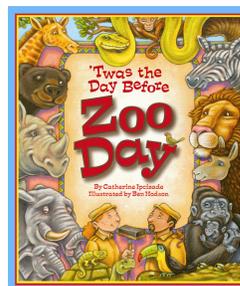


A Conversation with Catherine Ipcizade *author of 'Twas the Day Before Zoo Day*



Where did the idea for 'Twas the Day Before Zoo Day originate?

I wrote the story mainly because of my son. He was entering kindergarten and wanted desperately to learn everything he could about animals. But, at the age of five, he also needed to be entertained. When I searched for books about animals, I found two things – strictly non-fiction and fiction. Finding books that provided animal facts in a fun way proved much harder than I anticipated. So I wrote *T'was the Day Before Zoo Day* to do both. Hopefully, kids will agree.



What are the most frequently asked questions you encounter as an author?

Because I freelance in addition to writing books, I often get asked how I have the time for everything. My response is that we always make time for our passions. If you want something badly enough, you put in the time and effort, you maximize your time, and you keep going, no matter what. I also get asked how I come up with ideas. Mainly, my ideas come from observing life. My children give me constant inspiration, as do other children I encounter. My own childhood sparks some of my ideas, while other ideas are simply "born" out of the blue when I least expect them.

What gets your creative juices flowing?

I'd love to say I'm creative all the time – I'm not. I have two times each day (mid-morning and dusk) when creativity hits and I can write freely. Other than that, it's a touch and go situation. Sometimes inspiration strikes at other times during the day, while other times, trying to write in my "off" hours is like pulling nails. So what gets my creative juices flowing? I'd say simple things – this may sound strange, but a cup of coffee or tea while I'm curled up on the couch makes me inspired to write heartfelt pieces. A trip somewhere with my family sparks fun, zany pieces. Cooking and crafting with my kids sparks creativity to write pieces that challenge and teach, while entertaining.

What advice do you have for parents who want to get their kids excited about reading?

To help your children get excited about reading, don't be afraid to break out of the standard confines. There are so many books available in the market that parents don't know about. If your child is a reluctant reader, find out what they like. Say, for instance, your child enjoys skateboarding, but at a trip to your local bookstore you couldn't find anything. Don't stop there! Try the library, do an Amazon.com search. The books are out there. Sometimes kids just need their parents to do a little detective work to find something they will like.

Any other advice?

Well, I know I could have used some advice when I was trying to teach my son about animals. Children, especially in the age range of 4-7, love to learn about the world around them. This often includes a strong desire to learn about animals. Parents can help facilitate a lifelong love of learning for their children by taking the initiative to "teach" them creatively. Buy books that not only teach, but also entertain. A child's attention span is short at this age--you don't want to inundate your child with too much information at once. So a book that informs while entertaining will be something your child will read again and again, while retaining interesting and helpful information. Follow-up your reading time with visits to your local zoo or aquarium. In my book, *T'was the Day Before Zoo Day*, I made certain the animals I included could be found at nearly all zoos. Take lots of pictures and don't rush your child through the exhibits. Allow him or her to ask questions, both at the zoo and back at home. Think about asking some of your own, such as, "What was your favorite animal and why?" Get involved in your child's learning. You'll be helping to instill a lifelong love of learning and will be letting your child know that questioning the world around them is important.

Have you always loved books?

Oh, yes. To this day, I can tell you exactly where the following books were located in my elementary school library: *Serendipity*, a biography on Harriet Tubman, *A Wrinkle in Time*, *The Island of the Blue Dolphins*, those little Beatrix Potter books with the gloriously smooth pages, and a leprechaun book that I adored! Actually, when I was a child, I wanted to read so badly that at nighttime, when I was supposed to be sleeping, I'd hide under my covers with a flashlight and anything I could find to read. Sometimes it was a book; other times, it was the little hardware catalogue insert that came in the Sunday paper. When you want to read, you find a way!

What has been most rewarding or challenging in writing your *'Twas the Day Before Zoo Day*?

I think the most rewarding part of writing the book was hearing kids' chuckles as I "tested" the text out on them. It was a fun book to write, imagining what animals might do at the zoo while misbehaving. The most challenging part was probably just trying to fit in everything I wanted to say, while adhering to the rhyme structure ... oh, that and realizing rhinos weigh as much as a car...not a bus. (Hehe.)

Want to continue this conversation? Schedule an interview!

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