



# BROD BAGERT



## ABOUT BROD BAGERT

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Brod Bagert is the award-winning author of 17 books of poetry for children, young-adults, and adults. His work has received numerous awards including the International Reading Association's prestigious Young Adults Choices award, the Association of Educational Publishers Distinguished Achievement Award, the Independent Publisher Gold Book Award, and Mom's Choices Gold Medal. He tours some thirty weeks a year, and has visited Asia, Europe, South America, Africa and just about every nook and cranny of the good ole USA.

Born and raised in the City of New Orleans, Brod studied the classics in Latin and Greek, wrestled and boxed to vent adolescent angst, fell in love with and married his high-school sweetheart, practiced law, served in public office, and reared four children that are the joy of his life.

Brod started his career as a poet in the third grade with a poem for his mother. He wrote a few poems in high school, then picked up the pace in college because "GIRLS LOVE POETRY!" During his lawyer days, Brod wrote fewer and fewer poems. Then one of his children asked him to write a poem for her to perform in her school elocution program. That launched a flood of poems unabated to this very day. In 1992, Brod closed his twenty-one year law practice and became one of America's very few full-time, professional poets.

Today Brod mesmerizes audiences with poetry, both his and those of the great authors of history, leaving participants with a new or reinvigorated love for poetry in the process.

Brod continues to live in New Orleans with Debby, his wife of 44 years, where they spend quality time with their four children, and a growing tribe of grandchildren.





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## ABOUT BROD'S POETRY

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Enter the world of Brod Bagert's poetry and get ready to be launched into the future of form and style. Audience members connect instantly with his high-energy presentations as they come to realize the entire show is all about them!

Brod says, "I write my poems to entertain. So, when the audience changes, the poems change. For kindergarteners I tend to use chanting, repetitious heroic couplets. For third graders I like ballad stanzas with a strong storyline. For eighth graders, free verse shifting in and out of rhyme to match tone and content."

Brod is always comparing poetry to music. That's because he believes that the sound of words is as important to poetry as the sound of the notes is to music. For Brod, poetry is meant to be performed- "The idea of voice is simple; it's like writing lines for an actor in a movie. Sometimes I write in my own voice, but most of the time I write in the voice of the audience for whom the poem is intended. In a poem for kindergartners, the person talking in the poem is a kindergartner. In a poem for sixth graders, I write in a sixth-grade voice."

The result is a body of performance-friendly poetry through which children hear their own voices, engage their own thoughts, and discover their own innermost feelings. Throw in a touch of situational humor, and the result is an exciting, valuable, brand new kind of poetic experience for children.

Finding your own voice through *hearing* your own voice is one of Brod's favorite ideas. If you want to tease him, act really serious and ask him, "Do you think it's a good idea to recite poems out loud?" Then sit back and watch as Brod boils over with enthusiasm and talks for the next three hours! The lesson is, he says, "To understand, love, write, present, and speak poetry; as well as to woo your lover and raise good children, **RECITE POEMS OUT LOUD!**"

## ABOUT THE MUSE PROJECT

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Imagine having a body of content-rich, dramatic literature that teaches your entire science curriculum. And while you're at it toss in your social studies and math curricula as well. Now imagine that this material is sufficiently content rich that it requires little supplemental instruction, and that it is so entertaining that your students actually love performing it. An impossible dream? Welcome to Muse Project!

Muse Project is an ongoing collaboration between poet Brod Bagert and over three thousand U.S. classroom teachers. The goal is to create a comprehensive collection of performance-based content-literature for each core discipline spanning grades K-8. The texts consist of all original Brod Bagert poems, dramatic monologues-dialogues, and plays. Teachers (the Muses) provide the inspiration by volunteering to receive advance copies of the texts, using them in their classrooms, and (if they so choose) sending feedback.

The resulting material folds easily into either local or national core curriculum standards and lines up well alongside Standards and Benchmarks across the grades 1-8 teaching spectrum. Again, an impossible dream? It's right around the corner!

# BROD BAGERT

## TESTIMONIALS

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Thank you, Brod Bagert, for two poetry-filled days of laughter and learning in Rankin County, MS! The children and teachers of Pelahatchie Elementary and Rouse Elementary are forever "poetry lovers!" PreK-6th grade Pelahatchie students were honored to crown you the King of Poetry, taste "Booger" candy with you at lunch and surprise you with a first edition of your very first book, IF ONLY I COULD FLY! The Kindergarten & First grade classes of Rouse Elementary could hardly wait for you to see the hall of Giant Children they painted to welcome you! They could hardly wait for you to see their classwork related to favorite poems! But mostly, they could hardly wait to see you perform their all time favorite poem, BOOGER LOVE! Thank you for taking the time to sign books and poetry down the halls. Thank you for teaching students and teachers alike during your performance. Thank you for bringing poetry to life. Thank you for the joy and happiness your poems enrich our lives with! You truly are the King of Poetry!!

*Kaye Sowell ♦ Retired Teacher ♦ Brandon, Mississippi*

Thank you so much for your visit to our school! It was phenomenal! All of my students were so engaged and when we came back to our classroom, all they could talk and wanted to talk about was poetry. Thank you for bringing your own writer's experience to our students. I had three students tell me they would not be afraid to write their very worst anymore. It meant a lot to me when an author like you was humble enough to express how hard it can be to write and brings life down to earth to the children when it comes to how to handle your dreams.

*Peter Zimeri ♦ Third Grade Teacher ♦ Katy, Texas*

My students watched Brod go through the process of creating an original work. His thinking about his thinking, the revisions, and the connections to real-life events are the themes he used to help my students understand brainstorming, pre-writing, first draft, revision and final draft, all connected, all in one class, all in one period. He broke the old five-day writing process and turned it into a seamless, integrated student lead art form. My students became writers and artists in one day.

*Don Doggett ♦ Principal ♦ Beaufort, South Carolina*

When my two grandsons got in the car after school, the first thing they spoke of was the great time they had with Poet Brod. They remembered the poems and they recited several by heart. They got the message about writing and rewriting, courage in the face of fear, and using facial expressions in oral recitation. They thought he was very, very funny.

*Kathleen Casey ♦ Grandmother & School Volunteer ♦ Malone, New York*

I just had to email you to let you know that Brod was at my school yesterday and he was FANTASTIC!!! I can honestly say that he has been the best visiting author I have had in my 19 years of librarianship. He was like the Energizer Bunny constantly performing for the children! They loved him! I would recommend his program to anyone.

*Kathy Miller ♦ Librarian ♦ Enola, Pennsylvania*

I am once again as giddy as a school girl with brand new markers and fresh sheets of notebook paper because these poems ROCK! God has given you such a great gift and I can only thank you for sharing it!!!! Thank you, thank you, thank you! You are helping LOTS of kiddos enjoy class!!!!

*Christina Hiracheta ♦ Science Teacher ♦ Taft, Texas*

# BACKGROUND MATERIAL

Feature article: Ramon Antonio Vargas.  
“Poet Finds Success in Children’s Voices.”  
*Times Picayune*. January 7, 2010.

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An interview with Brod:  
“Poetry Makers—Brod Bagert.”  
*The Miss Rumphius Effect*,  
*missrumphiuseffect.blogspot.com*. April 27, 2010.

## Times-Picayune, The (New Orleans, LA)

January 7, 2010

### Poet finds success in children's voices

*Ramon Antonio Vargas*

*Staff writer*

**Brod Bagert** found his calling 29 years ago when his daughter Colette asked him for a poem. It didn't matter which one. She just needed to recite one for an elocution contest, and she preferred it be written in a child's voice.

Former New Orleans City Councilman **Bagert** -- who was running for re-election to the state Public Service Commission at the time -- leafed through classic children's poetry books but turned up nothing. He felt Robert Louis Stevenson's "A Child's Garden of Verses" was packed with adult-voiced reflections about childhood. So were some of Shel Silverstein's best-known works.

He realized if he was to grant Colette's request, he needed to produce a poem himself, which he had occasionally done for his mother and girlfriends since third grade.

**Bagert** cut his last television spot for the PSC election. Soon after returning to his home office, he grabbed a pen, hunched over a legal pad and wrote: "Last night I heard a funny noise / While I was in my bed, / And wondered, "Should I take a peek, / Or go back to sleep instead?"

A child tackled a burglar stealing her toys but then woke up to realize it was all a dream in the remaining verses of Colette's poem, which **Bagert** titled "The Night I Caught the Burglar."

**Bagert** lost his election, and Colette won the blue ribbon in her elocution contest. **Bagert** retired from politics, self-published a book of verses in 1985, closed down a 21-year-old law practice in 1992 and ultimately changed the world of literature by penning and performing original verses narrated by schoolchildren.

"I wanted to get kids to love not only reading poetry but performing it also," **Bagert**, 61, said, sitting in his Bayou St. John-area writing studio recently. "I felt it was something that didn't exist anywhere in the poetry world."

**Bagert**'s decision brought him personal success. The local poet has since authored 10 books of children's verses and five adult-themed books, all of which sold well. Three new works -- "Big, Mean, Tween Machine," "Dear Mr. Witherspoon," and "Ms. Caliri's Stars of the Flying Horse" -- are set for release this year. He travels six months a year reading his books during visits with a total of 60,000 children and teachers, earning appearance fees starting at \$2,000.

However, the father of four also ended up producing a body of work school instructors often turn to when they want to teach their students the rare skill of reciting text effectively, according to child's literacy experts.

**Bagert**'s verses often feature the private emotions -- raw, complex, humorous -- of youthful characters he created. In "Hormone Jungle," winner of a coveted Young Adults' Choices Award, distressed middle-school suitor Benjamin Talkington Sprock III writes of his valentine: "My pounding heart is warm with love, / my

brain is cold with fear, / So I'll just keep this valentine / And try again next year." In the upcoming "Big, Mean, Tween Machine," slam poet Shaneka Byrd receives a poem from her brother suggesting that she makes boys ill when she kisses them. In retaliation, **Bagert** had Shaneka write, "Clever, clever little brother, / he writes poetic charm. / Next time I'll steal his teddy bear and tear off both its arms."

"He weaves narrative into short poems, with rich vocabulary," said Kent State University literacy instructor Timothy Rasinski, who authored classroom teaching materials for **Bagert's** newest books. "It is sophisticated ... (and) has the authentic dialogue of young people," which is why teachers use it to instruct reading and recitation.

**Bagert's** verses thus became an uncommon, two-edged learning opportunity for school children: They can "study art" fairly comfortably when they analyze his verses and "create art" when they deliver their interpretations of his work in a performance, Rasinski said.

"Since he is one of the few poets to (truly) write in the voice of a child, it's easy for (students) to use his material for expressiveness," Rasinski

added.

Lesley Mandel Morrow, professor of early childhood and literacy education at Rutgers University in New Jersey, credits **Bagert's** verses with helping breed the beginnings of a new generation of young poetry lovers in classrooms across the country.

She served up her grandson James' love for **Bagert's** poem "Booger Love" as proof.

James, 7, recites the verses from memory at random moments in school and at home, as if he were singing a popular song from the radio. "I love this little booger / All shiny green and black. / You can hold it for a minute, / But I want my booger back," begins the poem, found in **Bagert's** book "Giant Children."

"He's wonderful for our school districts," Morrow said. "We're lucky to have him."

**Bagert**, meanwhile, attributes his place in the pantheon of children's poets directly to his daughter's decades-old request -- some verses in the voice of a child, to read out loud.

In his two-decade career as a lawyer, he advocated for his clients' interests. When he finished "The Night I Caught the Burglar" for Colette, **Bagert** realized, "I became an advocate for children."

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## POETRY MAKERS: AN INTERVIEW WITH BROD BAGERT

*The Miss Rumphius Effect, [www.missrumphiuseffect.blogspot.com](http://www.missrumphiuseffect.blogspot.com), April 27, 2010*

### **Q: How did you get started writing poetry? What got you hooked on children's poetry?**

I wrote my first poem in third grade. My mother was very sick, and I wanted to tell her I loved her for what could have been the last time. My third grade teacher, Mrs. Toups, had told us that poets write words that last forever, so I decided to put what might have been my last I-love-you to my mom in a poem. My mother recovered and saved the poem, which I had framed and hanging on the wall of my writing studio when Hurricane Katrina filled the room with seven feet of water for three weeks. The water dissolved the paper. All that was left was an empty frame. (I do, however, have a scanned image of the poem that I use in my school assemblies.)

By the time I graduated from high school, I had written only a few poems of my own. That all changed in college. I wrote a lot during my undergraduate years: some self-expression, some to entertain friends, some to "woo women." I was published in a number of journals and had begun to form strong aesthetic opinions about poetry, but never considered myself "a poet." I was headed for law school, and poetry was something I simply could not take seriously.

Over the next fifteen years—law school, law practice, and politics— I wrote only a dozen or so poems, but the poetic impulse inside me shook itself out of hibernation when my children needed poems to recite in school elocution competitions. In 1980 there were almost no poems in English written in the voice of children and therefore suitable for recitation by a child. So I wrote them, in the voices of my own children, for them to recite in competition, to help them perform successfully and grow in confidence. They succeeded; I was hooked. Twelve years later I closed my law office and became full time poet.

### **Q: What are the things you enjoy most about writing poetry for children/young adults?**

When I make a poem, I try to simultaneously entertain and empower the reader. I know no greater joy than when I make a poem that succeeds at doing those two things.

### **Q: Who/what made you want to write?**

Writing makes the loneliness go away. Social interaction is difficult for me. I am told that I seem confident and socially at ease, but it's like I have a little robot I bring out to interact with people, while the inner-me remains hidden and protected. That inner-me is an intense, intellectually aggressive, overly sensitive, insecure combination of philosophical black and whites and paradoxical emotional extremes. I have only a few very close friends who are comfortable with the inner-me, yet I truly love to communicate with my fellow human beings, and poetry is the medium that permits it.

### **Q: Have you had any formal poetry training? If not, how did you learn to write what you do?**

In high school I was immersed in poetry. By the time I graduated I had read several of the Greek poets (mostly Homer) in the original Greek, almost all of the Latin poets in the original Latin, and at least a sampling of all the traditional English poets. In college I did the usual English literature course work, took some advance classes on Shakespeare and the Romantics, and had one extraordinary semester with the now moderately famous poet Miller Williams. Formal education had taught me enough about poetry to conclude that, with some rare but notable exceptions, the poetry of the English language had not yet gotten it together, that the world of contemporary poetry was dysfunctional, and that if I wanted to write poetry that found an audience I'd have to figure it out on my own, which is what I've been doing for the last 45 years.

Along the way, I've had a lot of help. Toward the end of my political career, I developed a friendship with Gary Esolen: newspaper editor, fellow poet, and community activist. It was about the time I had written and self-published a book of poems for children which I titled "If Only I Could Fly— Poems for Kids to Read Out Loud." Gary, a devotee of the notion of poetry as an oral art form, was intrigued by the title's emphasis on oral performance. After a brief conversation during which I sprayed him with a barrage of unfocused ideas about poetry, Gary told me that I didn't yet "know enough about poetry to have a productive conversation" with him on the subject and that he was willing to teach me if I were willing to learn. We formed what we joking called the "Caffin Ave. Poetry Society," a group of poetry lovers who for ten years met once a week to read and talk about poetry. It was an eclectic group of brilliant, non-academic professionals, each with a penchant for thinking "out of the box." We taught each other a lot.

It was against that backdrop that I taught myself to write my poetry. I did it by writing, rewriting, reading the result to an audience, honestly assessing what succeeded and what failed, then writing and rewriting again. I scoured the compendium of poetry in English for poems that I personally loved, poems that touched me, poems that "worked." I then figured out how they worked, committed them to memory, and performed them, thus storing both the technique and the voice in the part of my brain that produces language. It's an ongoing process that continues to this day, as a result of which my writing continues to improve, and I get to live with dozens and dozens of the great poems of our language, and some other languages, alive in my active memory and always on the tip of my tongue.

**Q: Can describe your poetry writing process?**

My writing process would be more aptly called a "rewriting" process. I see ideas for poems everywhere. When an idea is strong enough to move me to write, I jump right in and start writing, and I start by permitting myself to WRITE MY WORST. That's right. I never try to write my best. I never even try to write well. I simply start by writing badly, celebrate successfully writing my worst, and then start rewriting. In each rewrite, I search for ways to make my poem better. Not good. BETTER! With each rewrite I focus on a different aspect of the language—sound, rhythm, surface meaning, unconscious connotation, even the facial expressions produced by the pronunciation of the words (which I call "visual onomatopoeia"—and I keep rewriting until I can't make it any better, which is how I know I've written my best. Then I read it out loud to the intended audience to see both how they react to the poem and how it feels to me when I perform it. Then I start rewriting again.

How many rewrites does one of my poems go through? It's rare for me to finish a poem with fewer than thirty rewrites and not uncommon to require a hundred or more. Then, when I put a book together, I compile all the poems I've written that are appropriate for the book, two hundred or so for a book that will eventually include twenty poems, and start rewriting all over again. In the end, about one in ten will make it into a manuscript that I send to my editor, which is when the rewriting process starts all over again.

The weeding process employs both a negative and a positive criterion. For the negative part of the process, I simply identify the weaker poems and eliminate them; while on the positive side, I'm looking for poems with connection, an connective emotional thread that functions largely at the unconscious level, the net effect of which is to empower the young reader. It's the source of a little personal frustration that no one has ever noticed this feature of my work. I don't blame anybody, if it were easy to spot it wouldn't work, but it tends to drive me crazy when people say that I write "silly" poems. I never write silly poems. There's always, in every poem, a serious core.

**Q: Do you have a favorite among all the poems/poetry books you have written?**

My books are like my children; it's hard to have favorites. Giant Children was illustrated by Tedd Arnold, which is pretty special. Hormone Jungle has won several awards.



**Q: Would you like to share the details of any new poetry project(s) or other books that you're working on?**

I'm presently working in collaboration with several hundred classroom teachers in a thing we call The Muse Project. The goal is to provide classroom teachers with poetry across the K-8 curriculum, richly entertaining poems that are rock-solid on common core standards in science, social studies, math, and language arts. Teachers suggest topics for content poems they'd like to use in their classrooms, I then write the poems and send them to the participants in monthly batches. The concept is evolving so we don't yet know how many books or videos or what will come out of it, for now our focus is on the work.

**Pop Quiz!**

**Q: Your favorite dead poet?**

In English: Robert Burns. In Spanish: Jose Marti. In Latin: Horace. In Greek: Homer.

**Q: Your favorite place to write?**

On a computer, connected to a projector, with a head-mike, in front of a live audience for whom the poem is intended, to whom I provide a running stream out loud of what's going on in my head as I write. For the last ten years, this is how I've written the rough draft and the first dozen or so rewrites of virtually all of my poems.

I then do the final twenty or thirty rewrites at home in my writing studio, sitting on a recliner with my computer in my lap, where the hours and the world and time itself disappear, night turns into day, and being alive is a very good thing.

**Q: Favorite quote on writing/poetry?**

In his book *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Friedrich Nietzsche characterizes some poets as "shallow seas" who "muddle their water that it may seem deep." In 1891, when Nietzsche wrote those words, he could not have known how prophetic his statement would seem in light of the poetic output of the 20th Century, a veritable cornucopia of bad poetry, bad not because it's difficult to understand, but because it makes itself difficult to understand as a mask to hid it's lack of artistic power.

I feel a little guilty because I've chosen a negative quote, but it's important. The golden age of poetry in English lies not in our past but in our future. It may be written by the young poets who read this paragraph, maybe by you, and it's important that you not be misled by the insidious apocryphal doctrine of contrived ambiguity that has poisoned a century of poetry in English and alienated three generations of human beings from the poetry we desperately need.