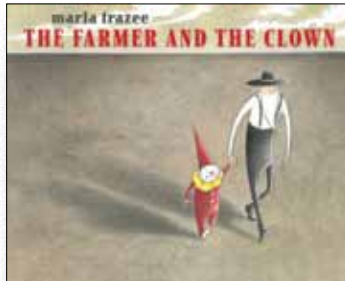


# Young Children Introduces: Marla Frazee, Pat Mora, and Peter H. Reynolds

LYRICAL LANGUAGE, unique stories, and stunning illustrations are just a few characteristics of the works from Marla Frazee, Pat Mora, and Peter H. Reynolds. They are speaking at NAEYC's 2014 Annual Conference & Expo in Dallas.



## Marla Frazee

Marla Frazee has illustrated several books for young children, including *All the World* and *The Seven Silly Eaters*. She is illustrator and author of *The Boss Baby* and *A Couple of Boys Have the Best Week Ever*, a Caldecott Honor Book.

**Meghan Dombrink-Green:** *All the World* is lovely, but the text alone is so spare. How did you first approach illustrating this story?

**Marla Frazee:** The most important thing I try to do when I'm working on a book is to figure out the emotion that I want to communicate. With *All the World*, I jumped right in before I found it. I didn't do the usual thumbnails and character studies. I didn't do a lot of preliminary drawing. I began with a full-scale dummy. There were so many threads, and I needed to figure out who these people were and where they lived. But what happened was that I lost the key emotional thread, so I had to dump my first effort and begin all over again.



I spend a lot of time on sketches to understand the rhythm of the pictures and to figure out where the major beats are. With *All the World* there is this very beautiful rhythmic text, and I determined early on that the last line of each stanza would open up to double-page spreads. That became the touchstone for the structure of the book.

**Meghan:** How do you figure out what a character looks like?

**Marla:** Almost always, I start with what is actually a

really bad drawing—very typical, fairly generic, not interesting. Then I keep drawing it over and over again, or I try different things until I finally get to know whatever or whoever this character is.

I teach a children's book illustration class at Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California, where I went to school. I tell my students it's a matter of getting to know the characters, like when you meet a new neighbor. You might have an initial impression of her, but after a few more conversations you start to think of her in a slightly different way.

I do the illustrations for the Clementine books by Sara Pennypacker. The seventh and last in the series is coming out next spring. This series was the first time I had done pen-and-ink, black-and-white illustrations for longer chapter books. I love the process because it's very different from illustrating a picture book. The illustrations punctuate the events rather than tell their own story.

**Meghan:** Your newest book, *The Farmer and the Clown*, has a very specific use of colors. Can you talk about the color in your illustrations?

**Marla:** I wanted to make the circus train and clown the most colorful part of the landscape. I painted the sky the same dusty color as the land so that the circus train could stand out.

Color is one way of building emotion in a book. There are many things that we as illustrators can do to enhance the emotional experience of the reader—composition, scale, the placement of the entire piece on the double-page spread, whether it takes up the whole space, whether smaller pictures dance around the page. When illustrators pay attention to impacting readers with whatever emotion we want them to have before

they take in the content, that's when a picture really works.

**Meghan:** It's a wordless book. What made you decide to make it wordless?

**Marla:** I didn't set out to do a wordless book. I wanted to tell a particular story, and it didn't click until I thought about both a little clown and a farmer. Once I had these two characters, I really wanted to tell a story about why they were together. I knew that my story would be about a farmer who was not as grumpy as he appeared and a clown who was not as happy as he appeared, and this would be revealed as we went through the story. When I started to draw, it was clear that narration of any kind was going to get in the way of the revelations.

One of the most compelling things about working on picture books is that children are really, really good at reading pictures. They're better at it than grown-ups are. Adults concentrate on the word story more; but kids see every single nuance, every secondary story, any kind of detail in the picture story.

If the illustrator has been able to control the picture story in a way that makes sense to a child, children will follow it. They spend more time on it. They have more focus. The book carries them away, and they get more out of the picture narrative than an adult usually does. I love that.

**Meghan:** In your books you often connect with basic problems that babies and children have, like walking or picky eating. What do you think adults forget about the challenges of being a child?

**Marla:** I think adults minimize the emotional life of children a lot. I had a loving family and a secure life and a neighborhood of friends—but I remember how hard everything still was for me. In my books, whether it is the baby learning to walk in *Walk On!* or the scared girl on the roller coaster in *Roller Coaster*, I want the story to have a larger meaning. With *Walk On!* even very young children understand the book as an extended metaphor for whatever it is they are nervous about doing. No matter how old we are, we're all nervous about doing something!

### Pat Mora

Pat Mora has written several books for young children, including *I Pledge Allegiance*, *Book Fiesta*, and *¡Marimba! Animales From A to Z*. She received a National Endowment for the Arts Creative Writing Fellowship in poetry in 1994.

**Meghan Dombrink-Green:** You've written a number of children's books in English and Spanish, and several of your books focus on Mexican stories and traditions. How do you think culture and heritage have influenced you as a poet and a writer?

**Pat Mora:** I'm so fortunate to have grown up bilingual. Both of my parents were bilingual, but my grandparents didn't speak English. My experience is like those of some of the Latino population, although it is a very diverse community. Culture is a big inspiration for my writing, as are the desert and the fact that I'm female. Culture, nature, and family are strong values in my work. I have also written a lot about the fact that I was an avid reader and that my mother was an avid reader.

When I talk to parents, particularly parents who speak only Spanish, I talk about how important reading is. Parents don't have to speak English to support their children's literacy. When I speak to children, I say to them, "I want you to be able to read, write, and speak English well. If you are lucky enough to know another language, be that Spanish or Polish or Chinese, I want you to be able to read, write and speak that well, too, because that's such an advantage."

**Meghan:** How did growing up bilingual affect your writing and your use of language?

**Pat:** When I look back, I think about how lucky I was that my mother was a reader, how lucky I was that she took

my sister and me to the summer reading club at the public library. Teachers, parents, and caregivers can forget what a dramatic impact they have on children's reading habits. It's important to use diverse books during story time and to

invite parents into the classroom to help read, whether in Spanish, Korean, or another language. This is validating for everybody.

Many times parents—particularly parents who don't speak English or who may have limited economic resources—feel a bit embarrassed about going to the library or going to the school. We need to be their coaches and say,

"Sit with your children every night. I can show you how to do it, I can model it, but I'm not at your house, I'm not at your trailer, I'm not at your apartment."

**Meghan:** On your website you have a poster, "Growing a Nation of Readers: Creating a Bookjoy Family." What inspired you to create this list of family reading suggestions?

**Pat:** I didn't plan to be a writer. I had never seen or heard of a writer who was bilingual. I feel so blessed because of the role of books in my life. I believe that for all young people to have a fair opportunity to succeed, they need to be readers—and not just because teachers say so. They need to learn to enjoy books for pleasure. Hence the word *bookjoy*.

**Meghan:** You recently wrote a book with your daughter, Libby Martinez. What was working with her like?

**Pat:** We've done two books together. Libby is a lawyer by training. She's my older daughter, and she has a great sense



of humor. Five or six years ago Libby said we should write the story that became the book *I Pledge Allegiance*. It is about Lobo, an aunt of ours, becoming a US citizen late in her life. *Lobo* means wolf, and our aunt chose the name, our mother wolf. Libby and I worked via email and phone. We started playing with the text, and then we worked with a terrific editor. I have a special gift from the book's illustrator—the scene of Lobo, Libby, and me all enjoying a big hug. I can look at that all day long.

**Meghan:** You are a great literacy advocate; you founded *Día—El día de los niños/El día de los libros* (Children's Day/Book Day). What do you hear about people celebrating *Día*?

**Pat:** I want April to be a month for celebrating children and books. I want it celebrated in all different languages. Many times people celebrate *Día* near April 30, and there are hundreds of celebrations across the country.

Many of them include free books for children. I have seen *Día* celebrations in parks where materials were donated. Community businesses, grocery stores, grocery chains, and restaurants have been incredibly supportive. Many times we just have to ask them to donate. I have seen fabulous *Día* celebrations as part of story time, as part of having a book acted out at school. It just takes inventiveness.

**Meghan:** How would you like teachers to use your books?

**Pat:** My hope is that teachers will be excited about the books they share. A teacher's own excitement about a book is what excites children. I can write a book, and I can put a lot of myself into it, but I am not going to be in those child care centers, kindergartens, schools. I'm really relying on teachers, librarians, and parents to interest children in what I write. We are partners.

**Peter H. Reynolds**



Peter H. Reynolds has written and illustrated several books for young children, including *Sky Color*, *I'm Here*, and *So Few of Me*. His books have received numerous awards and starred reviews.

**Meghan Dombrink-Green:** How did you get started illustrating and writing children's books?

**Peter H. Reynolds:** I suppose I just never stopped imagining, drawing, and writing as a child. Of course, having a daughter helped. Born in 1986, Sarah was my best audience for my stories. By the mid-1990s, I decided I was ready to start sharing my stories in a big way. My first published book, *The North Star*, got the ball rolling and led to my illustrating Megan McDonald's Judy Moody series for Candlewick Press and the release of *The Dot and Ish*.

**Meghan:** International Dot Day, which is celebrated every September 15, started with your book *The Dot*. What is International Dot Day about, and how can teachers and children participate?

**Peter:** Dot Day was started by a teacher, Terry Shay, who decided to celebrate the themes of the book: courage, creativity, and collaboration. It has snowballed into a global event. This year, almost two million children and educators around the world participated in International Dot Day. There are many ways to celebrate, from drawing and painting to community service projects. To learn more, visit [www.thedotclub.org](http://www.thedotclub.org).

**Meghan:** How do you make the Judy Moody world so alive and engaging?

**Peter:** I draw on my childhood. Those books remind me of my own romping around the neighborhood with my gaggle of friends. I sketch quickly and try to get the gestures right. The details come later, when I ink.

**Meghan:** How do you and your twin brother, Paul, fuel each others' creativity, from when you were children to now as adults?

# Meet the Authors

at NAEYC's Annual Conference & Expo  
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**Peter:** Being born a twin automatically gives you the advantage of having a partner. Not all twins leverage that relationship, but Paul and I were in total sync from the start. Paul is amazingly encouraging about my work, and I finally have gotten him to start writing and creating with me. *Going Places*, released earlier this year, was our first book together. Our second book is volume one of the Sydney and Simon series, which features—no surprise—twin mice!

**Meghan:** Many of our members are teachers or teacher educators. Can you talk about a time when a teacher impacted your life?

**Peter:** I have had a few teachers who made a huge difference. I often talk about my seventh grade math teacher, who encouraged me to teach math using my art and storytelling. I also have to thank my media teachers, Jim and Jean Morrow, who taught in Chelmsford, Massachusetts. They both inspired me by showing what creative, passionate people look like. They lived it. Outside of school they were doing their craft. They treated me like a fellow media colleague, not a student. They both inspired me to be a storyteller and make that my life's mission. No test invented could assess how they influenced me during those years in the mid-1970s.

**Meghan:** You're a busy guy. You have more than just the books going on, yes?

**Peter:** Yes, I own a book and toy store in my hometown of Dedham, Massachusetts. I opened it 11 years ago when I noticed our town had no independent bookstore. I also founded FableVision Learning, a company focusing on creativity in the classroom through books, media, and technology. We champion innovation in learning. We're busy right now on a software tool that will allow elementary school students to learn digital fabrication. It's really exciting to see how new tools let children engage, learn, and show what they know in a wide spectrum of ways. Visit us online at [www.fablevisionlearning.com](http://www.fablevisionlearning.com).

**Meghan:** Now that your daughter is 28, who will be your inspiration?

**Peter:** Henry Rocket Reynolds, my son, is 3 1/2. He is a fountain of joy and imagination. I look at him and marvel at how much he looks as though he were one of my drawings come to life. Pure magic.

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Meghan Dombrink-Green is an associate editor at NAEYC.

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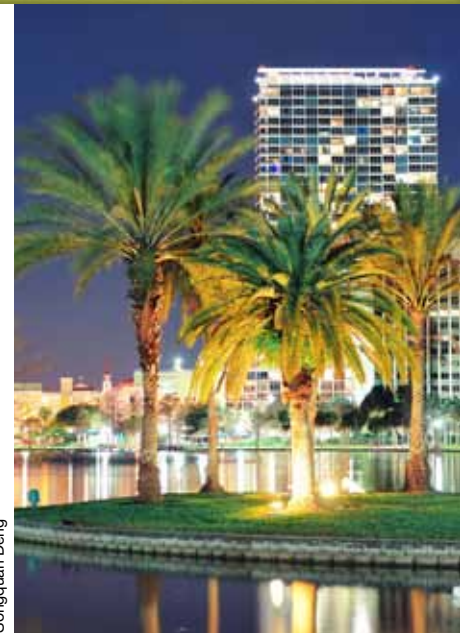
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