



A Note to Teachers from Author David A. Adler

Why did you decide to write the Cam Jansen books?

"I had been a math teacher in the New York City school system and was just beginning a child care leave. My first son had been born and I planned to stay home and take care of him while my wife returned to her work as a school psychologist. I had already written a few books, but I wanted to work on a series. I wanted to create a character young readers would want to read about again and again. I remembered a classmate in first and second grade with a great memory. It was rumored he had a photographic memory. The character Cam Jansen began with him. I also remembered the trouble I had when I first learned to read, the difficulty I had with the books meant to follow the Dick and Jane series. It was too big a leap for me. Even in the late 1970s, when my first son was born, there were still very few books between the easy-to-reads and the eight-to-twelves. Somehow, children were expected to make that leap. For some, it was no problem. For me and many others, it was. The Cam Jansen books (not the Young Cam Jansens) are transitional readers, books for children 'in transit,' from easy-to-reads to middle-grade novels."

What makes the Cam Jansen books transitional readers?

"The Cams are not simply chapter books with easy reading levels. Children who are just beginning to read on their own, read slowly. They read every word. But they don't think slowly. We can't ask them to speed up their reading, so to keep their attention it's necessary to keep the story moving. The Cams move quickly. Something is always happening. Characters are introduced through dialogue and plot. Scenes are set in just a few words."

Why did you make the Cams mysteries?

"Comprehension is a real problem with beginning readers. One of my sons once asked me about a book he had just read, 'What's it about?' He read every word of the book and understood none of it. He was too busy sounding out the words to pay any attention to what he was reading. Mysteries are perfect for beginning readers. In the Cams, the clues Cam remembers at the end of the books, the clues that solve the mysteries, are there for the reader, too. Cam's readers, hopefully, are alert. They try to find the clues and solve the mystery before Cam does."

Did your years as a math teacher influence your writing in any way?

"I approach my Cam Jansen mysteries as math problems. First I set up the problem—to create a mystery that will be solved with visual clues. Then I go about solving it."

Why did you decide to make Cam a girl?

"I like to write against stereotypes. Cam, as a girl, is curious and assertive, just as many girls really are. But that's not their stereotype. It's my hope that the current generation of readers will be open to treat people as individuals, whatever their gender, race, religion, or age."

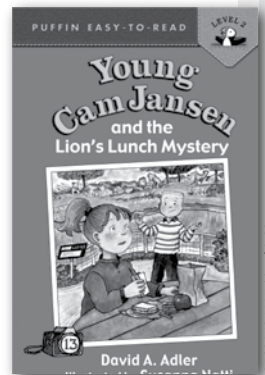
Are Cam and Eric based on children you've known?

"Cam is based on a friend of mine from elementary school. Eric is based on me. When I wrote the first of the Cam Jansen mysteries I thought children would identify with timid Eric. I was wrong. I've been told that most children who read the books see themselves as the smart, assertive Cam."

For more information about David A. Adler, downloadable classroom activity sheets, a teacher's guide to the Cam Jansen series, photographic memory quizzes for your students and more, visit www.davidaadler.com



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