

Book Fair Author Spotlight On...

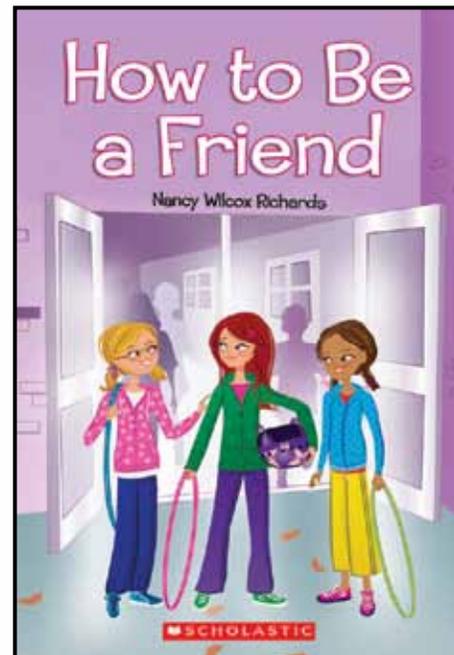


Nancy Wilcox Richards

How to Be a Friend

Q What inspires you to write?

A I often think that a writer is a little bit like a thief. At least I am! I steal (maybe 'borrow' is a kinder word) bits and pieces of peoples' lives. I use those bits and pieces as a spark to ignite something in a story and then I weave imaginary details around it. So, I guess everyday events inspire me. It could be a kid in my Grade Two class who found a mouse in her sneaker. It might be a funny comment someone has said. It could even be as a result of watching something out of my window. For example, at school the other day, I noticed a crow was systematically plucking all of the garbage out of the trash cans on the playground. I found myself thinking that that could end up in a book. Sometimes I am inspired by events that touch my heart. *Claire's Race* is one of those books. It's the true story about my 7-year-old neighbour who ran a race after having brain surgery. *How to Tame a Bully* was inspired by a desire to help kids overcome bullying issues. Sometimes these problems aren't neatly resolved. Not everything in life has a 'happily ever after' ending. I think all of my bully books, including *How to Outplay a Bully* and *How to Handle a Bully*, help kids to understand this. Bullying is a complex issue. Lots of times it is not wrapped up like a tidy package. It can be complicated.



Q What advice do you have for young writers?

A The best advice I can give young writers is to "write, write and then write some more." The only way to get better at something is to keep practicing. If you wanted to get better at a skateboard jump, you'd keep practicing, fine tuning it each time. Writing is like that. Creating the story is the fun part. It's like learning to do the jump on your skateboard for the very first time. You're pretty happy you can do it. But then you realize you need to be able to land a bit more smoothly. Perfecting the jump takes lots of practice and hard work. It's the same with writing. Once you're happy with the characters and plot, it's time to get down to the nitty-gritty business of editing and revising. That's the hardest part – looking at word choice, adding those extra details to make a clearer picture, hacking out unnecessary details. But once you've done that (and it can take many, many edits), the finished piece will be much more polished. And it will feel great – like acing the perfect jump!

Q What was your favourite book when you were growing up?

A I was a bit of a late bloomer when it came to reading. I think I was in Grade Three when reading finally made sense to me. Up until that time, it was hard work figuring out the words and reading smoothly. I didn't really enjoy reading. Instead, I preferred to be outside playing with my friends. And then one day, it was like the reading light came on. Everything just kind of clicked! I remember going to the library and signing out a Nancy Drew book. It was probably my first chapter book. I devoured it. Then I read another. And another. Soon I had read the whole series and I was hooked on reading.

Q What do you like to do when you're not writing?

A I have so many things I like to do. I live on a beautiful lake. In the summer I enjoy swimming and boating. I really hate the cold weather which means I'm not much into skating anymore but I used to do lots of that when my kids were little. I enjoy Nordic walking and hanging out with my family and friends. I love to cook – especially any recipe that involves chocolate (and, if truth be told, I have a little bit of chocolate every single day. Probably not the most nutritious thing! *Shhhh*, it'll be our little secret). I love to read – all kinds of books. And I read everywhere: in my house, in my boat, in my hammock – anywhere I can find a peaceful little corner.



Q What has been the biggest achievement of your career so far?

A This is a tough question. Teaching is very rewarding on many different levels, much the same as being a children's author has its own unique achievements. Every day in my classroom there are little events that are cause for celebration – whether it's the student who finally understands a math concept or the student who suddenly has an 'aha moment' when learning to read. As teachers we like to make a positive difference in the lives we touch. But teaching, writing and raising a family can be very challenging. You need to strike a balance between family, work and play. My greatest achievement is finding that balance. The result? I have two wonderful adult children who are ready to tackle their own careers, and they have a good sense of that balance.

Q What do you think are the qualities of a true friend?

A We have many different kinds of friends. Some friends are only in our lives for a short time. Other friends seem to be there forever. I think true friends can fit in either of those categories. But they need to be someone you can trust. You can tell them your deepest secret and they'll never blab about it because they understand all about loyalty. They genuinely care about you and they're honest, reliable and supportive. Lots of times you have shared interests and your friends are fun to hang out with. Sometimes true friends can be hard to find. But when you're lucky enough to find one (or two or even more), it's absolutely one of the most special things you'll ever have in your life.