

My Dog Ate My Book Report

Episode Two Transcript

Brandon

Welcome to My Dog Ate My Book Report, a podcast where two weirdo thirtysomethings take turns introducing each other to a formative book from childhood the other has never read. I'm Brandon (he/him), and, uh, Wren: I've decided to run away from home and I've chosen you to accompany me.

Wren

You only want me to come with you because I have twenty-three whole dollars.

Brandon

That's correct. I've got like five bucks.

(Music comes in: snippet from Valley of the Drakes, licensed from Epidemic Sound)

Brandon

So, From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler, which I'll probably just call, like, Mixed-Up Files or something.

Wren

I appreciate a long title. I think that's fun and whimsical. I just don't want to type it out or say it every time.

Brandon

Yeah, it's a 1967 novel, written and illustrated by E.L. Konigsburg. It was one of her first. It's the story of Claudia and Jamie Kincaid, who ran away from home to live in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. While there, they discover Angel, a statuette of unconfirmed provenance, and determine that they will solve the mystery themselves. I don't think there are any content warnings for the book, except for maybe, I don't know, learning that Michelangelo is not just a Ninja Turtle.

Wren

I thought about it. I feel like if people are troubled with themes of homelessness, it could be seen as sort of making light of that a little bit. But that's as far as I got in terms of thinking about what could be problematic about this book. I don't know, entitled white Connecticut kids content warning?

Brandon

Touching a bunch of stuff that you're not supposed to touch at a museum. I...even when I was younger, I did have a certain horror at what they were doing.

Wren

Have you been to the Metropolitan Museum of Art?

Brandon

I actually have not, sadly. I've spent very little time ever in New York City at all. And and what little time I did have I did not spend at the Met.

Wren

I thought about that while I was reading because I know that, you know, I'm on the east coast. Yeah, not that far. So I've been there. And you were raised in the east coast, but you have since moved far away from there. So I was sitting there thinking, oh, there's a good chance Brandon has not actually been to this museum.

Brandon

Yeah, um, you know, growing up in Virginia, and specifically in the southern part of Virginia, New York was always just kind of far away. And in general, like, my parents, never really liked big cities, or whatever. So like, they just didn't tend to be vacation choices for my family. And if we ever wanted to go to museums - and that was something that my grandmother actually did a lot. She was very invested in exposing my brother and I to museums and other, you know, educational vacations and stuff - the Smithsonian in DC was much closer, and much easier to have a lot of varied museums in easy walking distance of each other.

Wren

Oh, now I'm envious, because I've never been there.

Brandon

Oh, yeah, I've been to the Smithsonian a lot.

Wren

I've driven through DC, but I've never actually stopped to see anything there.

Brandon

There's some phenomenal, phenomenal museums at the Smithsonian... So this book, this is a book I encountered in fifth grade, we actually did read it for class. Like, it wasn't something that I read of my own accord, technically, but like, as occasionally happens with school with books, you have to read for school, I really liked it. And like, plowed through it much faster than I had to, to keep up with the requirements for the class. I just really got into initially the like, figuring out how to live in the museum element. And then once the sort of mystery part pops up, I just really wanted to know the answer. I think I had always been into mysteries before this book, but I think this book kind of introduced the notion of the idea that things in museums could still be mysterious, and that there can be a lot of investigation and research that goes into something as simple, as seemingly simple as knowing who made a particular work of art. I think prior to this, like all the mysteries I knew were things like that either had gone missing and were never found, or like crime mysteries, right? And this kind of, I think, introduced me to the notion that there was another kind of mystery and that research could be like intriguing as an investigative thing, and Uh, and also this is probably the first time that I ever really encountered Michelangelo as an artist. I knew that all the Ninja Turtles were named after after artists

but like the only one of those artists that I really had any context for besides just knowing that they existed was da Vinci, so I remember this being like the first time that I ever really encountered the actual Michelangelo in any sort of context. I think I glossed over this, but the the museum believes that this statue, Angel, is a lost work of of Michelangelo. So there's a lot of talk about Michelangelo.

Wren

I'm trying to think if I read this as a kid if I would have had any concept other than Ninja Turtles myself, but I don't think so. I was not a particularly cultured child. And I don't think I really encountered works by those types of artists until probably later elementary school. They did a lot of focus on Van Gogh and Monet. Monet? Manet? Wow, I don't know...I was not an art student. They did a lot of focus on, you know, the pretty arts, not statues and things.

Brandon

Yeah, I feel like da Vinci is the obvious one that I think pretty much everybody encounters first. Michelangelo is probably the second most recognized just because of the Sistine Chapel ceiling, but I think I he's a distant second.

Wren

I don't think I can even think right now of what Donatello did.

Brandon

Donatello was a sculptor, I believe, but I cannot name any of his works.

Brandon

Yeah. So we did talk a lot of last time about like, the sort of feeling of survival and roughing it in the wilderness and everything and how I was never like super that and I was never like, oh, man, I wish we could be camping all the time, or something like that, but I did appreciate Claudia's plans, because I also don't like to empty wastepaper baskets. And I also think it'd be pretty cool to live in a museum. I, you know...to your point, Claudia is really the main character here. This book is really about her kind of struggling to find herself at a formative age. She's 12. And like, a lot of this story kind of ends up being about her sort of feeling out her transition into not adulthood yet, certainly, but like, from child to less of a child, I guess. Maybe not teenager yet but tween and it's not for any terrific reason. It's not like to escape a bad home or because a plane crashed into the Met with her in it. It's because she's tired of chores and having to sometimes watch her youngest brother, and has decided that she's going to leave now and recruits her younger but not youngest brother Jamie because he's frugal, and she wants his money.

Wren

Yeah, I...I didn't like Claudia as a human being.

Brandon

She's a little bit of a sociopath.

Wren

I understood her a lot by the end. I still felt like I didn't like her all that much. But definitely in the beginning when she was going over her plan, and talking about the injustice of having to clean the garbage, and that's why she's gonna run away, but she doesn't like gross things or bugs, so she's gonna run away somewhere posh...I just sort of set the book down and I was like, oh gosh, I'm gonna hate this girl, aren't I? She's...she's very Connecticut. I have friends I love from Connecticut, but I think they'll agree with me.

Brandon

I'm glad to know that there's some real like, experience captured in this character. Speaking as a person who grew up in the South, I don't have that point of reference as much. I never knew anybody who would run away with to the Met. I wish I did.

Wren

But I do recognize that a little bit...a little bit of her are some things that I didn't really like about myself all that much as a child because - and I don't know if this is the discussion question that you've got hidden from me - but I did try to run away once as a child. Because it was when my youngest brother was a baby, and I was irritated about it. I was maybe nine. I took my middle brother with me. We walked up the street for maybe 45 minutes. And then we walked back.

Brandon

I definitely did that kind of running away at least one time when I was a child. Where it sort of was a bluff, I think, mostly, just to see like how far my parents let me get before they caved. And I think the answer was they did not cave and I caved and came back from the like corner where I caught the bus. I didn't like get on a bus to run away - it was the school bus. Just it was like a block away from my house where - this is a complicated anecdote now.

Wren

My parents didn't actually notice that I was gone. They were at work.

Brandon

I always made sure to let them know.

Wren

Oh. That's very bold of you.

Brandon

Well, that was the point. It was a threat. It was like a statement of whatever disagreement we're having.

Wren

I really want to know what the parents thought when they - so Claudia runs away and mails her family the letter explaining why she runs away. Talking about you know, the injustice. I was very, I was very hung up on her word "injustice" because it just bothered me so much. None of this isn't justice, you little...! Anyway. And they don't tell us really how the parents reacted other than that they were worried

and they, you know, called the authorities and things. But I was very, very curious to know what they thought when they read that letter.

Brandon

Well, I have to imagine that, in Claudia's parents' case, this couldn't have felt too much like a surprise. right? I have to imagine Claudia was a handful. I imagined the bigger surprise is that like she went through with it and took Jamie. Right? Yeah, it's hard. They don't really give us that because this whole book is presented as being written by Mrs. Frankweiler to her lawyer. So some of the parts that we don't get are things that either she didn't care to really research or, or didn't care to repeat, at the very least. And she didn't really seem to care all that much about how the Kincaids felt. She was much more interested in Claudia and Jamie and their adventure. So that's, that's the part we get.

Wren

Yeah, the framing of the book was definitely really interesting because it starts off with the aforementioned Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler being really snarky to her lawyer. And I was sitting there like, Why is she so snarky at this guy? Yeah, sure. Like, it's funny to be grumpy at lawyers. It's kind of a recurring trope, but why specifically, and then, you know, it kind of comes to light at the end, why she's being so snarky with him about this particular topic, which I thought was hilarious. But the particular framing of the story did make me pause about a third of the way through. And I wrote myself a little prediction, which was wrong, but I want to fess up to it.

Brandon

Yeah, do it.

Wren

My prediction was: based on the framing of the notes to her lawyer and the altering of her will - right, that little detail. The book starts with, hey, lawyer, I'm going to be snarky at you, but also change my will. Anyway, so I wrote: I am guessing that they are going to thwart a robbery in this museum. Or they somehow prove that the statue is real.

Brandon

So I'm thinking of Home Alone, but in a museum?

Wren

Well, I just I wasn't sure where it was going at that point. And I was like, There's got to be some reason why they've caught the attention of this random lady. So those were my guesses. I was wrong.

Brandon

Yeah. Well, the thing about this book is that the titular Mrs. Frankweiler doesn't actually show up in the story until the very, very end. Which is, you know, interesting, from a, from a standpoint of titles, right? Because it sort of feels like you're 75% through the book, and you're like, I have heard of Mrs. Frankweiler. I've yet to see her or her mixed-up files.

Wren

Yeah. One of my notes that I have here is that I would definitely like to know more about Mrs. Frankweiler. Why is there not more? There are no sequels. Give me more details about this woman! She's fascinating!

Brandon

There's an itty bitty sequel.

Wren

I know, I read it, it's in the back. It's like two pages.

Brandon

Well, she was based on a couple people that Konigsburg knew, in fact, most of the characters in this book, were based pretty directly on people that her life, Claudia and Jamie were both pretty heavily two of her children, who also posed for the art. But Mrs. Frankweiler was primarily based on the headmistress of a school that Konigsburg had taught science in for a time prior to this. And so that's where a lot of her personality comes from. This headmistress was apparently also a very sort of direct matter-of-fact individual.

Wren

Well, she's just, you know, so by the end of the book when they meet Mrs. Frankweiler, she's just this no-nonsense, but also chaotic, older lady. And there are aforementioned mixed-up files, because she makes the kids go through this little test to find files in this wall of file cabinets.

Brandon

She is an agent of chaos, like for sure. And we're never entirely told what her filing system is either. She mentions that it makes sense to her, and it doesn't immediately make sense to Claudia or Jamie. They kind of imply that things are filed by location, but by like alpha by like place in the world that they're relevant in or that things happened in rather than necessarily who they're about or subject matter. So more specific spoilers now, I guess, for this story if you've gotten this far but still want to be able to read it for yourself. The museum is showing off a new bronze that had been acquired on the cheap and that some people suspect was a lost work of Michelangelo. But there was not sufficient evidence to confirm that for sure. And Claudia and Jamie's efforts to confirm that for sure ultimately lead them to Mrs. Frankweiler because Mrs. Frankweiler is who sold the statue to the Met in the first place. And so they do find that she has more information about the statue that she did not give to the Met, and she continues to not want to give it to the Met. Just...just because. The change in her will, that that you mentioned is specifically to leave the evidence of the statues genuinely being made by Michelangelo, to Claudia and Jamie. And if they want to go to the museum, sure, it will be theirs. But she does not want to give it to the museum herself. Or during her lifetime, because she just kind of likes to watch the world burn, I guess.

Wren

Yeah, she says a couple of things like, "I could have donated this object to that museum, but I didn't want to give them anything."

Brandon

Yeah.

Wren

I was like, "You're so ridiculous. I like you."

Brandon

Yeah. But at the same time, one of the features of the statue that we're told in a couple of cases is that the museum got it for a very good price, especially if it is a Michelangelo. And so it's not it's not even just about she doesn't like donating - she kind of makes a stand against donating in general - but also, if she had included the evidence when she auctioned the thing, it would have gone for a lot more, so she also does not care about money, per se. She just kinda doesn't want to give them the satisfaction of knowing.

Wren

Yeah. So it's important to note that this very beginning catalyst of this story, the children deciding to run away, and then meeting Mrs. Frankweiler are the very, very, very beginnings and ends of this book. And there was a journey to get there of two children running around the Met at night, which, as you said, is horrifying, like touching things they're not supposed to.

Brandon

Just touching them. They slept in the freakin' bed.

Wren

They slept in a bed that was - I forget what it was.

Brandon

Oh, don't worry, I looked all of these things up.

Wren

This historical bed. I had things to say about that. Things at a museum are so meticulous, and I really want to know, did they remake that bed perfectly? Every morning? Because they don't they don't talk about whether or not. They just say okay, we got up and we got dressed and we, you know, hid in the bathroom, which I also have comments about. But I feel like for somebody to have been sleeping in a bed in the museum and the museum staff to not notice that, these children must have been amazing at making beds.

Brandon

Yeah, well, maybe maybe among the other injustices they suffered was being forced to make their beds every morning. When this book was written, it was free to get in the Met, so like being there during the day was not a big deal. They could kind of come and go. There were enough school tours they were able to blend in. And then at closing time, they would go to the bathrooms, stand on the toilets, so that, you know, their feet couldn't be seen under the stall and waited, basically for everyone to be gone. And had kind of a sense of like the one security guard or whatever who patrolled at night, where he was

going to be. And then they would go and sleep in this bed. Before getting up in the morning hiding in the bathrooms in the time between when staff showed up and the museum actually opened and then repeating the whole process. The bed in particular was a state bed that was allegedly the scene of the death (maybe murder) of Amy Robsart, the first wife of Lord Robert Dudley. I looked all this up. So a lot of items in the museum are mentioned in this book, and with the exception of of Angel, all of them are things that exist. Not all of them are still on display anymore, but they are all things that at least were at one point. And this bed was like I said, an Elizabethan bed from the 16th century. We also learned offhand that Mrs. Frankweiler apparently also sleeps in a 16th century bed of her own. Why not? And although I couldn't really find too much information about this specific bed, the sort of backstory there is that Amy Robsart is, or was, the wife of the Duke of Leicester. And that guy, Robert Dudley was, purportedly, Queen Elizabeth I's favorite. Basically, like, there was a rumor that the Queen loved him, but you know, couldn't marry him because he was already married. But when he went to work for the Queen, Amy didn't go with him, she kind of hung out in the country. And then one day, she turned up dead at the bottom of some stairs.

Wren

They had sort of interesting habits. Every four days, they went to the laundromat.

Brandon

Yep.

Wren

And they ruined their clothes. Because of course, they didn't know how to do their own laundry. So like, they shrunk sweaters and accidentally dyed their clothes gray because there was something black in the whole load. It was. I thought that was funny. I've encountered a lot of affluent children who just don't know how to do very basic things like laundry and that makes a lot of sense. I'm gonna go even more basic: things like how to hold a broom. I think the thing that horrified me the most was that when they...when it was time to take a bath, they took a bath in the wishing fountain.

Brandon

Yeah. What else were they going to take a bath in?

Wren

Yeah. So gross.

Brandon

Well, and then they realized that...so a big part of this was that Claudia planned this based upon having enough funds to support them, and that's why she recruited Jamie because he saved all of his allowances and also cheated war on the bus for money. So he was a gambler who cheated. And so he had money: \$24 and some change.

Wren

Hey, it's the '60s that was quite a bit of money.

Brandon

and it was much more than Claudia had. So there was always this sort of like, ongoing thing about their funds. And Claudia wanting to do things that sometimes Jamie just kind of petulantly would be like, Nope, we don't have the money for it. Because they didn't always get along. They definitely butted heads at times. But they realized that they could just start taking the change out of the fountain when they took baths.

Wren

So they're stealing other people's wishes.

Brandon

Stealing other people's wishes. Yeah, that's correct. That's how it works. The fountain is apparently no longer there, exactly. It sounds like it's been replaced by a different fountain.

Wren

One of the funny things was is that they don't steal anything else. They make a big deal at one point about stealing a newspaper from somebody who had set it down because they were done with it. And then they have to like pray for forgiveness or something for stealing that, but they don't steal from the snack bar. I feel like if I was in this situation, I would have just gone to the snack bar at night and taken food. So they make a big deal about not stealing anything, except then they steal all these people's wishes and I have a much bigger problem with them stealing the wishes of people rather than stealing some corporation's food at their snack bar

Brandon

To be clear...

Wren

I just...I just...

Brandon

...the notion that they're stealing wishes does not exist in the book. They're just stealing the coins. But I understand what you're getting at.

Wren

Ya know, the notion that they're stealing wishes came from me. They're stealing all the coins that people put into this mountain to make wishes on.

Brandon

Yeah, they have a very, very Like arbitrary code of conduct here, obviously, since like, they're not supposed to be in the museum, they're not supposed to sleep in this bed. And, you know, hide their stuff in sarcophagi, and things like that. But, but yeah, they don't steal for the most part.

Wren

There were a couple of things as well about their schedule that baffled me. I think...I guess this kind of lines up with the the fact that I'm reading this for the first time as an adult, so some of the magic is a little lost on me. I'm sitting there thinking to myself, how are they waking up in time? They don't have alarm clocks.

Brandon

Good question.

Wren

How does the bathroom trick work when there's a janitors and such that are gonna come clean toilets? They're gonna get caught. But they don't. Yeah, so So because of these little like, default ones. Oh, that's fair. But that was like not because of rational things that I'm thinking about when reading this book. It gave me a lot of anxiety, to read this book, just because I'm sitting there thinking, oh, gosh, there's going to be cleaners. There's going to be this. You know, somebody's going to come in early one day before they've woken up because I don't have an alarm clock. So I read the whole book, slightly stressed out, just waiting for them to get caught. And they never do (spoiler alert).

Brandon

Well, Jamie does come out of the stall a little early and run into a janitor. And the janitor is like, where did you come from? And Jamie says, "My mother always said that I came from heaven," and then takes a bow and leaves.

Wren

That was amazing.

Brandon

Which was, yeah, the best. They are only in the museum for like a week. It's not like they dodged detection for months. They were there for a week. But there are a couple times that they they do have to go find places in galleries to hide, waiting for people to pass. Like, there's there's one of the nights where people come in to move Angel to a different part of the museum, and they hadn't planned on that. There is a bit of a close call there because there's more people in the museum after hours than they expected. And Jamie actually realizes this when he's in the men's bathroom, because some some men come into the men's bathroom and he hears them talking. But by then Claudia is in the women's bathroom and they don't have any way to communicate to each other, so he's really worried that she will, like, leave as usual, not realizing there are people to avoid, but they kind of get lucky and I think they hide for a little while behind the security desk or something like that, or the information desk. There's some talk of it, but yeah, they do manage to stay undetected for for an implausably long time.

Wren

I don't want my saying that I had all these nitpicks to make you think that I didn't enjoy it. I read the book in two sittings, which could have easily been one but the first night I was super sleep deprived, and I fell asleep about a third of the way through. I enjoyed it. I just felt like there were things that I thought about coming at this story from an adult that stressed me out.

Brandon

Oh, yeah. I also definitely thought about things that I had never really thought about before, because I've read this book a couple of times, but it's been a long time since last time I read this book. So certainly some of my perspective on things is different now. I was pleased to come back to it and find that I still really enjoyed it. It's a very funny book, I think, which is reportedly partially because when Konigsburg was writing it, she would read sections to her children and if they didn't laugh, she would change them. She would rewrite it. So like that was by design and I really appreciate this book's sense of humor. A lot of it is just kind of very wry, and...it's not slapstick or anything. It's kind of stuff that I think, probably when I read it previous time some of it went over my head a bit. But some of it is also just really charming. Like I find the fact that Claudia really wants to hug the statue and gets upset that other people hug the statue to be sort of weirdly charming.

Wren

Yeah, she and Jamie get in this little tiff because she's envious that the people that moved the statue got to hold the statute to move it, and Jamie's just like, "you are getting in this whole statue thing a little deep."

Brandon

Yes, she says, "The men who moved it last night hugged it when they moved it. There's all kinds of hugging."

Wren

You're right in that it was funny. I think the only part that really made me actually laugh out loud was the line about, my mommy says I came from heaven. I just sort of stopped there and just had a little chuckle.

Brandon

I liked that they hide with tour groups a few times during the day. And, and one of them, they mentioned that they hear some of the other children say, when visiting the Egyptian gallery, "Sarah looks like Pharaoh, pass it on." And then Mrs. Frankweiler says, "Sarah really does look like Pharaoh." And I'm like, wow, that's what you research? Okay. Mrs. Frankweiler is gonna throw some shade on these incidental children.

Wren

Yeah, she she gets real sassy. There was a certain point where she was getting snarky at him in the beginning, about how the lawyer doesn't care about anything other than his family. And I was like, where did that come from? That's so mean. But then at the end, it makes sense why he's fretting about his family. Were there any moments when you were reading it that you stopped and you were like, oh, oh, yeah, when I was a kid, this part, you know, blah?

Brandon

I think the main thing is that I don't think I ever really connected with Claudia very much. And here's why. So like, the real thing about this book, and what it's sort of getting at with Claudia in particular, is really a struggle to find her identity. There's a lot of talk about Claudia wanting to find a way to be

different. And that clearly starts to come around to being, she wants to sort of figure out who she is, right? Not that she necessarily is desperate to stand out, although that's part of it, but that she's kind of at an age where she's tired of just being a child and to some degree children are all kind of the same, right? And she's looking for sort of the way to come into her own and like what she is really about. And this journey to the museum and her desire to like learn a new thing every day, and then her desperation to solve the mystery of Angel, all kind of give her that journey. And I think I just never really got that beyond the surface level.

Wren

Yeah, I don't know if I would have got that if I read it as a child, but at the end, when she says, "I knew that I was going to go home eventually. I just needed to go back different." I felt like I really understood that. And I understood her a lot more as a character. I didn't necessarily like her any better. But

Brandon

Yeah, they don't have to be together.

Wren

Well especially, you know, when the chauffeur's like, "Yeah, neither child thanked me." I was like, Oh, they're so entitled. But I felt that wanting to go back different thing. I feel like every summer vacation, I always had this grand idea that when I got back to school, I would be different and cooler somehow, because I was always really on the outcasts level of my fellow students. And I think I always thought there would be some magical change that would happen, where I'd come back and I would suddenly be interesting and I would have friends. That part resonated with me, remembering what childhood was like.

Brandon

Yeah, it's a theme that I think I wasn't really equipped to understand. It's not that it's hidden. It's stated pretty clearly several times, especially late in the book, that that's what Claudia is looking for. But I think I probably always took it to be, you know, she wants to be the hashtag not like other girls, or whatever. Which might also be true, but is not the point. Jamie, though, he's just like, we had fun, wasn't that enough? And I was always like, Jamie, you're dumb.

Wren

He balanced her out, though, nicely. Whether it was just because he had, you know, sort of the apathy of being younger, or maybe he really was more emotionally intelligent than her in some ways.

Brandon

Jamie isn't dumb. I just disagree with him on that point. But yeah, they play off each other well. Jamie is just very miserly, and kinda just wants to exist. Like he's not really looking for a purpose to life, and he doesn't really understand why Claudia wants to either.

Wren

I forget how old Jamie is.

Brandon

He's nine or 10. I forget. He's a couple years younger. But yeah, he saves his money, although it's a little unclear why; I guess for later. And he bets nickels on a game of war on the school bus every day, but he cheats. So yeah, Jamie is great, probably. At one point, they go to the library to look up stuff about Michelangelo. So they walk to the library, and they get there, and they find some books about Renaissance art and things like that. And Claudia basically assigns Jamie to look at the books with like, a lot of the pictures and stuff while she goes through some of the other ones. Later on, they see a marking that that could be indicative of Angel being done by Michelangelo, and Jamie is like, "Oh, I've seen that." And she's like, "What is it?" And Jamie's like, "You didn't tell me to read what the pictures were of. I remember what page it was on." And it's just like, Jamie. Come on, buddy. What did you think she wanted? So I think it probably makes sense to talk a little about the author.

Wren

Yeah, I would like to know more about her for sure. I deliberately didn't read anything about her. I even waffled on reading that final note in the book.

Brandon

Yeah, her afterword.

Wren

Well, by that point I was too invested. I felt actually a little bit like how I talked about how Hatchet ended so abruptly. I felt like this ended so abruptly. Maybe it's just that I'm older now. And it takes me like a little bit longer to get into a book. And by the time I'm into it, and then it just ends if it's a kid's length book and I'm just like, no, I'm not done. I'm not done here. I need more details.

Brandon

So E.L. Konigsberg: she was born in New York, lived for much of her earlier life in Pennsylvania, and went to Carnegie Mellon for chemistry. Married a guy who was there for psychology. She pursued graduate level chemistry until she decided that lab science isn't fun, and I feel that. I also abandoned the college level because I didn't like lab science. That's when she taught science in school for a little while and when she met the headmistress who was some of the basis for Mrs. Frankweiler. They had three children and while she was raising those children she started to take art lessons, because we haven't really talked about it but she did do all of the illustrations in this book as well. Creative pursuits were not really a thing she had dealt much with until her adulthood. It wasn't like this passion she'd nurtured for a long time. So when, when her youngest child got old enough that they were going to school she started to write in the mornings when the children are all the way at school. And that's how we got to this book. And she basically sold this book and her other first novel. She sold those at the same time to the editor she would end up working with pretty much for her whole career as far as I could tell. And both of them were actually Newbery honors nominations. The Mixed-Up Files won the medal and Jennifer, Hecate, etc, got a Newbery honors award. I believe she's one of two people I think I saw that has won the medal and an honors in the same year. She's also one of the only six people to win the medal twice, the second time in 1997 for The View from Saturday, which I haven't read.

Wren

Have you read, Jennifer, Hecate...?

Brandon

I have not, but I'm probably going to. This book's story came from a couple places. One of them was when she was picnicking with her family. And the children were complaining about sitting on the ground and the fact that there were bugs, and she sort of mused to herself that their idea of running away would be to run away somewhere really like posh, right? Then, at a later time, when she was taking art lessons at the Met and would take her children there and they would just kind of have to hang out in the museum while she was taking lessons and then they would like look around a bit. There was one day when they saw in one of these display rooms where they've set up like a whole room of like old furniture, and everything and like you can only go a step or two into the room. They saw a piece of popcorn on a couch that was like, well, well away from where the velvet ropes were. And so there was kind of this moment of, how did that get there all the way over there were like people are not meant to be? You're not supposed to go that far. Where would you even get popcorn? So that's kind of where the someone living in the museum after ours idea came from.

Wren

That's great. I love that. I really liked the parallels between my first pick and your first pick, not just because of the subject matter, but also because of the authors. They both had a very similar life track where they had a career in the sciences and then said, "Ugh, no, I want to be a writer," after they'd already, you know, done all that education and training.

Brandon

Generally, Konigsburg's books are kind of known for not talking down to children and having plots with things like living in a museum and trying to figure out if a statuette was actually made by Michelangelo, which is not exactly like a plot that if you encountered it in the wild, you would say that's a children's book. But there it is.

Wren

I definitely enjoyed that though. Because, you know, when I started the book, I was just sitting there like, what is the primary struggle going to be here? Them getting caught? And that's, you know, when my brain started formulating that, maybe this word or robbery thing, because that seems like a typical kids' book thing, I guess, probably, as you mentioned earlier, because of Home Alone.

Brandon

Yeah, it was definitely kind of a different sort of thing than most of the stuff I had read and as a weirdo who liked learning about stuff like that, it definitely sort of spoke to me in a way that most books I was reading didn't. So yeah, that's the book.

Wren

I think because of that element, I probably would have liked reading it as a kid, but I definitely know that I would have liked reading it as a kid better if I read it after Hatchet, because like I said, after Hatchet I just started thinking about survival situations in every situation I walked into. I would be in a building with my parents. And I would imagine where I would hide out in that building if there was a nuclear

apocalypse or something. I could imagine little kid me reading this book, and then thinking about what it would be like to hide out in a survival situation in a museum.

Brandon

Yeah. Well, speaking of that. So I designed our discussion question for an event just like this. So discussion question: If you were to run away and live in a museum, which museum would you live in?

Wren

Well, one would think, if they know me, that the natural answer would probably be the Museum of Natural History in New York, but if I were to run away, it would certainly not be to New York City.

Brandon

That's the only problem with that museum that you have?

Wren

Primarily.

Brandon

I get it.

Wren

I don't mind New York. New York is fascinating, has a lot of interesting things, but if I was running away in some sort of needing to hide survival situation, New York City is not where you want to be. Too many people. Too closed in. Yeah, I...woo. Do you have an answer for this while I think?

Brandon

Yeah. I did think about it a lot. A part of me would like to say the National History Museum in New York, because I like it, but I know that you would never come visit me and the place that I would hang out which is the undersea room.

Wren

Oh yeah, no, no. No.

Brandon

So that one gets bumped for that reason. This might be a little bit of a cheat, but it would probably be somewhere at the Smithsonian. I think I land on the Air and Space Museum, ultimately, which is always one of my favorites. Partially because there's a lot of vehicles that you can kind of hide in where you know, there's like small chunks of plane recreated or whatever, partially because the museum continues to have one of the shooting models of the USS Enterprise used in Star Trek: The Original Series. And I would just like to be able to see that every day. It's big. And...and I mean, ultimately, like all the museums at the Smithsonian are within walking distance of each other so it's a little bit of a cheat because I could go and during the day and visit a different museum. But like Claudia and Jamie left the museum, so you don't have to be in the museum all the time. But yeah, runner up is probably the Natural History Museum at the Smithsonian, which has a pretty solid dinosaur collection.

Wren

See, I'm just so torn. In my heart, the true answer would involve me going back in time.

Brandon

Oh, well, okay. I do have to asterisk: I know I shouldn't feel okay about this necessarily, but I do love the British Museum. It sucks that it has all these things that really should be returned to their original owners, but I like it

Wren

Well, my go-back-in-time answer is similar. If I could add going back in time to this, it'd be the Crystal Palace.

Brandon

Sure. Okay, so going back in time we do the Crystal Palace, but if you didn't have a time machine? I'm also willing to expand this to like aquariums. Not sure if zoos count. Zoos are not sufficiently inside.

Wren

An aquarium I don't think would be sufficient because for the most part the space in the aquariums are not habitable by me. So less to hide in. I can't, you know, jump into a tank to hide behind some coral. I mean, I can, but that'd be uncomfortable. Oh, golly, I mean...can I pick the Natural History Museum up and plop it somewhere else?

Brandon

No. I mean, there's other natural history museums, though, and other other comparable museums,

Wren

But I haven't been to them.

Brandon

You just have to, I don't know, roll the dice and hope that the one you pick is good enough.

Wren

I want to be a smartass and say the Mothman Museum, but that's not a very big museum.

Brandon

You are onboard for a very modest experience there, huh?

Wren

I suppose the answer is the Natural History Museum. But I would, you know, like, stay away from the whale room. That room is terrifying.

Brandon

That's fine.

Wren

You know, I'd say second place might be the Museum of Science in Boston.

Brandon

That's probably a good choice.

Wren

It's a fun little museum. It's not massive, but it's got a lot to learn. A lot of info scattered around.

Brandon

So we end these things with giving our ratings in counts of giant peaches, because we both like James and the Giant Peach. One of the relatively few books we had in common that we both really liked from this part of our lives, so...I've waffled about this quite a bit. I'm afraid to like give anything to higher rating immediately. Because then

Wren

I think the new person is supposed to the rating because you gave the rating first last time.

Brandon

Okay, yes, so go ahead and hit me with a rating.

Wren

I don't want you to be upset. I'm giving this book 3.5 giant peaches, because I want more. I want more detail about sneaking around. I just want to know more about everything. And I am completely affronted at how little information we have about Mrs. Frankweiler. So it's not because it's bad, it's because there was not enough.

Brandon

But didn't you learn anything about the value of there being a mystery? Of not having answers?

Wren

No. I'll bump it to 3.75 giant peaches, though, because you got me there.

Brandon

Okay, okay. I think I'm at four and a half. I don't want to start out and be like this is the best: five. Four and a half sounds like it might still be high in my brain; four feels low and I'm not ready. I just...coming back to it, it was still very much the book that I remember loving. Now that I have developed from my formative stage, I still recognize a lot of I think why I am the way I am in this book. And I just...like I said I think some of the humor and stuff hit me now in a way that I didn't get when I was younger. So it felt like also just a nice thing to come back to.

Wren

A lot of the parts of the book that I really enjoyed definitely gave me this feeling of, okay, I can see some of like the sparks of Brandon's humor forming here.

Brandon

Yeah, yeah. Especially my humor in writing, I think is not dissimilar from the humor in this book. So yeah, I don't know if I can draw a straight line but I can probably draw a line of some kind. "Straight line" is itself redundant, because lines are by definition straight. If it's not a straight thing it's not a line...

Wren

Don't bring math into it. My goodness.

Brandon

Anyhow, thanks for joining us for this episode of My Dog Ate My Book Report. What're we going to be reading next time, Wren?

Wren

Oh, good golly. We're going to be reading *The Mouse and the Motorcycle* by Beverly Cleary. It's a super quick read, so if you want to join along, you should totally grab it.

Wren

My Dog Ate My Book Report is hosted and produced by Wren and Brandon – that's us – and edited by the fabulous Derrick Valen.

Brandon

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Wren

Have a question or comment for the team?

Brandon

You can find us on our website which links to all of our socials at dogatemybookreport.blubrry.net. That's B-L-U-B-R-R-Y dot net – or by e-mailing at dogatemybookreport@gmail.com.

Wren

Blubrry doesn't like vowels. But, anyway, we'd be super excited to know what books you loved growing up.

Brandon

Thanks for listening!