



A WORD FROM the Author

I've come to realize that parenthood is like having a lifelong conversation with your children. With two teenagers of my own, the topics have certainly evolved over the years. During their various ages and stages, there has been fevered discussions about topics ranging from ninjas and dinosaurs to rainbows and Parmesan cheese. There have also been times when conversation fodder was sorely lacking, most recently, during the COVID-19 pandemic. My children and I would sit at the dinner table with not much to say to each other. None of us had any news about our day to share, because we were together at home like the rest of the world.

It was one of those nights when the dog wandered in and sniffed the cat's butt.

"Gross," my son said with disgust.

"Why do they always do that to each other?" my daughter asked.

Random question, I thought. So I did some research. Turns out that in animal speak, my dog was simply enquiring about the day's events. Dogs sniff for two reasons: the act of smelling things is both enjoyable and interesting for them.

When I told this to my kids, they were impressed. One random question lead to another and another. Do birds sweat? Why do humans have chins? Do sharks have to swim continuously to survive? Which country has the most pyramids?

I had a feeling that we might be on to something. Before I knew it, Totally Random Questions started writing itself. Even though my children are older than the 8–12 age demographic intended for this series, their enquiring minds did want to know!

To source content for magazine articles and books, I'd spent nearly two decades researching the interests of kids, through focus group testing, visiting classrooms, and collecting data from thousands of kids via monthly surveys. Through this process, I learned something powerful. The key to effective teaching is curiosity. If you can pique a child's interest in a topic they enjoy, like sharks, pizza, or pets, you have a huge opportunity to teach them about the world and how it works. In turn, you can help prepare them to be global citizens capable of one day stewarding the planet.

These books are designed to do just that. The content is high-interest for the tween demographic, with subjects ranging from extreme weather and rain forests to ancient Egypt and the human brain. Each book is packed with more than 400 carefully curated photographs presented with bold, colorful graphics, and captured in an eclectic, collage-like design.

Each off-the-wall question is set up as either True-False or multiple choice, so even the youngest readers have a decent chance of guessing correctly. When readers turn the page, they are presented with a short, clear, in-depth yet age-appropriate explanation. And because the book's 101 questions are completely unrelated, readers can flip through and start reading at any point. Best of all, the questions are so, well, random, that they beg to be shared with family members, friends, and classmates for read-aloud fun.

The magic of nonfiction is that often, truth is stranger than fiction. Now, that's interesting to people of all ages. And let's face it, when our kids enjoy the process of learning, parenthood is rewarding. My hope is that Totally Random Questions will spark your family's curiosity about the amazing world we live in, too.

—Melina Bellows