

An Interview with Eric and Natalie Yoder:

The father/daughter team behind the bestselling
One Minute Mysteries: 65 Short Mysteries You Solve With Math!

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You already tackled science in your previous book, *One Minute Mysteries: 65 Short Mysteries You Solve with Science!*, and now you've moved on to math. During the writing process, did you see any connections between science knowledge and math knowledge?

Eric: Some of the stories could have fit just as well in either book—such as one involving light speed, or conversions between Fahrenheit or Celsius—and the same was true of some of the stories in the science book. So the connection is definitely there. That's why you so often hear "math and science" almost as if it's one word when people are talking about education.

Natalie: The line between math and science is pretty thin. Learning the two together makes a lot of sense. I took chemistry last year and a lot of that is math; same thing with physics this year.

What was the most challenging part of writing this book?

Eric: To me, it was the challenge of making them true mysteries rather than just number problems. We wanted to avoid having them sound like those problems involving a train leaving Chicago going west at 60 miles per hour. The key to writing these—and I guess any mystery—is to first think of a reason why something has to be discovered—the McGuffin, as it's sometimes called. So it required us to think along certain lines, but once we got into thinking that way, we were able to come up with ideas. Thinking of sixty-five McGuffins is hard work no matter what the topic, though.

Natalie: We had to come up with a mix of some harder stories and some easier ones. That changed how we would write them. A lot of ideas either don't work at all and ended up getting tossed out, or you have the idea but the story doesn't unfold just right. Then you have to keep rewriting them until they do work.

Was there a specific area of mathematics that you most enjoyed writing about?

Eric: Some of my favorite stories don't involve doing much, if any, math at all. It's just knowing what strategy to apply in a certain situation—like the value of estimating. I also liked doing ones involving shortcuts, such as rules of multiplication or simplifying a calculation. It was really important to us that you didn't need a pencil and paper to answer all the problems.

Natalie: I really enjoyed writing and solving the math mysteries involving logic. I was never very good at the problems that asked to solve for "x", but thinking outside of the box was always an area of strength for me.

Since this is the second book in the series, what did each of you bring to the table during the writing process? Was it any different than writing the science book?

Eric: This time we had a better feel, going into it, how to structure the stories. Natalie was better at writing to the correct length. I tended to still write too much and then have to do a lot of cutting. Natalie brings authenticity in terms of how kids would react to comments or events.

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Natalie: Like the science book, there is a lot of drafting that happens and sometimes things just don't work out the way you planned. In this book, it was easier to find ways to not get stuck in the middle of a story.

What are your hopes for this book?

Eric: I hope it's useful for parents and teachers to try to show real-life uses of math, and also for the younger readers to see that there is a point to what they're learning. I know that many teachers and homeschoolers have used the science stories as homework and in-class assignments.

Natalie: I hope that this book will really help kids to think about math in a different way, so they can have fun with it.

How is life different after the first book?

Eric: We got a lot of nice feedback about the science book from parents, teachers and kids. People have said it is motivating them to try writing something they've been thinking about for a long time. It's been very satisfying to know we did something that has a lot of value for people.

Natalie: People heard about the book and would talk to me about it. There was a teacher at my school who never had me in his class, but he had an article about me and had me sign it. It shows how people hear about you when you do something like this.

What did you enjoy most about working together?

Eric: I'd say collaborating, sharing ideas, and working with what the other one has written to polish it into a finished story. I think working together actually is as good for building relationships as having fun together, maybe even better.

Natalie: If your idea didn't work out, there was someone else to help you out. There was also someone to celebrate with when our book received awards, and someone to support me as we did interviews around the nation.

Author Biographies:

Eric Yoder is a reporter at The Washington Post, a business writer and editor who has written, edited or contributed to numerous books. His first children's book in the One Minute Mystery series, *One Minute Mysteries: 65 Short Mysteries You Solve with Science!*, received numerous awards and acclaim from scientists, educators and mystery buffs alike. He shares his home with wife Patti, his co-author daughter Natalie and his younger daughter Valerie. He can be reached at Enc@ScienceNaturally.com.

Natalie Yoder is a high school junior whose favorite subjects are psychology, science, and photography. A sports enthusiast, she also enjoys writing, being with friends and family, and listening to music. She is excited about her second book and looks forward to more writing. She can be reached at Natalie@ScienceNaturally.com.

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