

A CONVERSATION

A Conversation with
Joanna Cole & Bruce Degen

Creators of
The Magic School
Bus series

Questions & Answers

Q: After more than twenty years, how do you come up with new science ideas for your books?

JC: There are so many ideas, and so little time to write them all. We try to choose subjects that fascinate us and that we hope will fascinate readers.

Q: Were you good at science when you were in school?

JC: I have always loved science. I think I liked finding out that things made sense, finding the causes of happenings in the world. Science books have always been my pleasure reading.

BD: I liked science. Of my friends who lived on my block, Warren went on to be an award-winning science teacher in high school and college. In the sixth grade Warren built a telescope on the roof of his apartment house, and we would locate the stars, planets, and the features of the moon.

Q: Science is changing every day. How do you manage to keep your books current?

JC: The books are always under review as we keep up with science news. Every few years we update them with the help of experts in the various fields.

BD: So much has changed in what we know about the solar system, dinosaurs, hurricanes, and all the subjects that we have to make changes in the text and the pictures.

Q: What is your greatest challenge in making learning exciting for kids?

JC: The biggest challenge is simplifying complex material. We have to make it simple enough for kids to understand, but not so simple that the meaning goes out of it. You would be surprised if you knew how many times we go over each simple school report in the books.

BD: Keeping a good sense of humor, sifting through tons of information, and keeping focus on the basic questions of the subject, that is the challenge, I think.

Q: Did you ever have a teacher like Ms. Frizzle?

JC: My junior high school science teacher, Miss Bair, was like Ms. Frizzle in her enthusiasm for her subject. She did not dress or act like the Friz.

BD: Oddly enough, the teacher I had that was the most like Ms. Frizzle was not a science teacher but a high school math teacher. You could see her face shine when she did a beautiful logical proof. This was infectious to me. Although I was not your math star in school, that year I loved math!

Q: Joanna, is it true that you write all of the jokes found in each book?

JC: Yes.

Q: Do you have a favorite Magic School Bus adventure?

JC: I loved writing *In the Time of the Dinosaurs* because I had written a dinosaur book ten years before. It was fun finding out everything scientists had learned since then.

BD: That is like asking your parents which is their favorite child. I love them all.

Q: What has surprised you the most about your more than twenty years creating The Magic School Bus books?

JC: The biggest surprise for me has been how teachers use the series in the classroom. I thought the books were going to be for kids to read for fun.

BD: Everything. I didn't know it would be such a big hit. Most of all, it has been the responses of the kids and the parents, who tell us how much they have enjoyed the books. It has been the responses of the teachers, who like to dress up like Ms Frizzle, and to do all kinds of science work with their classes, and turn their classrooms into bat caves and rain forests like a Magic School Bus field trip!

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