

STUDENT FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) for Paul DuBois Jacobs and Jennifer Swender

A huge thank you to all the students who asked them!

Questions about us:

- Do you live in a city or some place that has lots of animals?
 - We used to live in New York City where there were lots of squirrels and pigeons. Now we live in a small town in Massachusetts where there are coyotes, bears, moose, bobcats, foxes, chipmunks, porcupines, and birds. And still a lot of squirrels.

- Do you live in a warm place or a cold place?
 - We live in a place with 4 seasons. In the winter, it is cold and snowy. In the summer, it can get very warm.

- Do you have any kids?
 - Yes, we have two. One is in high school and one is in elementary school.

- Do you have any pets?
 - Yes, we have two. One is a dog and one is a cat. They are not in school.

- Do you like to read?
 - YES!

- When did you start writing books?
 - We both started writing as kids. (Paul still has a book he wrote in 4th grade.) Our first book together, My Subway Ride, was published in 2004. (That's probably before you were born.)

Questions about our books:

- How many books have you written?
 - We have written 15 books together. We are working on #16 now. Paul has also written 4 books with musician Pete Seeger. Jennifer has written 1 book by herself and is working on #2.
- Have you even won a gold or silver medal?
 - We have not won a gold or silver medal, but we are proud of a few awards. Jennifer's novel Solving For M won the 2020 Mathical Book Prize and Paul's book The Deaf Musicians won the ALA's Schneider Family Book Award in 2007.
- How many books are in the Animal Inn series?
 - There are 5. Each book has a different narrator, so each pet tells one of the stories (except for Fuzzy and Furry).
- Which is your favorite book that you wrote?
 - We write lots of different kinds of books (activity books, picture books, chapter books, and novels) so it can be tricky to compare them. But our first book My Subway Ride is very special to us. We still get messages from families saying that they like to read it *every night!*
- Do you have a favorite children's book that you *didn't* write?
 - That is a tough question because we have *so* many favorite books and the list is always changing. Hmmm. We'll have to think about this one. Paul thought about it. He says The Snowy Day by Ezra Jack Keats. Jennifer is still thinking. What are some of your favorite books?

Questions about writing:

- How many books can you write in 1 month?
 - Zero! 😊 It takes us a long time for us to complete a book. From the first idea to the actual printed book can take several years!

- How do you write the books? What's the process from the idea to the finished book on a shelf?
 - The process we go through is the same process you go through when you write. First, we gather our ideas. Some people call this "gathering seeds" or "brainstorming." We talk about the characters, the setting, the plot, and the tone of the story. Then we start writing drafts. The drafts start out pretty rough and then we revise and revise them. When we get to a "clean" draft, we send it to our editor, and they send back notes so we can revise again. When the editor is happy, the manuscript goes to a copyeditor who finds all of our typos and spelling mistakes. While this is happening, the illustrator is also working on the pictures with the help of the art director. When everything is all set, the publisher sends the final book to the printer. Then it's ready for you to read!

- In our class we use more than 1 peer editor. How many editors do you work with?
 - Each book usually only has 1 editor, but that person can also have some helpers. In addition, we have a helper called an agent who reads our drafts and gives us advice about how to revise them. We also edit each other's work.

- Where do you like to write? Your house or someplace else?
 - We each have a desk at home where we work, but sometimes it's nice to work someplace else. Some of our favorite places to write are the library and outdoors.

- How do you think of all the ideas for your books?
 - Our ideas come from different places. Sometimes we get an idea from another person, like an editor or friend. Sometimes we get an idea from an event, an experience, or something we think is interesting. And sometimes... we just get an idea! A lightbulb goes on!

- Do you use a typewriter?
 - We start most of our projects with a pencil and paper. Then we move to the computer.

- How do you draw the pictures so neatly?
 - We wish we could take credit for all of the beautiful art in our books, but that credit goes to the illustrators. (We are just the authors.) We have been lucky to work with some amazing artists.

- Have you ever written a story that you decided to stop and/or keep secret?
 - Yes! We stop and start a lot of stories. Sometimes it is hard to say how long we have worked on a story because of all the starts and stops. We don't know if we have ever kept a story secret, but there are some ideas that we work on and then think... hmmm, maybe the best place for this is the filing cabinet!

- How do you keep writing a story if you get stuck?
 - This is one of the great things about having a co-author. If we get stuck, we can let our co-author take a turn. Some other ways to get "un-stuck" could be to take a walk, do something else for a while, or read a book you think might help you.

- Have you ever made a mistake when writing a story?
 - Yes! We make mistakes ALL THE TIME. Some are "happy mistakes" because they lead us to something that we wouldn't have thought of without them. And some are just plain, old mistakes that need to get fixed. We always say that most of writing is revising, and according to the dictionary *revise* means "to look over again in order to correct or improve."