

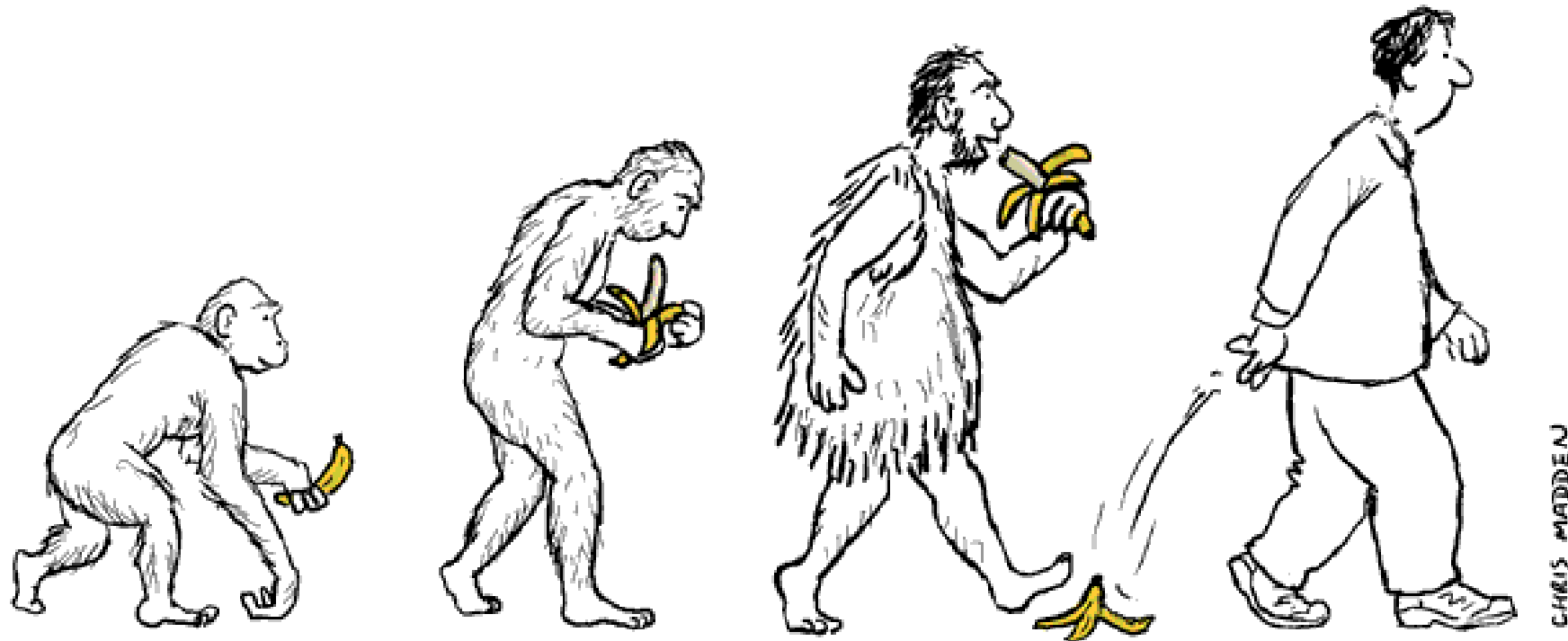


Adding Humor to Children's Stories

JOHN BLADEK-PHD

Why Funny?

THE EVOLUTION OF HUMOUR



Why Funny?

Kids (especially reluctant readers) are playful and laugh more, and more easily than adults.

Why Funny?

**Funny stories
capture the joy
and imagination
of childhood with
words and ideas.**

Why Funny?

Kids interact and build friendships around funny books. Laughing is a great way to make friends.

Why Funny?

**Funny books
reflect reality, a
mixture of sad
and funny, joy
and pain, highs
and lows.**

Why Funny?

Funny Stories encourage critical reading. Kids learn to read between the lines and develop an awareness of subtly and sarcasm, right and wrong. (Daily)

Why Funny?

**Humor makes
Kids (well,
everyone) feel
better.** (Daily; Zbaracki)




What's
Funny?

“Humor can be dissected, as a frog can, but the thing dies in the process and the innards are discouraging to any but the pure scientific mind.”—E.B. White

What's
Funny?

Scientific fact:
Every joke is 10%
funnier when you
explain it.


Know Your Audience



Kids laugh at
different
things than
adults

...so

Know Your Audience



Kids laugh at
different
things than
adults

Find the Kid
in yourself

Know Your Audience



Kids laugh at
different
things than
adults

Listen to kids

Let's Try

As we go through each category of humor, think about, and take notes, on how you might use that humor in a story.

Don't worry about incorporating everything, these are choices, a menu, you don't order everything on a menu, unless you think that's FUNNY!



What do you find funny?

Do you have a memory or story
from your childhood that is funny?

Write it down, thinking about what
makes it funny.

What do
you find
funny?

Think about funny
books you've read.
Make a quick list.

What makes them
funny?

What is funny?

Irony?

Fantastic
situations?

Real life
problems?

Anti-
authoritarian?

What is
funny?

Silliness?

Language?

Odd characters?

Inconsistent slide show?

What is funny?

The gap between what we expect and the character's awareness

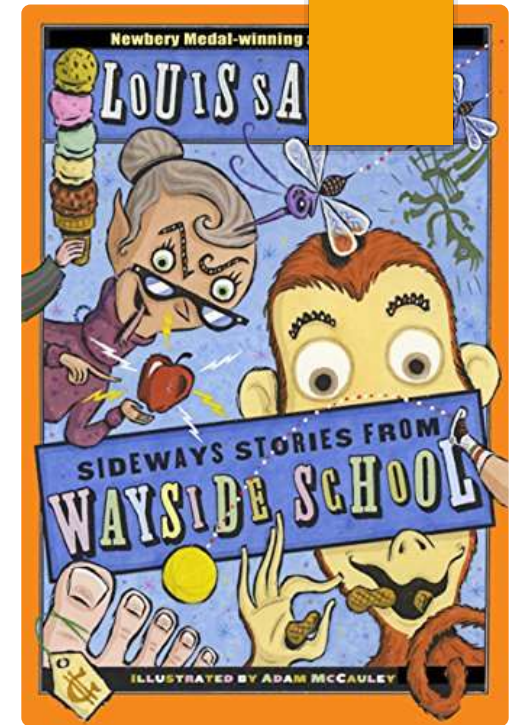
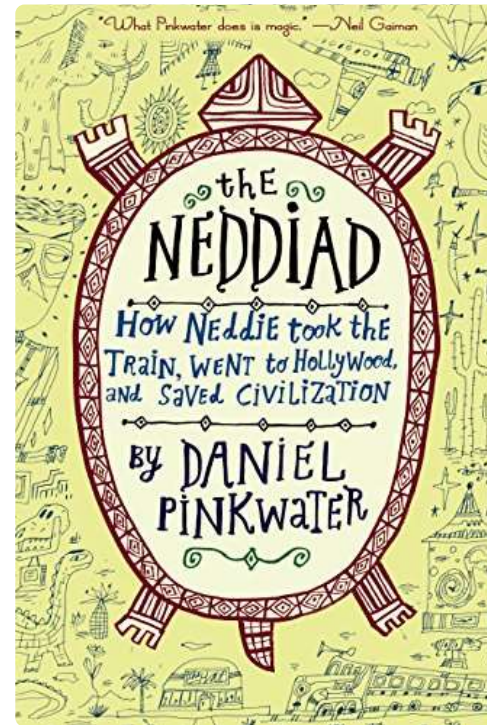
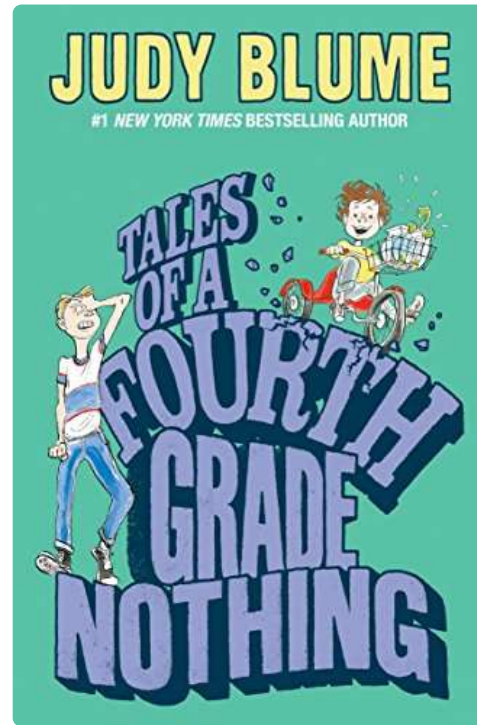
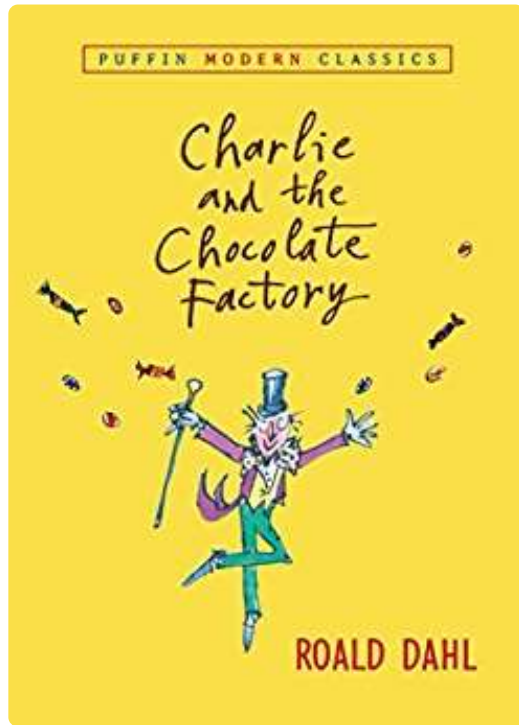
Things just a little off-center

But with a universal appeal--we see ourselves in the humor

Just plain craziness

Much the same as any Kid Lit in it's appeal, but twisted towards humor

Can have multiple levels of humor, slapstick to sophisticated references



What do you find funny?

Characters

Creating funny characters



Attributes

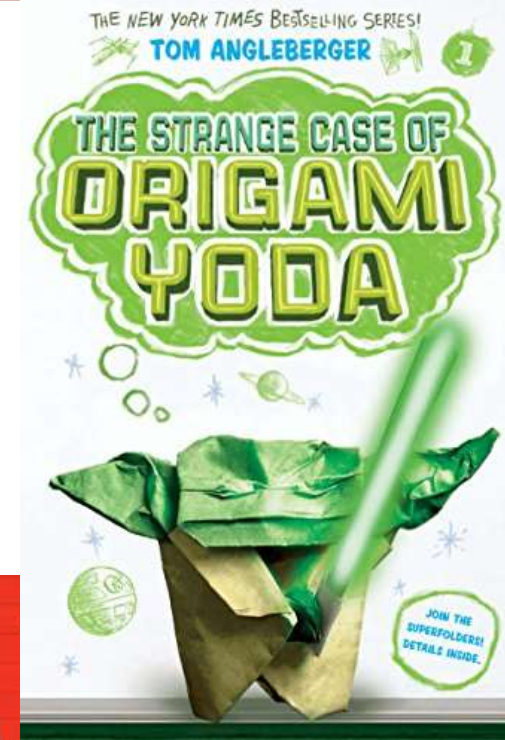
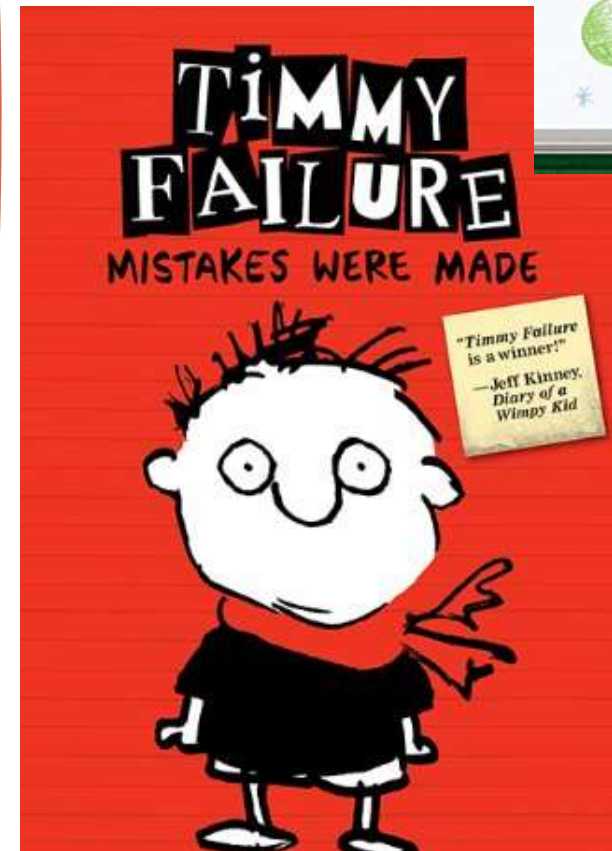
- Physical Description
- Likes, Dislikes
- Attitudes toward others
- Self aware? Oblivious?
- Problems
- Strengths/weakness?

Characters

Odd Character in a Normal World

Timmy Failure- Stephan Pastis

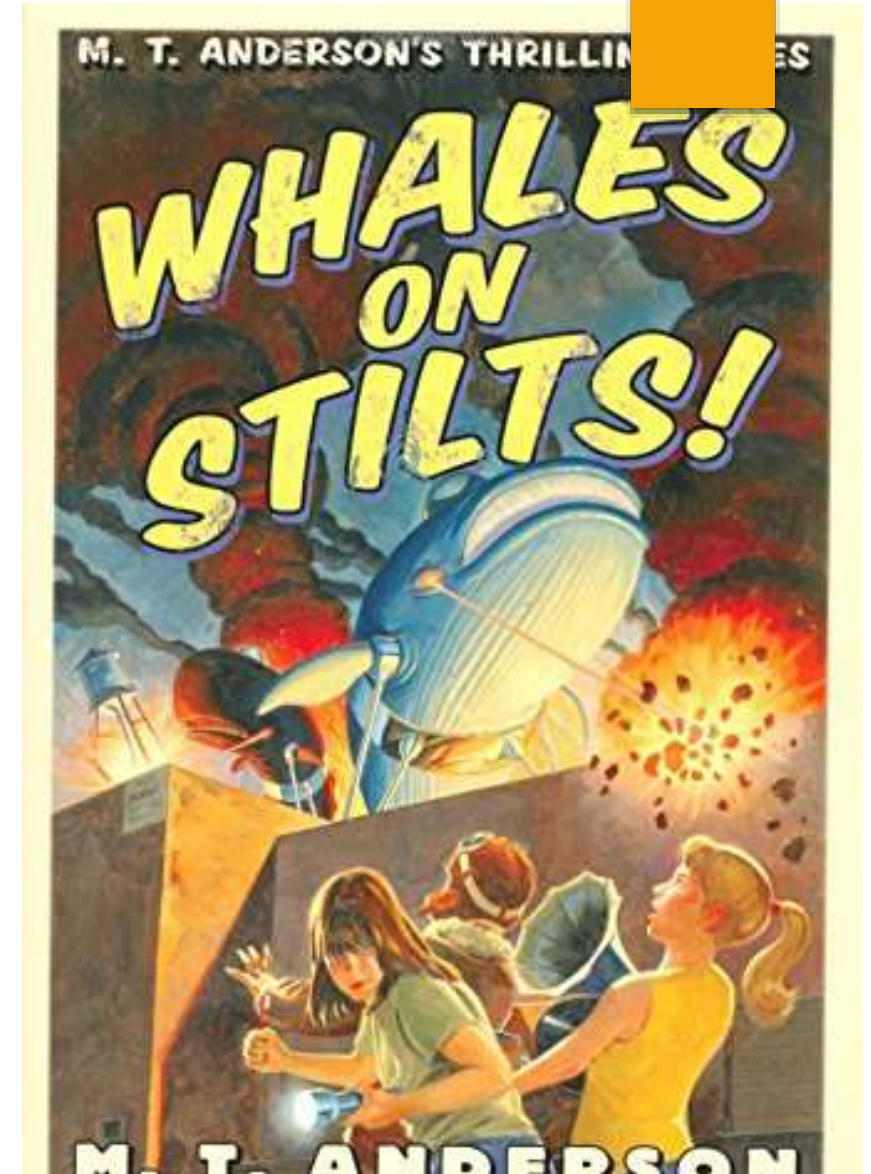
The Strange Case of Origami Yoda—
Tom Angleburger



Characters

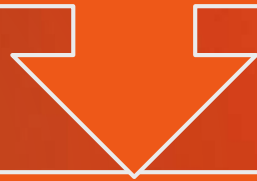
Normal Character in an
Odd World

Whales on Stilts- M.T.
Anderson

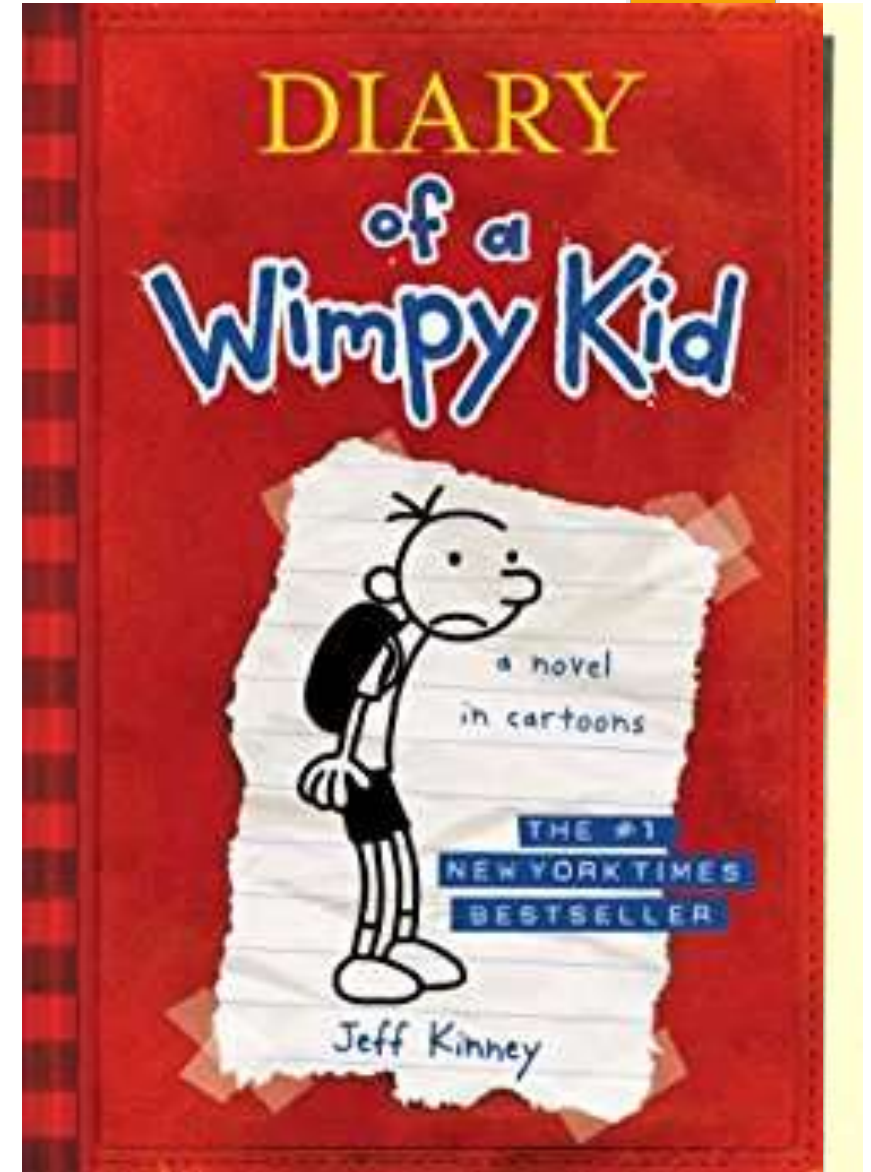


Characters

Normal Character, Normal
World



Diary of a Wimpy Kid—
Jeff Kinney



Plot

Is your story
serious, with
comical
moments?

Is your story
humorous, but
with serious
content?

Is everything
comical?

Plot can be
funny, but a
serious plot can
also be funny

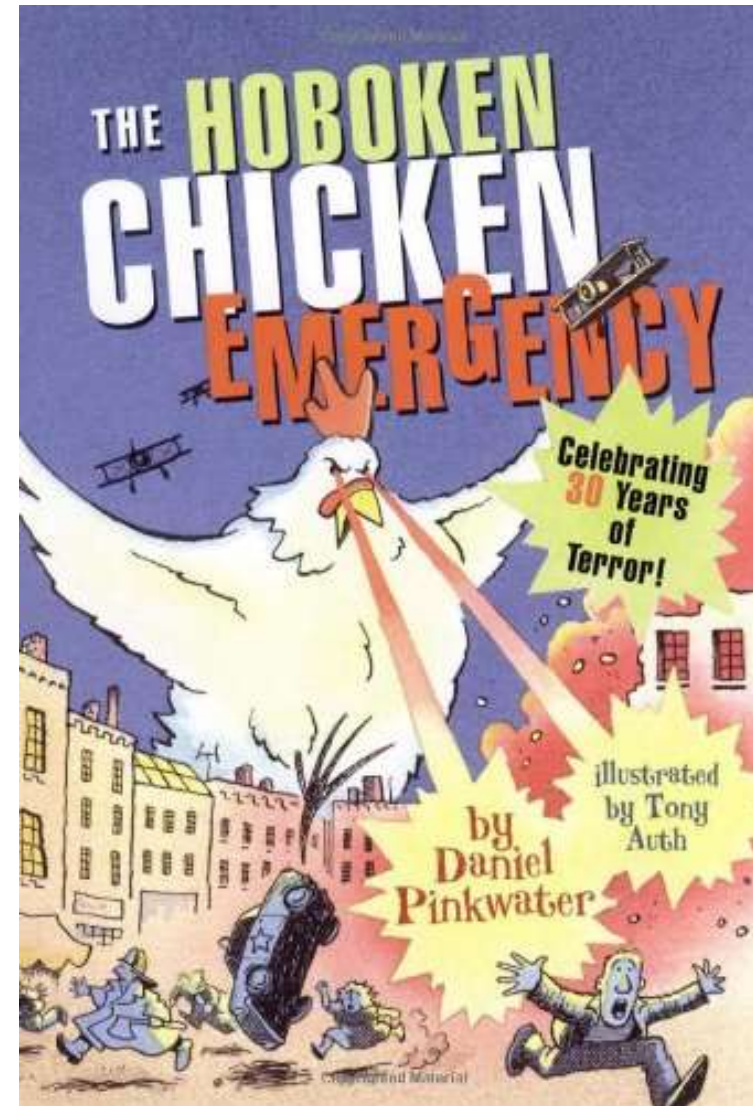
Plot

- ▶ Silly situations...
- ▶ serious consequences.



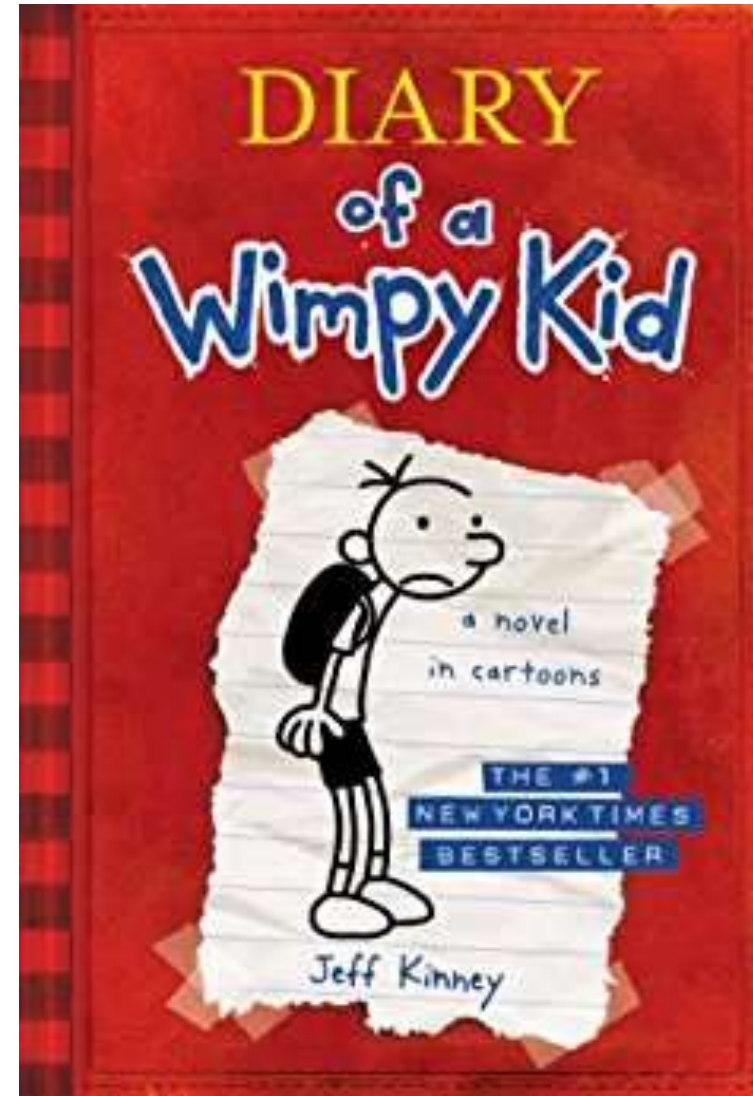
Plot

- ▶ No Turkeys for Thanksgiving?
- ▶ Replace them with Chickens...giant chickens!



Plot

- ▶ Life in middle school
- ▶ Plot is minimal, humor in the distance between character and his self-awareness



Setting

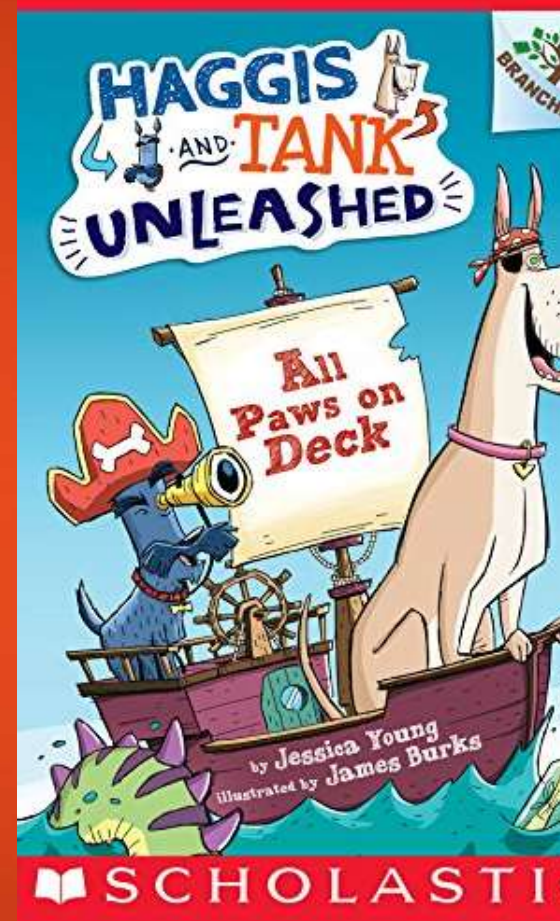
- ▶ How can you use setting to be funny?

Dialogue

Funny dialogue can show character, advance the plot, or just lighten the tone in a serious story.

Word Play

- ▶ *Haggis and Tank*, Jessica Young
- ▶ (Tank points to a sign: SAIL SALE)
- ▶ Tank: Look – sails for sale!
- ▶ Haggis: But they're ripped, and we can't sew.
- ▶ Tank: So?
- ▶ Haggis: Right. We can't sew.
- ▶ Tank: So?
- ▶ Haggis: THAT'S WHAT I'M SAYING – WE DON'T KNOW HOW TO SEW!
- ▶ Tank: Got any duct tape?
- ▶ *Frindle*, Andrew Clement



Surprise

Cliffhangers-

Surprise

...wait for it...

Surprise

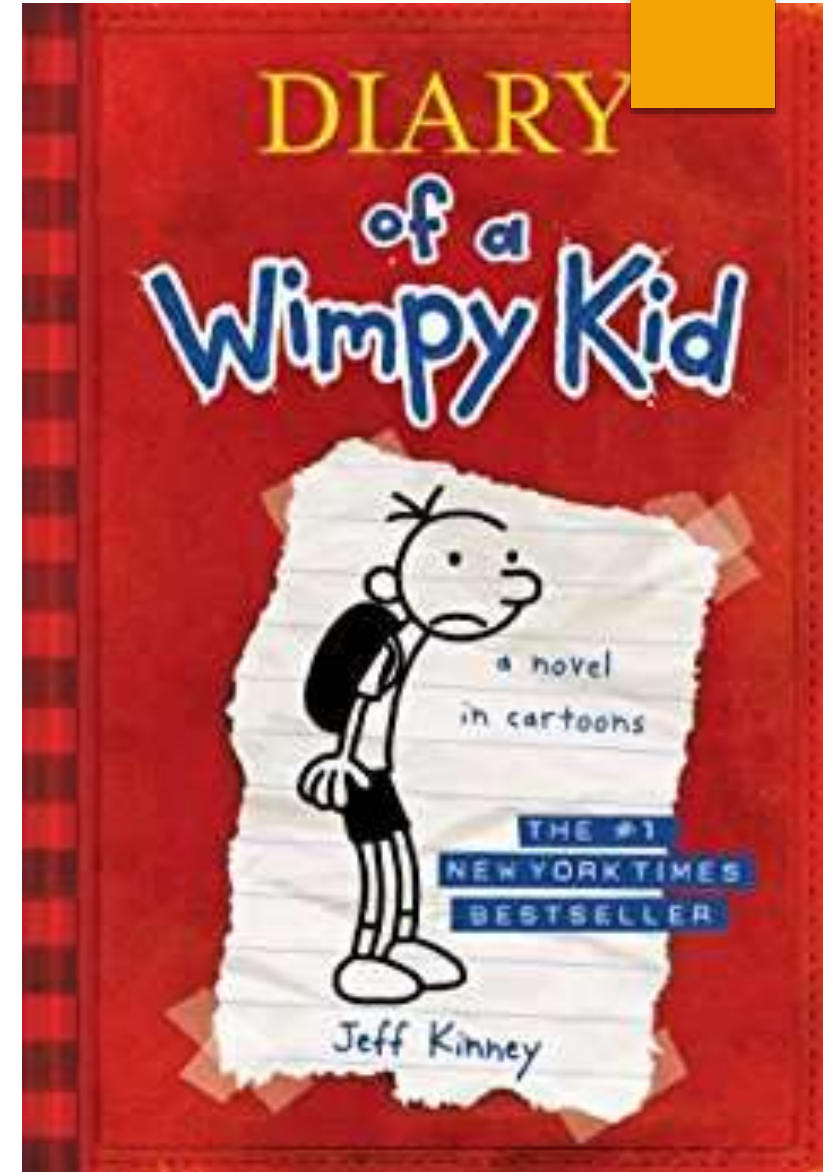
**Waiting for the next
joke to come.**

Timing

- **Farts jokes are funny...sometimes. When do you “let it rip?”**
- **Timing is delicate and hard to explain.**
- **Sometimes the out-of-the-blue joke is the funniest.**
- **Sometimes waiting for the next joke, the suspense, works**

Timing

- ▶ Sometimes you can guess what stupid, selfish thing Gregg will do next, sometimes you can't. But Jeff Kinney always keeps you guessing.
- ▶ Try not to telegraph the jokes. They're funnier if they take unexpected twists and turns or appear out of the blue.



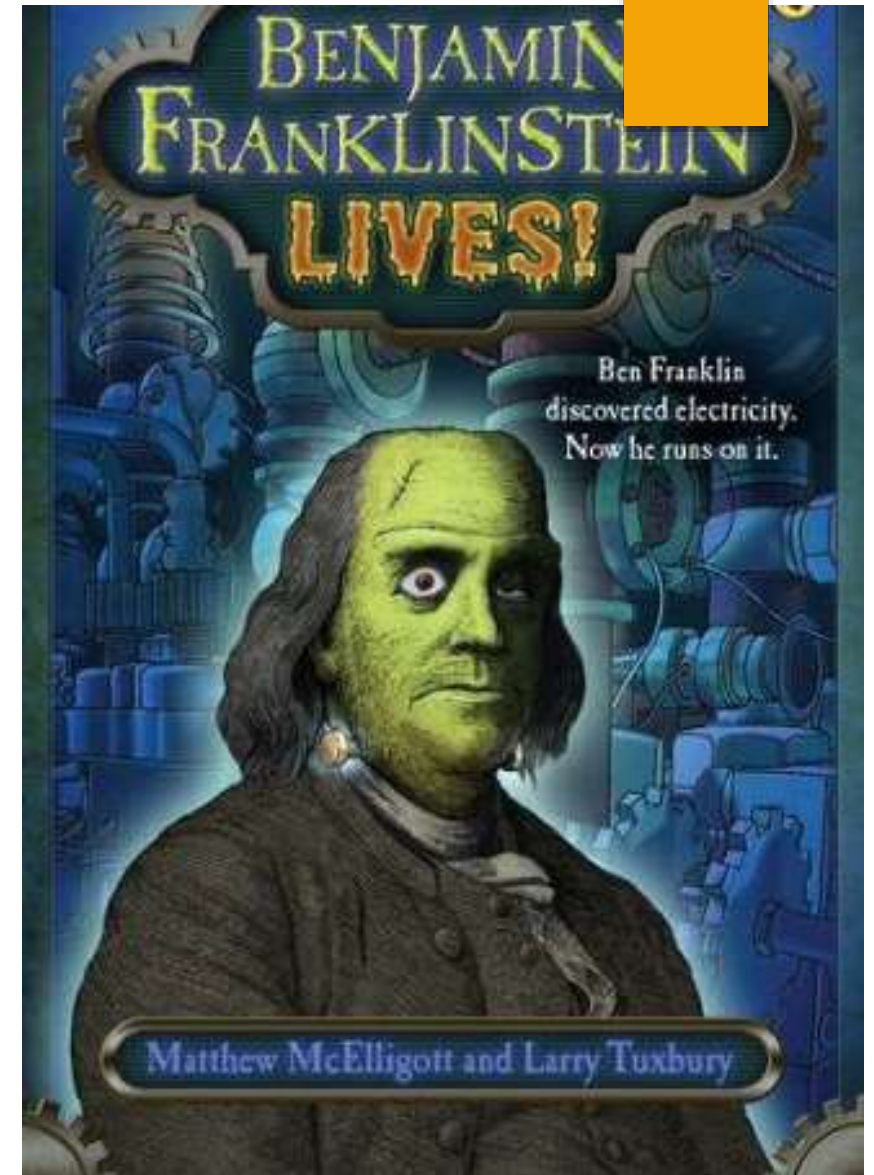
Voice

Voice is what you hear in your head when you read, the voice of the author.

Does it fit the humor?

Voice

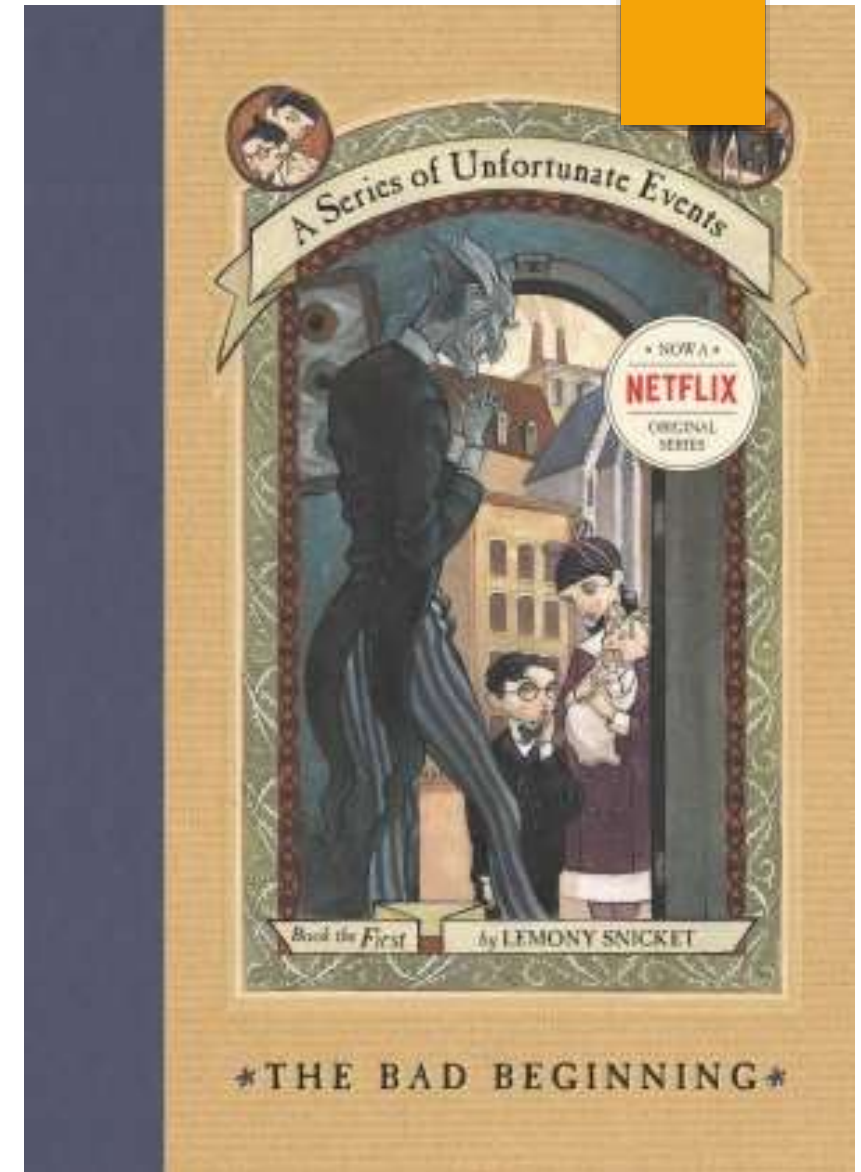
- ▶ *Benjamin Franklinstein*
- ▶ “Victor Godwin knew it was going to rain. It didn’t matter what the weather man said. The weatherman was a doofus.



Voice

► *Series of Unfortunate Events*

- If you are interested in stories with happy endings, you would be better off reading some other book. In this book, not only is there no happy ending, there is no happy beginning and very few happy things in the middle. This is because not very many happy things happened in the lives of the three Baudelaire youngsters. Violet, Klaus, and Sunny Baudelaire were intelligent children, and they were charming, and resourceful, and had pleasant facial features, but they were extremely unlucky, and most everything that happened to them was rife with misfortune, misery, and despair. I'm sorry to tell you this, but that is how the story goes.



Action!



Physical Humor



Action

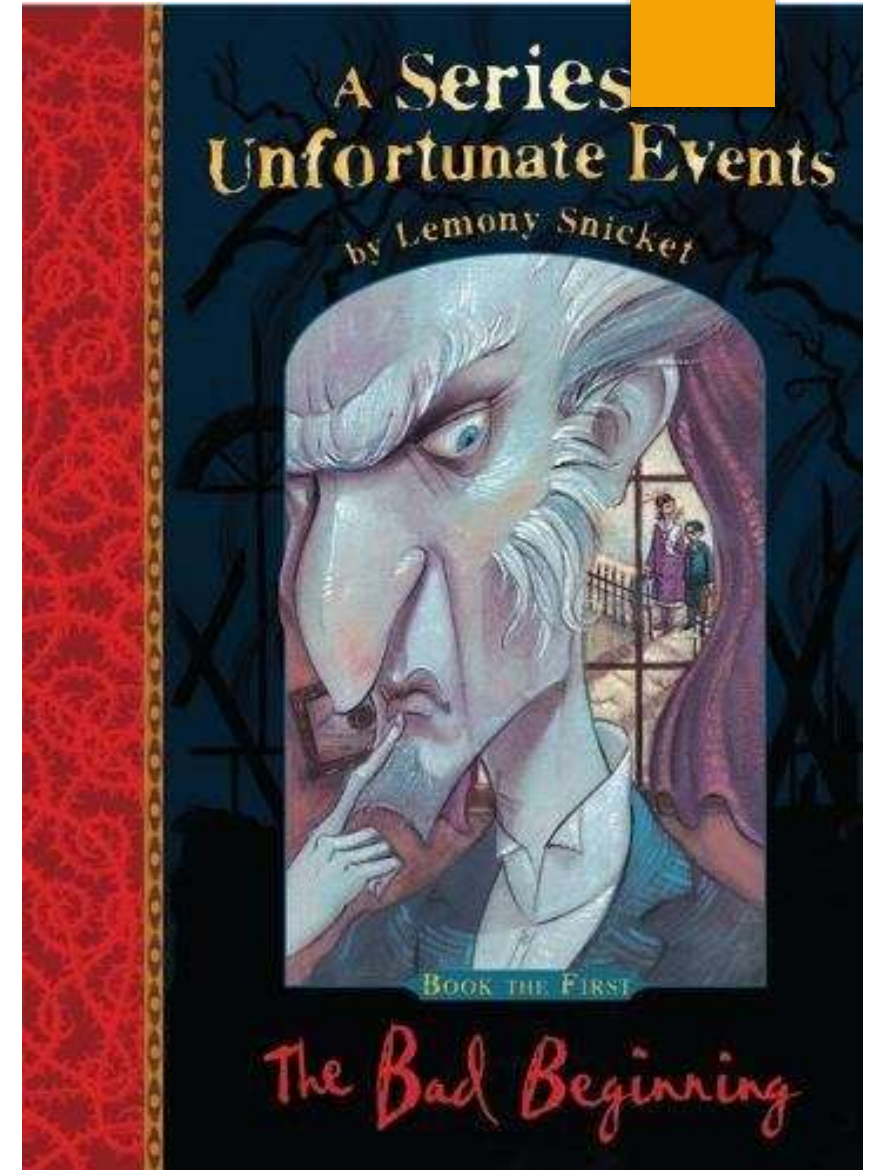
Action descriptions can be silly,
over the top

But often just describing an
already ridiculous situation is
enough.

If there's a giant chicken or
whale on stilts rampaging
through the city, just describe it.

Tone

- ▶ Changing the tone can make a sad story funny. It's the author's choice.
- ▶ *Series of Unfortunate Events*—Lemony Snicket



Gentle, Dark, or Gross-out? How Far do you go?



Gentle—Judy Bloom, *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing*



Humor is often cute, inoffensive



Dark—Roald Dahl, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *Matilda*



Humor is more cutting, children, or adults, come to bad ends



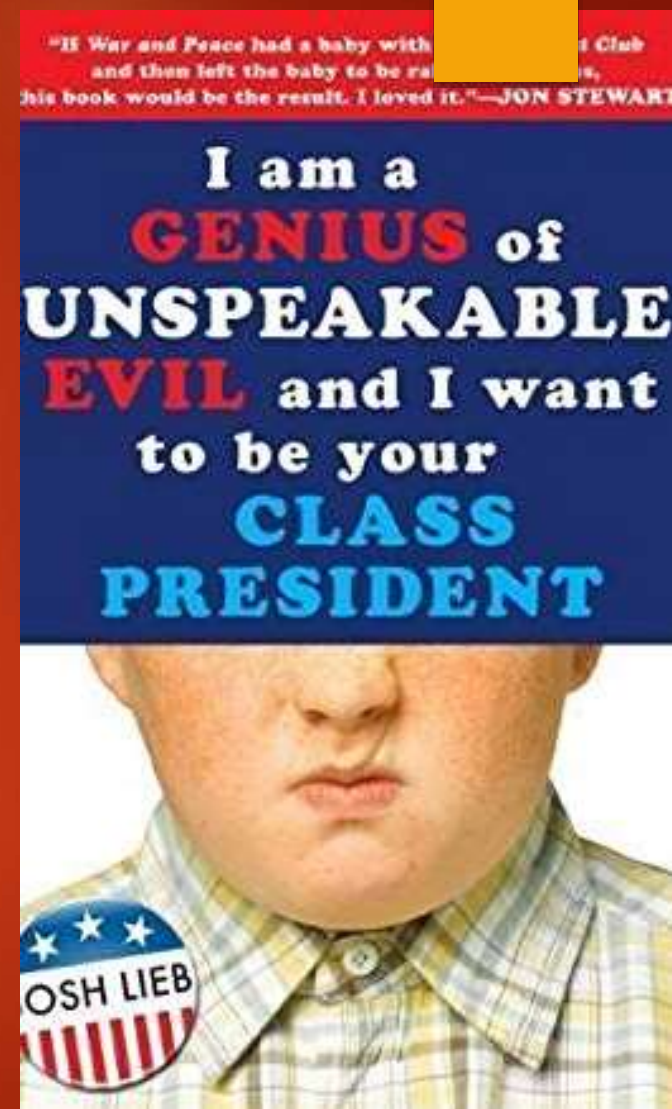
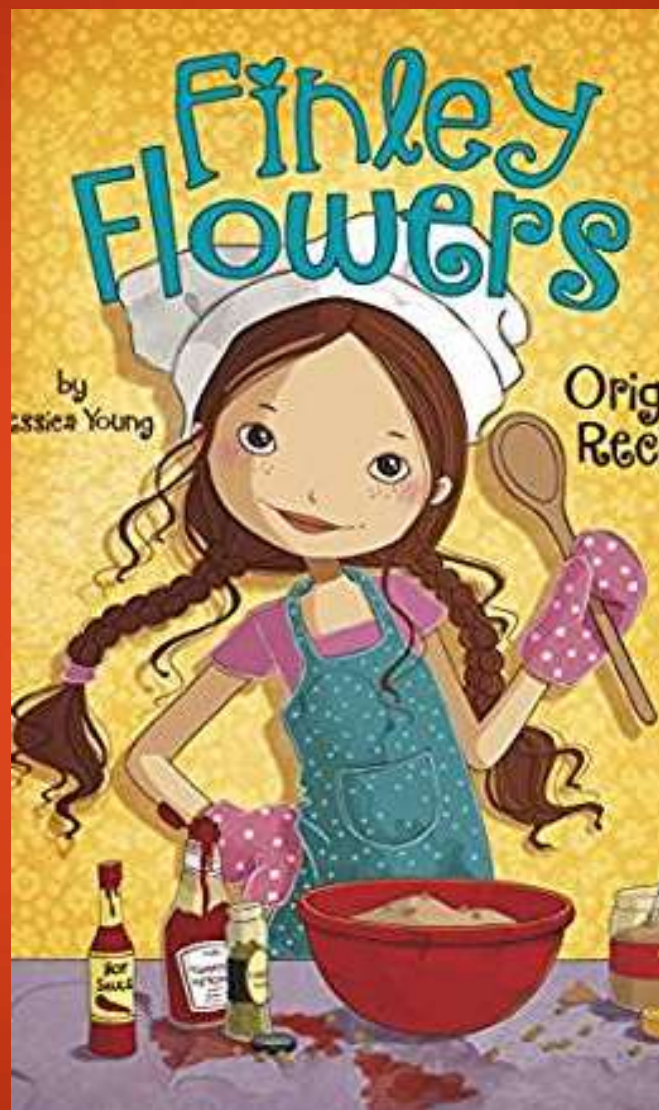
Gross-out—*Doctor Proctor's Fart Powder*

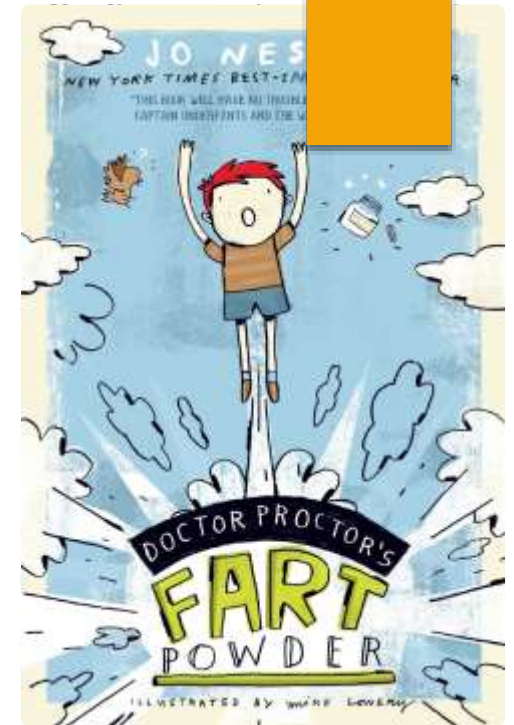
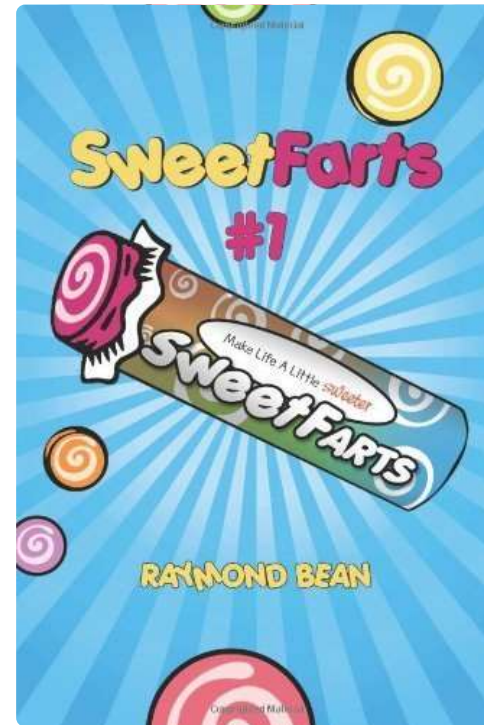
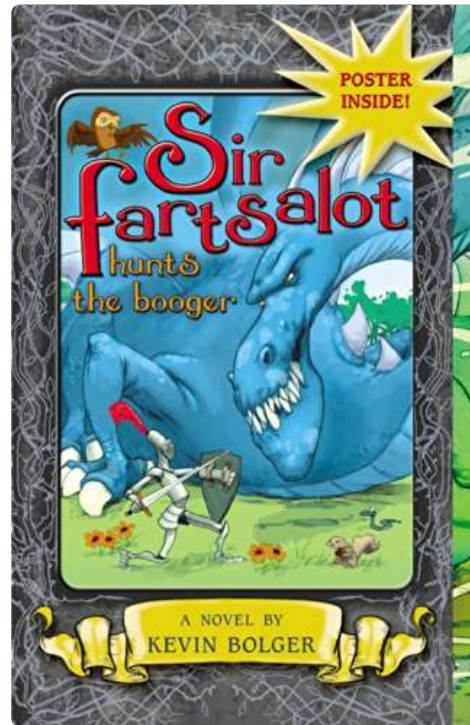


Humor is pretty obvious



Gentle,
Dark??...





Or Gross-out



Fun!

Humor is
FUN!

Humor
lightens the
mood

Humor sets
the mood

Writing Exercise

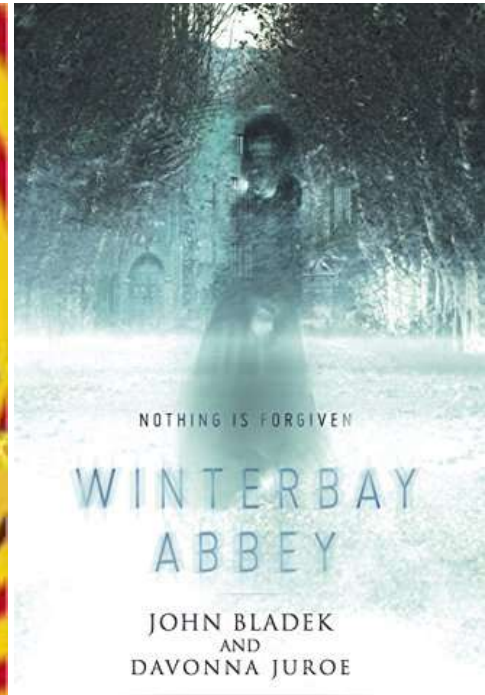
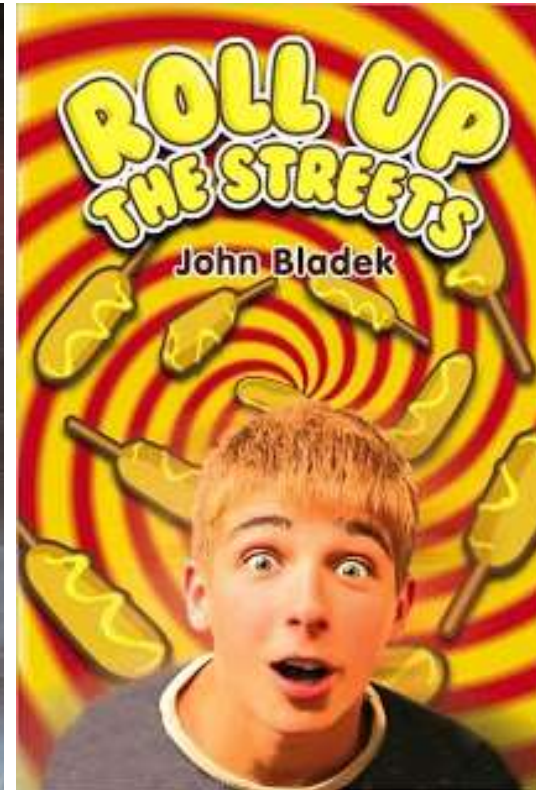
Gather your notes

Think of a character, or piece of dialogue, or action, anything...

and make it funny.

Books by John Bladek

- ▶ *Lost in Ghostville* (Capstone)
- ▶ *Roll Up the Streets!* (Kane Miller)
- ▶ *Winterbay Abbey* (With Davonna Juroe)



Sources

- ▶ Megan Daily, "Humor in Children's Literature." *Children's Books Daily*.
<http://childrensbooksdaily.com/humour-in-childrens-literature/>
- ▶ Matthew D. Zbaracki, *A Descriptive Study of How Humor in Literature Serves to Engage Children in Reading*. Unpublished Dissertation, Ohio State University, 2003.