



An Interview with Todd Parr

Little, Brown: How do you make kids feel good about themselves?

Todd: I start by sharing *It's Okay to be Different* because it best describes what I do, which is empower kids to feel good about themselves. I remind them that everyone is different and encourage them to be kind to one another.

Little, Brown: How did you develop your distinctive style?

Todd: Early on, I didn't have the confidence to believe I was an artist, so I didn't pursue it. In later years, I decided that it was something I really wanted to do. I finally said to myself, "I don't care what anyone else thinks." In the beginning, people didn't get my art. "Where are the pastels? What are these funky lines?" People were skeptical of my approach to art, but the messages of positivity seemed so natural to me. It was good that I was so naïve. It's taken a number of years to get to the point where people really get what I do and to earn my place on the bookshelf.

Little, Brown: Why are your characters all different colors?

Todd: I like bright colors and like to use them to show how we are all different.

Little, Brown: What do you want kids to take away from your books?

Todd: Be imaginative! Be kind! Feel good about yourself!

Little, Brown: What are some ways you would suggest teachers and librarians use your books?

Todd: My books can be used to inspire kids to create their own versions of my themes. For example, teachers can use *The Feel Good Book* to show students how people feel differently about the same things. The class could create a list of things that make them feel good. And story time is not quiet time with my books. I interact with the kids, and draw them into what the characters are doing by asking questions. I like to keep them engaged.

Little, Brown: You frequently talk about your grandmother reading to you at night. What books do you recall?

Todd: *Go, Dog. Go!*, *Are You my Mother?*, *Green Eggs and Ham*. She'd read them over and over and over. There was another book I loved *Three Billy Goats Gruff* because it featured a troll who lived under a bridge. I was fascinated that a whole world existed under a bridge!

Little, Brown: How do your books help build a sense of empathy?

Todd: They help kids recognize the differences in everyone. I simplify and celebrate those things that make everyone unique and different. I remind kids that it's okay to have wheels or glasses or to be challenged. We all struggle with different things.

