



Jerry Pallotta & Ralph Masiello

About the Author

Jerry Pallotta grew up in Medford, Massachusetts, and summered in the seaside town of Scituate, Massachusetts. As some of his books suggest, he has long been fascinated with the ocean and its creatures. A graduate of Georgetown University and a former insurance broker, Jerry is now a full-time children's author.

Writing for young readers arose from Jerry's experiences reading and telling stories to his own children. Noting that most alphabet books lack text, in 1986 Jerry wrote *The Ocean Alphabet Book*, which immediately became the bestselling book at the New England Aquarium. This first book, like his later work *Going Lobstering*, was inspired by his love of the ocean and his summer jobs as a mosser (harvester of seaweed), a lobsterer, and a dragger (a commercial fisherman who drags huge nets). *Going Lobstering* is an accurate, meticulously illustrated story of two children's experiences lobstering for the first time.

Jerry's careful research brings him in contact with some of the world's finest scientists, and he has been known to spend hours discussing entomology and undiscovered species of frogs of the rain forests of the Amazon with members of Harvard University's herpetology department. Jerry's text is remarkable for its clarity, and his own children help keep his style age-appropriate. He works with a variety of outstanding illustrators, choosing them with care, book by book, and always working with them throughout the project.

Jerry has become a regular speaker at elementary schools, libraries, and conferences across the country, sharing the experiences that have enriched his books and garnering new insights and questions from the young minds of his audience.

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Suggested Activities for Books by Jerry Pallotta

1. Ask the students, "What do you notice about the plants and/or animals that Jerry Pallotta chooses for each letter of the alphabet in his books?"
2. Make an alphabet book as the culminating activity of a research project.
3. Pallotta's books were illustrated by several different artists. Ask the students to compare styles. Students might want to imitate a style to illustrate their own book.
4. As a prereading activity for *The Dinosaur Alphabet Book*, take your students on a guided imagery journey. Turn off the lights. Direct the children to put their heads down on their desks. Read the following:

Close your eyes. Take a slow, deep breath and RELAX.
Picture yourself going back in time to the land of the dinosaurs.
You are surrounded by a gigantic green jungle.
The ground is quivering beneath your feet.
You hear the swish of the plants as something large brushes against the leaves.
When you look over your shoulder, you see a tree trunk.
It has sharp looking roots coming out of the bottom. The tree trunk is moving.
Your eye follows the tree trunk as it lifts off the ground.
You see a large dark brown head poking out of the treetops.
Its jaws are munching a large branch.
It's a Diplodocus. You're glad that it is not a meat eater.
Look at the Tylosaurus in the waters of a lake just ahead.
Observe him as he swishes his tail and moves slowly through the deep, blue-gray water.
As you reach the lake, feel the water splash on your face from the Tylosaurus's tail swishing through the water.
Take a look at his powerful jaws--like those of a crocodile--as he wades out deeper into the water.
See yourself moving through time back to the present.
See yourself coming back to your seat in the classroom.
When I count to ten, open your eyes.
5. Create a classroom chart listing characteristics of Pallotta's books across the top, such as color illustrations, one letter per page, upper and lower case letters, borders, etc. Along the left-hand side, the students can list the books that they read and then put an X under each the characteristic that exists in a specific book.
6. Use the copyright page and ask the children to put the books in chronological order by publication date.
7. What other plants or animals could be used for each letter of the alphabet in a book? Brainstorm new names. Make a class book.
8. Gossip Game: Divide the class into two teams. The teacher chooses words from one of the alphabet books and whispers it to the first person in a line. Each student must whisper the word to the person behind him or her without it being heard by anyone else. Points are given to the team having the correct word announced by the person at the end of the line. A second point can be earned if a team member can give a correct definition or description of the word.



9. After reading *The Victory Garden Alphabet Book*, read *Stone Soup*. Ask students to bring in a wide variety of vegetables and to sample them raw. Make stone soup and give students a taste. Create a bar graph or pie graph showing the favorite vegetables of students in the class. Separate charts may be made for raw vegetables and cooked vegetables.
10. Use Pallotta's information about a plant or an animal to compose one or more poems. The class can select poems for choral reading.
11. ESL students can work alone or with others to write the names of the animals and plants in their own languages. After reading *The Icky Bug Counting Book*, students may say the numbers in their languages.
12. Classify the plants and animals in Pallotta's books according to habitat. Design a mural for each habitat including the plants and animals.
13. Ask students to make Big Books, pop-ups, and/or flap books. Tape record them for another class.
14. Compare Pallotta's books to other alphabet books.

Suggested Activities for Books Illustrated by Ralph Masiello

Both the author and the illustrator strongly emphasize the accuracy of information included in the books. They even obtained a photocopy of a particular frog's feet from a scientist who had a preserved specimen in his laboratory. Masiello has also illustrated the tongue of one of the reptiles to cover three pages to indicate its relative size.

1. Ask students to examine books such as the *Eye Witness Visual Dictionaries-- Dinosaurs*, other *Eye Witness* books, or books that include large, clear, color photographs such as *A Gathering of Garter Snakes* and others by Bianca Lavies. The students can use these books to help them illustrate their own alphabet books on topics that relate to the curriculum.
2. Use books such as Joanna Cole's *Large as Life Daytime Animals* and *Large as Life Nighttime Animals* that contain life-size illustrations by Kenneth Lilly as examples and ask students to create books that are accurate in size as well as detail.
3. Use books such as the *Zoobooks*, which include illustrations of the bones and muscles of animals, as examples for students to use as they produce illustrations that show the insides of things with which they are familiar. Ask students to exchange their drawings. Then they can draw what they think the objects look like on the outside.
4. Compare the techniques of other illustrators who also illustrate nature books, such as Jim Arnosky and Kenneth Lilly, with the techniques used by Masiello. Also examine those books that are illustrated with large colorful photographs. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of using drawings versus using photographs.
5. Make an alphabet chart using real items and direct students to draw those items to make their own alphabet books.



6. Play the Memory Game of items on a tray or table. Include items from alphabet books by Masiello, by other authors, or by the students. Students can use the alphabet as a clue to remember what they have seen.
7. Use illustrations of items for each letter of the alphabet. Ask students to put them in alphabetical order.
8. Make a mural or a bulletin board of a topic that students are studying. Use items representing each letter of the alphabet in the style of *Animalia* by Graham Base, or use hidden picture books and ask other students to try to identify the items using the alphabet for clues.
9. Compare the books illustrated by Masiello on the basis of copyright and ask students to compare and contrast the style of illustrations used over the time period.
10. Compare and contrast related books illustrated by Masiello such as *The Icky Bug Alphabet Book*, *The Icky Bug Counting Book*, *The Frog Alphabet*, *The Yucky Reptile Alphabet*, *The Extinct Alphabet*, and *The Dinosaur Alphabet*. Are there overlaps in the illustrations selected? Why would he choose certain illustrations for one book and not for another?
11. Published children's picture books contain 36 pages and the alphabet is 26 letters long. Ask students how the illustrators use the extra pages to make the books complete.
12. Discuss what the illustrator did when there was no animal that was appropriate for a specific letter? How could the students solve that problem in alphabet books that they would be making?
13. Examine other alphabet books that use creative illustrations to show letters or numbers, such as *Eye Spy* by Joy Hulme, *Animalia* by Graham Base, and *26 Letters and 99 Cents* by Tana Hoban.

Activities for Specific Books

Teacher's Note: Any of these books can be the basis for a class research project; use both facts and illustration in the books as springboards.

The Dinosaur Alphabet Book

1. No one knows what dinosaur skin looked like or how it was colored. Examine how Masiello colored the dinosaurs. Let students draw dinosaurs in crayon or colored pencils using color and imaginative patterns.

The Frog Book

1. In three drawings, show the metamorphosis of a frog from egg to tadpole to frog.
2. Model a frog out of plasticene or clay.
3. Draw or paint a frog in its natural habitat.

The Icky Bug Alphabet Book

1. Draw insects with correct parts. Add fanciful patterns, colors, and habitats.