



# Matt Damon's Event Description

## Reading:

It is no surprise that author Matt Damon loves to read aloud his book, *The Fall of General Custard*. Matt is a storyteller and classroom teacher who has been telling tales to children and families for nearly 20 years. His ability to transmit humor to a young audience, as well as delight listeners of all ages with the rhythm and rhyme of his well-crafted verse, makes hearing him read a not-to-be-missed treat. Any time Matt reads, you can be sure there will be playful puns, spot-on character accents and plenty of food for thought. Themes such as friendship, cooperation, kindness, and courage are woven tightly within the book, so that hearing the story is more than entertainment. It is a chance for children (of all ages) to be reminded of life-affirming core values.

Matt is always happy to answer questions from the audience. He also enjoys sharing the story of how he wrote the book and created the characters, as well as his own feelings about some of the important themes in *The Fall of General Custard*.

## Workshop:

In addition to offering a reading of *The Fall of General Custard*, Matt is also available to teach and share with students in schools. Matt has lots of experience using *The Fall of General Custard* as a launching point for learning and can offer workshops varying in length from one hour to one week.

## Available "Artist in Residence" Workshops:

### Create Your Own Food Character Who Lives in the "Fridge"

- Students create a new food character, guided by lessons on character traits, description and detail, as well as simple drawing methods.

### Messages in the Mayhem

- Students identify themes in the book as well as finding and recording evidence for the themes. Includes cooperative group/partner work and optional writing extensions.

### Why Did Custard Start This Food Fight Anyway?

- Students compare character traits and explore how certain traits brought about characters' actions and shaped the storyline.

### Delicious Mouthfuls of Meaning

- Students develop vocabulary acquisition skills using "close reading" techniques to explore the meanings of words in context within a book they enjoy. Includes partner work.

### Let's Collaborate

- Matt can collaborate with teachers to create a tailor-made workshop relevant to desired learning goals in any classroom or school.

**Workshop combinations or variations can be created.**

## About *The Fall of General Custard*

In *The Fall of General Custard* a faithful olive (Romeo) and a brave cherry (Rosaline) must work together to help the foods in the “Fridge” choose peace instead of a nasty food fight started by greedy General Custard. This tasty tale pits all that is wholesome and good against foods gone bad! Parents and kids love food and the family fridge is central to every home. This wild and brilliant story of war and peace inside a refrigerator will appeal to everyone who has ever opened their fridge and wondered, “What really goes on in here when the door is closed?”

### Q&A with Matt Damon

**Q. How did you get the idea to write *The Fall of General Custard*?**

**A.** When I was a kid, I heard about the arrogant Lieutenant Colonel Custer and his “last stand”. I confused his name with the word “custard”. My mom corrected my error and we both had a good laugh, thinking about a dessert fighting in a battle. Many years later, sitting at my writing desk, this memory came to me and I began to play with it like a ball of clay, shaping and mixing the memory with story ideas and my own quirky sense of humor. Before you could say the word “refrigerator”, I found myself writing a rhyming children’s story about an arrogant custard who starts a food fight. As the story evolved, it became not just a humorous tale, but also a vehicle for sharing with children the power of kindness and cooperation when faced with conflict.

**Q. What is the story behind getting *The Fall of General Custard* published?**

**A.** The original manuscript was written more than 20 years ago. At that time I made some attempts at having the story published and got very close on a couple of occasions. Then life happened. Copies of the manuscript (and a floppy disc, of course) were slipped into the back of a drawer. The next two decades of my life were spent teaching, storytelling and creating a home in Oregon with my amazing wife and equally amazing daughters. Occasionally I pulled out the Custard manuscript to share it with students I was teaching. Serendipitously, Steve Scholl, the publisher at White Cloud Press, and a parent of one of my students, heard the story during a visit to the classroom. Steve fell in love with the story and encouraged me to submit it to him. His belief in the manuscript brought the dream of publication back to life. Now I’m very excited that with Steve’s help and the incredible artwork Gideon Kendall created, I can finally share the world of the Fridge and its delicious denizens with young readers.

**Q. Why foods and rhyming?**

**A.** Food and human emotions are tightly connected. Food is deeply woven into our lives from a very early age and connects us to family and friends, as well as our cultural roots through celebrations involving food. Likes and dislikes, scarcity and abundance are all connections we make with food. When you talk about food with kids, you get their attention quickly! Not to mention that in the English language, frankly (pun intended), lots of food and cooking terms relate to human activity and emotion. In my book a food character can get “steamed” or be “tender” and the double meaning is not only funny, but helps bring human emotion into this anthropomorphic world.

Rhyming awakens our brains and sticks just a little more deeper into our consciousness and memory than everyday language. A good rhyme is as satisfying as hitting a shot in basketball, or jumping into a pool on a hot day. This is why children love Shel Silverstein and Dr. Seuss. This is also a main reason why music

## Q & A Continued

lyrics in rap, rock and other music genres can have such an impact emotionally and socially. Our brains and our children's brains are tickled and awakened by rhyme. This is why I choose it as a medium for this story.

### **Q. How was Gideon Kendall chosen to illustrate *The Fall of General Custard* and what do his illustrations bring to the story?**

**A.** When the publisher, Steve Scholl, and I were looking for possible illustrators, we scoured the Internet. When we found Gideon's whimsical and detailed illustrations, they caught our attention in a big way. We saw in his work an ability to capture the action-packed scenes in the story, as well as accentuate the humor and playfulness of the text. Gideon immediately went to the top of our list of possible artists. When he agreed to take on the project, we were thrilled. As it turned out, his work with us exceeded all expectation. Certainly his artwork fit perfectly with the story, as we expected it would, but Gideon also brought so much to the project as his fantastical portrayal of the Fridge and its food characters came to life. His artistic vision, in fact, changed how I viewed the story myself. Gideon's strong imagination and professionalism brought about numerous creative discussions that led to new characters, tweaks in the text, and even a bit of a change to the ending!

### **Q. The text of your book is longer than most children's picture book texts written today. Is that a strength or a weakness?**

**A.** Like most things related to the creative process, it's all in how you see it. Steve Scholl and I began to look for books that were comparable to *The Fall of General Custard*, we saw there was nothing quite like it published in recent years. My longer rhyming text with rich vocabulary and a strong social message was certainly bucking the current trends in children's publishing. As far as the text length goes, however, I have always seen it as a strength and necessary for conveying the layered social messages along with bringing heaping helpings of action and humor to young readers. Any concern I may have initially had about text length melted away when I began to share the story with children. Even before the engaging illustrations were added, I always had riveted listeners who loved the story and wanted to know more about the Fridge and its characters.

For Steve and I, the ultimate criteria for the book has always been that it be a great story for kids. Regardless of current beliefs about short attention spans, children are wired biologically to want to hear stories. I believe a great story that is entertaining and carries life-affirming values, regardless of length, can rise above the modern din and be a place that children want to visit again and again.

## **About Matt Damon**



Matt Damon is a professional storyteller and an elementary classroom teacher who lives in Ashland, Oregon. Matt's personal journey as an educator and lover of stories has made him a believer in the power of story to impact children's lives, bring families closer, and to influence the culture of a classroom. This power has inspired Matt to write his own stories to share with children.

## **Contact Information**

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## Praise for *The Fall of General Custard*

“Our new family read-aloud favorite, *The Fall of General Custard* is a rhyming and illustrated tale of epic proportions! The clever narrative with its conflict resolution theme is perfectly designed to be shared, while the illustrations will bring readers back to the page again and again to discover something new in the story. Adventuresome reading for the whole family!” –**Jane Almquist, Owner TreeHouse Books**

“A clever and fresh take on what it means to be a hero or heroine in a “fridge gone bad!” *The Fall of General Custard* is brilliantly written with great vocabulary and rhyming text. Children will cheer for the forces of good and laugh aloud at the rollicking illustrations. It is delectable children’s literature with marvelous messages baked right in!” –**Connie Halpern, owner of Mrs. Figs’ Bookworm**

“Damon’s epic rhyming tale about good food gone bad, coupled with Kendall’s hilarious illustrations of the ultimate food fight, playfully bring to the table the importance of standing up for what is right and collaboration when faced with conflict. A sweet read!” –**Trudy Ludwig, award-winning author of *The Invisible Boy* and *Gifts from the Enemy***

“As a kindergarten teacher I am always on the hunt for engaging read alouds that teach students that kindness and cooperation are of paramount importance. *The Fall of General Custard* held my young audience captive with its rich vocabulary, humorous storyline and winsome illustrations, all the while instilling teamwork and unity.” –**Tia McLean, kindergarten teacher**

“*The Fall of General Custard* is filled with delicious, exuberant verse that keeps students engaged in that eyes-wide-open kind of way, as they peer over their classmates’ heads to sneak a peek at the lively illustrations. This vibrant story tells many important tales, including positive messages of acceptance, courage, and the importance of standing up for our friends, especially in times of trouble. Everyone in my classroom has a smile on their face after this fun read aloud!” –**Trish Dorr, fourth grade teacher**

“This rollicking tale of friendship, courage, and kindness is sure to delight readers of all ages! Beautifully rendered illustrations and richly riveting rhymes draw the reader inside again and again. Whether read aloud or devoured under the covers, the sweet and salty characters of *The Fall of General Custard* are sure to inspire engaging discussions and a desire to be a good friend and citizen. A true masterpiece, and destined to become a classic!” –**Rebecca Mizera, Reading Specialist**

### White Cloud Press:

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