

# LiteraryLandscape

KID-FRIENDLY GHOSTLY TALES

## Author Robert Oakes’ had the perfect test audience for his kid-friendly ‘The Ghostly Tales of The Berkshires’ — a classroom of third graders

By JENNIFER HUBERDEAU  
*The Berkshire Eagle*

“If I invited you to join me on a walk through a dark, haunted house, would you go?”

“What if we had flashlights to light our way? Would you say yes?”

Author and renowned Berkshires ghost tour guide Robert Oakes asks those questions at the beginning of “The Ghostly Tales of The Berkshires,” a book of Berkshires-based hauntings and supernatural events adapted from his 2020 book, “Ghosts of the Berkshires.” Part of the Spooky America series published by Arcadia Children’s Books, this book was written specifically for readers in third to seventh grade.

“I was really excited to do this one,” Oakes said during a recent phone interview with The Eagle. “What I love about this style of writing is that it is very much storytelling. With the previous book, I was trying to be more of a documentarian, focusing on research, facts and reporting the experiences people had.”

This time around, Oakes was able to be more creative in writing the tales of haunted hallways, phantom trains and ghostly garrisons on patrol, adapting the majority of his supernatural tales for younger audiences.

“I gave myself more of a storyteller role,” he said. “I imagined myself in front of a group of children, sitting down, telling them a story.”

He wouldn’t have to imagine that scenario for too long. As luck would have it, Maria Carpenter, a third-grade teacher at Rectory School in Pomfret, Conn., reached out to him to ask him to tell her class a ghost story.

“One of her students was really into ghosts,” he said. “It was such a cool thing to be able to share a little bit about what I do, about writing books and leading ghost tours with them.”

In preparation for his visit, Oakes took one of the stories from “Ghosts of the Berkshires” and rewrote it for the children to listen to.

“It pretty much happened at the same time that I had been asked to do the young readers version of ‘Ghosts of the Berkshires,’” he said. “As I was working on the book, I would go back to the third-grade classroom and read to them. They became involved in the process, giving me feedback on what they liked and didn’t like; which part was favorite.”

“I put a little dedication at the beginning of the book to them. The way it came together felt magical. I loved having the chance to read these stories to these children,” he said.

Oakes and his wife, Katherine, now both work and live at the junior boarding school. He works in the school’s communications department, while Katherine, who illustrated the book, teaches art.

“I love working with kids,” Oakes said. “I was a teacher for a while at Berkshire Country Day School for some time and, independently, working with homeschoolers. This experience was so special to me because it brought three things I love to do — writing, working with kids and ghosts — together.”

And his new position at Rectory School has allowed him to keep in touch with his test audience.

“I recently got to go to fourth grade and present them with copies of the book,” Oakes said. “They were so excited.”

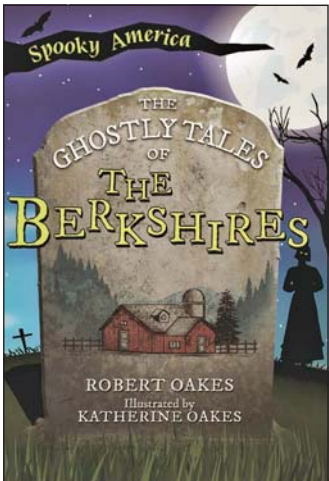
WRITING FOR  
A YOUNG READER

In writing for a younger audience, Oakes carefully crafted an introduction that



PHOTO PROVIDED BY ROBERT OAKES

Author Robert Oakes has penned a new book of ghostly tales.



Read It

“The Ghostly Tales of The Berkshires” by Robert Oakes

Published by Arcadia Children’s Books

\$12.99

112 pages

reassured readers that if they were scared they could always turn on a light: “Ghosts may be hiding in the shadows, but that beam of light will always scare them off.”

The light he’s referring to isn’t just the “flashlight” that he’s offered up at the beginning of the introductory invitation.

“I wanted to give the young reader the feeling of safety, the notion that you have a light in you that will keep you safe,” he said.

The age of the reader also played into which stories he adapted and those that didn’t make it.

“I really didn’t do anything on cemeteries, except for one. And I didn’t include the story of the Colonial Theatre,” Oakes said. “Part of it was length. When I thought of the place and the stories, I thought, ‘Could I hear it become a tale in the style of this book?’ Certain ones emerged, like the Hoosac Tunnel. You can’t do a book about ghosts in the Berkshires and not do one about the Hoosac Tunnel.” But a story about the

If You Go

Reading and Youth Ghost Tour at The Mount

**What:** Oakes will read selections from “The Ghostly Tales of The Berkshires.” A youth ghost tour, designed for ages 8 to 12, follows.

**When:** 5 - 6:30 p.m. Oct. 22

**Where:** The Mount, 2 Plunkett St., Lenox

**Information and tickets:** 413-551-5100, [edithwharton.org](http://edithwharton.org)

Hoosac Tunnel’s tragic history — the numerous accidents and deaths — can be too real for a young reader.

“It’s such an evocative place. But, I thought, how do I tell that one? The truth of it? There’s such real horror — men being buried alive and drowning. That kind of story can be so troubling if told a certain way, so I lightened it a little in how I told the story.”

In his tale, the focus is on a train going into the tunnel, its passengers include one non-believer and one with a lot of tales, which Oakes says is the “perfect way to tell the story” without getting into all the details.

STILL MAGICAL

Although Oakes has moved away from The Berkshires, he’s still finding it magical when he returns to lead ghost tours at Ventfort Hall Museum and Gilded Age Museum and The Mount.

“Now that I’ve moved away, when I come back for these events, I think, ‘Oh right, this is that feeling that only this place has,’” he said.

Jennifer Huberdeau is the features editor at The Berkshire Eagle. She can be reached at [jhuberdeau@berkshireeagle.com](mailto:jhuberdeau@berkshireeagle.com) or 413-496-6229. On Twitter: @BE\_DigitalJen

Nazanin Nour. Photo by Daniel Rader.

Babak Tafti. Photo by Knud Adams.

**BARRINGTON STAGE COMPANY**

“An **insightful and nuanced** production...a **funny and profound** consideration of the interconnections of **language, culture and identity.**” —*Albany Times Union*

**ENGLISH** BY SANAZ TOOSSI  
DIRECTED BY KNUD ADAMS  
BASED ON THE STUDIO THEATRE PRODUCTION

“**Insightful, delicately crafted**...Playwright Sanaz Toossi **skillfully navigates issues** that deal with **cultural identity, personal identity**... how we speak; how we are heard and understood” —*Berkshire Eagle*

**BARRINGTONSTAGECO.ORG • 413.236.8888**

Sanaz Toossi & Pooya Mohseni. Photos by Knud Adams.

“**Compelling us to question,** listen, wonder, resist and empathize with others trying to improve their lives with language. **You will leave talking.**” —*Berkshire On Stage*

“Complex, **topical and timely**” —*Berkshire Fine Arts*

**WINNER OF THE 2023 PULITZER PRIZE IN DRAMA**

**FINAL DAYS! MUST CLOSE OCT 15**