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[00:00:00] Literaticast theme music plays.

Jennifer: [00:00:06] Hi and welcome to the Literaticast. I'm Jennifer Laughran and I'm a senior agent at the Andrea Brown Literary Agency. And today I'm going to talk about authenticity.

[00:00:17] So, people come up to me all the time and they ask things like, will this topic sell? Will my book about such and such a thing sell? And I generally have the same response for them. I've said it so many times that if it wasn't a cliché before it is one now. I say there's always a market for awesome.

[00:00:40] But what do I really mean by that? So partly I'm trying to get off the hook for answering this question that doesn't have an answer because I don't know you, I haven't read your book. You're a stranger, probably. I have no idea if your book is going to sell. So there is that aspect for sure. But also, I mean it, I think that rather than thinking, okay, will a paranormal romance sell, I don't know. But will a really awesome paranormal romance that breaks barriers and doesn't follow trends and all that stuff? Will that sell?

[00:01:19] It's more likely for sure. I mean, on the one hand, not every book that gets published, if we're really being honest with ourselves, can be described as awesome. Some of them can, but not all. And we all know that not every awesome book gets published, but okay. Bear with me. I recently read an article in the New York Times about Yoplait. Yes, the yogurt brand. So this is going to be a little bit of a tangent, but I think you'll get it. So you no doubt have noticed in recent years Greek yogurt has become hugely popular. Huge. It's taken over the yogurt business, Yoplait obviously noticed as this craze is severely messing with their bottom line. So they brainstormed, how can we make our own Greek yogurt to compete with this? And they tried everything to launch something that would be the next Chobani or Phi-A. And guess what? It was a failure again and again. These fake Greek ideas were tanking. So they went back to the drawing board. What makes you a place special? It's lighter than Greek yogurt, sure. But also it has something that Greek

yogurt can never have. It's French. They decided to lean into the Frenchness. To put the yogurt and little glass pots like they do in the old country.

[00:02:48] Guess what? It was a hit. They found the thing that made them them and they leaned into it and consumers really responded and I think that's part of what I mean when I say be a trendsetter rather than trend follower or is there a market for... there's a market for awesome. I mean instead of trying to make yourself and your books into the image of somebody else, figure out what is authentically you and lean into that.

[00:03:16] My guest today is an author who is great at showing her own true colors and she's made quite a splash with her nonfiction picture books like Shark Lady and Pink is for Blobfish. Jess Keating is not only an author but also a self-promotional wizard and she's going to talk about both today if I can get her on the line.

[00:03:37] Hi Jess.

Jess: [00:03:38] Hey Jen. How are you doing?

Jennifer: [00:03:39] I'm great. First of all, talk about your background in zoology. What got you from there to writing kids' books?

Jess: [00:03:46] Oh Gosh. Like many people, I did not come around to writing kids' books on a very linear path. I think a lot of us sort of find our way through the spirals of life. And I began in zoology. I will preface this with, I've always loved books and reading. I was that book nerd in school who a lot of people made fun of because I spent recesses in the library, but I think we're all on the same page with that. So we'll get that out of the way. But I've always loved science and zoology. So I went through school to basically take as much zoology as I could and as much science as I could. But I realized when I got into my master's that I was starting to get a lot of sort of push back from different advisers and stuff because they wanted me to be much less voicey in my academic writing.

[00:04:33] So I would learn something amazing about, sharks or bowerbirds or whatever. And my first instinct would be to convey this information sort of for regular people out there in the world because I mean, why else would you be doing it? And I was getting all sorts of these funny comments like written in the side of my margins, saying you need to tone down the voice in this or this is not the place for jokes about sharks. And I think that's when I realized that this is maybe not the job for me in terms of getting out the information that I want to get out there into the world.

[00:05:11] So I did a very abrupt about face. I finished my Master's of Science and I called my parents up and said you know what, instead of being a professor of vertebrate zoology or something like that, I'm going to write children's books.

[00:05:22] And God bless them. They were lovely about it. And since then I just have not looked back. This allows me to research all the things that I love. And the one downside to academic life is you often are forced to specialize, right? Like you have to get smarter and smarter and smarter in one particular area. And I found that that really, really did not suit, my interests at all. So this way I get to write books about all the amazing things that I learned and then when I'm finished with that, I can move on to something else and I can meet and reach real readers out there as opposed to other academics. Which, no offense to them, they're lovely, but I like reaching kids, you know what I mean? I like reaching kids because I think that they're going to be the ones making some really big changes.

Jennifer: [00:06:08] I know you have a ton of ideas for picture books and all kinds of books. So how many of these ideas actually make it into book form?

Jess: [00:06:17] Oh, gosh. So I think that most prolific authors probably share this. Many don't. And I would say even the majority of them don't. Maybe 40% ultimately end up getting sent to my agent or my critique partners. But a good majority of them, I, again, most people probably have some sort of a writer notebook or they use their phone. I'm jotting ideas down maybe three or four a day. And then from there I have to ask myself, is this something that we... that is even worthwhile doing or is it to some sort of random flight of fancy? Because I'm like, oh, chickens are fun, that, that type of, they are fun. Maybe we do need a good chicken book. But is it going to sort of stand the test of time in terms of readers but also ourselves.

[00:07:07] I mean, you know this as well, like that if you are actively writing a book and you want to get it out there, you're going to be reading this book maybe 200, 300 times, before it gets to readers. So it needs to be something that is going to hold my attention for that long as well. And, one other reason that, a book might not make it past, sort of my notebook pages or my agent is if we've noticed somebody else doing it really well. If somebody has a similar, say there's an amazing chicken book out there that just got published, I will probably pull back and ask myself, will I be adding anything extra to this chicken book industry or is it just something that I really want to do that maybe I can just encompass in a blog post or a video or something like that.

Jennifer: [00:07:53] You are something of a self-marketing guru. I definitely share your social media playbook blog posts all the time, for example, and I will put it in the show notes for those who don't know what I'm talking about because it's incredibly useful. But what are your top tips for new authors who might be, don't have that social media savvy but want to build it?

Jess: [00:08:15] Oh gosh, so I've done a lot of workshops and intensives at the SCBWI conferences and such about platform development. And I think it's an area that a lot of people, how can I put this? I think a lot of people set themselves up to be their own enemy with it. And one of the first things that I would suggest, which is really, it's very unsexy and it's not kind of a marked list of things to do but is to really, really check your mindset.

[00:08:45] I can't tell you how many people I meet that they have a book coming out or they're working actively on a book that they ultimately want to be promoting, but then they'll say to me, oh, but I have nothing interesting to share online or the impostor syndrome kicks in, right? Like, who am I to be online or promoting or talking about this book. And I just want to say like, be careful of these stories that you tell yourself because others might start to believe them, too.

[00:09:13] Do you know what I mean? Like, if I'm out there sending the message like, oh, I don't know what I'm doing, or I have nothing interesting to share or nobody will like sharks. Chickens are so passé. If I was saying these things to myself and kind of sending that message out there, you can't blame people for not really wanting to hop onboard your train.

[00:09:31] So that's the first thing I would recommend is just to check your mindset. Because you do, I guarantee you, have a place in this world and your job with platform development as a whole is not to sell your book to the entire world. It's really just to find your people. it's really to find the group of people that will interact with you. That maybe your book, will one day be interesting for them. And even if it's not, you never know how those relationships are going to unfold.

Jennifer: [00:09:58] So let me ask you this, wait a second, because you've used the phrase platform development a couple of times.

Jess: [00:10:04] Yes.

Jennifer: [00:10:06] And I know what I think platform means, but what do you mean by it?

Jess: [00:10:10] Okay. So actually I wrote this out ahead of time because it's something I wanted to be prepared and I really did want to do some deep thinking like, okay, what the heck is platform development? And I'm going to give you my really super nerdy analytical answer, but it served me well.

[00:10:24] I truly think that platform is an ecosystem, okay? And it's, a combination of the way you market, the way you brand yourself, the things that you choose to put out there. And I think if we were looking at, very concisely, what is your platform? I would say it is all the ways that you are online and visible.

[00:10:46] Does that make kind of sense, hope, to listeners? It's basically anything that you're putting out there into the world via whatever app or social media, what have you, that's your platform. And I often hear like, oh, only nonfiction writers need a platform or don't worry about it so much if you're a fiction author. And that's totally fair.

[00:11:08] But to me, I think that no matter what, you are going to have a platform. If you're online in any way, shape, or form, you already have a platform. So instead of saying, Oh, do I need one or don't I just, accept it. The point is moot. You have one, so you might as well be really, really deliberate about crafting that platform. You know what I mean? Because that that gives other people very quick insight into who you are. But it also helps you because I think a lot of authors don't see the other side of platform in that it helps you kind of as a compass. It can guide you and give you clarity onto your path and how you proceed to do certain, if you have opportunities come up, you can ask yourself, well is this in line with what I really want to be doing.

[00:11:58] It fits the themes behind my writing and if it isn't for some reason, then you know, maybe I don't necessarily need to do this particular event or online blog post or video or whatever. But at the same time you might come across something that sounds like a really amazing opportunity, but for some reason you sense it isn't in line with the platform you already have and then you can start to tweak your platform to include it and to modify those parts of yourself. Does that make sense?

Jennifer: [00:12:27] Yeah.

Jess: [00:12:29] So that's what I would call a platform.

Jennifer: [00:12:30] I know that, I mean it can be really overwhelming for authors when they are like Twitter, Pinterest, whatever, LinkedIn. What do I do?

Where do I start? I mean I always am of the opinion that you should just do the things that you like.

Jess: [00:12:45] Yes.

Jennifer: [00:12:47] What do you?

Jess: [00:12:47] I think that there are three general questions that I asked myself when I was kind of first starting out like however many years ago. One of them is what are the themes behind my writing? And in my case, if I took a broad view of what I write about and kind of how I approach things, there's a lot of science, there's a lot of creativity, there's a lot of curiosity and there's a lot of humor. So then just looking at that, I can say, okay, which apps or social media platforms make sense to me based on those questions? Right? So in my example, I really like visual stuff. So right there we know, okay, maybe I lean towards, Twitter or Facebook or video for example, because I like that visual element.

[00:13:34] A second question is, who is my audience? Where are they? And you can be an amazing, Pinterester, if that's even a word, but if nobody that is a part of your audience is on Pinterest, you're kind of just screaming into the void. And to my mother, who is also on Pinterest and she will love you, I promise, but that might not be enough. \

[00:13:57] So you could go to those apps that you would find your audience there. But another big question is, what tone does my actual writing and life take? And I do include life because I think it's important to be authentic. And I know we hear that word thrown around a lot and it sounds a little, I don't know, it sounds a little crunchy right now. But I think it is really important to be authentic and people will sense if you're on any social media platform and your only goal is just to sell books, that or to gain followers.

[00:14:28] Like I hate that when I hear like, oh I want to have X number of followers. Like followers are fantastic. But first of all, I don't actually think that equals books sold. And second of all, like that's a really narrow view of why you're building your platform in the first place.

Jennifer: [00:14:44] Oh yeah. I mean I can tell you, I have a lot of followers on Twitter. And I think probably maybe four books will sell if I tweet something and I have 40,000 followers. So yeah.

Jess: [00:15:01] So there you go. Right. And we don't want to crunch those numbers because it's really kind of depressing. But the point is like, you're not on Twitter to sell books or to sell your client's books. You're on

Twitter to be on Twitter and to engage with the people that will have, find value in something that you're doing.

[00:15:18] So I would say like, in terms of setting goals for social media, don't make your goal be like, oh, I want John Green to follow me. Like I'm sure he's a nice guy, but he's probably got things to do. And if that's your goal, you're going to be really unhappy really fast. But your goal could instead be something like, I want to be really authentic and share something meaningful to myself or valuable and I want to meet other people that inspire me. And all of a sudden you've got a platform that... You can have a really strong platform with just, 500 or a thousand people working with you if they're really connected to you. But you can also have a platform that includes 200,000 people, but they're all like bots, soliciting you. So I think it's, important to keep that in mind, for sure.

Jennifer: [00:16:04] So I have a few listener questions that are kind of addendums to this.

Jess: [00:16:07] Oof, okay.

Jennifer: [00:16:09] What is your advice on getting noticed by the—you mentioned reaching out to librarians and there are these big mouth librarians on Twitter and elsewhere. But if you don't actually know them, how can you get to know them?

Jess: [00:16:23] That's a really good question. So I will preface this again with... and I get this a lot when I do the workshops as well. And I think it's really easy to fixate on that one person. You know what I mean? That's got the 200,000 followers or that just they, it's like the Oprah of our industry. Like there's all sorts of them, these amazing librarians that they say the word and then all of a sudden, boom, that, equals a lot of excess help for your book.

[00:16:49] And they're wonderful. This is not to discount them at all, but I will say do not underestimate the power of sort of the regular folk as well. And I, maybe that's the wrong way to put it, but the not so famous Insta, fame, magic followers. Don't forget that every librarian who is out there and tweeting you is important.

Jennifer: [00:17:11] So another listener question is, how does one go about getting a cover reveal from a major blogger and also—

Jess: [00:17:17] Oh gosh.

Jennifer: [00:17:17] —does it matter?

Jess: [00:17:17] A cover reveal from a major blogger? Well, here's the thing. Like, I think we need to be careful not to treat people like tools of our own success, and in as much that, again, we are all humans here. And those bloggers, like we all know these bloggers. They're amazing, amazing people, but they're very busy and they might not have time or they might have something going on in life. So don't set yourself up for disappointment in saying again, when I say be careful what you tell yourself, right? If you premise your success with, I need to have so and so reveal my cover or else I'm a gigantic failure and that's the end of it. And I might, as... I'll never work in this industry again. You're setting yourself up to fail for that. And I know that's not really the question that they asked, but I will preface it with that because I think that mindset is so important.

Jennifer: [00:18:13] No, I think that's a really great answer actually. And I would say further to when they ask, does it matter? I would say no.

Jess: [00:18:20] Yeah. It's a bonus, right? I mean it's always, yeah, it's always... Same as a book trailer reveal or any sort of interview. But it's, I really do think, and again, maybe it's a little bit depressing to think this way, but in a way it's really empowering. I think that your book is going to shake out in the industry as it's going to shake out. I don't think that any one thing you do is going to make or break your success in this industry at all.

[00:18:50] Now that being said, I don't want to be somebody who sits there and thinks, oh, there's nothing I can do to help myself in this world. That's crap also. So that's why I focus so much on, things that I can control, like platform development, which again, we keep saying it and it sounds really boring, but to develop your platform means that you will slowly become seen as a recognizable person, but also an expert.

[00:19:14] And a lot of people think, oh well I'm not an expert at anything. I can't...I only know what I'm writing. But the beautiful thing about our industry is you don't need to be an astrophysicist or an expert in something to truly be an expert because you just need to be you. You're an expert at the book you wrote and you're an expert at how you should go about putting that message out there. So I would definitely say don't lean or rely on people you know that have a massive number of followers just because you think that's going to save the day or save your book. I don't think it will at all. But if you really do want to get relationships started with these people, just treat them like people and start early when you don't need something from them.

Jennifer: [00:19:58] Agreed. I mean, I just think to me really the cover reveal thing like unless you're super famous, Cassie Clare, YA author kind of thing

where you have massive numbers of fans who are very eager for that, I think then that can be a really fun thing. But if you're a debut picture book author. Nobody knows who you are yet.

Jess: [00:20:19] Yeah. Just roll with it. And the other thing is, kind of warning about this is you can take, this happened to me, you can take all the time in the world and set up this amazing cover reveal with somebody. And then it can be on Amazon like two weeks early and somebody will tweet it and then boom, they're like, that becomes your cover reveal. So again, there's so much in this industry you can't control. And I kind of think that that's one of those things that if you have that amazing opportunity, by all means take because it's only going to help. But don't set yourself up for disappointment if it doesn't happen. You gotta be in the driver's seat here. And again, that falls back on, what can you control?

[00:21:00] You can control a cover reveal. You can do that yourself. Whether or not it's planned [crosstalk 00:21:04]

Jennifer: [00:21:04] Yeah, it's called just showing people your cover though.

Jess: [00:21:06] Exactly. You could tweet it. That could be your cover reveal.

Jennifer: [00:21:08] Hey!

Jess: [00:21:08] Here's my cover reveal, tweet. Like it's... have a giveaway. Do something fun that feels right to you. And like you said, for a debut author like there's... and this is not to sound horrible, but it might, but there are so many books out there that your cover reveal really only matters to you and a select number of people. And again, I hope I don't sound like a jerk in saying that. I care about your cover. I promise I care about your cover. But in the big scheme of things, it's not something to break your back over, that's for sure.

Jennifer: [00:21:40] And at the end of the day it just needs to exist. And then you show people and then it's really about people seeing your cover multiple times and not just that one. Anyway, whatever

Jess: [00:21:54] And thinking of you, that's the other thing. And thinking of you when they see that cover. So this is a... it's maybe a tangent and I don't know if you'll want to cut it or not because it does get a little politics here. But, so this is a really good example of that platform development and how I think it's like an ecosystem where eventually it starts to work for you when you have a real back and forth with, with your people. Last year when Donald Trump was running. I know, I went there, but so I have this book, Pink is for Blobfish, right? And the cover is this gigantic, slimy blobfish. And last year there was this meme going

around that was Donald Trump's face next to the blobfish. And people saying like, oh, isn't this, you've probably seen it, and if not like you can totally imagine it, right?

[00:22:38] So, but the funny thing is, so that was going around, and I noticed it a couple times online, but then a funny thing started happening and people started to tweet that image at me or email, like I must have had 30 or 40 people send me that meme and saying, oh, look at this. Isn't this funny, I saw this and here's the cool part and it reminded me of your book.

Jennifer: [00:22:57] So yay, yay?

Jess: [00:22:59] And that's as much as I maybe don't want to be associated with certain things. I think it's actually really amazing because that means that not only did this person see this image out there and they were reminded of my book, which yay, that's fantastic. But they also took the time, invested that, five minutes or three minutes to send me an email or to send me a message or something to tell me about it.

[00:23:22] And the bonus part is when things like that happen, when your platform ecosystem, so to speak, is working. That creates those opportunities. So in those moments when people email me that stuff, I was able to actually have a real conversation with them. Like, oh hey, so and so, it's so great to hear from you. How about I send you a book plate, a signed book plate or something for your kids. And then you've this back and forth that suddenly has meaning. Even though it started out with this kind of random goofball thing.

Jennifer: [00:23:54] So another listener question. Let's say you don't have a connection to a bookstore and they haven't necessarily bought your book. But you are thinking like, I'm going to Minneapolis, I love the Wild Rumpas Bookstore, my book is about animals. How do you reach out to them? I mean, do you have any, do you introduce yourself to them or do you go through your publicist?

Jess: [00:24:20] I would definitely, I tend to, so here's the thing, I know some people they would immediately say, oh, the biggest challenge here is I'm shy. And I think that's a totally legit challenge to have. But if that's, if your conversation ends with I'm shy, therefore I cannot do this, that, or the other thing, I kind of don't, I don't subscribe to that. I think that, if you're shy, there are things you can do to slowly build those muscles. So I would just, going into this conversation, again, maybe this is the theme of this, this episode, be careful what you tell yourself because if you set yourself up to say, oh, well I can't, I'm too shy to reach out or I don't know

what to say, you're already losing. So let that go. I would definitely reach out in any way that I could.

[00:25:09] I've actually, one thing that I started doing this year and last year was sending out thank you cards and I know it seems sort of like maybe cheeseball but who doesn't love getting thank you cards. So every time I've noticed a bookstore, you know how they'll tweet out their displays of like, oh, these are the books that we have. So there was a lot of displays for Shark Week, this past July and they happen to include my book Shark Lady a lot of the times. So I would actually click on their Twitter page, find out where they were and then get their actual snail mail address and send them a like message just a really short. Hi guys, I noticed you were, promoting my book for Shark Week. Thank you so much. I'd love to check in sometime if I'm there. So that is just, I'm a huge, huge proponent of the thank you card.

[00:25:56] And I recognize in this example, maybe it's not somebody who's already carried your book, but if that is a practice that you start ahead of time, you will probably notice some overlap and eventually it'll be like, oh, that's the, I've already spoken to these people because I've thanked them for something. Now I'm going to be there in person. Then you have an easier way to sort of make that connection. But if for some reason you don't have any connections at all, I would say find them online if possible. Most bookstores nowadays generally are online. And start like I mentioned with the big librarians or something like that, start connecting with them as people. Introduce yourself. Say, Oh, I loved your blog post about this. Or, the one good thing about bookstores and you'll know this, Jenn, is you guys love to be asked for recommendations.

[00:26:46] You always want, and you have a billion books that you'd love to tell people about. Ask them about their favorite books and just sort of get that dialogue going. And then it's a bit more of a soft entry into that discussion of, oh, I'm coming in March, and I'd love to set it up. So I would say, I mean, your publicist, I believe, often will do this for you, but I generally like to sort of make an impression myself because I'm fully invested in what I'm doing. I know what I'm bringing to the table and it helps to make that personal connection. I don't think it ever hurts to have that personal connection. So yes, introduce yourselves. Don't be shy and connect with them in any way that you feel comfortable doing.

Jennifer: [00:27:29] So I know you do a ton of work to add value for teachers and educators. Can we talk about that?

Jess: [00:27:40] Oh yeah. So one of the things that I think it was important way back when when I was starting, one of the best things I did was I sort

of took stock of the strengths and interests that I had. In terms of like say mine for example. Like I'm quite outgoing, I'm an introvert but I'm quite outgoing and I'm not afraid to public speak or talk to all sorts of people. But I think it's also really important to develop your weaknesses.

[00:28:10] So when it came to creating this extra content for teachers, that's where I focused a lot of my energy because I wanted to create something for them that sort of spoke for me even though I couldn't be there in person. I do offer free Skype visits and I offer longer paid Skype visits.

[00:28:28] But sometimes let's face it, your schedules just get so full so fast and I wanted to make sure that there was something to act as a stand in for being. So one of the things that I told myself was, okay, I'm gonna lock myself in a room and I'm going to learn how to, make a podcast or a video or any sort of the tech. That was the part that I felt like I wasn't as strong at. So that's where I sort of devoted my time with that. And now most books, and this goes back into that when you know how to, how to organize your publicity push with your publisher.

[00:29:05] One of the things that I'll tell publishers now is, okay, any book that we come out with, I guarantee I will make you... I will make some sort of educator video to go along with it. That kind of acts as almost a stand in for a Skype visit. Sharing behind the scenes information or visions. Anything like that. I tell them I will come up with a book trailer. And I think that that's something that... that's a skill that I did not have. My first book trailers were so bad, but you know what? They were out there. But that's all that matters, right? It's getting it out the door. It doesn't need to be perfect. And podcasts, like anything like that, that feels natural and genuine to you.

[00:29:46] I think that teachers, like we all know that teachers are so overworked and they're so invested in what they're doing. Anything you can do as an author, whether it's picture books, middle grade or YA, anything you can do to help them use your book in their classrooms, I think is an amazing, amazing tool.

[00:30:02] So that's something that I would definitely recommend from the start. And I mean, you can also do the old standards, which are bookmarks or book plates. I think book plates are wonderful because I'm in Canada. So anytime I send a physical book, I have to sell like 300 books to make up for the cost of shipping it. So I'm a big fan of the book plate because you can sign it, you can send it off yourself. But anything like that that helps people sort of relate to you a bit more as an author. People love behind the scenes stuff. Any bloopers? I've seen a lot of YA

authors, they'll post the playlist of the music that they're listening to when they're writing the book or certain scenes. I think a lot of teens would love that. Revisions.

[00:30:44] There's so much you can do, but it really depends on, what you're comfortable doing. But I will say my technique for this was, okay, I also want to shore up the weaknesses that I have. So that was a good avenue for me. Okay, how can I learn a bunch of this tech? What's going to make me stick at the computer long enough to actually start to master some of these things? And this was my way of doing that, was creating that extra content for teachers. But yeah, you can take it any way you can do recipes for, like there's so much you can do.

Jennifer: [00:31:16] So, speaking of Skype visits though, you do school visits a lot and Skype visits a lot. How do you get these school visits?

Jess: [00:31:25] Well, the first thing I would say is to make yourself known somewhere online because if people can't find you, they won't know that you're offering them.

[00:31:35] If you do want to get into doing school visits or Skype visits, you do need like a tab on your website or something that says school visits and then people can learn what you talk about in there. I also offer free Skype visits. I do...I think there's... Kate Messner has a list of authors that do free Skype visits as well. A lot of authors do a free 20-minute visit and that's just a people email and you kind of book them as needed. And to book an actual school visit, I would say the more extra content you have is going to help you make those bookings. Does that make sense? Like if people can watch a video and hear me speak or see me interact with them, they have a really, they have a better idea of what I'm going to bring to the table in an actual school visit.

[00:32:25] And I think it's really important to outline on that webpage. if you've got this page on your blog, here's what I talk about in my school visit. I think that's really important because people and teachers are looking for those questions. Will they be about, the importance of revision or is this going to be more a look at my personal journey to being a writer. I think that those questions do come into play. So if you basically package yourself in a way that helps them find you. I think that that will serve you really well.

Jennifer: [00:32:57] Cool. So now we're actually so running out of time.

Jess: [00:33:03] Oh gosh. I talk a lot.

Jennifer: [00:33:04] And, I mean we didn't talk about books yet. So let's move on and talk about books. So your latest is a biography, Shark Lady. So what drew you to the story of Eugenie Clark?

Jess: [00:33:16] So, Eugenie is somebody who, I think she's always been in the back of my mind as like a scientist when I was growing up. She's kind of like a Jane Goodall, Jane Goodall of sharks, really. Which is kind of equally cool, I have to say, because who doesn't love sharks? So I think it was one of those stories that just sort of frittered away in the back of my head. And then one day it just kind of occurred to me like, there needs to be a book about this. Especially when I was realizing the, the parallel between the way people see sharks, which is, oftentimes we see them, we miss underestimate them or we, we misjudged them and think that they're awful. And people were doing the same thing with Eugenie herself.

[00:34:00] Growing up they were like, oh, you can't be a scientist, you should be a secretary, blah blah blah. The whole woman in science challenge. And I realized—it was that moment when I realized the parallel between the way people saw sharks and the way people often see women in science. That's when I knew. Okay, this is a really strong hook. This book needs to happen like yesterday. So that's what drew me to it and I'm really, really proud of how it worked out. I'm overjoyed with the book itself and the art. Oh my God. I'm very lucky.

Jennifer: [00:34:33] Yeah, it is a gorgeous book and in fact, I have a copy that I'm going to give to people who are on the Patreon.

Jess: [00:34:40] Ooh, thank you.

Jennifer: [00:34:42] Yeah.

Jess: [00:34:42] And I'll send a book plate. If you give me their info, I'll send a signed book plate for them or something.

Jennifer: [00:34:48] Excellent. Thank you. So you also have a middle grade series and picture books about weird animals like Pink is for Blobfish and What Makes a Monster. Can you tell us some of your favorite weird animal facts?

Jess: [00:35:01] Okay, now you're really gonna have to cut me off. I've recently been researching terminal velocity in cats, which, so terminal velocity is basically how fast something can fall when it stops changing speed. Basically it stopped speeding up. So it's really the number at which, how fast are we going to die? Kind of. And in humans, the terminal velocity, if you throw a human, out of a plane or something, their terminal velocity

is 120 miles per hour. Right? And that's, bad news if you don't have a parachute. But the terminal velocity for cats is actually half of that. It's 60 because they can do this like magic cat physicality thing that increases drag and stuff. So there's literally really no difference between a cat jumping out a window and the cat essentially jumping out of a plane. It can land and be like shaking it off. And I just think that's, we, we live with cats often and we overlook the fact that they are basically superheroes.

[00:36:04] So I think that that's something that needs attention. There's a lot of reasons why I think cats are amazing. The other thing that I recently a podcast about this really briefly. Cats, they purr obviously, like we all know cats purr, but it's been shown that the purring, the hertz that they purr at, the hertz at which they purr, sorry. It actually promotes healing and bone density. So oftentimes if you hear a cat purring, that physical vibration of their purr helps to heal them and speed up injury. But the amazing thing is it doesn't just work for them. It also holds true for animals that are in a close vicinity to them.

[00:36:46] So if your cat is on your lap, they are literally sending out these healing spells to you via their purrs.

Jennifer: [00:36:54] Aww.

Jess: [00:36:54] We all love cats, right? Even if it's kind of a jerk sometimes. But I think that's really, really amazing.

Jennifer: [00:36:58] That is!

Jess: [00:36:58] So that's one of them. And one other one that... it's very quick, is that everybody should know, on the planet that a wombats have cubic poop as in they literally, it's a cube. And I don't know the physics of why. I probably shouldn't get into it because you know this is a book podcast. But I think that is just fascinating and—

Jennifer: [00:37:17] I mean...

Jess: [00:37:17] —who doesn't love wombats.

Jennifer: [00:37:20] But are their butts square? I don't understand.

Jess: [00:37:23] Well that's the thing, right? I have not personally... I wish I had a better answer for this. I probably should have done some research and like ask some wombats. I have not personally dissected or examined a wombat derriere but I reckon that there is something that goes between the physical anatomy of the wombat as well as the food they eat that maybe lends itself to being compacted into a cubic type form.

[00:37:51] But yeah, I think that that the world is so endlessly fascinating. And that's a good example.

Jennifer: [00:37:57] So if readers have devoured your nonfiction books, what is the next great nonfiction picture book? Not by you. That you think that they should pick up.

Jess: [00:38:08] Okay. Well thank you very much readers for devouring if you have devoured. I appreciate that. There are so many... nonfiction is like killing it these days and I'm so, so happy to be a part of it. One book that I have loved recently is by Lily Williams. It's called If Sharks Disappeared. Um, she's an illustrator as well and it's... sharks are one of those species that if you are moved them from their ecosystem, basically the whole world just kind of goes wild and chaotic and everything collapses. And she does an amazing, amazing job of visually portraying that. And I love that book.

[00:38:41] Two other people to look out for. Always, just in general, always have Melissa Stewart on your radar. She has a really fun book, Can an Aardvark Bark? which I think is just, I mean that's an amazing title. So she's somebody that I always, auto-buy her. And Sarah Albee as well, who I think... she's represented by ABLA as well.

Jennifer: [00:39:02] I think Caryn Wiseman is her...

Jess: [00:39:03] Yeah, there you go. Her latest book, Poison, which is all about like how poison has been used throughout human history and how it's changed things. And I think that was fascinating. So there's three for you instead of one.

Jennifer: [00:39:16] That's great. So finally, I always ask my guests, what are you obsessed with this week? And it does not have to be bookish, but it can be.

Jess: [00:39:26] Oh gosh. Okay.

Jennifer: [00:39:27] And I can go first.

Jess: [00:39:28] You should go. I've done a lot of talking, so you should definitely go first.

Jennifer: [00:39:33] I will go first, and mine actually is bookish. So I'm reading a galley of a grownup book, which is weird, already because I don't read grownup books.

Jess: [00:39:43] Weird.

Jennifer: [00:39:43] It is called *The Power*. It's by Naomi Alderman, and it is about essentially if girls ruled the world. It's about, yeah, it's about all of a sudden it's our world, normal patriarchy as we know it. And suddenly teenage girls develop a power where they can electrocute men by touching them. And that turns into the entire—

Jess: [00:40:14] That's so good.

Jennifer: [00:40:14] —like it spins from this, a few isolated cases of girls doing this to basically entirely turning the world as we know it upside down.

Jess: [00:40:30] Wow.

Jennifer: [00:40:30] It's amazing.

Jess: [00:40:31] That sounds like a utopia.

Jennifer: [00:40:33] Kind of. It was blurb'd by Margaret Atwood.

Jess: [00:40:36] Wow.

Jennifer: [00:40:38] And Margaret Atwood used many exclamation points in her blurb. So you can imagine, it's kind of like, it's very satisfying.

Jess: [00:40:48] Yeah, that sounds awesome.

Jennifer: [00:40:49] It's also scary. I mean it's science fiction and it's very interesting. It comes out in this country in October. And what are you obsessed with?

Jess: [00:40:59] I am obsessed with a lot of things. First of all being the wombat poop as you can imagine. But I have something a little more colorful to share and it's actually a hashtag. It's not necessarily bookish but you can definitely relate it to books. And it is the hashtag *ColorCollective* and it is this Twitter account that every week it tweets out a color. So this week's color for example, is *buttercup*. And what artists and illustrators do is they use that sort of as a visual prompt of sorts to create anything they please, visually, to include that color. And one thing I'm noticing is as an author, if you go through that *color collective* hashtag there is so much inspiration there. Like there's so many different styles of art and so many different interpretations of that particular color. It can be absolutely anything.

[00:41:52] I find it to be something that if you just sort of peruse that I've had about 30 picture book ideas just pop up because I'm thinking, Oh, who's that character? Or what that animal doing. And I think that that's

an amazing way of finding inspiration. I think Jack London said, like, you can't just wait for inspiration. You've got to go out after it with a club or something to hunt it down. I think that the Color Collective hashtag is a really good way of clubbing down your inspiration. So I recommend any authors out there or illustrators, of course you can take part in it. I don't think you actually have to be an illustrator to do it, but, definitely worth checking out.

[00:42:31] And the Twitter account for that is @clr_collective. That's how you would get the weekly prompts.

Jennifer: [00:42:37] Yeah, I'm actually... I just went on Twitter just now to look this up as we were—

Jess: [00:42:41] Did you find it?

Jennifer: [00:42:41] I did. It's amazing.

Jess: [00:42:43] It's really cool, right?

Jennifer: [00:42:45] So thank you for turning me on to that. Yeah. I will be following that hashtag with interest.

Jess: [00:42:49] And there's so many... That's the thing, like there's so many, like probably a lot of unagented illustrators there too. So you never know what you're going to find.

Jennifer: [00:42:58] You never know. And I will also put the links to that in the show notes, too.

Jess: [00:43:02] Oh, perfect.

Jennifer: [00:43:03] Anyway, Jess, it's been such a pleasure. Thank you so much for hanging out with me.

Jess: [00:43:07] Thank you so much for having me. Thank you, for real.

Jennifer: [00:43:10] And I'll see you on the internet.

Jess: [00:43:13] Yes.

Jennifer: [00:43:14] Bye.

Jess: [00:43:14] Have a good day.

Jennifer: [00:43:16] Thanks, Jess, for joining us and thank you listeners for listening to us. As always, I'm on Twitter @Literaticat. Jess can be found

on Twitter @Jess_Keating. I'm going to have links to all the cool stuff we talked about today in the show notes on the website, which is JenniferLaughran.com/literaticast. Also, we have a Patreon, if you want to throw in a buck, you can support the show and possibly win books and get to know our guests before they're announced. And ask questions and all kinds of stuff. So please join us there. It's patreon.com/Literaticat. Thanks again and, uh, I'll see you next time.

[00:44:01] Literaticast theme music plays.