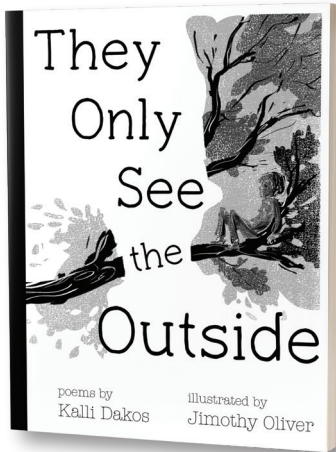




## *They Only See the Outside:* Interview with the Author



We've interviewed Kalli Dakos, author of a new collection of poems, *They Only See the Outside*. We ask her about the process of making this book and how poetry can help children better understand their feelings and feel less alone.

**Magination Press:** What inspired you to create this poetry collection, *They Only See the Outside*?

**Kalli Dakos:** I was asked to do a collection of poems that deal with emotional issues and I thought it was a wonderful idea. I've been sharing poetry with children for many years now and I know that poems can help them deal with problems at so many levels – both reading and writing poems. Reading poems helps children to feel that they are not alone with their difficulties and writing poems helps to give a voice to their problems and to share their own stories.

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**MP:** You've written many books of poetry. What makes this one different?

**KD:** This is my first book that has both previously published poems and new poems as well. I was able to share some of my favorite poems from other books and to add poems on brand new topics.

**MP:** Are there any poets who have inspired or mentored you?

**KD:** There are many poets who have inspired me over the years — from William Wordsworth to Shel Silverstein to the wonderful children's poets today who are my friends.

**MP:** The poems in *They Only See the Outside* can raise many different emotions and reactions from page to page as you cover incredibly different topics, from serious to ordinary to amusing. Can you explain why this approach benefits readers?

**KD:** Poems help children to develop empathy and compassion for the struggles that their peers face, and covering all different topics helps this exposure. And then there are the poems that strike a chord with individual children because they have experienced the feelings in the poem.

I love to include longer free verse poems that can handle topics that require more text, and it is always important to include humorous poetry that gives children a break from the deeper issues, but also helps them to realize they are not alone with embarrassing situations.

**MP:** In this collection of poems, you explore all kinds of feelings a kid might have in diverse life experiences. In your picture book *Why Am I Blue?*, you explore feelings, too. How is writing a book of poetry different from crafting a picture book?

**KD:** I feel that most of my writing is poetry even if it is in a picture book. I always begin a picture book as a poet, with either free verse or rhyme. In the original versions, the stories are written as poetry, and then changed to picture book format, as in *Why Am I Blue?*

**MP:** In *They Only See the Outside*, you take on some heavy topics like the death of a pet, the immigrant experience, bullying, and a friend moving away. Why is it important to explore issues like this with kids?

**KD:** It is important to explore these issues because so many children are experiencing them. One of my favorite authors, Katherine Paterson, feels we must give children the “words” for the experiences and feelings they are struggling with and poetry can do this. It can also bring them into the inner worlds of children who are struggling with problems like immigration or bullying and help to develop compassion for the sadness other children face in this world.

**MP:** What was it like to see Jimothy Oliver’s illustrations that accompany your poems?

**KD:** It’s always so much FUN to see how an illustrator interprets a poem I have written. Jimothy Oliver captured so many of the feelings of the children in these poems. I am in awe of artists who can do this.

**MP:** What is your favorite part about writing children’s books? What is your least favorite part?

**KD:** My favorite part of writing children’s books is sharing the poems with children everywhere. I’ve been visiting schools for thirty years now and it is delightful to see how children will interpret poems through the lenses of their own experiences. I love when children read poems of mine and then are inspired to write about their own lives.

The sad goodbye poems have surprised me the most. So many children carry sad goodbyes inside their hearts — friends move away, pets die, and grandparents become ill. I’ve found that children want to talk about these goodbyes and they want to share their own.

Above all, it is important to celebrate the special moments of life and this is one of the greatest gifts of poetry.

The least favorite part of writing books for children is the business end — contracts, etc.

**MP:** What do you like to do when you aren't writing?

**KD:** I love to travel and have lived in Alberta, Nevada, New York, and Virginia. I've visited schools all over Canada and the United States and love to explore the areas where I am visiting.

I live in Ottawa, Canada, but I have an office 60 minutes away in Ogdensburg, NY. I love to explore and celebrate life on both sides of the border.

In Ottawa, I live right by the Rideau River and I enjoy hiking, boating and bicycling. Interesting restaurants and theater are high on my list of joys which I share with my daughter who has the same passions. I love cooking and barbecuing and having friends and family over for loads of great food and fun. I enjoy gatherings where there is storytelling and poetry and readings and puppets for children, but also for adults. I think we all need to "play."

**MP:** Is there a fun fact about you that readers might not know that you'd like to share?

**KD:** I lived above the Arctic Circle and taught school in a town in Inuvik, Northwest Territories, Canada. In the summers the sun shone all day and all night, and in the winters, it was dark all day and all night. The children went to school in the dark, and later in the day, they went home in the dark. I wrote a book of poems called, *Recess in the Dark*. It was inspired on a playground at Sir Alexander Mackenzie School in the cold and dark and shows the joys of recess under the stars and the moon and sometimes under the northern lights.

**MP:** What was your favorite children's book when you were growing up?

**KD:** My favorite book growing up was *Heidi*. Years ago, I went to Switzerland looking for Heidi high in the mountains. My husband, daughter and I were on a train and an old man came aboard and he looked just like the Grandfather in the book. And then the train had to stop for cows that were crossing over the tracks, and when I looked out the window I saw a boy and a girl who were the same ages as Heidi and Peter in the book. The book brought Switzerland to life for me, and Switzerland helped me love the book even more. I found this as well on Prince Edward Island with the Anne of Green Gables books which are also favorites.

If you missed it, here's Part 1 of this post.

### **This Article's Author**

Kalli Dakos is a children's poet and educator. She visits schools across the United States and Canada to encourage children and teachers to write about their own lives. She has written many collections of school poems that include six ILA/CBC Children's Choice Selections, such as *If You're Not Here, Please Raise Your Hand*. She lives in Ottawa, Canada, and has an office in Ogdensburg, NY.