

## James Marshall

by Chazda Albright -

<http://greatstorybook.com/recommended-reading-james-marshall/>

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*James Marshall is really one of the great unsung heroes of children's storybooks. If you know about his stories, give me a shout-out in the comments section. PLEASE!*

**If you've never read a book by James Marshall, you are missing out. He was one of the best.**

Even though he only lived to be 50 years old, James Marshall created over 60 children's books. Yet chances are, you don't recognize his name in the same way you might Eric Carle, Beatrix Potter, Maurice Sendak, Beverly Cleary, or Dr. Seuss (Theodor S. Geisel).

**The Miss Nelson Collection is something I treasured as a child - which says a lot, because I was one of those kids who hated reading.**

As it happens, James Marshall was friends with Maurice Sendak, who has reportedly said that Marshall was "uncommercial to a fault." This is why you probably don't know his name – even though everyone

interested in illustrated storybooks *should* know it.

Marshall is perhaps most known for working on the [George and Martha](#) series and [The Stupids](#).

For several of Marshall's books (**The Stupids** and all the [Miss Nelson books](#)), writing credit was given to his friend, a celebrated botanist named Harry Allard.

## **What you might not know about Marshall and Allard.**

### **Allard didn't write any of the books.**

Allard came up with *story ideas* and gave them to Marshall, who then wrote and illustrated them. But it's still Allard's name given top credit (literally, at the top of the book cover) for each of those stories. Some libraries don't even mention Marshall as a contributor, noting only the primary contributor (Allard).

I've no doubt Marshall knew this would happen. To be frank, I find that *the refusal to accept proper acknowledgment is common amongst creative people*. Whether Marshall was ready to take ownership of his abilities or not, the man should be recognized at least now, and at least by others who can learn from his body of work.

## **Getting Credit**

James Marshall, sometimes credited as Edward Marshall (using his middle name), is considered a top-drawer writer and illustrator.

In terms of awards, Marshall was only ever a winner of the [Laura Ingalls Wilder Award](#). Once. No other awards for any of this work. And yet his stories have been adapted into cartoons, movies and stage musicals. His stories have inspired orchestras to play new songs.

One of my favorite books of all time as a kid (I think second grade) was Marshall's [Miss Nelson is Missing!](#) I absolutely loved this story and read it several times, staring at the pictures, searching for clues.

## **Not just Nostalgia - it really is great**

After all these years, I stumbled on this classic again, just a couple weeks ago. I bought a copy and sat back with my new-old book fully expecting to be... well, let down. I got it for nostalgic reasons, mostly. Seriously, I did not expect the book to actually be as great as I remembered.

What a mistake! This book is so [perfectly paced](#) and [the rising action](#) so exactly set-up by the author, I was impressed. I *am* impressed.

There aren't many books that really cause me to sit up and take note of the form and craft of the thing, but this gem, which was published in 1977 (when I was six), should be the type of book held up in creative writing classes as a great example of solid story structure.

## **Set-up, Inciting Incident, End**

The set-up and inciting incident are [both exactly where they should be](#). The ending is so spot on, so gratifying, that you want to start all over again from the beginning. You get suspense, you get a sense of mystery, and you get a fabulously sly pay-off.

No wonder I loved this book as a kid! I still love it, and for all the same reasons – just that my perspective is different. (I'm taller and the book looks smaller than I remembered.)

## **What do you love?**

What about you? Name a book you loved as a child. Have you read it again recently? How did rediscovering it change your perspective (were you impressed all over again or dismayed)? Write below, let me know – or just send me an email.

**Keep creating (and reading), no matter what.**

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