

# Story Monsters Ink

September 2019

The Literary Resource for Teachers, Librarians, and Parents



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TELGEMEIER**

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(SCHOOL) HOUSE!

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THIS IS THE LITTLEST  
THEY'LL EVER BE

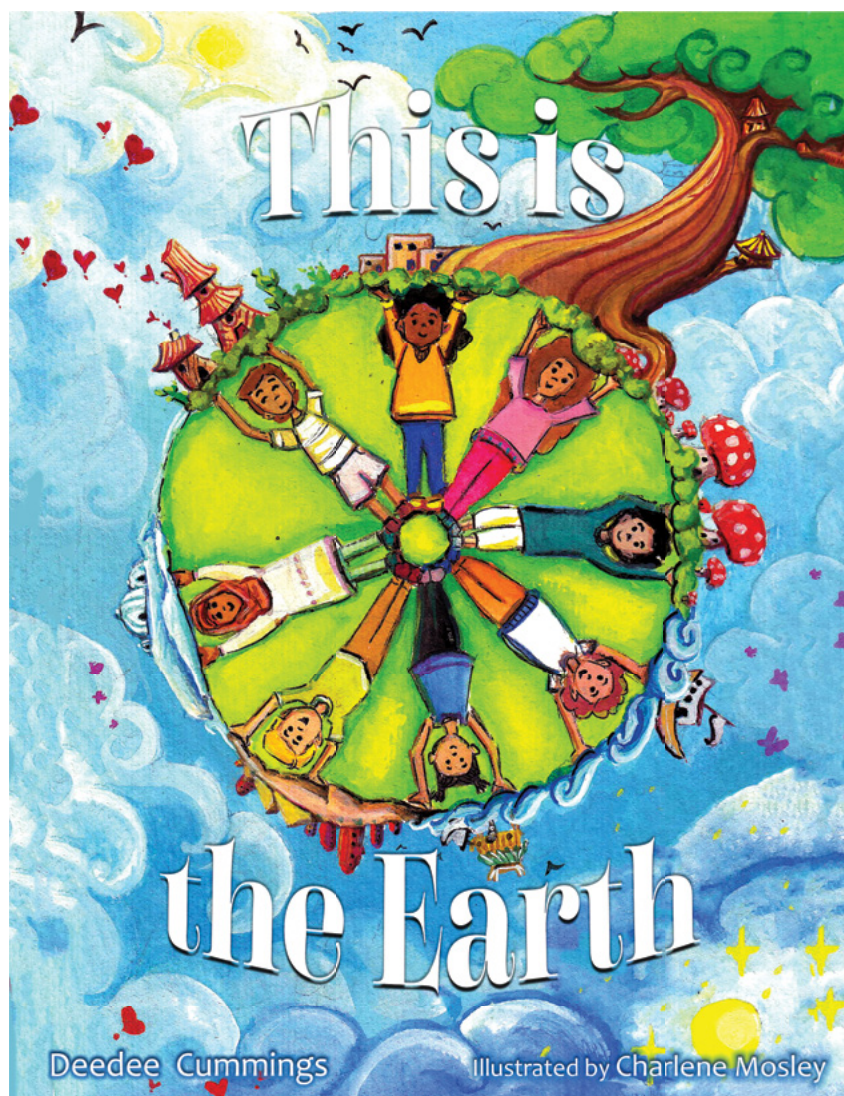
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ADVICE FOR AUTHORS  
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**HEADS BACK  
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# Deedee Cummings

## Inspires Kids to Follow Their Dreams

by Melissa Fales

Before she became a children's book author, there was a time when Deedee Cummings was a single mom, earning a living as a child protective service worker during the day and attending law school at night. "For years, people would ask me, 'How do you do it all?'" says Cummings. "I would tell them I honestly didn't know. It was hard, but once I made my mind up to do something, I would make a way. I gave that answer so

many times." When Cummings formed her publishing house in 2014, the only name that seemed to fit was Make A Way Media. "I publish books and literature and information to help kids develop the right mindset to achieve their dreams," she says. "The basis for all of my books is to encourage kids to make a way to accomplish their goals." Her latest book, released in April, is *This is the Earth*.

Working in the social service field for 20 years took a toll on Cummings. “Child protective service worker is probably the worst job on the planet,” she says. “It’s meaningful, but it’s stressful in terms of what you see every day. I saw a lot of injustice and I came to believe I could make much more of a difference in these children’s lives if I became an attorney, so I did.”

Cummings also worked as a therapist for children in foster care. “There were unbelievably traumatic and tragic stories,” she says. “When you’re there for all their twists and turns and heartbreaks, they become your heartbreaks. I really struggled with it.”

As a part of their therapy, Cummings helped her young patients write their stories. “I couldn’t help but notice how cathartic it was. They wrote the story they wanted to tell. Not the story a teacher at school wanted to tell or their foster parent wanted them to tell. It was their story. It gave them a sense of control and power when they saw themselves in their writing.”

Inspired by what she saw, Cummings began writing stories to help herself process the distressing, disturbing situations she found herself in every day on the job. “I

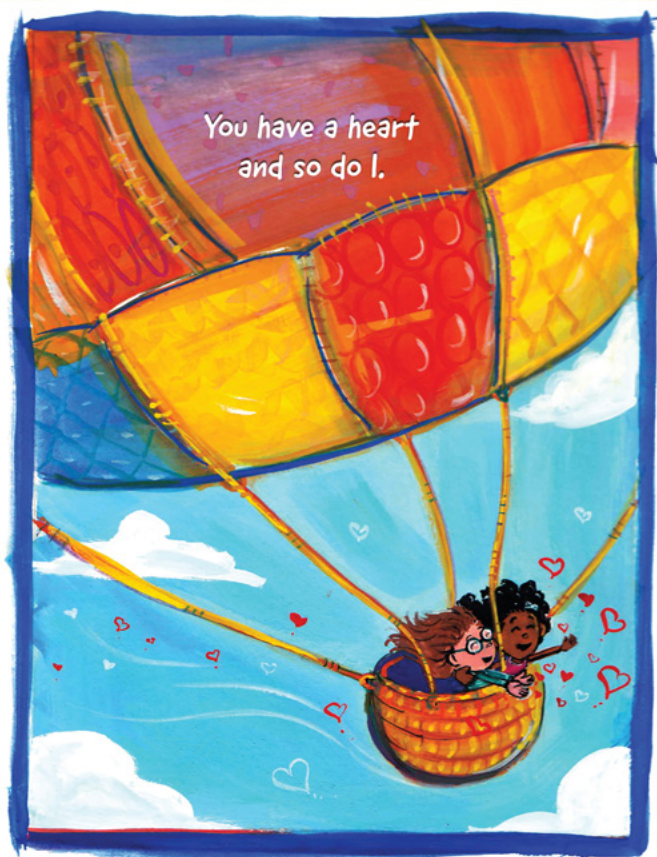


didn’t go through anything compared to what those kids went through, but second-hand trauma is very damaging,” she says. “Writing books has been my therapy, too.”

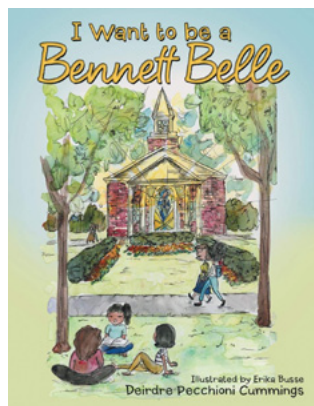
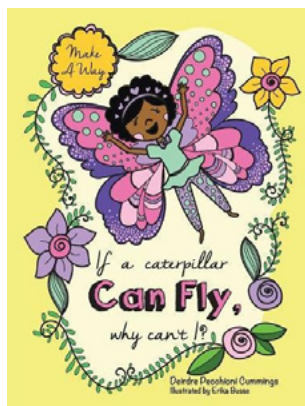
The books Cummings writes feature diverse characters and diverse stories. “In the children’s literature field, there are more stories with animals as the main characters than there are stories with black children as the main characters,” she says. “For kids to read a book that not only has pictures that look like them, but a story that sounds like their life is powerful. It helps them connect. For children in tough situations, it can help them feel less alone.”

To date, Cummings has written 10 books. Her latest, *This is the Earth* was inspired by the divisive political climate our nation is experiencing. “Our country right now is in such turbulence,” she says. “Discord and disagreements have to be at an all-time high. Everybody seems a little on edge and a little unsure about the future.” Cummings penned *This is the Earth* after watching some particularly upsetting news on TV. “I couldn’t help but wonder what it will take for the human race to learn to get along as a people,” she says.

Once again, Cummings began writing as a way to kickstart the healing process. “*This is the Earth* is about respect for all the different colors of people we share the planet with,” she says. “Some older people already have a fixed mindset, but we can start with the young. We can teach them the language of peace.” In *This is the Earth*, Cummings uses an example to easily explain to children how quickly controversial issues can polarize







our society and it includes discussion questions for parents and teachers to use when starting conversations with young readers. “I hope this book will teach younger kids how to work with people who have a different set of values, and the importance of working together to come to a solution that’s beneficial to all of us.”

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Cummings earned a number of coveted Purple Dragonfly book awards this year, and *This is the Earth* took First Place in the Cultural Diversity category. “This is the first time I’ve ever submitted any of my books for an award,” says Cummings. “To win First Place in such an important category is a particularly big deal for me. Sometimes people think ‘cultural diversity’ is that mandatory training session at work. To me, it’s like family counseling for the whole country. Let’s learn to communicate and listen to each other and solve our problems.”

Look for two more books from Cummings within the next year. *In the Nick of Time* is due to be released in November. “It’s about a little boy named Nick who lives a privileged life,” says Cummings. “He receives a letter intended for St. Nick and when he opens the letter, it changes his life.” The letter is from a child living in poverty whose wish list includes things so many of us take for granted. He asks Santa to help his mother find a job and to help his family find a place to stay. “At first, Nick thinks it’s crazy to waste your Christmas list on things like that,” says Cummings. “Who writes a Christmas list and doesn’t put himself on it?” But Nick learns a lesson about living in poverty and that there’s more to life than thinking about oneself.”

Cummings will also be releasing her first YA book called *Why I Lie*, which will be about her experience working with foster kids. For example, she notes that many foster kids don’t own a suitcase and resort to transporting their meager belongings from one foster home to the next in a trash bag. “That’s humiliating enough, but there’s so much worse than that,” she says. “There are so many injustices, so many acts of indecency. I want to tell their stories in an eloquent way without being preachy.”

The material for *Why I Lie* doesn’t come from any one person in particular. Instead it’s a medley of the many things she’s seen and heard and felt. “These stories used to haunt me,” Cummings says. “Writing these books have helped, but they still kind of live with me. I carry these stories with me and they are calling me to be told.”

For more information about Deedee Cummings and her books, visit [makeawaymedia.com](http://makeawaymedia.com) and [deedee Cummings.com](http://deedee Cummings.com). ●

