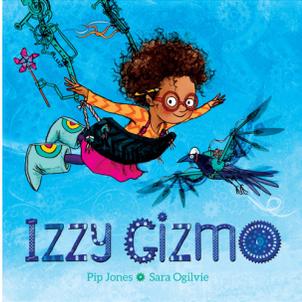


AUTHOR SPOTLIGHT



Pip Jones on *Izzy Gizmo*

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Izzy Gizmo’s inventions are marvelous, magnificent—and they often malfunction. But when she finds a crow with a broken wing, she just has to help! Izzy tries again and again to build a new pair of wings, but nothing is working. And that makes Izzy really angry! Can Izzy overcome her failures? Or is her friend destined to live as a crow who can’t fly?

We asked author Pip Jones about what sparked this feisty tale of determination, ingenuity, and friendship, and why *Izzy Gizmo* resonates with aspiring young inventors.

Q: Where did your inspiration for *Izzy Gizmo* come from?

A: I often procrastinate and allow my mind to wander, and I’m always having silly ideas for (really brilliant) machines. One morning I wrote a lengthy post about one of my ideas on Facebook (the Egg Tap—it would have required serious commitment from the government, if I’m completely honest, to install a nationwide network of underground pipes). I think I wrote about 850 words, going into all the details of how it would work and replying to various responses from friends. But then I read a comment from my friend Sarah (also an author, and she knows her stuff), who wrote something like: “OMG, Pip?! You’ve just written practically a day’s word count about an Egg Tap! DO. SOME. WORK.” So I laughed, logged out of Facebook... and wrote the first draft of *Izzy Gizmo*.

Q: Were you a little inventor as a child? If so, what were your favorite tools?

A: I was more a writer as a child. I’d decided by the age of seven that I wanted to be an author for a living. I spent all of my weekends hand-writing stories and poems. Possibly one of my best ever gifts was a typewriter, so I guess you could say that was my favorite ‘tool’. That said, my Grandad Bill was a bit of an inventor—he was always making funny little machines and gadgets in his garage and my sister and I loved being in there with him.

Q: STEM and STEAM are critical components of today’s education curriculum, as is the growing makerspace movement. Were you thinking about those trends when you wrote *Izzy Gizmo*?

A: Oh yes, it was part of it, of course—I have children who are experiencing more STEM/STEAM in school, and in life. But it was also Izzy’s personality that drove it. I loved the image I had in my mind of Izzy: a kid with her very own tool bag. Not the clichéd geeky inventor girl, and not a tomboy either—simply a girl who’s feisty and bold and real. It’s not at all unusual for little girls (as well as boys) to like hitting things with sticks, climbing trees, making Lego™ airplanes, and playing with tool kits—whether or not they wear skirts. I have two of those girls myself! It does seem crazy that side of all these normal little girls’ personalities has been under-represented. Not any more though. I think—and STEM/STEAM and the makerspace movement are already helping with that hugely.

Q: The theme of trial and error and failure runs throughout *Izzy Gizmo*. Did that theme come first or did it develop naturally while writing the story?

A: That theme was there from the outset, yes—for comedy value as much as anything else! I love that Izzy gets all enthused for making her crazy inventions, and then they go hilariously wrong, making her absolutely furious. Again, that’s just real life; it’s frustrating when things go wrong. Sara Ogilvie’s art is just incredible for capturing all that. I couldn’t possibly have imagined Izzy’s life better than Sara drew it.

Q: How important do you think the concept of failure (and trying again) is in children’s books?

A: Oh, very. You know, one of the most fascinating things I discovered when I had my own children is how very base tiny human beings are at the outset. You know how babies and toddlers HATE to share? Sharing is learned behavior, it’s not instinctive behavior. Part of our job as parents (apart from the obvious feeding them, clothing them, and keeping them safe) is to socialize children, and to encourage them to fulfill their potential. Unless we are faced with, say, starvation or danger, and our life depends on us pushing ourselves to the limit, it’s ever so natural to take the easy option and decide: “Nah. Tried it, can’t do it, too hard!” But of course, to actually fulfill our potential, we have to learn to push ourselves, which in some ways is challenging when you’re tiny and learning. So, yes, I think it’s an important message for little people!

Q: Izzy’s inventions are certainly wild! If you could invent anything beyond your wildest dreams, what would it be?

A: I’ve already invented it, I just haven’t made it yet: the Blink-Tastic. So, you stick a pinhead-sized miracle to your eyelid, and then you can just blink yourself anywhere in the world, at any moment (without crashing into anything, including other Blinkers). It’d be so handy—I’d never be late ever again. And I’d be able to just go and spend my lunch hour in the Maldives for some relaxation, or the edge of the Grand Canyon for some exhilaration, and then be back in plenty of time to pick the kids up from school. I mean, how great would that be?!

Q: Which is your favorite of Izzy’s failed creations? Why?

A: Izzy has lots of inventions, some of which don’t appear in the book—but from this story, it has to be the Swirly-Spagsonic. I find it funny that a little kid would

spend so much time building an absolutely colossal machine... just to eat spaghetti with!

Q: Izzy’s grandpa is a key figure in the book. Did your grandparents have any influence on your writing and creativity?

A: I’ve been very lucky—I knew all my grandparents into my adulthood and every one of them was wonderful and inspiring. In fact, I still have my paternal grandfather—Grandad Bill is 104! Certainly both of my grandfathers were creative people and I must have inherited all sorts of genes, as we all do. Grandad Bill is not published, but he loves to write, and he always encouraged me. A few years ago he handed me an envelope of everything of mine he’d kept since I was about six! That was lovely.

Q: The crow is another character we immediately fell in love with at Peachtree, but crows can often carry a bad rap in the animal world. Did you choose a crow for a reason?

A: Crows are so clever! I love them. They talk to you, and they look at you right in the eye. The crow wasn’t featured in the first draft of *Izzy Gizmo*—but he actually existed before she did. I imagined him a few years ago, when I’d been commissioned to write some books under a pen name. The stories—set in a magic school for animals—had been mapped out by the editors, and my job was to simply write the chapters. I never put him in those stories, but he was a very strong character for me—a crow, called Fixer, living in a ramshackle shed, mending old bits of machinery with his beak. In the second draft of *Izzy Gizmo*, I decided Izzy’s inventions weren’t the whole story, and she would like very much to have a friend, a sidekick. Then of course, who fluttered out of the depths of my memory? I’m so glad I’d squirreled Fixer away, because he and Izzy were just the perfect fit. I love them so much together.

Q: What do you hope readers take away from *Izzy Gizmo*?

A: The obvious message is one of perseverance and as I said, that’s really important. But I’d also like readers to feel warmed by Izzy’s relationship with her Grandpa, and to feel the strength of her friendship with Fixer. Grandpa gently pushes Izzy, but in the end it’s also the emotion she feels for the heartbroken bird that drives her to keep trying. I mean, just look at the pictures. I’m totally in awe

of how Sara injected so much sadness/frustration/determination/joy into a beaked creature! Of course Izzy was driven by that, who wouldn't be? So yes, what I really hope readers also take away from the book is what I put (albeit less obviously) at the heart of the story: love.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Pip Jones spent her childhood gobbling up books and dreaming about being an author. At nineteen, she began a career in journalism, and in 2014, she published her first book. She is most often found either writing, staring at the contents of the fridge, or herding her two children. She lives in London.

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REVIEWS

“This story of a girl engineer is sorely needed and has potential to develop and nourish readers’ interest in STEAM subjects. Additionally, themes of creativity and tenacity, together with the portrayal of a girl who’s allowed to show anger and frustration, make this a worthwhile read. Fun, with depth.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

“The bright pops of color make the artwork vivid and appealing. The text is full of challenging new words for young readers and the text rhymes, which allows the story to flow in a fun, inventive way. The theme of not giving up after a first, second, and third failure will resonate with readers of all ages. This book will inspire kids to get out there and to try new things.”

—*School Library Journal*


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