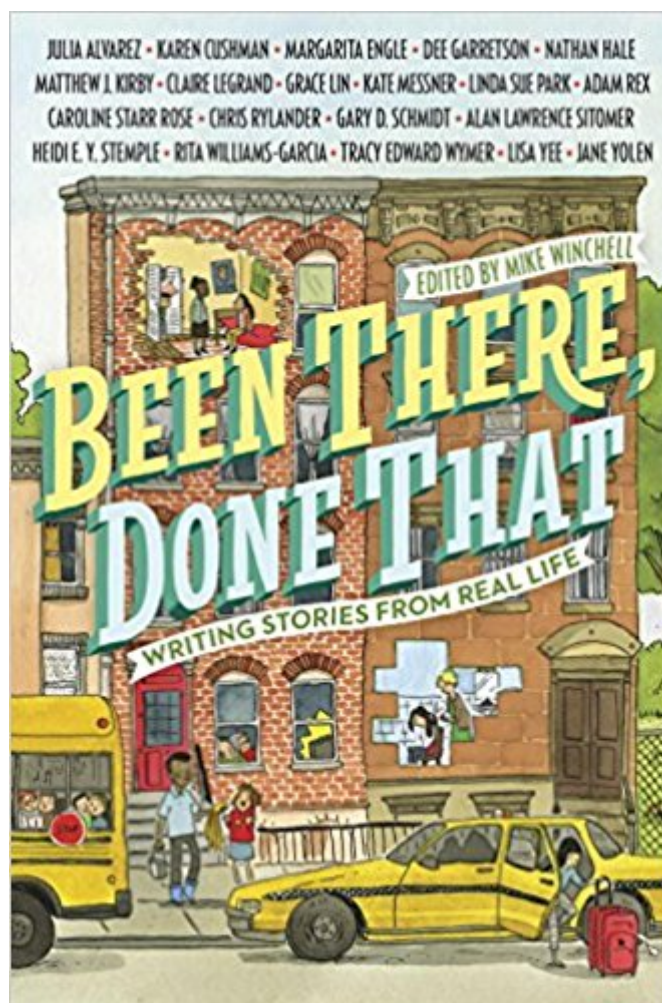


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# Been There, Done That: Writing Stories From Real Life



## Synopsis

Award-winning and bestselling authors turn their own real-life experiences into captivating works of fiction! Where do authors get their ideas? And how do they turn those ideas into stories? This anthology looks at the process of taking real-life experiences and turning them into works of engaging fiction. The collection features award-winning and bestselling middle-grade authors who provide both original fictional short stories as well as the nonfiction accounts that inspired them. The contributing authors include Julia Alvarez, Karen Cushman, Margarita Engle, Dee Garretson, Nathan Hale, Matthew Kirby, Claire Legrand, Grace Lin, Kate Messner, Linda Sue Park, Adam Rex, Gary Schmidt, Alan Sitomer, Caroline Starr Rose, Heidi Stemple, Rita Williams-Garcia, Tracy Edward Wymer, Lisa Yee, and Jane Yolen.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Gr 4-7 • A collection of short works from a wide variety of young adult and juvenile fiction writers. Each piece has two parts: actual events from the author's life and the story that was inspired by that event. The book is organized into six thematic chapters such as "If Only: Dealing with Regret, Guilt, and Sadness" and "Why or Why Not?: Asking Questions About the World Around You." Some of the works have identifiable flavors of the actual event while others merely use a kernel of truth for their story. One of the best is "Lemon Squeeze" by Caroline Starr Rose, based on stories she was told by her mother. Lemon Squeeze was a game played by her mother in the Little Nippers club, where each girl contributed an anonymous "suggestion" to another girl. Rose spins a story written in free verse poetry. Each girl has her own voice and tells her inner thoughts

about the game and the hurt feelings that go along with criticism. Many of the stories feel like "works in progress" and read more like developmental practice. As a result, some of the creative stories may not stand well on their own. This collection will work best in a classroom setting, as the entries are solid mentor texts for "write what you know" exercises. VERDICT A worthwhile purchase to fulfill a specific niche. — Patricia Feriano, Montgomery County Public Schools, MD

KIRKUS REVIEW Twenty writers share how they drew upon personal experiences to write short fiction. Gary D. Schmidt kicks off the collection with a fine story based on a summer-camp job in which his fictional character falls in love and deals with some scary peer pressure. Claire Legrand transmutes a personal experience into an eerie dystopian tale with a tone akin to that of "The Lottery." Julia Alvarez's "My First True Frenemy" combines the politics of the Dominican Republic, immigration to the United States, and the difficulties of forging a friendship. A brief "What Really Happened" section precedes each story so that readers can compare the real-life experiences with the fictional renderings. Stories are arranged by theme--peer pressure; regret, guilt, and sadness; being surprised by what some people do; putting others first; asking questions about the world around you; and dealing with change. The stories are purposive, out to show the connections between personal experience and fiction, so there's a sameness in the first-person point of view and the reminiscent tone, though variety is provided by stories in a graphic novel format, monologues, and verse. Though no single story is a knockout, the collection is consistently strong and useful. What Rebecca Stern and Brad Wolfe did for personal essays in *Breakfast on Mars* (2013), Winchell delivers for teachers of short fiction. A fine collection and a boon to writing teachers everywhere. BOOKLIST REVIEW Winchell's collection of tales inspired by real life features short stories from some of the most acclaimed middle-grade writers--Rita Williams-Garcia, Gary D. Schmidt, Karen Cushman, etc.--in the business. From contemporary realistic to graphic-novel style to sci-fi, the stories in this collection span the breadth of the middle-grade market while also featuring a diverse cast of characters. Standouts from the collection include Linda Sue Park's deeply affecting story, "The Voice," based on the author's childhood experience losing a distinct classmate, and Grace Lin's "The Jade Ring," which shows how a well-placed roll of toilet paper eased the journey to a new country. Humorous stories from Alan Lawrence Sitomer, Adam Rex, and Chris Rylander bring levity and balance to the collection. Each story is prefaced with the author's account of what really happened, proving that the old adage "Write what you know" can take a story in so many rich directions. This collection offers a little something for everyone and plenty of

opportunities for classroom writing exercises. -- Jennifer Barnes VOYA REVIEW This title is a unique blend of fiction and nonfiction in which twenty writers tell about an incident in their life and then develop a short story using that experience as their inspiration. Most of the authors are well-known favorites, such as Gary D. Schmidt, Margarita Engle, and Linda Sue Park. Stories are arranged in thematic chapters: surprises, curiosity about the world, regret and sadness, coping with change, and facing peer pressure. Some stories are a retelling of the real-life incident, while others only use a kernel of the story to weave a new tale. Karen Cushman views her husband's childhood in San Diego from a historical perspective, creating a tale about a family changed by the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Claire LeGrand takes readers into a fantasy world and illustrates how the mind of a fantasy writer works. There are a variety of writing styles, including graphic novel format, monologue, and verse. Seeing fact transformed into fiction right before your eyes is compelling. It makes writing seem so accessible. Comparing the fact and the fiction, readers can see how the writer worked with facts to create a piece of fiction. This collection would work wonderfully in the classroom. Given the emphasis on nonfiction in the Common Core, this could be a mentor text for writing exercises.

Such a refreshing book of actual events Such fun to read!

Great book!

Just picked this book up and I can't wait to take it into a classroom, especially with kids or adults writing memoirs. What a clever idea. Young writers can see just how a memory can inspire a piece of writing whether it be a close re-telling or a mere springboard for a piece that goes far beyond the original incident. What a treat!

This is a great collection of work! I love how every story is different and can appeal to a wide variety of interests from a teenage crush, a girls club, sports, and even how kids relate to losing a classmate. I'm not a teacher, but just love books in general. Even though it's based for a younger audience, I found the book and stories to be appealing as an adult. I wish I had a book like this growing up when I struggled to find ideas or topics to write about.

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