

What's It Like to Have 151 Editors?

To begin the beta testing process, I sent Hall Fletcher Elementary school librarian Beverly McBrayer an early PDF of *Get the Scoop on Animal Puke*. Beverly divided the book into small sections, and made enough copies for every student to have their own group of pages. She read portions of the book aloud during library time, and reviewed copyright law, vetting, and the roles of editors, and proofreaders. Each student editor wrote comments on their copies during class time, and additional feedback was collected through Survey Monkey.

About a month later, I made three visits to the elementary school, one for each of the 3-5 grades. For the first half of the visit, we discussed their comments, which often led to explanations of production terms (FPO, low res, high res, silhouetting, etc.) and different types of editors (line editors, copy editors, developmental editors, photo editors). Later, I asked for their opinions on some of the images, including the cover, and we brainstormed questions for a physician Q&A about human puke that was planned for the back of the book. After we finished, several students in each grade stayed behind to read aloud from the book.

The three grades gave very different types of feedback. Third graders generally wanted to talk about the existing content. Fourth graders were concerned with word breaks, language choices, and illustration sizes. Fifth graders gave the most detailed feedback: they were good visual editors as well as text editors, commenting on positions of images, sizes and proportions of images, etc.

The most surprising moments came during a discussion about South American gastric brooding frogs. It felt like a professional editorial critique. Students wanted to know why one of the frog photos was so small. I explained that I thought the photo with the larger throat sac was more interesting, but they preferred the smaller photo because

the eggs were more distinct. Forcefully, they argued to increase the smaller photo's size on the page. This led to a discussion about proportions and the repercussions we would see on the page if we increased the size of the smaller photo. They really wanted that photo larger, and I really did not want to open up more photo space by removing a second paragraph of text that mentioned geography and extinction issues. It felt like a Wall Street negotiation!

Months later, when the book published, I revisited the school for a launch party. The beta testing students received a copy of the book, made possible by a donation from a local veterinarian and a discount from a local bookstore. It was a wonderful experience, and an important reminder of how seriously and carefully children evaluate books.

Beverly and I presented details of our beta testing process at the North Carolina School Media Association state conference in 2014.