Chris Van Allsburg – Bio

As long as I can remember, I've always loved to draw. But my interest in drawing wasn't encouraged very much. Growing up in the 1950s, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, boys were supposed to be athletic. Certain peer pressures encouraged little fingers to learn how to hold footballs rather than crayons.

My early love for drawing developed into a love for telling stories through pictures. Stories begin as fragments of pictures in my mind. I create a story by posing questions to myself. I call it the “what if” and “what then” approach. For example, for my book Jumanji, I started out by thinking “What if two bored children discovered a board game? What if the board game came to life? What then?” The Polar Express began with the idea of a train standing alone in the woods. I asked myself, “What if a boy gets on that train? Where does he go?”

From the time I come up with the idea, write and illustrate the book, and deliver it to the printer, it takes about seven months. First, I begin thinking of the idea (asking myself what if and what then). Then I imagine the pictures and the story. A good picture book should have events that are visually arresting - the pictures should call attention to what is happening in the story. I first consider scenes that are exciting to look at and then my challenge is to weave a story around those pictures. The next step is putting the illustrations and story down on paper. At that point, it becomes intense work - all day, every day, even on weekends!
When you first look at my illustrations, you see ordinary, everyday things. But if you look closer, things might not seem quite so simple. When I'm writing a book, I always try to create something strange or puzzling in each picture. By using artistic strategies of perspective, light, and point of view, I can give the drawing a kind of mysterious quality. In other words, the style I use allows me to make a drawing that has a little mystery to it, even if the actual things I am drawing are not strange or mysterious.

All of my books are picture books, so they are generally thought of as books for children. But when I make them, I think of the books as being for everybody - for people of all ages. When I was a kid, I had no idea what I wanted to be when I grew up, but now I'm really glad I became an artist and a storyteller.