

# FERGUS AND ZEKE

## ... A NOTE FROM KATE MESSNER ...



Five or six years ago, a little girl walked up to my table at the Rochester Children's Book Festival, looked up with big eyes, and said, "I just learned to read! Do you have a book I can read *all by myself*?" I didn't at the time, and I felt bad about that . . . like I'd let her down. When I got home, I couldn't stop thinking about that reader, so I went to my library and signed out a stack of books — the best stories I could find, published with very new readers in mind. I read piles and piles of them and started experimenting.

Confession time: I'm a lifelong field trip enthusiast. As a kid, I'd mark class field trip days with a fat Magic Marker circle on our refrigerator calendar. The idea that we'd be having school somewhere else for the whole entire day felt slightly illicit and incredibly exciting.

Fast-forward thirty or so years and you'll find me teaching middle school, still in love with field trips. In my fifteen years as a teacher, my students and I have explored the Adirondack woods on snowshoes, an eighteenth-century gunboat replica, and the river behind our school. I'm no longer teaching full-time, but field trips remain a staple of my writing life when it comes to research. Nothing makes me happier than having an entire day to get lost in a museum or research library.

That's how I fell in love with Fergus, a classroom mouse who's enthusiastic about everything from music class to story hour. How could he possibly stay behind when it's time for the big field trip to the natural history museum?

It's probably no surprise that my first step in writing *Fergus and Zeke* was planning a field trip for myself. I'd been to the American Museum of Natural History in New York City several times before, but I'd never imagined it from the point of view of a mouse.

The truth is, the museum exhibits that Fergus loves most in the story also tend to be my favorites (with the exception of the reptile hall — I'm rather fond of snakes, but felt that wouldn't have been believable from a rodent's perspective). I'm generally a rule follower, but who hasn't always wanted to get inside those glass cases in the mammal hall to pet the lions and gorillas? And wouldn't it be fun to climb on those dinosaur skeletons?

As a kid, I found that I learned best when I was doing something out of my seat. As a teacher, I always connected with those fidgety students who couldn't quite sit still during a lecture. I did my best to get us all up out of our seats — and out of the building — as often as possible. Those are the kinds of adventures that Fergus and Zeke have, not just in this first installment, but throughout the series. (They'll be experimenting at the school science fair in book two!)

I couldn't be more excited to send these active, enthusiastic characters out into the world. I'm looking forward to sharing Fergus and Zeke's adventures with readers — kids who love school, kids who live to explore, kids who don't like to sit still, and kids like that little girl at my book festival table who want books they can read

All best wishes,

*Kate Messner*

