

EPISODE **114**

# Writing the Book You Needed as a Child, a Conversation with Susan Tan

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## Meet **Susan Tan**



From being named, “most likely to be a children’s book writer,” in her middle school yearbook, to working in her local library, to earning a PhD in Critical Approaches to Children’s Literature, Susan Tan has been immersed in book culture for most of her life.

She is also the author of the wonderful, delightful Cilla Lee-Jenkins books.

## In This **Episode**

Susan joins Sarah to chat about the fantastic Cilla, living a life of books, and the need for diversity in children’s literature.

## The Listening Guide

**Use this guide to skip to parts that most interest you, or listen to the entire podcast.**

- 1:51 Meet Susan Tan & Cilla
- 6:29 Becoming a reader (and then an author)
- 9:44 Representation in children's literature
- 14:39 Why kids need to see themselves in books
- 19:10 Writing in bed and on the bus
- 24:12 Two kinds of writers
- 27:01 A new 'epic story'
- 29:45 Let the kids speak

"I began to imagine how I would have liked those conversations to go when I was a child, and I began to imagine a child who didn't understand the question but in not understanding it was able to reclaim it. So, the premise for Cilla comes from someone asking what are you? And her saying, "Oh my gosh, I don't know. No one's ever asked me this question before, but if I have to pick now I guess I'll be a future literary genius."?" - Susan Tan

## Quotes and Questions

### \* Impossible!

"Cilla reminds me in some ways of Ramona Quimby in that **she's impossible not to love even when she's being a little bit impossible.** I just love her."

### \* Reading magic.

"When I finally did learn how to read it really was this kind of magic. You know, this magic that I had worked so long for. And you know **it literally felt like the biggest treat to be able to sit down and enter a book world by myself.**"

### \* The books she wants as a child.

"It was in my academic studies as I confronted this gap that I suddenly felt like **where are the books that I wanted as a kid?** And my sisters are getting older and my cousins were having children and I was thinking where are the books that I want them and their kids to read? And that really is what inspired me to start writing. So weirdly, going to Academia led me right back to writing."

### \* Advice for writers ...

"You can write anywhere. Seriously. And **you should write wherever works for you.** There's no one way to do it."

### \* Write to think or ...

"I think this is something for aspiring writers to think about, I also teach English and I say this to my students all the time that I think **there are two kinds of people, people who think to write and people who write to think!**"

## Show Notes

### **Books from today's episode:**

- [The Ramona series](#)
- [Cilla Lee-Jenkins: Future Author Extraordinaire](#)
- [Cilla Lee-Jenkins: This Book is a Classic](#)
- [Thief of Hearts](#)

### **Other links from today's show:**

- [CCBC 2017 Multicultural Statistics](#)
- [The Diversity Gap in Children's Book Publishing, 2018 \(Lee and Low\)](#)
- Get the FREE booklist and more - go to [readaloudrevival.com](http://readaloudrevival.com) or text BOOKS to 345345

To find more resources to help you build your family culture around books, visit [ReadAloudRevival.com](http://ReadAloudRevival.com).