# Table of Contents

- Discussion Questions 3
- About the Author 4
- FAQ 6
- About the Book 10
Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think Jip decided to cry “wolf!” over and over again? Why didn’t Jed believe him?

2. Have you ever had someone tell you something that wasn’t true? What did you think? How did you know it wasn’t true? What happened because they told you an untruth? Why do you think it is important to tell the truth?

3. Stories and Games are very important in this story. Why do you think they are so important? Why are listening to (or telling) stories and playing games important to you?

4. What is your favorite game that you like to play? Is there a favorite story (or book) that your family especially likes?

5. Having the trees trimmed by the powerlines is a HUGE event for all of these squirrels. What big events have happened to you in your life? How do you get through these huge events?

6. If you were a squirrel, what would be your favorite part of being a squirrel? What would your least favorite part be? What is your favorite part of being you?

7. Friends are very important. Why do you think Jeb, TsTs, and Chai are such good friends? What makes them good friends? What makes your friends so great?

8. At the beginning and at the end of the story a squirrel is talking to a human. Have you ever felt like an animal was able to talk to you or understand you? What animal was it? What was your conversation about? How can you tell that animals sometimes understand you?

9. What is your favorite kind of animal? Why do you like those animals? If you could be any animal, what animal would you want to be? Why?

10. After reading this book, would you ever want to be a squirrel? Why or why not?
About the Author

I was born in the summer of 1956 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and grew up not far from there in Cheswick, a town on the Allegheny River. My mother taught elementary school and my dad was a lab technician. My sister Cathie taught me to read when she was six and I was four.

We lived in a little brick house on a street full of nearly identical brick houses, one of several such streets on top of a hill, right next to some woods and a place called “the Boney Dump.” Nearly three dozen kids lived on our street alone. We rode our bikes everywhere. We played wiffle ball and dodge ball on the street, jumped rope, spun hula hoops, ate birthday cake, rooted for the Pirates, caught lightning bugs, ran through the sprinkler, went sledding, hiked through the woods to the creek (where we were supposed to watch out for hobos), waited for the ice cream truck, played board games, went to church, played cards, went to school, got measles, did our chores, clamped skates to our shoes, watched TV, sat on porches and curbs and around kitchen tables, talking, or listening to the grownups talking.

Lynne Rae a long time ago

We went on vacations to the seashore and to see our cousins in West Virginia. There were quiet times, too: time to read, to lie in the hammock, to be bored, to make projects, to play piano, to daydream.

It was a pretty wonderful world to be a child in.

And the future was bright. Something was bound to happen. *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* sold soap to a man who turned out to be rich and kind and generous. *Anne of Green Gables* went to college and eventually married Gilbert. *Heidi* got Clara to walk and melted the grandfather’s frozen heart. I was sure something like that would happen to me, too, only with modern clothing and appliances.
Which, if you leave out the rich guy part and the medical miracle part and add in a whole tremendous pile of other stuff— the 1970’s, the fun and not-fun parts of adolescence, finding out that the world was more complicated than I had imagined, wonderful people, other kinds of people, conflict, resolution, the 1980’s, my twenties—is more or less what happened.

I studied art at Penn State University and at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. After that I framed pictures, taught drawing and watercolor classes, worked as a cashier and at the deli of a natural foods grocery store, waitressed at a jazz club, worked for a model railroad company. I moved to Boston and worked as a graphic designer. I met my husband, Bill, and he whisked me away from Boston to Michigan where we grew Christmas trees and lived in a tiny cabin on a hillside. As time went by, we had children and the cabin grew into a house. All the while, I drew and painted. I had always loved to read, but I never really thought about writing books myself until the day in 1993 when I showed my illustration portfolio to Mrs. Ava Weiss, who was the art director of Greenwillow Books. She liked my drawings, and asked if I was a writer. I found out later that she always asked this question when reviewing portfolios, but I didn’t know that. I thought she had spotted some hidden writerly quality in me that no one else had ever noticed. I went home and worked out a little story that I had been thinking up, just for the sake of a subject for my drawings. I typed the story up and sent it to Greenwillow Books. It was called Home Lovely.

They published it. I illustrated it. And that is what I am still doing: writing stories and illustrating them. I have written and illustrated half a dozen picture books as well as three novels for older readers. In 2006, I was honored to be awarded the Newbery Medal for the novel Criss Cross.

My husband Bill makes beautiful furniture from twigs and bark. Our children are practically grown up by now. We moved a while ago from our hillside house into a small town on an inlet of Lake Michigan.


http://lynnerae.com/about/
FAQ

Did you always know you wanted to be a writer or an artist?

No, I didn’t. I have always liked to draw and I have always liked books, but I have always liked a lot of things: riding my bike, walking, listening to people talk, making things, food, music, jokes, being outside, being inside, adventures, figuring stuff out, daydreaming.

Besides, I grew up in a small working-class town and being a writer or an artist didn’t seem like a job a real person could have. I didn’t know how to go about it. It took me a long time to figure it out. But here I am. (Actually, I’m still trying to figure it out.)

To tell the truth, I don’t often think of myself as a writer. An artist? Maybe a little more. I think of myself as an ornery person who likes to make things.

Which do you like better, writing or drawing?

I think what I like best are ideas. I don’t mean big complicated abstract ideas, though sometimes they might be. I mean:

A cat sits serenely on top of a chair. The chair back is in shreds because that same cat has used it to sharpen her claws. This is an idea for a picture. You could write about it, but a picture lets the viewer figure out the joke.

Or: Someone tells you about being on a sailboat where, because a wrench was set down too close to the compass, the trip went dangerously off course. To me, that seems like a story that would work better with words.

I once saw an egg-shaped woman in a lavender sweatsuit and red ankle boots. The word “ovoid” popped into my head. I also admired her fashion fearlessness. That was an idea that had both a picture and a word.

The thing I like best is having an idea and trying to figure out how to share it so someone else gets it, too.

Which comes first?

It goes back and forth. While I am drawing, words pop into mind. While I am writing, ideas for pictures appear.

Where do you get your ideas?

The same place that you do. Everyone has ideas every day. Maybe you think, I wonder how it would taste to dip this cheese in this barbecue sauce? (answer: great!) That’s an idea.

Or you might think, My toes are starting to look like raisins. I better get out of the tub. That’s an idea. It might not be a great idea, or an idea you can do anything with, but it might be. Some ideas are better than others, but they’re all ideas.

I make a job out of spending time with my ideas and seeing which ones seem to be worth sharing. A book is made up of some main ideas and a bejillion smaller ideas. I feel happy if I have one or two good ideas in a day. But doing this professionally means I have to try for more
than that. You can train your brain to spot ideas, just like you can learn to fish. And while I try to figure out how to share ideas, interesting and fun and mysterious things happen.

Did some of the things in your books happen in real life? Are the people based on real people?

Some of the things are like things that really happened. And the people often start out being like people I have known. But a mysterious thing happens while working on the story: The events change and the people take on their own personalities.

What is the hardest part of making books? What is the most fun part?

I like to be surprised. When I work on a book, I have a feeling about how I want it to go, but I don’t know exactly how to get there. So I think the hardest part is being patient while I put one foot in front of the other. Especially at the beginning.

The most fun part might be when my brain, unbeknownst to me, has been working away in the backroom at solving some puzzle, and it surprises me by figuring it out. All of a sudden, Eureka!

But I also like: Trying to think of the right word. Trying to make a drawing look the way I want it to. Doing some more mechanical part of a drawing, like crosshatching or painting woodgrain, while listening to music. Rewriting. (Really. You know how you have a conversation with someone, and you walk away and suddenly you realize what you should have said? That’s what rewriting is. You get to say it way you wish you had the first time.)

Which of your books do you like the best?

Many authors answer this question by saying, “That’s like asking which of my children I love the most.” And that’s exactly right. It’s an impossible question. I hope that, like people, they each have something to offer.

What is your favorite book that you have ever read?

Another impossible question. But I am going to put a partial list on the “favorites” page of this website.

How did you get your first book published?

I was trying to get work as an illustrator. A friend arranged for me to have my portfolio reviewed by the Art Director of Greenwillow Books, who was Mrs. Ava Weiss. I made up a story, just for the sake of having something to make illustrations of, for my portfolio. The story was about a girl who moves into a mobile home with her mom. She finds some seedlings growing near the garbage can and transplants them to the front yard, thinking they might be flowers or trees. They turn out to be potatoes, tomatoes and melons that grew from kitchen scraps that didn’t make it into the garbage can.

Mrs. Weiss was very encouraging about my artwork and she asked me if I wrote. “Send us your ideas,” she said. So I typed up the story about the girl, sent it to Greenwillow Books, and they published it and contracted me to illustrate it. That was my first book, *Home Lovely*.

What advice do you have for someone who wants to be a writer?
Read a lot. Pay attention to everything. Listen to people’s stories. Learn how to tell a joke. Have an adventure. Send postcards that say more than “Wish you were here.” Also, if you are an adult, try to find a cheap way to live so you can concentrate on your work instead of on paying the bills.

**What was it like to get the phone call about the Newbery Medal?**

I had heard just a few days before the announcement that *Criss Cross* had been mentioned by some people as a possible Newbery candidate. Part of me said, Don’t even think about it. Another part of me said, If you don’t win, this is your only chance to feel what it’s like to think you might win. So you should enjoy that. That’s what I went with. We were building a new house out of mostly recycled materials, so I spent the day before the announcement scraping paint from an old radiator, listening to the radio and thinking, “I could win the Newbery!” It was a very happy day.

The next morning, I got up very early and had my cup of coffee and planned how I was going to have a really great day even without the Newbery. All I can remember about that plan was that it included taking the dog for a long, long walk.

The committee called at about 7:15 a.m. It was a conference call – the whole committee was on the phone. It was pretty amazing. My family was dancing and hollering around the house. A few minutes later, Virginia Duncan, my editor, called and said I had to fly to New York that day, to be on TV the next morning. I didn’t even have any clean clothes, and we were living in a rental cottage while we finished our house, so I spend the morning at the laundromat, taking phone calls on my cell phone from USA Today and The Today Show. That was a funny juxtaposition.

**How has winning the Newbery made a difference?**

Writing is a solitary activity, but its purpose is to connect. It's like putting your ideas in a bottle and tossing it out into the ocean. The most likely result is that it will never be seen again. Even being considered for the Newbery means that a bunch of people found the bottle, read the message, and thought it was interesting enough to talk about. That's a pretty good feeling right there. And if those people decide to give your book the award, it’s even better. It’s a huge yes from the world. It doesn’t mean everyone will like what you do. People like different stuff. But it means that you get to join in that big noisy conversation that is always going on. I mean the conversation made of all the things people do to say what they think: music, photographs, laws, buildings, movies, books, TV, the internet, graffiti, theatre, clothing, billboards. You get to be part of it in a way that is kicked up several notches from the way you were part of it before. Practically speaking, it makes earning a living as a writer a more likely proposition. Which is nothing to sneeze at.

**What are you working on now?**
A picture book I illustrated, *Seed by Seed*, written by Esme Raji Codell, was recently published. It’s about Johnny Appleseed. I had a wonderful time researching and making the pictures. It’s very cool to see it as an actual book.

And now I am puttering around with some new ideas. That’s all I can say at the moment, because sometimes if I talk about things, I don’t do them, and I would so much rather do them.

http://lynnerae.com/frequently-asked-questions/
About the Book

*Nuts to You* is a middle-grade (ages 8-12) novel; an adventure story about a squirrel. Two squirrels, really. No, three. Well, four *main* squirrels, and a bunch of others. I’m publishing this page of the website on August 26, 2014, the official release date for the book, but it’s a work-in-progress and I hope to add more to it over time.

Where did it come from? A few years ago, I was working on another project when the phrase “the squirrel who cried wolf” popped into my head. Out of nowhere. It made me laugh, and I wrote it down. A few weeks went by, and it still made me laugh, so I started making up a little story. And the story grew and grew.

I wanted the story to have drawings. I have drawn lots of people, and a fair number of dogs, but I had only drawn squirrels a couple of times. I wanted the drawings to be sort of cartoon-y, graphic novel-y:

Also, it wasn’t going to be the kind of book where the squirrels wore clothing, so it took me a little while to work out how to distinguish one squirrel from another:
I decided one squirrel could wear clothing, of a sort. An acorn beret:

That was Chai. Here’s how he looks in the drawings in the book:

Bit by bit, the drawings piled up. I have three big bulletin boards in my studio, and I pin drawings up on them as I do them:

Of course, there’s more to this book than pictures. There’s a story — a story about friendship and courage and adventure and danger. And friendship again. I had a lot of fun writing it. I hope you have a lot of fun reading it, too!

http://lynnerae.com/novels/nuts-to-you/