

A CHILD LEADS THEM TO WRITE

BY LISA CHASE

For parents of third- through seventh-graders, not every book they read with their kids promises to be shared thrills and laughs. Many are so laden with history or scientific details, it's easy to understand why some youngsters aren't the least bit interested.

However, authors Ridley Pearson and Dave Barry, both New York natives, have been working diligently to make the anticipation of turning the page a great experience for kids. Of course, they did have a spectacular idea, thanks to Pearson's then 6-year-old daughter, Paige, who one night inquisitively asked, "Daddy, how did Peter Pan meet Captain Hook?" He had no clue, but responded, "I'll have that answer for you next year, because I'm going to write you that story." And he did.

Pearson and Barry, the Pulitzer Prize-winning humorist, had been playing together in a band when they decided to collaborate on a trilogy of prequels about Peter and how he came to fly, encroach upon pirates and earn the last name Pan. The third and final installment, "Peter and the Secret of Rundoon" (\$13, www.amazon.com), hit stores this week, and the two will be signing books at the 92nd Street Y at 8:15 p.m. on Monday, and at the Borders store in White Plains from 7-9 p.m. on Tuesday.

"We were both pretty sure this would only be a minor project, but it was incredibly well-received by kids," Barry says. "That's the great thing about kids ... they don't care about critics or who you are; if they like your story, they want you to write more."

So what's the secret to writing successfully for young readers? "Kids don't want you to spend a lot of time developing characters or setting the stage," Barry says. "When we plot the book, we always ask, 'What's going to happen?'"

Jammed with adventures and countless nuggets of humor, each installment of the trilogy is a rather large book. So how does a parent convince a kid to start it? "One of the many great debts we owe to 'Harry Potter' is that we assumed kids had no attention span," Barry notes. "But J.K. Rowling proved us wrong! Not only do kids read our books, they're sorry when they end — even the parents, who are half our audience!"

