



AUTHOR SPOTLIGHT

WITH

RALPH MASIEELLO

DID YOU ENJOY READING AS A CHILD?

I loved to read. I especially loved reading during summer vacation. My friends and I spent a lot of time playing baseball, and the only air-conditioned place we could go to to cool off was the library. We read for hours. The librarian there was really nice — she made us lemonade and cookies!

WHAT WERE YOUR FAVORITE BOOKS?

My earliest favorite was Robert Louis Stevenson's *A Child's Garden of Verses*. When I was very little, my mom would make me a sandwich for lunch, cover the small table in my room with a cloth, and read the book to me by candlelight. When I got older, my favorites were *The Phantom Tollbooth*, *A Wrinkle in Time*, *Treasure Island*, and anything by Jack London.

WHAT DID YOU WANT TO BE WHEN YOU GREW UP?

When I was little, I wanted to be a doctor and a father. I loved bandaging people up and always had my kid-sized medical kit nearby. I wanted to be just like my dad. He was my hero.

HOW DID YOU BECOME AN AUTHOR-ILLUSTRATOR?

I changed my mind about being a doctor when I was in high school. I decided I wanted to be like Jacques Cousteau and study the ocean. In college I studied marine biology and drew pictures of all my dissections. Someone saw my drawings and convinced me to take an art class. I did and found out I loved to draw. So, I left marine-biology school to attend Rhode Island School of Design.

WOULD YOU GO BACK TO STUDYING MARINE BIOLOGY?

No, but I still love the ocean. I wish I could spend more time in it. If I go back to school for anything, I definitely want to do some glass and ceramic work as well as more printmaking.

DOES WRITING COME AS NATURALLY TO YOU AS DRAWING?

Writing does NOT come naturally to me! I have to work very hard to put words to paper. Unlike drawing where I see every brush stroke, every mark in my head even before I put it to paper, writing is an effort. I write many rough drafts before something intelligent, or at least interesting, forms.



YOU TRAVEL ACROSS THE COUNTRY VISITING SCHOOLS ALL YEAR. WHAT SCHOOL VISIT STANDS OUT THE MOST FOR YOU?

It is hard to single out one particular visit because each has something special to offer. However, I really loved visiting the schools in Guam this winter. Each school I visited gave me shell-and-flower necklaces, drawings, and a ton of local Chamorro food to take back to my hotel each day. The teachers even took time to take my wife and me out for tours of their beautiful island. It was quite an experience. The Chamorro people of Guam are some of the most friendly and patriotic Americans I have ever met. I plan to return for a real vacation someday.

WHAT IS THE FUNNIEST THING A STUDENT HAS SAID TO YOU?

A boy at a school said to me, “You’re NOT an illustrator. You’re a stand-up chameleon!” I think he meant *comedian*, but I said, “Hey, you just called me a reptile!”

HOW DID YOU CHOOSE DRAGONS AS A SUBJECT?

I have always been fascinated by dragons and dragon lore. I think kids today are too. In this book, I didn’t want to oversimplify the information. There are dragons in almost every culture in the world and, though they are separated by thousands of miles, they still have very significant similarities. I wanted to give them meaning and context. I also wanted a higher-level drawing book for kids that need more of a challenge.

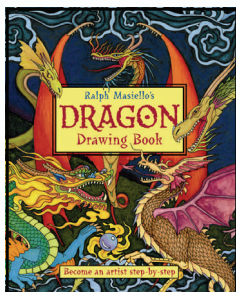
WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH THROUGH YOUR DRAWING BOOK SERIES?

I hope that kids and adults will find it fun and interesting to do the drawings in the books, then take what they learned and create their own art.

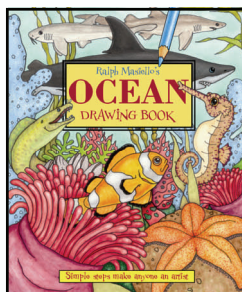
WHAT IS YOUR ADVICE FOR ASPIRING WRITERS/ILLUSTRATORS?

My advice to anyone is the same advice I got from one of the toughest art teachers I ever had at Rhode Island School of Design: Mahler Ryder. He told me, “Work hard, play hard.” That is now my life motto. When you work, work as hard as you can and when you play, do it with a zest for life. Balance your work with the rest of your life.

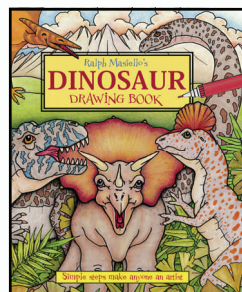
RALPH MASIELLO’S DRAWING BOOKS



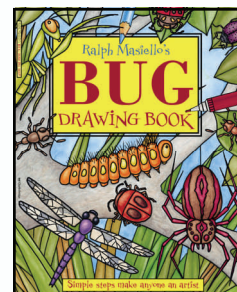
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LOOK OUT FOR *RALPH MASIELLO'S ANCIENT EGYPT DRAWING BOOK* NEXT FALL!