



Laura Numeroff

If You Take a Mouse to School
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A Conversation with Laura Numeroff...

The *If You Give a . . .* series has a unique style of its own. Where did this style come from and how has it contributed to the success of the series?

The idea for *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie* came to me on a long, boring car trip. I had an image in my head of a little mouse nibbling on a gigantic chocolate chip cookie. I pictured him getting crumbs in his whiskers, and then wanting some milk, and so the whole story unraveled right until the end when he was thirsty again and wanted another glass of milk!

I've been told by parents and teachers that kids like the circular pattern of the *If You Give a . . .* books, and how one thing eventually leads to another. When I first read the story to a classroom, the teacher said, "That's a wonderful circular story." I had no idea what that was, as I had never set out to write one!

Tell us about the various charities you are involved with, particularly First Book. Why is it important to give a child his or her first book?

I made a decision a few years ago to start donating a portion of my royalties to charity. They have included the North American Handicapped Riders Association, The Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric Aids Foundation, and the Michael J. Fox Foundation, as well as many others.

I heard about First Book through HarperCollins and thought the idea of a giving a child his or her own book, when they otherwise would never have the opportunity to own one, was wonderful. Books can open up new worlds, inspire kids to use their imagination, and take them to places they'd never be able to go on their own.

Your new book is called *If You Take a Mouse to School*. What made you decide to bring Mouse to school? Did you base any of the scenes on your own experiences?

Mouse and I don't have much in common when it comes to school. First of all, he's good in math! Also, I always wanted to do very messy science experiments in school, but never got the chance. I gave Mouse the opportunity so I could live vicariously through him. He's also a bit of a sports nut, but I was always figuring out a way to get out of gym!

Mouse's curious nature enables him to make the most of his day at school. Describe your typical day.

My typical day starts out by cuddling with my dog Sydney and then taking him for a walk. After breakfast, I spend the morning catching up on phone calls and e-mails. I eat my lunch outside in my backyard. The view is spectacular and it always feels like a mini-vacation seeing the mountains and the city!

Then I spend the rest of the day working on my latest book. Three days a week I go horseback riding or I go to the gym and work out with weights. I also like to hike on the trails near my house. And at night, I love getting into bed with my dog and cats and reading, especially biographies.

Animals with active imaginations are an important part of your stories. How does your love of animals influence your work?

I have always loved animals as much as I love books. I still have the *Field Guide to Dogs* from when I was a child. I used to memorize as many breeds as I could. My dog, Sydney, is an Australian Shepherd. I also have two cats, Lily and Petunia: Sydney's a sheepherder but since I don't have any sheep, he herds my cats! They put up with it but you can tell by the look on their faces that they're not amused! I often find them sleeping together, which is the cutest thing. One day I'd love to live on a farm and have llamas, cows, miniature horses, a few sheep, and more dogs and cats! Being such an animal lover, I try to write my books about them!

Speaking of animals, *Laura Numeroff's 10-Step Guide to Living with Your Monster* features a different kind of pet. How did you become such an expert on monsters?

I saw my first monster in my backyard. I made a note of it and continued to be on the lookout for more. Over the years, through all my travels, I've become quite the expert and have done extensive research on the behavior of monsters. They never fail to amaze me! I'm still hoping to catch a glimpse of the rare Jiggledy Finkler!

What books inspired you to become a writer?

As soon as I was old enough to have my very own library card, I would take out six books at a time (that was the maximum) and go back for more the following week. I loved *Stuart Little* by E. B. White, *Eloise* by Kay Thompson, and any book by Marguerite Henry or Beverly Cleary.

The If You Give a . . . series is so beloved by children. How do you feel when you see the way children react to your books?

It is the greatest feeling in the world to see a young child happily clutching my book in anticipation of me autographing it. When they tell me it's their favorite book, I am so touched and honored! But I'll never forget the little boy who said, "You're ruining my book," as I signed my name in it! I only hope kids enjoy reading my books as much as I enjoyed reading my favorites when I was a kid.