arnold discusses his inspiration behind this colorful tale.

Tedd, please tell us about your new book, *VINCENT PAINTS HIS HOUSE*.

Many, many years ago, I had played with a variation of this story in which the house painter was a bear and the house colors were limited to the six elementary-school primary and secondary colors. It wouldn't even have filled a standard 32-page picture book. Then, a few years ago I happily became a Holiday House author with the publication of *Dirty Gert*. In that story I was granted the rare opportunity to go bonkers with vocabulary.

Then later, while plowing through my "Ideas" folder, I rediscovered my little house painter and considered how I might take a simple story about simple colors and elevate it to some higher level. Looking at my easel, canvases and paint tubes strewn across one end of my studio, I realized the painter could be an artist and the artist's colors could become an excuse for once again going bonkers with vocabulary. I do not think young readers need to always be sheltered from the glory of language.

***VINCENT PAINTS HIS HOUSE* does a great job of introducing young readers to different shades of colors. Where did you get your inspiration for this story?**

I was painting my two-story house in Elmira, New York. I'm not one for finesse, so I had skipped step one of house painting—power washing. In one stroke I brushed right over a spider's web. The spider scurried away out of reach. I said to myself, "I guess she doesn't like the color I'm painting her house." It hit me all in a flash. Her house? In fact, I'm not the only one who lives at this house. In addition to spiders, I had seen bird nests, bats in the attic, mice in the basement and more. What if each critter that lives in and on my house had a preference about what color to paint their house? The entire story came in one quick vision, and that very seldom happens for me.

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The story gives a subtle nod to the Post-Impressionist artist Vincent van Gogh. Who are some fine artists that have inspired you over the years?

I have too many favorite artists to even begin naming them. And I wouldn't limit my list to so-called fine artists. But Vincent was on my mind after having recently read two wonderful biographies. First, an epic volume titled *Van Gogh: The Life* by Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith. But more on point was the title of a smaller book, *The Yellow House: Van Gogh, Gauguin, and Nine Turbulent Weeks in Arles*, by Martin Gayford. I thought about which artist in all of art history is most recognized and recognizable. Vincent immediately came to the top of my list. And just imagine—Vincent once lived in a yellow house!

What do you hope young readers will learn from this story?

What I love in VINCENT PAINTS HIS HOUSE is that color is both simple and myriad. And the names of colors on my tubes of paint are a poetry that is sometimes evocative, sometimes mysterious, and always music to my eyes and ears.

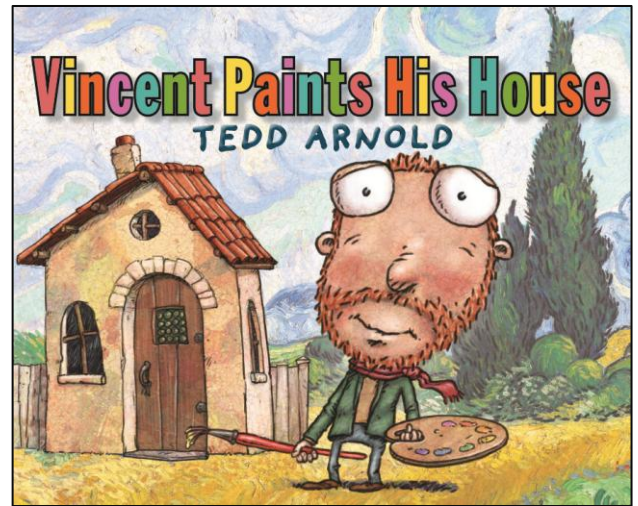
When did you know you wanted to become an author and illustrator?

I never decided to become an artist. I always was. Almost all young children scribble with whatever tools are at hand—crayons, chalk or a stick in the dirt. As they get older, many kids stop drawing. I don't know why. It's not good or bad. It just happens. I am simply one of those kids who never stopped drawing.

The writing portion of the question is a different story. I never thought of myself as a writer, even back in middle school when I drew cartoon stories with word bubbles. I wasn't thinking that I was "writing." I was just cartooning! Decades later, when my wife's kindergarten classroom books inspired me to try my hand at the picture book business, I didn't know any authors to collaborate with. So I began writing my own stories.

If you could give any advice to young authors and illustrators what would it be?

I have four words: (1) READ (2) WRITE (3) AND (4) DRAW. Also, I think it should go without saying that they need to keep a journal. So I guess that's seven words total. But if I said it as one sentence, it would be, "Read, write, and draw, and keep a journal." Now it's eight words. But, for the artists out there, it should be nine words, "Read, write and draw, and keep a *visual* journal." Okay, nine words. That's enough. For now.



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