

When do you think he's going to get started?

Beats me. I have no idea what we're doing here or what's going to happen.



# Timothy Young

Lets His Characters Tell the Story in New Picture Book

by Melissa Fales

What do you call a children's book featuring a coatimundi and a capybara as reluctant main characters whose sole topic of dialogue is how disappointed they are to be stuck in said book? Author/illustrator Timothy Young calls it *Untitled* (Schiffer) and it's his latest. "I had a lot of fun with this one," says Young. "It's very meta. It doesn't just break the fourth wall, it completely destroys it."

According to Young, *Untitled* was not his first choice for a title. "Originally, I was going to call it *Another Stupid Book* by Timothy Young," says Young. "I thought that

was a hilarious title." But when Young mentioned it to a school librarian, she thought it was a sequel to a book she hadn't read. "I knew I had to rethink it," Young says.

Young toyed with a number of other title ideas, but nothing really fit. "As I was ruminating, I started thinking about the book as being untitled, the way a poem without a name is called *Untitled* and then that becomes the title," he says. "I thought it would be funny to intentionally name the book *Untitled*. I still can't believe I got away with it."



Young lets his two characters tell the story as they grow increasingly impatient waiting for him to do it. “They get more and more frustrated with me and start giving suggestions about what they could be doing,” says Young. “They say they would rather be fighting monsters or exploring the oceans, and they go off on a rant about being stuck in my book.”

Young says the idea for the book came to him while he was on the road, traveling to a school visit in Delaware. “It all came to me as I was driving,” he says. “I had an hour to kill so I found a coffee shop near the school and I typed up half the story there, just like that.” He says he’s come to appreciate, and maybe even embrace, the unique way he works his craft. “In reviewing all of my past books, I’ve come to realize that I tend to write monologues,” he says. “My books are not ‘once upon a time’ books. In my books, the character jumps right in, usually in the middle of the action, and tells their story. It works for me. I’ve come to think of my characters as being on stage. And in this case, in *Untitled*, the characters don’t have a script.”

This is the third time he’s basically written an entire book in his head over the course of a long drive. In fact, his very first book, *I’m Looking for a Monster*, came to him while he was driving from New York to Maryland. “The editor I had met with had requested a very specific look,” says Young. “I had most of it in my head by the time I got back home.”

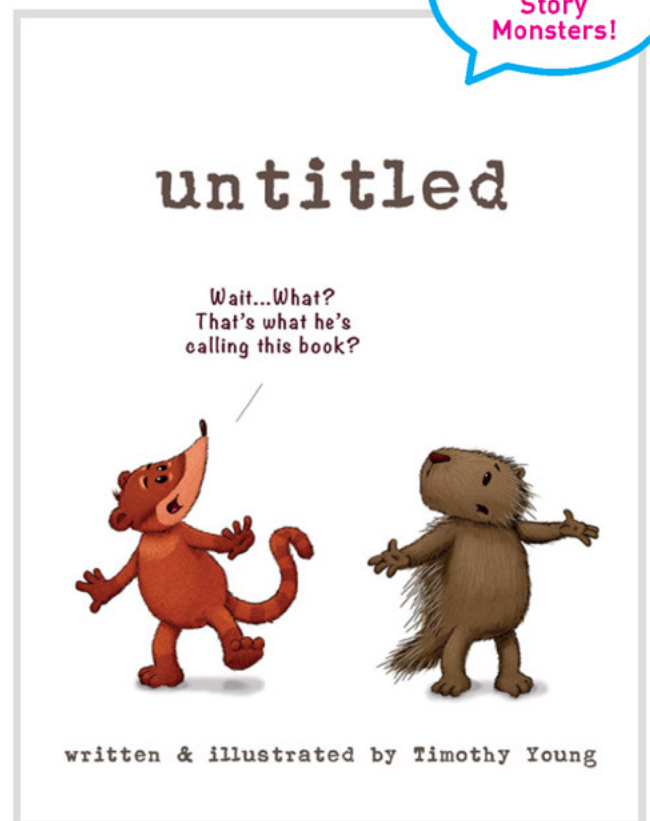
Young has had a diverse career in the arts before he started writing for kids. He worked on magazine covers

and layouts, toys, animation (including Peter Gabriel’s video for “Big Time”), and even designed and built Muppets for Jim Henson. “My first job right out of college was working for *Pee-wee’s Playhouse*,” he says. “I’ve had this incredibly lucky career because through that job, I met so many people in the industry. I had a great time, but I always thought I’d eventually write books.”

It took several years for Young to decide that he was ready. “When I finally got the confidence to go for it, I met this guy who wanted me to illustrate a project of his,” says Young. “He already had two books published by Random House and he told me if I worked with him, he’d see that I had the opportunity to pitch my book idea to his editor, Heidi Kilgras.”

When Young met with Kilgras, she was more impressed with the logo he had created for his company, Creatures and Characters, than with any of the illustrations he’d done. The logo, with its dark silhouettes and sharply contrasting bright eyes and teeth, captured her attention and she told Young she wanted him to create a book that looked like that. Hence, that long car ride

Click to read  
along with  
Story  
Monsters!



I wish he'd send us on some kind of adventure to battle dragons or monsters or aliens or something.



“If there are any educators out there looking for authors to visit, invite me to your school. I’d really like to fill up the whole map. I love any opportunity to share a story.”

Young spent thinking about how to fulfill her request. “I spent a few weeks drawing and when I sent the manuscript for *I’m Looking for a Monster* to her, she said, ‘Now that’s the book I wanted from you,’” he says.

After *I’m Looking for a Monster* was published, Young was pleasantly surprised to discover that author visits to schools would now be a part of his job. “I had no idea that schools start inviting you to read your books to kids once you have a book,” he says. “Now, school visits are one of my favorite things I get to do. I read, I draw pictures, I tell stories ... I love it.” Young is such a fan of doing author visits to schools, he’s set a goal for himself to do one in each of the 50 states. “If there are any educators out there looking for authors to visit, invite me to your school,” he says. “I’d really like to fill up the whole map. I love any opportunity to share a story.”

Last year, Young started a blog, *Scribbling in the Margins*. “Everyone has their cocktail party story they know is going to get a laugh,” he says. “I have dozens and dozens of them. With a school visit, I only get to present for an hour. I have 20 hours of stories and only an hour to fill, which is partly why I’m doing the blog. It’s an effort to get more of my stories out there.”

Currently, Young has two board books in the works. “They’re both loosely based on other books of mine,”

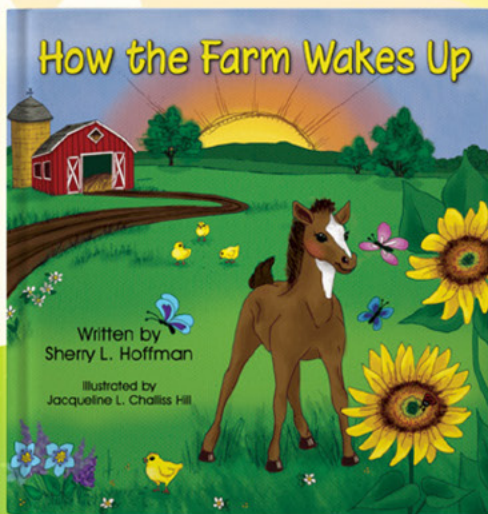
he says. “My puffin character has been very popular, so I’m doing an alphabet book called *P is for Puffin*. It’s going to feature a lot of exotic, lesser-known animals. And I’m doing another based on *I’m Going to Outer Space!*”

Despite his success as an author, Young says he suffered Impostor Syndrome at first. “I felt more like an illustrator who had just figured out some words for a few books,” he says. “I couldn’t even tell people I was an author until after my fourth book, *I Hate Picture Books*, came out. It references a lot of beloved children’s books and makes fun of the classics that everyone loves.” Young says his transformation happened when a woman approached him at a book festival in New Jersey. While looking through *I Hate Picture Books*, the woman began to cry. “Granted, she was pregnant at the time,” says Young. “So maybe she was a little more emotional than she might have been, but once I saw her experiencing an emotional response to my book, that’s when I knew I truly was an author.”

For more information about Timothy Young and his books or to read his blog, visit [creaturesandcharacters.com](http://creaturesandcharacters.com). ●




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