



Dav pilkey

**Teachingbooks.net Original In-depth
Author Interview**

Dav Pilkey, interviewed on February 28, 2014.

TEACHINGBOOKS: Share a little bit about what you were like growing up.

DAV PILKEY: I was a bit of a misfit as a kid. I had ADHD, dyslexia, and behavior issues that usually resulted in my spending a great deal of time out in the hallway.

TEACHINGBOOKS: How did your family respond to you being a “misfit?”

DAV PILKEY: My parents wanted me to fit in, of course (so did I), but they were very supportive of me even when I didn't. I always felt like I had a safe place to come home to, where I was encouraged and loved. It was the total opposite of school.

TEACHINGBOOKS: Did you doodle?

DAV PILKEY: Yes. Especially when I was alone in the hallway at school. That's where I taught myself to draw and make comic books.

TEACHINGBOOKS: Do you still doodle and make non-book art?

DAV PILKEY: Yes. I am also very interested in music, especially songs from the 1920's and 1930's. So when I'm not working on a book, I can usually be found plinking away at my ukulele.

TEACHINGBOOKS: How do you use your childhood as inspiration for humor in your stories?

DAV PILKEY: My childhood antics are the inspiration behind the two class-clown “stars” of the Captain Underpants series: George and Harold. Back then, I was usually sitting in the hallway because I'd been disrupting the class, trying to entertain everyone and make my friends laugh, just like George and Harold.

TEACHINGBOOKS: What led to the inspiration of Captain Underpants? Why “underpants?”

DAV PILKEY: When I was in 2nd grade, a teacher said “underpants” in class one day, and the whole room erupted with laughter. I realized it was comedy gold for the under 10 crowd—my classmates—so I appropriated it. I began drawing Captain Underpants shortly thereafter.

TEACHINGBOOKS: Why do you suppose *The Adventures of Captain Underpants* and its sequels are so popular?

DAV PILKEY: I think kids respond to the humor and the kid-power themes.

TEACHINGBOOKS: George and Harold narrate your books. Do you sometimes feel that you are they, and vice versa?

DAV PILKEY: Definitely. George and Harold are more confident versions of me when I was a kid. I think their friendship is what inspires that confidence.

TEACHINGBOOKS: How would you describe their personalities, antics, and/or motivations?

DAV PILKEY: George and Harold are not really driven by anything too complex. They're just two fun-loving kids who are stuck in a boring school with mean teachers. I think their antics are just a survival technique, really.

TEACHINGBOOKS: *Captain Underpants and the Tyrannical Retaliation of the Turbo Toilet 2000* is out (August 2014). Anything you'd like to share about this specific adventure?

DAV PILKEY: It's exciting for me, because the Turbo Toilet 2000 is my favorite villain in the series. He's a giant, hulking thug—and he's very fun to draw. I'd been wanting to bring him back for a long time, and this book gave me a chance to do that—*twice*.

TEACHINGBOOKS: Captain Underpants is often on banned/challenged book lists. How do you feel about that?

DAV PILKEY: The reason the books are banned often mystifies me. It's usually something like “offensive language” (the series actually contains NO profanity) or being “unsuited to age group” (the only thing that might be too advanced is the vocabulary, which is actually much higher than what is typical for 7- to 10-year-olds).

TEACHINGBOOKS: Captain Underpants is often credited with encouraging boys to read. How do you feel about that?

DAV PILKEY: I don't think the books are gender specific. I hope that I have created a series that will give any reader a positive experience with reading, which unfortunately, I didn't have as a child.

TEACHINGBOOKS: *The Paperboy* (a Caldecott Honor) is quite different than *Captain Underpants*. What would you like to share about the inspiration and motivation to write and illustrate this book?

DAV PILKEY: The book is based on my own experience as a paperboy. I loved the feeling of independence that came when I rode my bike around our neighborhood on chilly weekend mornings while the rest of the world was asleep.

TEACHINGBOOKS: We are excited to see that your *Ricky Ricotta* series is being re-issued with all new full-color artwork by Dan Santat. Can you tell us something about where you got the idea for that series?

DAV PILKEY: The series was inspired by my childhood love for robots. I was always trying to build one (which usually involved me duct-taping golf clubs and cassette players to a vacuum cleaner).

Meeting a kid in Canada who was a big fan of the series inspired the new editions. He'd been waiting in line for an autograph, and he refused to leave until I promised him that I would write more *Ricky Ricotta* books. I tried to be vague, but he wouldn't accept it. He made me look him in the eye and PROMISE to write more. So I did.

TEACHINGBOOKS: What is a typical workday like for Dav Pilkey?

DAV PILKEY: It's usually ten to twelve hours of sitting (either drawing at a table or writing on a computer). Mentally, it's very challenging and stimulating. Physically, it's not so good for me. I try to break up each day with some activity that gets me moving.

TEACHINGBOOKS: What do you do when you got stuck writing or illustrating a book?

DAV PILKEY: I try to get out of my studio and take a walk, or kayak. Just getting out in nature and clearing my head seems to "unstick" me.

TEACHINGBOOKS: What do you like to tell teachers and librarians?

DAV PILKEY: Thank you.

TEACHINGBOOKS: What do you like to tell students?

DAV PILKEY: I tell them about my challenges with ADHD and dyslexia and how those things can sometimes be positive because they help you to see the world differently. I

love to show them pictures of remarkable people (Albert Einstein, Thomas Edison, Whoopi Goldberg, John Lennon, Muhammad Ali, Andy Warhol, etc.), who became successful despite having challenges like I did.

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