

Author Spotlight

with Dawn
FitzGerald



Growing up, what did you want to be?

A firefighter. An artist. A professional soccer player. A nun. A lawyer. President! I guess being a teacher and a writer are the perfect jobs for me. I can inspire my students to be all these things and imagine myself living different lives through my writing.

How did your career as an English teacher and as a soccer coach prepare you for being a writer?

I teach and coach high school students. I've learned empathy, patience, and an appreciation for my students' wry sense of humor.

What do you like about being a writer? What do you dislike about being a writer?

I love everything about writing, especially that moment when I have a new idea for a story and it begins to take shape in my mind. It's like falling in love! On the other hand, writing can be isolating, and I have to force myself to push through to the end of a project.

Vinnie Ream is not a well-known artist. How did you come across her?

It was love at first sight. I saw a picture of Vinnie next to one of her clay sculptures of Lincoln in a history book. I was amazed that such a child-like young woman had such prodigious talent and determination to realize her dreams. I read everything I could find on her and felt compelled to try to write a picture book depicting her struggles and eventual triumph.

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What do you want readers to take with them after reading

Vinnie & Abraham?

I want readers to take with them an appreciation for Vinnie's talent and persistence in overcoming obstacles in order to become a respected working artist, and an admiration for both Lincoln and Vinnie's courage in pursuing their goals in spite of all the naysayers.

You tend to gravitate to strong female characters, historical and fictional. How important is it for young women today to have positive female role models?

Very important! Popular culture and the cult of celebrity do not always offer positive female role models for young girls. Pop culture wants to sell products, not self-esteem. It's difficult to fight because the images and messages are powerful and pervasive. Middle grade and young adult literature can offer girls hope and a haven for dealing with these pressures, allowing them to see how characters struggle with similar issues and prevail in the end.



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What do you do when you're not writing?

I love to read! I'm happiest when I have a good book - sometimes two or three going at once. It's a great way to prepare exciting lessons for my English classes.

What are your favorite books?

My favorite books have to be *The Golden Compass*, *The Subtle Knife*, and *The Amber Spyglass* (Phillip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* Trilogy). I've read each book three times.

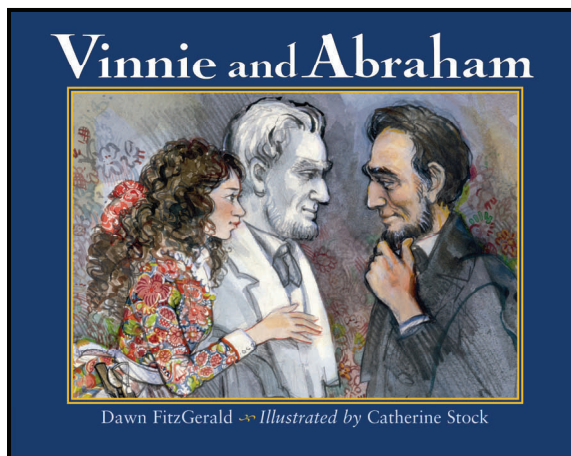
Who are your favorite children's authors?

My favorite authors are Phillip Pullman, M.T. Anderson, Lois Lowery, and E.L. Konigsburg.

Any advice for aspiring writers?

Read, read, read! Keep a journal, and write in it every day. Find a writer's group, a group of people who share your passion for the written word. Share your work with them. Rewrite, rewrite again, and then do your research on publishers who are publishing your type of book and send your stuff out there. Collect your rejections and learn from them. They're a badge of honor. You took a risk, and you'll rewrite some more and take another!

Books by Dawn Fitzgerald



Before women had the right to vote, sixteen-year-old Vinnie Ream had a regular appointment with the president of the United States. Despite her "most unladylike persistence," Vinnie became the youngest artist and the first woman to receive a commission from the U.S. government to sculpt the statue of Abraham Lincoln that still stands in the Capitol rotunda.

★ "[V]ibrant. A spirited introduction to a little-known artist." - *Booklist*, starred review

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