

BOOKS FOR BENJAMIN



R.G. de Rouen

Illustrated by Uliana Barabash

To my parents who encouraged my reading and author Ruth Craig, who was my mentor
at The Institute of Children's Literature for believing in this story.

-RGD

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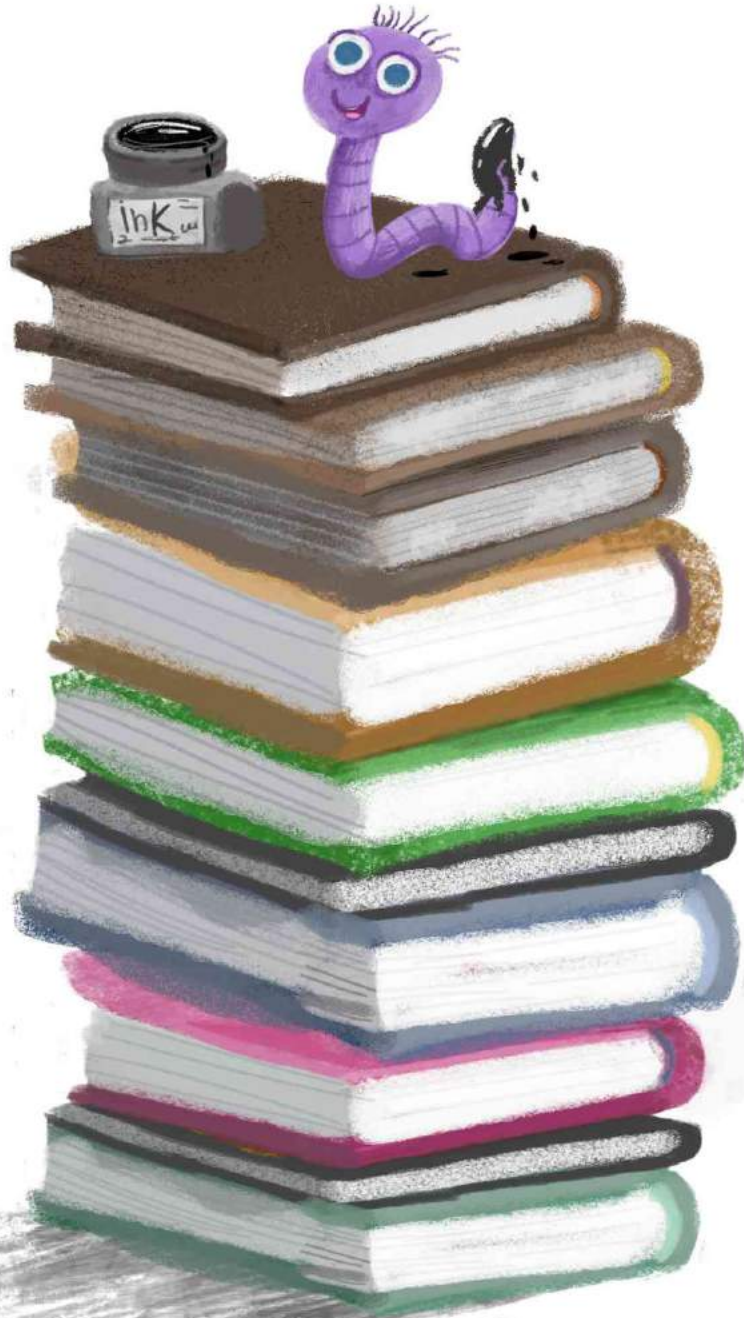
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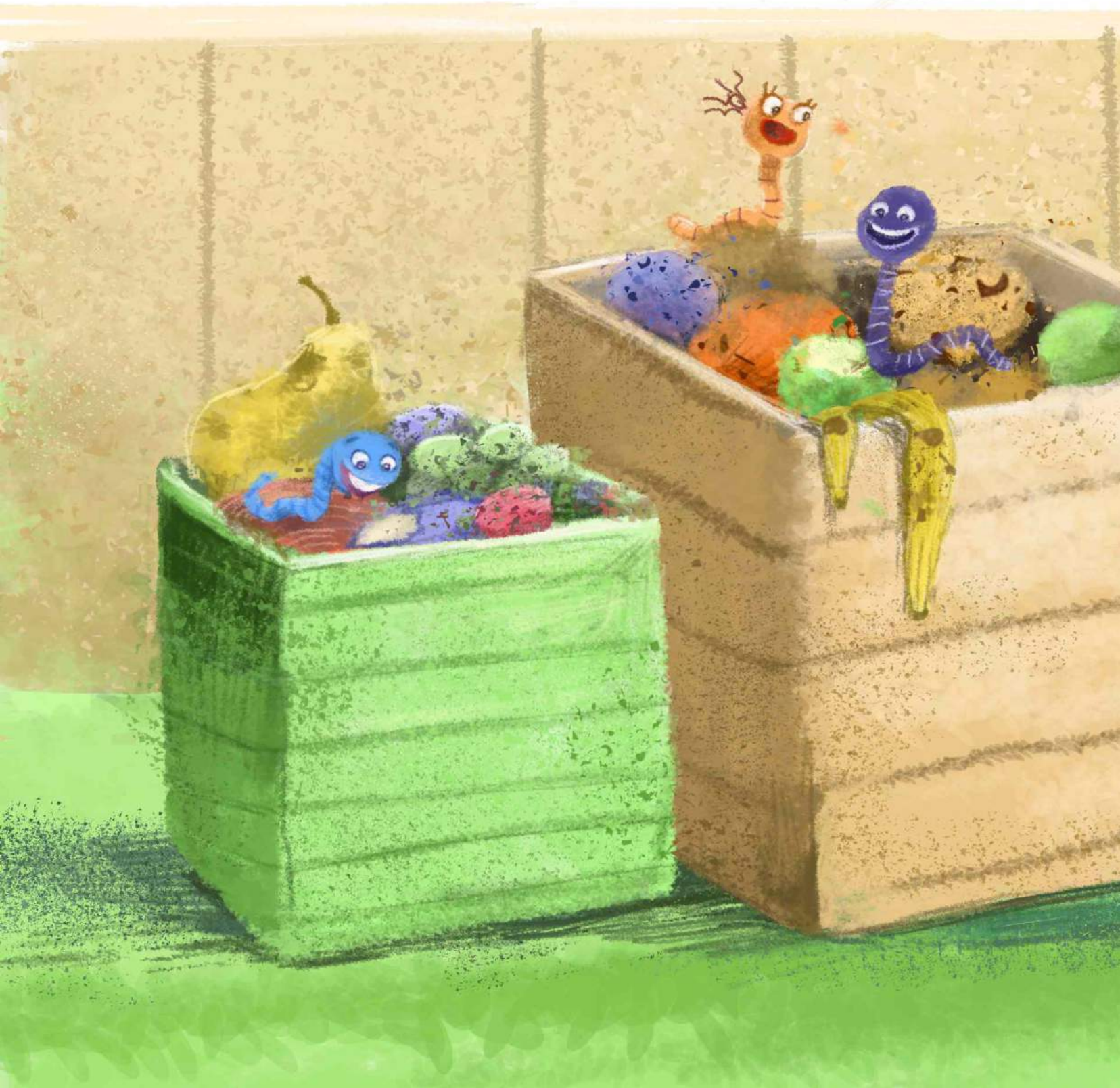


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In the back lot of a grocery store lived a family of worms.

They ate and burrowed their way through apples and peaches, cherries and plums. All the scraps that Mr. Green, the grocer, threw out.



But not Benjamin.

He would rather read about adventures in a giant peach than eat one.



“Who ever heard of a worm that reads?” said Digger, Benjamin’s brother. He laughed so hard he fell from his perch on top of an apple core.



“Reading can’t be healthy,” Winona Wormwood told her son.
“You know we worms only eat nice rotten things.”

“Sounds too clean to me,” said Ferdinand Wormwood, Benjamin’s father.
He munched on slimy lettuce and could not be bothered with all this talk
of books.

But Benjamin was tired of reading old newspapers and magazines covered
with tomato splashes. He had a plan.



That night, as Mr. Green turned off the lights to his grocery store, Benjamin inched his way through a slight crack in the wall.

He slithered over to a rack of newspapers, crawling inside one of them.

Someone is sure to buy this paper tomorrow and take me home, he thought. Then I can finally read real books!

Benjamin was almost too excited to sleep.

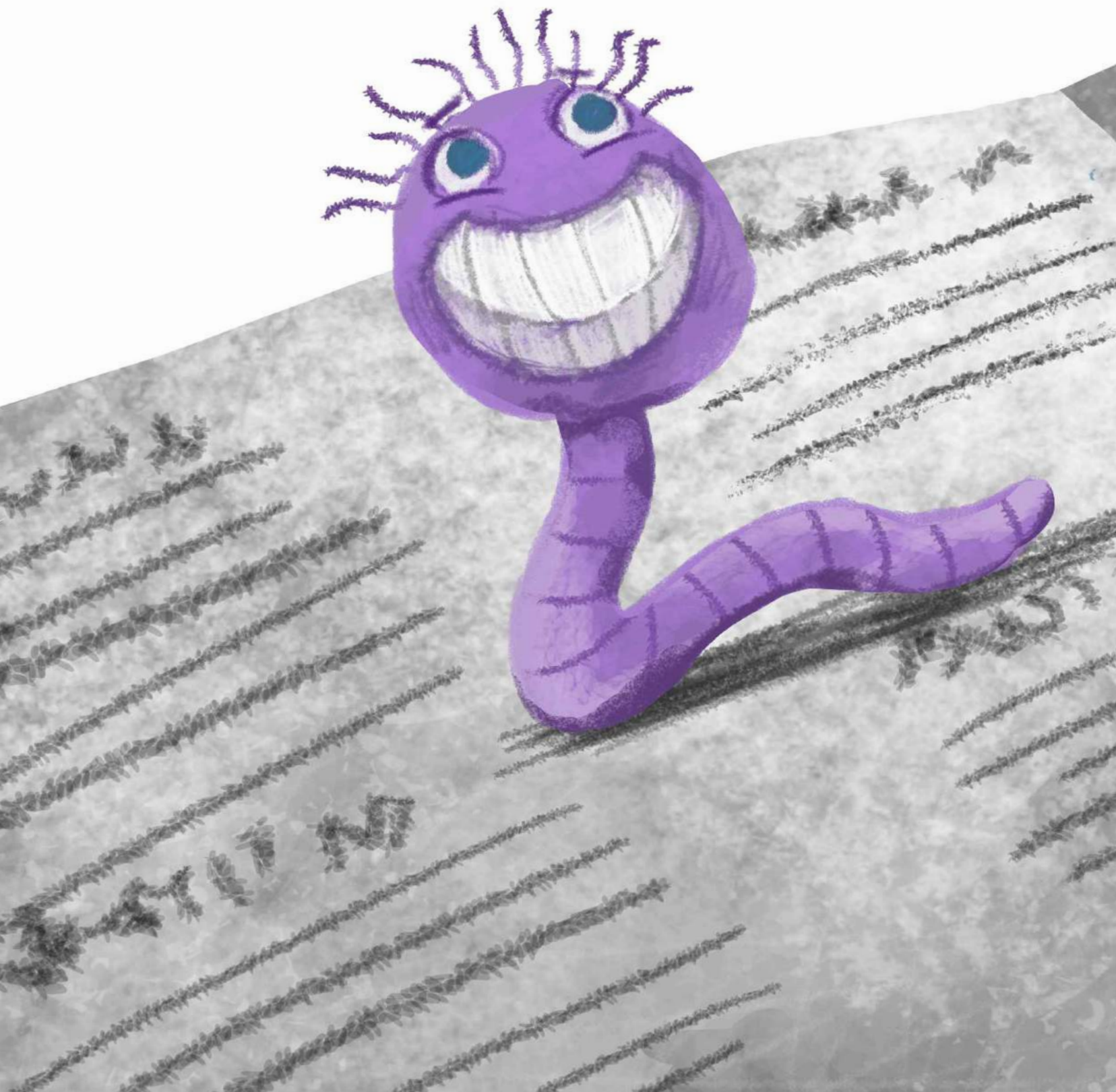


Sure enough, the next morning, a gray-haired lady with a pleasant smile grabbed the paper where Benjamin was hidden.

Once at home, she sat down on the veranda to enjoy a cup of tea. And when she opened her morning paper ...



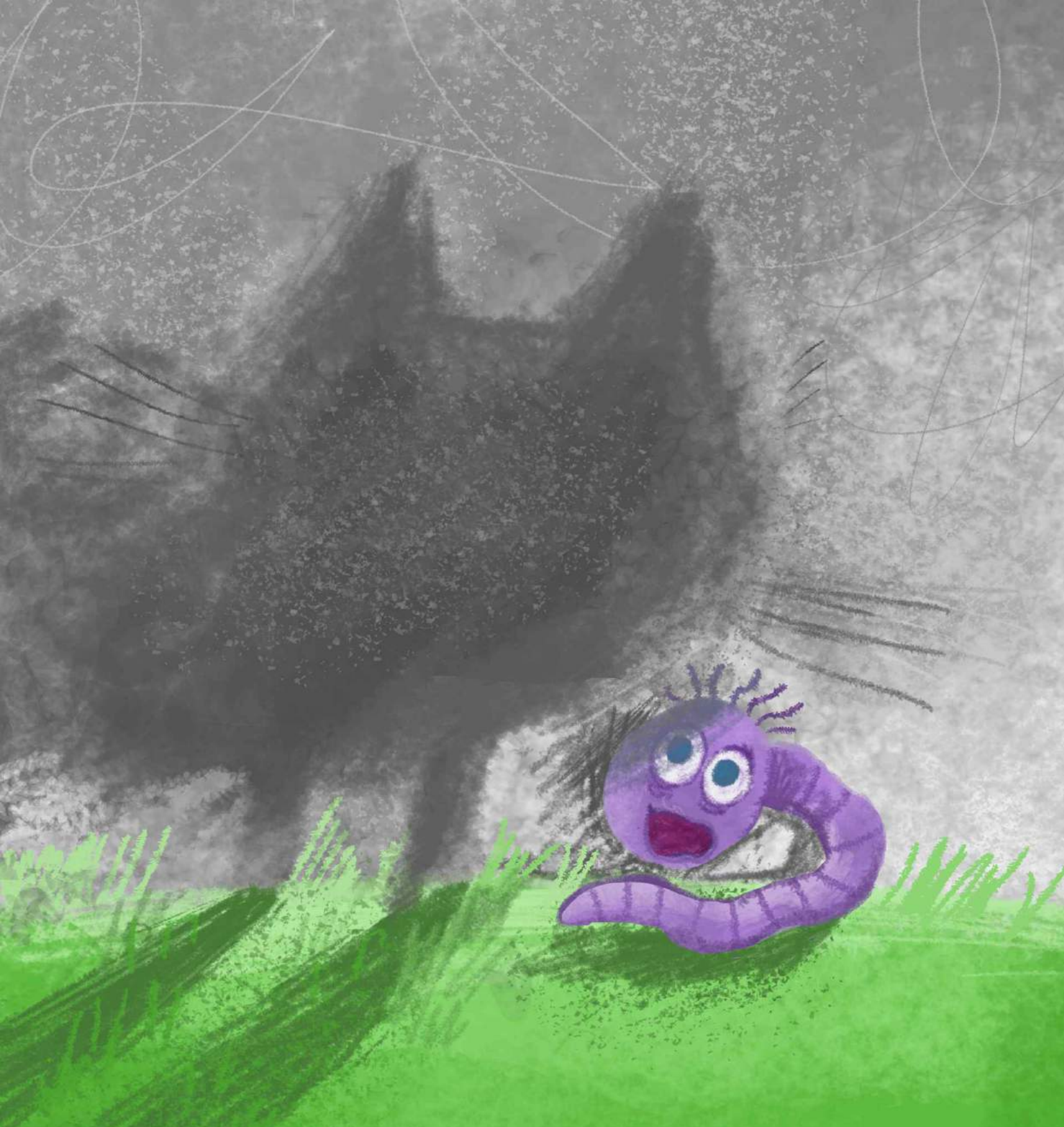
Benjamin's face peered at her with a grin wider than the Grand Canyon.





“Yuck, a worm!” she shrieked. The next sound Benjamin heard was an enormous CRASH of a giant flyswatter.





Benjamin's heart raced as he searched for a place to hide.

Suddenly, a dark shadow loomed large over him. Benjamin didn't dare look. He just curled himself up like a porcupine.

LEFT! RIGHT!

Benjamin bounced
like a ping-pong ball
between the cat's paws.

UP IN THE AIR he flew.





SNAP!

The macaw's beak narrowly missed Benjamin's tail.

Benjamin dropped with a THUD...

...onto a spiderwort plant.



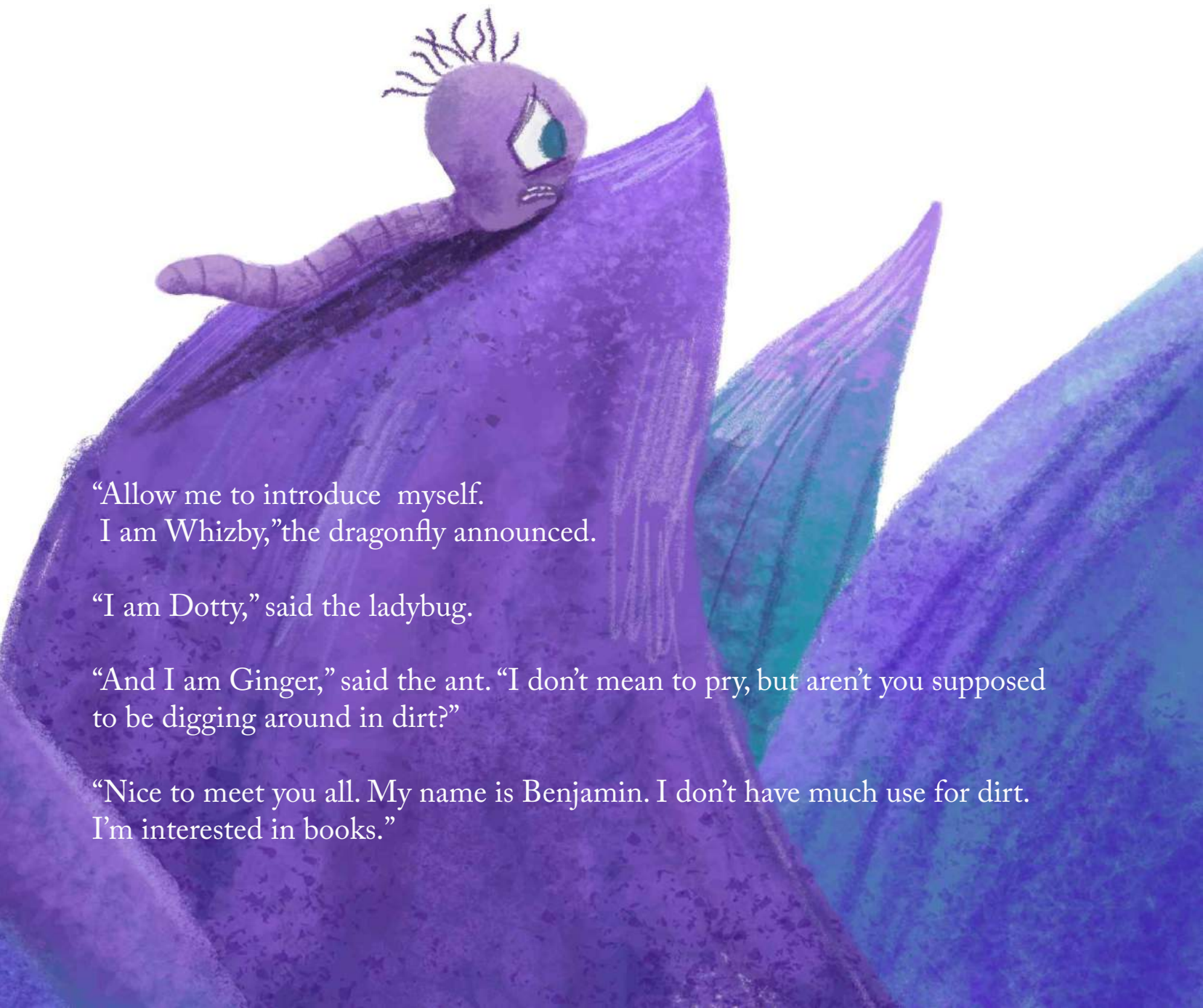
Benjamin clung to the purple leaves for dear life
hoping to blend in.

“That was a close one!” said a voice.

“Almost made into birdseed!” said another.

“Mrs. Thimble and her cat almost got you!” said a third.

In all his fright, Benjamin hadn’t noticed other creatures around him.



“Allow me to introduce myself.
I am Whizby,” the dragonfly announced.

“I am Dotty,” said the ladybug.

“And I am Ginger,” said the ant. “I don’t mean to pry, but aren’t you supposed to be digging around in dirt?”

“Nice to meet you all. My name is Benjamin. I don’t have much use for dirt. I’m interested in books.”

“Oh, do books taste better than old apples and mulch?” Dotty asked.

“No, I don’t want to eat the books,” Benjamin explained. “I want to read them.”



“I don’t know much about reading books,” said Dotty. “But I do know where you can find them and I’d be happy to take you there.”

“He’s too big for you, my dear,” Whizby said. “But I can easily take him on my back, and you can carry Ginger on yours!”

So off the little group flew.

Off to the public library!



Benjamin could not believe his luck. Books were all around him. He spent many happy days and weeks in the library, reading everything he could crawl into.

Whizby, Dotty, and Ginger would often visit to hear Benjamin read great stories. Everything from dinosaurs to dandelions, pirates to penguins.





But, one night,
the lights to the library suddenly switched on.

“Ah, so you’re the culprit!” said Miss Nicholas, the librarian. “Now I know where all those funny marks came from.”

“I’m sorry,” replied Benjamin, withdrawing his tail from the ink well. “I didn’t mean to do any harm. It’s just that you have so many books. I marked them to remember which ones I’ve read before.”

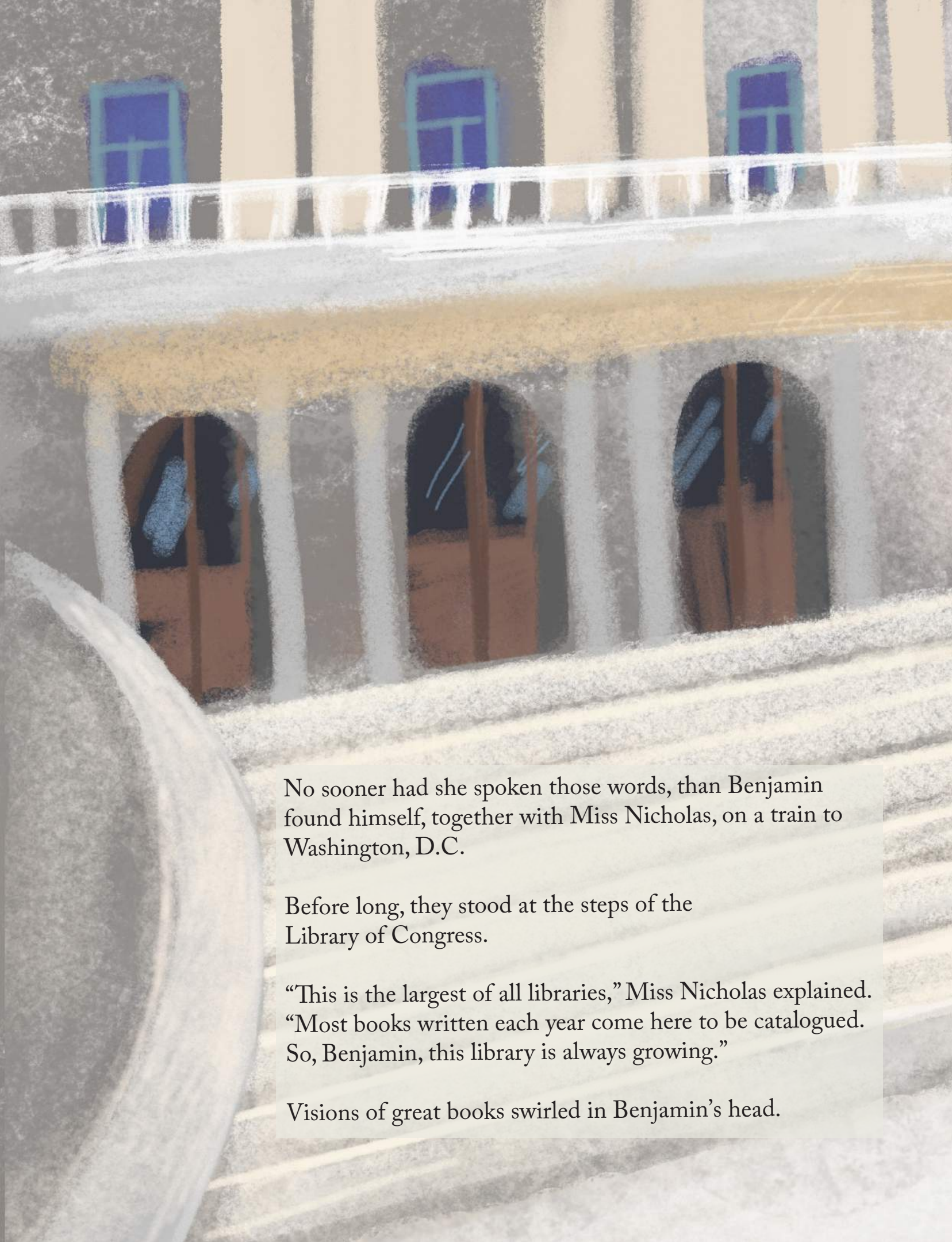




“Wow, a worm that reads!” Miss Nicholas exclaimed. “And just how many have you read so far?” she asked.

“Almost all of them, and some twice,” Benjamin said. “But now I really wish there were more books to read.”

“Hmm, I might just have the place for you,” Miss Nicholas said.



No sooner had she spoken those words, than Benjamin found himself, together with Miss Nicholas, on a train to Washington, D.C.

Before long, they stood at the steps of the Library of Congress.

“This is the largest of all libraries,” Miss Nicholas explained. “Most books written each year come here to be catalogued. So, Benjamin, this library is always growing.”

Visions of great books swirled in Benjamin’s head.

Inside the library, Benjamin and Miss Nicholas received a grand tour by the Head Librarian and various trustees of the Library of Congress. They were all eager to see this book-reading phenomenon, named Benjamin.

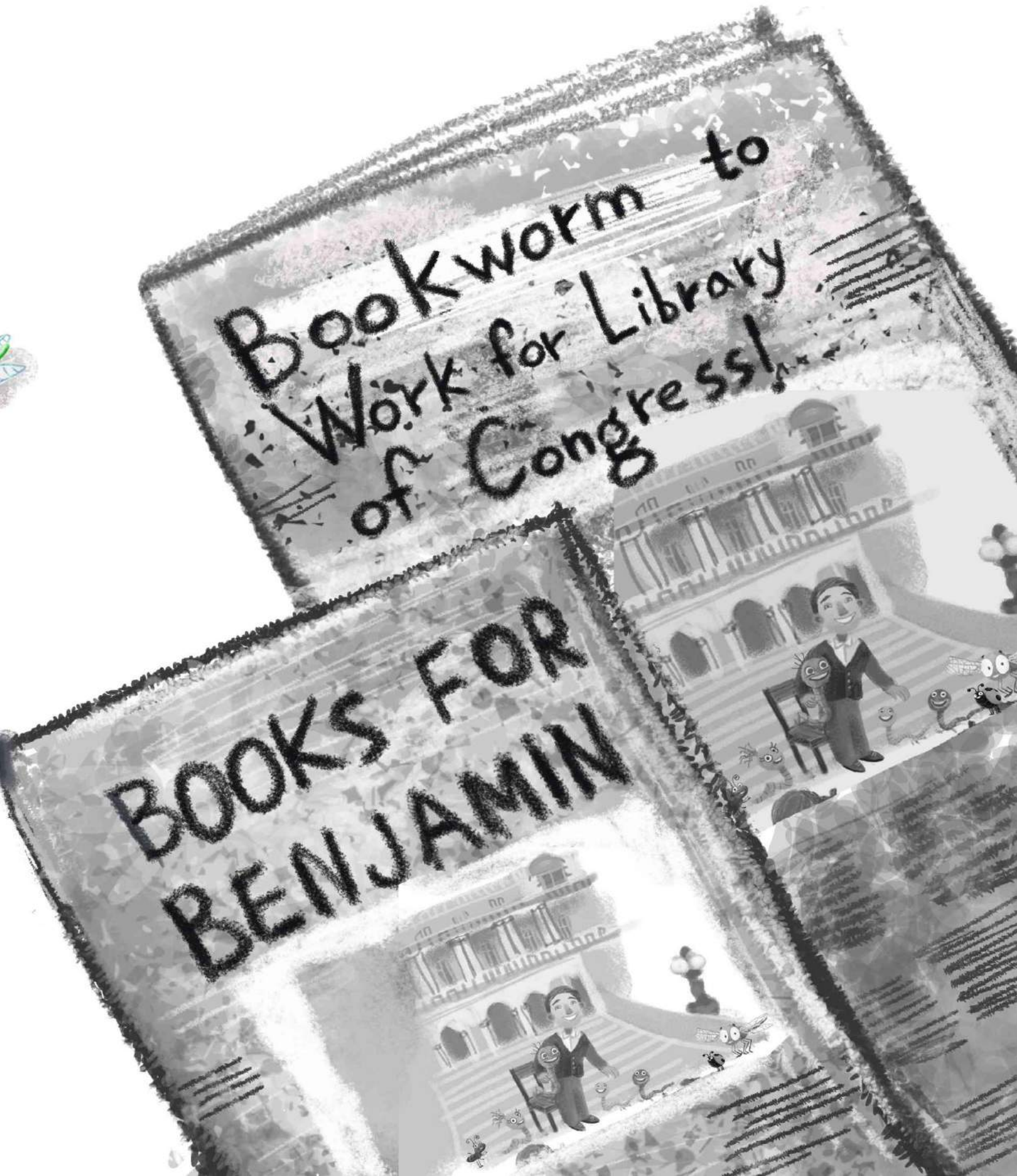
They watched in wonder as Benjamin breezed through several stacks of the library's best collections. Even the most difficult ones!


“The worm’s a genius!”
they cheered.





Benjamin's picture appeared in all the papers. They even showed him next to the President of the United States.





Soon Benjamin became the most widely read person (make that worm) in the whole world. For no book was allowed to be published without first being read and stamped by Benjamin.

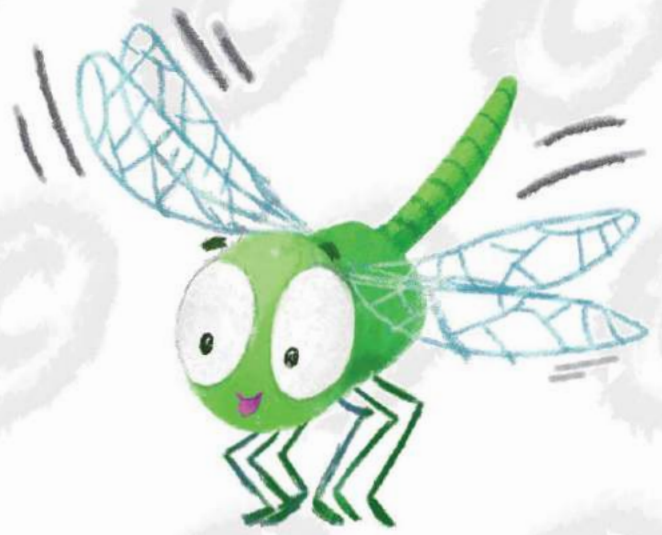
If you don't believe this story, just peek inside your books. You might find Benjamin has read them too.

Right next to the year the book was published, you'll find his famous signature.

It looks like this!







Did You Know?

About Libraries

The earliest library dates back 2,700 years. Back then, books were made of clay and not paper. Writing marks were made on the clay tablets by using sticks.

Nowadays, many libraries not only provide books, but also access to computers. In addition, they also offer fun activities and events.

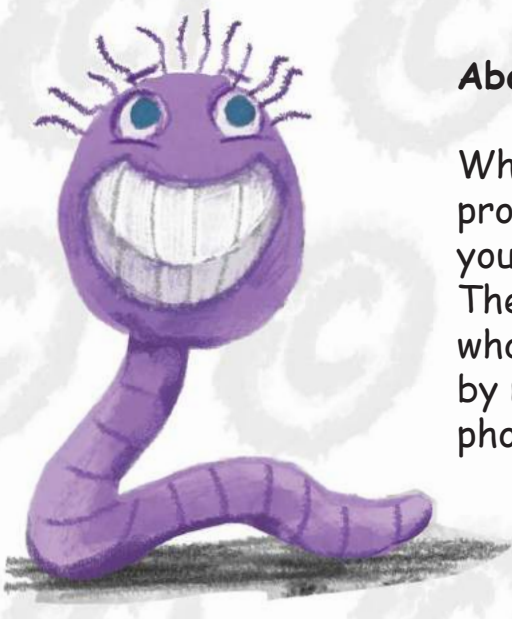
Most countries have a special day dedicated to celebrating libraries.

About the Library of Congress

The Library of Congress is the largest library in the world. It houses not just books but also music, video, photographs, maps, and many other interesting items in its collections. It even has a children's section.

It is not a circulating library. This means you can read books there, but not take them home.

It is also home of the U.S. Copyright Office where many authors or artists send their work to be catalogued.



About the Copyright Symbol © in a Book

When you create a story or drawing, you are already protected by copyright. That means, if someone copies your work, she or he needs to ask for your permission. The symbol that you see in your book lets people know who created the story and the illustrations. It is used by many countries around the world. It also covers photographs, maps, music, and more.

About the Author

R.G. de Rouen is originally from Carmel, California and has been working for more than 25 years as an elementary teacher in international schools throughout the world. He is a graduate of the Children's Writer's Institute in Connecticut and enjoys teaching creative writing skills to his students. Like Benjamin, R. G. de Rouen can't live without books.



About the Illustrator

Uliana Barabash is an illustrator from Ukraine. She studied at the Academy of Printing and has been drawing since childhood. Her love of children and children's books is evident in the vibrant colors she portrays. Uliana is inspired by all the details that nature has to offer.



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