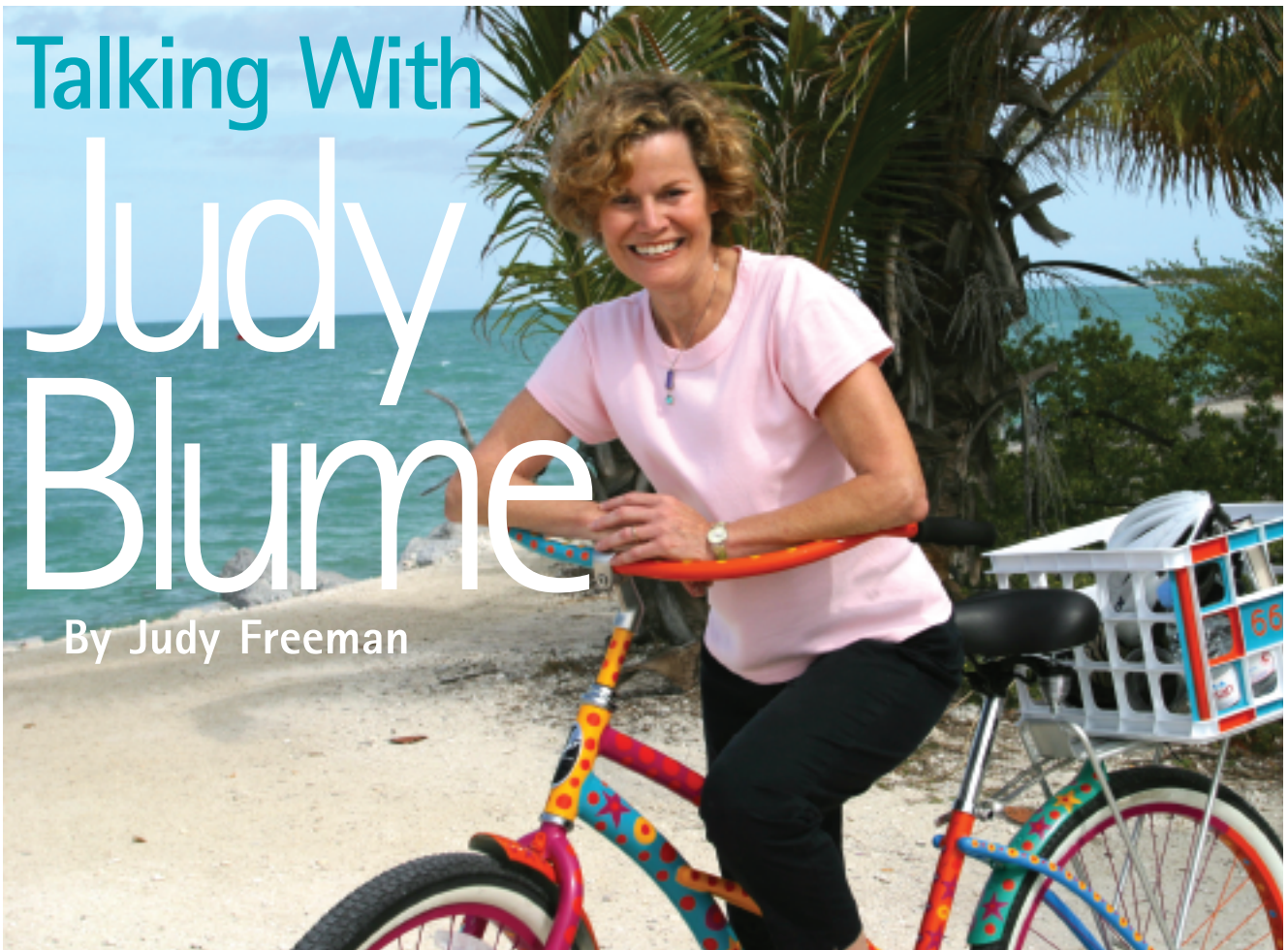


# Talking With Judy Blume

By Judy Freeman



**T**he believable voices of Judy Blume's characters—such as the troublemaking Fudge from *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing* and freckle-less Andrew from *Freckle Juice*—have charmed readers since Blume published her first book, *The One in the Middle Is the Green Kangaroo*, in 1969. In fact, Blume's first fans are all grown up and sharing her stories with a new generation. In *Instructor's* recent reader survey, teachers named her one of their top 10 favorite children's authors.

That's why we wanted to talk to Blume about what she thinks motivates kids to read. We also found time to discuss censorship (some have found Blume's books objectionable for their frankness), her own favorite authors (Beverly Cleary, for one), and the National Book Foundation's Medal for Distinguished

Contribution to American Letters (in 2004, Blume became the first children's author to receive this honor). Read on to discover what else this well-loved writer has to say!

## Why do you think that, after 35 years, your books are so popular?

**JUDY BLUME:** I've no idea. I'd guess it's that young readers continue to identify with my characters. Some things never change.

## Are kids' interests today different from those of kids in the 1970s?

**JB:** Children's reading interests tend

to be cyclical. (Or maybe it's publishing that tends to be cyclical.) In the 1970s series books were out. Fantasy was out. Rhyming picture books were out. Kids need choices. There are always some who want to read about real life. I write for those readers.

## What children's writers have influenced you?

**JB:** When I began to write I'd go to the public library and carry home armloads of books. I laughed so hard I fell off the sofa reading Beverly Cleary. I thought, I'd like to write books like these. Never boring, never sentimental. Fresh and funny. What could be better? I was also inspired by Louise Fitzhugh's *Harriet the Spy* and E.L. Konigsberg's *Jennifer, Hecate, William MacKinley*, and *Me, Elizabeth*. I continue to be inspired by fresh voices with original stories to tell.





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### What other authors or books do you recommend?

**JUDY BLUME:** I found Ned Vizzini's *Be More Chill* hilarious—it's written with such energy and originality! And there's a new book out by Gigi Amateau called *Claiming Georgia Tate* that grabbed me from page one. I also thought *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* by Marc Haddon was fabulous. I gave it to my 13-year-old grandson, who couldn't put it down. I like to recommend younger writers, such as Carolyn Mackler, Wendy Mass, Rachel Vail, Jacqueline Woodson, and David Klass. I know I'm leaving off other writers I admire!

### How can we turn more reluctant readers on to books?

**JB:** I can't tell you how many letters I get from children—as well as adults—who talk about their teachers reading aloud to them. A 34-year-old man just wrote to say he's still in

touch with a teacher who read my *Fudge* books aloud to her class at the end of every day. He remembers the voice she invented for Fudge.

Teachers who take the time to read aloud can introduce kids to the fun of reading. I remember one teacher who read *Animal Farm* aloud to us in sixth grade. A good reader can make anything come alive for students.

### You've said you remember everything from childhood. What was an experience that shaped you?

**JB:** Death. By the time I was 10 I'd seen my father lose a sister, two brothers, and his mother. We were always "sitting shivah." I thought it was up to me to protect my father, and I invented fancy rituals to keep him safe. I never told anyone about this. It was a heavy burden for a child. When I began to write I was sure that I wouldn't have much time.

### Kids always ask for more Fudge. Any chances of a new book?

**JB:** Right now I have no plans to write another Fudge book. *Fudge-a-mania* was supposed to be the last book about Fudge and his family. But my grandson Elliot inspired—and begged—me to write *Double Fudge*. I'm thinking a series based on *The Pain and the Great One*. I feel ready to revisit those characters.

### What do you think of turning kids' books into big movies?

**JB:** I love good books and I love good movies. But they're different experiences. I hope that if kids see a movie they like, they'll read the book.

### Is there a book of yours you'd like to see on the big screen?

**JB:** I've been very protective of my work. My TV experiences haven't been the best. But sure, I'd like to see honest, interesting adaptations of my books on the big screen. Right now we're working on an adaptation of *Deenie* with Disney.

### What issues need to be tackled in children's literature? Is there anything too sensitive for today's students or classroom?

**JB:** I don't think of writing in terms of issues. I begin with a character, sometimes with a character and a situation. But I don't think today's children are less able to deal with hard topics than they were 30 years ago. The difference is in the political climate, which has changed drastically. We've become a fearful society.

### How does it affect you when your books come under fire?

**JB:** I felt alone and frightened when my books first came under attack. I felt angry. But for many years now I've felt sad—sad for the kids—because banning a book sends such a negative message. It says to them, "There's something in this book we don't want you to know about, something we don't want to discuss with you." Today, I work with a network of professionals who believe that readers of all ages are entitled to intellectual freedom.

### How do you assess the current book-banning climate?

**JB:** It's not getting any better. My guess is we'll see more challenges to books in the coming years. Teachers and writers who care about censorship must speak out. If you're facing a ban, contact the National Council of Teachers of English ([www.ncte.org](http://www.ncte.org)) or the National Coalition Against Censorship ([www.ncac.org](http://www.ncac.org)).

### What advice can you give to young writers?

**JB:** I'm not big on advice. I don't understand the creative process, and I'm not sure I want to. I would say only: Write from inside. Let it come out spontaneously, without fear. ■

For more on Judy Blume, go to [www.judyblume.com](http://www.judyblume.com). Judy Freeman ([www.judyreadsbooks.com](http://www.judyreadsbooks.com)) is a children's literature consultant and author of *Books Kids Will Sit Still For 3* (Libraries Unlimited, 2005).