



Author Spotlight: Rebecca Johnson



Rebecca Johnson: award-winning author and primary school science teacher

Rebecca, when did you know you wanted to be a writer?

When I was reading a lot of picture books to my very young children and could see how much they loved them.

Where do you write? Do you like to be by yourself in the quiet, or do you like to write in a noisy space?

I do most of my 'writing' in my head. I think about my stories for ages and pitch them verbally to victims until I am sure I have it all sorted in my head, then I sit to write in my lovely, quiet study overlooking my garden. I encourage children to tell their stories out loud before they write too, because, in my opinion, it is almost impossible to write a good story if you can't tell one.

What do you use to write – pencil and paper or computer?

Head first. VERY few drafts, then I type it into the computer. I can type a 7000-word novel in a week that is publisher-ready, but I have thought about it and pitched it and sounded it out in my head for weeks beforehand. I hate sitting down all day, and I hate re-doing things over and over even more, so I do heaps of my drafting mentally whilst I do other (fun) stuff like gardening, then by the time I sit down to write, it's like typing out a movie I know really well. People give you more honest feedback too, when you **tell** them a story. They feel less nervous about letting you know how they really feel about it. Try it some time.

When is the best time for you to write?

I do my best work from 5am when the house is really quiet. I'm always too tired at night (I still teach three days a week) for anything too creative.

When and where do you get your ideas?

From my life's experiences as a mother, teacher, child and my own children. I think you have to write about what you know and love.

What gave you the idea for this series about insects?

I am a science teacher and I love insects, and I just couldn't find the books I needed to succinctly and factually tell kids about the life-cycles and characteristics of insects in a fun way, so I wrote some.

What do you like best about the series?

Kids love them because they are funny and a bit silly, but they are still full of facts and information. I think they remember things better if it is presented in more appealing and humorous way.

What can you tell us about the photographs that illustrate the books?

My sister (Narinda Sandry) took most of them and it was hilarious. We didn't want to harm any of the insects, so we had to put some, like the mealworms, in the fridge for a while to slow them down to get the shots. I will always smile as I recall the day we sat around a cow pat in a paddock trying to photograph dung beetles before they re-dug themselves in! The old farmer that had let us into the paddock stood to the side scratching his head in disbelief.

How did your feel when you wrote these stories?

I was really pleased when they came out because the photos are just gorgeous, and they were very well received by schools and parents. Winning the Whitley awards was really lovely recognition too.

How do you hope readers will feel?

Hopefully empowered with more information and knowledge, and perhaps inspired to look more closely at the wonderful world of insects and an appreciation of the benefits they bring.

How would you like teachers to present your books to children?

I'd love them to make them part of their science lesson, and even team them with some real insects (like mealworms) to make it all so much more engaging. There are two free blackline masters for each one too, that are designed to be able to be used independently by children in reading groups etc. There are heaps of facts inside the covers, and a glossary of terms, so plenty to learn in each one.

Are there any messages you would like them to discuss?

The main thing is that insects are so important and not just a good excuse to whack something!

Do you have any advice for teachers in their role as writing guides?

As I said earlier.... talk before writing as much as you can. It is amazing how hard kids find it to describe something verbally and yet we ask them to do it in the written form all the time with disappointing results.

Do you have any advice for children as writers?

Tell, tell, tell, and don't be too hard on yourself if it takes a long time to get it right. It took me five years to get my first book published.

What is your favourite picture book? What do you like about it?

I have so many favourites, but Bob Graham's *Greetings from Sandy Beach* always makes me laugh out loud, and humour is really important to me in a book.

Who is your favourite children's author? What do you like about his/her work?

The *Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* (CS Lewis). He made me see a movie in my head. I could picture every scene, decades before there was a movie. I remember thinking that one day, I wanted to make a reader feel like that.

To find out more about Rebecca and her award winning books visit her website at rebeccajohnson.com.au.

You can find out about and purchase her [Insect Series](#) and other [books](#) on her website.



Books by Rebecca Johnson

Rebecca Johnson is an award winning author and primary science teacher based in south east Queensland. She has written more than 100 books, including:

The [*Steve Parish Storybook Collection*](#) of forty books features Australian animals. More than 3.5 million books have been sold.

The [*Juliet – Nearly a Vet*](#) series for young readers features ten-year-old Juliet who, having watched her mother who *is* a vet, thinks she is *nearly* a vet. More than 100,000 books from the series have been sold. In 2014 Book 4: *Bush Baby Rescue* won the Wilderness Society Environment Award for Children's Literature. Other books in the series have been nominated for awards including the Children's Book Council of Australia Younger Readers' category in both 2014 and 2015, and the Adelaide Festival Awards for Literature 2014.

The new [*Steve Parish Reptiles & Amphibians*](#) series of ten books features Australian reptiles and amphibians.

The [*Insect Series*](#) of ten books was awarded the 2014 [Whitley](#) Certificate of Commendation for Best Educational Series. The books focus on metamorphosis, survival, adaptations, properties of natural materials and the usefulness of insects through fiction stories. The stories are accompanied by stunning close-up photos of insects of all kinds.

The books, which won the **2014 Whitley Award for Best Educational Series**, have strong listed links to the Australian Curriculum for many year levels. They are a great resource for teaching and learning about insects. The fiction stories that accompany the facts make the learning even more fun. Two free blackline masters support the use of each book. The blackline masters can be accessed on the [Blake Education Website](#).

While the books feature Australian insects and have links to the Australian curriculum, they are loved by children all over the world.

In addition to receiving awards for her writing, in 2010 Rebecca won the [Peter Doherty Award for Excellence in Science Teaching](#).

Rebecca regularly visits schools in South-East Queensland, presenting writing workshops to inspire children of all ages to read and write. Her past experience as a wildlife carer has given her an extra insight into the behaviour of our native animals, giving her fiction stories a taste of realism. The books are great for Australian children, and for introducing Australian animals to children from other places.

To find out more about Rebecca and her award winning books visit her website at rebeccajohnson.com.au.

You can find out about and purchase her [books](#) on her website.