
AUTHOR SPOTLIGHT



GRETCHEN BRANDENBURG MCLELLAN

on *Mrs. McBee Leaves Room 3*

Q: What inspired you to write *Mrs. McBee Leaves Room 3*?

A: For many students, their sense of security is rooted in the geography of the school. I've had 5th grade students who were heading off to middle school ask me through tears if I would still be in my room the next year. They needed to know that this part of their lives was stable as the tectonic plates of their lives shifted. This connection to the geography of the school inspired me to write *Mrs. McBee Leaves Room 3*.

Teachers leave for so many reasons: to have babies, to return to the university, to move to a new school or away from the area, to change careers, to care for themselves or family members who are ill, or finally to retire. All of these moves are bittersweet.

Q: Have you known any Williams and Jamaikas in your teaching life? What would you like readers to take away from their experience?

A: There are usually Williams and Jamaikas in every classroom, the sensitive observer who has his own way of processing feelings and change, and the bossy organizer who has a master plan for everything and wants everyone to toe her line. There are students who take a long time to test the water and others who plunge right in. What I'd like them both to learn from each other is respect and compassion, and to honor each other's contribution to the whole. In an increasingly complex and multicultural world, we need to understand the limits of our own points of view and be open to expanding them.

Q: In your experience as a teacher, how do you help students make challenging transitions?

A: Children's literature is always a guide! Reading aloud a picture book that depicts children encountering the same challenges is my first go-to. I hope that *Mrs. McBee Leaves Room 3* will be a go-to book for teachers, too, when it is time to say goodbye. It will help children understand and name their feelings and learn that to be human is often to have conflicting emotions.

Q: Do you have any favorite memories from teaching?

A: There are too many to name. Every day with children has moments that are special. For a reading specialist, seeing students engrossed in a book by themselves or enjoying sharing a book with a reading buddy and hearing laughter or the words "I love this book! I love reading!" is always great.

Another kind of pivotal experience is feeling the magic of a perfectly selected read-aloud book transform a group of children. I loved hopping up and pulling a book from my shelf, knowing that YES, NOW! was the moment for this book.

Q: What is bittersweet to you?

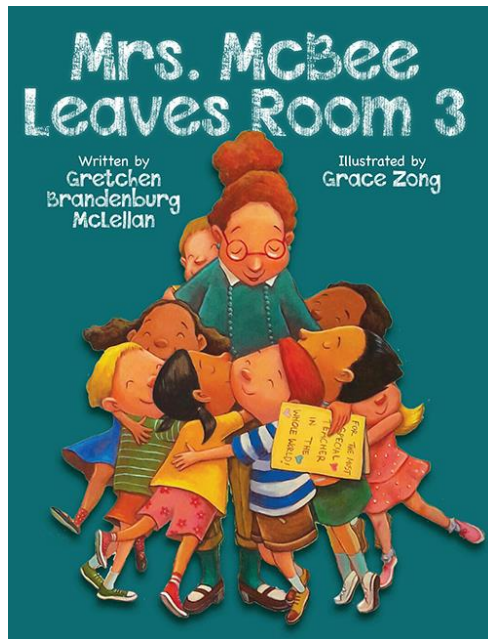
A: As a reading specialist, I am privileged to help students struggling with reading. My success always means that I no longer will be their teacher. It is always sad to say goodbye—but such a celebration too!

My decision to leave teaching and focus on my writing has been a bittersweet decision as well. I am lucky that my books will take me back to schools as a visiting author, keeping me close to children and their world.

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Gretchen Brandenburg McLellan knows the bittersweet of saying goodbye to a lot of people and places. She attended eight different schools in Virginia, Germany, and Florida before graduating from high school in Virginia and attending college in Germany, Virginia, and Oregon. She has taught toddlers through adults in Washington state, and most recently said goodbye to her own Room 3, leaving her career as a reading specialist to devote herself to writing for children.



MRS. MCBEE LEAVES ROOM 3

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