

# Children's Classic Literature Newsletter

*Enjoy Neenah Public Library's bimonthly feature about writers and illustrators whose work has lasted over the years. Reread their classic works or discover them for the first time. For a brief summary of the artist's life and a list of their books, keep reading. Visit the Youth Department for a display of their books and books on CD, and pick up a copy of the complete newsletter and past issues.*

April 2006: Arthur Ransome, Lucy M. Boston  
May 2006: Eleanor Farjeon, Edward Ardizzone  
June 2006: Eleanor Estes, Frances Hodgson Burnett  
July 2006: Virginia Lee Burton, Richmal Crompton  
August 2006: Beatrix Potter, Edith Nesbit  
September 2006: E.H. Shepard, A.A. Milne  
October 2006: Elizabeth Enright, Barbara Cooney  
November 2006: Enid Blyton, Astrid Lindgren  
December 2006: Tasha Tudor, Edward Eager

## Featured author #1 for December: Tasha Tudor 1915 -



Tasha Tudor (given name Starling Burgess, after her father) was born in Boston on August 28, 1915. Tasha's mother was a portrait artist, her father a yacht designer. The family wasn't wealthy, but was connected with some of Boston's most prominent residents, including Abigail Adams, Maxfield Parrish and Mark Twain.

When she was nine years old, Tasha's parents divorced. She lived weekdays in the care of friends in the Connecticut countryside and spent weekends with her mother in Greenwich Village. During these years, Tasha began a love affair with nature, drawing and country living. She wasn't fond of school – and never passed the eighth grade

– but enjoyed drawing in books. She credits her “Aunt Gwen” with encouraging her creativity.

In her teens, Tasha resumed living with her mother full-time, which included summers on a farm in Connecticut. Tasha raised money for a cow and a flock of chickens, and began to develop her art under the tutelage of her mother. She also studied at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts School for a year. She began to dream of one day having her own farm and producing her own books.

Her dreams were encouraged by the man she married in 1938, Thomas Leighton McCready Jr. A book that she wrote and illustrated for her husband's niece, *Pumpkin Moonshine*, was published a year after her marriage (after first being rejected numerous times). The couple had four children, established a farm in New Hampshire with no running water or electricity, and raised a host of farm animals and pets. Tasha relished the 19<sup>th</sup>-century lifestyle, which included washing clothes by hand, sewing weaving, and cooking from scratch, and huge vegetable gardens. She loved to wear antique clothing and live as self-sufficiently as possible, and began to illustrate books for other authors.

After a divorce in 1959, the self-sufficiency she had cultivated kept her and the children afloat. Her children remember her hard work, creativity and passion for her art. She wrote and illustrated many books during these years, typically at an old-fashioned table near a kitchen window. In 1972, Tasha moved from the farm in New Hampshire to a new one in Vermont designed to her specifications and built by her son Seth. There she does have electricity – though still no running water!

Tasha Tudor's lifetime body of work includes over thirty books she wrote and illustrated herself, as well as forty more that she illustrated for others. Two of her books were Caldecott Honor Books. Her simple stories and sentimental pastel illustrations reflect an artistic vision that is centered in her way of life.

## Featured author #2 for December: Edward Eager 1911 – 1964



Edward Eager was born and raised in Toledo, Ohio. Details of his early childhood and family life are sketchy, but he was known to have loved reading, especially L. Frank Baum's "Oz" books.

Eager attended Harvard University, then moved to New York City. For fourteen years, he made a living there writing plays and song lyrics for radio, theater and television. Eventually he settled in Connecticut and in 1951, inspired by the stories he read to his young son Fritz, he began to write children's stories.

Through his son, Eager discovered the books of E. Nesbit (see Children's Classic Newsletter, Volume 1, Number 10), whose magic stories left a clear imprint on his own work. He considered Nesbit "the best children's writer of all time." He says of her influence, "I am always careful to acknowledge my indebtedness [to Nesbit] in each of my stories; so that any child who likes my books and doesn't know hers may be led back to the master of us all." (Something about the Author, Volume 17) Eager learned from E. Nesbit to see the world as a child sees it, "a

magic place where anything can happen next minute, and delightful and unexpected things constantly do." (Horn Book, 1969)

Eager's first children's book, *Red Head*, was inspired by Fritz's dislike of his hair color. In 1954 he wrote his first magic stories, with characters inspired from his childhood. *Knight's Castle* emerged from observing Fritz play with his collection of toy knights. His final children's book, *Seven-Day Magic*, won the Ohioana Book Award in 1962. He died just two years later.

Children's Books by Edward Eager:

*Red Head* (1951)  
*Mouse Manor* (1952)  
*Half Magic* (1954)  
*Playing Possum: Story* (1955)  
*Knight's Castle* (1956)  
*Magic by the Lake* (1957)  
*The Time Garden* (1958)  
*Magic or Not?* (1957)  
*The Well-Wishers* (1960)  
*Seven Day Magic* (1962)