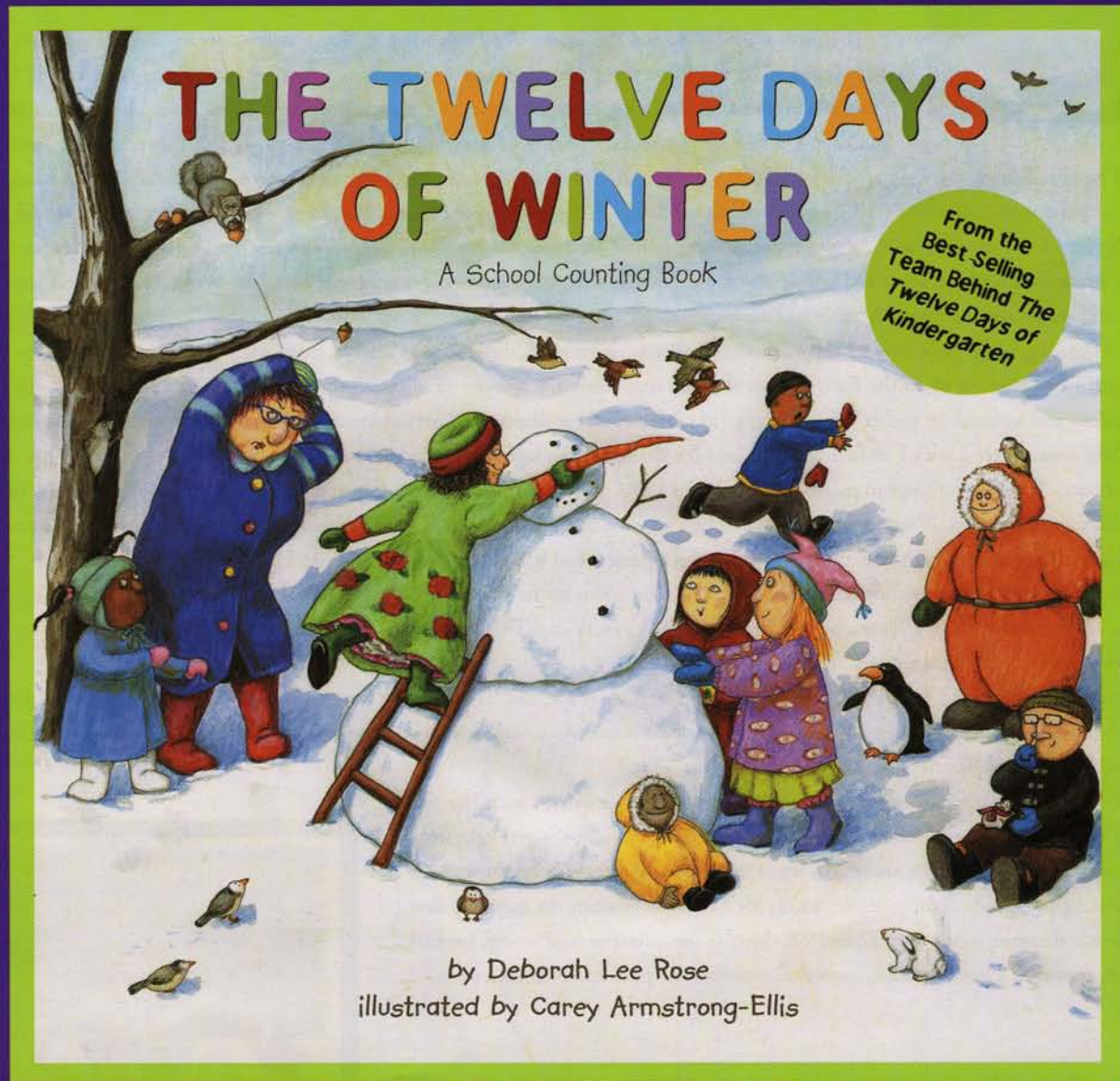


# The California Reader

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# about the cover

BY HELEN FOSTER JAMES



*The Twelve Days of Winter:  
A School Counting Book*  
by Deborah Lee Rose

It was a sunny August day when *The Twelve Days of Winter* arrived on my desk. I had just started wondering what would be the perfect book to feature on the cover of the winter issue of *The California Reader*, and there it was. I did a quick search on my computer to learn more about the author and illustrator. I had never had the pleasure of meeting Deborah Lee Rose, and I was eager to learn a little about her. The first line of the first article I found about her stated that she “practically grew up in the public library.” The second article mentioned her school librarian who read *Charlotte’s Web* aloud to her. I knew she would have a literacy story to share and that I would want to share it with you. Here’s what she told me about her newest book: “*The Twelve Days of Winter* jumped into my head on a sunny, summer vacation day near the beach—as far from snow and winter as I could possibly imagine. That’s how inspiration works sometimes. Just when I least expect them, ideas and words come so fast I have to race for paper to get them down.

I’d been thinking for a while how to chronicle the further adventures of the class and teacher from *The Twelve Days of Kindergarten*. I knew snow days well from growing up in the East, but my children only knew the wonder of snowfall from rare trips to the mountains. To create a book for readers and listeners in winter snow country (like Maine, where illustrator Carey-Armstrong Ellis lives) or winter rain country (like Northern California, where I live), I crafted verses to lead the characters through a “blizzard” of activities, many snow-themed but not all. Each step in the writing, I kept two things in mind: how teachers I knew made meeting standards fun, and how Carey might add her own humor to each verse through illustration. “Nine worms for watching” let us include a terrarium habitat (a favorite science station in many classrooms). Then Carey gave the worms a palm tree, tanning lamp and sunglasses, and had them spell out hello and SOS with their bodies!

From weather words to hibernating teddy bears to sugar cube igloos to the refrain of “a bird feeder in a snowy tree,” *The Twelve Days of Winter* catalogues academic and creative gifts teachers offer their students every day. This book, and *The Twelve Days of Kindergarten*, are also my gifts to teachers who give so much of themselves.

In all my books, including *Into the A,B,Sea*, *One Nighttime Sea*, *Birthday Zoo*, and *Through All the Seasons of the Year* (forthcoming), I weave together themes of the love of language, the natural world, learning and home. As an adult, I have rediscovered those themes in my favorite children’s books, especially *Charlotte’s Web*.

I tell children and teachers I meet that Charlotte the spider is a writer much like me. She thinks a lot before she starts writing, she chooses her words carefully, she gets help from her friends, she writes and rewrites, she works when the rest of the world is asleep, and she shows her writing in the best light possible, which for Charlotte is when the morning dew makes her words shimmer in the web. To me, Charlotte is the quintessential writer, because her words are powerful. They can teach, entertain, convince, inspire, and even save a life.”

*Sincere appreciation is extended to Abrams Books for Young Readers for their permission to use the cover images of Deborah Lee Rose’s books in this issue of California Reader.*

