

# Kristin Levine

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May 28, 2015

Dear Children of Massachusetts:

I was so honored to learn that I had received the 2015 Massachusetts Children's Book Award for *The Lions of Little Rock*. It really made my day.

A little bit about me: when I was in the 4th, 5th and 6th grade, I didn't really like to write. Okay, so that's an understatement. I hated it! It was my least favorite subject. Everyone else had better ideas than me, everyone else was funnier than me and I was (and still am) a terrible speller.

But the summer after 7th grade I had the opportunity to take a writing workshop class through CTY, a program run by John Hopkins University. There I discovered something unexpected. I might not be a very good writer, but I am a really good reviser. And I am really good at taking feedback from other people and making changes to my drafts. To my surprise, I found that once I took the pressure off myself to be perfect, to get everything right the first time, I actually LOVED writing.

Like Marlee, who starts out thinking she is too shy to ever speak up in class or stand up for what she believes in, I found I was wrong about something important about myself. What a wonderful discovery!

I have to admit, though, that *Lions* was not an easy book to write. My kids were little, and I could only find time to write while they were napping. I decided since *Lions* was my second book, I didn't need to make an outline, only to realize that (at least for me) trying to write without a plan is a recipe for disaster. I wrote an entire first draft of *The Lions of Little Rock* where Marlee had no trouble talking - which is amazing, because without the idea of Marlee finding her voice there isn't much of a book at all.

But I kept at it. I got feedback from my editor and my family and friends, and kids like you. I made lots of changes. Sometimes I threw out 100 pages at a time. Sometimes I cut a character or subplot. And the story got strong and stronger, until finally I started to think, yeah, maybe, just maybe, this could really be a book.

If there's one thing I hope you take away from *Lions*, it's that change isn't easy, or fun, or fast, but it is possible - and sometimes it can even be marvelous. Thank you again for this honor. I wish all of you the very best. Happy reading!

Sincerely,

Kristin Levine