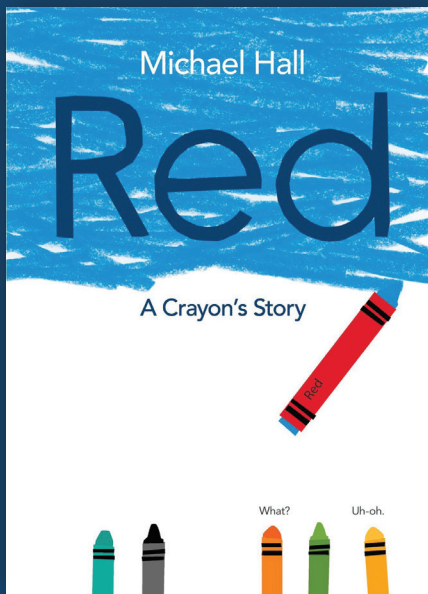




## CHILDREN'S LITERATURE WINNER

Category sponsored by  
Books For Africa



## Red: A Crayon's Story by Michael Hall

GREENWILLOW BOOKS/HARPERCOLLINS PUBLISHERS



The Friends, as the Library of Congress-designated Minnesota center for the book, organizes the year-round, statewide activities of the Minnesota book awards.

## ABOUT THE BOOK

Red has a bright red label but he is, in fact, blue. His teacher tries to help him be red by drawing strawberries, his mother tries to help him be red by sending him out on a playdate with a yellow classmate (“go draw a nice orange!”), and the scissors try to help him be red by snipping his label so that he has room to breathe. But Red is miserable. He just can’t be red, no matter how hard he tries. Finally, a brand-new friend offers a brand-new perspective, and Red discovers what readers have known all along. He’s blue!

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**Michael Hall** is an award-winning author and illustrator whose work has been widely recognized for its simple and engaging approach. He studied biochemistry and psychology at the University of Michigan and worked in biomedical research for several years before becoming a designer. He is the creator of the *New York Times*-bestselling picture book *My Heart Is Like a Zoo* (winner of a Minnesota Book Award in 2011) and the acclaimed *Perfect Square, Cat Tale, It's an Orange Aardvark!*, and *Frankencrayon*. He is also the creative director of the Hall Kelley design firm in Minneapolis. Visit [www.michaelhallstudio.com](http://www.michaelhallstudio.com).

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why does everyone expect Red to draw red things? Does it surprise you that no one noticed he was actually blue?
2. Red tries hard to draw the strawberries, but practice just doesn't seem to help. Can everything be practiced? What are some things we can and can't practice?
3. Look at the page that says: “Everyone seemed to have something to say.” Do you agree with the other crayons' comments? How might Red feel if he heard that he was “lazy” or wasn't “applying” himself?
4. One crayon replies: “Give him time. He'll catch on.” Even though the crayon probably meant well, was this a helpful thing to say? Why or why not?
5. Until he meets Berry, Red cannot be himself because everyone believes he is different than he actually is. What does Berry do to help Red? Why is this so important?
6. Do you have a special friend you feel comfortable just being yourself around? What qualities make that friend so important to you?
7. What does Red's teacher mean when she says Red is really “reaching for the sky”? Can you think of some real-life situations where this expression could be used?
8. Why do you think Red's teacher Scarlet is shorter than Red? Why are his grandparents even shorter than Scarlet?
9. Notice that Red is still wearing the masking tape on the final page of the story. Why do you think this is? What does the tape look like?
10. If you were asked to draw a self-portrait, but were only allowed to use one color, what color would it be? Why do you think that color represents you best?

# 28TH ANNUAL MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

The Minnesota Book Awards is a statewide, year-round outreach program of The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library in partnership with the Saint Paul Public Library and the City of Saint Paul.

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The 28th Annual Minnesota Book Awards was supported by the following partners and sponsors:

Brainfuse; Books For Africa; The Creative Writing Programs at Hamline University; Education Minnesota; Macalester College; Saint Mary's University of Minnesota; The Waterbury Group at Morgan Stanley; Kevin and Greta Warren; and Wellington Management.

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## A CONVERSATION WITH MICHAEL HALL

### What inspired you to write *Red: A Crayon's Story*?

Forty years ago, a woman named Mickey Myers produced a series of prints based on oversized images of crayons. I was smitten with them. Crayons make an appealing subject. They are joyful and unpretentious, and they can work as a metaphor for many things. I used them several times in my work as a graphic designer. When I began making picture books, I knew that at least one of them would be about crayons. I've recently published a second crayon book: *Frankencrayon*.

### What do you hope your readers will take away from it?

I hope *Red* will be among the many resources that help young children learn about colors. I hope readers of all ages enjoy the antics of Red's well-meaning friends and family, who simply cannot see beyond his official label. I hope the book will provoke classroom discussions about issues like judging people based on outside appearances, how all of us have both strengths and weaknesses, and the importance of being true to oneself. And I hope *Red* will inspire reflection about the subtle ways children become mislabeled, about judging children based on their successes rather than their failures, and about the unmitigated joy of finding one's place in the world.

### Did you encounter any interesting challenges in writing and illustrating this story?

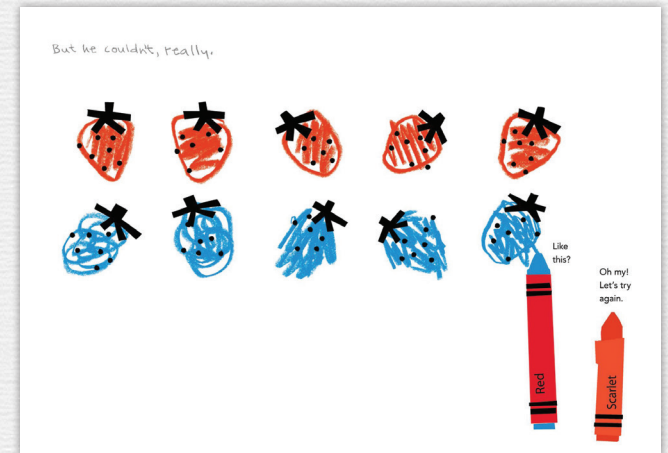
There were a lot of questions regarding what the crayon's world was like. Here are a few:

*Can the crayons hover in the air, or are they subject to gravity?*

I decided they can float around (possibly supported by an unseen hand) when they are drawing. Otherwise, they're stuck on the ground.

*Where do the crayons live? In a drawer? In a box?*

I tried putting the crayons in a number of different places, but the illustrations were too busy. So I decided they simply live in a dark place. The rest is up to the reader to decide.



*Do the crayons have faces?*

I tend to fall on the side of leaving faces out of places where they don't occur naturally. Facial expressions can add a lot to a picture book, but I want to leave some of the imagining up to the readers.

### How does your background in biochemistry influence your picture books?

I have always been interested in systems. This drew me to the sciences initially and influences my books currently. One of my books, *It's An Orange Aardvark!*, while not explicitly about science, can be read as a primer on scientific method. I worry that too few Americans understand the nature of scientific inquiry well enough to develop informed opinions on important issues.

### Could you share a little about upcoming books or plans for a future project?

Fall has always been a special time for me. So when my editor asked if I'd be interested in writing a book about autumn, I put a lot of thought into it. I discovered that autumn can be described fairly completely with adjectives that end in *ful*, like *frightful*, *thankful*, *colorful*, and even *wistful*. I collected 15 of them, changed each *ful* to *fall*, and made 15 rough illustrations. My editor liked it, and the book, *Wonderfall*, is coming out in September, 2016.