



Author Spotlight with **Doug Cushman**

Pigs and horror movies aren't necessarily two things that people associate with each other. How did you come up with the idea to write pig-themed poems about creepy classic films?

It was actually my editor Yolanda Scott that had the idea to make *Pigmares* movie-themed. I had seventeen poems parodying creepy, spooky stories, movies and cliché settings like haunted houses and graveyards. Yolanda thought a tighter focus on classic monster movies would make the book more cohesive. Of course she was right (brilliant editors usually are). A good number of my original poems related to old movies, but I needed write about six or seven new poems to fit the theme and fill out the book.

As for the pig thing, well, pigs are so versatile. They can be intelligent, evil, cute, ugly, sophisticated and, well, pigs. And they're so much fun to draw.

Was there a lot of research involved in writing this book? More than other books you've written?

There was A LOT of research for this book, probably the most I've ever done for a single book. I watched and re-watched every movie I parodied (I actually own most of them) and watched some really horrible movies for *Pigmares*. I looked at sites for old movie posters to get ideas for the hand lettering I did for each illustration. And of course for the "Movie Source" pages I read a lot of information in books and online to find the little facts for each movie. In one instance I timed exactly how long the monster actually was seen in the film. But it was great fun to research.



How is it different to illustrate a book someone else has written as opposed to writing and illustrating a book yourself? Do you have a preference—writing, illustrating, or writing and illustrating?

Writing is hard for me. Most of my picture books are in prose but this book was especially hard because it was poetry. This is my first full-blown book of poems. Some of the poems were written eight or nine years ago. Poetry is very difficult to get right. Just making some words rhyme isn't enough. A good poem works on many different levels, each word, syllable, comma and period matters. Pictures come easier to me but it's important in picture books that the art and words match, that they work together, that the spirit of the pictures capture the spirit of the words and vice versa. I love illustrating for other authors because it forces me to think in different ways and draw different things.

You have conducted a lot of author visits at schools around the world. What has been your most memorable experience so far?

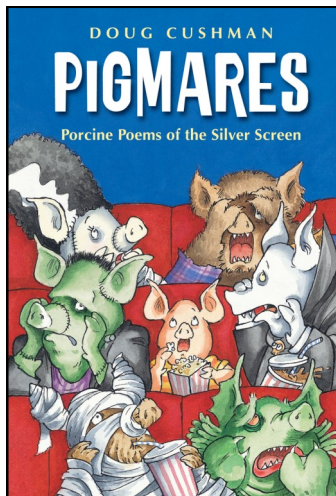
Interesting question. Traveling around the world and talking to students in schools in India, Romania, France, and all over the US—including an Arapaho Native American Reservation—I’ve found that they all react to the same things in a book: strong characters, humor, fun twists in the plots, and word play. There are some cultural differences but mostly kids like lively stories where they can laugh or maybe solve a mystery. For me, as an author, I’ve discovered that if I’m doing my job right, even though I’m an American writing in English, I can tell stories that children from around the world can relate to. Of course some of the places I’ve visited outside the classrooms have been wonderful; the Taj Mahal, Dracula’s Castle in Transylvania, The Blue Ridge Mountains, etc. But the kids seem to remain the same, which is encouraging. Because really, aren’t we all the same at heart?



Do the movies featured in *Pigmares* represent your favorite classic horror movies of all time? Are there any other films you wrote a porcine poem about that just didn’t make the final cut?

I confess I love cheap B films, both horror and sci-fi with low budget costumes, scripts, and in some cases, really bad acting or over-acting. There is an innocent charm to these films. But many of the movies I parodied were excellent with great writing and acting. Look at Boris Karloff’s depiction of Frankenstein’s Creature. There was real heart and tenderness in the acting. I like to think that I didn’t make fun of them but paid tribute and honored these movies that are part of our culture, iconic films that will be with us for a long time. I have many more poems using other films that didn’t quite fit the theme of *Pigmares*. But who knows? They may be collected in another volume later!

By Doug Cushman



978-1-58089-401-2, HC, \$12.95
978-1-60734-457-5, E-book, \$9.99
Ages 7–10

When a young pig watches monster movies before bed, he’s in for some tail-curling nightmares. From poor Pigzilla, who just can’t seem to get any sleep, to Pig Kong, the vegetarian whose dinner never meets his dietary needs, each of the seventeen poems centers on a different monster classic with a pig twist. Doug Cushman’s illustrations evoke retro movie posters with hog-wild humor and bring each poem to life with devilish fun.

With its playful verse, *Pigmares* is a great way to expose students to poetry and celebrate Halloween in all of its ghoulish glory. Kids will laugh themselves silly as they read this collection over and over again. Curious readers who wish to learn more about the familiar characters in each poem can read the back matter to find out what movies and literature acted as inspiration.