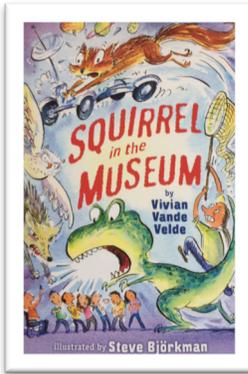


# Author Craft Tips to Improve Writing

From Children's Author Vivian Vande Velde



## *Where do authors get ideas?*

Vivian Vande Velde said she watched the showdown between her husband and the squirrels at their bird feeder. Husband built contraptions to keep the bird feeder safe vs. sneaky squirrels who maneuvered around the obstacles easily.

**Observations:** Sneaky squirrel twitches his tail often, seems to be clever and confident when solving the problem and performs acrobatic feats.

## **How Vivian applied these observations:**

On page 13 “And because I’m such a good thinker, I think: Why are these buses called *yellow*?”

On page 15 “I jump from the branch that’s closest to the bus (I’m an excellent jumper) and land on the roof of the bus (I’m an excellent lander).”

## **Discover Ideas Through Observation**

Take a nature walk. Keep an eye out for a battle between two forces. How can you use them to create a new character? Think about character traits. Think about an opposing force (antagonist).

## *How do authors use organization and voice?*

Vivian Vande Velde explained how each classroom in the school had a different class pet. For example, two intelligent geckos reside in the science classroom and squabble like brothers. To bring these two characters alive, the author wrote their dialogue like a play, or in a script format. Twitch sought knowledge from the two geckos:

On page 10

“TWITCH:       What’s a field trip?

NEWTON:       A field trip is when the children take an educational trip away from the school.

GALILEO:       But they don’t go to a field.

NEWTON:       Except in October, when the kindergarten children go to a pumpkin field-

GALILEO:       Patch. Pumpkins grow in a pumpkin patch, not a field. Silly younger brother.”

The geckos continue with the argument, and circle back to explaining about the field trip to Twitch. By using this organization, the reader can imagine and hear the squabbling between the two geckos. We find out that Twitch doesn’t know everything and the geckos are intelligent “science geeks.” We can infer this because of their word choice. Vivian does an excellent job using word choice to create distinct characters.

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## **Discover Distinct Characters Through Voice**

Pick a character and set up a conversation in a play format. Write only in dialogue. When you reread the conversation, what do you find out about each character? How are they distinctly different?

## **How do authors encourage each other and spark new ideas?**

Author Vivian Vande Velde thanked her critique partners on the dedication page. She has participated in the same critique groups for years. She also conducted science research and verified the facts with another writing colleague (also mentioned in the dedication). Writers rely on each other to provide appropriate feedback and encouragement.

Vivian is a generous and compassionate person. She reached out to illustrator Steve Bjorkman to say thank you. In turn, he mentioned he'd love to illustrate another Twitch book if she had one. At that point, Vivian hadn't thought of writing a series. However, because of the illustrator's encouragement, she created two more hilarious books in the series including her newest installment titled *SQUIRREL IN THE MUSEUM*.

## **Be Open to New Ideas**

When revising, be open to what your critique partners have to say. As the author, you are in charge, but it doesn't hurt to try things out. You may find something magical happens. When critiquing someone's work, start with a positive comment. Then, ask questions, like "I wonder if the character's words match his age?" And, end with a positive comment. Working with a critique group can be a rewarding experience.

For more detailed Critique Directions, visit Linda Sue Park's article:

<https://www.lspark.com/writing/critique.html>

Check out Vivian's website for more writing ideas:

<http://www.vivianvandevelde.com/>