



Literacy Daily



Home > Blog > Children's & YA Literature > **5 Questions With...**

5 QUESTIONS WITH...



5 QUESTIONS WITH...

5 Questions With... Wendy Henrichs (WHEN ANJU LOVED BEING AN ELEPHANT)

BY WENDY HENRICHS | Dec 02, 2011



Share

Wendy Henrichs is the author of I AM TAMA, LUCKY CAT (Peachtree Publishers) and WHEN ANJU LOVED BEING AN ELEPHANT (Sleeping Bear Press). Although she knew she wanted to be a published author at seven years old, it took more than a few decades, only happening after her husband and two sons moved to Iowa City, Iowa—an UNESCO City of Literature where novel quotes are literally underfoot on downtown sidewalks. When Wendy isn't writing, she's puttering in the garden, walking her dog, or failing miserably with household chores.

Your new book, WHEN ANJU LOVED BEING AN ELEPHANT, tells the story of an elephant's capture and captivity. What sparked your interest in this issue?

In 2007, I read a magazine article about the [Elephant Sanctuary](#) in Hohenwald, Tennessee and its co-founder, Carol Buckley. Buckley and co-founder, Scott Blaise, created the sanctuary for Buckley's

elephant, Tarra, knowing of the wild space needed for her to be healthy and happy. This was Buckley and Blaise's dream, not only for Tarra, but for all captive elephants.

The article also told the amazing story of Shirley and Jenny, two elephants who were unknowingly reunited at the Sanctuary, remembering each other from working in a circus 25 years before. Their story profoundly touched me and, from then on, inspired me to learn more about elephants. What surprised me most was that elephants are not so different from humans with their deep empathetic capacities for one another.

You include two very useful information sections in the back of your book: "Elephant Facts" and "Ways You Can Help Elephants." Do you have any tips for teachers who might want to enlighten students about the plight of captive elephants?

I would suggest first examining an elephant's habits in the wild and compare those to what many endure in captivity. For instance, in the wild, elephants walk up to 18 hours a day, foraging for their food and water, requiring much land and space. And, like us, *family* is a huge emotional component for young elephants raised alongside their mothers and extended family. In captivity, an elephant is often standing on concrete, chained to one spot for hours or days on end. This can result in a medical condition called "foot rot," a potentially systemic and life-threatening disease. And, if captive elephants are kept apart from other elephants, great sadness and distress can lead to psychologically distressed behaviors.

From here, the class could determine the best conditions for captive elephants: ample space to roam on soft, natural ground instead of concrete, and, most importantly, living among the company of other elephants. If the class knows of a nearby zoo where these conditions are not met, they could make it a project to become elephant advocates, organizing a letter-writing campaign on behalf of an elephant that may be suffering, or, if conditions are good, thanking a zoo that has truly considered all components of an elephant's well-being. They could also put pennies in a jar for an elephant conservation group or sanctuary of their choice to support elephants.

You published another picture book this fall, I AM TAMA, LUCKY CAT, about a cat that lives in a Buddhist temple. Have you always been drawn to animals as characters?

Yes. I grew up with three older sisters and two generous parents who never said no to all the stray animals we brought home, so our home was FULL of pets. Given that I was a very shy kid, I always felt most comfortable with our animals. As a young reader, many of my favorite books had animals as characters, including the picture books MISS SUZY and HARRY THE DIRTY DOG and the Easy Readers JOHNNY LION and LITTLE BEAR.

As a children's author, I'm very drawn to writing about animals even beyond picture books, as my work-in-progress young adult novel involves bats. I can't seem to *not* write about animals!

An animal lover like you must have pets. How many do you have, and do you look to them for inspiration?

I have two cats, Lily and Lucy, and one dog named Juno. When we first adopted Lily, we noticed she held

one paw up while sitting, like a Lucky Cat statue. This triggered my interest in researching the history of the statues, which led to I AM TAMA, LUCKY CAT.

My dog, Juno, is half-Australian Shepherd and half-Blue Heeler, a herd dog through and through. Although she only has squirrels to herd in our backyard, her stalking movements and running speed inspired the herd dog picture book I'm currently working on.

Your books are set (at least partially) in Japan and Indonesia. How have your travels influenced your writing?

One thing I tell kids I meet and share my picture books with is that, although I would love to travel to Japan and Indonesia, I have not yet been outside of the United States. So, how was I able to write the books? By traveling to the library! A magical trip we ALL can make!

Want more? Download the Teacher's Guide to WHEN ANJU LOVED BEING AN ELEPHANT [here](#).

© 2011 International Reading Association. Please do not reproduce in any form, electronic or otherwise.

[Tweet](#)

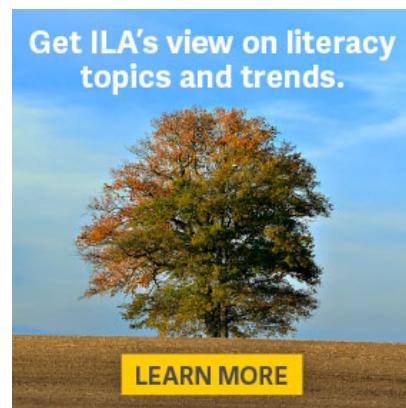
[5 Questions With... Dorothy Hinshaw Patent \(DOGS ON DUTY\)](#)



INTERNATIONAL
LITERACY
ASSOCIATION

**ILA journal SUBSCRIPTIONS
are OPEN to EVERYONE...**

LEARN MORE >



Get ILA's view on literacy
topics and trends.

LEARN MORE

Leave a comment

ILA 2020
CONFERENCE
October 15-18 | Columbus, OH

**Shaping the Future
of Literacy:
2020 Vision**

LEARN MORE >

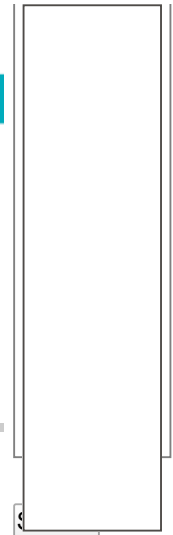
ILA Show your support for
Children's #RightsToRead



SIGN NOW >

STANDARDS
FOR THE
PREPARATION OF
**LITERACY
PROFESSIONALS
2017**

READ MORE



[Back to Top](#)

Sign up to our email list for updates, savings, and more!

**Required* [Privacy Policy](#)



PO Box 8139
Newark, DE 19714-8139
800.336.7323 (U.S. and Canada)
302.731.1600 (all other countries)

[Contact Us](#)

