

• Meet the Author •

Lynn Plourde

Interview conducted by Toni Buzzeo, career media specialist and author (visit www.tonibuzzeo.com).



Photo courtesy of Lynn Plourde.

Lynn Plourde is the author of twenty picture books including *Dino Pets*, *Science Fair Day*, and *Margaret Chase Smith: A Woman for President*. She also continues to write activity books for teachers, such as *Listening, Speaking & Learning*, based upon her experiences working as a speech-language therapist for more than twenty years in public schools. Lynn makes frequent visits to schools where she prides herself on being a “teaching author” as she helps students to write their own stories. Lynn lives and writes in Winthrop, Maine.

I know that you were a public school educator, so it comes as no surprise that you’ve written another school story. Was there a germ of reality that led you to write this particular story about lost mittens at school?

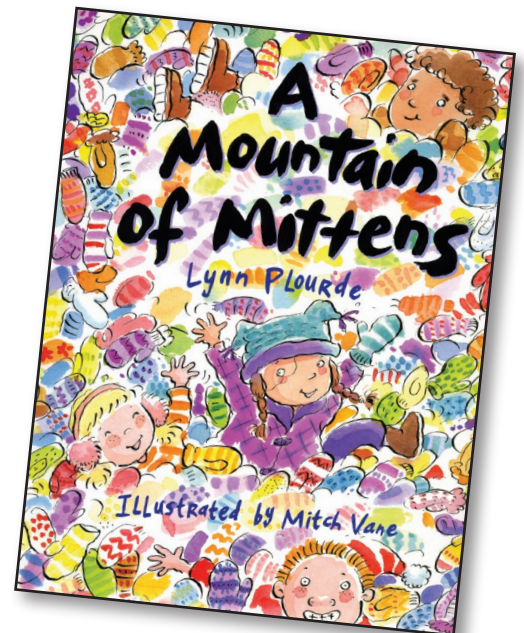
LP: Yes, a reality we lived at our house when my kids were younger and the reality I see at the schools where I work. I see “lost mittens” as a universal experience—everyone loses them! In fact, I lost a favorite pair a year ago that I’m *still* looking for. My kids lost mittens and we would end up with a bunch of mismatched mittens left for them to wear. The lost-and-found piles at schools are amazing—they cover two, three, or more cafeteria tables or the whole stage floor and they don’t include just mittens, but hats, scarves, coats, shirts, and pants—how can someone lose their pants and not realize it?

Molly is a very earnest character with terribly good intentions and a generous dose of impulsivity. Is she like you were as a child? Is she modeled on someone you know?

LP: I see Molly as an innocent do-gooder. She doesn’t mean to forget her mittens at school—it just happens as she tries to help others. Molly reminds me of many kids I know; they are so well-intentioned to do something, but then real life happens to them and they live and react to that moment’s reality and forget about their earlier intentions. I love that about kids—they live in the “here-and-now.” I would

like to applaud illustrator Mitch Vane for bringing Molly’s character to life; Molly appears to be drawn with a few simple lines, yet she feels so real—not at all a caricature. Mitch lives and creates in Australia so I’m not sure we’ll ever get to meet, but I’d *love* to meet her. She has such a great sense of humor as shown by her wacky illustrations in *A Mountain of Mittens*, and she created a Molly that I want to meet, too—maybe Molly is like Mitch!

One of the aspects of your books that evident in *A Mountain of Mittens* is your playful use of language and refrain. Talk about what leads you to write stories that employ these elements.



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LP: The speech-language therapist in me leads me to play with language and sounds, but the author in me leads me to write stories with patterns. The use of patterns is the most powerful thing I've learned as an author of kids' books. I don't remember anyone teaching me to use patterns in writing classes I took. But patterns have helped me to be a better author and also a better teacher as I teach children how they can write better stories by using patterns. In fact *Mittens* is the one book of mine that demonstrates best how patterns can work to tell a story. There are so many patterns in this story. There are patterns in the *action* of the story in that the lost and found pile grows and grows, Molly forgets her mittens for a good reason time after time, and Molly's parents try new mitten-remembering tricks morning after morning. There are also patterns in the *words* of the story with the repeating chorus, all the "olly" names in the story, and growing phrases such as when the school staff "mumbled," then "mumbled and grumbled," then "mumbled and grumbled and rumbled," and finally "mumbled and grumbled and rumbled and roared." I like to challenge students to find as many patterns as possible in this story and then play with creating patterns in their own stories.

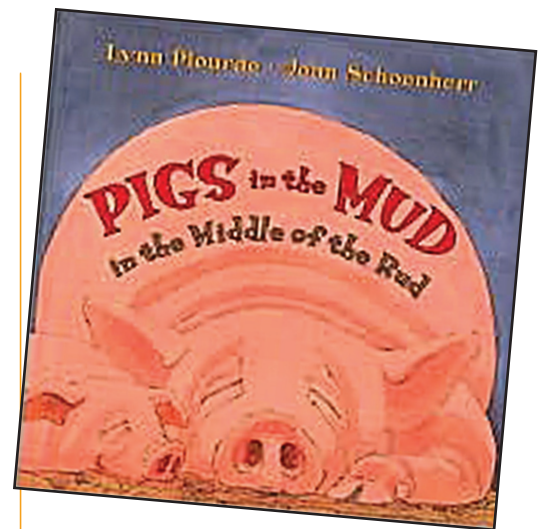
You have included an active refrain in the story that lends itself to actions that are illustrated on the end papers. What a creative idea and one not often seen in picture

books! Talk a bit about this novel idea.

LP: Many of my books have a chorus (for instance: *Pigs in the Mud in the Middle of the Mud*; *School Picture Day*; and *Moose, of Course!*). I think children's books are similar to songs; they need a chorus or refrain to pull them together and to encourage participation as the story is read aloud. When I write a book with a refrain, I usually teach children actions or gestures to do along with the refrain as I read it to them. Doing the gestures helps kids to feel a part of the storytelling; it also helps their auditory memories as the gestures help them to remember the words to the chorus; plus it's just plain FUN to do gestures along with a story. For *A Mountain of Mittens*, I wanted the gestures to somehow be included in the book itself so that teachers and librarians could encourage children to do them. I asked Yolanda Leroy, my editor at Charlesbridge, to include a final page in the book with a description for the refrain gestures, but she had an even better idea—to have the gestures illustrated on the endpapers. What fun!

Some schools and libraries have planned interesting programs to accompany *A Mountain of Mittens*. Will you share some of them in order to give readers ideas for implementing at their own schools and libraries?

LP: I was thrilled to have schools, libraries, and bookstores use *A Mountain of Mittens* for a worthy cause. They did a challenge and asked children to bring



in mittens (gloves, hats, and scarves) to create a "mountain." Then they set a celebration day where I read the book or someone from their location read the book along with cozy snacks of hot chocolate and mitten-shaped cookies as well as mitten craft activities such as sponge paintings (with sponges cut in the shape of mittens). Afterwards, the mountains of mittens were donated to local charities to help keep needy children warm.

How can readers learn more about you and your books?

LP: They can visit my Web site, www.lynnplourde.com, for more information about me and to access learning activities based on my books.



*Toni Buzzeo, MA, MLIS, is an author as well as a career library media specialist. She is the author of eight picture books, most recently *The Library Doors* (UpstartBooks, 2008) and many professional books and articles. Visit www.tonibuzzeo.com or e-mail Toni at tonibuzzeo@tonibuzzeo.com.*