

Meet the Author

Tara Truscott

Christopher Dinsdale

THINKING CRITICALLY WITH FICTION

Christopher Dinsdale is the author of *Broken Circle* and *Stolen Away*, which was nominated for the Red Maple Award in 2008. His latest book, *Betrayed*, is set on Oak Island. His books include Canadian settings and information that isn't found in social studies or history textbooks. When he is not writing or researching, Christopher is a Grade 2 teacher with the York Region District School Board.

TingL: Your novels have all included First Nations characters and their interactions with Europeans. What motivates you to include these perspectives in your novels?

Christopher Dinsdale: I enjoy writing about Canadian history. It was never my intention to go out and write "First Nations" stories, but when I thought about the moments of history that I found interesting and felt hadn't been explored in young adult fiction, I found myself drawn to First Nations history and the first contact moments with new colonists. Quite often these moments were told only from the eyes of Europeans so I thought I'd take a shot at telling it from both the European and First Nations perspective. I am by no means an expert in First Nations history or culture so I had to do a lot of research in an attempt to get the First Nations perspective right.

Your stories are powerful as a result of your thorough research. What does the power of research mean to you? How can teachers and teacher-librarians make research compelling for kids?

Much to the surprise of parents, I feel that kids are naturally drawn to research. Everyone wonders at one time or another about the big questions: Who am I? Where did I come from? Where am I going? If you phrase the research question in a way that makes it a personal quest for the students and give them a way to access the appropriate information, they will jump all over the assignment with unbridled enthusiasm.

We often hear that aspiring writers should "write what they know." What in your life has inspired or influenced your writing?

I have to smile at this question, because if I only wrote what I knew, then I would never have written any of my novels. Let me explain. I would change your statement for aspiring authors to, "write about something that lights your passion." I have a passion for history and mysteries. I like to try to solve mysteries that intrigue me through doing research in libraries or, sometimes, through online searches. Quite often the research ends up driving my storyline in directions I never expected when I first started the project, so that's why I disagree with the original statement. However, I will say that I never start writing a novel unless I've first mapped out the storyline, which is the next step for me after I've completed my research. If you do a detailed storyline, the dreaded writer's block never becomes an issue.

It sounds like you avoided this issue by learning and becoming knowledgeable before writing - you made sure you "knew" before you "wrote." Your writing is linked to a variety of cultures and includes adventure and discovery; what did you read as a child?

I loved adventure stories as a child. I read *Raise the Titanic!* in Grade 6 as one of my first mainstream novels and soon fell in love with all of the other wonderful Clive Cussler adventure novels. I also used to read Ian Fleming and a smattering of science fiction. I'm hoping that my novels lure the reader into learning a bit about Canadian history as they enjoy an adventurous storyline. Clive Cussler was a genius at doing that, and I'm trying in my own small way to follow in his giant footsteps.

continued on page 12