



An Interview with Author Sara Pennypacker

Sara Pennypacker has always been happiest reading, writing, and making art. That has transpired into her becoming a *New York Times* best-selling and award-winning author. In this interview, she shares insight into what inspired the return of Pax and how it discusses the environmental impact of war. Read on to find out what she hopes readers will take away from *Pax*, *Journey Home*.

It's been more than five years since the publication of *Pax*, which has struck a deep chord with children and adults worldwide. What kinds of feedback have you received from readers of this book?

Three things struck me. The first was how eager kids are to help right a wrong. Wherever I'd talk about Pax, kids always asked what they could do to help animals abandoned in war zones. Next, many kids – and a fair number of adults – wrote to tell me about encounters they've had with wild animals, including foxes. They shared how moving these encounters were – how they made them feel chosen and trusted – which was precisely how I'd felt whenever it had happened to me. I added a nod to this in the sequel. Finally, as I'd expected, I got a lot of feedback questioning what happened to Peter and Pax after the final scene, which I'd left a little open-ended.

What inspired you to return to these characters and write *Pax*, *Journey Home*?

First, I never planned for there to be a sequel. I ended *Pax* the way I did because I figured readers would have strong feelings about whether Peter and Pax should reunite or not, and I wanted to leave a little room for either scenario. What I hadn't predicted was how invested I was in what happened afterward! Every time I heard from a reader wondering what Peter and Pax did later and how they were, I found myself imagining it. Pretty soon, I had envisioned their paths so thoroughly that I had to admit I had another novel.

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One of the joys of reading these books is learning about foxes – their intelligence and playfulness, behaviors, and communication methods. What was it like to revisit this world?

Oh, that was the joy of writing the books, too! I did a lot of research, of course, to get things right – it seemed essential to respect the foxes as actual characters, not use them for my plot purposes, but to relate their realities as best I could. Research increasingly supports the theory that animals have rich emotional lives, so I felt comfortable implying human-like responses and motivations. Still, with one big difference: I freed the foxes from neuroses and self-reference. It was fascinating to imagine the world from that viewpoint, which seemed pretty healthy – maybe animals have a lot to teach us. Finally, in writing from a wild animal's point of view, I've become more aware of how connected we Earth-dwellers are.

The sequel takes place after the fictional war we learned about in *Pax*. Was there a significance in choosing to set it at this time?

Definitely. In *Pax*, I asked the readers to consider the effects of war on children and animals – tough stuff. It seemed fair in the next book to take a look at some possible positive responses to war: the Water Warriors, who repurpose military strengths and resources to repair and protect; Volia's respect for people who rebuild things; the way people in the sequel value clean water now. Mostly, I wanted to present our choice after a traumatic event – to become more closed or more open. Peter and Pax represent different approaches.

The new book deals much more directly with the environmental impact of war. Why was it important to you to center this issue?

Simply because one of my main characters is a wild animal. Politics and societal responses just don't matter to foxes, but how war affects our environment does. In general, the water situation in Flint and how threatened our water supply is also played a substantial role.



Interview courtesy of HarperCollins Publishing

What do you hope readers take away from *Pax, Journey Home*?

Mainly, I hope they feel as satisfied as I do – I no longer have to worry about either Peter or Pax. I hope readers agree that this ending satisfies both their needs and sets them both on good forward life journeys.

But one other thing: I had an opportunity in this book to explore what it means to be a parent – not something that main characters in children's books experience often. Pax becomes a parent, and Peter loses one and must decide whether and how to accept a different loving adult. These are hugely important things, and I hope I've been both positive and honest in their treatment.



Pax

Sara Pennypacker • Balzer + Bray
2016 • IL 3-6

Pax and Peter have been inseparable ever since Peter rescued him as a kit. But one day, Peter's dad enlists in the military and makes Peter return the fox to the wild.

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Pax, Journey Home

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It's been a year since Peter and his pet fox, Pax, have seen each other. Once inseparable, they now lead very different lives.

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