

The Petit Proust Questionnaire

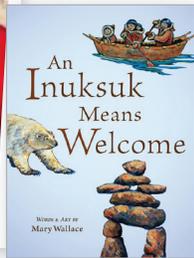
from Owlkids Books

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Meet author/illustrator Mary Wallace

MARY WALLACE is an award-winning artist and art therapist who spent almost twenty years teaching arts and crafts at the Haliburton School of Fine Arts. Her previous title, *The Inuksuk Book*, won several prizes including the UNESCO International Youth Library White Raven Award and the National Outdoor Book Award. She lives in St. Thomas, Ontario.



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An inuksuk is a stone landmark that different peoples of the Arctic region build to leave a symbolic message. The inuksuk frames this picture book as an acrostic: readers will learn seven words from the Inuktitut language whose first letters spell INUKSUK. Along the way, readers gain a sense of Inuit life in the Arctic.

When you were a kid, what was your favorite thing to do?

My favorite thing to do was be in nature, under the skies, amongst trees, traveling with my horse, exploring along secret paths and cliff edges... this is where I felt most at home. I invented wonderful ways to make safe nooks beneath huge old tree trunks, in little hollows, and beside small sunlit clearings. What amazing escapades we had. Once I even rode my horse for several days and nights in a row, camping along the way, finally arriving at a sandy beach on Lake Erie where we could swim. Yes, my horse and I did go swimming together.

What did you most dislike doing when you were a child?

As a child, I did not want to be indoors. Inside the house was a boring place to be... we had no TV, few toys to play with, and we had to keep the house neat and tidy. I had three brothers and three sisters and all of our play was outside. We only came in when mom rang the bell for lunch or dinner. We had a large property where we had the freedom to run, roam, and play out any scenario we could imagine.

As a child, where did you dream of living?

When I was a child I dreamed of designing, building, and living in a home softly sculpted out of the earth. This home had lightly textured rounded walls, with carved cozy benches, beds, and tables, all connected in a seamless way. Everything I needed to survive and thrive was in near proximity, supplied by nature. Others, friendly folk, lived nearby. Sunshine, birds, lush greenery, colorful fruit, fragrant flowers, and friendly forest animals surrounded us. In this place I could invent and create anything and everything I could possibly dream up... it was a place of endless adventure.

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What did you think you were good at when you were a kid?

As a kid I thought I was good at training horses and drawing. My father bought a first horse for all of us kids, and then one, and another, and another just for me. I loved them all... training them and teaching neighborhood kids to ride them. And I thought I was good at drawing. In the evenings I watched my father create pen and ink landscape plans for clients (my parents owned a tree and plant nursery). I loved how the crisp black ink lines looked on the bright white paper, and how precisely everything was laid out. A few times I snuck into his office drawers to try out the precious treasures stored there. He must have noticed, because it wasn't long before he gave me paper, a pen, and a bottle of India ink of my very own.

When you were a kid in school, what did you look for in a friend?

At school I skipped a grade after Grade 3. I was younger than the rest of the class, and smaller, and on top of that, I was a Dutch immigrant: in other words, I was different. The other kids teased me a lot, telling me I was a little baby, a tulip tramper, and too little to join in games. I also had a teacher who shamed me for drawing in the margins of my notebook. He made me stand at the front of the class on one foot with a book balanced on my head for a whole hour. I was shy to begin with. That made me even shyer! All I wanted was someone, anyone that I could hang out with at recess. Finally a new girl came to our class and I gave her one of the ginger Spekulass cookies from my lunch... and so I finally found a friend.

What did you want to be when you grew up?

I wanted to be either a nun or a scientist. A nun because I loved going to our cathedral-like church and sitting in awe of the majestic architecture there. The angels and saints portrayed in the stained glass windows made me sure I was intimately connected to a mystical, powerful, and awesome presence. I thought that as a nun I could continue to bask in that presence. I wanted to be a scientist because I loved inventing things, and was absolutely positive that I could invent a way to make life on earth healthier and happy: maybe a cure for cancer, maybe a way to never have to wash dishes (yes, that was one of my chores as a kid).

What was your favorite book as a child?

I loved books that showed me how to make and do things. I saw an ad for *Professor Beery's How to Train a Horse* in my mother's *Good Housekeeping* magazine. I studied every bit of that book and figured out how to train horses of many kinds. My parents bought me an untrained two-year-old thoroughbred, and let me train horses for other people and give riding lessons at our stable. They just trusted that I was able to do it...and I was!

What is your favorite pastime now?

I love to kayak and paint in Canada's wild landscapes, and most of all, I love to play with my grandchildren.

What do you find an absolute chore?

I still don't like washing dishes.

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If you could live anywhere, where would you go?

I love where I live — a place of peace and natural beauty, with family and friends close by.

What is the one talent you wish you had?

Singing and dancing really well is a talent I wish I had.

What makes a good friend?

A good friend is someone whom I can trust, laugh with, cry with, and someone who inspires me to be my best.

If you weren't an author or illustrator, what job would you have?

I would be a teacher — which I am! I teach little kids, big kids, and grown-ups. I love teaching them all. I think that being a teacher is the best job on the planet.

What children's books have caught your attention lately?

Stories about children from other cultures intrigue me because they show how wonderfully unique we are in custom and tradition, yet also show that we all need the same love and care from the adults in our lives.

If you had to have a motto, what would it be?

Choose to dare and do good every day.

