

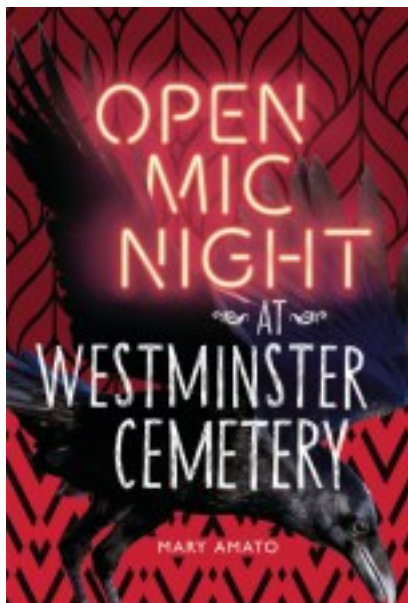
MARY AMATO'S INSPIRATION FOR OPEN MIC NIGHT AT WESTMINSTER CEMETERY



Posted by Libby Stille, Associate Publicist

Today YA author Mary Amato shares her inspiration for *Open Mic Night at Westminster Cemetery*.

Mary Amato visits Westminster Cemetery



My new novel, *Open Mic Night at Westminster Cemetery*, takes place in an old cemetery. The premise is that a 16-year-old girl wakes up, dead, in the same cemetery that Edgar Allan Poe was buried. As a “modern” girl she has a hard time adjusting to her new setting and fitting in with the long-buried residents. Complete fiction, of course, except that the place is real.

Below are photos of Poe’s monument with the front gate as well as his headstone, which marks the place of his first burial.

To write the novel, I twice visited the real Westminster (officially called Westminster Hall and Burying Ground). When I first arrived, I was struck by its spooky ambiance. I

thought how cool it would be to take the real names from the tombstones and turn them into characters.



Poe's headstone.



Poe's monument.

One set of graves in particular caught my attention. Sarah and John Brown (not the famous abolitionist) who lost six out of their ten children. Sarah died at age 80, and I put her and her grief into my first draft. But after reading that draft I realized that I had too many characters who were old. So, I did what historians can't do. I ditched the facts and went with my gut. I made Sarah 21 and decided she would die in childbirth with her second child.

Researching factual places for use in fiction is tricky. On the one hand, you want to use authentic details. On the other hand, you want the story and characters to grow and develop without being shackled by what might turn out to be unnecessary or unrelated facts.

I quickly learned that my story would be best served by using the cemetery as broad inspiration for my imagination. Seeing the graves of Sarah and her children gave me the idea for creating a character who has to deal with infant mortality. But then I made it even more dramatic and better suited to the themes of my novel by having my Sarah die young.

No doubt many of the images I encountered on my visits to Westminster worked their way into my mind, stimulating and inspiring me to make an imagined graveyard come to life.



The gravestones for the Brown family.

would climb to write in his journal.



Crypts near Poe's monument. This is where I imagined Sam

I love the textures and colors that show time passing in this old cemetery.



These graves under the church gave me the idea that there would be an old path leading to a catacomb.



Learn more

“Full of heart, honesty, and Poe-etry, with just a dash of the macabre. You’ll love the deceased residents of Westminster Cemetery—and not just the famous one.”—Gareth Hinds, author-illustrator of the graphic novel *POE: Stories and Poems*

“[B]lends prose with stage directions for a hybrid

structure. The resulting alchemy capitalizes on the strengths of both media to create a unique, fully-realized world. . . . Quoth the Raven, ‘Encore.’”—*Kirkus Reviews*