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An Interview with Don M. Winn: Space Cop Zack Returns

Sep 10, 2018 by
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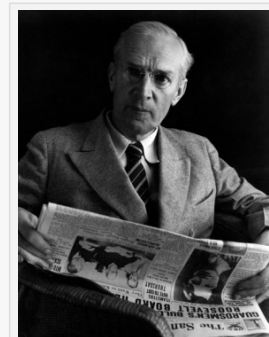
1) Don, it is the start of a new school year—and kids are eager to learn and read—your latest book—Space Cop Zack is just what the teacher ordered! What is it all about?

When I released my first Space Cop Zack picture book in August 2013, I also published a series of blogs about the power of imagination, covering everything from how imagination empowers humans to learn how to [think symbolically](#), its role [in problem-solving](#), and its [psychosocial](#) and [psychological](#) benefits. At that time, I also mentioned that Space Cop Zack is about the “[beta version](#)” of imagination—childhood imaginings that help us develop our imaginations into powerful tools that can serve us well throughout our lives.

In book three, *The Lost Treasure of Zandor*, Zack and his trusty robot companion, GARG, are racing the nefarious Captain Menace to find a lost treasure buried deep in the caverns of Zandor. Along the way, Captain Menace sends his three most trusted minions—Gormag the Grievous, Noot the Tall and Terrible, and GARG’s nemesis, the gigantic robot Cantobor—to try and stop Zack and GARG as they scale the Colossal Cliffs of Pantera in search of the lost treasure. Will they beat the evil captain to the lost treasure? That will all depend on your imagination!

And as usual, this latest Space Cop Zack book demonstrates for kids how to use their imaginations—in two particular ways. One is the way that the robot GARG (whose skills and personality are very much products of Zack’s vivid imagination) always has exactly the right tool for every occasion, and the other is the way that Zack uses common, everyday items in a certain location in his house (it’s the kitchen pantry this time) to become amazing creatures and gadgets and events in his adventure. At the end of this and every Space Cop Zack story, kids can have fun matching items in Zack’s real life to items and events in his adventure.

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2) Why do kids seem to relate to Space Cop Zack—is he easy to read or is it his sidekick robot?

Well, who doesn't love robot sidekicks! But there's some substance and gravitas here as well; Space Cop Zack is very relatable. He is emotionally self-sufficient, able to entertain himself to his full delight, and inspires confidence in young readers that they can learn to do the same. It calms kids to see another child who is happy, centered, and self-actualizing. Readers may come for the fun, but they stay for the way they feel when they read the story over and over again.

Here are several comments submitted from my UK readers about the first two Space Cop Zack books.

"This story was fun to read. I liked the picture on the front a lot. Dr. Dogbreath is the best in it. I have a dog too and his breath also smells bad."—Girl, aged 5

"Best book ever."— Boy, aged 6

"I liked the drawings a lot. They were fun. The story was fun too."—Girl, aged 6

"Very colorful with plenty of funny moments."—Parent of twins, aged 7

"Very sweet book. Fantastic illustrations and a strong story."— Parent of twin girls

"Any boy would love this exciting, illustrated adventure. Tons happening from the very start with a thrilling ending."— Primary School teacher aged 35

3) Approximately what age and grade is this book for?

The ideal age is from Kindergarten through third grade, but all of my picture books are written to inspire shared reading beginning at a very young age. Each book also includes questions to help start a conversation about the story.

Here are a few sample questions from Zack 3:

- What things in your house can you re-imagine as something different to have fun like Zack does?
- Do you think Captain Menace finds the lost treasure of Zandor after Zack and GARG leave? Do you think the treasure was even in the cave?
- What do you think happens next in Zack's imaginary adventure?

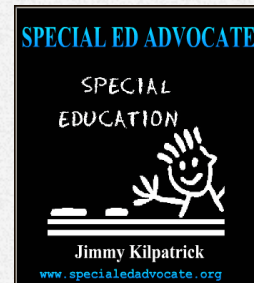
"I liked the Q and A at the end. It's good to be given the opportunity to discuss the story with the child. I find a lot of children's books tend to 'do all the work' for the child, but this book is good for motivating the child's fantasy. Very enjoyable. I have now read it with my three children every night for two weeks."— Parent of three, aged 2, 5 and 9

(As a heads up, Zack makes a bit of a mess this time during his adventure, but I was sure to include a question at the end of the story where parents can talk with their children about how *not* to do that.)

4) Let's talk parents now—and their role in fostering and nurturing reading—nothing could be simpler than giving a child a book to read—agree or disagree?

I must disagree, at least in the beginning. Reading is not automatic. You can't hand an 18-month-old or a 3-year-old a book and expect them to do anything but gnaw the corners and look at the pictures—speaking from my own personal experience. Raising readers requires a long-term approach, beginning with shared reading at as young an age as possible. Some parents even start reading to their infant in utero! It's a great idea.

Dr. Martin Haberman
1932 – 2012



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When I was a child of preschool years, and I visited my grandmother, she did more than just read to me. We had a routine each night before bedtime in which I would sit on her lap and read along with her from a large children's dictionary. She would sound out words and show me the sound of each syllable and letter and would also use the pictures to help me understand what was being read. She would then ask me questions and in turn, I would ask her questions. Those various words in the dictionary sparked conversations about so many different topics. I cherish those memories. Looking back, I realize that *what* we read didn't matter nearly as much as the conversation and loving, supportive human interaction it produced.

Sadly, today shared reading has often been replaced to a great extent by an electronic babysitter, like the television or other electronic devices, and although these have their place, they cannot replace the benefits derived from shared reading.

In 2010, an article in the New York Times described a Florida State University study that showed the link between lap reading (shared reading) and improved literacy. The study stated that lap reading "makes children more willing to read and increases the frequency of their reading." Citing the use of Curious George images in a literacy campaign put forth by the Advertising Council, the copy supporting the images reads: "What makes a curious reader? You do...Read to your child today and inspire a lifelong love of reading."

Having a good pre-literacy foundation before a child starts school helps to solidify the concepts on which reading is based. What concepts? Phonological awareness (connecting sounds to letters), vowels, consonants, letter combinations, the structure and workings of syllables, rhyme, and more. Understanding the foundational rules of language demystifies words and reading, and gives the child tools to learn new words, all in enjoyable, multisensory ways. And this can benefit ALL children but especially those with learning differences.

5) Let's talk about our great librarians also—are they able to access your books for readers? Or how can teachers and parents get your books?

We have amazing resources for parents, homeschoolers, teachers, and librarians. Digital downloads, as well as softcover and hardcover books, are available to purchase on all the usual online retailers like Amazon and Barnes and Noble, and there are lots of free enrichment activities and downloads on my website. A Picture Book Lesson Reference Guide, a Space Cop Zack classroom activity sheet, coloring sheets for all the books, and Sir Kaye classroom lesson plans are all available [right here](#).

All of my books are available in softcover, hardcover, and eBook format and all of my Sir Kaye books are also available as audiobooks and can be purchased from most online resellers: [Amazon](#), [Barnes and Noble](#), [Audible](#), etc.

All of my picture books are available for significant discounts to schools, libraries, non-profits, retailers, and vendors directly from [Cardboard Box Adventures Publishing](#) or [Ingram/LSI](#).

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6) Let's give your website and tell everyone what is on it and what they will find there!

My team and I work hard to make my [website \(www.donwinn.com\)](#) a dynamic resource for parents, homeschoolers, and teachers. My website is also the portal where readers can communicate with me. I love questions and feedback from readers and do my best to answer each query personally.

You can find information there about the different programs I offer to schools for author visits—both for students (where I feature either picture books for younger students or give a slide show illustrating some historical background for the Kaye series for older ones. I also offer writing workshops.) and parents/educators. My two most popular presentations for parents and educators are about overcoming the challenges of helping dyslexic students learn to love to read and the value of shared reading.

You can also find short videos about my books on my website on both the [picture books page](#) and the [chapter books page](#).

As always, thanks so much for the opportunity to reach out to your readers!

THANKS, DON for your supporting reading!



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