



Author Spotlight with Catherine Urdahl

In your new book *Polka-dot Fixes Kindergarten*, Polka-dot has some first day jitters and a bad interaction with a girl she calls a “meanie.” Do you have any advice for children experiencing similar difficulties at school?

For most kindergartners, school is fun, fun, FUN! But if you’re shy like I was, the first day or two can be hard. It’s okay to watch for a bit before joining in, but then look for someone else who needs a friend and ask him or her to play.

Most kindergartners are nice most of the time. But once in a while someone might talk or act mean—like Liz in *Polka-dot Fixes Kindergarten* or the real-life Liz in my old neighborhood. Often that’s because the person is having a hard time and is feeling frustrated and crabby. If someone says something mean, you should not say something mean back. But you should tell him or her to STOP. If that does not work, talk to your teacher, a playground helper, your mom, your dad, your grandma, your grandpa, or another grown-up.

Also—if you make a mistake, that’s okay. On one of my first days of kindergarten I (like Polka-dot) broke a kindergarten rule by dipping the blue brush in the red paint. I thought it was a BIG DEAL, but it was not.

Polka-dot is taught by her grandfather how to fix just about anything with duct tape, runny soap, and dotted bandages. Is this something that you were taught by your own grandfather or father?

Like Polka-dot’s grandpa, my dad can fix anything—plus he builds beautiful furniture. But unlike Polka-dot’s grandpa, he does things the right way (with nails, screws and real tools) and hardly ever uses duct tape. My dad tried to teach me to fix things the right way, but I was not a good student. So I use duct tape, electrical tape, hem tape—anything that’s quick and easy. I did, however, receive many valuable “tools” from my dad. He gave me faith, strength and determination. For that, I am so grateful.

Polka-dot is a character many children admire. Will we see more books about the young heroine and her trusty fix-it kit?

I really like Polka-dot, and I hope children like her, too. She’s spunky, sassy, carries a fix-it kit, and has a fabulous sense of fashion. She’s the kind of kindergartner I wished to be. I’ve sketched out several ideas for future Polka-dot stories, and I hope to write and publish more adventures for her and her fabulous fix-it kit.





Your other book, *Emma's Question*, is also a picture book. What made you decide to write for such a young audience?

As I said, I was quite shy, especially during my early elementary school years. I struggled to adjust to school and other social settings and, because of this, I remember that time particularly well. I didn't exactly decide to write for this age group, but many of the characters that develop inside my head seem to be that age. Also, I like spending time with children who are about kindergarten age, and their voices sometimes find their way onto the page.

If you could have your own fix-it kit, what three items would it contain?

Of course, I would pack duct tape (neon green, pink, tie-dye, or zebra print) because it really does fix anything. I'd pack spot remover because I spill a lot, especially if I am eating my favorite food—spaghetti and meatballs. And I'd pack a mini flashlight so I can read even if there is a storm and the electricity goes out.

Do you have any favorite picture books that you'd recommend to children at the moment?

I have lots of favorite picture books, but if I have to choose, *A Baby Sister for Francis* by Russell Hoban, ill. Lillian Hoban. Francis is the world's spunkiest and funniest badger, because she makes up fabulous rhymes, and because of honest new-big-sister lines like, "things are not very good around here anymore." And because the Francis books always made my daughter, Anna, laugh.

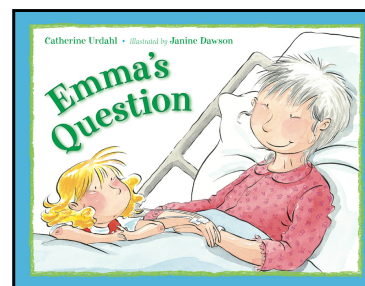
You have two daughters of your own and they're both young adults now. Is there any chance that you'll write for that demographic in the future?

I have written a draft of an early chapter book and sketched out ideas for a middle grade novel. But often the characters that present themselves to me are fairly young. I'd be open to writing a story about teenagers or young adults, if such a story began to grow in my head. For now I find it easier to think like a five- or six-year-old than like a 16-year-old. But you never know—that could change.

— **By Catherine Urdahl** —



ISBN 978-1-57091-737-0 \$16.95 HC
ISBN 978-1-57091-738-7 \$7.95 PB
ISBN 978-1-60734-312-7 \$6.99 E-book



ISBN 978-1-58089-145-5 \$16.95 HC
ISBN 978-1-58089-146-2 \$7.95 PB
ISBN 978-1-60734-125-3 \$6.99 E-book