



Meet the Author Neal Shusterman

Neal Shusterman is the *New York Times* bestselling author of more than thirty award-winning books for children, teens, and adults, including the Unwind dystology, the Skinjacker trilogy, *Downsiders*, and *Challenger Deep*, which won the National Book Award. *Scythe*, the first book in his latest series, *Arc of a Scythe*, is a Michael L. Printz Honor Book. He also writes screenplays for motion pictures and television shows. Neal is the father of four, all of whom are talented writers and artists themselves. Visit Neal at StoryMan.com and [Facebook.com/NealShusterman](https://www.facebook.com/NealShusterman).

Q&A

Tell us about yourself. How did you become a writer?

I really got interested in writing in 9th grade. I had a great 9th grade English teacher who challenged me to write a story a month for extra credit that whole school year, and by the end of that year, I felt like a writer, and haven't stopped writing ever since. When I was in college, I spent my summers working as a counselor at a summer camp, and quickly got to be known as the camp storyteller. That's what got me into writing books for kids, because my early books were based on stories that I used to tell at camp. I'm still in touch with a number of those campers who are grown now and have kids of their own reading my books. It's very cool!

What have been the biggest influences—people or experiences—in your work?

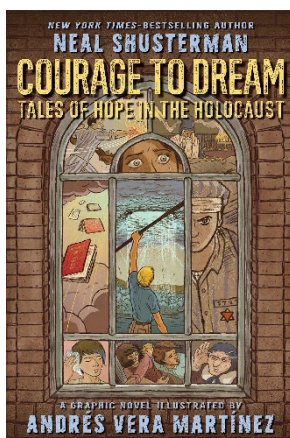
In terms of writing, I was influenced by an eclectic mix of books and writers. From *Lord of the Flies*, to *Lord of the Rings*, to the dark whimsy of Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *James and the giant Peach*. In high school I read a lot of Stephen King—I loved the way he wove his tales. My sense of humor as a writer was definitely influenced by Douglas Adams—every once in a while, I'll reread the entire *Hitchhiker's Guide* series. My favorite author of all is Kurt Vonnegut. I love his ability to write stories that transcend the genre of science fiction. His books are full of wonderful satire and social commentary. I would also say I was influenced by Steven Spielberg. When I was a teenager I wanted to be Steven Spielberg and dreamed of being a film director. But instead I found a different way to tell stories!

What was your creative process like for this book?

Courage to Dream was a labor of love from the beginning. I was initially inspired by the artwork of artist Jeffrey Schrier, and the way he approached Jewish art. For the longest time I wanted to write a Jewish-themed book, and when Andrea Pinkney approached me with the idea of doing a graphic novel, I jumped at it. The question was, what could I write that would be additive? As one of my favorite movies is *Pan's Labyrinth*, I thought using fantasy and surrealism could be a powerful and poignant way to approach a subject as difficult as the Holocaust. I saw it as a challenge, and I love challenges. Having done a lot of screenwriting, my initial manuscript was formatted similarly to a screenplay but with suggestions of how the frames might be organized. After the first draft of the text was done, it took a while to find the right artist—but when we saw Andrés Vera Martinez's work, we knew he was the one! He has the ability to capture both wonder and darkness, hope and heartbreak in his work. Every time I look at his illustrations, I still get chills. *Courage to Dream* took over 10 years to create, and it was worth every minute spent on it!

If there was one message that you'd want every reader of this book to have, what would it be?

That, while *Courage to Dream* delves into the surreal, its purpose is to shine a light on reality. That if we don't learn from the past we're doomed to repeat it. That imagination and creativity are central—not just to telling stories, but to creating a better world. That we must not turn away from harsh truths about our past, or our present, because that's one step short of denying reality. And once we deny what's true, we've lost our way.



Courage to Dream

By Neal Shusterman and illustrated by Andrés Vera Martínez

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National Book Award winner Neal Shusterman presents a graphic novel exploring the Holocaust through surreal visions and a textured canvas of heroism and hope.