



## Author-Illustrator Spotlight: Chrissy Byers



**Chrissy Byers:** author, illustrator, teacher, mother

### ***Chrissy, what was your motivation for writing this book?***

As an experienced early years class teacher, I had noticed that, with the rise in technology there was a decline in the amount of time children spent engaging in imaginative play. I was compelled to write and illustrate a children's book which would remind parents, and inspire children, to see the magic in everyday household junk.

Unlike a traditional children's book, I felt that the recount genre would suit my intentions better than a narrative. I saw this as being an additional bonus for primary teachers, as there are very few examples of recount picture books.

The repetitive text elements encourage pre-reading children to join in a shared reading experience. It also provides opportunity to incorporate hand gestures when reading, which helps focus young minds and occupy little hands during carpet time. The rhyming couplets assist in reading prediction and keep the beat of a fast-moving text.

### ***Do you think of yourself more as a writer or an illustrator?***

As a small child, I would spend hours writing and illustrating my own little stories constructed on folded note paper with staples down the side. For me the two roles come together so harmoniously that I would find it extremely difficult to work on only one aspect.

I am perhaps unconventional in my methodology also. I believe the traditional path is to write first and illustrate at draft stage. For this book and the follow-up book *The Magic in Dress-Ups* (which is out later this year), I have chosen to let the children's games dictate the story content to me. I then started sketching and writing in unison. However, I always seem to finish the illustrations first.

### ***Where do you write?***

My most useful ideas always seem to come to me when I am cooking, cleaning or walking. There is always a notebook nearby to jot down random thoughts before they're lost forever! I then use a computer to combine the scribblings into a more coherent form.

### ***Tell me about the process you use when illustrating.***

When working on both my books, I provided the children with the play materials and encouraged them to decide what game they would like to play. My stories are very real and I hope the natural poses of the children makes the characters and themes more believable to an audience. They are so real, in fact, that my eldest son (who features in *The Magic in Boxes*) told his librarian that his book should be in the non-fiction section of the library because *it really did happen!*

While the children are playing I take lots of photos and use these to assist writing my storyboard and making preliminary sketches. Afterwards, I produce large sketched illustrations on paper using pencil, pastel and pen.

A professional photographer digitally captures my sketches and other three dimensional objects or creations I have made for the imagination pages. From there I use Adobe Photoshop to create digital canvases.

My intention to use flat, realistic sketches for the **real-world pages** in contrast to the exciting mixed media compositions found in the **imagination scenes** is to promote the **limitless capacity of a child's imagination**. I want the real world to seem boring compared to *what can be "magic-ed" up in the mind.*

### ***What do you like best about your story?***

I love that after reading the story children want to run off and engage in imaginative play using household junk. They often re-enact the scenes from the book before coming up with their own ideas. In my eyes, this is the book's true success.

I am so very pleased that educators recognise the book's potential in a classroom setting and I am so grateful for the support and kind words they have passed on to me.

### ***Were there benefits to independently publishing this book?***

As an independently published author/illustrator I was able to look beyond the financial constraints dictated by the traditional publishing houses. This was extremely appealing to me as firstly it meant that I could keep all of my 52 illustrated text pages. Traditionally a children's book has only 32 pages and, as the pace of my book moves so quickly, the book would not have had enough substance if it was reduced so drastically.

Secondly, as the independent publisher, I was able to source recycled paper and card choices for both the hard and soft cover versions of my book. All text pages are a combination of consumer pulp and recycled materials. The lovely end pages on the hard cover edition were manufactured in France and are 100% recycled. The paper back cardboard cover comes from Germany and is also 100% recycled. I do not know of any other children's book on the market which uses recycled materials to the extent that I do. Sadly, this does mean that I have a very slim profit margin, although integrity always comes at a price!

Find out more about Chrissy on her website [www.chrissybyers.com](http://www.chrissybyers.com)