



A Moment With Munsch

Robert Munsch is the author of more than 50 children's books, including *the Paper Bag Princess*, *Thomas's Snowsuit* and *Love You Forever*, which has sold more than 20 million copies in North America. Also available are several anthologies of Munsch magic and a CD, *Love You Forever: The Best of Robert Munsch*, which includes several Munsch favourites, read by Robert himself. Munsch is the most published writer in Canada.

As honorary celebrity chair of Family Literacy Day, Robert Munsch sat down to share his thoughts on telling stories for a living and the importance of reading.

Q: What inspires you to write your books?

A: I get my inspiration from kids, looking at them, seeing what they do and hearing the funny things they say. Most books I have written have been inspired by one particular child. For example, *Dirty Socks* is about Tina Fabian from the Hay River Dene Reserve in the North West Territories, and my book *Sandcastle Contest* was inspired by Matthew Luttmann who lives on my street. Because it takes me a long time to get these stories into the shape I want them, these kids are often grown-up before their story gets made into a book.

Q: Do you have any books written especially for your children?

Yes, I have three books based on my own kids. *Andrew's Loose Tooth* is for my son Andrew because he hated having his teeth pulled, *Makeup Mess* is for my daughter Julie because she really, really liked makeup and *Something Good* is for my daughter Tyra because we always fought about what to get when we went grocery shopping.

Q: Are you in any of your books?

A: Yes, I have been the dad in some of the books. One of the illustrators I work with most, Michael Martchenko, has drawn me as the dad in some of my books.

Q: Of all the books you have written - which is your favourite one?

A: That's hard to say. I really like a few. *Love You Forever* is one of my favourites because I wrote it after my wife and I had two stillborn babies and it's like a memorial to them. I also really like *I Have to Go*, which is a story about the kid who goes pee at all the wrong times, because it's just silly. I think *Mortimer* is the funniest book I have ever written and if I was going to be in one of my stories, that's the one I would want to be in.

Q: What was the first book you ever had published and was it hard to get your first book published?

A: My first published book was *Mud Puddle*. It did not take me a long time to get published once I decided to try because I had lots of stories that I had been telling for years. I wrote down 10 of them and sent them to 10 different publishers. Nine said “NO” and one said “YES!”

Q: How long does it take you to write a book?

A: About five years. That’s because I tell the story until it gets to the point where I think it’s worth writing down.

Q. How many unpublished stories do you have?

A. I have about 200 stories that have not been published. About 30 of them are scheduled to be books. We publish two books a year – a spring book and a fall book.

Q: What is your most famous book?

A: It’s called *Love You Forever*. It’s sold more than 20 million copies. So many people have written to me to tell me how much they like it and that it makes them cry - especially mothers.

Q: You're a children's author but do you feel your books have a more universal appeal?

A: I think so. Lots of older people, especially mothers, have copies of *Love You Forever* and I get mail from all kinds of people telling me they still love my books even though they are grown up. I recently had a 16-year old write me to tell me that she loved my books and said it was my fault that she loved reading so much! That’s a really good problem to have caused someone.

Q. Finish this sentence: “Being able to read is like...”

A. Being able to read is like being able to unfold your life from an envelop and unfolding a world of possibilities. You can make your own world by the books you read. You can choose your world and use your imagination – as opposed to how it is when you watch TV.

Q: What should parents do to encourage children to read?

A: First, turn off the TV for an hour every day and read together. Make sure you have lots of books around and books that appeal to whatever you and your child are interested in. If your child likes trucks, read about trucks with them. And don’t forget to make it fun. It shouldn’t be like homework. Make funny sounds and voices, act the story out together - kids really like that! And do other things together that encourage using words - singing, looking up stuff on the Internet, writing letters, cooking together. And remember, children learn from adults. If they never see you reading, they will probably not think that reading is neat.

Q: What do you do to help the literacy cause?

A: Mostly I write my books. I also travel around and do storytellings at schools (I have visited over 500 schools so far) so kids get interested in stories, then go to the library and find my books and other books that will interest them. I am always really touched when parents contact me and say their child started reading because of a book I wrote. The child had the parents read the books many times and then eventually started reading it themselves. This is one of the great things about being an author for children. I am also the Honorary Chair of Family Literacy Day, so I am helping ABC Life Literacy Canada spread the word about the importance of everyone in Canada being able to read, write and do math.