



Photo by Anne Steinfeld

# A conversation with David Ezra Stein creator of **INTERRUPTING CHICKEN**



## *How did you come up with the idea for Interrupting Chicken?*

*Interrupting Chicken* started out as a knock-knock joke that I heard as a kid. It went like this:

“Knock, knock.”

“Who’s there?”

“Interrupting Chicken.”

“Interrupting Chicken wh—”

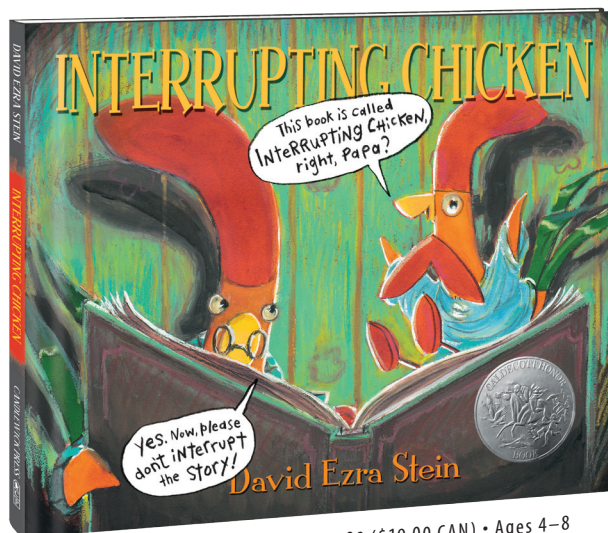
“Bwak! Bwak!”

So, ever since I heard that joke, I have been wondering, who is this little chicken? And what does she interrupt? What’s the rest of her life like outside of this knock-knock joke? So I had this idea for a long time, and then in 2006 I drew up a little dummy of the book and what I thought she might do as a little chicken being put to bed.

## *How have your previous jobs—as a window-display artist, puppeteer and puppet builder, interior and set design illustrator, and cartoonist—influenced your illustration style in general? How did they influence *Interrupting Chicken*?*

One of my first jobs was working in the Swedish Cottage Marionette Theatre in Central Park. It was an amazing job. I got to paint the puppets; I would paint the stage makeup on them. That helped me to think about theatricality and how the audience would read my artwork and what makes things “pop,” because that is what you want on the stage. You want a character’s face to really pop out. I had a lot of fun painting witches and pirates and princesses.

I also got to perform with marionettes for children, so that was one of my first experiences working with a whole group of kids and seeing what they responded to. I could peek down from the bridge, high up where I was dangling the marionettes, and I could see their faces as they watched the show. That was really a joy to behold.



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## *Tell us about first finding out that you had won the Caldecott Honor.*

When I heard the news about the Caldecott Honor, I didn’t even know that they were announcing it that day. I was in my pajamas and was going to eat some oatmeal with my family when I got a call. They said, “Hey we’re in San Diego! It’s the Caldecott Committee. We are all here, and we want to let you know that you won a Caldecott Honor.” As soon as I heard the word *Caldecott*, I froze and was like, are you kidding me? I didn’t know what to say. I still don’t know what to say about it. But it’s really exciting that so many people will be able to see my work, and it’s exciting that something I created in a little studio is out there for all the world to see.

That’s one of the best things about being an author in general: you can do something very personal, and lots of people might see it.

