

# • Meet the Author •

## Carole Gerber

Interview conducted by Toni Buzzeo, career media specialist and author (visit [www.tonibuzzeo.com](http://www.tonibuzzeo.com)).

Grades  
K–2, 3–5



Photo courtesy of Carole Gerber

**Carole Gerber** is the award-winning author of 16 picture books, two chapter books, and more than 100 elementary reading and science texts. An Ohio native, she holds a B.S. in English education and an M.A. in journalism from Ohio State. Her latest picture books include *Annie Jump Cannon, Astronomer* (2011) and *Little Red Bat* (2010), both told in prose. Many of her books are written in verse and have won awards from the Children's Book Council, the National Science Teachers Association, and the Parent Council.

**How did you first encounter the fascinating fact that little red bats can choose whether to hibernate or migrate? And how did it go from fascinating fact to the topic you wanted to pursue in a picture book?**

**CG:** I noticed that bats were a publishing trend, so decided to jump on the “bat wagon” and identify a little-known but common bat. After reading hundreds of articles about dozens of bat species, I chose the little red bat because it is not scary-looking, it has lovely rust-colored fur, and it is the only species that can either hibernate or migrate. Another important factor was that red bats are solitary tree bats. I felt art depicting the outdoors, one cute bat, and a cast of forest animals would be much more visually appealing to readers than illustrations of dozens of bigger bats in the dim interior of a cave. Finally, I could not resist writing about a creature that can wrap up in its tail and disguise itself as a pine cone!

**What things did you have to consider and research as you built the list of animals the little red bat interacts with in this book?**

**CG:** I had to choose animals that would co-exist in the same eco-system and whose predators also prey on bats. That narrowed the field considerably. Also, since the little red bat (“little” is actually part of its common name) is small enough to hide behind an oak leaf, I chose as many small animals as I could so the bat would not look too teeny-tiny. The only large animals are the deer and turkey. As a picture book author, I try always to “think in pictures.” The bright turkey, the soft furry mouse, and the elegant shape of the deer are as important as words in telling the story.

**Did illustrator Christina Wald do any hands-on research to ensure the accuracy of the little red bat?**

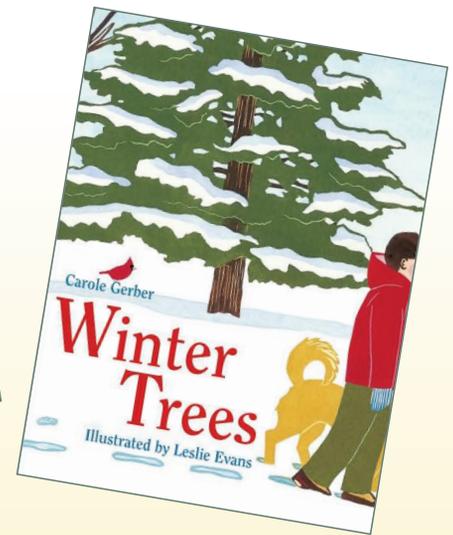
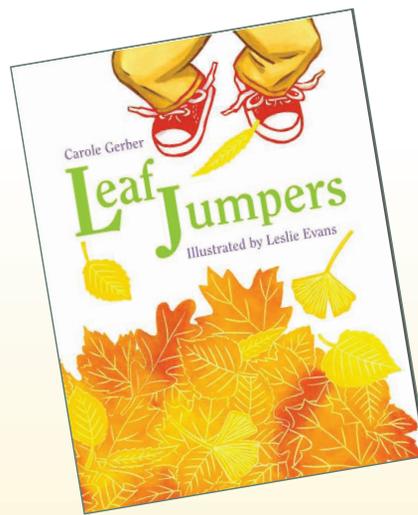
**CG:** Christina believes that nothing is better than seeing the living animal move. She contacted bat rescue people in Cincinnati, where she lives, and was put in touch with Robert and Anne Walton, who rehabilitate little red bats in their home in Ft. Wayne, Indiana, and then release them back into the wild. Christina drove to their home, where she watched them providing daily care, including feeding them milk blended with mealworms. She took lots of video

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and photos, but the literally “hands on” and most exciting part of her research was getting to hold a little red bat.

**Many of your picture books are nature-based. What makes the writing of these books so appealing to you, and how is it different from writing for children on other topics or themes you have tackled?**

**CG:** I was trained as a journalist, so I’m predisposed to start with the facts. Nature provides thousands of fascinating topics to explore that I can sometimes develop into books. The best example of this is my trees series for Charlesbridge Publishing. I wrote about trees in autumn in *Leaf Jumpers*, followed by *Winter Trees* (selected as an outstanding trade book by the Children’s Book Council), and coming out in 2013 is *Spring Blossoms*. I have begun writing the summer trees book. All are told in verse and illustrated by Leslie Evans. Also in 2013, Holt will publish *Seeds, Bees, Butterflies and More! Poems for Two Voices*, illustrated by Eugene Yelchin. I also love writing on playful, “research-free” topics. *Tuck-In Time* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, forthcoming) is an interactive bedtime book, and HarperCollins will publish *A Band of Babies*, illustrated by Jane Dyer, in 2015. All are told in verse.



**I know that you were a middle school and high school teacher. How does this background influence your writing of books for young children?**

**CG:** Teaching taught me that the best way to educate students is to engage their minds with lively, entertaining, fact-based materials. I’m an introvert, so supplying those materials as an author suits my personality better than interacting with dozens of people during a typical school day. I do enjoy school visits tremendously but am always happy to get back to my quiet office and write.

**You volunteer as a tour guide for children at a local nature preserve and farm. Please talk about how this activity informs your writing life and how your writing contributes to your volunteer work.**

**CG:** I love taking preschool and elementary school children on tours of the 236-acre Stratford Ecological Center near

my home in central Ohio. They are delighted by the smallest things, and so am I: Walking single file on a forest trail, milking a goat, jumping in the hay loft, eating a carrot pulled from the ground, cranking a cider press. Nature fills me with wonder and it’s gratifying to see young children get excited about it, too. I especially love seeing fearful children overcome their reluctance to try something new—for example, letting a chicken peck seeds from their hands. I don’t usually tell them I’m a writer. I introduce myself as “Miss Carole,” and let their joy teach me what I want to write about.

**Who wrote the informative curriculum material that forms the back matter of your book? What do you hope it accomplishes?**

**CG:** Sylvan Dell Editor Donna German writes the three to six pages of “For Creative Minds” material included in each of their books. It’s meant to extend learning and includes fun facts, crafts, vocabulary, and games to reinforce the educational value of the books, and to sup-

port National Science and Math Standards. Each book is also carefully vetted by experts in the field including scientists and educators from NASA, NOAA, SeaWorld, Houston Zoo, and various nature centers and aviaries. Sylvan Dell also provides 40 to 60 pages of free online supplemental resources for each book, as well as eBook versions of all titles in Spanish and English with the same lesson extensions and activities as the print editions.

### How can readers learn more about you and your books?

**CG:** I have an author website, [www.carolegerber.com](http://www.carolegerber.com). Details about my school visits through the Artists-in-Schools program are listed on the Greater Columbus Arts Council website, [www.gcac.org/edu/ais](http://www.gcac.org/edu/ais).

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*Toni Buzzeo, MA, MLIS, is an author as well as a career library media specialist. She is the author of seventeen picture books, most recently Inside the Books (Upstart, 2012) and Stay Close to Mama (Hyperion, 2012) and many professional books and articles. Visit [www.tonibuzzeo.com](http://www.tonibuzzeo.com) or e-mail Toni at [tonibuzzeo@tonibuzzeo.com](mailto:tonibuzzeo@tonibuzzeo.com).*