READING WITH YOUR KIDS MAGAZINE

INTERVIEW WITH ISSAC FITZGERALD

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A Letter From Our Showrunner

I'm so excited to welcome you to the very first edition of The Reading With Your Kids Magazine. I have dreamed of launching an online magazine to complement our podcast for a long time, and thankfully, with the help of many, the dream is coming true. A big thank you goes out to our editor-in-chief, Rory Grady. He is a talented young writer, and I know you will enjoy reading his contributions.

I also want to thank my dear friend and colleague, Fatima Khan. Fatima has been a part of the Reading With Your Kids team since we debuted in 2017. She is most responsible for coordinating our Reading With Your Kids Certified Great Read program.

I also want to thank the incredibly talented interns from Emerson College in Boston who have been working with us this semester. Be sure to listen to the fantastic interviews conducted by Jordan Sahley and Cassandra Maisonet. Will Cheever has created some great content you will find on social media, and Stephanie Davila has created a series of five Reading With Your Kids En Espanol episodes featuring interviews with authors from throughout South America. I'd also like to thank Daylene Odvina for designing our logo and the cover artwork for the magazine. Of course, I also want to give a big shout-out and thank you to my beautiful wife. Without her love and support, none of this would be possible.

Last and certainly not least, I want to thank all our friends and listeners who have prayed for me over the past few months. As many of you know, I experienced an accident at home that resulted in tears in both quadriceps. Many have asked what exactly happened, and I will let you all know as soon as I come up with a story more entertaining than the truth. Thankfully the surgeries were a success. It has been a long recovery, and we still have a few more months to go, but I want to thank you all for your well wishes and prayers.

I look forward to celebrating and promoting your books here.

-Jed Doherty

AUTHOR HIGHLIGHT

5 May, 2023
Readville, MA

INSIDE ISAAC FITZGERALD'S UNORTODOX LOVE LETTER TO MASSACHUSETTS

Isaac Fitzgerald Talks *Dirtbag, Massachusetts*; Tattoos; and Olive Garden Knockoffs

T**here's a certain sadness** that afflicts the men of Massachusetts. Call it seasonal affective disorder, call it the Curse of the Bambino. Either description is probably at least partially accurate. I feel it in myself sometimes, but whatever it is, it predates me. It didn't start with Patriot's Day, or the helmet catch, or the day Dukakis lost. My father has it; my grandfather had it; my great-grandfather had it; and though you'd never know it from talking to him, Isaac Fitzgerald, a man Hoda Kotb has called bubbly and effervescent, has it. In his latest release, *Dirtbag, Massachusetts*, Fitzgerald comes to terms with the feeling that many Boston Irish Catholics before him have tried and failed to either articulate or repress.

As I've gone back and forth between rereading *Dirtbag* and writing this profile, I haven't shaken the similarities between personal essaying and karaoke. It may sound like an abstract comparison, but for a moment, consider their similarities: 1.) They are imperfect art forms, i.e., at their worst, they can be frustrating, embarrassing, or ruefully self-indulgent. 2.) We may not participate in them for fear of our friends' reactions. 3.) We're only as good as the words in front of us. 4.) The measure of someone's talents is their ability to continue even when they don't know the words.

T**his is where Isaac shines.** There is redemption within the pages of *Dirtbag, Massachusetts*, but at no point does he claim to know how it's achieved. Like the rest of us, Isaac is still figuring out what it means to be himself. It's this uncertainty, he says, that separates *Dirtbag* from other memoirs.

"I'm only thirty-nine. I started writing this when I was thirty-five. Some memoirs are like, 'Here's my whole life.' I'm kind of writing this one in the middle of it. The book doesn't end with some nice bow tied around it. It's an ongoing conversation. Who knows how I'm going to feel about this book when I'm forty-five? But right now, I'm really glad I wrote it when I did."

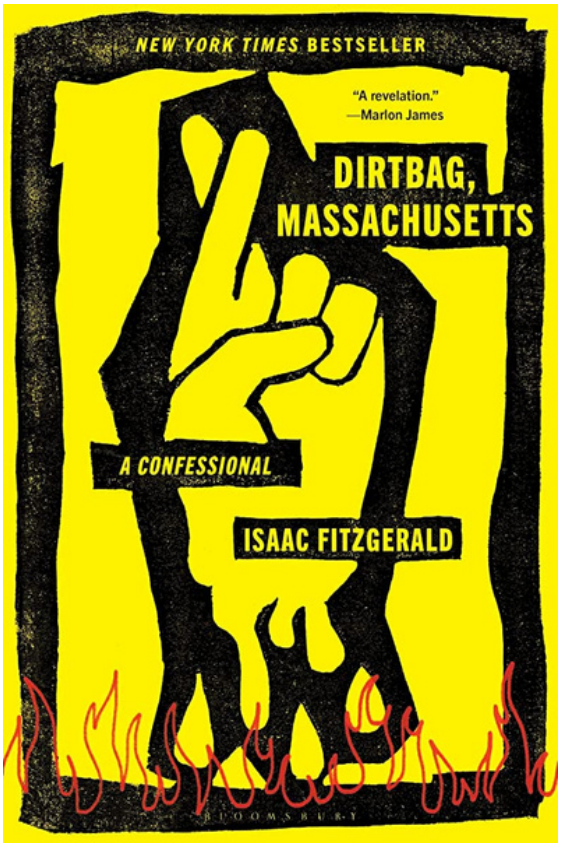
The book is branded as a confessional, a choice Isaac made after deciding it would be ill-defined as a memoir or essay collection. Though the book's raw and honest tone has struck a chord with readers, it wasn't his initial intention to write something so revealing.

"**The project originally started as essays**," he said. "I didn't expect to write so much about my childhood. I thought every essay would be a view on something in pop culture with a little bit of me in there but mainly focused on the pop culture element. But as I started writing some of the essays, I was like, 'There are ten paragraphs about my dad here. I wonder what that's about.' Eventually, I called my publisher and told her the book might be more about my childhood, and she said, 'Yeah, I've been waiting eighteen months for you to figure that out.'"

Over twelve chapters, Isaac chronicles his life across two countries and four states—five if you include D.C. Now living in New York, where he's spent more than a decade, he's had time to reflect on what it means to be at home, a once nebulous concept. When I ask how he'd define it now, he grins and presents the knuckles that served him so well in his teenage fight clubs. Written across them is the phrase "Come Home." The tattoo is just one from the score he's accumulated over the years.

"For a long time, I wanted to be one of those people who says, 'Wherever I lay my head is home,'" he said. "But my idea of home has really changed, especially in the last year. Now, it's about community. It's far more about honesty and relationships than a place."

Living in New York has also granted Isaac more consistency as he lives as a full-time writer. Through his twenties, Isaac spent time as a campaign staffer, an international smuggler, and a begrudging Buca di Beppo employee before finding his way to writing. While the suspense and squalor of Isaac's youth offered their share of intrigue, some of the more profound moments of the book lie in his reflection upon the mundane, quotidian things you do in a day just to prove you exist.



The book's penultimate essay—one of the shorter entries in the collection—is ostensibly a story about haircuts, but it quickly turns into a parable on self-discovery and the relationships involved. It's a fitting representation of *Dirtbag*'s whole ethos. The book covers a lot of ground, but it isn't necessarily about all those things. The deeper meanings can be far more layered. The book's true subjects, Isaac says, come down to two things.

"This is a story of hope and forgiveness. My whole life, I told myself that I'd forgiven my parents. In the past, I had this mentality of, 'Oh, don't sweat it.' It was my therapist that pointed out that real forgiveness comes from facing something and talking about it. I spend so much time trying to arrive at a place of real forgiveness, and I don't think I do by the end of the book. There's still the hope that I continue to have these conversations and face this stuff. I let my mom read it before it was published, and we've been talking about it for almost a year now. What's wonderful is I can say, now that I'm a year into the future, that what I hoped would happen did happen."

Isaac is signed on for his next project, titled *American Dionysus*, with a tentative release date of sometime in 2025. In it, he will retrace the steps of John Chapman—Johnny Appleseed—as he planted orchards in the northeast. Inspired by the work of Bill Bryson and Cheryl Strayed, the book is a marriage of Isaac's love of walking and New England heritage. He hopes to begin writing in "the thaw," his term for that ambiguous point in the spring when you start seeing peoples' calves again. The process may draw him away from home, but I'm sure he won't feel it as long as the trail has barstools and conversation.

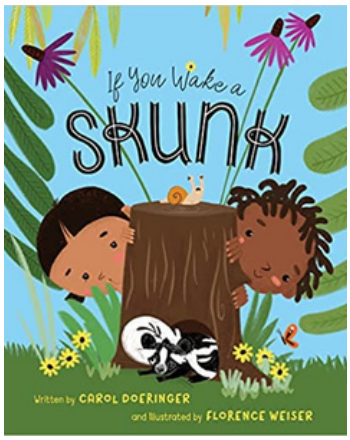
READING WITH YOUR KIDS

Certified Great Reads

You can find our full reviews of these books and others at readingwithyourkids.com
Reviews by Fatima Khan

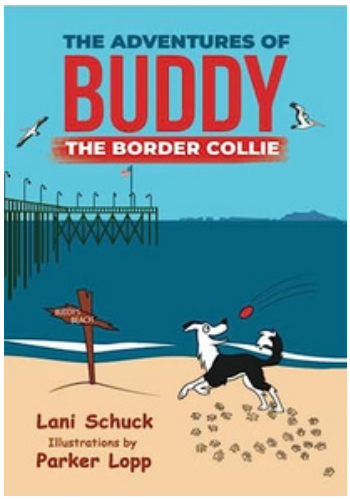
If You Wake a Skunk **By Carol Doeringer**

If You Wake a Skunk, written by Carol Doeringer and illustrated by Florence Weiser, is an amusing tale that features simple rhyming text and gorgeous illustrations. This educational picture book teaches kids facts about skunks and features carefully chosen full-color illustrations, making it a treat to read aloud to young children or for beginning readers.



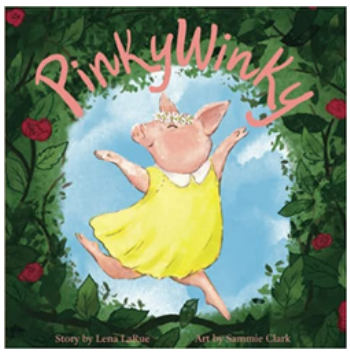
The Adventures of Buddy the Border Collie by Lani Schuck

The Adventures of Buddy the Border Collie is a wonderful children's book written by Lani Schuck and illustrated by Parker Lopp. The book follows a charming border collie named Buddy. It's an engaging read for kids as they can enjoy imagining themselves in Buddy's adventures.



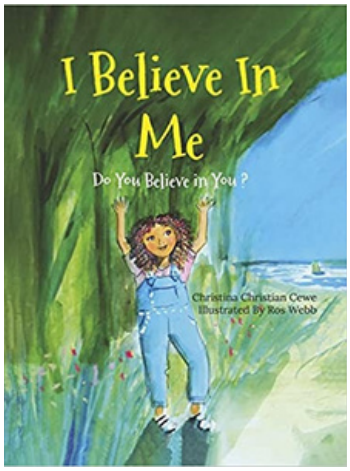
Pinky Winky **by Lena Larue**

This engaging retelling of the classic tale will have you and your children giggling the entire time. The theme of kindness and empathy is reinforced in a kid-friendly fashion through a surprise ending. Teaches children to "Be Wise. Be Kind. Be You."



I Believe in Me, Do You Believe in You **by Christina Christian Cewe**

I Believe in Me: Do You Believe in You? by Christina Christian Cewe is a great picture book that inspires meaningful conversations about development mindset and goal-setting.



FOUR QUESTIONS WITH LEVAR BURTON

INTERVIEW BY JED DOHERTY

The following article has been edited for length and clarity.

RWYK: How did you become such a passionate advocate for reading?

LeVar: My mother was an English teacher and then subsequently a social worker. She was my first teacher. I was really lucky to grow up in a household where reading was highlighted, We took two daily newspapers. I saw my mother always reading a book in her spare time and often juggling two or three novels. I grew up with that model that reading and literature were normal and important parts of human existence.

RWYK: How important is it for kids to read during their younger years?

LeVar: I believe that literacy is the birthright of every single human being. If you can read in at least one language, then you are, in my estimation, well on your way to being a free and emancipated human. You're free of the restrictions of getting your information solely from other people. As a literate person, you can seek out answers to the questions your curiosity causes you to create in your mind, and there are no limits to what you can discover through the written word. The ability to read really unlocks so many doors for kids.

RWYK: Where does the inspiration to explore new things come from?

LeVar: Sometimes we don't know what we're really passionate about until we encounter it, right? It's just sort of a lightbulb that goes off in our souls, and we get activated and energized. I firmly believe that if a child is just exposed to enough variety of real-world experience, they will find something that ignites their soul, something that ignites their passion. Once we've done that, then we just have to keep feeding the child more and more. Soon, their own curiosity, their own drive their own passion will take over. They're off and running.

RWYK: In recent years, with reading, it's become more common for kids to get their foot in the door with things like comic books and manga. What do you think of this development?

LeVar: Yeah, comic books are quite sophisticated these days, and I say all the time, it doesn't matter [what kids are reading], so long as there is a gateway drug, if you will, that draws the child into the world of the written word,

Cooking With Your Kids

Looking for something fun and delicious to do as a family? We're here to help. This month's family activity is from Snackable Science Experiments by Emma Vanstone. Whether you're looking for new recipes or just ways to make your current recipes more scientific, this is for you. If you enjoy this recipe, be sure to check out the full book, which is out now through Page Street Publishing.

Ingredients

- Cookie dough
- Melted Chocolate
- Sprinkles or other decorations

Supplies

- Medium baking sheet
- Parchment paper
- Plastic dinosaur or other toy

Directions

- Preheat oven to 350 F (180 C). Line a medium baking sheet with parchment paper.
- Divide cookie dough into about 12 evenly sized balls and squash them down so they are flat.
- Clean the plastic dinosaurs' feet and press them firmly into the dough so you have a footprint shape.
- Bake the cookies in the oven for 15 to 20 minutes or until golden brown. If the footprints fade too much after baking, press the dinosaurs' feet in the cookies again while they are hot.
- You can either leave the cookies as they are or fill the footprints with melted chocolate or sprinkles.

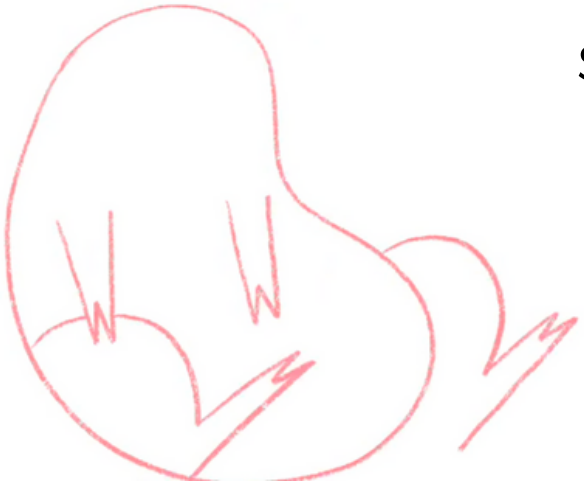
Drawing With Your Kids

This month features a contribution from our friend Nic Yulo on how to draw her character Patches from her book *Patch of Sky*. To watch Nic's full narration, visit readingwithyourkids.com

Step One: Draw a big oval in the center of the page.

Step Two: Draw two W's on both sides of the oval.

Step Three: Draw two curved lines toward the bottom of the oval.



Step Four: Start drawing her feet. Draw two more W's at the ends of the curves.

Step Five: Draw two curved triangles at the top of the oval.

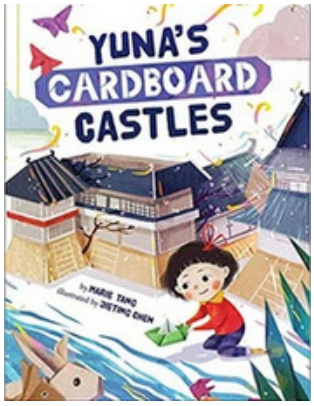
Step Six: Draw a circle in the middle of the oval and fill it with two smaller circles.

Step Seven: Using another colored pencil, draw two dots for eyes and four lines for hair and eyebrows.

Step Eight: Color in your W's to create hooves and draw two dark lines to give the ears dimension.

Step Nine: Draw and color in two splotches on either side and add a big squiggly tail. Now you have Patches!

Asian American - Pacific Islander Heritage Month Reading List

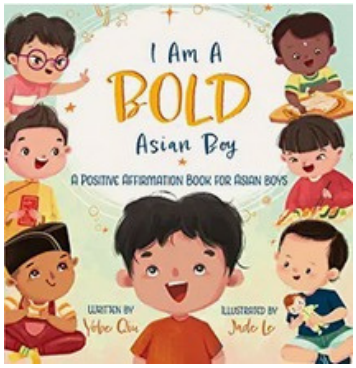


Yuna's Cardboard Castles by Marie Tang

Yuna and her family have just moved to the United States, and she doesn't speak English yet. At first, her attempts to catch the attention of the neighborhood kids get lost in translation, but when she shows that she can do something very special with paper, a whole new world unfolds.

I Am A Bold Asian Boy by Yobe Qiu

I am a bold, beautiful and brilliant Asian boy! Follow a journey of confidence and positive affirmations as our narrator discovers his strength, courage, and cultural identity. This bold Asian boy dreams big and plans to discover the world, all while reminding young readers what makes them so great!



Grumpy New Year by Katrina Moore

Daisy is traveling to China, and she's excited to see her Yeh-Yeh again! She has big plans for all the fun they'll have together in preparation for Lunar New Year, like flying kites and making jiao zi. But when she arrives, she has trouble sleeping and is less jolly than she hoped. Throughout the week, Yeh-Yeh tries all sorts of things to help her have a fun holiday and get her past her grumpiness.

Sora's Seashells by Helena Ku Rhee

Every summer, when Sora's Halmoni, or grandmother, visits from South Korea, the two of them take the bus to the beach to search for seashells. As summer turns to fall, Halmoni returns home and Sora starts kindergarten, where some of the kids tease her about her "weird" name. But when her parents reveal the origin of her name, Sora channels a newfound pride and, inspired by Halmoni, combats her peers' hurtful comments by sharing her shells with everyone in her class.

Don't miss our conversations with Marie Tang, Yobe Qiu and Katrina Moore in May. And be sure to subscribe to the show to catch our conversation with Helena Ku Rhee coming later this Spring!

The Certified Great Read program has really given me more credibility as an author when I am pitching my book to stores, libraries and even media outlets."

Lori Orlinsky, author of *Being Small Is Not So Bad After All* and *The Tooth Fairy's Tummy Ache*

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