

• Meet the Author •

Jane Yolen



Jane Yolen, often called “the Hans Christian Andersen of America,” is the author of almost 300 books, including *Owl Moon*, *The Devil’s Arithmetic*, and *How Do Dinosaurs Say Goodnight*. The books range from rhymed picture books and baby board books, through middle grade fiction, poetry collections, nonfiction, and up to novels and story collections for young adults and adults.

Her books and stories have won an assortment of awards—two Nebulas, a World Fantasy Award, a Caldecott, the Golden Kite Award, three Mythopoeic awards, two Christopher Medals, a nomination for the National Book Award, and the Jewish Book Award, among others. She is also the winner (for body of work) of the Kerlan Award and the Catholic Library’s Regina Medal. Five colleges and universities have given her honorary doctorates.

Interview conducted by Toni Buzzeo, career media specialist and author (visit www.tonibuzzeo.com).

Have you had a longtime curiosity for or admiration of the Wright Brothers themselves? If so, what drew you to their story? If not, did the excitement of the centennial inspire some of your interest in them?

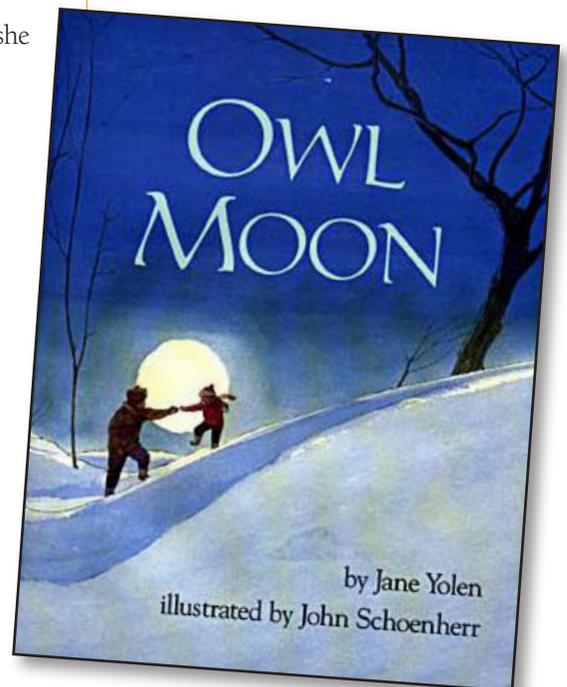
JY: I have always been leery of flying, though I do it all the time, and the absolute fearlessness of the early pilots has always stunned me. But I wrote this book because of the centennial. And I only said I would do it when I discovered Katharine. Because so many books about the Wright Brothers have been done before, I didn’t want to do one unless it could be unusual. Surprisingly, no one had ever done a picture book with Katharine at the center, as she was in their lives.

Did you first encounter Katharine Wright in the research for this book or had you known of her beforehand? What made her story compelling for you? And how did you decide to take this unique approach to telling Orville and Wilbur’s story?

JY: I was asked to do a book about the Wright Brothers and I said, “Give me a couple of days to do some reading before I tell you if I can get a handle on it.” And there she was, right as I began my research. I was stunned and sure that many writers before me had written about her. But I was wrong. And when I found that out, I knew I could go ahead with the book.

In what ways did telling the story from Katharine’s perspective limit or expand your telling of the story that is usually told?

JY: Well, she wasn’t actually at Kitty Hawk and didn’t do the inventing. But she was the brothers’ sounding board when they

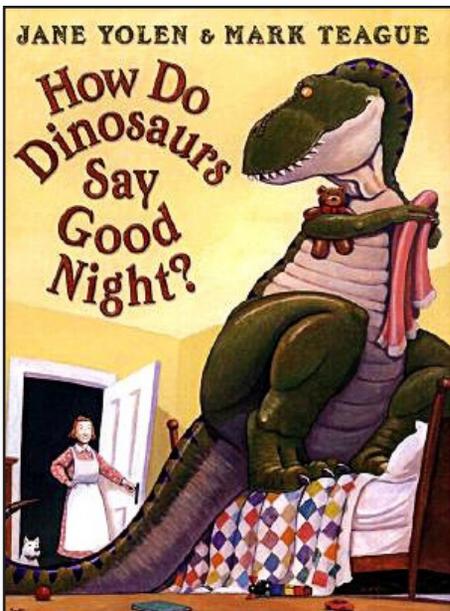


were first working on their models. And when they went off on their flying trials, they wrote letters home, and sent that famous telegram to Katharine and their father. So she had an interesting perspective on how things were going. I liked that.

In what ways was Katharine Wright like you as a child? What was your birth family configuration? Were you—or are you—a steadfast supporter of those you love and a believer in the impossible?

JY: I am the oldest of two, but my brother was the Golden Boy in my father's eyes, so there is a bit of similarity. And I have been a supporter of his work (he's been a brilliant journalist in South America and is now a translator) all his adult life.

Please share some of the fascinating things about Katharine Wright and her brothers that you had to forego including in your story.



JY: For one thing, unlike the usual way families of the day thought about education, she was the only one of the siblings to get a higher degree, not the boys. But for me, the saddest thing was how, at the end of her life, Katharine was estranged from Orville. When in 1926 she decided to marry a man named Henry Haskell, Orville threw a fit. He raged and refused to speak to her again. Katharine and Henry got married, moved to Kansas City, and tried often to reconcile with him, but he was furious with her for leaving him when he felt he needed her to take care of him as she had all his life. But two years after the marriage, she caught pneumonia and it was clear she was going to die. Their older brother Lorin persuaded Orville to visit her, and he did, just in time before she passed away.

You write so many kinds of books. Please talk about how the writing of a picture book biography like this one is different from writing a fictional picture book. What is the appeal in the picture book biography format for you?

JY: The arc of the story the writer will tell is already there. It is real. You cannot tamper with it. But finding an interesting way into the story is the fun part.

How can readers learn more about you and your books?

JY: My Web site, and the journal on it, are there for anyone who is interested at: www.janeyolen.com.

See janeyolen.com/janeworks.html for a bibliography.

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*Toni Buzzeo, MA, MLIS, is an author as well as a career library media specialist and member of the Maine Association of School Libraries Executive Board. She is the author of five picture books, most recently *Our Librarian Won't Tell Us ANYTHING! A Mrs. Skorupski Story* (UpstartBooks, 2006) and many professional books and articles. Visit www.tonibuzzeo.com or e-mail Toni at tonibuzzeo@tonibuzzeo.com.*