



A Conversation with *Tom Robinson*

author of
Fibonacci Zoo

What is most challenging about writing children's books?

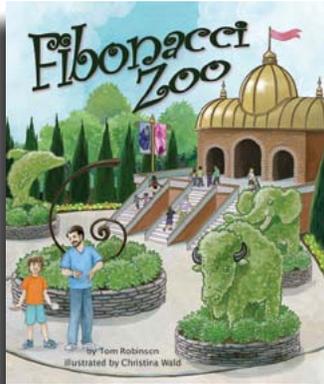
For me, the biggest challenge is to take a concept that I find so intriguing (such as the Fibonacci sequence) and introduce children to it in a way that sparks their interest. In a picture book, I have few words to tell a story, so each word must be carefully chosen. I close my eyes and try to imagine a young child with a parent, both sharing my story and I want each word to bring that parent and that child closer together.

When are you most creative?

I am a night owl. Late at night, after my family is asleep, my mind is free to think of new story ideas. The idea for a story usually begins with a single nugget. Slowly over time, long before I begin writing, the nugget begins growing into something bigger. I can't really say when the nugget turns into a story, but once the story is in place, I begin writing, and the story really writes itself.

What was your incentive to write this particular book?

The genesis for this story was a suggestion from my wife. She challenged me, a high school math teacher, to write a story that would connect the youngest of readers to interesting math and science concepts. After sifting through several story ideas, math and science concepts, and manuscripts, Fibonacci Zoo was born. I was thrilled to learn that Arbordale approaches reading and learning in much the same way I do, and I am so pleased to be partnering with them on this journey.



What do you like best about the Fibonacci sequence?

As much as I appreciate the number pattern and the interesting manner in which all of the numbers are produced, what captivates me about this sequence is that as the numbers get very large, the ratio of consecutive numbers in the sequence approaches a truly extraordinary number. The number is 'phi' (Φ), and it's

approximately, 1.618, though like the number Π , phi is a decimal that continues forever. The number is known as ‘The Golden Ratio’ or ‘The Golden Mean’, and describes the dimensions of some of the world’s most important and impressive art and design, such as Da Vinci’s Mona Lisa and the Parthenon.

As a writer and teacher do you have advice for parents?

As a math teacher, one might think my advice would be mathematical in nature. But it’s far simpler than that. Read, read, read to your children! There is no minimum age for reading to children. Read them anything and everything you can. They will tell you the stories they like best and which ones they want to hear over and over. Just let them hear your voice sounding out words and telling stories. In time, they will find their own stories to read, but the example parents set for their children, long before the children even realize, is one that will last a lifetime.



Is there one particular question you are asked over and over from kids?

The most common question I get asked, and those asking the question are typically children, is what made me decide to write a book. My answer is never simple. I explain that

while anyone can decide to write a manuscript, it takes a combination of good writing, an editor who believes in the story, and good timing to make a book. Life is filled with stories, but many of those stories never become books. I am blessed to have seen this story turned into a book for all to enjoy

When did you decide that writing was something you wanted to pursue?

I fell in love with reading and writing in high school. Karen Hukari, my AP Literature teacher, introduced me to the power of the written word to take us on journeys limited only by our imaginations. It wasn’t until 1998 that I finally found a story I wanted to tell. I wrote my first manuscript for an adult audience, but that manuscript led to two very exciting science experiment books for children. It was through the writing and publishing of those two books that my vision for writing for an audience of young readers began to take shape. Fibonacci Zoo is the next step in bringing that vision to life.

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