

Telling Stories: Jon Scieszka

Thursday, March 8, 2007

11 a.m. – 12 p.m. ET

Grades 5-9

About the Program

This Guy Reads and Writes

Author Jon Scieszka (pronounced SHEH-ska, rhyming with “Fresca”), says that he reads *everything* from comic books, newspapers, and cereal boxes to poems, myths, legends and fairy tales. Perhaps it is because he just loves to laugh. Whatever the reason, Scieszka’s books make readers chuckle, giggle, and even “LOL”—laugh out loud.

Scieszka’s writing motto is simple: “Never underestimate the intelligence of your audience.” He believes that young people can be both silly *and* smart. In fact, silly and smart may best describe Jon Scieszka. As proof, just read his books.

Making Reading Fun

A former teacher, Scieszka decided to take a year off to develop book ideas for young readers. Around this time, he happened to meet a talented illustrator named Lane Smith. Together they created a different way to approach books, focusing on how books are read and what readers expect from them.

When viewing *Telling Stories: Jon Scieszka* and participating in this guide’s suggested activities, the following language arts standards sponsored by the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association will be addressed: 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 9, 11.



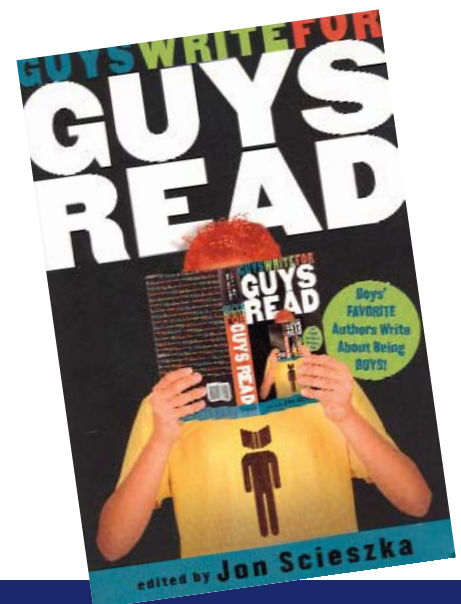
They also targeted readers who may not be comfortable with a traditional approach to literature. Their goal—to change the substance and appearance of children’s literature.

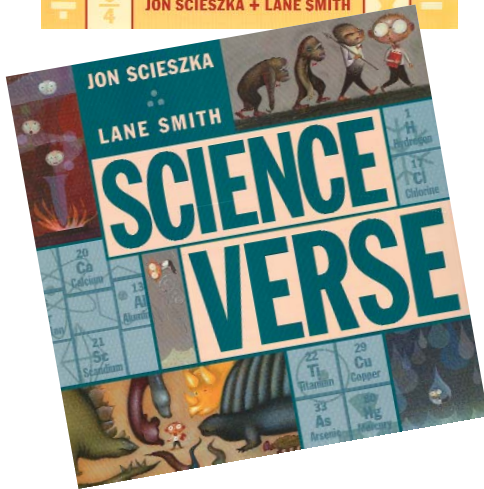
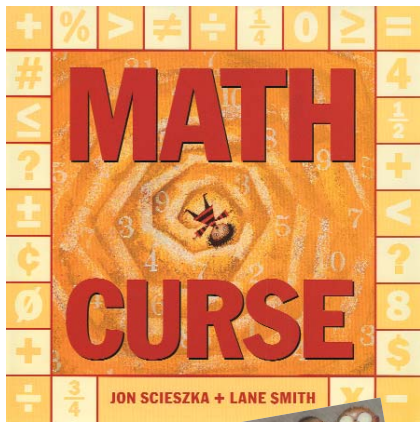
Years later, Scieszka became alarmed at statistics that indicated that boys’ reading is much below that of girls. In 2001, Scieszka launched a campaign to make boys view reading differently. “Guys Read” is an Internet-based site/promotion that introduces books to young male readers. Scieszka’s message is clear: “read what you like, when you like, whatever that happens to be.”

Twisted Tales, Topics, and Time

What happens when a creative boy who likes to laugh reads Dr. Seuss’s *Green Eggs and Ham*? Scieszka says that the book made him realize “that books can be goofy.” Scieszka’s books fracture folk and fairy tales, rework time-honored poems, and reshape subjects such as math, science, and history. For example,

- Alexander T. Wolf tells *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* from his jail cell. He was framed, of course, because it all started with a sneeze....
- *The Frog Prince, Continued* begins after the “happily ever after” when in fact, the “frog turned prince” and princess are no longer the blissful couple they started out to be.
- Only echoes of familiar fairy tales are heard in *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales*. Scieszka plays with point of view and even challenges traditional book layouts. How many books come with a warning from the Surgeon General? The reader is cautioned, “it has been determined that these tales are fairly stupid and may be dangerous to your health.”
- *Squids Will Be Squids: Fresh Morals Beastly Tales* sets its sights on fables, classic short tales that teach moral lessons. Scieszka creates fresh fables and morals—all with humorous visual and textual twists and turns.





- *Math Curse* and *Science Verse* take on the anxiety caused by these subjects. Scieszka restyles the two school subjects in a clever format.
- *The Time Warp Trio* series take friends Joe, Fred and Sam throughout time and across the world in a series of adventures. The boys meet their own descendents in 2095, join the crew of the fearsome pirate Blackbeard in *The Not-So-Jolly Roger*, and sail with Leif Erikson in *Viking It and Liking It*. Other historical periods and people come to life when one of the boys touches the magical *Book* and facilitates their time travels.

Meet Jon

Jon Scieszka will talk about his work in a discussion moderated by Maria Salvatore. Other topics include the importance of humor in encouraging young readers, the ways literature affects readers, and influences on Scieszka's writing.

Instructional Activities

Fracture This!

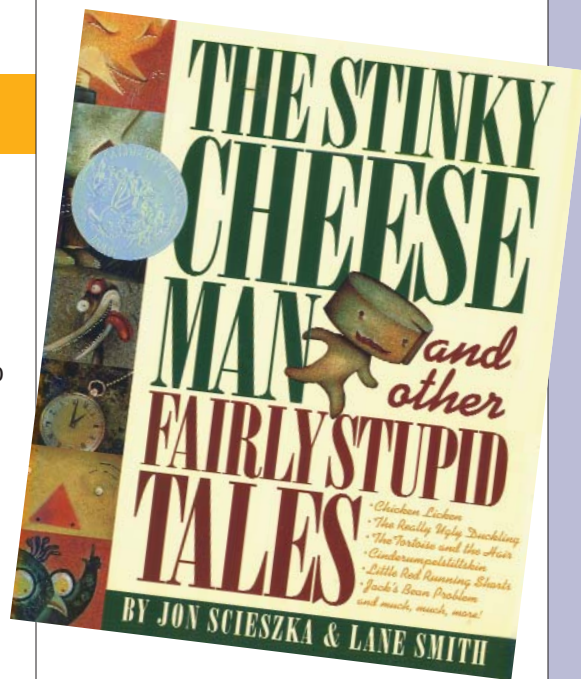
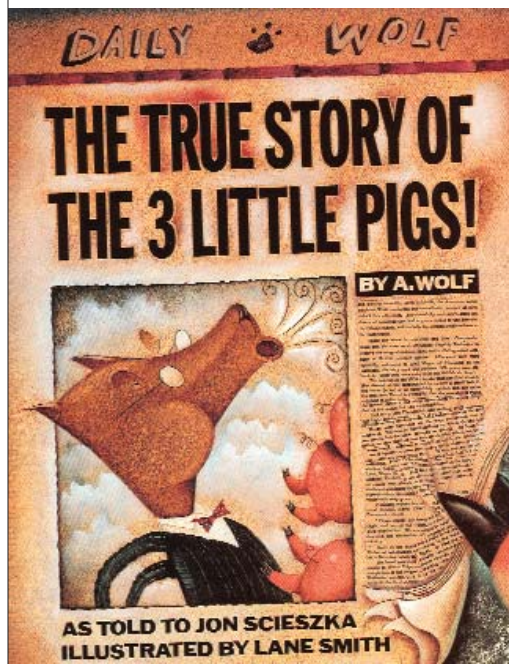
Read a familiar folk or fairy tale (e.g., "The Three Bears" or "The Three Little Pigs"). Rewrite the story from another character's point of view. You may change the beginning, ending, or even add another character. Try to make your version humorous. Then, working alone or collaborating with a classmate, prepare illustrations for your original story.

Join the Club

Imagine yourself as a new member of the Time Warp Trio, making it the Time Warp Quartet. Like the boys did in *Summer Reading Is Killing Me*, open the magical *Book* to bring another book to life. What would happen, for example, if the Stinky Cheese Man or Alexander T. Wolf suddenly appeared in your room?

Real Or Not Real?

Find out more about the actual events in one of the *Time Warp Trio* series such as sailing with Vikings or the pirate Blackbeard. Compare documented information with the fictionalized versions in Scieszka's novels.



Resources

Internet

Guysread.com
 teacher.scholastic.com/wrtewlt/mff/
 fractured_fairy.htm

Print

Scieszka, Jon.
Frog Prince Continued (illustrated by Steve Johnson). Viking, 1991;
Guys Write for Guys Read (edited by Jon Scieszka). Viking, 2005;
Math Curse (illustrated by Lane Smith). Viking, 1995;
Science Verse (illustrated by Lane Smith). Viking, 2004;
Squids Will Be Squids: Fresh Morals, Beastly Tales (illustrated by Lane Smith). Viking, 1991;
The Stinky Cheese Man and other Fairly Stupid Tales (illustrated by Lane Smith). Viking, 1992;
True Story of the Three Pigs (illustrated by Lane Smith). Viking, 1989;
Time Warp Trio Series (published by Viking). including:
Not So Jolly Roger (1991);
 2095 (1995);
Summer Reading Is Killing Me (1998);
Viking It and Liking It (2002).