



Mary Pope Osborne

I grew up in the military. By the time I was 15 I had lived in Oklahoma, Austria, Florida, and four different U.S. Army posts in Virginia and North Carolina. Moving was never traumatic for me, partly, I think because I had very close and loving relationships with my parents, my twin brother, my younger brother, and my older sister.

But if moving was not traumatic, staying in one place was. When my dad finally retired to a small town in North Carolina, I nearly went crazy with boredom. I craved the adventure and changing scenery of our military life. Miraculously, one day I found these things literally only a block away—at the local community theater. From then on, I spent nearly every waking hour after school there, either acting or working backstage. When I stepped from the sunny street into that musty-smelling, dark little theater, all things seemed possible.

I went to study drama at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. In my junior year, I discovered an even greater realm of adventure and changing scenery: the world of mythology and comparative religion. So I became a religion major and learned as much as I could about other cultures.

After graduating from college in the early 1970s, I lived an intensely varied life. For a while I camped in a cave on the island of Crete. Then I joined up with a small band of European young people heading to “The East.” We traveled overland in a caravan of rickety vans through 16 Asian countries, including Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, and Nepal. We nearly lost our lives, first in an earthquake in northern Afghanistan and then in a riot in Kabul. My trip came to an abrupt halt in Kathmandu when I got blood poisoning. During the two weeks I spent in a missionary hospital there, I read all of the Tolkien trilogy. I would sleep, read, and look out the windows at the Himalayas. To this day my journey to “The East” is tangled up in my mind with Frodo’s adventures.

After I returned home and recovered from my illness, I promptly headed back into the real world. I worked as a window dresser in Carmel, California, as a medical assistant in Monterey, California, and as a Russian travel consultant in Washington, D. C. One night in Washington I attended the opening of a musical about Jesse James. From the balcony I fell in love with Will Osborne, the actor-musician playing Jesse. I loved his boots and his white cowboy hat; I loved how he sang and strummed the guitar. A year later, in New York City, we were married.



Thereafter, when I wasn't on the road with Will, I worked as a waitress in Greenwich Village, taught acting classes in a nursing home in the Bronx, was a bartender in Broadway theaters, and had a job as an assistant editor for children's magazine.

Then one day, out of the blue, I began writing a story about an 11-year-old girl in the South. The girl was a lot like me, and many of the incidents in the story were similar to happenings in my childhood. The first draft was crudely written, but it must have communicated something to an editor, because shortly after I finished, it became a young adult novel called *Run, Run, as Fast as You Can*. Finally I knew what I wanted to be when I grew up.

Now 17 years and 40 books later, I feel I'm one of the most fortunate people on Earth. I've been an elegant spider detective who plays jazz clarinet, and a small girl traveling on the back of Moonhorse. I've journeyed through Greek mythology, Norse mythology, medieval stories and American tall tales. I've "met" George Washington and Ben Franklin, and without even leaving my home I've traveled around the globe, learning about the religions of the world.

Most recently I've taken journeys through space in *The Magic Tree House*, visiting the times of dinosaurs, knights, mummies, pirates, and ninjas, and traveling to the rain forest, the Ice Age, the moon, a coral reef, the Wild West, Africa, and the Arctic.

The Magic Tree House has also whisked me to schools all over the country, and the contact I now have with children has brought overwhelming joy into my life. I love the letters I get from them and I love reading the countless *Magic Tree House* stories that they've written. I feel as if these kids and I are all exploring the creative process together, using our imaginations plus our reading and writing skills to take us wherever we want to go. This, I tell my small fellow authors, is true magic.

Mary Pope Osborne is the author of many highly acclaimed books for children and young adults, including novels, picture books, biographies, mysteries, and retellings of fairy tales, myths, and tall tales. She has recently completed serving two terms as president of the Author's Guild, the leading organizations for professional writers in the United States.



Suggested Activities for Books by Mary Pope Osborne:

A common thread throughout all of Mary Pope Osborne's books is travel. Use a world map and/or a United States map locate all the settings for her books.

Magic Tree House Books

1. Start with *Frog Creek, Pennsylvania*, home of the *Magic Tree House Books* or your own school and travel to various points of interest as you read this series.
2. Use Venn diagrams or data retrieval charts to organize people, places, and/or objects in the series.
3. Create a tree house reading area in your classroom. Use the book for authenticity.
4. After reading several books ask students to tell you the formula that Mary Pope Osborne uses to create her stories.

New books in the series are *Polar Bears Past Bedtime*, *Lion at Lunchtime*, and *Magic Tree House Visits America*. Check you local bookstore for copies or join the club that is available in each copy of the book.

For the voracious reader or the child who needs more books like *Magic Tree House* books, look in your library for the subject headline "Time Travel-Fiction." The following titles or series would have similar appeal to those who like the series.

2095. The Time Warp Trio. Jon Scieszka. Puffin Books. 1997. ISBN 0140371915.

Jumanii. Chris Van Allsburg. Houghton Mifflin Co. 1995. ISBN 0395754119.

Knights of the Kitchen Table. The Time Warp Trio. Jon Scieszka. Puffin Books. 1994. ISBN 0140346031.

The Good, the Bad, and the Goofy. The Time Warp Trio. Jon Scieszka. Puffin Books. 1993. ISBN 0140361707.

The Magic School Bus Series. Joanna Cole. Scholastic Trade.

The Not-So-Jolly Roger. The Time Warp Trio. Jon Scieszka. Puffin Books. 1993. ISBN 0140346848.

Time Train. Paul Fleischman. A Charlotte Zolotow Book. 1991. ISBN 006443351X.



Spider Kane Series

Spider Kane and Mysteries Under the May-Apple and *Mystery at Jumbo Nightcrawler's* are two mystery books with Spider Kane, insect detective. Children who normally are not fond of mysteries will enjoy these two books. Great for reading aloud, these two books can stand alone or be read in order.

1. Use this series for starting an insect unit. Try to find all the insects mentioned in the books in nature (a spring or fall activity) or your library insect section.
2. Use these two books as a springboard for other nature fiction writers

The following titles, series, or authors would have similar appeal to those who like the series.

All Upon a Sidewalk. Jean Craighead George. E. P. Dutton. 1974. ISBN 0525254625.

All Upon a Stone. Jean Craighead George. Ty Crowell Co. 1971. ISBN 0690055323.

The Fire Bug Connection: An Ecological Mystery. Jean Craighead George. Harpercollins Juvenile Books. 1993. ISBN 0060214902.

The Moon of the Monarch Butterflies. Jean Craighead George. Harpercollins Juvenile Books. 1993. ISBN 0690555555.

Shoebag Returns. Mary James (M. E. Kerr) . Scholastic. 1996. ISBN 0590487116.

Shoebag. Mary James (M. E. Kerr). Scholastic. 1992. ISBN 0590430300.

The Tarantula in My Purse and 172 Other Wild Pets. Jean Craighead George. Harpercrest. 1996. ISBN 0060236272.

American Tall Tales; Mermaid Tales from Around the World; Favorite Greek Myths

1. Mary Pope Osborne has done extensive research in the books mentioned above. Take time to read the introductions and the author's and artist's notes to students. It will give students many insights and facts that they might have missed in their first readings or exposure.
2. Use a graphic organizer to compare stories within each title.
3. Use world and United States maps to find all countries and states where the stories take place.



4. Choose a character from one of these stories. Describe their strengths and weakness; their attitude towards life. Are they happy or sad, shy or outgoing; what are their personalities like. If you could be one of these characters, which one would you be and why? Do you dislike any of these characters? Which one do you dislike and why?
5. Write a passage from a character's point of view.
6. Change or alter the character to show how this would change his or her point of view.
7. Take a close look at the art work in these three books. Troy Howell illustrated *Favorite Greek Myths* and *Mermaid Tales From Around the World*. Compare his art work to that of Michael McCurdy who did wood engravings for *American Tall Tales*. Why do you think Osborne choose these illustrators?
8. Pick a tall tale and retell it to your class or a group of younger students.
9. Take a real life incident and make it into a tall tale. "On the way to school..."