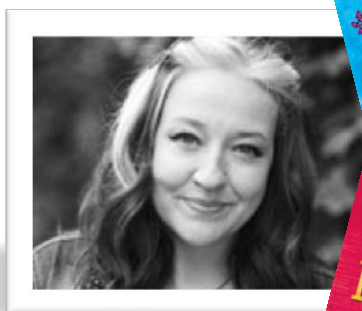


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# AUTHOR SPOTLIGHT

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## Pip Jones on *Izzy Gizmo* and *Izzy Gizmo and the Invention Convention*

### ABOUT THE BOOKS

In *Izzy Gizmo*, Izzy'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 cross! Can Izzy overcome her failures? Or is her friend destined to live as a crow who can't fly?

In *Izzy Gizmo and the Invention Convention*, Izzy has been invited to Technoff Isle's annual convention where the inventor of the best machine will win coveted admittance to the Genius Guild. Great inventors produce gadgets that can be put to good use, so Izzy Gizmo decides to build a recycling machine that mends broken tools. But with fearsome foe Abi von Lavish getting the best of her at every turn, can Izzy Gizmo and Fixer create the winning invention?

**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:** *Sara Ogilvie's illustrations bring Izzy's inventions to life. How did you feel when you first saw her interpretation of Izzy's creations?*

**A:** Ha! I have spoken to Sara about this actually. She told me I gave her some good challenges—not only because she had to draw machines that really look like they could do what they're supposed to, but she also often needed to visibly include various machine parts I mentioned in the text. She does such a brilliant job; every single one of the machines looks superbly quirky—just looking at the images, you can almost hear them whirring and clanking!

At the start of *Izzy Gizmo and the Invention Convention*, Izzy and Fixer are making a “So-Sew” to fix Grandpa’s jacket. My intention was that Izzy would take this along with her to the contest to use parts for her new creation, which she does—but Sara also created an incredible machine to actually take them to Technoff Isle, and through the illustrations you can see how Izzy has tinkered with this and used the So-Sew along the way. It’s genius.

**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 books. 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: *Izzy Gizmo's grandpa and her crow sidekick Fixer return in Izzy Gizmo and the Invention Convention, but you also introduce a brand-new group of young inventors. What, or who, inspired the personalities of Izzy's new peers?***

**A:** In this book, there's an ultimate message about renewable energy as well as make-do-and-mend, but I wanted the *Izzy Gizmo* books to also always have messages about kindness and thoughtfulness (not only in the emotional sense, but also in terms of working through a problem to a meaningful end) at the heart of them.

So actually, all the other competitors were designed to increase the impact of the core messages by representing the exact opposite.

Abi von Lavish is Izzy's main adversary. She wants to build a machine that creates sparkling jewels and she takes all the cogs, wires, and power before anyone else can. Abi represents greed, selfishness, and wastefulness. Snooty and mean, she has only one thing on her mind—she will win by any means possible.

Will Digg creates an "Opti-Logger." He and the machine he builds are a nod to fossil fuel, the destruction of nature, and pollution—the polar opposite of the clean,

green, useful machine Izzy eventually makes with Fixer's help.

Gillian Din builds a machine which I don't name in the book, but it's designed to play the drums all by itself! Shall we name it now? Let's call it the Robo-Boomatron! This represents all the noise there is around us all the time, which can divert us from thinking and reflecting on the important stuff we should be doing instead.

It was left to Sara to decide what Maxmillian Spout's machine would be—my only thought was that it should immediately disintegrate. She gave him a very cute flying machine, which fails immediately, and represents consumerism and the fact we constantly want all this pointless stuff that we end up throwing away.

All that said, I try to be careful with "messages" in picture books, in as much as I don't want to ram them home hard. I expect older children who think on it will likely make the connections I've explained here, but for other children, these kids are just a range of characters who make a lot of funny-looking, very silly machines—and that's just how it should be!

**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 lives in England.