

Christy Hale B.A. '77, M.A.T. '80

The Art of Creating Children's Books

CHRIS RILEY



When Christy Hale's daughter was a baby, she remembers watching her make brightly colored pyramids out of stacking rings. "Turned upside down, the stack of rings resembled Frank Lloyd Wright's design for the Guggenheim Museum in New York City," thought Hale.

Over the years, Hale continued to notice similarities between structures created by children and buildings designed by world-renowned architects. "My mind is constantly making visual connections," she says. Her latest book—*Dreaming Up: A Celebration of Building*—pairs shape poems and lively illustrations of children at play with photos of iconic architecture.

Hale is an art educator and children's book author and illustrator. She has illustrated more than 20 children's books and has written two of her own (for details, see her website, www.christyhale.com). Her work has been praised by the *New York Times Book Review*, *Kirkus Reviews*, and many others.

By age 10, Hale knew she wanted to be a writer and illustrator. She and her best friend wrote stories and acted out scenes from their favorite works of fiction.

When it came time to follow her passion and study art in college, Hale chose Lewis & Clark, in part for its active overseas study program.

"During high school, I was a youth ambassador to Oaxaca, Mexico," she says. "I lived with an Oaxacan family, studied Spanish, and learned about Mexican culture." She continued to pursue her interest in other cultures by signing up for the college's overseas study program to England and Scotland during her sophomore year.

"Multiculturalism has become a huge theme in my life," she says. "All of my books honor diversity. Children from many cultures can identify with pictures of people who look like them."

While studying at Lewis & Clark, she made a special connection with Stuart Buettner, now professor emeritus of art history. "We came to Lewis & Clark the same year," she says. "He gave me a job compiling and organizing his extensive slide library."

Over the years, Hale has stayed in touch with Buettner. In fact, she sought his counsel when planning her recent book.

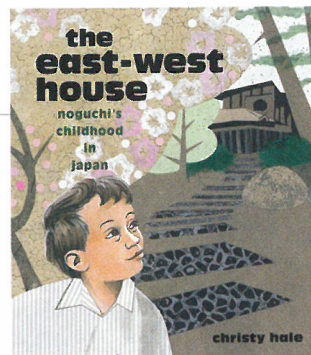
"Stewart was my student advisor and easily the most important professor to me during my time at Lewis & Clark," she says.

As an undergrad, Hale also took education classes to earn a teaching certificate. After college, she taught middle school art in West Linn, Oregon, and simultaneously completed her master's in teaching at the Graduate School of Education and Counseling.

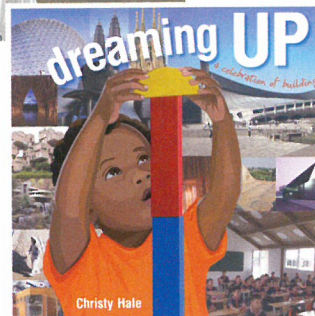
"My job as a teacher was to nurture other people's artistic abilities," she says. "It was rewarding, but I grew hungry to nurture my own talent."

After attending design school, Hale worked for several children's book publishers in New York as a designer and art director. She taught at the Center for Book Arts and was an adjunct professor in communication design at Pratt Institute while beginning her freelance career.

Hale perfected many complementary skills at Lewis & Clark as well as at art and



Recent books written and illustrated by Christy Hale



design schools—calligraphy, bookbinding, letterpress printing, and typography. She brought these crafts together with her design and illustration expertise when she created a chapbook for poet William Stafford. "His daughter Barbara was my roommate at Lewis & Clark," she says.

In 2001, Hale moved to Palo Alto, California, with her husband and daughter. She has written many articles for *Instructor* magazine and art curriculum guides for Scholastic. Hale continues to write and illustrate books, design, and provide art direction for publishers. She offers art workshops and presentations at museums, schools, and libraries, and leads programs for staff development.

"I'm never at a loss for new projects," says Hale. "I have scads of ideas on the back burner."

Despite the myriad of electronic devices available today, Hale believes that printed children's books will endure. "I love the interplay of verbal and visual narrative in picture books," she says. "There's nothing more satisfying than curling up with a book on your lap, enjoying the tactile element of surprise as you turn a page."

—by Pattie Pace