

To the wonderful readers of Massachusetts!

I was thrilled to hear that *11 Birthdays* won the Massachusetts Children's Book Award. I went to college in Massachusetts (at Tufts University), and lived in various parts of the state for a few years afterwards. I have such wonderful memories of my time there, which makes this award particularly special to me.

It should be no surprise that I loved to read growing up. I loved being able to escape into another world before heading back to the real one—you know, the one with homework and chores and pesky siblings in it! I wanted to give the next generation of readers the types of books that gave so much to me during those years. The fact that so many of you participated in the children's book award program by reading the selected books shows how much you love reading, too, which makes me very happy.

I'll tell you a little secret--every time I sit down to start writing another book, I get scared. What if the ideas don't come? What if it's not any good? What if my cat knocks iced tea onto the keyboard again and I lose 100 pages? But then I think of you guys, eager for new adventures, new opportunities to open your mind, to find characters you care about and identify with. To learn from their mistakes so you don't have to make them in real life. Those are the things I kept in mind when writing *11 Birthdays*. I basically set out to write a fun book about friendship, forgiveness, and SpongeBob Squarepants. Okay, so maybe SpongeBob snuck in there on his own. The hard part was finding creative ways to make each version of Amanda and Leo's 11th birthday different—to explore different themes each time through the different choices they made. But, hey, I'm always up for a challenge!

I enjoyed writing this blend of fantasy and reality so much that I wrote two “companion novels” to it—*Finally* (out now), and *13 Gifts* (out September 1st). I was glad to spend time with Amanda and Leo again whenever they appeared in the other books. They’ve started to feel like my own kids! (Don’t tell my *real* kids that, though! They might get jealous. ;o)

I hope you guys will keep reading, and will share your favorite books with your friends, especially those who may not have discovered the joys of falling into an imaginary world and coming out changed. Because what’s more fun than that?

All my very best wishes for a life full of books,

Wendy Mass