

BIOGRAPHY

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

LAURA ATKINS is an author, teacher, and independent children's book editor with twenty years of editorial experience. *Sled Dog Dachshund* is her first published children's book. Laura has worked with various publishers, helping to produce winners of the Coretta Scott King Award and ALA Notable Book selections. She holds an MA in Children's Literature from the National Centre for Research in Children's Literature (NCRCL) at Roehampton University in London and an MFA in Writing for Children and Young Adults from Vermont College of Fine Arts.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

AN PHAN has spent his life in art. He creates advertising illustrations and concept art for many computer games from massively multiplayer online games to casual mobile titles. His art complements an active life of travel, as he explores new locations to further inspire his creativity. An studied art at Arena Multimedia in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, where he lives with his family.



AUTHOR Q&A



What was your inspiration for Sled Dog Dachshund?

Minted Prose had an idea for a story about a dachshund who is sure he can run in a sled race. I worked with the concept, did my own research about sled races, and developed Jasper as a character. I also watched a documentary about the sled racing in Alaska and read websites, learning about what a grueling race it can be. As I wrote, it became clearer to me that Jasper was going to learn about the joys of being part of a team, and his indomitable spirit would help them all to win.

You've edited dozens of books, many of them award winners.

How did that experience influence your own picture book debut?

Editing picture books helped me to have a strong sense of the form of the picture book. I knew about breaking the scenes down, almost as if watching a play. Examples would be using the page turns for dramatic effect and having really fun scenes to illustrate. The humorous content of the book made that easier as well. There's so much visual humor in the idea of a little dachshund being sure that he could race alongside the big dogs. But it was still definitely a learning experience. Editing and writing are very different. I appreciated the difficulty of creating a strong story, and about being on the other side of the editorial desk! I think it's helped me to be a better editor as well as a better writer.

Sled Dog Dachshund features the world's biggest sled dog race.

What sort of research was involved in your writing?

I read around, watched documentaries, and researched the logistics of the sled team and different positions. I thought about how much to have the book be based on facts, and how much to just have it be fun and playful. Lots of research went on behind the scenes. We thought about creating dog-friendly facts at the end. Imagine paw prints instead of bullet points. But it felt like the book wanted to be more fun and less educational. So kids who get caught up in the racing side of things can go off and dive in further.

If you could pick one thing, what would you like readers to take away from this story?

Mostly I want the readers to have fun reading and sharing the story with the person reading it to them. But there are some other underlying themes, like, while it can be fun to do things on your own, being part of a team can be great. That winning isn't the most important thing, though it's nice too. And I figure dog-loving kids will just have fun spending time in this all-dog world. Sorry, that wasn't one thing!

How do you feel this story is enhanced by the fact that the main characters are animals?

An interesting question. Originally this wasn't an all-dog world, and at first I really resisted the idea of changing it. But I came to understand how this made things simpler, and kept the focus on the main story. It was tricky to have humans and dogs, with dogs speaking to each other but not to the humans. This all-dog world helped the story to be more fun and focused.

Author's choice: Is there anything else you'd like to share with readers about the writing of Sled Dog Dachshund?

I have always liked dogs, and grown up with dogs in my life. But haven't been a dog owner myself. Since writing Sled Dog Dachshund my daughter and I have adopted a dog, which has totally changed our lives. At first I would have said turned it upside down! But I'm falling in love with Milly, and she's brought a lot of fun and silliness into our lives. So I now have an even deeper appreciation for the world of dog people. It's great to have a book that connects to the love—if retroactively.

