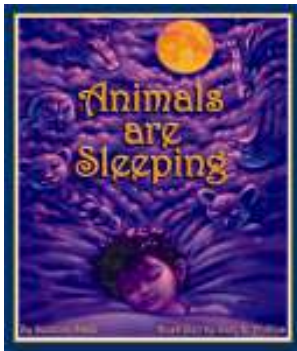


A Conversation with Suzanne Slade
author of
Animals are Sleeping, What's New at the Zoo? and
What's The Difference



How did you get the idea to write *Animals are Sleeping*?

My family was driving to my parent's house in Indiana a few years ago for Thanksgiving dinner when my daughter suddenly announced, "You know, they sleep standing up!" She was pointing to a horse standing on an Amish farm.

Her comment started my thinking about other unusual ways different animals sleep. Inspired, I pulled the out notebook I keep in the car (for just such creative moments) and scribbled down, "Standing up." Then I added, "Upside down." Staying with this pattern, I thought of a location beginning with "down" and wrote, "Down below." And finally, "Below the ground." Then I was stumped! I couldn't think of a place where an animal sleeps that began with the word "ground". So I put the notebook away, but I was very excited about this new idea.

When we returned home from Indiana, I did some research and expanded my original vision of the text to include the places, positions, and duration that animals sleep. Eventually, I ended up with four verses and a total of 70 words to share the fascinating way 14 different animals sleep in *Animals are Sleeping*.



How did you get the idea to write *What's New at the Zoo?*

I am fascinated by all animals—ones I spy in my yard, in the woods when I cross-country ski,

called peachicks! That name was so cool, and I'd never heard it before! And it got me thinking about the other interesting names for other baby animals. This one surprising discovery became the idea spark for *What's New at the Zoo?*

How did you get the idea to write *What's The Difference?*

I recently completed several non-fiction titles about endangered animals. In my research for those books, I discovered the extraordinary ways scientists, conservationists, and everyday people are helping these precious animals, and was pleasantly surprised to learn that some are making an amazing recovery. You can find many books which explain why certain animals have become endangered, but I wanted to write an encouraging book which also shared the ways people are helping endangered animals and how children can get involved. The educational subtraction component of this book is a natural follow-up to my additional title, *What's New at the Zoo?*



What is the most frequently asked question you encounter as an author?

I'm often asked what I enjoy most about writing children's books, and to be honest, it's hard to think of anything I *don't* like about writing children's books! I love the excitement of getting a fresh, new idea. I love digging in and doing research for a new book. I am very curious and enjoy learning new things when I write a story. I really enjoy the challenge of putting my ideas for a fiction story together. To me it's like putting the pieces of a puzzle together. I usually know all the parts of my "story-in-progress", and it's just a matter of figuring out how they fit together.

I also like to play with fun-sounding words. When I read, I often write down interesting or unusual words I find in case I want to use them later. It's also exciting to discover words that sound really cool together. Like hop poppin', wicky wacky words! Another part of writing I enjoy is working with editors. They are always very helpful and smart. Editors have great ideas to make my writing better. And of course, one of my favorite parts of writing books is sharing them with children. Most children are very curious like me, and they have great imaginations. It's great to see them enjoy one of my books.

What gets your creative juices flowing?

I get new ideas for books all the time - usually when I'm not thinking about writing at all. The funny things my kids say have also been a source for many new manuscripts. News stories often get me thinking of an idea for a book, particularly an amazing science discovery or stories about animals.

Is it true you used to work on rockets?

Strange, but true. I have a mechanical engineering degree and worked for McDonnell Douglas in California in the 1980's. As a test engineer there, I worked on Delta IV rockets that NASA used to send weather and communications satellites into orbit.

How did you go from engineering to writing children's stories?

When I was a teenager I was interested in writing children's stories, but my love of math and science determined my studies in college. Later after I became a mom and was reading picture books to my children every day, I began to think about writing again. My path to publication, like many authors, was a rather long journey. I had a great deal to learn about writing, editing, submitting, and children's stories in general. I took several writing classes, joined critique groups, learned from the many resources available from SCBWI (Society of Children's Writers and Illustrators), and just kept practicing writing.

What was the most rewarding part of writing *Animals are Sleeping*?

I had a blast researching many different kinds of animals and their sleeping habits for this story. I think animals are fascinating, and I love to learn about them. It was a lot of fun to read about many unusual and unique animals as I worked on this book. The hard part was deciding which animals to include in *Animals are Sleeping*!

Want to continue this conversation? Schedule an interview!

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