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Jon Scieszka

If anyone is in need of a good laugh, read a book by Jon Scieszka. Scieszka is an American children's writer, best known for picture books created with the illustrator Lane Smith. Jon is very silly and creative with his work, he is known to make his audience laugh a lot. He takes history, math, old folktales and fairy tales and gives them his own funny twist. Jon Scieszka is currently 65 years old currently living in Brooklyn, New York. *Source*

Jon Scieszka was born in Flint Michigan on September 8, 1954. He is the second oldest of six Scieszka boys. His mother, Shirley, worked as a registered nurse and his father, Louis, worked as an elementary school principal. Scieszka's grandparents came to America from Poland. In Polish "Scieszka" means "path". Jon went to Culver Military Academy for high school and became Lieutenant Scieszka there. He thought about becoming a doctor and studied both science and english at Albion College in Michigan. Graduating in 1976 living in Detroit Jon decided he wanted to become a writer instead. So he moved to Brooklyn, NY to write. Earning his MFA in fiction from Columbia University in New York, 1980. After graduating Jon was very confused and lost not knowing exactly what he wanted to do. In an article it says, "not knowing" *Source*

thinking of

what he was getting into, Jon applied for a teaching job at an elementary school called The Day School in New York City. He started as a 1st grade Assistant Teacher, graduated to teaching 2nd grade, taught 3rd and 4th grade Math, 5th grade History, and then some 6th, 7th and 8th grade. Teaching school, Jon re-discovered how smart kids are, and found the best audience for the weird and funny stories he had always liked to read and write. He took a year off from teaching to write stories for kids"(Scieszka). From teaching he discovered that kids love to hear his funny stories throughout this specific age group, elementary and middle school kids. This is when he decided the best audience for his books were kids. Now he needed an illustrator who can ~~can~~ *could* communicate what happens in the story in a visual way and enhances the enjoyment and experience of reading. It states in an article that, "Scieszka and Smith met through their wives who worked together at a New York magazine. They hit it off immediately and began comparing notes"(Newman). So through his wife Jeri, who was at the time working in NY as a magazine art director. Jon met a funny guy named Lane Smith. Together they created the book called *The True Story Of The Three Little Pigs*. Which went out and sold over, "3 million copies worldwide and translated into 14 different languages"(Scieszka). So over the past 19 years Jon and Lane worked on many picture books including *The Stinky Cheese Man*. Which, is a collection of twisted fairy tale stories, with a unique setting. Jon lives in Brooklyn with his wife Jeri and his two kids. His daughter Casey and son Jake. *source*

From noticing Jon Scieszka's work, it shows that he wants to do something different than other authors. He didn't want his stories to go a classic fairy tale route. For example, in the book *The True Story Of The Three Little Pigs*, everyone knows the saying the "Big Bad Wolf"

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thinking the wolf is evil. Or a bad character an antagonist. Although, the wolf name Alexander, in the story he said said, "Everybody knows the story of the Three Little Pigs. Or at least they think they do. But I'll let you in on a little secret. Nobody knows the real story because nobody has ever heard my side of the story" "The real story is about a sneeze and cup of sugar"(1,3). In the book the wolf explains how he was baking a cake for his grandmother and wanted to borrow sugar from his neighbors. His neighbors are the three little pigs, he has a cold and so accidentally he sneezed on the houses and blew them away. Scieszka wants to remind children that a point of view is a way of looking or thinking about something. He wants to go a different route with his story instead of the "Big Bad Wolf" classic tale. Sharing the wolf side of the story and what happened through his eyes. This is most likely why the book sold over "3 million copies"(Scieszka) and its illustrations by Lane Smith helps visualize the story. To end the story off Scieszka ends it in a funny note, which even made myself laugh, as I read it. The wolf was put in jail and he says "The news reporters found out about the two pigs I had for dinner. They figured a sick guy going to borrow a cup of sugar didn't sound very exciting. So they jazzed up the story with all of that "Huff and puff and blow your house down." And they made me the Big Bad Wolf. That's it. The real story. I was framed. But maybe you could loan me a cup of sugar"(14-15). The last sentence was a great way to end the story for the readers like me. Which made me end up with a smile and a little laugh. It states in the American Library Association that this book got "The Notable Children's Recordings Award"(ALA).

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To add on, another notable book by Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith is *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales*. This book won a, "Caldecott Honor Award in

1993" (Baloney). Its a collection of very short stories that are fresh take on classic folktales.

Many of the stories are irreverent, gross and silly. For instance, in the classic fable "The Ugly Duckling" the main character grows up to be a beautiful swan. But in Scieszka's version, he writes "Everyone used to say, what a nice looking bunch of ducklings all except that one. Boy, he's really ugly. The really ugly duckling heard these people, but he didn't care. He knew that one day he would probably grow up to be a swan and be bigger and look better than anything in the pond. Well, as it turned out, he was just a really ugly duckling. And he grew up to be just a really ugly duck. The End" (16-17). As stated before, Scieszka has a unique way of telling stories that are very different from other authors. He doesn't take a traditional fairy tale route with happy endings, evil witches, magic and someone being saved. He sticks with the reality of the story, with the same description as the title stated "The Really Ugly Duckling". For the most part, an ordinary fairy tale with a title like that would end up with a beautiful duckling at the end of the story. Somehow magically the duck turned out to be the most gorgeous duck in the end. But, in Scieszka story the duck grows up to be a really ugly duck. The stories in this book play with traditional folktales, often changing their moral or the point of view.

In many of Scieszka's books, the words on the page are very large or small. They might be upside down, squished or in different colors. (Just like in the book *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales*.) This helps children a lot because it breaks from traditional children's books and allows the reader to have fun with the words and explore language. In an article it says, "Scieszka gets ideas for his stories from many experiences. In interviews he has mentioned that he gets ideas from looking out the window, talking to his children, or eating his children's

cereal. He also gets many ideas from growing up in a large family of rowdy boys. In addition, Scieszka was a teacher for about ten years, and many of his stories come from his experiences and his passion for education" (Brain Pop Educators). In early 2008, "Scieszka was named the first ever National Ambassador for Young People's Literature by the Librarian of Congress" (Reading Rockets). A two year appointment to give responsibility with the task of raising national awareness of the importance of children's books. Jon is now working on a giant pre school publishing program called "Truck Town" (Rich). Basically, it's a world where all the characters are trucks and they act like preschoolers loud, crazy, wild and funny.

In addition, Scieszka notices that as a writer and teacher boys were less likely to read than girls. In an article it states, "As a writer and teacher, Scieszka noticed that boys were less likely than girls to read, and the boys who did read tended to favour nonfiction, humour, or other forms not typically assigned by their mostly female teachers. Scieszka founded an Internet-based literacy movement called Guys Read, which encouraged boys to read and men to serve as reading role models. He based the movement on the belief that the key to producing more adult male readers was to let boys read what engaged them rather than forcing them to read specific selections" (Craine). So in 2002, Scieszka creates the Guys Read literacy program to "help boys become better readers, better students, better guys." He also said "boys often have to read books they don't really like. They don't get to choose what they want to read. And what they do like to read, people often tell them is not really reading" (Scieszka). This is something that I myself can relate to. Jon Scieszka really didn't inspire me in any such way but, he made me appreciate and respect him a lot for acknowledging most of us boys that don't like to read. An author that finally

why not? Usman, you need to come see me to discuss fragments!

aren't
 recognize that most boys don't read and why don't they. Including myself, I don't really like to read just because I don't have any interest in books. Maybe because some of the things that I may like to read isn't age appropriate. Teachers and people may think I'm too old to read comic books like Star Wars. As an author for him to admit boys tend to not read as much as girls makes me respect him very much. Going out and making this whole program to help boys to read he must really feel proud. I believe that guys should read more, we have a stereotype around us that were men and it's not cool reading books. Jon Scieszka as an author seeing this issue and shedding some light on it makes me grateful for people like him. I think more authors should see this dilemma through and give notice to this. Me personally I would love to read books, but I feel like I am afraid to read the books that I would like to read. Well since Jon Scieszka thinks boys should read whatever they like, I shall give it a try with reading.

And what would you read?

Good!
 However, Jon Scieszka critics may disagree with me and dislike many of his books. One critic states on Amazon reviews about the book, *The Stinky Cheese and Other Fairly Stupid Tales* that, "my kids are 2 and 4 and I don't think it captured their attention as well as I would've liked. Because there's a few stories, it doesn't draw them in for the whole book. Maybe it will be better as they get older. My other issue is that my kids really haven't been exposed to the original fairy tales so I'm not sure they "get" that the stories are "fairly stupid" versions of those. If my kids had known those other fairy tales, perhaps it would have been more interesting to them"(Danielle). I can see why she is saying that because most of the stories in that book, in order to understand the humor you need to know about the original fairy tale story line first. Or understanding what a usual type of a fairy tale story is like. Another critic but, for the book, *The*

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True Story of The Three Little Pigs a person on GoodRead reviews says, "I think this book is better for older children who already know the story of the three little pigs and who can understand people having different perspectives. If I were reading to preschool and kindergarten age children, I would just read them the original story of the three little pigs. The story would work well with older children to introduce them to the idea of people being able to have different opinions about the same situation"(Rose). I also vouch for this because this isn't the original tale of this story. A kid wouldn't be able to comprehend the story as much without knowing its original storyline. Through this it's notice that a couple of Jon Scieszka's stories may not be understandable for all children age groups. ^{Frog} Certain books like this and *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales* may not go well with kids who are just getting into fairy tale books. Overall, most of his critics have left positive messages about his books all over the internet. On GoodReads Jon got an overall 4.3 rating out of 5 for the book, *The True Story of The Three Little Pigs*. Furthermore, in his book, *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales* he got an 4.8 rating out of 5 on Amazon reviews

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