

Big Al

Illustrated by Yoshi

0-88708-075-8 (HC) • 0-689-81722-3 (PB)

Big Al and Shrimpy

Illustrated by Yoshi

0-689-84247-3 (HC)

Frindle

Illustrated by Brian Selznick

0-689-80669-8 (HC) • 0-689-81876-9 (PB)

Horn Book Fanfare

Christopher Award

Parents' Choice Silver Medal

Children's Crown Award

The Landry News

Pictures by Salvatore Murdocca

0-689-81817-3 (HC) • 0-689-82868-3 (PB)

Illustrated by Brian Selznick

Parents' Choice Silver Medal

SLJ Best Book of the Year

New York Times Bestseller

ABA Pick of the Lists

NCTE Notable Children's Book in the Language Arts

The School Story

Illustrated by Brian Selznick

0-689-82594-3 (HC) • 0-689-85186-3 (PB)

Parents' Choice Silver Medal

The Jacket

0-689-82595-1 (HC)

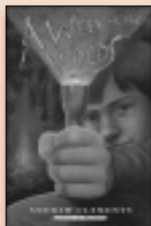
A Week in the Woods

0-689-82596-X (HC)

The Janitor's Boy

0-689-81818-1 (HC) • 0-689-83585-X (PB)

SSLI Book Award Honor Book



**Jake Drake Series:
Ready-for-Chapters**

#1 Jake Drake, Bully Buster

Illustrated by Dolores Avendaño

0-689-83917-0 (HC) • 0-689-83880-8 (PB)

#2 Jake Drake, Know-It-All

Illustrated by Dolores Avendaño

0-689-83918-9 (HC) • 8 0-689-83881-6 (PB)

#3 Jake Drake, Teacher's Pet

Illustrated by Dolores Avendaño

0-689-83882-4 (HC) • 0-689-83919-7 (PB)

#4 Jake Drake, Class Clown

Illustrated by Dolores Avendaño

0-689-83921-9 (HC) • 0-689-83916-2 (PB)

**Pets to the Rescue Series:
Ready-to-Read Level 1**

#1 Ringo Saves the Day!

Illustrated by Ellen Beier

0-689-82915-9 (HC) • 0-689-83439-X (PB)

#2 Brave Norman

Illustrated by Ellen Beier

0-689-82914-0 (HC) • 0-689-83438-1 (PB)

ASPCA Henry Bergh Children's Book Award Honor Book

#3 Dolores and the Big Fire

Illustrated by Ellen Beier

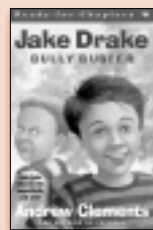
0-689-82916-7 (HC)

0-689-83440-3 (PB) Available Spring 2003

#4 Tara and Tiree, Fearless Friends

Illustrated by Ellen Beier

0-689-82917-5 (HC)



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Andrew
Clements



“Writing for children
is a great privilege, and
I am grateful for it.”

I only remember one English teacher from high school, Mrs. Rappell. With her help—more like insistence—I discovered I was good at writing. But frankly, I was lazy. I only wrote when I was inspired. I wrote about thoughts and feelings of the moment. I wrote when it seemed to come naturally. I didn't spend much time at it, and apart from essays and papers during college and graduate school, writing was little more than a hobby.

All through the seven years I spent as a teacher I continued to write, mostly poetry and songs. My wife and I began performing my songs, and we moved to New York to see if there was a career in music for us. I wrote ten or twelve new songs during our first few months in the city. That was the first time I had ever really worked at writing in a sustained way. Our career in music never happened, but the songs and the writing experience remained.

Then I went to work for a children's book publisher. Writing tasks came thick and fast: catalog text, flap copy, advertising copy, story summaries, letters to authors and illustrators, even business plan writing. My colleagues came to depend on me for a lot of the company's writing. And one day the publisher asked me to write a story for an illustrator who needed a project. That became the picture book *Big Al*, and my career as an author was off and running, or at least off and meandering.

I've written a lot of picture book texts. The picture book is a small container—typically about a dozen page-turns

from start to finish. It's a real challenge to put a substantial idea into so small a package. The story must be told economically, simply, and dramatically.

I have learned that I cannot sit around and wait for inspiration. I have learned to begin working, and let the inspiration come from the writing itself.

Yet, the language must be rich enough to evoke an illustrator's best work. I continue to write picture books, and expect I always will.

While I was visiting at a school, a fifth-grade boy asked, "When does writing become easy?" I had to tell him the truth. Never—at least not in my experience. It takes discipline to write. It takes some doing. To write something, sooner or later I have to go off by myself and put one word after another, word after word after word, until it's done.

I recently figured out that if I took all the words in my first novel, *Frindle*, and ran them end-to-end with no returns and no paragraph or chapter breaks, I would have one string of words as long as three football fields. And now, when I get to chapter six or seven in a new novel, I say to myself, "Only two more football fields to go."

But when the writing goes well, I don't think about counting the words. I get drawn into the lives of the characters, and into building a world for them to explore. I usually have an idea of where a book will

end up, but sometimes I am surprised. I often start with a simple idea, a "What if?" situation. What if a boy decided he was going to make up a new word? What if a girl began to publish her own newspaper? What if a boy's father was the janitor at his school? Once a character is placed in a particular situation, then it's simply a matter of continuing to answer this question: "What happens next?" Answering that question leads me to the end of the story.

I have learned that I cannot sit around and wait for inspiration. I have learned to begin working, and let the inspiration come from the writing itself. The old rule, 'Never stare at a blank piece of paper,'—or a blank computer screen—is a good one. Beginning is important. If I can get a story started, the ending will come.

No writer is self-created. I have many debts. I owe so much to my wife, Rebecca, and our four boys for the joy and stability that fuel my work. I owe so much to my parents for making good books a part of my childhood. I owe inspired editors who have helped me again and again. I owe the words of the Bible. I owe Shakespeare, Yeats, E. B. White, Bob Dylan, and Margaret Wise Brown. And of course I owe the teachers and librarians and parents who have chosen to share my books with children.

Writing for children is a great privilege, and I am grateful for it.