



# Two Children Tell: The Author and Nicholas

Article Author:

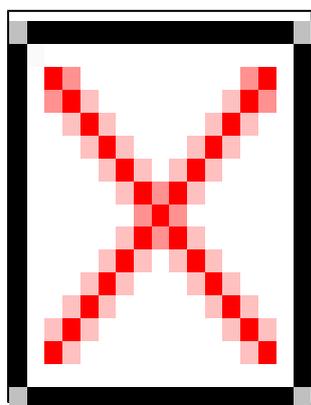
[Virginia Lowe](#) [1]

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Byline:

**Virginia Lowe's** observations on children's realy response to stories.

In the latest of her regular series describing children's early responses to stories and language, **Virginia Lowe** observes how children understand the concept of the author.



It is frequently said that very young children cannot understand the concept of the writer or illustrator of a book, that they may even think that it is the reader who is making up the words as they go along.

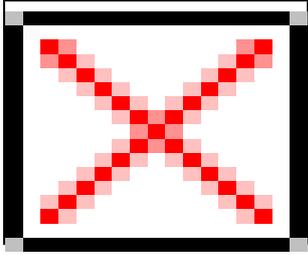
Committed bibliophile parents not only read the author's words (and what does it matter if children don't understand them? They are taking in new words all the time, and sometimes the attraction of a word is that it is not part of the family's daily lexicon) but they also read the cover and the title page, including the author's and illustrator's names. In such cases, the concept of author and illustrator is available to young children, and they may take it in, as with anything else they are offered.

Parents may even refer to books by their author-illustrator, especially when they comprise a series in the same physical style. So 'there's time for a quick Dick Bruna' became a familiar phrase in our family, used when we were rushed for time. Or one child would ask for 'another Beatrix Potter'. The books by Richard Scarry had an endless fascination for Nicholas, and became his special 'keeping him occupied' books, especially the **Best Word Book Ever**. Almost at once he could recognise the drawing style. My somewhat dismissive attitude towards the book was shown by my referring to it as 'Scarry'. At two years five months (2y5m) he would ask for 'dat big Scarry book', but by 2y11m had extended this to others: 'We've got a new Scarry!' he enthused to an adult friend. It is notable that, unlike the Brunas and the Potters, the Scarrys Nicholas knew were not uniform in size and shape, but recognisable only by their drawing style and by the fact that 'Richard Scarry' was part of each title.

When Nicholas was 3y4m, Rebecca brought home a sheet of busy-work from school, and along the top were the familiar Scarry figures 'photocopied line sketches in black and white, and quite out of context. However Nicholas recognised them at once without any prompting: 'That's Scarry! Lucy [his friend] has got that in a book'. By now this term was clearly applied not just to the books, but to the style of drawing, although it was presumably still the generic term for that sort of picture, rather than for the person who created them. When he was 3y7m whenever I mentioned 'bookshop' he'd say 'I can look at the Scarry books!' At 4y3m, though he had many more sophisticated favourites, still

there was magic in the Scarrys. As he looked at four of them spread out on the sunroom floor he chanted 'Scarry, Scarry, Richard Scarry' over and over, enjoying the sound of the words.

At 3y0m, about the very familiar **Rosie's Walk** by Pat Hutchins, Nicholas asked, after the author statement was



read, 'Where's Hutchins?' He knew that the only characters in the story were the hen and the fox (with cameo appearances of goat, mouse and bird) but studied the title page picture carefully, then decided 'I think Pat Hutchins is there,' pointing to the door of the windmill. As this was an isolated incident, he was probably playing with the concept, rather than genuinely puzzled by her identity.

He identified Micky as 'Max' in **In the Night Kitchen** (both Sendak characters) and on another occasion got cross with his father who didn't understand when he requested 'the other one' on beginning **Where the Wild Things Are** 'he suggested 'it's green!', 'it's about a different boy!' and 'it's got poems in!' We had only recently acquired Sendak's **Hector Protector** and Sendak's little boys are similar. Recognising a familiar character was a simple skill. Sometimes also they owned two copies of the same book, or found one at the library, so they knew the pictures were printed in multiple copies (we played with potato prints, too). Occasionally there was an author intrusion also, which was sometimes queried. Beatrix Potter in Jeremy Fisher: 'But I think [roasted grasshopper] would have been nasty!' At 2y11m Nicholas was puzzled by this, but Rebecca (5y2m) glossed it: 'Yes, but if I were a frog I would like it!'

The concept of the author, rather than an author-illustrator, is perhaps harder to grasp, especially by young children who cannot yet write their own stories, only dictate them. Nicholas showed that he had the concept quite correct at 4y0m, when, to a particularly condescending authorial question: 'Can you see the brown bear?' his reply was a resounding, 'A'course I can, read-maker'. He might have forgotten the word 'author' but he clearly recognised the role. Never underestimate the young child.

Further details on the same incidents have been published in:

**'It's Got the Same Clouds': Young Children's Concepts of Illustrator and Artistic Style.** International Journal of Education through Art, 2 (2006) 119-137.

**'Stop! You Didn't Read Who Wrote It!': The Concept of Author.** Children's Literature in Education, an International Quarterly, 22 (1991), 79-88.

Dr Virginia Lowe lives in Melbourne, Victoria, Australia. She is the proprietor of [Create a Kids' Book](#) [3], a manuscript assessment agency, which also runs regular workshops, interactive writing e-courses, mentorships and produces a regular free e-bulletin on writing for children and children's literature generally. Her book, **Stories, Pictures and Reality: Two children Tell** (2007) is published by Routledge (978 0 415 39724 7, £29.99 pbk).

**Rosie's Walk**, Pat Hutchins, Red Fox, 9781862308060, £6.99 pbk

**The Tale of Jeremy Fisher**, Beatrix Potter, Warne, 9780723247760, £5.99 hbk

**In the Night Kitchen**, Maurice Sendak, Red Fox 978 0099417477, £6.99 pbk

**Where the Wild Things Are**, Maurice Sendak, Red Fox, 978-0099417477, £6.99 pbk

**Hector Protector and As I went over the Water**, Maurice Sendak, Red Fox 978-1782952886,

**Richard Scarry's Best Word Book Ever**, Richard Scarry, HarperCollins Children's Books, 978-0007507092, £6.99  
pbk

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