



The DRAWING BOARD

by Will Hoekenga

New York Times bestselling author Andy Andrews has written many different books. *The Traveler's Gift*, his first novel and best-seller, is a fictional foray into a time traveling journey that leads the down-on-his-luck protagonist to the key to getting his life back in order. *The Heart Mender*, his latest novel, is a half fiction, half nonfiction tale about Nazi submarines in the Gulf of Mexico during World War II. Now, he has tackled a new literary challenge--- the children's book. Titled *The Boy Who Changed the World*, Andrews' book is a children's version of his popular gift book *The Butterfly Effect*. Often perceived as simple, children's books can actually be deceptively complex, as Andrews discovered.

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Add to that the fact that Andrews doesn't enjoy writing in the first place ("It's a discipline for me," he said), and it's easy to see that writing and publishing a children's book is no small task. The only thing Andrews found more enjoyable about writing the book was that it took fewer words to complete it.

However, his passion for the book's substance and concept is palpable. *The Boy Who Changed the World* tells the story of Norman Borlaug, a boy who eventually grew up to save the lives of over 2 billion people worldwide by hybridizing wheat and preventing starvation. Andrews traces the influences that led the young Borlaug to science and agriculture, from Borlaug's father, to George Washington Carver, to Moses and Susan Carver, the couple who rescued the young George Washington Carver from thieves. As Andrews continues to trace the series of events that led to Norman Borlaug's rescue of 2 billion people, it becomes apparent that it wasn't just Norman who changed the world---it was everyone else, too. Therein lies the book's point--- everything you do matters. Your actions, big or small, have an effect that influences everything and everyone. Of all the principles explored and explained in his previous works, Andrews was most drawn to this one when creating his children's book.

"This is the principle that's most needed in our world today," he said.

The book is full of vibrant illustrations created by English illustrator Philip Hurst. They are as varied as they are frequent, going from green Iowa cornfields, to a blazing Kansas barn, to a flourish of butterflies against a pale blue sky. To Andrews, the book's illustrations are almost equally important to the words as a device that allows children to better comprehend the message.

"As adults, we tend to think of illustrations as window dressing, but the illustrations are what keep a child's attention while the adult

is trying to get the words to penetrate their heart and mind. If you didn't have the illustrations there, they'd be looking at the clock or the cat or the car that went by outside or the vacuum cleaner in the other room."

Though it was the book's publisher that selected the illustrator, Andrews still ended up being quite pleased with them. "They blew me away," he said. "I've got an eight- and a ten-year-old, so I can't help but think of illustrations in two ways. I think of them in terms of what strikes me, and I think of them in terms of what they will respond to. I've shown them to my boys and they love 'em. There's so much to look at."

Really, Andrews is just glad the publisher didn't ask him to illustrate the book. "It would've been a lot of stick figures," he said laughingly.

In the end, it was Andrews' boys' reaction that let him know he had created something worthwhile and meaningful to children. "A fair amount was riding on their reaction. It's the only children's book I've done. Obviously, they're the only children I have. If they had told me they hated it I would have gone back to the drawing board."

Andrews was recently relaxing with his two sons at a neighborhood pool when he was approached by a fan. When he told the fan about his new children's book, Adam, his eight-year-old, immediately chimed in, saying, "My daddy read *The Boy Who Changed the World* to me and I loved it! It's the best thing he's ever done." With a reaction like that, it's easy to see why Andrews didn't consider going back to the drawing board.



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