



Author Spotlight with Carole Gerber

How did you get your start as an author?

After teaching high school English for a couple of years, I earned a master's degree in journalism. As a freelance journalist, I wrote for ad agencies, magazines, corporations, hospitals, universities, and work-for-hire educational publishers. It was fabulous training for becoming an author, because it taught me to write concisely, to be willing to revise, and to never be thin-skinned about constructive criticism. Moving into writing my own books flowed naturally from my background as a journalist.

Do you find writing in verse a help or a hindrance when trying to convey science to children? What are the advantages and disadvantages of using this format?

The advantage of verse is that it's concise; the flow helps children to anticipate, understand, and remember new words. There's nothing better than lovely or funny verse to capture and hold a young reader's attention. The disadvantage is that verse is far harder to revise than prose. Changing a line of prose is no big deal. Changing a line of iambic pentameter affects the other lines around it. It's difficult to write good verse and, in my opinion, takes a lot more skill than writing prose.

What made you want to become a poet?

I couldn't help myself! Seriously, I wrote poems naturally as a kid. In high school, I was lucky to have had a wonderful English and creative writing teacher named John Engle. He was a tough critic and insisted that I revise and revise. He also helped me (and others in my class) get our poems published—and in some cases we were paid for them. He was a prolific poet, with more than 1,000 published poems in major magazines. He died in 2006 and one of the last poems I shared with him was the text of *Winter Trees* (published in 2008), including the dedication: "In memory of John D. Engle, Jr., tree-lover, poet, teacher, friend."

What other areas of science would you like to write about?

I like biology and all types of natural science. Besides *Winter Trees*, I have five other books coming out for other publishers between 2013 and 2015. One is about stingrays; another is a series of funny poems for two voices about “seeds, bees, and butterflies and more.” (That’s part of the title.) Also coming are a Christmas book, a bedtime book, and a funny book for toddlers.

The letterpress-influenced illustrations in your books are very striking. How does the creative process work with illustrator Leslie Evans? How do the illustrations complement your work?

There’s not usually a direct collaboration between the illustrator and author, but I do share my reference sources with Leslie to help her ensure accuracy. The editor sends Leslie’s sketches for my comments before she does the final illustrations. I have never met Leslie in person but I admire her talent. Her spare style is perfect for my trees books and I am always especially thrilled with her clever covers. My favorite visual is the red bird she perched on the “G” in Gerber on the cover of *Winter Trees*.

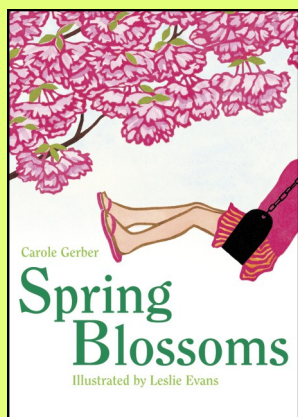
What advice would you give to aspiring writers?

Unless you’ve been a teacher who has read hundreds of children’s books, get some actual writing experience, preferably paid, where your work is judged and you are required to revise. Your first thought is not your best—it’s just the beginning of a process. Finally, read the books of published authors whose work you admire. If you love a book, type it and page it out as you type. This will help you see how books of various genres are paced and structured. You will eventually discover your own voice, which has been lurking inside you for years, waiting to be polished and—with luck—turned into a book.

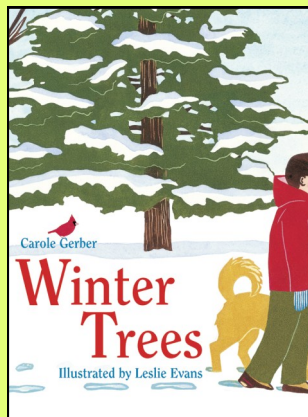
You wrote Leaf Jumpers in 2004, and it was followed by Winter Trees and Spring Blossoms. Is a summer book, perhaps inspired by your love of gardening, next?

Yes, I would love to write a summer trees book to make the series complete! I have been keeping a file of ideas and information for when I hopefully get the go-ahead to write it.

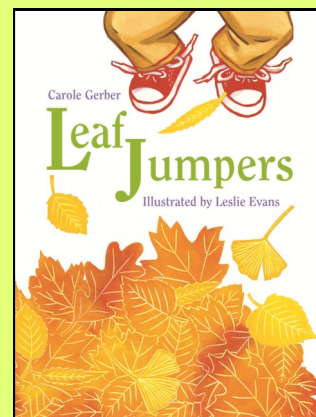
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