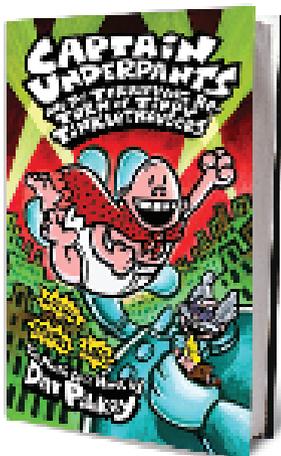


KIDS'-BOOK SENSATION

A Briefs and Candid Chat With *Captain Underpants* Creator Dav Pilkey



Since 1997, Dav Pilkey has been delighting children (and grossing out parents) with his massively popular Captain Underpants series about two mischievous boys who accidentally hypnotize their principal into becoming an elastic-waistbanded superhero. Pilkey's mix of illustrated adventure and gleeful potty humor has proved irresistible to readers ages 7 and up, with nearly 50 million copies in print and a DreamWorks Animation movie adaptation in development. The ninth book in the franchise, *Captain Underpants and the Terrifying Return of Tippy Tinkletrousers*, arrives on Aug. 28 after a six-year hiatus. Speaking by phone from his Seattle home, Pilkey, 46, discussed his lovably crude creation and the inherent comedy of undergarments. —Keith Staskiewicz

When did Captain Underpants, in all his comfort-fitting glory, first pop into your brain?

That was in second grade. A teacher used the word *underwear* in class, and the entire classroom just burst

into laughter. Then she got mad and said, "Hey, hey, boys and girls. Underwear is not funny!" And I remember thinking, *Wow, underwear is really powerful. I should find a way to capitalize on that.* So I started drawing Captain Underpants.

When you're writing about sentient toilets and snot monsters as a 46-year-old, do you try to channel your inner second-grader?

When I was a kid, I had a lot of reading problems. Anytime you put a book in front of me it was like punishment. However, I would have liked books about superheroes who battled monsters in their underwear. So I'm really writing to the child I used to be, that kid who didn't like books.

The go-to compliment for children's literature is always "It gets kids to read." But your books also encourage them to write and be creative.

It was always a dream in the back of my head that some kid would be so inspired that they'd staple some pages together, grab some pencils, and make their own comics. Now I get comics sent to me from all over the world. This isn't a homework assignment for them. Nobody's standing over them saying, "You need to do this comic." These kids are doing it on their own, and that's really, really cool to me.



Dav Pilkey

Have you gotten push-back from parents who feel bodily functions have no place in literature?

Every now and then there will be a parent who just doesn't think that it's funny, and they'll try to get my books banned. But fortunately I've never met a kid who thought that way. My target audience gets it.

You placed No. 13 on the top 100 banned and challenged books of the '00s, beating out *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

I did?! That is a great, great honor.

How much will you be involved in the big-screen adaptation of *Captain Underpants*?

My biggest responsibility is picking out a tie for the premiere. It's a bit surreal. I mean, when you're a kid sitting in the school hallway drawing pictures, you never think that it's going to be a movie people will see all around the world.

I guess you've finally proved that teacher wrong.

Kids all around the world have proved that teacher wrong. I don't care what you say: Underwear is funny. ■

