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## A GUEST POST BY MARY AMATO

**Happy Thursday! Author [Mary Amato](#) has two new books out this fall—the first in a chapter-book series, *News From Me, Lucy McGee*, and a YA called *Open Mic Night at Westminster Cemetery*. Although the two books couldn't be more different, both books contain characters who break into song. What's up with this? I asked Mary about her connection with fiction and songwriting.**

I just walked over to my book shelf and actually counted. Of my eighteen published books, twelve contain characters who make up songs. This surprises me. I would have guessed six. What is up with this? Sure, I've always loved to sing. But I also love to dance and cook and do yoga, and I don't have lots of dancing yogi chefs in my books. I clearly have a tendency to include songs. Do other authors do this? Am I odd?

I feel instinctively that I'm not odd, but I can't, off the top of my head, rattle off singing kid-lit characters who influenced me. So, back I shuffle to another bookshelf, and I do a little experiment. I pull out the books that influenced me as a child and that I studied and still study as an adult. My first handful: *Charlotte's Web*, *The Witches*, and *House at Pooh Corner*. Okay, there was music in film/stage versions, but did E.B. White, Roald Dahl, and A. A. Milne include songs in the original books? I honestly can't remember. Can you?

I swear, it takes only a few seconds of flipping to find the little treasures: there is White's Charlotte singing a lullaby; there are Dahl's witches singing a hex; and there's Pooh rhapsodizing about snow. Excited, I grab *Peter Pan and Wind in the Willows* next. Again, Disney added music but did Barrie and Grahame? Yep! There's Wendy singing to the lost boys and how could I have forgotten Grahame's Toad letting loose with such a funny braggadocio? And these are just the first quick finds. I know I could uncover more from all these authors, but I have to face the moment of truth.

I take the two most important books for me, the ones that I'm sure don't contain any singing: *Little Women* and *Harriet the Spy*. Yet, Beth does sing, and, in her own bottled-up way, Harriet does, too, when at her most vulnerable. In one of the most heart-wrenching scenes, the one in which poor Harriet is missing her nanny, Ole Golly, Harriet sings her name over

and over in her mind. "Harriet didn't answer and inside the song went, Ole Golly, please please, Ole Golly."

I'm not odd, in fact, I'm just continuing a kid-lit tradition. So now the question is not why do I do it, but why is singing a recurring motif in children's literature?

I'm actually working on a longer essay about this, but here are my sneak-peek reasons why:

- Singing is a natural impulse for many children in early childhood and an important component of play.
- A song adds texture to a novel and breaks up the prose or dialogue with rhythm, rhyme, repetition.
- Songs are focused opportunities for word play.
- A song shines a spotlight on any given scene and heightens the impact of that scene.
- A song can help develop character.
- A song can be a comfort, hearkening back to the lullaby.
- Finally, the act of singing is cathartic for the character.

In both of my new books, my characters let out their emotions by singing their hearts out. I do so for all of the reasons above. And, of course, because I just love to sing.

You can actually hear the songs in Mary Amato's new Lucy McGee book series, sing to the karaoke versions, and learn more [here](#). She is working on a longer essay about characters who sing and would love for you to tweet your examples to her [@maryamato](#) or contact her through [www.maryamato.com](http://www.maryamato.com).