

Author Spotlight with David Biedrzycki



How did you come up with the character of Ace Lacewing, Bug Detective?

Several years ago I was illustrating *The Beetle Alphabet* book along with several other nonfiction books about insects, and I learned a lot by conducting research for them. One day a beautiful green lacewing landed next to my computer monitor. I put it under a little magnifying glass and did a detailed drawing of it. Then, I had a little fun—I did another drawing of it wearing a trench coat and a fedora. It wasn't a great drawing, but it had character!

After sketching the insect, I scanned the rough drawing into my computer and began refining it. The more I revised the illustration, the more I liked it. I started asking myself the “what-if” questions—what if he was a detective? Where would he live? I wanted his world to be made by bugs and have structures that bugs would design. I wanted a place with glowworms lighting up the street. Before I knew it, I had a character and a setting with ideas for a detective story. But, I had no text.

I showed the sketch to the team at Charlesbridge and it was met with excitement. After running several ideas by them, I started putting together some text for a story. For inspiration, I read several Philip Marlowe detective novels by Raymond Chandler and I watched the Dick Tracy movie. I wanted Ace to have a little of both characters—a tough-as-nails detective like Marlowe, with a soft spot for the ladies like Tracy. I also bounced ideas off my family and friends, and they offered some great insights and humor.

Your illustration for both Ace Lacewing books is a mixture of color pencil and computer manipulation. Will you describe your illustration process in more detail?

Actually, I don't use colored pencil anymore, since I draw directly on a Photoshop file using a Wacom graphic tablet. I developed a brush in Photoshop that works just like a pencil and I do my revisions right in the file using a lot of layers, similar to using tracing paper. When I'm happy with the final sketch, I add color onto a layer underneath the final sketch layer. By using this technique, my sketch and spontaneity remain in the final artwork, and I love it. It's actually an environmentally friendly method to do art, too. The last book I illustrated using paints and brushes was *Dory Story* ten years ago. I had five trash bags of old paint, sketch paper, air brush frisket, and used brushes. After I finished the new Ace Lacewing, *Bad bugs Are My Business*, the only thing I had left was a disc with the sketches and files of the whole book.



How did you become interested in illustrating children's books? How did you segue into becoming an author as well?

Ever since I was little kid, I loved to tell stories. Even when I was four years old and couldn't write, I still drew pictures to tell my stories. I frequently made my own comic books and stories as I grew up. After college at Kutztown University, I arrived in Boston in the early eighties. I took my portfolio around to every place that bought art—and I mean *every* place. I started doing textbook illustration, but then I switched almost exclusively to advertising art because it paid really well. By this time I had a family to support, so the commercial artist jobs were essential to my career. By the mid-nineties, I was doing mostly advertising and design illustration. I did art for labels such as Mott's Apple Juice, Tropicana, and Celestial Seasonings. The supermarket was almost like a gallery of my work back then. However, I was getting burnt out spending so much time just illustrating. Author Jerry Pallotta saw an advertising illustration I did of the commuter ferry boat his brother owned, and he called my house. My wife was reading his *Icky Bug Alphabet* book to my younger son at the time, and she couldn't believe the author was on the other end of the phone line. I eventually collaborated on *The Boat Alphabet Book* and other books with Jerry. After the first couple of books were published I started thinking of writing my own stories. I offered Charlesbridge several book ideas, and *Ace Lacewing: Bug Detective* was among the first.

The Ace Lacewing books are full of fun, silly, and sardonic humor. How do you keep silliness and fun in your own life?

Well, I've been accused of being too silly more than once. But I like to keep things lighthearted, and I love to entertain. I think finding humor in everyday life is a positive thing, and when you write and illustrate for kids it makes for a wonderful life. Humor is also a great teaching tool. When I do a school visit and have teacher come up to me and say they never saw a certain kid laugh and smile like that all year, it really makes my job worthwhile.



What do you do when you're not drawing or writing?

You mean there are other things in life? Actually, I like hanging out with my family, reading, watching Boston sports teams, and traveling. But for the most part, I do a lot of school visits all over the country and overseas. On average I visit over seventy-five schools a year. I get to see places I've never been before and meet some of the most wonderful teachers and students, most of whom I keep in touch with.

Visit David's website at www.davidbiedrzycki.com

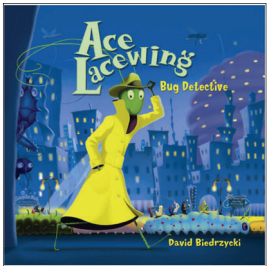
Books by David Biedrzycki



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Small, green, and handsome—Ace Lacewing is back!

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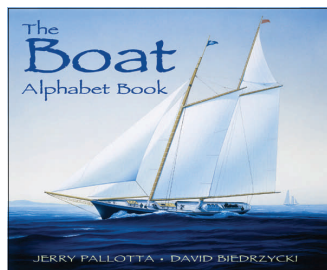
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“[F]ans will happily sink their mandibles into this buggy brouhaha.”
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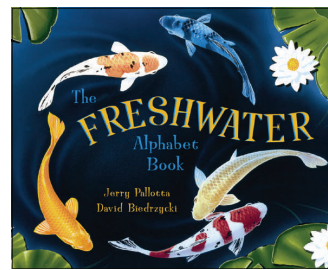
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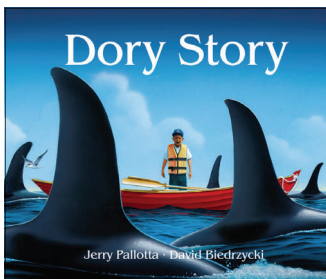
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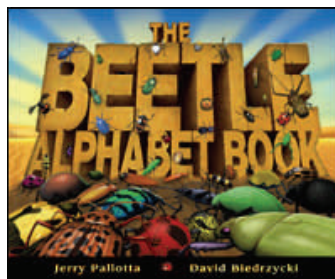
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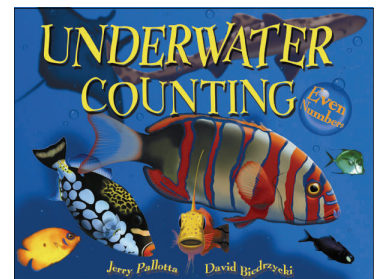
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