

Charles R. Smith Jr.

"Many hours were spent with characters in books traveling the world, solving mysteries, or living in a different time in history," says photographer and children's book author Charles R. Smith Jr. of his California childhood. "Reading books filled with stories and poems inspired me to write my own. The more I read, the more I wrote. And if I wasn't reading a book, I was playing a sport: I played everything, particularly basketball, and spent many afternoons on the court, perfecting my jump shot."

In high school, Charles found a new love: photography. "Right up until that point I wanted to be an astronaut and walk on the moon, but after taking yearbook pictures nonstop for a year, I knew I wanted to learn how to be a professional photographer." Even after graduating from Brooks Institute of Photography and moving to New York to pursue his dream however, Charles did not forget about his childhood pastimes. "I continued with my writing, and, with a heavy influence of rap music, began writing more poetry instead of stories."

Today, Charles R. Smith Jr. combines his experiences in these three areas--writing, photography, and sports --in his work with children's books. This fusion is evident in his very first book, RIMSHOTS, a collection of stories, poems and "other stuff" mixed with gritty black and white photos and has only grown from there. Many of his books such as HOOP KINGS, HOOP QUEENS, TALL TALES and SHORT TAKES focus on basketball but his diverse interests have kept fans on their toes with other fun subjects. Baseball gets it's due in DIAMOND LIFE, while the definition of what it means to be American is celebrated in bright, colorful images and words in I AM AMERICA. A father of three himself, Charles brings his love of basketball and baseball right down to the toddler set in LET'S PLAY BASKETBALL and LET'S PLAY BASEBALL. His recent work celebrates those who have inspired him, such as Muhammad Ali in TWELVE ROUNDS TO GLORY and subjects he's been interested in since he was a kid, such as THE MIGHTY 12, which celebrates Greek gods and goddesses. Of the distinctive niche Charles R. Smith Jr. fills with his books, he notes, "I want to show students, particularly boys, that there are many ways to pursue their interests, no matter what they may be."

Charles was born and raised in California. While living in Carson, California he attended elementary and junior high in Compton, California before moving to Duarte, California for high school. He currently lives in Poughkeepsie, New York with his wife Gillian and three kids, Sabine, Adrian and Sebastian.