

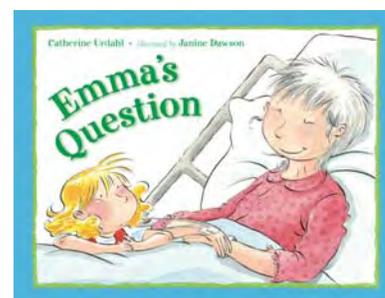
School Visits

I begin with a brief introduction. Then I ask students how many of them have experienced a HARD DAY. Can you fix a hard day? If so, how? I then read my picture book *Polka-dot Fixes Kindergarten*.



- I ask a series of questions (depending on the age of students): Who is having a hard day in this book?
 - Why was it hard for Polka-dot to be at kindergarten?
 - Why was it hard for Liz?
 - How are Polka-dot and Liz alike?
 - How are they different?
 - What could Liz have done differently? Do you think it was easy or hard for Polka-dot to help Liz?

- I tell the real-life story behind *Polka-dot Fixes Kindergarten* and my earlier book, *Emma's Question*. We talk about generating ideas and how stories can be a combination of real and pretend. I show students how they can take something or someone real and build a story around it. Exaggerate! Make yourself a hero! Change what happens!



- I talk about how a story became a book—from the idea to the writing to the revision process and the steps of publishing. I show marked-up drafts (to emphasize the importance of rewriting and revision), as well as publisher proofs.
- Group activities—I have a variety of activities that tie into *Polka-dot Fixes Kindergarten*. For descriptions of activities ... In the case of a larger group presentation, teachers can choose to do activities in their own classrooms.

- We finish by building a story together. Each student then writes and illustrates his or her own resolution to the story.
- For older students, I offer prompts to help them mine ideas from their personal lives: What's the most exciting thing that's ever happened to you? The scariest? The most embarrassing? The saddest? Have you ever faced a moral dilemma – like in ? I encourage students to use their own experiences as sparks for a story.

NOTE: I use Power Point images and various props to hold students' attention. I request that the school provide an LED projector and screen, if possible.

I provide book order forms for schools to send home in advance of my visit. I then personalize and autograph the books. My publisher offers schools a significant discount on pre-orders, allowing sponsoring organizations such as PTO groups to use book sales to help offset the cost of the school visit.

Catherine Urdahl

is the author of two children's picture books—*Polka-dot Fixes Kindergarten* and *Emma's Question*. Catherine also conducts school visits and teaches classes in children's writing at the Loft Literary Center in Minneapolis. She is a 2008 graduate of the Loft Master Track program in children's literature and a 1984 graduate of St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minn. A member of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators and the Children's Literature Network, Catherine attends workshops at both the local and national level. She is married and has two daughters and a pet rabbit.