



A Club for Kids Who Love Books

CHASING VERMEER

Q&A With Blue Balliett

Blue Balliett answers key questions about *Chasing Vermeer*

What type of research did you do in order to write *Chasing Vermeer*?

Once I knew I was going to make a stolen painting by Jan Vermeer the center of the book, I read everything about Vermeer that I could find. I let the information in all of these books kind of settle into my mind, and then I went back and reread many parts.

What was your favorite part of working on the book?

My favorite part was probably those moments when the characters took over and started telling the story themselves... that's a cool and very exciting feeling. It's kind of like discovering you have ideas in your back pocket that you didn't know were there.

What was the most surprising part?

The most surprising part of writing *Chasing Vermeer* was discovering how much I really had to say, and that I really could write a book, a page at a time, even though my life was so busy.



What other influences (favorite artists, unexplained occurrences) inspired the story?

A great deal of my own life went into the book. I've always been fascinated by happenings that no one can explain, by communities that have their own special flavor, and by art. I grew up in New York City, and ran in and out of the museums all the time — they were a peaceful, safe place to hang out with friends.

How long did it take you to write *Chasing Vermeer*?

About five years, because I was still teaching full-time.

What do you find personally compelling about Vermeer's work?

I have always loved looking at Vermeer's paintings (there are eight in New York City, so I got to know his work a long time ago), maybe because the people in them look kind and calm and dreamy. I studied him some in college. When I began reading about him again, and realized how little we know about the man and his life and work, I knew he'd be perfect for this book. I wanted an artist that kids could think about with the same power as adults — as most of the records about Vermeer's life disappeared many centuries ago, a person of any age can look and think and come to their own conclusions. I like that.

How did you discover Charles Fort and what do you like about his ideas?

I found a 1931 copy of Charles Fort's book, *Lo!*, about 30 years ago, in a pile of books a library was discarding. I opened it up, like Petra, and couldn't believe what I was reading. Showers of snails and worms and frogs? Weird noises and things floating through the air? I still have it.