



Meet Patricia Lakin Author of the Max and Mo Series

About the Books

From award-winning author Patricia Lakin and Caldecott Medal–winning illustrator Brian Floca comes six Level 1 Ready-to-Reads starring the adorable hamsters, Max and Mo. Follow along as they go on their exciting classroom adventures!

From their first day of school to making Halloween masks to making apple prints, join the fun-loving classroom hamsters Max and Mo as they make crafts, build a snowman, and more in *Max & Mo's First Day of School*, *Max & Mo Go Apple Picking*, *Max & Mo Make a Snowman*, *Max and Mo's Halloween Surprise*, *Max & Mo's Science Fair Surprise*, and *Max & Mo's 100th Day of School*.

Ready-to-Read leveled readers include both engaging nonfiction and stories featuring fan favorite characters. They are vetted by educational experts to adhere to the latest beginning reader guidelines and receive official Lexile and F&P reading levels.

Q&A with Patricia

Q: Max and Mo are classroom hamsters, who love reading and arts and crafts. Each book in the series ends with an activity that students can do with an adult that follows the hamsters' adventure in each book. How did you come up with some of these activities and stories for this series?

A: For many years, I was a classroom teacher, specifically for second and third grade. We had pets in our classroom. My stories are usually ignited by posing the question, "What if?" For Max and Mo, I thought, "What if some of the animals we had in my classroom actually could participate in school activities—albeit while 'the big ones,' the students, weren't looking?" That's how the Max and Mo books were born. Because they live in the art room of a school, a variety of craft activities seemed like a natural project for them to do on their own. As a mom, I wanted the activities to be simple and easy to complete with objects commonly found in a home. No adult needs to hike to the store to get the necessary supplies. And I test all of the activities to make sure they work and the directions are clear.

Q: Could you share how you went about writing this series for those young readers who are just beginning to learn to recognize letters and words alongside an adult?

A: I am dating myself when I say that I learned to read with the Dick and Jane Readers. Those stories were told by repeating simple-to-sound-out words. Yes, I could sound out the words, but the stories weren't very engaging for me. Years later it dawned on me that I could use many of those same simple words and their rhyming counterparts to create truly engaging and humorous stories—ones with a solid beginning, middle, and end. The humor comes through in the way in which those decipherable words are used and how they're illustrated. It is always my goal to create each Max and Mo adventure using simple words that convey a meaningful story that is packed with humor! Those three elements can give a beginning reader an enjoyable and successful reading experience.

As a side note, a famous educator once explained that when a child “misreads” a word, it often shows an underlying solid understanding of word recognition. Perhaps the misread word has the same outlined shape as the word on the page. Or the misread word may have the same ending letters. When an adult points out those connections, it can help a new reader feel more empowered.

No matter what, reading with a child gives both adult and child a chance to enjoy a shared experience, discuss the story further, and share a good laugh.

Q: Why do you think it is important to incorporate a sense of humor into these early reader books, and how do you think it impacts children when learning to read on their own?

A: For me, the joy in creating the Max and Mo series resulted in the great melding of my words with Brian Floca's engaging illustrations. His sense of humor comes through in the way he's captured Max and Mo. These clever hamsters can laugh at their existence and in their predicaments. Being able to laugh, even at one's own dilemmas is a wonderful life lesson. I regard humorous stories as a path to feeling thoroughly entertained and relaxed—two qualities I feel are essential for a beginning reader to build confidence.

Q: Since these books take place in the classroom and many of them follow special events during the school year, what would you say to teachers and librarians who are looking for ways to introduce the Max and Mo series in their classrooms and libraries?

A: I feel I am preaching to the choir because so many classroom teachers and librarians have a wealth of ideas on how to introduce their students to a variety of books. As for Max and Mo, that's easy! These hamsters are already part of a classroom. Their adventures and subsequent activities either revolve around making nametags for the first day of school, sprouting beans for a science fair, creating counting activities to celebrate the 100th day of school, crafting indoor snowmen, mask making for Halloween, or cooking applesauce to welcome fall and apple season. In addition, students could dream up their own “What if?” questions for Max and Mo and create their own stories. They could design a new home for them—or figure out new ways for Max and Mo to enter the classroom without the big ones knowing. Hint: I created my own challenge and dreamed up six totally different ways for Max and Mo to open and leave their cage.

To learn more about Ready-to-Read, visit ReadytoRead.com.

Download the [Ready-to-Read Guide for Educators](#). This guide has been provided by Simon & Schuster for classroom, library, and reading group use. It may be reproduced in its entirety or excerpted for these purpose. For more Simon & Schuster guides and classroom materials, please visit simonandschuster.net or thebookpantry.net.