



Author Spotlight with *Julie Danneberg*



First days can be scary for anyone—whether it’s the first day of a job, school, camp, or even travel. How do you deal with your jitters?

I think anytime we face something for the first time, we all get a little nervous, mainly because we don’t know exactly how everything is going to go. It is that unpredictability, that not knowing, that gives us the jitters. Unfortunately, I’m not sure how to cure those jitters, and the truth is, I’m not even sure if you can! But the one thing I do know about having the jitters is that they are natural—everyone has them and eventually they pass. For instance, my school hasn’t started yet, but I already know that on the first day, I’m going to have butterflies in my stomach and sweaty palms. But I also know that by the second day of school, my jitters will have passed! I know this because over the course of my life, starting new jobs, having new friends, traveling to new places, I’ve had the jitters lots and lots of times. Sure, they might be annoying, but I’ve found that the best way to get rid of those pesky first day jitters is to just jump in and start whatever it is you’re nervous about! That truly is the best cure of all.

You’ve written many books that have a context in the American West. How and why has this area influenced you as a person and writer?

I have written a lot about the West because I’ve spent my whole life here and I love it. I love the friendly people, the open spaces, the beautiful mountains, the sunny weather and the diverse Western culture. I grew up in Colorado, as did my mother and my grandmother. As a child I loved to listen to my grandmother’s stories of growing up in mining towns all over the state. Our family visited many of those places, and I think that the unique combination of storytelling and real-life experience really made history come alive for me. I loved hearing stories about a place and then actually getting to go and see that place firsthand. We visited ghost towns, rode old trains, went down in gold mines and camped and hiked all over the state.

Thanks to all of those fun childhood experiences, to this day I absolutely love learning about history, not just Western history but all history. The Denver Public Library has a huge collection of old manuscripts, books, maps, and photographs. Going there, I feel like a detective looking for clues to the past. I love the excitement of uncovering little pieces of information and then putting them together, like the pieces of a puzzle, into a story or new understanding.



Your books also tend to focus on women, whether they are writers, artists, or teachers. Is there a particular woman from history that inspires you?

I am especially inspired by those women in history who had the strength, courage, and vision to break out of the expected roles for women in order to follow their own path.

Mary Hallock Foote (1847–1938) was one such woman. She was an artist, a writer, a wife, a mother, a traveler, and a hombody. She was raised in the East but moved west to be with her husband, a mining engineer. Even though she worked hard running her household and raising her children, she was also able to carve out time to pursue her creative interests in both writing and illustration. Her success as a writer and an illustrator was an especially big achievement because, back then, there were very few women who attempted a career, much less succeeded.

I am also inspired by the painter Georgia O’Keeffe (1887–1986). When she was forty-two years old she traveled to Taos, New Mexico, from New York City. What started out as a vacation turned into a major life change. She was so deeply touched by the landscape, people, and culture of the West that she moved there permanently. I understand her connection to the West and am inspired by her willingness to pursue her art and inspiration no matter where it took her.

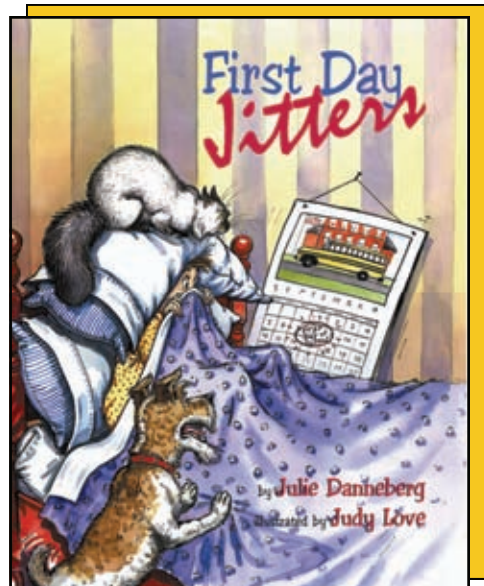
What other books have influenced you as a writer?

I love to read and I read a lot. I read a wide variety of books on a wide variety of subjects. I read fiction and nonfiction, adult and children’s books, magazines and newspapers. Heck, the truth is, I’ll read just about anything that you put in front of me! I believe everything I read influences my writing. Good books inspire me to work harder and write better, while books I don’t like teach me what not to do with my writing. Books ignite my curiosity and inspire my questions, and they also lead me to answers and new ways of thinking. Books show me different realities, introduce me to new people, take me to the four corners of the world, and allow me to visit all eras of time and history. I feel lucky that both of my jobs, being a reading teacher and a writer, not only center around something that I love so much, but allow me to share that love with others. Yay for reading!





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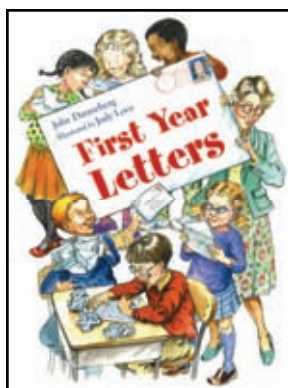
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