



Transcript for “Junie B. Jones Continues to Delight Children and Frustrate (some) Adults”

Dr. Dipesh Navsaria: [00:00:00] Reach Out and Read where books build better brains. This is the Reach Out and Read podcast. I'm your host doctor Dipesh Navsaria, a practicing pediatrician with degrees in public health and children's librarianship. I'm a clinical professor of human development and family studies at the School of Human Ecology, and a professor of pediatrics at the School of Medicine and Public Health, both at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. At Reach Out and Read, we dream of a world in which every child is read to every day. Our show explores how children and families flourish and thrive through a combination of individual well-being, confident parents, supportive communities, strong public health, and good policy. Join us here for thought provoking conversations on these issues with expert guests, authors, and leaders in the field of early childhood health and literacy. Research shows that reading physical books together brings the strongest benefits to children. That's why we're happy to have Boise Paper, a responsible paper manufacturer, as the founding sponsor of this podcast through their paper With Purpose Promise. Boise Paper looks for ways to make a difference in local communities. Thank you to Boise Paper for investing in our Reach Out and Read community. First published in 1992, the Junie B Jones series has sold over 65 million books and consistently landed on the New York Times bestseller list. With success came some scrutiny, and the series was on the American Library Association's list of 100 Most banned books from 2000 to 2009, partly because of bad grammar and because Jenny uses words like stupid. So who is Junie B Jones, and how much influence does an imaginary six year old really have on children today? We are talking today about the beloved children's series, the latest evolution in its history, and the controversies that have followed it from the beginning. Our guest today is Colleen AF Venable. She is the author of several acclaimed kids books, including Katie, the Cat sitter and the Creepy Cafeteria series. Her latest book is an adaptation of Barbara Park's Junie B Jones series called Junie B Jones and the Stupid Smelly Bus. Colleen, welcome to the show.

Colleen AF Venable: [00:02:13] I am so happy to be here.

Dr. Dipesh Navsaria: [00:02:15] So let's just start off because some of our listeners may not actually know a whole lot about Barbara Park and the Junie B Jones series, so who was Barbara Park and what? Tell us about this series.

Colleen AF Venable: [00:02:27] I mean, Barbara Park is a legend. Like, you talk to anyone in kids books, and Barbara Park is just like, she's up there like everybody that ever met her loved her. She barely ever did public events. So she was like this mysterious person. But she did 28 Junie B Jones books, as well as a bunch of other books. I think she did almost 50 books total, but these books absolutely captured a generation. And now they are recapturing, as that generation is, having kids. So it's like there's this little gap of like ten years that if you were born in those years, you may not know who Junie B Jones is. But if you were born before those years or after those years, oh my gosh, you're obsessed. And I think it's been an amazing thing to be part of that, because I was a little too old for Judy Jones. I was a babysitter, and the kids I was babysitting gave me a pile of books to read. One of them, I believe, was Junie B Jones one man band, which had her playing a thousand instruments on the cover.

Colleen AF Venable: [00:03:21] Cracked me up from just the cover. And I should say, Denise did the original art, and her art is perfect for those books. So perfect. There's one called Something Fishy, where Junie B Jones on the cover is dragging a fish on a leash. I'm like, what is this series? But yeah, the kids asked me to read the book, and I started reading it, and the kids were getting so mad at me because I could not stop laughing. And they kept saying, read the story. Don't laugh. And I basically, like, waited for them to go to sleep, I waited. See, now I'm having, like, Junie Jones. Grandma. I waited for them to go to sleep. And I just dug through all the books they had of Junie Jones, and I just adored it. And it's still to this day is like, so funny. I reread the books in a cafe while I'm working on them, and I'm always laughing. It's just amazing that like Junie surpasses her generation. It's hard to believe these books are from 35 years ago.

Dr. Dipesh Navsaria: [00:04:25] Indeed, indeed. So again, we may have some listeners that might be like, gosh, I've just never encountered these books to tell. Tell us you've talked about how hilarious they are and all. Who is Junie B Jones? Like the character.

Colleen AF Venable: [00:04:41] Junie B Jones is the most perfect example of an agent of chaos. Yes, she is neither good nor bad. She just is chaos. And she does the thing that every kid wants to do, but doesn't do because they know they're not supposed to. And she just says the thing that every adult wants to say but would never actually say out loud. And she just looks at the world in this very interesting way. I'm right now working on yucky, blocky fruit cake where she wins a prize and she gets to pick any cake. There's chocolate, there's coconut, there's cupcakes, and she loves fruit. So she chooses the fruit cake, having no idea what it is.

And she drags it so heavy that she drags it around on a rope to show everyone what she wants. And then she finally opens it and she's like, oh my God, it's gone bad. And it's just that moment where you're a kid and you're so excited about something to have it not go the way you think it's going to go. And I think that's why she connected so much, not just because she was being bad, but because she was always making mistakes and she was always, you know, also being optimistic the next time anything happened. Like she got over those mistakes. But man, does she make a lot of mistakes, right?

Dr. Dipesh Navsaria: [00:05:53] Yeah, over and over and over again. Yes. So as we said in the intro, you've adapted the latest Jenny Jones book. What does that mean?

Colleen AF Venable: [00:06:06] So, it is like the world's most fun jigsaw puzzle. That's what I say. So I write my own graphic novels, and I do just the scripts. I don't do the art. And I love breaking things down with beats. When you do a graphic novel, you can actually control the pace of your reader in a way you can't as easily with prose. I can control when there's a page turn, and when you're going to have this big two page reveal of something really funny. On the art being giant. I could also control how fast the panels are. There could be three fast panels. And for me, I'm taking these books and I'm modernizing Junie B Jones. And the thing I found shocking is there's not that much I need to update. Yeah. I thought, you know, these are books from the 90s. It's like that thing where you will watch any movie from the 90s, and you're sitting there being like, oh my gosh, oh my gosh, the guy's just the guy's.

Dr. Dipesh Navsaria: [00:06:55] Pager, you know?

Colleen AF Venable: [00:06:58] Yeah, exactly. That are like pagers. The nice thing that could happen. Most of the time you're like, wow, I wasn't offended by this when I was. This was my favorite movie when I was 12. Oh my goodness. And they don't have that problem. I'm updating clothing. You know, like, her friend has light up high tops now that she like covers. But it's very much staying true to the original. The original cast of kids was already super diverse. The parents were very much all white women. It was like the teacher was a white woman. Everybody was a white woman, except for the one white man that was in charge. So that was one of the only big changes I made was I was like, no, we're going to have men in different roles. Her father's going to have a bigger role because he's there. And, you know, we're going to make sure, like the principal is now black woman, we're going to just but it never changes the characters themselves at all. They're still absolutely true to who they were. So for me, it's been this just joy of not having to do that heavy a lift when it comes to. Because I think the biggest change I made was in one book. They were talking about careers, and one kid wanted to be a jail warden. And I was like, oh, let's maybe not do that. If his purpose for wanting to be a jail warden is he likes keys. Let's come up with another idea of a job that has a lot of keys. So it stays true to his motivations and his emotions. But let's not get

the, you know, United States penitentiary system into a children's book have to explain anything. So now he works at an animal rescue in his fake job. So.

Dr. Dipesh Navsaria: [00:08:28] Excellent. Yeah, yeah. You know, I didn't think, you know, there's so many books out there that have been transformed from novels to graphic novels. Right. And some better than others with, you know, varying levels of success and all, and I'm not doing this kind of work myself, right? I didn't really think about this until you just said it that like, yeah, if you're submitting the text of a novel, your manuscript, you don't control where it falls on a page, right? That's your publisher's issue. And they probably would be really annoyed if you micromanage that. But as someone laying out a graphic novel, you do get to control the page turns and the reveals and things like that in different ways.

Colleen AF Venable: [00:09:12] Yeah, it's really kind of wonderful. I feel like, you know, *Leaves of Grass* got to do that. But most novels do not get to do that. And not just that, but in the original books, there'll be a single line that's kind of a throwaway line where she'll talk about once she jumped out of a hamper and she scared her grandfather, and somehow his teeth hit the ground. And so I got to actually show her, carefully hiding in this hamper and carefully putting a single sock on her head, she's, like, very visible, and see her jumping out and seeing the dentures, which she didn't know were there, and it just was nice to take these very small moments and get to actually visually see them, and to see the way she looks when she's dragging a fruitcake down a hallway of a school. You know, it's like it's very funny to write it, but to see her and it's like elongated over pages where she's talking, but she's still there's this drag sound effect as this cake is just being pulled on the ground. So it's another way to kind of get into Judy's head and to see the reactions of the people around her, which, you know, it's first person. There's a lot of captions. That was a hard thing, was finding Judy's voice, where a lot of graphic novels. And I actually in my own graphic novels, I don't really use captions that much. It's all dialogue or silence. And here I get to have the caption boxes of her saying things because she just has the funniest thoughts, and we couldn't. I didn't want to take that away. So it's this great mix of she's really still just telling you the story. So it feels very intimate as a reader like Judy is telling you this story. And you could see that something's about to go wrong five pages before it does. Because you know what? Her brain is where she's at.

Dr. Dipesh Navsaria: [00:10:52] There's a lot of text in most novels, and obviously much less in a graphic novel. Some of it is describing the scene, which, you know, again, happens visually through the illustrations. Did you find yourself at all restricted? Like, man, I would love to put in X or Y and it's just going to make it too much. Or did you just feel that it just flowed beautifully.

Colleen AF Venable: [00:11:15] It's actually been a really nice ratio. I feel like I haven't actually taken out anything really, other than, you know, like things like the jail warden. But in terms of the plot points, it's all there because they went from 64 page prose to 160 pages. So we have a lot of breathing room. Usually I'll finish a draft and I'll have to go back and like, condense some pages and expand other parts to get it to that. It has to be that exact page number. Which is another thing that's odd about these graphic novels is they want every spin to be exactly the same size. So again, it's that jigsaw puzzle you're trying to figure out how to get this story to fit in this exact number, this exact spine size. And for me, I love puzzles. It's a delight.

Dr. Dipesh Navsaria: [00:12:00] Do you think there's a change that matters when it comes to graphic novels? Right? Like what? A graphic novel version of this worked 25 years ago. Are kids different today in terms of their expectations? Are we reaching a different set of kids that might not have picked up because the original is still available? What are your thoughts about how graphic novels play into kind of the current state of readers?

Colleen AF Venable: [00:12:26] I think if they existed, you know, 20 years ago, 25 years ago, 35 years ago, they would have been just as read. If you ask any kid you know that grew up in the 80s or 90s, if they read the newspaper comics. Every kid was obsessed with them. Every kid had a Garfield Wall calendar. They were obsessed with Farside or Calvin and Hobbes. We didn't have graphic novels then for kids. And this new boom, I think, is tapping into that lovely mix of visuals and jokes and words and things you could only do with the combination of the two. And I think kids were always there, especially, you know, the TV generations, the 80s, definitely. Like I was a latchkey kid. They just put me in front of the TV, left me there for hours. Luckily I went to the library a lot too, so I figured out the reading was actually even better. Yeah, I think they would have appealed. But the thing that wouldn't have happened was the ability for librarians to bring them to the forefront. So I really attribute the boom of graphic novels to librarians and teachers who make the argument, these are just as powerful, just as strong as a prose novel. These are working kids brains just as well. And now there are every library you go to.

Colleen AF Venable: [00:13:44] Every school library, public libraries. There's a graphic novel section, and there's usually one for adults and one for kids. And sometimes, if it's a really good library, they have one for teens to really kind of focus those readers. So I think it's just the world is more ready for graphic novels. I think they do so well with kids for a lot of reasons. One, they're very fast to read, and you could finish a book immediately, give it to your best friend, and within an hour you could have a conversation about that book with your friend. Even if they haven't finished it, you still have enough of the book to have that. And I think watching books spread on the playground and talking to librarians where they're like, I get a book back and they're their friend is next to them, ready to take it out? Sure. And that

doesn't happen as much in prose books, you know, because it takes a long time to read. So I think the speed of it becomes these almost like, you know, viral things going around the playground where everyone's talking about dog matter, everyone's talking about, you know, bone or amulet or, you know, Baby-Sitters club and Rayna, Tolga Maya really helped start this, right? And her books are about normal kids doing normal things.

Colleen AF Venable: [00:14:53] And the fact those became so big means kids want to have those conversations, want to be able to see themselves. They're always going to love a good, like, action story thing, but also they just want to feel seen and to be able to hand the book to a friend and say, what do you think? And then have that conversation. I think that's really special to readers. So I think a lot of readers are very isolated. You read a book and you're begging your best friend to read it, but here they'll read it right away. And I think that's led to a lot of just so much turnover in the books. The library copies, so much turnover in the books. You go to any bookstore and there's a huge graphic novel section. So I don't think it's necessarily because kids are scared of prose. I think it's just it's that like quick dopamine hit of being able to read a book fast and feeling proud of yourself that you finished a book. And on top of that, I'm a sucker for visual jokes. There are so many jokes that you can't do in prose that you could get away with in graphic novels.

Dr. Dipesh Navsaria: [00:15:57] Old gag panel.

Colleen AF Venable: [00:15:59] Yeah, the side panel. You know, something falling out of a panel. I love a background joke where you see, like we had one scene where she's wallpapering or they're wallpapering the baby's room, her little brother's room before he's born, and the father's there. They say that in the book, but it's one line. And then it's only the mom talking with Jimmy. And I was like, how about the dad is really bad at this? Why don't we have the dad doing a horrible job in the background with the wallpaper? And every time you come back to him, he's got more stuck to him. And it's just it wasn't in the book, but it was just imagining what it was like. Same thing with her dog. She mentions having a dog, and I've added the dog in so many scenes. So to be able to add the depth, there is just a delight as a creator and as a Judy fan, to be able to be like her grandmother has a cat. Let's make sure that cat is hidden in every other page, you know? So it's a really, I love it as a medium. And, you know, I love prose, I love poetry, I love nonfiction, but there's something about the format of graphic novels that just really connects with readers of all ages, but especially kids.

Dr. Dipesh Navsaria: [00:17:07] Yeah, yeah. I'm remembering this is more in the picture book world, but is it what Peggy recommends? Good night Gorilla, two of her books. Like one of them, like, featured in the background one of the characters from another book. Like, just as a quiet little back scene. And I remember when we picked up on that and said, hey, wait a minute, that's the gorilla from Goodnight Gorilla.

Colleen AF Venable: [00:17:28] And she's amazing. If you've ever had ten minutes to bedtime, she's got this kid just getting ready for bed. But there's these hamsters that all have a number. And every single page, that same numbered hamster is doing a very similar thing. And there's one that has a different item of clothing stuck on his head on every page. And I was obsessed with that hamster. He was struggling through the whole book.

Dr. Dipesh Navsaria: [00:17:52] But speaking of picture books, like a lot of this reminds me of conversations, one that we've had with many authors and illustrators of picture books, right? About the dynamic between them and how they think about page turns and, you know, and sections of books and so on. But, you know, I think also picture books, I suspect, for kids that are in, you know, say elementary school, you know, onward, you know, can feel like, oh, well, I've outgrown that, you know, whereas graphic novels offer a kind of in the next level up of sophistication, but still enjoying the joys of the visual that you've just articulated so, so beautifully.

Colleen AF Venable: [00:18:33] And I think, you know, having that spine to be able to be like, look at how much I read. And to be able to prove that. And I think in some ways kids are often pushed away from picture books too soon by parents, by teachers. I think a good picture book should be read by any age. But there is now this world where you can have those feelings and those abilities that you could do with a picture book, a really incredible picture book. They could exist in a graphic novel. I will say I give so much credit to picture book creators. You can't have a single word be off in a picture book and have the book work. I always say that picture books are like playing Tetris, but you only get those Z pieces and you got to somehow figure out how to make it fit. Picture books are so difficult. I'd like to think that my books don't have a single sentence you could take out, and it would work as well, but I'm not delusional. I usually get like two for my other series. It's like 224 pages. I'm sure there's a bunch of sentences that could have been taken out, but a lot of respect for any time a picture book really works, it really works. And I do love that. A lot of the most popular picture books of all time are essentially comics. You know, don't let the pigeon drive the bus. It's a comic. Just every page is a single panel. I actually have a monster at the end of this book. Tattoo? Absolutely. A comic. Things like Shaun Tan's *The Arrival*. There's just so many really wonderful picture books that have used the power of sequential storytelling and the like, visual language of comics to really have kids, again, connect with those characters. So I think, I think there's a big crossover between those two worlds.

Dr. Dipesh Navsaria: [00:20:08] Yeah, yeah. So you've covered a lot about what kids want, and I think so in this book. And again, for folks who have not read the original novel or the graphic novel now, this is basically about journeys, you know, first day going to school or first days going to school and the challenges of writing, you know, the school bus and, you know,

all the wacky hijinks that ensue from that in different ways. Are there things about journey you said earlier? Like she does things and thinks things that adults certainly wish they could do and you implied there was sort of a universality like the experience of children. Could you say more about that, about what is it about her that really connects with children?

Colleen AF Venable: [00:21:02] I think she does so many, even just little moments where, you know, she finds a package of Band-Aids and she just sticks them all over herself. Yeah. She pretends to be the teacher, but the only letter she knows how to write is O, she just draws O over and over again on the board. It's just there's so many true to kid moments that other books may not show because they're just tiny moments, but it's those tiny moments that makes her feel so real. I think that it's almost impossible to read a few journeys without having a single book saying like, oh yeah, that happened to me once. Or oh yeah, this kid once did this to me. Granted, usually your reaction is not the reaction she has, but it's really a very, very relatable series, very relatable characters, even the other children in the class. It's not also the kind of story where she's a fully formed character and everyone else is just a cardboard cutout, right?

Dr. Dipesh Navsaria: [00:22:01] Right.

Colleen AF Venable: [00:22:02] They are all such like the smallest character in her class could have like two scenes, a book, and you know who they are. You know all about what Charlotte's like. You know what Grace is like. Jamal. Ricardo. Like, all these kids are very born. Yeah. And to have a book that's only 64 pages to have so many characters feel real. It just reads like, you know, this is what it's like in my school.

Dr. Dipesh Navsaria: [00:22:29] Yeah, a page that an event in the book that, like, stuck with me from just reading this last night was, you know, her teacher asked her, oh, are you going to ride the school bus? Junie B and she does this big shrug and then the adults go off and this whole conversation about, oh, the bus driver and this and, you know, blah, blah, blah, and she's having, like, a gigantic crisis, like an anxiety, like, I've never I because I never write it on a bus before. And then she says only. Yeah, only. Where is it going? And they're ignoring her. I still don't know where it's going. And then she finally just blows up and says, yeah, only where's the stupid, smelly bus going? And of course. Watch yourself, missy. We don't use that word, etc. but she was having this minor crisis there and the adults are completely oblivious about this. Right. And I think kids have that experience, right. Like, no one's understanding I'm falling apart here and you're not. You're not listening to me and you're not even paying attention. And then when I finally let it out, I get in trouble. Mhm.

Colleen AF Venable: [00:23:38] Yeah. Yeah. And I think that happens so much to kids. They feel like they don't have a voice. It's just their life is kind of being moved around. And she has

the voice that a lot of people wish they did have. There was a debate at first when, you know, because I don't use the word. I don't I feel even weird saying it out loud, which is ridiculous because I'm an adult. Stupid. Yeah. But we were like, oh, are we still going to call it the stupid smelly bus? And it was like, yeah, that is the level of emotion she has. She has to say stupid. She has to say she hates things. I would never put that in another children's book usually, but I think the only edition we did for this new edition was we made one line where she says, and then I used two words I wasn't supposed to use? Sure. Just to make sure that we know that this version of Judy, because back in the 90s, you said stupid, you said hate, and nobody ever would reprimand in a lot of schools, stupid is a bad word. You don't use that word, you get in trouble. So we wanted to make sure that that was addressed, that she knew this was bad, but she was so, so frustrated that it was the only way she could say it and be true to that emotion. Yeah. I love that scene. And I think honey Beame who did the art. I should give more credit to honey.

Colleen AF Venable: [00:24:46] She's fantastic. This is her very first project she's ever done. Really well. I can't believe it. Amazing and, you know, we talked about that scene and how it was like a kettle boiling, and you have to see her starting to, like, vibrate. And just the way she did those panels kind of exploding, and they start really small because Judy feels so small and it gets bigger and bigger until she bursts. And the colorist, whose name is Kiwi Bird. So there's actually really I would say there's four of us that make this book in terms of the physical object. I'm doing the words which I often after the first round of sketches, take out a lot of the words because not needed. Honey does the pencils and she does the inks, and then Kiwi goes in and actually colors them. And then we have a designer, Sylvia, that goes and does all the word balloons, which in this book, those word balloons are a person, they are a character. They are showing the emotions very clearly. And another thing you could do with graphic novels, you could show those emotions. I always love Scott McCloud as a great example in his book Understanding Comics, where he has a word balloon and it's got like kind of ice coming down off of it, right? It's like this shape with the icicles, and it says, oh, it's you. And I show this to kids at elementary schools. And I was like, how would you say this? Oh, it's you. They're like, no, it's oh, it's you, it's you.

Colleen AF Venable: [00:26:10] And just to have those like that coldness of that word balloon. And that's all you needed. Was that visual to tell you this person is not happy to see you? And I love that those balloons are amplifying every big emotion. And she has a big she's just full of big emotions like Judy is 90% emotion and maybe some water. I think we have water in our bodies too, but mostly emotion for Judy.

Dr. Dipesh Navsaria: [00:26:34] So in the passage I just read and what you just talked about there. I want to come to the controversies right around Judy Jones. Right. So she's often criticized for being a mouthy or rude young girl. Poor grammar, bad behavior. I mean, it's

hilarious reading the Amazon reviews of all these people saying my granddaughter doesn't speak correctly because of this book, and I think it should be banned, you know, and all. I mean, just it's like incredibly divisive, right? And for again, for folks who are not familiar examples of language. I wore my bestest hat I righted on a bus. Don't know where it's going. And then words like yes, stupid. Kids are pouring chocolate milk on other kids heads are hiding from your parents or adults, which is the entire second half of the book. And getting into all sorts of trouble. What would you say to a critic who says this book is a bad example for young children?

Colleen AF Venable: [00:27:38] I would say, talk to a kid who's read the book, and a lot of times kids love to point out her bad grammar. Yeah, it in some ways becomes a grammar exercise for children. She'll say like, oh, I ran over there and they're like, oh, you're supposed to say run! And like, they'll be so excited to feel like they're smarter than this character. Yeah. In terms of her doing bad things, every kid does bad things. Mhm. And the thing that I love about what we've been able to do with the graphic novel is we can show remorse on her face. We could show her, realizing that she went too far. We could show the people around her reacting to something she's doing. So again, we're giving that clue of like, hey, this actually isn't okay to do. But in the prose novel, it wasn't as clear. So it's just another way that the graphic novel I feel like was kind of Judy's meant to be in graphic novels in a lot of ways. Like, I love the originals, but I also love that this feels like just a expansion of the universe. And people have actually said, like, I'm liking the graphic novels because I could show her face and I could say to my kid, hey, what do you think she's feeling here? Do you think she thinks she should have said that out loud?

Colleen AF Venable: [00:28:46] But I do think I would be so shocked if I had kids, which I do not. And they were reading anything. I would be so excited. There are so many things in the world. There's video games, there's TV, there's, you know, kids are on TikTok when they're like basically in diapers. Like, I would be thrilled to have a kid reading these things and to be able to have those discussions with my kids and say like, hey, what would you do if you were scared of riding the bus? What would you do? Like, you know, if you felt like you were in danger, like, here's what calling 911 actually is. Here's why you shouldn't just do it when you have to go to the bathroom. And I think being an active parent, it gives the ability to have these discussions. Because when on earth would you have the discussion about not calling 911? Would you have to pee? Like that's not something that comes up very often. But I think it opens up. And I think it's just these parents that are very scared that anything is going to just ruin their child's plan. But kids are so much smarter than they give them credit for.

Dr. Dipesh Navsaria: [00:29:50] Yeah. And I think there's nuance in this. Like, I loved how you opened this conversation by saying, you know, she's not a good kid or a bad kid. She's an agent of chaos, right? She just is. Right. And, you know, after all this drama and I won't give it

away for people so they can enjoy, like, you know, the story and all, but you know, she's in trouble at the end. And the parents, of course, the adults are all lecturing her and all this stuff. And there's this moment, yeah, where the tears start coming down. And she says about the bus, right. Yeah. But there's meanies on that thing. And then there's this moment of understanding. Right. And then it's one of her parents who says, what if? And offers a solution that would work, right? There's this moment of like, ah, now her view and the parent view suddenly kind of comes together here. And I hope that the message that a child might get from this is, if you have a situation like this, right, there can be a moment where maybe this understanding will happen because, yeah, come on, you know, she was in trouble, right? And she shouldn't have done all those things. And sometimes I don't think we give kids credit, you know, for how smart they are about things?

Colleen AF Venable: [00:31:04] Yeah, absolutely. And I do think, you know, she always has consequences. There are consequences in these books to her actions. Yeah. Yes. She does the wrong thing, but she gets reprimanded. She talks it through with her teacher. She never remembers her real name. Yeah, because she's not paying attention when she says it the first time, and then she just decides I don't have to use your name. So Mrs. is got she has incredible amounts of patience, but she doesn't let things slide either. She's an incredible teacher. And that's a great example too of like how you would deal with someone in your classroom. And I think a lot of kids do that. You know, ADHD kids are like looking at this and being like, that was me. Yeah. Like, oh my gosh, I wish I had someone that would, you know, take that time. And I was Juni when I was a kid, I was always in trouble. I was always going to the principal's office. But there were always, you know, consequences. And I think having there be not just consequences, but then all the adults in her life are willing to think it through with her and be willing to see what the cause and effect was to get to that bizarre point that they're at with whatever calamity she's created. Yeah, and I do think that that is, again, such a great teaching moment.

Dr. Dipesh Navsaria: [00:32:15] The adults will come through true for you once they've tried everything else. Right? So yeah.

Colleen AF Venable: [00:32:20] Yeah, exactly.

Dr. Dipesh Navsaria: [00:32:22] Real quick last question here. What are you working on next?

Colleen AF Venable: [00:32:29] Oh, I am now working on book five. I will say I just signed up. I am up to book eight. We're going to definitely do at least eight graphic novels. I'm shocked. I got to meet Barbara Parks entire family. Unfortunately, she passed away a year ago. I wish I could have met her if I get a time machine. Me and Barbara were going to hang. And they are so happy with the graphic novels. And, having met them, they kind of said, I'm officially a

park. They're like, if you want to put park at your name, you could be a calling. A of animal park. So, yeah, it's again delightful to get to work on these. And I'm also working on Katie the cat sitter six. So I'm deep into two series. They're both very silly. Different age groups. So it's really great to switch from kind of my, like, early elementary school brain to the slightly older elementary school brain. And I'm also working on a teen book with Sally ride's widow, which is amazing and all about the love story of how Sally ride's widow and Sally got together when they were both semi-pro tennis players under Billie Jean King, which I was like, excuse me. What? Yeah so that's what I'm getting to work on.

Dr. Dipesh Navsaria: [00:33:41] I can't wait to read it.

Colleen AF Venable: [00:33:42] It's amazing. There's actually a fantastic documentary that just came out about Sally ride from National Geographic. And having known Tamm for these years, we've worked on this book. I just I was teared from 20s into that documentary. So yeah, I'm writing a lot of different things for different age groups.

Dr. Dipesh Navsaria: [00:34:00] Excellent. Well, thank you so much for this conversation. This was a delight to so many great insights and richness about how to think about Judy Jones and graphic novels and the whole process and all. Thank you for this book. And thanks for the conversation today.

Colleen AF Venable: [00:34:19] Thank you so much.

Dr. Dipesh Navsaria: [00:34:23] Welcome to today's 33rd page or something extra for you, our listeners. We spoke today a bit about the objections, perhaps to Junie B Jones. Some of it was around her behavior, but another objection that's come up over time is around how she speaks. In a 2007 article in The New York Times by Anna Jane Grossman, she's discussing this exact issue. And she summarizes for us, this spunky kindergartner, first grader in more recent volumes is prone to troublemaking, often calls people names, and isn't averse to talking back to her teachers. And though she is the narrator of the stories, she struggles with grammar. Her adverbs lack the suffix ly subject and object pronouns give her problems, as do possessives. She usually isn't able to conjugate irregular past tense verbs, and words like funnest and beautiful are the mainstays of her vocabulary. But Anna then goes on to actually interview a doctoral student at Rutgers University, Jill Ritson, who says Junie B's English is actually more complex and interesting than most realize, and possibly more quote unquote correct. I believe perfect grammar is any grammar that works, said Miss Rasen, whose paper on the series, You Are Not the Boss of My Words, was published in the journal Children and Libraries in 2005. Junie B is actually following the precise rules of English which she is not following are the exceptions. For example, she said, as adult English speakers, we know that the word run has an exception in the past tense and is therefore ran. But other verbs, you just

add ed, and she's following that rule to the letter, even though she's at an age where she has not yet been taught formal grammatical rules.

Dr. Dipesh Navsaria: [00:36:12] She just knows them. She also notes that the trend of language's evolution is towards this kind of regularization, which means Junie B might be teaching children the English of the future. But she said just because they read funnest doesn't mean that they'll learn to say that I've never heard a kid speak in a Yorkshire accent because they read *The Secret Garden* or say, have you any will? So maybe there's more to Johnny's style of speaking than we actually thought. And that's today's 33rd page. You've been listening to the Reach Out and Read podcast. Reach Out and Read is a non-profit organization that is the authoritative national voice for the positive effects of reading daily, and supports coaches and celebrates engaging in those language rich activities with young children. We're continually inspired by stories that encourage language literacy and early relational health. Visit us at reachoutandread.org to find out more. And don't forget to subscribe to our show wherever you listen to your podcasts. If you like what you hear, please leave us a review. Your feedback helps grow our podcast community and helps others that this podcast is worth listening to. Our show is a production of Reach Out and Read. Our producer is Jill Ruby. Lori Brooks is our Chief External Affairs Officer. Thank you to our founding sponsor, Boise Paper, for making a difference in local communities like ours. I'm your host, doctor Dipesh Navsaria. I look forward to spending time with you soon. And remember, books build better brains.