



Author Spotlight with Cheryl Bardoe

You worked at Chicago’s Field Museum for almost a decade. What did you do while you were there?

I wrote and wrote and wrote. I wrote text that appeared on the website, visitor map, the museum magazine, or anywhere that people looked to learn more about the museum and what they might see there. I like to joke that I even “wrote” signs telling people where to find the bathrooms. I also helped create exhibitions; one of my favorite projects was when we designed a hands-on playlab for children to explore natural history. Working at the museum showed me how many places there are in the world to be a writer. It also gave me the opportunity to work closely with scientists, to understand how they see the world and to then communicate about important research to museum visitors.

With a background in journalism and a Masters in Creative Writing, what is it that draws you to writing children’s nonfiction?

Children are instinctively and passionately curious, and I have never let go of that unquenchable curiosity. If I hear about something surprising or amazing, then I am compelled to find out more, which often leads to a story idea. I feel very privileged to write nonfiction for children. It’s my job to follow the path of curiosity farther than most people and then to share what I find by writing about it. I want to write stories that encourage children to ask questions about the world. The more questions we ask, the more we learn, and the more opportunities we see for making connections in the world.

On your website you say “I like to draw back the curtain to reveal how scientists go about asking questions, gathering information and drawing conclusions.” In what ways do you think that approach lead to the development of *Behold the Beautiful Dung Beetle*?

Although a scientist isn’t part of the story in *Behold the Beautiful Dung Beetle*, I did interview dung beetle expert Dr. Doug Emlen, a biologist at the University of Montana, when writing the book. Thinking like a scientist helps us put aside the “ewww” factor to observe nature up close and appreciate how the different parts of our world work together. What dung beetles do for our environment is really incredible—even if it isn’t a job we want to do ourselves.

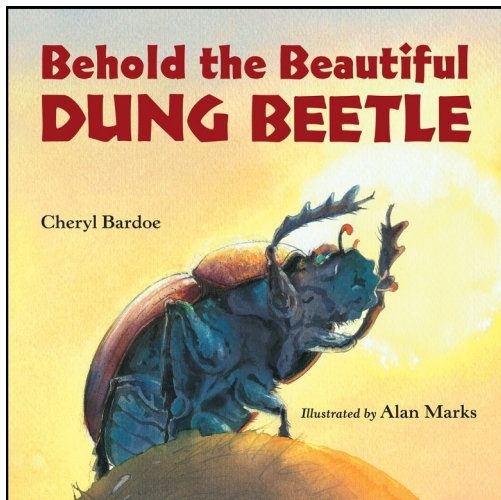


Why decide to focus on dung beetles?

I was driving in the car and heard a scientist being interviewed on the radio. He described the many different shaped horns dung beetles had on their heads and told how fiercely the beetles compete for a resource that most people would consider worthless. As soon as I got home, of course I looked for photos on the internet—and wow! The beetles were gorgeous colors. And they did have such unusual shaped horns. As a writer, I'm drawn to unsung heroes. The idea that tiny animals who eat poop could also be beautiful and important struck both my funny bone and my desire to give credit in nature where it is due.

Did you discover anything in your dung beetle research that amazed or surprised you?

I hadn't thought about dung beetles before, so I discovered many surprises: how many different kinds there are, how many places they live in the world, how important they are for healthy habitats, and certainly how many shiny colors they can be. The more I researched dung beetles, the more amazing they seemed. The biggest surprise is that this impressive feat of recycling—dung being transformed into valuable food and soil—is happening all the time all around us and we rarely even notice.



By Cheryl Bardoe
Illustrated by Alan Marks

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 *A Junior Library Guild Selection*

Correlated to Common Core State Standards:
Reading Informational. Grade 2. Standards 1, 3-8, and 10.
Reading Informational. Grade 3. Standards 1-5, 7, 8, and 10.

Dung is a precious pile of food and drink for these beetles.

Simple science text and dramatic illustrations give a close-up view of the fascinating world of the dung beetle. When an animal lightens its load, dung beetles race to the scene. They battle over, devour, hoard, and lay their eggs in the precious poop. Dung is food, drink, and fuel for new life—as crucial to these beetles as the beetles are to many habitats, including our own.