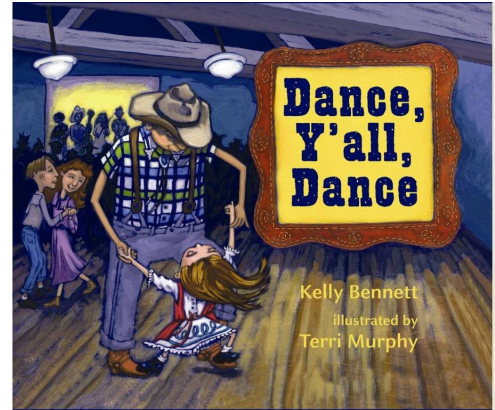


Dance, Y'all Dance
by **Kelly Bennett**
Illustrated by **Terri Murphy**
(Bright Sky Press, 2009)

About the book:

It's Saturday night and time for the farmers and kids to come into town and put their worries away! Yes, they'll be romance and shenanigans and maybe even a hayride when the bank needs a break. So, pull on your satin slippers or shine your cowboy boots there's a good band and a good time waiting for you!



About the author:

Kelly Goldman Bennett writes books for children—both fiction and non-fiction. She has been writing professionally since 1986. Her work has also appeared in national magazines and newspapers.

At the moment, Kelly is obsessed with creating picture books. “Picture books are like icebergs,” she notes, “so much of what goes on goes unseen.” And revising picture book text is a lot like carving an ice sculpture.

“I start with a big, messy jumble of words, pages of words, block of words and just start chipping away. When I’m finished, I hope what’s left is as pure and simply stated as I can write it.” While she’s chipping away, Kelly imagines pictures to go with her words—but she never shares them. Instead, she strives to leave lots of space in her stories for the illustrator to fill with art.

Author Interview:

What inspired this fun story about a Saturday night romp?

As a family activity, my husband, Curtis, and children, Max and Alexis, (along with 2 of their friends) took Country Swing dance lessons. For eight weeks we danced circles around each other. You can imagine how much fun--and sore toes--we got trying to do moves like "the pretzel." While I was writing the book I played country music non-stop and made Curtis Texas Two-Step me around the house while I recited the story, so I could be sure to get the rhythm right.

How do you know an idea is worth working on?

A good story idea makes me tingle. It's like an electric current zips through me. It gets me asking questions? If I want to find out more about something--especially how a story turns out--I know readers will, too. When a story idea zaps me, I check the library and book sellers first, to see if other books on the same topic are already out there. If the story I am imagining has already been published, I have to consider whether or not the world "needs" another book on the same topic.

Sometimes the answer is "no, silly, read those other books." Sometimes a story idea just won't let me go. It niggles me, saying "tell me! Write my story, Kelly! You need to write this." Each of us has our own voice, our own way of looking at things. The key is to infuse our stories with our unique personalities and viewpoints. It means digging deeper, exploring different characters and new ways of looking at a topic, which isn't always easy. But, if I can find a way to make a story idea fresh and exciting to me, then it's worth working on.

What types of revision do you do?

Each of my stories goes through many, many, many, many revisions--at least 10 or 20 per picture book. And I'm talking about true revision: rewriting scenes, adding and deleting characters, moving lines around--not just fixing spelling errors and punctuation.

I begin with lists: lists of words, lists of characters, lists of possible scenes. This fills me with ideas. Next, I sit down and write. I write a complete story, from beginning to end. The next few times, I'll work on story structure. Making sure the story makes sense. That it has a beginning, middle, and a great ending. I can't move ahead with a story until I love the ending. Once the story feels good, I begin cutting words. They say that writers "have to tell themselves the story first," which means writing much more than what needs to be in the story. The manuscript for a picture book, like *Dance, Y'all, Dance*, may have only 400 words in the end, but an early version had more than 1200 words. I examine every word, and delete every single one that isn't needed. I revise with illustrations in mind. I cut out descriptions, adjectives, adverbs, everything I think will be "told" in the pictures. The almost-last revision is especially fun. I "dummy" my story. I print out my story and cut it into scenes and lines which I tape into a book of blank pages. I am not good at drawing, but I do draw little line sketches to go with each page. Then, finally, even after the story is going to be published and the illustrator is working on the art, I make more revisions with my editor--and sometimes more, after the copyeditor goes through and double-triple-quadruple checks spelling, grammar and punctuation.

What can your fans look forward to next?

Spring 2010 is a celebration of Fathers! Two picture books featuring Fathers and Kids will be in bookstores: *Dad and Pop* (Candlewick Press) and *Your Daddy is Just Like You* (G.P. Putnam's Sons).

Questions to consider:

1. Why are they heading to town on Saturday night?
2. What do they have to get done before they can have fun?
3. Why do you think the author decides to repeat some words? What is she trying to make it sound like?
4. Who might you see when you come to the dance? Of the character mentioned who would you most like to know? Why?
5. Why are Ida Belle and Clint special the way they dance? Have you ever broken anything? What was the worst part?
6. What do people do when the band needs a break? Have you ever been on a hayride? Describe it.
7. Explain what Buck, Harlin and Beau are doing under the stage?

8. Why does Aunt May tell everyone to stop dancing? How do you think she felt?
9. Why isn't Curt dancing? Should he wait for her or go on and find someone new to dance with? Why?
10. Which illustration is your favorite? Why? Why do you think the illustrator chose the color palette that she did? How do you decide what colors to use?

Projects:

Reading:

As someone reads the story aloud raise your hand each time you hear two words that rhyme. Can you tell another word that rhymes with that pair? Or, write the words on index cards and play rhyming concentration!

-or-

Create a Venn diagram between the way it was in the 1800's on Saturday night compared to today. What do they have in common? How is life different?

Writing:

Pretend you're going to write a picture book about what you do on Saturday nights. Brainstorm a list of possible activities. Then, take one of those and make a web using all the people, places and ideas that could end up in your story. Write a draft but don't worry about rhyme!

Art:

Inspired by the art of Terri Murphy draw (and add color) to a picture of what you best like to do on the weekend. You might play with perspective like Murphy (notice how pictures are at really different angles in the book) and draw the same scene from a different angle, or perspective.

Music:

Sing to the tune "*Row, Row, Row Your Boat*":

Move, move, move your feet
every Saturday night
Pretzel, travel, shuffle, slide
you'll soon get it right!

Dance, dance, dance y'all
swing it to the beat
after all our chores are done
it's the place to meet!

This guide was created by [Tracie Vaughn Zimmer](#), a reading specialist and children's author, visit her website to find hundreds of other guides to children's literature.