

New Jersey authors for young readers



AP photo, 1998

Judy Blume's books are sometimes challenged because of their subject matter, but they remain favorites among preteens.

Judy Blume tackles real issues with her groundbreaking books

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Those who think children's book authors only write about sugar, spice and everything nice haven't read anything by New Jersey-born writer Judy Blume.

Unfortunately for Blume, those who do think children's books should only be about such subjects have read her work — and then mounted strong efforts to have it removed from the shelves of school and public libraries.

While many of Blume's books are written for children — she is the author of the wildly popular "Fudge" series — she also writes books that deal with topics she believes children and teens think about. These include "Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret" (religion and puberty), "Blubber" (bullying), "Iggie's House" (racism) and "Forever" (teen sex).

But while Blume's writing may have made her some enemies, it is also earned her legions of devoted fans. The books, some more than 30 years old, are still popular with young readers.

"The books are incredibly popular. We have multiple copies of her books because they go out so much. Children just love her books," said Janet Marler, an outreach and access ser-

vices librarian with the Atlantic County Library System.

Marler was in sixth grade when she read "Are You There God?" The book made her a lifelong Blume fan.

"The book is wonderful, like all of Judy Blume's books, for talking about things in a matter-of-fact, child's point of view sort of way," said Marler. "One of the appeals of her books is that she deals with sensitive topics with a great deal of humor. When kids read her books, they really get a sense of the characters and issues being discussed, but they want to keep reading because the books are so funny."

Blume was born in Elizabeth, Union County, in 1938 and lived there until moving to Florida when she was in the third grade. She now splits her time between Key West, Florida, and Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts.

Blume published her first book, "The One in the Middle is the Green Kangaroo" in 1969. She has published 28 books, including "Friend or Fiend," published in May and part of the "The Pain and the Great One" series.

Blume is not just a children's book author. She also has written several popular adult books, including "Wifey," "Smart Women" and "Summer Sisters."

Because of the challenges to her books, she

also has become an activist against censorship. She works with the National Coalition Against Censorship and is editor of "Places I Never Meant To Be, Original Stories by Censored Writers."

On her Web site, Blume admits to being surprised that people would be upset by her books.

"It never occurred to me, at the time, that what I was writing was controversial," she writes on her site. "Much of it grew out of my own feelings and concerns when I was young."

"I believe that censorship grows out of fear, and because fear is contagious, some parents are easily swayed," she writes. "Book banning satisfies their need to feel in control of their children's lives. This fear is often disguised as moral outrage. They want to believe that if their children don't read about it, their children won't know about it. And if they don't know about it, it won't happen."

"Censors don't want children exposed to ideas different from their own," Blume writes. "If every individual with an agenda had his/her way, the shelves in the school library would be close to empty."

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Some of Judy Blume's books

Interested in finding out what Judy Blume's writing is like? Here's a look at some of her more popular books for children and teens.

"Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret"

When she begins a year-long independent study project on people's beliefs, 12-year-old Margaret Simon also finds herself examining her own beliefs. They are a little different than most, after all, because Margaret's mother is a Christian while her dad is Jewish. As if this is not enough, Margaret also has to deal with her family moving to New Jersey and a slew of other problems that typical preteen girls face — such as worrying about when her body will develop and buying her first bra. It sounds heavy, but the book is one of the most-loved of Blume's works because she manages to capture what it's like to be a preteen girl with lots of style and humor.

"Blubber"

Blume takes on bullying in this book about the bullying of an overweight girl that goes on in a fifth-grade. Jill first takes part in the bullying, but when she stands up to the class' queen bee, Jill finds herself the new target for torment. This book is noted for its real and subtle take on childhood bullying.

"Otherwise Known As Shelia The Great"

Shelia Tubman faces a variety of new challenges when her family gets the chance to spend the summer at a house in the country. Not only is Shelia stuck sleeping in a room meant for a boy, but the family also has to watch a dog for the summer, and Shelia's afraid of dogs (not to mention

spiders, thunderstorms, ghosts and swimming). Of course, Sheila makes friends, has fun and has to confront her fears during the summer, and all of it is told with Blume's usual humor.

The Fudge Series

This series, which includes the books "Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing," "Superfudge," "Fudge-a-Mania" and "Double Fudge," is a series of stories about Peter and his younger brother Farley Drexel, who insists on going by the name Fudge. Anyone who has had a brother or sister can relate to either Peter or Fudge as the pair deal with one crisis after another caused by the usual challenges of growing up or Fudge's outlandish behavior. The books are funny and are great examples of Blume's ability to entertain.

"Iggie's House"

Winnie's best friend moves away and an African-American family moves in. While Winnie and her brother make friends with the new kids, her neighbors are upset that a black family now lives among them. Winnie is surprised by the racism and tries to help defuse the situation, but she only makes things worse. And then comes word that her parents, too, are considering a move.



About Explorer

This is the final installment of our summer Explorer series, which looked at the lives and achievements of famous New Jersey residents. The Education page will return next week.

Explorer on the Web

To download this page and earlier Explorer pages search [explorenw](http://www.PressofAtlanticCity.com) at www.PressofAtlanticCity.com

Making books for children

New Jersey may be a small place, but it is home to several award-winning authors and illustrators of books for children and teens.

Ann M. Martin

Ann Matthews Martin, born in Princeton in 1955, is best known as the author of "The Baby-Sitters Club" series. She has written several other series, including "The Kids in Miss Colman's Class" and "The California Diaries." She has also written several stand-alone novels for children.



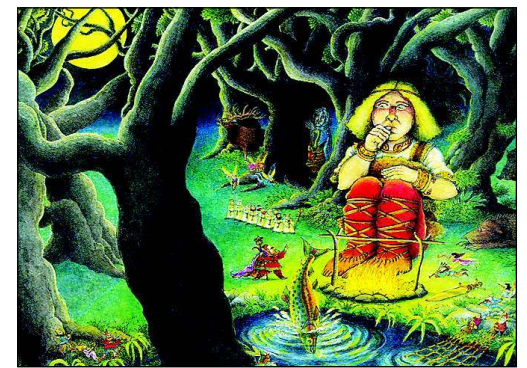
Carol Plum-Ucci

Carol Plum-Ucci, born in Atlantic City in 1957, is the author of "The Body of Christopher Creed," a teen mystery set in southern New Jersey, which was the winner of a Printz Honor Books Award for Excellence in Literature for Young Adults. Plum-Ucci has written several other books, her most recent being "Streams of Babel," released in 2008 and also set in southern New Jersey.



David Wiesner

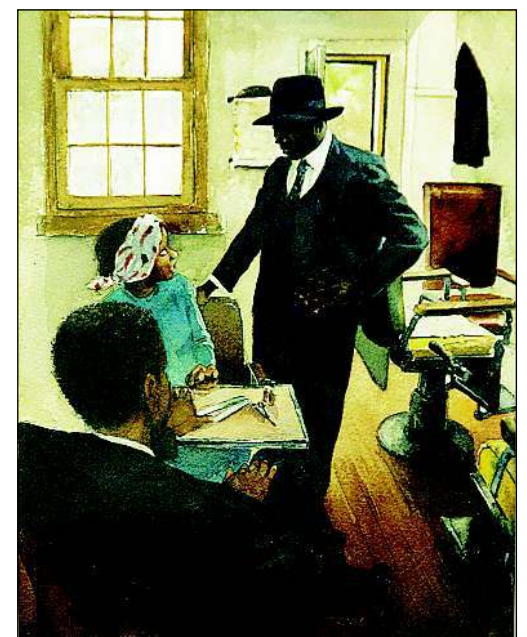
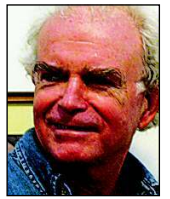
Born and raised in Bridgewater Township, Somerset County, David Wiesner is an illustrator known for books that tell stories without using words. His 2007 book, "Flotsam," which is set on Long Beach Island, received the American Library Association's Randolph Caldecott Medal for best picture book that year.



Robert Byrd

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Robert Byrd was born in Atlantic City and graduated from Atlantic City High School. He has won several top awards for his illustrations, the latest being a Newberry Award in 2008 for "Good Masters! Sweet Ladies! Voices from a Medieval Village."



E.B. Lewis

E.B. Lewis

Illustrator E.B. Lewis lives in Folsom. In 2003 he received the American Library Association's Coretta Scott King Award for illustration for "Talkin' About Bessie: The Story of Aviator Elizabeth Coleman."



Questions: Week 10

1. Think about your summer. If Judy Blume wrote a book about it, what would be a good title?
2. What is the name of David Wiesner's book without words about Long Beach Island?
3. What New Jersey-born author wrote the "Baby Sitters Club" series?

WEEK 9 WINNER: Mason - St Vincent de Paul School

Boys & Girls!

YOU CAN WIN

- VIP Courtesy Ticket Book from Gillian's Wonderland Pier
- 4-Pack of tickets from the Atlantic City Aquarium
- The Press of Atlantic City NIE Gift Bag

Beginning Monday September 14,
look for the return of the **Education Page.**
Look for more exciting Explorer Page stories in July, 2010.

Read this week's EXPLORER page and answer the questions that follow. Send your answers on a separate piece of paper along with your name, address, school and grade to: **Sandy Reed - NIE, The Press of Atlantic City, 1000 W. Washington Ave., Pleasantville, NJ 08232.**
Each week, we'll draw the name of the lucky winner. It could be you! All entries must be received by noon Friday.