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WINN: WHO IS SIR KAYE?

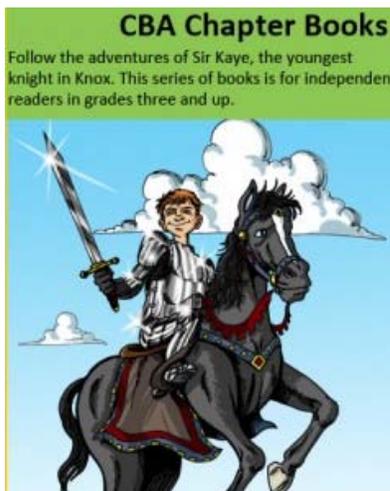
## An Interview with Don M. Winn: Who is SIR KAYE?

Posted by Michael Shaughnessy EducationViews Senior Columnist on March 6, 2013 in Book Reviews, Commentaries, Daily, Insights on Education | 0 Comment

Michael Shaughnessy -

1) Don, you have just finished a book entitled “Sir Kaye-The Boy Knight.” How did this book come about?

Originally Kaye started out simply being named “K.” Long ago, as a writing warm-up, I made myself write a very short story that included all the words in my dictionary that began with a silent ‘K’. The main character quickly became a knight, although at that point he was an adult knight, and I named him K to go with the theme of the story. That’s also why I named the country Knox. This was never meant to be more than a brief writing exercise, but many years later, when I was looking for a new idea for a picture book, I dug up my old manuscript about K the knight in the land of Knox. I showed it to a friend, who suggested that there might be more to the story of K than a picture book could tell and challenged me to write a chapter book for older readers.



This made a light go off in my head, because when I go visit elementary schools, the students always ask me when I’m going to write a chapter book. Since it was going to be a book for kids, it just seemed natural to make the main character about twelve years old. So I had to ask myself, “How and why would a twelve-year-old ever be knighted? How could he deal with the challenges of being a knight?” The story began growing from there.

2) This book is set in the land of Knox—could you tell us about this proverbial land?

Knox is a fictional land very loosely based on medieval England around the 12th or 13th centuries. Unlike England, Knox is not an island. It is bordered by a peaceful, sunny country to the south named Vinland, and a more dangerous neighbor to the north called Eldridge. Knox and Eldridge have a rather turbulent history.

Up to this point in its history, Knox has been a strong, well-maintained country, but things have gone downhill. The previous ruler died childless after an extremely long illness, during which the country ran wild. Most of the knights are corrupt, bandits roam the countryside, and the new ruler is a very young woman from Vinland who is not particularly welcome in Knox, both because she is a foreigner and because she is a woman. As she takes the throne, Eldridge is a slowly growing threat to the north, and although both the queen of Knox and the king of Eldridge are making diplomatic efforts to keep the peace, there are other secret political forces at work that may just result in war.

3) Kaye seems to have a best friend named Reggie—Is Reggie Sancho Panza to Kaye’s Don Quixote? Was this intentional? Or am I reading something into this?

Well, you’ve certainly elevated my story with that comparison, and I thank you for that. When I wrote it, I was hoping to achieve a very accessible adventure story that was somewhat more complex than a Hardy Boys book or a Boxcar Children book.

However it is true that Kaye, like Don Quixote, is absolutely determined to pursue the concept of “the ideal

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knight." This is the core of his character and his life goal, to the point where he almost has tunnel-vision about it, even though this task is bigger than he is. This characteristic was intentional, and yes, there is definitely a similarity there. However, through his father's life, Kaye has first-hand experience about the self-sacrifice and practicality needed to be an "ideal" knight, whereas Don Quixote learned about knighthood from reading books and creating his own romanticized interpretation of those stories.

Reggie is actually more likely to romanticize knighthood than Kaye is, but that is something that I really enjoy about Reggie. He only knows about knights from the stories he's heard, he has a gift of being able to invest even ordinary events with the glory and glamour of knighthood, and he is absolutely fascinated by Kaye's self-imposed quest, although he himself has no desire to be a knight.

In Don Quixote, Sancho Panza is pretty much the last link that Don Quixote has with reality, and I suppose that Reggie performs that function for Kaye in a slightly different sense. Kaye is surprisingly good with practical details and the reality of a situation, much more so than Reggie, so Reggie doesn't help him in that respect. Kaye's problem is that he sees the ideal knight as one who helps Humanity with a capital H. He sees this ideal knight as being very formal and dignified, and so he acts accordingly (aside from his terrible puns, which he only shares with Reggie). Reggie is the one that has the ability point out to Kaye that a certain part of Humanity has a face and a name and a pet duck and three brothers, and knows where to pick the best summer berries, etc. Reggie is very curious and concerned with the how and why of people and not overly concerned with keeping his dignity. Kaye needs this. Above all else, Reggie shows outstanding loyalty to Kaye, and in this respect he is most like Sancho Panza.

4) Who is Old Stone Face and what role does he play in this drama?

Old Stone Face is the nickname that Reggie and Kaye gave to a man named Alfred, who officially serves as a messenger for the queen, but also unofficially serves as a guide because he knows the land of Knox so well he can guide people by secret ways that even the bandits don't know about. Alfred never betrays any emotion. He doesn't talk, but only grunts. It's not mentioned in the book, but Alfred was a loyal servant of the old king. Although he may have his doubts about the new queen, I believe he stands by her for the sake of the old king. Perhaps time will reveal more about him and his secretive silence.

Reggie and Kaye find themselves in Alfred's company probably more than they would prefer. They don't dislike him, but they certainly don't find him very compelling. His silence often throws them back on their own resources, especially when it comes to making choices. Although his expressionless face never offers them any guidance, his presence tends to remind them to think very hard about the choice they're about to make.

5) I understand you have another book in this series- The Lost Castle Treasure- due out soon. Had you planned to make a series of Sir Kaye adventures?

Yes. I like the idea of a series. It gives so much more time and space to develop characters. I have either five or six books planned for the series. They will all be about the same length. I've noticed that some series get progressively heavier and more complex as they reach their conclusions. There's nothing wrong with this, and it's a good idea because it takes time to write books and readers grow during that time, but for this series, I really want to make it a goal to have all the books in the series at a consistent reading level, so that if a third-grader were to discover the series, that third-grader can enjoy all the books one after the other (once I've written them) without having to wait to grow into the later books in the series.

6) Sir Kaye has certain secrets which I will not reveal here - but they seem quite different. Was this intentional?

Absolutely. Kaye's secret is that he has an unusual talent. It's pretty ordinary by today's standards, but it was unusual during the Middle Ages. I wanted to write a book about mostly ordinary boys that find themselves in extraordinary circumstances and cope with them in a fairly plausible way. I didn't want them to have to rely on some kind of super-human ability or superpower to get through their difficulties. I wanted them to succeed in their adventures because of their hard work and willing attitudes and a little cleverness. But with that being said, a hero has to have SOME kind of unusual ability. So, I chose Kaye's talent. This also suited me because although he could have used that talent to become rather wealthy and successful, instead he chose knighthood.

7) I have to say that the illustrations are particularly well done, and exceptionally well placed. Who did the illustrations?

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Questionnaire

Star  
Teacher

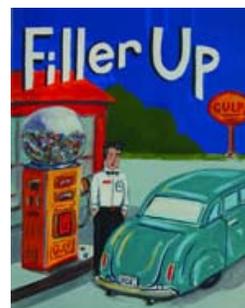


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The illustrations were done by Dave Allred, a talented illustrator who's worked with me on several of my picture books. He was very instrumental in the shaping of the story. I'm a very visual person, and it's a tremendous help to me to be able to see something when I work. So even before I sat down and started writing the first draft, Dave and I worked together on coming up with sketches of all the major characters. I sent him written descriptions of the characters and he sent back sketches. Some of them required us to go back and forth a bit to tweak them, but Dave read the description of Kaye and on the first try he was able to draw a character that WAS Kaye, and I knew it as soon as I saw it. These sketches were invaluable to me as I went through the writing process, and made it much easier to coordinate when we were ready for the actual illustrations.

8) There are elements of mentoring in this book. Again, was this intentionally well done? And do you feel mentors to be helpful to adolescents?

I feel mentors are helpful to everyone. Who of us doesn't benefit from having someone to look to for assistance or understanding of our struggles as we try to learn or do something new? For adolescents, who stand on the brink of the whole world and have so much that is new to learn and to do, a mentor can be an immense help. However, mentors don't have to be formal. They can be found in many unexpected places, and they can play an important role in a person's life but maybe only for a brief time. I think that's what happens in *The Knighting of Sir Kaye*.

9) Where are your books available?

The books are available in softcover, hardcover and eBook format and can be purchased from most online resellers: Amazon, Barnes and Noble, iTunes Store, etc. You can find additional information and links on my website, [www.donwinn.com](http://www.donwinn.com).

Amazon:

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## About Michael Shaughnessy EducationViews Senior Columnist

Dr. Shaughnessy Eastern New Mexico University Portales, New Mexico is currently Professor in Educational Studies and is a Consulting Editor for Gifted Education International and Educational Psychology Review. In addition, he writes for EducationViews.org and the International Journal of Theory and Research in Education. He has taught students with mental retardation, learning disabilities and gifted. He is on the Governor's Traumatic Brain Injury Advisory Council and the Gifted Education Advisory Board in New Mexico. He is also a school psychologist and conducts in-services and workshops on various topics.

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