

ABOUT

the Author



JEN BRYANT has written several books for young readers, including *Music for the End of Time* (Eerdmans) and *Pieces of Georgia* (Random House). She received acclaim for *The Trial* (Random House), a novel-in-verse. Jen lives in Pennsylvania.

Jen says that William Carlos Williams is important because he turned everyday things into poetry. “In his poems,” she says, “readers can find fire trucks, cats, flowerpots, plums, babies, construction workers, and refrigerators.”



the Illustrator



MELISSA SWEET has illustrated several books, including *The Boy Who Drew Birds: A Story of John James Audubon* and *Tupelo Rides the Rails. Carmine: A Little More Red*, which she also illustrated, won the *New York Times* Best Illustrated Book Award (all three are Houghton Mifflin Books). She lives in Maine.

To capture the magic of William Carlos Williams’s poetry, Melissa made collages using covers from old books. “The book covers became my canvas,” She says. “I took a book cover, ripped it off, and painted more.”

A RIVER OF WORDS

Written by Jen Bryant
Illustrated by Melissa Sweet

Hardcover ISBN: 978-0-8028-5302-8 ♦ \$17.00

9" x 10" ♦ 34 pages ♦ Ages 7 and up
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If you have any suggestions for using *A River of Words* with young readers, we would be happy to hear from you.

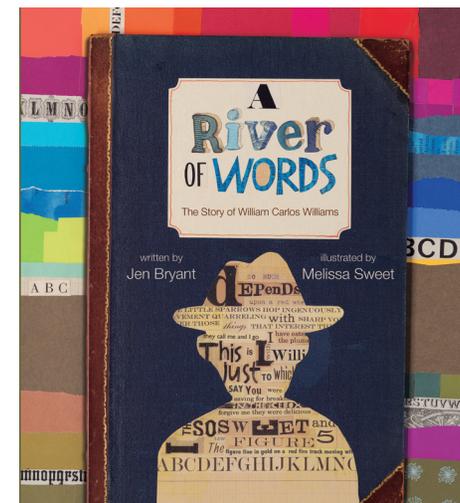
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An imprint of Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

A RIVER OF WORDS

Written by Jen Bryant
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Willie tried writing a new way. . . Now when he wrote poems, he felt as free as the Passaic River as it rushed to the falls. Willie’s notebooks filled up, one after another.

THEMATIC CONNECTIONS

- ♦ Writing and poetry
- ♦ Art
- ♦ Responsibility
- ♦ Medicine and healing
- ♦ Dreams
- ♦ Independent thinking

Eerdmans Books for Young Readers
Discussion Guide

VOCABULARY

Look up the following terms in a reference book: torrent, frustrated, rhythms, rhymes, ordinary, literature, delivered, prescriptions.



THINGS TO THINK ABOUT BEFORE READING THE BOOK

1. Read the title of the book and study the cover illustrations. What do you think the title *A River of Words* might mean? How important do you think words are to the person on the cover?
2. Do you think everyday things are beautiful? Think about something you see almost every day. What makes it special? How might an artist or a poet see the same thing?
3. Read the poems on the first pages of the book. Are they different from other poems you have read? If so, how? What do you like best about these poems?
4. Think of a doctor you have visited or heard about. What was he or she like? Imagine that the doctor also made art or wrote poems or short stories. What kind of art or poetry would the doctor create?



QUESTIONS TO REFLECT ON AFTER READING THE BOOK

1. Describe what William Carlos Williams is like as a child. Think about ways that you

are like young Willie. Do you like some of the same things he likes?

2. Why does Willie decide to write poems about ordinary things? Do you think the ordinary things Willie writes about — “plums, wheelbarrows, and weeds, fire engines, children, and trees” — are good subjects for poems? Why or why not?

3. Willie decides to become a doctor even though he would rather spend his time writing poetry. Why does he make this decision? Imagine that you had to make a decision that might make it hard for you to do something you love. Do you think you would make the same choice Willie does? Why?

4. The harder Willie’s studies get, the more he enjoys spending time with his friends. Why do you think these friends mean so much to Willie?

5. After he becomes a doctor, how important is poetry to Willie? Do you think he will keep writing poems after the book ends?

6. The illustrations in the book include both pictures and words. Why do you think the illustrator uses words in her illustrations? What do the illustrations tell you about what words and poetry mean to Willie?

7. Read the author’s note at the end of the book. What does the author tell you about the way William Carlos Williams wrote poems? Read the poems on the last two pages. In your opinion, which poem best shows what the author says about Williams’s poetry?

ACTIVITIES

1. Write a poem about something that you see almost every day. First, think of an ordinary object. What is this object like? How does it make you feel? Write down words you think of when you think about the object. Use these words to write your poem.

2. Use library or online sources to research William Carlos Williams’s poetry. Find out what people thought about his poems when he wrote them. What do people think of Williams’s poetry today? How has Williams’s poetry influenced other poets? Present your findings to the class.

3. Melissa Sweet, the illustrator of this book, made collages by combining words and pictures from old books with her own paintings. Make a collage to illustrate one of the poems in the book. Look in magazines and newspapers for pictures and words that make you think of the poem. Cut them out and paste them together on a piece of paper. Add drawings and paintings of your own.

4. Plan and give a poetry reading in your class. Start with the poems in the book. With your teacher’s help, find several more of William Carlos Williams’s shorter poems. In a group, choose who will read each poem and practice reading them out loud. Then, give your poetry reading for the class. You might want to play music during the reading.