

“Stories show us what’s possible . . . and make us realize we’re not alone.”

AN INTERVIEW WITH JEFF ANDERSON ABOUT DIVERSITY, DIFFERENCES, AND ZACK DELACRUZ

You taught for many years before becoming an author. Is this what inspired you to write middle-grade fiction?

Over the years, I read aloud to my students and saw them affected by humor and humaneness. I wrote the *Zack Delacruz* series because I wanted books that included students like those in my San Antonio classrooms. Young readers want to laugh and think and grow. Stories do that. Stories show us what’s possible, help us live out options, and make us realize we’re not alone.

In this book, Zack learns the importance of listening. What inspired you to make this the crux of the story?

In sixth grade, my best friend, Sajeewa, wore hearing aids. As a teacher, I had students with hearing issues, and my partner has them. So, I know how this invisible issue can lead to misunderstandings. I’ve learned to be clear and not talk with my hands in front of my mouth. But the irony is that—in life and in *Just My Luck*—those with perfect hearing often don’t listen at all, which causes even more problems.

Do you have any words of wisdom for kids who, like Zack, often find themselves in awkward situations?

Awkward situations happen to all

of us, so don’t worry too long about them. I mean, yeah, zip up your pants when you leave the restroom, but other than that, we have little control over accidents and embarrassments. Move all the way through it. Don’t run away. Don’t avoid. Keep moving, and soon you’ll be on the other side.

When you travel around the country visiting kids at schools and in bookstores, what is it about Zack Delacruz that gets them excited?

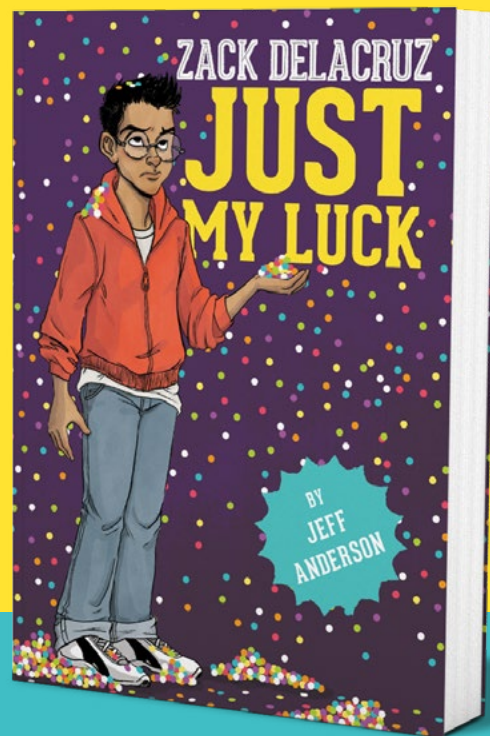
Students love laughing at the characters they recognize—a character like them or a friend. I’m a ham and a former actor, so I add drama into my readings. Kids love to be part of a story. They enjoy the ridiculous El Pollo Loco—the crazy chicken—and all of his antics. Kids are relieved to read a middle-grade book that’s lighthearted. Serious books are important, but laughing has healed me more than anything else. I love spreading the joy of humor.

***Zack Delacruz: Me and My Big Mouth* has received praise for its diverse set of characters. Why does diversity matter in literature—particularly, in children’s literature?**

Diversity matters because children need to see themselves in the pages of the books they read. It’s validation of their importance and inclusion in



the world. And if readers don’t learn about differences through direct contact, the pages of a book can give them experiences with those differences. Diverse literature gives children a chance to see people are more alike than different, desiring respect and acceptance.



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ME AND MY BIG MOUTH
(Zack Delacruz, Book 1)
9781454920670

“THE RACIALLY AND ETHNICALLY DIVERSE CAST of students and teachers are given faces... and readers will find many of their own anxieties addressed in Zack’s mishaps and relieved in his eventual triumphs.” —*Booklist*

JUST MY LUCK (Zack Delacruz, Book 2)
by Jeff Anderson • October 2016
ISBN 9781454920670 5½ × 7½ • Hardcover
\$12.95 (\$14.95 Can) • 208 pages (all in 2-color)