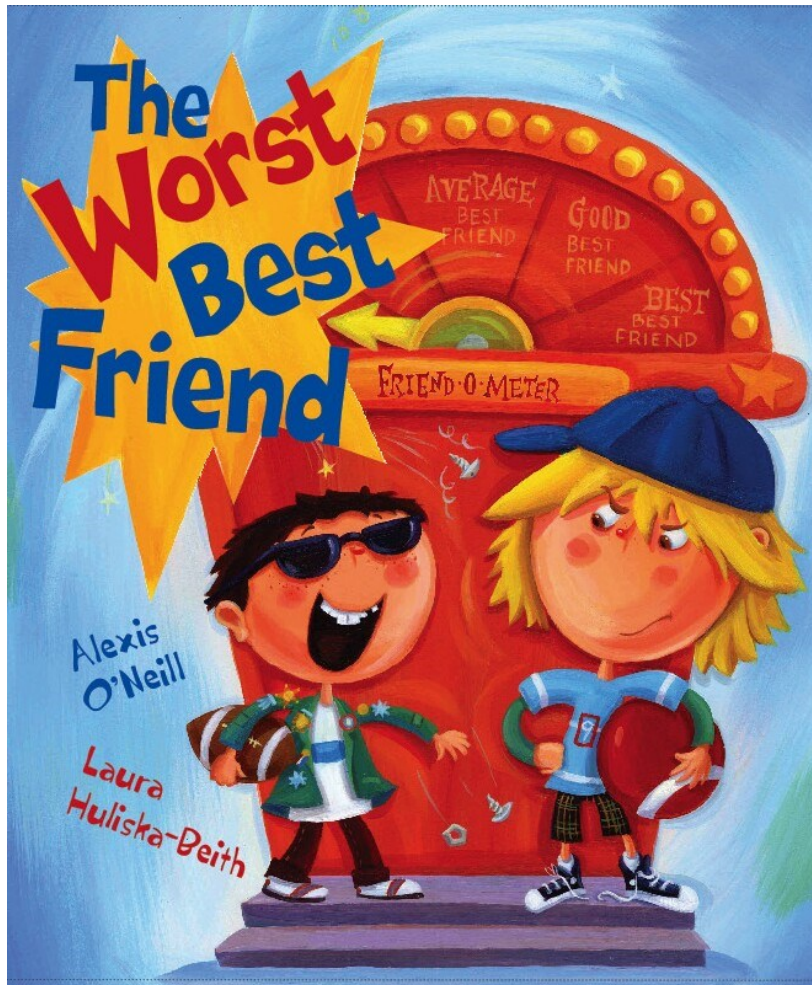


# Because You Asked!

## Questions & Answers

About *The Worst Best Friend*  
and Author Alexis O'Neill



**How did you come up with your story?**

I was thinking about friendship and people who stay friends their whole life long, like my dad and his best friend, John, and my sister, Donna, and her best friend, Corinne. Then I thought, I wonder what would happen if something or someone got between those friends? Could they ever be friends again?

**How many drafts did you write before the story sounded good to you?**

I wrote at least 22 drafts (but who's counting?!) Between July 2005 and February 2006, I wrote 11 drafts. Between March 2006 and the middle of May 2006, I did 11 more drafts before it went to a committee at Scholastic. In August, my editor & I did "tweaks" (about 5 passes for this) and we "tweaked" it even after the folded gathered pages came out, right up to production time. Needless to say, I like the LAST draft much, much better than the first one! And it took "only" 22 drafts to get it right!

**Do you have an example of a line or a sentence that you re-wrote to sound better?**

Openings lines of picture books are always tricky. They have to look right to the eye, sound right to the ear and make sense to the story. Here's the progression of how I went from my really, really awful opening to the one that worked.

1st DRAFT: July 6, 2005

*Conrad was the BEST at everything -  
Climbing walls, jumping rivers, running races,  
Sliding, skiing, surfing, biking, golfing - you name it.  
He had the BEST manners. And he even got the BEST grades in school.*

**3rd DRAFT: January 21, 2006**

Conrad and Mike

Were very best friends --

Very, VERY best friends

**4th DRAFT: February 21, 2006**

Conrad and Mike

Were very best friends.

Actually, Conrad was the BEST at everything -

**6th DRAFT: March 13, 2006**

Conrad and Mike, Mike and Conrad.

From the day they were born,

They were best, best friends.

**7th DRAFT: March 29, 2006**

Mike and Conrad, Conrad and Mike,

were best, best friends.

Can you see how I made the opening shorter and punchier each time?

Then From my 7th DRAFT to my 22nd DRAFT, the opening stayed the same.

**When you wrote the story, did you have an idea of what the characters would look like?**

If I did have any images in mind, I can't remember, because as soon as I saw the illustrations by Laura Huliksa-Beith, I knew they were perfect! I especially love the way she incorporated characters from THE RECESS QUEEN into THE WORST BEST FRIEND. I hadn't thought of those two books happening on the same playground, but when I saw what she did, I knew she was right. There are many stories happening on playgrounds, all at the same time!



**How did you come up with the names of Mike, Conrad and Victor?**

I chose "Mike" for a loyal family friend, Mike Mahoney. "Conrad" sounded like "comrade" to me, the name of a friend's little wiener dog. And "Victor" - well, because he is always "victorious."

**What else have you written?**

My other books include THE RECESS QUEEN, LOUD EMILY, ESTELA'S SWAP, THE KITE THAT BRIDGED TWO NATIONS, two books about the history of Syracuse, New York (one for kids and one for adults) and a book for kids about an artist named Gustav Stickley. I've also written and tons of works for kids' magazines including *Cricket*, *Spider*, *Cobblestone*, *Faces*, *Odyssey* and *Calliope*.



BBFs John & Tip

**What's one of the best things about writing kids' books?**

Besides visiting kids at schools all around the country, I love being able to name family and friends on the dedication pages. Here are pictures of my dad and sister with their best, best friends.

For information about school visits, conferences, and workshops, go to:

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BBFs Corinne & Donna