

Meet the Author

EVAN MUNDAY

Meet Evan Munday, young adult (YA) author, illustrator, cartoonist, and former book publicist. Munday's series, *The Dead Kid Detective Agency*, has been nominated twice for the Forest of Reading's Silver Birch Award® – first in 2013, and most recently in 2015 for *Dial M for Morna*, the second of the series.

TingL: I note from your website that you have long been an illustrator and comic-book lover. What led you to create the young adult novel series *The Dead Kid Detective Agency*?

When I'm thinking up ideas, it usually starts as a high-concept elevator pitch. In this case, it was *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer* meets *Veronica Mars*, two of my all-time favourite TV shows. (Though I guess now that mash-up has been realized – more or less – as *iZombie*.) I've always been a bit morbid and interested in the paranormal. As I often tell people, I was trying to write a Nancy Drew story where Nancy was super-goth and all her friends were dead.

Also, as a (secret) American, I've always noticed the difference in the way Canadians and Americans teach themselves their histories. Say what you will about the United States of America, but it sure knows how to turn its history into the stuff of action-packed legend (largely because a lot of it's entirely fabricated, but still...). So, in writing *The Dead Kid Detective Agency* series, I was hoping to introduce some of that myth-making to Canadian history. In the most accurate possible way, of course.

TingL: Was it important that your protagonist be female? Why?

Yes. Personally, I had fallen into that typical rut where my protagonists (in comic books, in stories) were really just stand-ins for me, so I wanted to push myself with a character who was a thirteen-year-old girl, which I have never been. But I also was hoping that, being a male author, I could encourage some boys to read this middle-grade story about a girl. It's getting better in young adult books, but the in middle-grades, many of the adventure or humour books feature boys as the main character; I was pushing back against that a bit. I work part-time in a bookstore and so many parents are unwilling to buy a book featuring a girl for their male child. Though I'm polite in a customer-is-always-right kind of way, I have very little patience for that garbage.

If you're a girl or woman, you spend most of your childhood and adulthood reading men's stories in books and watching men's stories in movies and on television, because it's considered the default. So, like, shake it off, boys, you can read a few stories and watch a few movies about girls, too. I grew up watching *Gilmore Girls* and it's made my life immeasurably better. While your question was perfectly

fair, you probably wouldn't have asked me the question if I had been a woman writing a boy character. If one more boy reads a story about a girl because a male writer wrote it or because it's got, like, decapitations and jokes in it, I'll be extremely pleased.

TingL: Can you share a bit about your imaginative and creative process with our readers – the series blend of Canadian history, mystery, cultural references, great vocabulary, “dead kids” and modern-day teen issues is unique, to say the least!

I wish I could say there was a careful process involved, but if you read *The Dead Kid Detective Agency* series, you've seen a fairly good representation of my mind. Before each book I do a lot of research and reading on the time period that forms the backdrop of the story (for *Dial M for Morna*, it was 1914 Ontario). In general, I try to think up a few excellent set pieces for each book, then determine the most natural and entertaining way to connect those set pieces, making sure I don't ignore the emotional content (clinically depressed dad, missing mom, bullying at school). I guess there's a lot going on in these books. But the pop-culture references are