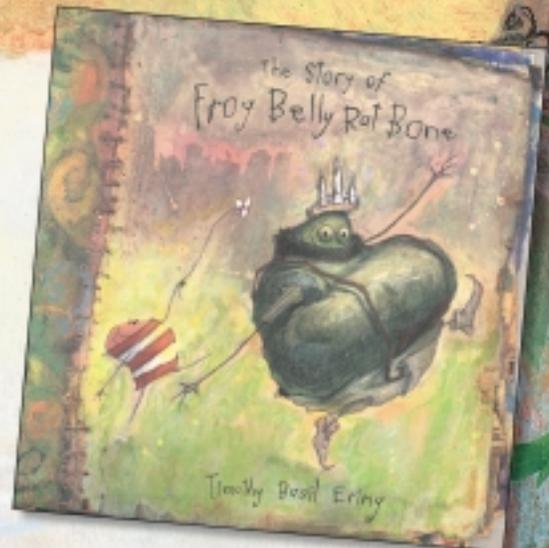


The Story of Frog Belly Rat Bone:

Timothy Basil Ering
Saves Us From Cementland



Take one look at the cover of *The Story of Frog Belly Rat Bone*, and it's clear that this is not your average picture book. Start with the intriguing hand-lettered title and the quirky, expressionistic artwork. Move on to the textured twine dangling from a bookmark hidden inside its pages. Check out the book's cover treatment, which makes it look—and feel—like it's been lovingly hand-stitched together and worked into a wonderfully textured surface.

Welcome to the picture-book debut of fine artist Timothy Basil Ering, and the whimsical, one-of-a-kind world of *Frog Belly Rat Bone*.

Set in a gray, endless place called Cementland, this is the story of a boy who finds strange, specklike treasures and the preternaturally wise creature he creates to watch over them while they grow. Taking its title from a little string of nonsense words Tim Ering invented and its heart and inspiration from an urban community garden, *The Story of Frog Belly Rat Bone* plays on a medley of themes ranging from magic to cooperation to patience, from the greening of cities to the blossoming of the human spirit. Exuding from its pages is the inimitable, painterly style of classically trained Tim Ering, who cites influences as far-ranging as Michelangelo, Dr. Seuss, and artwork created by children.

"Dr. Seuss creates a fun world to be inside—one that's utterly strange and fantastical and wild and wonderful, and kids are enticed by this," notes the author-illustrator, who was a Dr. Seuss fan as a child. "Within that enticing environment are messages about the human condition, but the messages don't hit kids over the head, they sneak in amid the creative trappings." As for children's art, he says, "It

just blows me away—the scratchy lines, the composition, whether it's using one little corner of a giant piece of paper or completely covering something until it can't take another glitter or glue drop."

Add to all this Tim Ering's artistic obsession with textures and surfaces, which he thinks comes from growing up on Cape Cod, where weather-beaten shingles require constant scraping and repainting. "At the time I thought it was tedious work, but now if something looks like I've seen it too many times before, I feel compelled to scrape at it to make it look less contrived," he says of his technique. "So when I first made the dummy book for *Frog Belly Rat Bone*, naturally, I beat up some wood and sewed it all together. It gave it that nostalgic, cobbled-together look that's just plain interesting to me. I wanted it to look like it was made the same way the little boy in the story makes Frog Belly, with just raw hand-stitching and splashes of paint."

The result is a picture-book celebration of creativity that Tim Ering hopes will inspire young readers. "Visually, I hope that children will get the creative urge simply by looking at the art," he says. "And then there's the story, about a boy who constructs a new world to live in. He goes to the junkyard and fashions Frog Belly, a sort of monster-protector or guardian angel who guides him through a scary time. And in doing so, he transforms Cementland into a blooming place. That's the thing about creativity: It allows you to look at the most mundane and boring objects and see beauty in them. That's what I hope to get across."