

Prairie Wind

Bulletin of the Illinois Chapter of SCBWI

FALL 2021



illustrator in the spotlight:
Laura Nyman Montenegro

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*Illustration by
Laura Nyman Montenegro*

In This Issue

by Amy Alznauer



When I first saw Laura Montenegro's art for our cover a Kathi Appelt line came to me, "Ahh, the trees." And where there are trees, there's a whole world to explore. Find within this issue a world of advice, reflection, and inspiration. Note, too, a small twist on the usual setup. *The Prairie Wind* team decided to lighten your column-writing load this time by taking on three of the columns ourselves. Here's a small peek inside our fall edition:

Debbie Topolski starts us off with a [greeting](#) that will both break your heart and inspire you.

In [Illustrator in the Spotlight](#), Laura Montenegro offers gorgeous art and poetic reflection on the artistic process. Lisa Sukenic's [Tale from the Front](#) is full of not only perfect little poems from her debut novel *Miles from Motown* but details on the passionate journey behind the book, which stretched from childhood to many local SCBWI-IL classes and other inspirations. In [Creative Sparks](#) we showcase a compelling excerpt from Barabara Gregorich's new novel *The F Words* and a series of sketches behind one of the final illustrations for Jackie Alcántara's *Your Mama* (by NoNieqa Ramos).

Our three features are beautifully hinted at by their titles. [On Doing Everything Opposite](#) by Kira Bigwood (on how she transformed her writing journey, and you might too!), [Creation Stories, or Invoking the Muse](#) by *Prairie Wind* editor Pamela Dell (on her delightful and long-running fiction series "Doodle and Dandelion" for *Spider* magazine), and [In Pandemics, Bowling, and Life...It's All About Your Approach](#) by Roxanne Owens (on drawing deep wisdom from her first-hand research into bowling leagues).

In [Mentor Texts](#), Jeanette Lee gives a succinct and idea-generating rundown of picture book biographies with unusual forms. And in [Writer's Bookshelf](#) I pick up on Laura Montenegro's idea of the gestational image and write about gestational tidbits from three of my all-time favorite books on writing.

In [Shop Around the Corner](#), Malayna Evans does a lovely interview with *The Book Table* owner, who says, "The most important thing we've always tried to do is offer diversity in our kidlit section." In [Voices of Change](#), through her own story, Ronni Davis powerfully explores what it means to weigh the demands of the publishing industry against one's own sense of self. "I wish no writer would ever have to wonder if they're enough," she writes, "and yet, I see that

questioning and second-guessing going on throughout all marginalized communities."

Prairie Wind designer Brooke O'Neill enthusiastically shares her [Illustrator Tips](#) for reaping the benefits of online illustration resources (especially ones for Procreate). In [Writer's Tips](#) Urania Smith, who has been secretly crashing illustrator sessions at conferences for years, explores the question of how to balance picture book text and art and offers a wonderful set of exercises to help achieve this balance.

And last but not least, we asked network representative Debra Daugherty to highlight the work of the [Springfield Scribes](#).

Finally, I want to take a moment to give a huge shout-out to our long-time columnist Carol Coven Grannick for putting so much time (two decades worth!) into sharing her [Inside Story](#) with us all these years. I know I have benefited greatly from reading her wise, carefully crafted words. Carol has decided to resign from the *Prairie Wind*, yearning to spend all her writing time, as she puts it, "with the poetry and stories I love." But I've told her that if she occasionally feels that pull to get down a particularly choice bit of wisdom, gleaned from all that poetry and story writing, she should send it the *Prairie Wind's* way. So, Carol, though we may no longer follow it in our pages, may your own inside story continue to bring you many poems and stories and joy.

A big thank you to Malcolm Newsome who has [rounded up the news](#) and to Jenny Wagh for putting together our fall [Season's Crop](#). And as always, my hat's off to our wonderful *Prairie Wind* team:

Director [Amy Alznauer](#)

who joyfully plans and acquires content for each issue

Editor [Pamela Dell](#)

who expertly tweaks and polishes all of our content

Designer [Brooke O'Neill](#)

who creatively designs and lays out every page

Advisor [Jenny Wagh](#)

*who remains our faithful and supportive
Regional Advisor*

Greetings!

OKAY FOR NOW by Deborah Topolski



Me and the D.

When I turned in my last greeting, our PW creative director, Amy Alznauer, reminded me that I would not have to navigate the murky waters of inspiration during the pandemic for a greeting again. *And I believed her.* Who can blame me? First of all—this is Amy—who speaks with such authority and positivity and has confidence in all her contributors. I still remember her cheerful reassurance. And second—I kept thinking, yeah, we'll have a vaccine and this thing will be *totally* over. While things were looking good initially, restrictions are back and with them, heightened concerns and masks for comfort and safety as we head into the fall.

The coming summer held a lot of promise as I returned home from errands sans mask on the Friday of Memorial Day weekend to find my dog Decker weak and unstable on his feet. Once I got him to lie down, he couldn't get up under his own volition. Brad and I took him to the vet. With practices still prohibiting human companions in the building, my spouse and I stared at the car's dashboard in shocked disbelief as the vet called to ask permission to

remove Decker's spleen. He was bleeding internally from an attached tumor. We saved his life but the vet returned a diagnosis of hemangiosarcoma, a rare, canine cancer in which the first sign is typically the rupture of a tumor on a blood organ.

Well, it wasn't the summer we had hoped for, but since we had been lucky—and bought ourselves some time—we rechristened it *The Summer of D*. Basically, this means that Decker gets what he wants—whenever he wants it! Extra water biscuits (aka ice cubes in our house), Kraft Singles, and unlimited playtime became part of our routine. This was tested two nights later when Decker woke me at 3AM to go outside to have a toss. And play toss we did, despite the hour and the neighbors and the tears. May we all be so lucky in our last days.



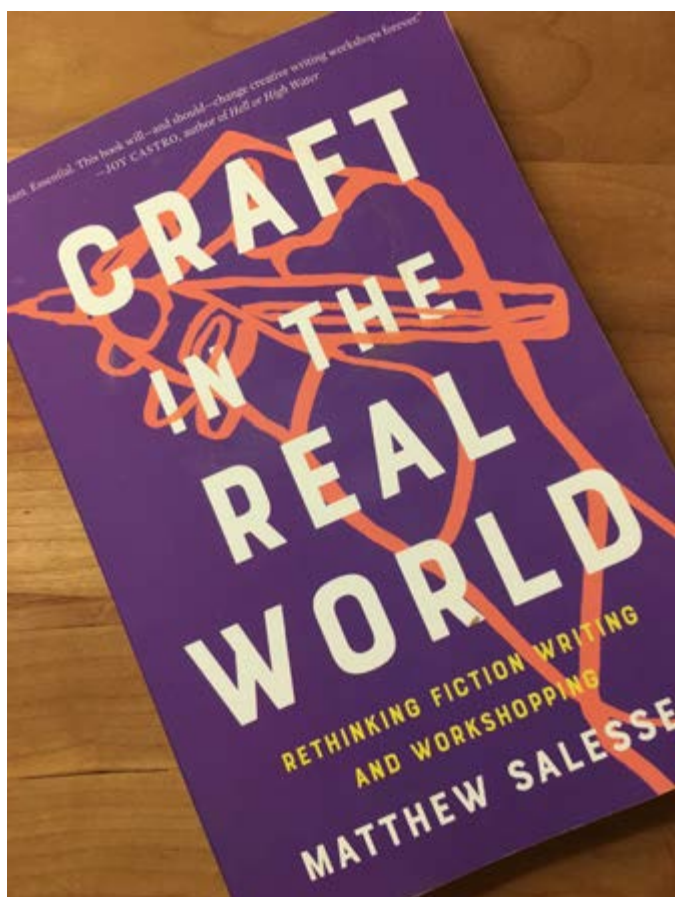
D and new companion, Girder—but her friends call her Gurdy.)

In the morning, I got to thinking about time and what I was waiting for; for years I've been working on a novel for which I actively sought feedback. I even received a request for a full, but I never committed to the kind of revision it would need. I was interested in revising at the Highlights Foundation's Whole Novel Workshop and had even applied for the opportunity twice before—with no luck. But what about now? Was I ready for another disappointment? A friend and colleague had just recently nudged me to apply again. Plus, I already had ample proof that time is fleeting and precious—what more did I want?

Greetings

So I spent Memorial Day writing my application and giving a quick polish to the sample pages before taking another chance and hitting send.

A month later, we learned of the resignation of SCBWI Equity and Inclusion Officer April Powers and heard calls for new leadership at the highest levels of our organization. Longtime members signed a petition demanding change and supporting volunteers. Many volunteers resigned with the hope that new, often overlooked, voices will take their place. As the organization makes strides to respond and rise to the challenge, your Illinois community is still here to support you, your creative goals, and your hopes for a more welcoming community. In addition to illustration and industry professional events, our SCBWI-Illinois Interactive fall programming will include a craft event with PAL professionals, featuring Matthew Salesses. His book, *Craft in the Real World: Rethinking Writing & Workshopping* (Catapult 2021) challenges traditional methods, reframing critique to be more inclusive. As a region, we hope to keep providing great programming while listening to and growing along with our members' needs.



If you ever have a chance to hear novelist Gary D. Schmidt speak or to attend one of his workshops, do yourself a favor. I'm a big fan of the educator and author of *The Wednesday Wars* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt 2007) and *Orbiting Jupiter* (HMH 2015). Schmidt was a National Book Award finalist for my favorite, *Okay for Now* (Clarion 2011). The main character, Doug, learns to cope with an array of issues by learning to draw, inspired by John James Audubon's *Birds of America* and an engaged librarian. In the end, he's spending quality time with new crush Lil as she faces illness and an uncertain future. But they're okay for now.

As I write this, I'm on a plane and heading to Highlights. I'm filled with excitement, apprehension, relief, but mostly hope. Hope for a healthier world, hope for my SCBWI community, and hope for my work. So if you had a summer that was not quite what you wanted, remake your fall *a la Decker*. Don't take chances with your health, but risk everything for your creative life and to connect with loved ones and to make progress on your life's goals. Time is of the essence and we're *okay for now*. 🌟



Coda: Decker passed while I was at Highlights. After I found out, I walked into the Highlights WORD GARDEN and placed the stones for him in a final message. He inspired me to come to Highlights. I will be grateful for this and so many other gifts.

DEBORAH TOPOLSKI dedicates this article to Decker and everyone who inspired her and rooted for her as she made time for her creativity this summer—thanks!

Connect at Illinois-ra2@scbwi.org.

Illustrator in the Spotlight

WHEN IMAGES INVITE WORDS TO DANCE

by Laura Nyman Montenegro



Are you an illustrator or an author/illustrator?

I am an author/illustrator. Thank you for inviting me to share some stories about my life and work. I am so honored.

What is your preferred medium to work in?

I love cut-paper collage for its malleability, pen & ink for its strong graphic qualities, gouache for its flat, chalky, poster paint look, and tempera paint because it reminds me of childhood.



Tell us a little of your beginnings and journey as an illustrator.

My fascination and love of picture books began very early. My mother was an early childhood educator and librarian as well as a writer and artist. For her, poetry, paintings, and storytelling were as necessary as the bread and butter on our table and she introduced and invited us into the imaginative world of the picture book. We breathed it in like air.

By the time I was six, I was making my own stories, drawing them into the little folded paper blank books my mother showed me how to make. And as I went through school, I turned every assignment I was given into a picture book.

Later on, pursuing this beautiful art form as an adult, my first picture book was published. It was called *One Stuck Drawer*. It was a story about a girl and a dresser, inspired by stories my mother and grandmother had told me about Jane Addams' Hull House. I loved hearing them tell about Jane's ingenuity, how she dreamed up ways to provide solace to the old by inviting them to keep a beloved piece of furniture in their rooms for its precious reminders of home. It was an evocative little book, illustrated with moody watercolor and pen & ink and I was delighted and honored when Houghton Mifflin offered to publish it.

Since then, I have published five picture books. I have taught adult classes in picture book making at Chicago's School of the Art Institute for years, as well as at various other art schools and at my own Big Table Studio. This has been a constant source of joy. My students never cease to amaze me with their inventiveness and spirit as they create their own exquisitely imagined picture books. I have learned so much from them and am in awe of their beautiful book dummies and their deep explorations of the picture book art form.



Do you have favorite themes or characters you return to in your art?

Yes. There are many characters I return to again and again... Artists, poets, aunts, and women elders who support, uplift, encourage, teach, and console young people. And always, young characters who struggle.

Which illustrators were your favorites when you were little?

I loved Garth Williams, Leo Lionni, Alice and Martin Provensen, Maurice Sendak, Leonard Weisgard, Roger Duvoisin, Wanda Gag, Marie Hall Ets, Louise Fitzhugh, Leo Politi, Ludwig Bemelmans.



Illustrator in the Spotlight



Which illustrators are your favorites now?

My own two children Sonya Montenegro and Nina Montenegro, Kitty Crowther, Vera Williams, John Burningham, William Kurelek, Isol. Paloma Valdivia, Beatrice Alemagna, Roger Mello, Cozbi A. Cabrera, Ana Juan, Leo Lionni, Tove Jansson, Ben Shahn, Julie Flett, Yuyi Morales, Peter Sis, Suzy Lee, Benjamin Chaud, Ezra Jack Keats, Ann Blades, Christian Robinson, Yashima, Jillian Tamaki. I could go on and on, there are so many I admire and love.

What inspires you creatively, spiritually, or emotionally?

I love to watch a child's eyes scanning, lingering, and taking in certain things on a page in a picture book as they're being read to. I love artwork made by children. I love teaching the picture book art form to adults. I love to watch my students create and share their book dummies. I am inspired creatively, spiritually, and emotionally by all of these things.

What does your workspace look like?

Let's take a look at my studio. My big empty work wall is very important. This is where I hang my drawings on strings using clothespins. Basically, it is a giant storyboard! By hanging my pictures here, I can easily see how they relate to each other and I can rearrange their sequence until the story and the proportions of the story feel right.

For me, the drawings come first and the words follow. The first drawing I make I call the "gestational image." It is the

spark and springboard from which all my other images will take their cue. This image will go up on the wall and as the next images are made, they will be placed tentatively next to or near this one, eventually creating a rough sequence.

This process of creating images and seeing them all as a group generates terrific energy. And because, at this point, the images are not trying to illustrate words and do not have to adhere to a text, they are drawn from the deep terrain where imagery has its source, the subconscious, the river through which images flow. This is essential to a picture book. Ultimately we want the deepest images we carry inside of us, as the makers of the book, to connect with the deepest feelings inside the viewer, the child.

Please share an instance in which the seed of an idea or experience (though small at the start) took root and grew to become one of your books or illustrations.

I would like to explore the story seed that first inspired my book *A Bird About to Sing* and the ways I used imagery to bring the reader closer to Natalie's internal experience.

In *A Bird About to Sing*, Natalie, a young poet, loves to write poems but does not want to read them out loud. Her poetry teacher, Monica, takes her to a poetry reading and when it is Natalie's turn to read her poem, no words come out. Her heart sinking, Natalie grabs Monica's hand and tries to leave. On her way, Ethel stops her, and putting her big face close to Natalie's says, "Don't worry, hon, when the time is right, the bird begins to sing."



Illustrator in the Spotlight

First, let's look at three illustrations from the very beginning of the book and examine how each, both separately and in combination with the others, subtly introduces notions about the underlying theme of change.

As we open the cover of the book, we see, first, the half-title page. No words, simply an image of a garden. It is painted in the soft, subtle colors of early morning. It is cool, moist, and delicate. The birds are bathing and splashing and darting in and out amongst the trees.

Contrast this with the 2-page spread we see once we've turned the page. We see the title page showing the evening, warm and glowing, with a black tree full of birds silhouetted against a bright yellow landscape. This spread draws us deeper into the story as we experience a subtle awareness of the passage of time between this and the previous image, from morning to evening. Our inclination is to turn the page to see what comes next as our eye continues to move from left to right.

On the next page, we see Natalie, our main character.

Turn the page again, and there is Monica. She is looking straight at us. In one hand she is holding a pencil, in the other a piece of paper. She holds them up in a gesture of offering. Is she handing them to Natalie? Is she handing them to us?

In three page turns we have been introduced, however subtly, to the deeper theme of this book, the notion of change. We have seen morning change into evening, we have seen cool turn into warm, we have seen the sun come up and the sun go down.

We have seen that everything changes, that nothing is static, that just as day turns into night and morning becomes evening, everything changes and *everyone* changes. And just because you don't want to read your poem out loud right now doesn't mean you won't want to tomorrow.

And maybe, one day, someone will hand you a pencil and a piece of paper, just as Monica did in *A Bird About to*

Sing, and you will take it and write your own poem, your own picture book. I hope you do!

Thank you for these wonderful questions and for being such a beautiful community of artists and children's book makers who see the power and beauty and importance of picture books for children! ☀



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LAURA NYMAN MONTENEGRO is an author/illustrator of children's picture books. She teaches classes in the picture book art form at the School of the Art Institute in Chicago as well as at her own Big Table Studio. She is a visiting artist/teacher at art schools and universities and has served as a children's librarian and art teacher. She is currently writing and illustrating a picture book about her adventurous and courageous Grandma Olga.

Tales from the Front

MILES TO GO... by Lisa Sukenic

THE MAP

To read a road map, you need to be able to interpret a map key, a compass rose, and find coordinate points to know your destination. I did not know where my novel-writing journey would lead me, but wherever I was going I wanted to get all the way there. And as I made my way I kept finding signs to guide me, such as writing mentors, critiques, classes, peers, and workshops. All these helped me reach my destination point: the publication of my first middle grade novel, *Miles from Motown*. We are all familiar with the “you are here” designation on maps but I had no idea beforehand of the trek I was about to take, much like my main character, Georgia, who fears her move from Detroit to the suburbs. In *Miles from Motown*, a historical novel in verse, Georgia physically moves only a few miles from her Detroit home, but in her heart it might as well be a million miles. She mourns this loss early in the story.

“I’ll pretend that the few miles
between here and there are small,
like an inch on a scale map and
I will be back to visit,
but it will never be the same.”
- Georgia

Before I knew Georgia, I loved and wrote poetry. My mom read Ogden Nash and e.e. cummings to me for bedtime stories! In college courses and on my own, I wrote poetry, taught students to write poetry, and was fortunate to work and live among poets in Kalamazoo, Michigan, such as Margaret DeRitter, Elizabeth Kerlikowske, John Rybicki, and Diane Seuss. Elizabeth and Diane had children at the school where I taught and all these poets came in to teach poetry to the students. My first poem was published in a chapbook in Kalamazoo.

In 2003, I moved to Chicago to be near my sister and to teach at the University of Chicago Lab Schools, and in 2008 I received my poetry certificate from the University of Chicago Graham School while working with poets Alice George and Dina Elenbogen. Later, I completed a manuscript titled

Entanglement, which explored growing up in the 60s and 70s and the loss of my mother to breast cancer. This work won me acceptance to [A Room of Her Own Foundation’s](#) 2009 writing retreat at the Georgia O’Keefe ranch in Abiqui, New Mexico, and I would be fortunate to return in 20011, 2013, and 2015.

MAP KEY

The year 2014 was a turning point in my writing journey. I became brave and applied to [StoryStudio Chicago’s](#) “Novel PB/MG in a year” course taught by Juliet Bond. For the course I submitted a 15-page prose story that would become the seeds for *Miles from Motown*. Midway through that year, my father was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and I began trying to write *Miles* as a novel-in-verse because the poetry felt more familiar and manageable as I travelled back and forth between Chicago and Michigan. When I was growing up, my grandparents lived and worked in Detroit, so I spent a lot of time going between Detroit and Southfield, and that visual map created the setting for my story. Even though the physical distance was small, the division between the communities was large.

When I was growing up, my dad and I spent hours watching the history of the 1960s unfold on *60 Minutes*, in documentaries, and in the Vietnam War photojournalism reports in *Life* and *Time* magazines, and this influenced my book as well. I felt a strong desire to show how the Vietnam War creates conflict within Georgia, whose brother has been deployed.

She wants us to make a mosaic that
Says Peace Not War.
I don’t tell her that my brother is in Vietnam,
because I believe in peace
And not war...

The words Peace Not War
glitter from the tiles. I bring mine
home after lunch and hide it
in my closet toward the back and
cover it with a towel.
Mama and Daddy can’t think I’m a
war protester.



Tales from the Front

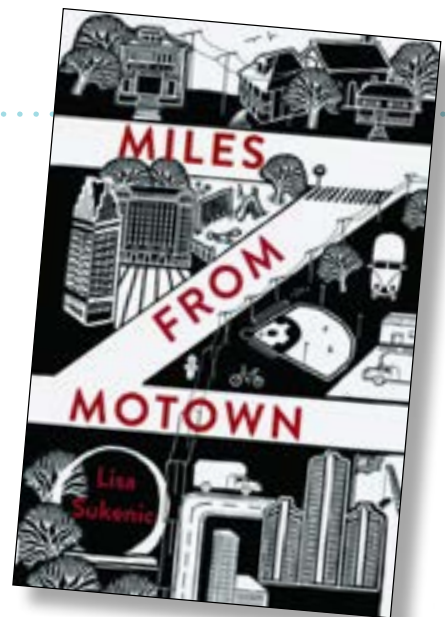
Writing is an act of bravery as you bare your soul. Georgia is a risk-taker and so am I. Jane Hertenstein, whom I met in Abiqui, had invited me to a summer gathering for SCBWI-IL's Chicago network, and there I met other amazing and supportive writers. I dove right in. I tried to go to as many network events as possible, including local readings, agent talks in all genres, and more, taking copious notes to learn craft from practicing authors.

COMPASS ROSE

In addition, in 2014 I enrolled in Esther Hershenhorn's MG/YA novel workshop at the University of Chicago Graham School. Esther's energy and enthusiasm was contagious. I learned how to write a middle grade novel, and a few months later I reached out to Esther to see if she would be my writing coach. We met every few months for four years, working to move my story forward. Even when I would veer off course she would rein me back in. I always looked forward to her insight and guidance, particularly when it came to identifying the "heart of the story." Many times on the way home from meeting her I'd pull off Lakeshore Drive to jot down "Aha!" moments of inspiration. At one of Esther's picture book courses at the Newbery, I met Ellen Pridmore and Megan Kelly, who would become my first critique partners and close friends.

My final workshop at the O'Keefe Ranch, in 2015, gave me the opportunity to work with Cynthia Leitch-Smith on *Miles*. That workshop especially renewed me and my poetry as Georgia's journey became clearer.

Writing an historical novel involved a lot of research even though I lived through that time period. The Detroit Historical Museum was a great source for material. There, I listened to oral histories and read archives from the Detroit Free Press. And because my protagonist Georgia idolizes her, I also researched Gwendolyn Brooks and her life in Chicago. I attended 100th anniversary celebrations of her at the [Chicago Poetry Center](#) and the University of Chicago, and heard her daughter Nora Brooks Blakely speak at the release of the book *Seasons: A Gwendolyn Brooks Experience*, a compilation of Brooks' works. I also attended when Terrance Hayes spoke at the Poetry Center about the *Golden Shovel Anthology*, published to honor Gwendolyn Brooks.



To Miss Brooks,
I want to be your tour guide,
take you to my school.
I want you to meet
Mrs. Murphy, who read
us your Bronzeville Boys and Girls
who told us about your Chicago neighborhood,
like my Detroit.
A song, a jump rope rhyme
with a beat in the city, your Chicago and mine.

As I drafted *Miles*, I continued to develop my craft through formal writing programs and workshops, work with mentors, Sarah Aronson's VCFA Writing for Children and Young Adults spring break program, and Highlights workshops and camps. My school, the University of Chicago Lab Schools, has been supportive of my writing career and has assisted with grants to help me attend these programs. These opportunities all provided invaluable feedback from numerous editors and agents as *Miles* took shape.

DESTINATION

Another turning point came in 2016, when I entered the SCBWI-IL Many Voices competition. Later, I learned that my manuscript had been selected as a finalist and an agent wanted to see additional pages. Later that summer my blind entry for SCBWI-IL's Laura Crawford Memorial Scholarship was also named a finalist and I received a wonderful editorial letter from Sarah Aronson, which was a key to unpacking my plot as I rewrote the manuscript in prose. That fall, at the Prairie Writer's Day workshop, *Miles*



Tales from the Front

was announced as the winner of the manuscript contest and I had the opportunity to meet with an agent. In our meeting she asked me if the work she was reviewing had been a novel in verse. Since she seemed to think the story would be stronger in that form, I took her advice and rewrote it again, returning to verse form.

In 2018, Esther encouraged me to begin querying broadly and she suggested I meet Carol Coven Grannick, who had also written a novel in verse. Coincidentally, Carol and I had already met the year before at SCBWI-IL's 2017 Spring Thaw and we'd exchanged drafts of our work. After Carol's *Reeni's Turn* received a contract from Regal House Publishing, hers being the first novel in verse for them, I wondered if I should submit mine to the [Kraken Book Prize for Middle Grade Fiction](#), which is awarded by Regal House's MG imprint, Fitzroy Books. I printed out a hard copy of my manuscript, went to the post office, kissed the envelope, and sent it on its way. In May of 2019, Jaynie Royal, editor and publisher at Fitzroy, told me I was a finalist and that she wanted to publish my book.

So here I am, the proud mama of *Miles from Motown*, which was released just this past August 21. The roadmap that took me to this story came from my childhood, from real history that I observed and experienced, and from childhood friendships and relationships that I established back then in my own neighborhood. It was quite an adventure of learning and discovery and I persisted. I worked my way to the heart of Georgia's story by following the map of her journey and writing the poetry that could sing her Motown song. 🌟



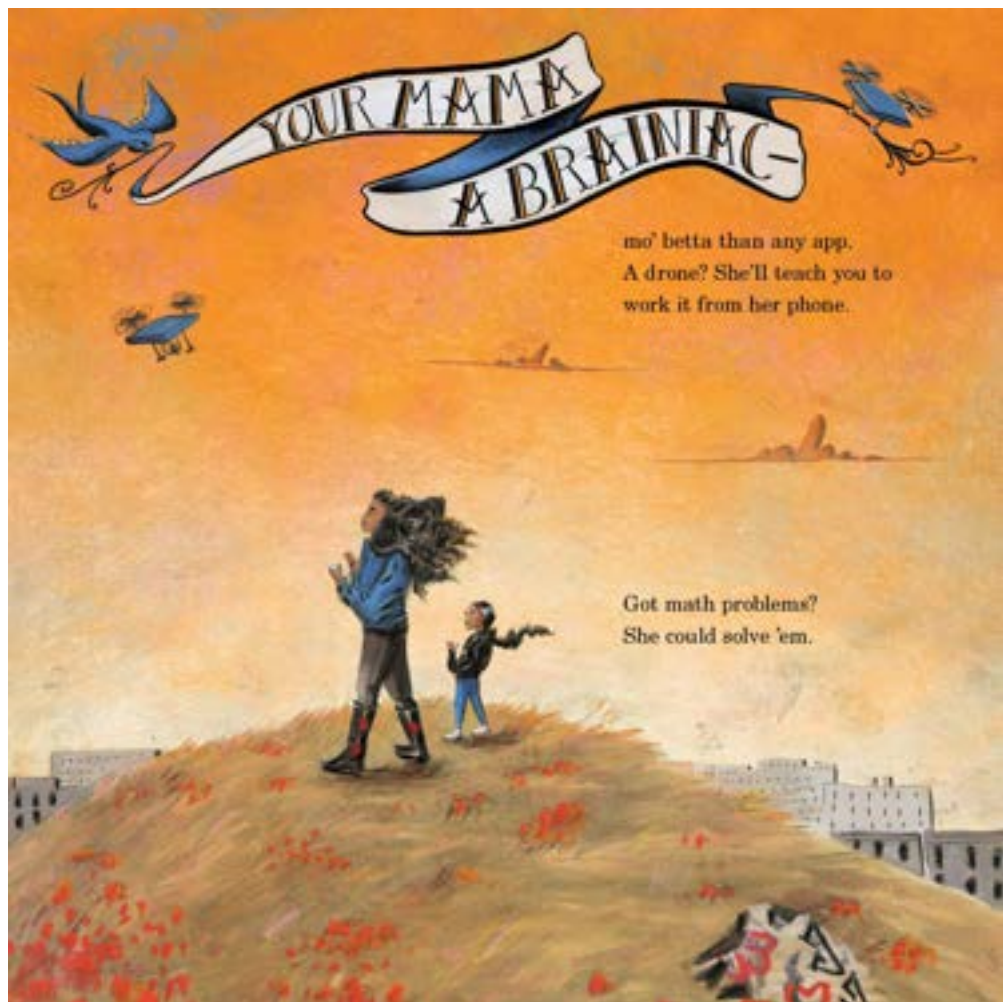
LISA SUKENIC is a poet, author, and fourth-grade teacher at the University of Chicago Laboratory Schools. Her 4th grade students write and publish their own novels using the [NaNoWriMo](#) Elementary School program and up until two years ago published their books through Student Treasures. Every year they do a book reading at [57th Street Books](#) in Hyde Park. Lisa has been a progressive educator for 36 years and is the co-coordinator of her school's Global Reading Challenge. Her fiction and poetry for adults appear in various publications, including [Everyday Haiku](#), [A Reason to Be Here](#), and [Turning Point](#).

Contact information @ lisasukenic.com



Creative Sparks

ILLUSTRATIONS by Jacqueline Alcántara
STORY by Barbara Gregorich



JACQUELINE ALCÁNTARA is the critically acclaimed illustrator of *The Field*, also by Baptiste Paul, which won the Sonia Lynn Sadler Award; *Freedom Soup* by New York Times Best Seller Tami Charles which was named a Kids Indie Next and Junior Library Guild selection; *Your Mama* by NoNieqa Ramos, which was a finalist for *The Kirkus Prize*, and *Jump at the Sun* by Newbery Honoree Alicia D. Williams, which has received multiple starred reviews. You can find her online at her website jacquelinealcantara.com, on Instagram [@jacqueline_alcantara](https://www.instagram.com/jacqueline_alcantara).



Creative Sparks

The F Words

Excerpted from a YA novel

by Barbara Gregorich

[The narrator is Cole Renner, 15-year-old high school student.]

Felipe and I check our phones.

I guess we log into the tenth grade election site at the same time.

“¿Qué?” he shouts. “¿Qué?”

Jillian’s candidate page has a new slogan, in letters striped red, white, and blue.

Vote AMERICAN team,

vote AMERICAN dream

VOTE Just Jillian

“She’s saying I’m not American.” Felipe’s words hiss like steam.

I’m wondering if maybe Jillian just chose the wrong words. By accident. Like maybe she didn’t know what the words imply.

But I can’t sell the idea to myself. Jillian knows what she’s doing.

“Yeah,” I say. “She’s implying it.”

“*La implicación es igual que decirlo.*”

Yeah, I had to agree. Implying it was the same as saying it.

“This is war!” Felipe hits the top of the fence with a fist. The fence shakes.

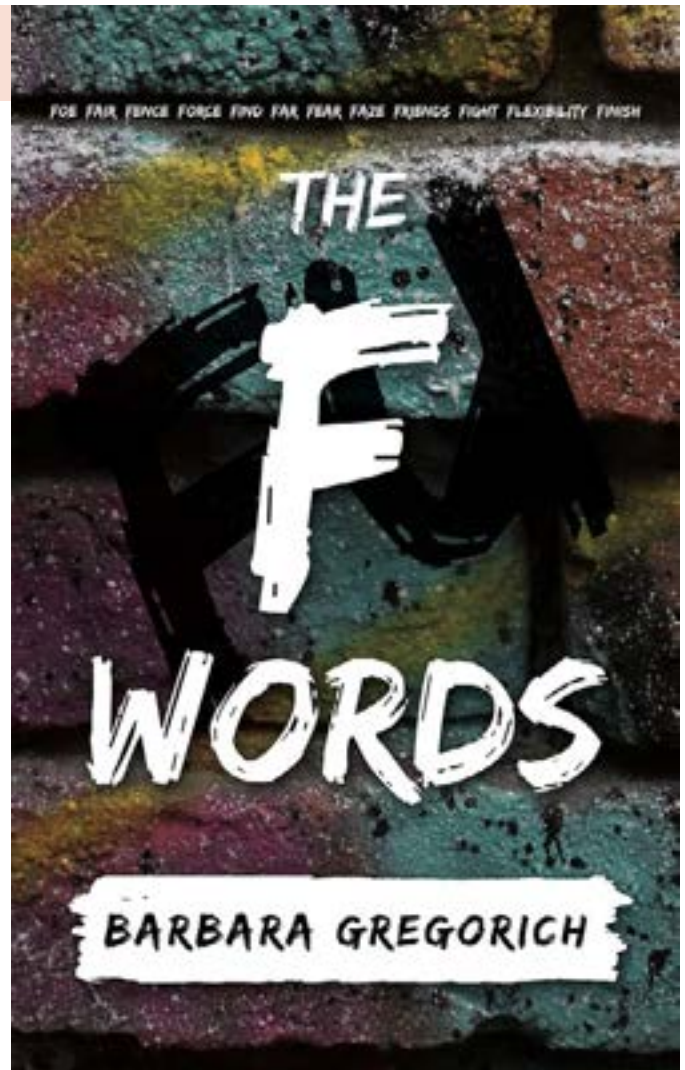
“Maybe not war,” I argue, “but definitely a battle. So we need a battle strategy.”

That’s when I notice Treva walking toward us, holding her cell phone.

“*La muchacha alta,*” Felipe announces, also noticing her. It’s hard not to notice somebody that tall, dressed in black, walking toward you in an I’ve-got-you-in-my-sights way.

“*Anarquista,*” I remind him. “Dad says anarchists are unpredictable.”

So far, though, I’m finding Treva more interesting than unpredictable.



Felipe nods.

“Hey,” says Treva.

I hey her back.

“I’m Treva,” she says to Felipe.

“Felipe,” he replies.

“How do we fight back?” she asks.

Felipe and I look at each other.

“We?” he asks.

“Fight back?” I ask.

She waves her phone in front of our faces. We see Jillian’s campaign slogan.

“Underhanded. Devious. Deceitful. Treacherous.

Crafty. Crooked. Lowdown.

Reactionary.”



Creative Sparks

I'm pretty impressed with her vocabulary. No f words, though. "Stop," I say, holding up my hand. "We surrender."

She grins at this. Like I hoped she would.

"We fight back, then," she says.

Felipe studies her a while. Finally he nods. "Sí."

"We fight to help Felipe win the election," I say, just to make sure we all agree on what we're fighting for.

"Totally," says Treva.

"No bombs," says Felipe. "No assassinations. Either one could get me in trouble."

He's kidding.

I think.

Treva tilts her head and gives him a serious look. "Old style. Vaporizing is more efficient."

She's kidding.

I hope.

"We could write a declaration of some kind," says Treva, "and pass it out to each student."

"No leaflets allowed," Felipe tells her. "Maybe I can talk to each tenth grader between now and next Tuesday, asking them to vote for me. Charisma always works."

"We could demand that Jillian be disqualified," I say. "She's being racist, implying that Mexican-Americans aren't Americans."

This riles Felipe again. "My ancestors were Americans before Jillian's ancestors came over on boats! The Americas extend from Tierra del Fuego to . . ." He looks at me.

I take a stab at it. "Ellesmere Island?"

"Sí. Some place very cold."

Treva frowns. "The principal isn't going to disqualify her."

"I know" I say. "Just brainstorming."

"Keep it up," she says. "We need to do something."

That very second, as Treva is telling me to keep

brainstorming, I have an idea. I swear it comes from my swimming in f words. "*Familia*," I say, straightening from where I was very comfortable leaning against the fence. "Felipe's slogan is La Familia. We're all part of the same human family, and we can remind people of that by taking photos. Photos of different students posing with Felipe. *Familia* is everybody, and everybody loves photos."

Treva points her phone at Felipe and me. We automatically pose. She automatically clicks. "We're going to wage a photo campaign. I'm in!" ✨



BARBARA GREGORICH is the author of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry for children and for adults. Her books have won awards from Chicago Women in Publishing and Society for American Baseball Research. *The F Words* is her first YA.

In Pandemics, Bowling, and Life...

...IT'S ALL ABOUT YOUR APPROACH

by Roxanne Farwick Owens, PhD



Lately I've been reflecting on re-entries. As a longtime educator (former middle school teacher and current Chair of Teacher Education at a university), I've been thinking about ways teachers might help children re-enter the classroom after a year online. Similarly, as a writer I've been talking with others about how we must stage a personal re-entry, not only for every new project but seemingly every time we sit down at our desks. And all of this has been percolating while I've been observing youth bowlers as part of my research for a middle-grade novel I'm writing.

"THE APPROACH" IN BOWLING

First, I spent time watching families bowl recreationally, and then I observed the Elite Youth Competition Tour organized by world champion bowler Diandra Asbaty. I discovered that a number of important factors are involved at both levels of bowlers.

In bowling, the ball's path and the fate of the outcome is determined by a complex series of motions that begins when the bowler picks up the ball and ends with the release of the ball. This combined series of movements is known as "The Approach" and each individual motion, completed in a matter of seconds, is critical. A strike relies on the correct completion of each step in the process, up to and including the release. Although the end result of the ball's journey is the action on which everyone tends to place their focus, it is all the preparation and skill that ultimately determines the outcome—how the ball hits the pins.

NEXT...MAKING ADJUSTMENTS

Focusing on trying to hit pins 60 feet down the lane can be intimidating, thus learning tricks of the trade separates amateurs from more advanced bowlers. As bowlers work on their approach, coaches help with what is termed "making adjustments." For instance, this can include swinging the

arm differently, weighing the pros and cons of taking three- vs. four- vs. five-step approaches, and throwing the ball with two rather than one hand. A more sophisticated technique involves using the arrows and dots on the floor just beyond the foul line to plan the direction of the ball's path. Assessing the condition of the oil on the wooden floor in relation to the humidity and temperature in the bowling alley to determine how smoothly (or not) the ball will traverse down the lane is another high-level skill bowlers learn. This is important in determining whether to use a lighter or heavier ball. There is a lot of geometry and physics in bowling.

Of course, there were significant differences between the skills of the young people out bowling with their families for a day of fun and those of the youth who were bowling in the tournaments in their ability to make adjustments. Family bowlers were usually more carefree and less skilled. They tossed the ball in the air so it landed with a loud thud on the maple floor, used a two-handed technique rather than a traditional one-handed release, or haphazardly pushed the ball as if it were on fire, watching as it hit the bumper guards. If anyone actually hit a few pins, it seemed a matter of luck rather than competence. For the most part, the goal wasn't to improve their score; it was to have fun as a family. No one seemed to notice the dots and arrows on the floor, or the advantages to different ball weights. Adults occasionally gave tips and tried to assist the young bowlers, but sometimes that ended in tears. Meeting goals can be like that—progress, progress, then two steps back.

The Elite Youth Bowlers, on the other hand, were focused and driven. They were having fun too, but they concentrated on every motion. Their approach and release looked like a smooth series of dance movements. Wanting to improve their score with each frame, they had a different purpose



In Pandemics, Bowling, and Life...

and thus were more invested and engaged in the task at hand. When the kids on the Elite Youth Tour made their approach and released the ball, they watched as it rolled down the lane and hit the pins. Whether it was a strike, a spare, or some other configuration, they high-fived each other and immediately picked up the next ball for their subsequent shot. They would check in with Coach Diandra to get an encouraging thumbs-up or a quick tip, but then they kept going. They assessed the situation, they made adjustments, and they moved on, picking up the next ball and the next one and the next one.

APPLYING THESE PRINCIPLES POST-PANDEMIC

As we move forward this year, returning to what might be our more regular routines or revised new routines—going back to work or school and focusing on our creative projects—we can apply the principles of “The Approach” and “making adjustments” to our own experiences.

The Approach: Looking ahead to whatever we’re aiming toward is likely to be difficult for some, welcomed by others,

and a combination of the two for most of us. It is helpful at this point to consider where we should direct our energies as we make our approach and “look down the lane” to what we’re focusing on—our next article, illustration, book, class, or tournament. Some of us might worry about being “rusty” and “behind” because of the pandemic. If there hadn’t been a pandemic we would have finished our book by now or would have won the Newbery by now (go ahead, dream big). Some might have gotten a lot accomplished—“With my child doing so well in online school, I wrote the next eight books in my series and have already signed a movie contract!” “I wear my Caldecott Award on a chain around my neck.” Most of us are likely somewhere in between, and that’s okay.

How much time do we want to spend lamenting what we didn’t get done? Rather than haphazardly “tossing the ball down the lane to see where it lands,” so to speak, making a plan seems to be a better idea. Should we focus on whether we need a 3-step, a 4-step, or a 5-step approach to move ahead? Would it be sufficient to count on luck to squeeze in time for our creative pursuits? How will we begin? It’s time to start answering these questions.



In Pandemics, Bowling, and Life...

Making Adjustments: We all know there is not one miracle method that helps us accomplish everything in life. It takes persistence, work, and follow-through in our approach. If that one way we tried didn't quite work, we switch it around and do it a different way. Write or draw something, get feedback, sit back down in the chair, try again, keep practicing, keep writing, sit back down in the chair, use a different narrative voice, write it in verse, sit back down in the chair...

We did all of this pre-pandemic, but, somehow, it might feel different post-pandemic. Different how? I'm not sure yet. Too much of a luxury to take the time? Too hard to concentrate? Too many other things pulling at us? Not feeling creative? Or are those just normal excuses until we get into regular re-entry routines? Maybe. Motivation tends to originate from successful experiences rather than happening before, so perhaps we need some positive feedback to get into the swing again?

BE STRATEGIC AND FOCUS ON THE ARROWS POINTING THE WAY TO THE MAIN PINS

One of the most important lessons I learned from the bowlers is that the ball doesn't have to hit all ten pins to achieve a strike. If it hits the correct four main pins, there is a domino effect and the rest go down.

So, as I consider this process for entering or re-entering, I am thinking about determining my Four Main Pins to set myself up for success in this way: 1) Will I consistently look past the foul line to use the arrows and dots to guide me? 2) Will I regularly assess conditions that might make me veer off course so I continue smoothly down the path and don't get stuck? 3) Will I remember to celebrate the victories large and small? 4) Will I be coachable and persistent?

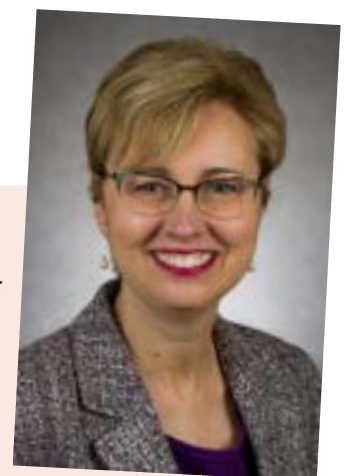
I don't think I can expect a strike right out of the gate as I admit I am a bit out of practice. For now, I won't have to concentrate on smashing the pin set 60 feet away. But if I keep these Four Main Pins in mind, I think I'll make good progress toward whatever main goal I decide is my first priority. You decide what your four main pins are going to be for you. Anything can add up to a strike.

Whether we are "behind" in our projects is not the primary question right now. We may not have accomplished as much



on them as we had hoped to do. We need to grant ourselves some grace on that issue. Whether we missed teaching and learning opportunities because of the pandemic is not a helpful thing to focus on at this point either. Rather, now that we're back together, how do we focus our approach and make adjustments to hit our chosen four main pins?

In life, as in bowling, sometimes there are disappointments and "gutter balls," but staying the course can—even if there has been a bit of a detour—help a person be a striking success upon re-entering the game. 🌟



ROXANNE FARWICK OWENS, PhD, is the Chair of Teacher Education at DePaul University, where she teaches children's literature courses. She is also the editor of the Illinois Reading Council Journal. She has been a member of SCBWI since 2006.

Creation Stories, or Invoking the Muse

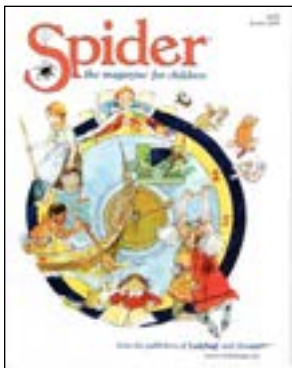
by Pamela Dell

That spring day in 2007, when the phone call came and I checked the caller ID, I gave a grateful little shout-out to my muse. The call was from *Spider Magazine*, and everyone knows no editor is going to call to reject a submission.

A few months before, I'd been challenged by the Cricket Media magazine group to come up with a new monthly fiction series for *Spider*, their magazine for 6-to-9-year-olds. The existing series, written by Polly Horvath, would be ending the following December. So they were looking for this new series to begin in January 2008.

I use the word “challenge” because I was only one of about five or six other published kidlit authors to be invited to submit. Ultimately, the winning series would be decided by a consensus of the editorial staffs of all the Cricket magazines, which include *Babybug*, *Ladybug*, *Spider*, *Cricket*, *Muse*, and others. I first wrote about this experience for the *Prairie Wind* way back in 2008, shortly after my series kicked off, so suffice it to say now that at first I had little interest in accepting the challenge. I just didn't have the bandwidth, I thought, being super-busy with book projects, teaching and editing, and other things besides. But as the weeks went by after that initial email invitation and the deadline for submitting grew closer, I started having second thoughts. *Wouldn't it be fun to at least try?*

ME AND MR. DAVIS GOT A THING GOIN' ON



On the Saturday evening before the Monday deadline for submitting, however, I didn't have a single idea. All my other work had distracted me from even thinking much about it. My muse had lain silent because I wasn't calling on her—or maybe I should say him.

The issue in which my series first appeared.

In the early years of my life, when I was maybe around three or four and still the only child in the house, I had an imaginary friend called Mr. Davis. According to my parents Mr. Davis ruled the household. Sometimes, when one of them tried to settle into an armchair, I'd demand, “Get up! Mr. Davis is sitting there!” They'd get up. Or, when my mom took me for a walk, I'd stall, saying, “We have to wait for Mr. Davis.” She waited, with no complaints. And when we stopped for a Coke on the way home, she'd always buy three—Mr. Davis had to have one too, of course. My parents fully indulged me and Mr. Davis. He hung out with me when I wrote stories too—or rather, when I put pages together, drew pictures, and dictated to my dad what to write on each page...since I hadn't quite acquired that skill yet.

Mr. Davis disappeared, my parents told me, sometime after my first sister was born. And in much later years I considered the possibility that, back then, since I had a sibling to fight with, he had probably opted for the calmer, more ethereal role of my muse in mind. Because he and I were tight. And throughout most of my writing life I've had an unassailable trust that when I needed an idea, some inspirational muse to speak to me, it would happen. And, I feel so grateful to say, it pretty much has.

DOWN TO THE WIRE

So that Saturday night as I lay in bed, my mind devoid of any fun fictional ideas, I called out for help. I was finally, way too belatedly, committed to going for it—even though one of the things the editors explicitly requested was a lot of humor, and I didn't think of myself as a funny writer at all. But lying there in the dark, I sent out my invocation, a silent plea along the lines of, “Come on, Mr. Davis (although I didn't actually use any name), you gotta give me something! Anything—please!” Then I went to sleep, with a vague optimism.



Creation Stories, or Invoking the Muse

Sunday morning, I woke up with an idea stirring, mostly just a character's name—Doodlebug—and a line of dialog. And I was liking it. Over the next two days I hustled to turn those beginning whispers into what I needed to submit: a 750-word story; character profiles for both main and a few side characters; and two or three possible future story ideas.

THE MUSE SPEAKS

From the start, the whole process seemed almost miraculous, as if Mr. Davis was dictating the whole deal, just like I'd done with my dad all those decades earlier. The words just came as the plot unfolded in my head. I worked hard, writing and revising and navigating by intuition and trust, always listening closely to the muse. By Monday night I felt good enough about the story, called "Key to the Casa," and everything else I'd come up with, to hit the "send" button and let my submission go. I was also fairly detached about the outcome (figuring it would be better if I didn't get the gig because of my limited time).

So when May-May, the *Spider* editor, called me that day a few months later to tell me they'd chosen my series, it was a bit of a joyful rush. Mr. Davis, as my muse will be known from here on out, had really done right by me. The *Spider* team was excited about "Doodlebug & Dandelion" and were now on a mission to find the perfect illustrator to match my quirky little series, which features the antics and adventures of two elementary-school siblings.

AN ILLUSTRATOR TO MATCH

In that search, as I mentioned in my previous article about this experience, I got a rare and remarkable gift. Because Cricket's editorial offices are in downtown Chicago, May-May invited me there to view the works of the illustrator-contenders they'd chosen. And to see the company's entire boardroom table covered with illustrations of my first story was an author's dream come true. These were full-color original works by each of the several illustrators—character drawings, illustrations of the house, the pets, and the infamous "Burp-Mobile," the big green backfiring bus the Pinkley family rides around in. Each artist had interpreted these elements in their own unique style, some more on the mark than others, I felt. But one stood out to me right away. His illustrations perfectly captured my own vision.

Back in her office, May-May asked who my first pick was. Earlier, she'd given me (another big gift) the same ballot the whole Cricket staff had used to vote for their top three, and I hadn't hesitated in checking the box beside the name Dom Mansell. May-May smiled as she informed me that my first pick had won by a landslide. Cricket's editorial director, May-May herself, the *Spider* art director, and several of the other Cricket editorial and art staffs had all decided Dom was the guy. Naturally, I was thrilled.



An early sketch of Doodlebug with his little Abyssinian kitten Choo-Choo

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT

Since the creation of that first story, Dom and I have been totally in synch. Sometimes he asks me a question. Sometimes I make a suggestion, but I trust him all the way and leave a lot of room for his own imagination and invention. Shortly after they picked him, he snail-mailed me, all the way from his home in Sheffield, England, a manila envelope of sketches he'd made as he'd worked on his own submission: Pencil drawings of Doodlebug and Dandelion in various poses and outfits, their pets, and more. You know how your heart feels like it's bursting when you first fall in love? That is exactly how I felt looking at Dom's sketches. And I'm no less in love today.



This illustration for the story "The Time Capsule" featured a time capsule box with items mostly invented by Dom, including Dandelion's teddy Englebert Fuzz.

Creation Stories, or Invoking the Muse

I think one's muse can come in many forms and from many sources. Dom's brilliant D&D illustrations have often been a muse for me. In one story, called "The Time Capsule," he drew a teddy bear and called it Englebert Fuzz. As shown in Dom's art, Englebert was one of the items Dandelion had put into the time capsule box, which was to be buried for ten years on the school grounds of Pine Nut Elementary.

That little teddy's name so inspired me that I later wrote a story titled "Losing Englebert," in which Dandelion laments the impulsive and irrevocable decision she made months earlier to let Englebert, her (as Dom put it) "first and best beloved teddy bear," go.

The previous January, Dandelion's class had made a time capsule. They'd all collected personal mementos and sealed them inside a cornerstone of the school greenhouse. Along with other items, Dandelion had put in Englebert Fuzz. The plan was to open the capsule in ten years—but now she was realizing that would be practically forever!

"Englebert and my other stuffed animals were in a clearing in this awful, tangled-up forest," Dandelion reported, her voice shaking. "It was night. They were having a luau with all kinds of food and dancing!"

"What were they eating?" Doodlebug asked.

"Englebert was wearing a Hawaiian shirt and a hula skirt," Dandelion continued, ignoring him. "He was doing the limbo—"

"How close was the limbo pole to the ground?" Doodlebug interrupted.

"What does that matter!?" Dandelion snapped impatiently. "When he saw me watching, he took off!"

"He's haunting you!" Doodlebug pronounced.

"Yes!" Dandelion agreed. "I can't believe I sealed Englebert up for ten years!"

"In ten years you won't even care about him, Dandelion," Doodlebug pointed out. "I mean, who ever sees old people going around with teddy bears."



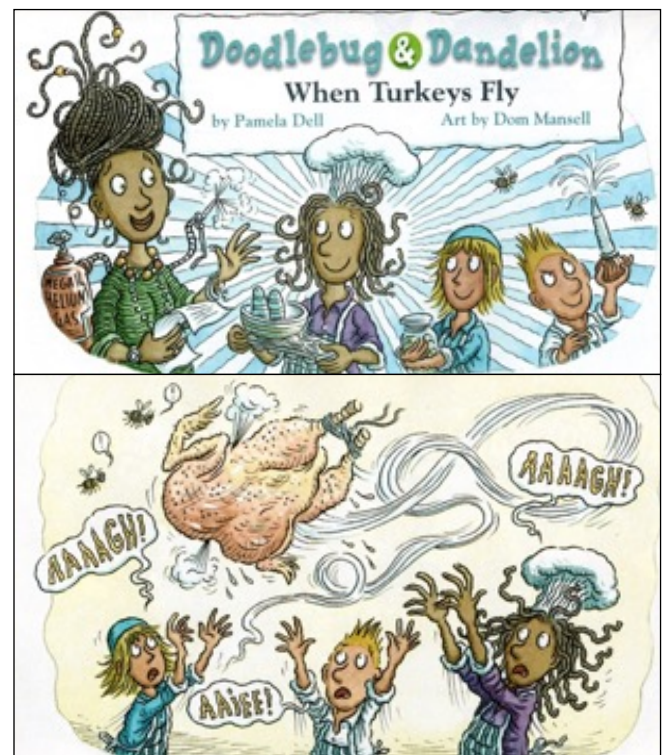
One how-to-write rule says never start a story with a dream sequence. Well, sometimes rules must be broken. This is page 2 of "Losing Englebert" – after Dandelion wakes up from a terrible dream about her lost teddy and goes to tell Doodlebug about it.

I've even drawn from Dom's real life. True confession: After I got those wonderful sketches, I went trawling online for anything I could find about him. One thing I came across was a fantastic bunch of old photos from his high school years, a few with comments about two girls, Astrid and

Olive, who apparently were crushing on Dom or vice versa. Very quickly, Mr. Davis dropped a gem into my wicked, gleeful mind—a story featuring two unwelcome babysitters named, of course, Astrid and Olive. Another story, which took place in a graveyard and involved downward-hurting bats, was lifted intact from that same experience Dom told me he had had with his son as a small boy.

"WHERE DO YOU GET YOUR IDEAS?"

It's a common question we writers hear, right? Briefly stated, the answer boils down to the obvious: Ideas can come from anywhere. And that anywhere can be vast if you make it so. As of right now, I'm working on the March 2022 episode of D&D. With nine issues a year (May/June, July/August, and November/December being combined issues) this will be Dom's and my 127th story. D&D leads off every issue so the stories have to engage the reader pretty quickly. This is great fun for me and my ideas really have come from all over the place. I've riffed off TV shows like *Survivor*, *Game of Thrones*, and *Top Chef*.



Top Chef's occasional focus on molecular gastronomy inspired this Thanksgiving story in which Doodlebug, his best friend Bog, and Dandelion try cooking techniques Bog's mom has taught them. Things go a little awry after they stuff the turkey with a bit too much "Mega-belium."



Creation Stories, or Invoking the Muse

Mr. Davis has been especially helpful for several October issues: The Halloween story “Creepy Hollow” was based on Washington Irving’s gothic tale “Sleepy Hollow.” Another featured a hissing Gollum-like creature in the Pinkleys’ basement.



Lurking in the basement, Gollum covets Dandelion’s mood ring.

And one Halloween tale saw D&D turn into zombies—two twisted little Goldilocks—and trash the (in this case) Two Bears’ house. One of my all-time favorite stories and Dom did not disappoint.



The zombie-locks decide the porridge is bad and so are the beds.

So, yeah. I love when the muse gets to work. Of course I do have the advantage of having an audience that continually changes as kids grow up and move on to other reading material. I could easily repeat a theme or a subject matter but I prefer to go with new ideas as long as Mr. D is dishing them out. And so far he does keep on keepin’ on.



18-year-old Dom already seeing his future

Pamela Dell and Dom Mansell—It has kind of a poetic ring to it, like it was meant to be. And I’m sure Mr. Davis made it so. (An odd coincidence just occurs to me—as well as a D-named artist, why did Mr. D also give me two main characters whose names start with D??) In any case, we all have our favorite creation stories, that moment when the muse really tapped us. How it has happened for other writers and illustrators is endlessly fascinating to me—another source of inspiration actually. So from the bottom of my heart, a big thanks to Mr. Davis and all his brethren (all genders included, of course)! ☀



The Pinkley parents with Astrid and Olive

PAMELA DELL has published more than 100 books and other materials for young people. She has also been an advertising copywriter for Macy’s, an entertainment journalist in L.A., and has published literary fiction for adults. Her favorite past gig was designing and writing a series of interactive narrative-fiction games as creative director at Purple Moon, a San Francisco computer game company for preteen girls during the dotcom boom. Although she’s a little anti-social feel free to reach her at pjdell@earthlink.net



How Doing the Opposite Just Might Get You That Book Deal

by Kira Bigwood

Everyone says to trust your gut. Well, I'm here to tell you, sometimes your gut is wrong.

It was 2018 and the third year in a row that I was applying to the [Rutgers University Council on Children's Literature annual One-on-One Conference](#). (It's a mouthful, but for those unfamiliar, it's also a wonderful, invitation-only chance to get expert feedback on your work.)

If I'm being honest, I was feeling a bit deflated. The previous two years, I had submitted what I thought were my absolute-slam-dunk manuscripts *aaaand* ...promptly got rejected. But in 2018, I didn't feel I had anything that resembled even a layup. I waited until the very last day to submit and then decided to try something different.

Remember that Seinfeld episode where George does everything opposite?



My name is George. I'm unemployed and I live with my parents.

Jerry tells him, "If every instinct you have is wrong, then the opposite would have to be right." I decided to test this theory. Going against all my instincts, I submitted what I thought was my weakest airball-of-a-story (writing is subjective, after all). And wouldn't you know, a few weeks later I received my acceptance letter.

WWCD?

Now I had been given the thrilling opportunity to travel to New Jersey. Where I knew no one. To attend a conference. Where I knew no one. And go over my work, face to face, with a real live editor (who, to recap, I did not know).

Kira was terrified.

But I wasn't Kira. I was Opposite Kira.

For one whole weekend, I forced myself to go against every introvert instinct I had (a truly, truly difficult thing to do). Each time I felt like retreating into my proverbial tuna on toast, I wondered, "What would Costanza do (WWCD):?"

That is how I found myself walking solo into a hotel bar to meet up with complete-and-total strangers (AKA other very nice conference-goers).

It's how I found myself striking up a conversation with the conference co-chair, who later gave me a shout-out during her closing remarks.

And how I found myself showing my assigned editor one last manuscript—"It's a lullaby for little spies, but it might not be anything yet."

Which is how I found myself chatting up a different editor at lunch, who just happened to love spy stories.

And that, my friends, is how I found myself with a debut picture book.

Secret, Secret Agent Guy (a 007 twist on the classic *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star*), illustrated by the talented Celia Krampien, was released this year from Atheneum/Simon & Schuster. And all because I went against every instinct I had.

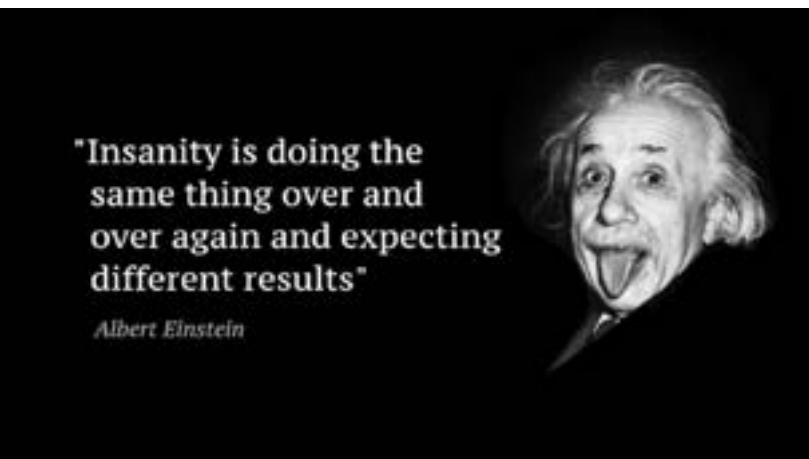


How Doing the Opposite Just Might Get You That Book Deal



THE OPPOSITE STRATEGY IN ACTION

I'm certainly not the first person to try this little experiment. Before there was Opposite Kira, or Opposite George, there was Opposite Albert. By now, most of us have heard these famous words...



He has a point. There can't be growth without change. Just look at evolution! Or your first draft compared to your final!

The ad industry has long agreed. Rather than try to compete by using a "same-here" approach, companies like Avis Car

Rental, with their slogan "We're No. 2!" have creamed the competition by doing the exact opposite of what their adversaries have done. By the way, within a year of running that campaign, Avis was profitable for the first time in more than a decade.

Sports teams use this strategy, too. When the Saints opened up the second half of Super Bowl XLIV with an inside kick, it was literally the opposite of what anyone, especially the Colts, expected them to do. In fact, it was the first time in Super Bowl history a team had called that play that early in a game. They went on to win 31-17.

Behavioral therapists also believe in the power of "opposite action," counseling their clients to be aware of how they feel and then act in a way that directly opposes that feeling. Going out with a friend, for example, when all you want to do is stay home and sulk; or approaching an editor at a conference, when all you want to do is hide behind your continental breakfast.

It's exposing yourself directly to your fears. It's doing the things we'd ordinarily never do. And it's a method that can have real results.

Think, too, about your favorite books—the ones that really stick with you. What is it that makes them so special? Do they offer something unpredictable? Unforeseen? Dare I say, the *opposite* of what you'd expect?

HOW TO PULL A COSTANZA

So, how can we apply all this to our own storytelling journeys and use this opposite strategy to escape our creative conundrums? (Say that seven times fast!)

Maybe you have writer's block. Maybe you're struggling with a story arc. Maybe you're still trying to find your illustration style or your writing voice. Maybe the thought of having to promote your work makes you kinda wanna barf. Maybe you're tired of me saying maybe.

Whatever's holding you back, let it go. If just for one moment, one day, one weekend. Let it go, and pull a Costanza.



How Doing the Opposite Just Might Get You That Book Deal

IF YOU USUALLY...

- ... aim for heart → shoot for humor
- ... illustrate in pen & ink → try pencil & crayon
- ... rhyme → don't rhyme
- ... grab mentor books from well-known authors → give a newbie a go
- ... start at the beginning → work backwards instead
- ... write about animals (or, like me, inanimate objects) → write about humans

IF YOU USUALLY...

- ... write in first person → write in third
- ... brainstorm with words → have a crack at doodles
- ... submit only to agents → add small presses to your query list
- ... take rejection personally → let it roll
- ... tend to be critical of yourself → try being kind
- ... snack on sweets while working → knock yourself out on pimento cheese (trust me on this one)

IF YOU USUALLY...

- ... talk too much → listen
- ... overdo the word count → cut ruthlessly
- ... pick popular story topics → write about something never before seen
- ... sit things out → participate
- ... write sporadically → finish a draft in one sitting
- ... clam up at conferences → chat up someone new (If I can do it, so can you!)

You get the point. Don't. Be. Usual.

After you've experimented and the magical moments follow (and they will), hold on to what you learned. Then rinse and repeat.

I learned I couldn't just sit back and let my writing journey happen to me. I couldn't just hope my work would speak for itself. As uncomfortable as it felt, I had to be, well, a little uncomfortable. And you better believe I'll do it again.

If you're in a rut, why not try being your opposite self? Why not try doing everything "wrong"? It just might be the rightest thing you do. ☀



KIRA BIGWOOD writes children's books, TV commercials, and, much to her 11-year-old's dismay, notes for her kids' lunchboxes. She was once edited out of a My Little Pony ad because she was missing her two front teeth (not that she's still hanging on to that or anything). Luckily, she has all her teeth now, and a much more positive attitude toward the editing process. Kira is a graduate of the University of North Carolina (go Heels!) and lives in Chicago with her husband and three children. Her debut picture book, *Secret, Secret Agent Guy*, illustrated by Celia Krampien, has received starred reviews from *Kirkus* and *School Library Journal*.

Say "hi!" to Kira online:

kirabigwood.com

Twitter: @KBigwood

IG: @kirabigwood



Voices of Change

AM I ENOUGH?

by Ronni Davis

The first time I ever saw anyone in media who looked remotely like me and had a similar-looking life to mine, I was a fully grown adult. It was a McDonald's commercial.

I cried.

I cried because it was the first time (outside of my own family) that I'd seen a very light-skinned girl with a brown-skinned father...And I cried because it reminded me of all the times I didn't feel like I was enough. Seeing a girl who looked like me with a Black father showed me that I was.

That was years ago, but the feelings of not being enough come back over and over again.

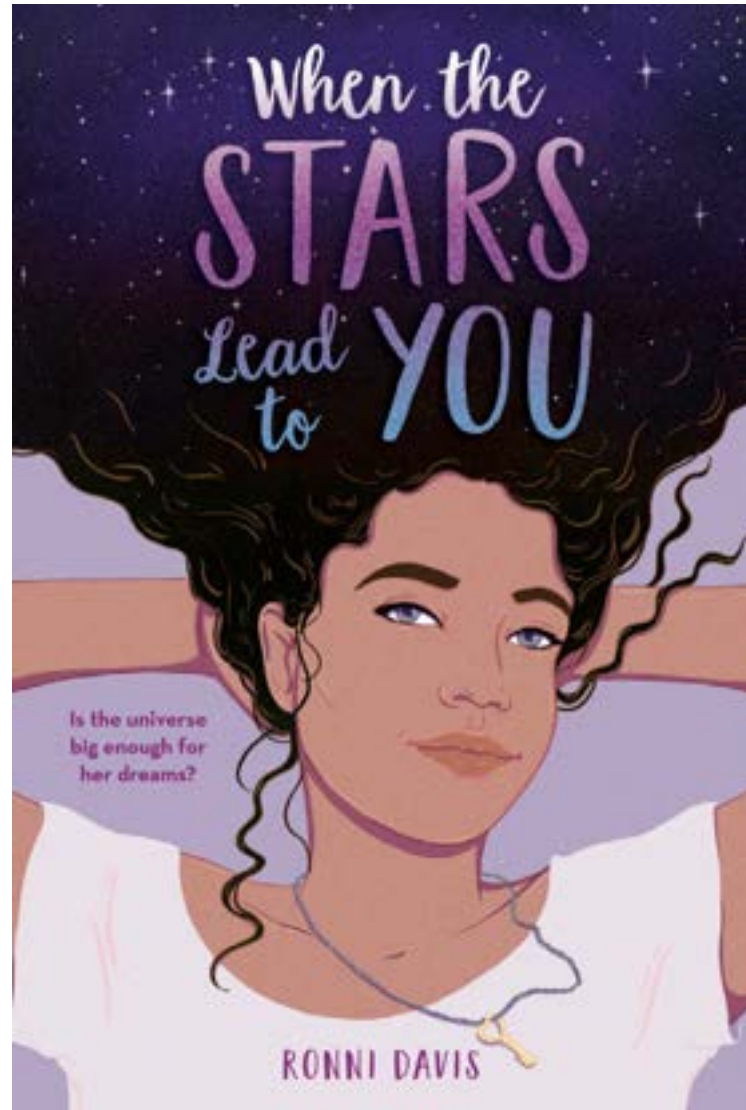
FEELING ENOUGH IN THE PUBLISHING INDUSTRY

Publishing is an interesting industry, and when I question why things are done the way they are, I remind myself that publishing is part of the entertainment industry. And this industry is not meant to coddle me and my feelings. But that doesn't excuse its lack of diversity, and it's no secret that publishing has a lot of work to do in regard to diversity at every level. When I see awards and accolades being given only to books about Black pain while books about Black joy are largely ignored, I feel some type of way. It's as if most of our stories aren't valuable unless they can teach white people a lesson about our lives, or make them feel better about theirs. I don't think those pain stories need to go away, or that they're necessarily painful to all readers. But I'm a huge supporter of joyful books by Black authors about Black kids, because those stories need space, too. More space than they're currently being given.

Back in 2012, I really wanted to write a book like the ones about white teens I've devoured throughout my life. The ones about girls figuring out college. Trying to make it in school. Navigating friendships and parents. Falling in love. But I didn't want to see only white teens experiencing all this. I wanted to see it happening with teens who looked like my friends and I did when we were teens.

But those books were few and far between. Or if they were out, they were not discoverable at all. And in my

opinion, that's because the publishing industry puts most of its publicity and dollars behind stories that they consider "Black enough" to be Black coming-of-age tales. But their definition of what makes a "Black story" seems to differ greatly from what some of us writers think.



FIGURING OUT MY STORY

Because of that, it took me years to figure out what eventually became my debut YA novel, *When the Stars Lead to You*. My main character is a Black/white biracial girl who, although she attends a prestigious private school on



Voices of Change

scholarship, is not poor. She experiences microaggressions and classism, but those things are not the crux of the story. The novel is a coming-of-age story about a girl falling in love, a girl trying to make the right choices for her future, and a girl trying not to lose herself in the midst of it all.

Eventually, I did go on submission with it. And like every author in that position, I wondered if publishers would think my work was enough. I wondered if it was good enough to be published in the first place, and if my work was good enough for the Black and biracial people I wrote it for. And would it be enough for audiences beyond that?

Early interest was very promising, but then the rejections started pouring in. Rejection is a part of this industry. It's just how things roll...but I found myself second guessing quite a few of the rejections or revision requests my project got. I couldn't tell if my book didn't fit their lists due to biases or because it needed so much more work.

More than likely it was both, but how on Earth does one sort that out?

Every single time I got a pass, I asked myself if I should try to revise the story to fit with what editors and publishers are familiar with so that I could get my foot in the door. I asked myself if I could make the book "saleable" without losing its heart. I asked myself what it even *meant* to make it saleable. Because when one doesn't know if it's craft or biases causing editors to reject a project, the questions take on a whole new meaning.

Ultimately, I ended up keeping the true heart of the story, because once editors of color got ahold of my manuscript, they knew where I was coming from and where I wanted to go. And they were the ones who fought for *When the Stars Lead to You*.

And finally, once the book was accepted for publication, I was on my way! Right?
Yeah, no.

I STILL WASN'T ENOUGH

For me, this feeling of maybe not being enough still trickles down to have an effect at all levels. I want my book to be enough to appeal to wide audiences, but I also want it to be enough for Black audiences. Every time a list of recommended books by Black authors comes out and I'm not on it, I wonder if people don't see me or my characters

as Black enough to be on those lists. And every time a *mainstream* list comes out and I'm not on it, I wonder if I am enough to fit there too.

I wonder if I'm Black enough to write about Black girls. If I'm Black enough to even want to work with other Black authors—be on panels with them. Write books with them. Am I Black enough to want to be part of the Black kidlit community? I wonder if it's even okay for me to want to be in the spaces meant for Black authors and Black books.

I wish no writer would ever have to wonder if they're enough, and yet, I see that questioning and second-guessing going on throughout all marginalized communities. Critics attack people because they don't look enough, act enough, aren't *being* enough. Some authors feel as though they have to disclose their sexuality, gender identity, or disability to avoid that kind of critique, and sometimes that disclosure is still not enough.

I don't know how to resolve the question of feeling enough. I suppose it comes from within. I do know two things, though: I can only keep writing, and I can only do what's enough for me. ✨

RONNI DAVIS lives in Chicago with her husband Adam and her son Aidan. By day she copyedits everything from TV commercials to billboards, and by night she writes contemporary teen novels about brown girls falling in love. Her debut novel, *When the Stars Lead to You*, is available now from Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, and the anthology *You Too?*, to which she is a contributor, is available now from Inkyard Press. Her next novel, *This Night Is Ours*, will be published in the summer of 2023 by Poppy/Little, Brown Books For Young Readers.



Shop Around the Corner

THE BOOK TABLE by Malayna Evans

When I moved to Oak Park seven years ago, I knew two things about the community. It was diverse, and it had some great bookstores. So when the nice people at *The Prairie Wind* invited me to contribute a “Shop Around the Corner” article, I jumped at the chance to feature my local indie, The Book Table. Owner Rachel Weaver agreed to chat with me about the store’s history, distinctiveness, and community connections.



Rachel, give me The Book Table backstory. How did it all start?

Eighteen years ago, my husband Jason and I decided to open a bookstore. We’d both worked for a range of independents stores, so we had an idea of what worked and what didn’t. When we went shopping for neighborhoods, Oak Park seemed like the perfect fit. At the time, many questioned the choice—the community already had a Borders, a Barbara’s Bookstore, and the Magic Tree. The Crown Books location in nearby River Forest had gone out of business. But before it did, that location had been their highest grossing store in the country. We believed, in spite of the competition, that the neighborhood could support a new indie. So we committed to a 2700-square-foot space on Lake Street in 2003, which we expanded in 2008, then again in 2018. Now, we’re the one bookstore remaining. We’re happy with our choice.

What accounts for your long success?

After nearly two decades in the community, we have deep roots here. We live nearby. We worked the floor ourselves for the first decade. Back then, we were the quirky store down the street. Then Borders left and we had the opportunity to fill more niches. We stepped up and did

that, which is when we really started to grow. In general, we’ve always tried to be very aware of community and what neighbors are looking for in regards to book sales, but also local politics, organizations, and events. We’ve worked hard to stay connected to schools and community organization so we can give back to community.

What makes The Book Table special?

In addition to our community connections, Jason and I have been in the trenches for a very long time. We have decades of combined experience as book buyers, at the counter, on the floor—basically we’ve done it all. So we have a deep understanding of the industry, as well as a meaningful connection to our community.

The past year or so must have been particularly challenging. How have you adapted? And do you expect any of the changes to stick? (If so, is that good or bad?)

Early in the lockdown, when we weren’t allowed in the store, we had to dropship books. We went from being booksellers to data entry/customer service providers. Fortunately for us, our loyal customers made the job easier. They were incredibly supportive—buying gift cards, ordering books,



Shop Around the Corner

being patient. Eventually we returned to the store (with our staff, who we'd never stopped paying) and offered both shipping and curbside pickup. Gradually, we were allowed to open the doors to customers. We're about back to normal with foot traffic now, but we're still getting more web orders than we had originally, which takes more time per transaction than face-to-face, so we're still adjusting for that because moving forward, it looks like web orders will be a larger part of our business. We're learning how to deal with the balance and we're always ready to take those orders.

Let's talk kids' books. You have a great kids' section. What does The Book Table offer to kids and parents that you think is unique?

We try to offer more than just the Disney, Nickelodeon, obvious bestseller stuff. We try to offer the weird, the interesting, the artsy, and the offbeat. The most important thing we've always tried to do—and it's gotten easier over the years because publishing has shifted—is to offer diversity in our kidlit selection. Oak Park is rich in diversity with many LGBTQ and PIBOC families. And in our community, those families aren't the only buyers of diverse books. Oak Park is full of people who are always trying to

better themselves. So many have answered the call and work to expose their kids to a diverse array of stories and voices. We're happy to enable and celebrate that.

Tell me a bit about your relationships with authors, both traditionally published and indie. What should authors know about The Book Table and how to best work with you?

For events, we sometimes work with local authors who are tied to community, often in conjunction with the library. We take books on consignment. When an author is able to direct customers to us, then we're more likely to work with them by offering more shelf space, more display space. For authors who want to distribute signed copies, we offer that as well.

Anything you're looking forward to? Changes on the horizon and such?

I'm excited to see the world opening up again, seeing people's faces again, and enjoying longer conversations about books with people who are less stressed and more in the world again. ✨



MALAYNA EVANS was raised in the mountains of Utah and spent her childhood climbing, reading sci-fi, and finding trouble. She earned her Ph.D. in ancient Egyptian history from the University of Chicago and has used her education to craft a time-travel series set in ancient Egypt. The first book in that series is *Jagger Jones and the Mummy's Ankh*, published in 2019. Evans lives in Oak Park, Illinois, with her two kids and the world's best rescue dog. She's passionate about coffee, travel, and visiting classrooms to proselytize about ancient Egypt. You can follow her on twitter at <https://twitter.com/Malayna>

Malayna Evans (left) with The Book Table owner, Rachel Weaver.

Inside Story

TURNING POINTS AND TRANSITIONS

by Carol Coven Grannick

Turning points and transitions: I love them. These profoundly meaningful life experiences have fascinated me for decades as a self-reflective human, writer, and psychotherapist. They are wondrous and difficult, joyful and painful, stirring deep and complex emotions about present and past, and [pulling us forward and back](#).

Perhaps we leave *old* in search of *new*, step away from *familiar* to discover and challenge ourselves with *unfamiliar*, or in painful situations leave *loving* and *wonderful* to greet loss and navigate *despair*.

This is my final regular column of “Inside Story”, and it marks a major turning point and transition for me. It has compelled my interest, purpose, and passion for almost two decades, as I’ve shared significant aspects of the internal creative life and supported the creation and maintenance of emotional resilience with this publication’s readers.

But my emotional and cognitive brain has turned me in compelling new directions. These beg for complete devotion and create incredible joy—poetry and picture books, the pleasures of work and love, and the as-yet-unknown delights of discovering, as J.R.R. Tolkien wrote, “what to do with the time that is given us.”

In the many columns and articles I’ve written for *The Prairie Wind* and various blogs, I focused on the importance of emotional resilience because I believe it is an essential and foundational tool in our creative toolbox. I look forward to having time to continue speaking about and teaching the actionable skills that lead to and flow from emotional resilience. I wouldn’t have a creative life without them.

I continue to challenge my brain’s ability to create new [neural pathways](#) as I take this pleasurable turn in my journey, exploring the mitigation of stressors on brain and well-being.

My columns have been personal. I’ve told the truth about what I’ve experienced and how I felt. I believed that if I was open and honest there would be some who could relate to my experiences, and feel support and even clarity about their own. I love the growing number of online perspectives from creatives who openly share the deeper emotional and psychological realities of a creative life.

I believe that if we choose to, we can experience ongoing change and growth. If we are lucky, we have the chance to grow old. That opportunity offers discoveries and doors in heart and mind that were unknown or unfamiliar in

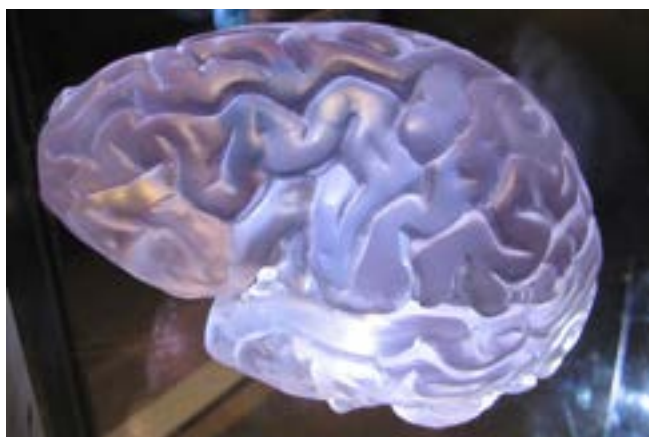


Inside Story



childhood or younger adulthood. I love the things that light my brain up with positive emotions—writing for the very young, service to others, music, and joyful, wonder-inspiring, surprising events. And I love the tapestry of being human, facing pain and loss with the knowledge that I can survive and heal, with other journeying humans I support who will also support me.

I'm grateful for being given the opportunity to write for *The Prairie Wind* all these years, and hope I have done something worthwhile. And I'm most grateful for being part of the extraordinary community that is SCBWI-Illinois and the rich and supportive writing life our community encourages and supports. I hope my columns and articles will stand as a celebration of the resilience of the human spirit, heart, and mind as we move forward on our creative life journeys. ☀



I love this life that feels ever-growing, ever-blooming, embedded with the navigation of twists and turns, ups and downs of our human journey. Knowing that life can turn on a dime, I treasure the productive days I have right now.



Painting by Carol Coven Grannick, for a class she once took with [Laura Nyman Montenegro](#)



CAROL COVEN GRANNICK is a poet, author, and speaker about emotional resilience and body diversity. Her MG novel, *Reeni's Turn*, is the story of a shy, introverted tween's search for courage, body acceptance, and her own strong voice. Carol's adult poetry and children's poetry and fiction appear in an array of children's magazines and literary journals. She is represented by Joyce Sweeney at The Seymour Agency.

Illustrator's Tips



PROCREATE AND THE ONLINE RESOURCES YOU SHOULD CHECK OUT!

by Brooke O'Neill

When Amy, Pamela, and I were brainstorming article ideas for future issues of *The Prairie Wind*, I suggested someone write an article about online art resources. Little did I know they would ask me to write it! Not considering myself a writer I was obviously nervous, but I'm so excited to tell you about some amazing online resources I've found over the past few years.

It all started in 2018, when the camera inside my iPhone cracked. I headed to my local Apple Store to get it fixed. When I arrived, a presentation on Procreate was happening. This presentation changed everything for me. (If you don't know what Procreate is, it's a drawing app for your iPad that is very similar to Photoshop. If you are familiar with the Adobe Suite programs, you should have no problem jumping right in! I should also mention that my four-year-old and eight-year-old are pros at Procreate now. So if they can learn it, so can you!) Check it out [here](#)!

For months I had scrolled through Instagram looking at other artists' work and wondering how they made such amazing digital art. Was it Photoshop? Illustrator? Being a graphic designer, I had these programs but couldn't figure out how they could create *art like that* with Adobe software. Finally, the answer was right in front of me. I knew I had to have Procreate, but first, I needed an iPad...

I was obsessed. It's all I could think about and I was desperately trying to figure out how I could afford an iPad Pro and iPencil. Luckily, my birthday was around the corner and my parents *generously* bought them for me! So I downloaded Procreate for a mere \$9.99 and the love affair began!

So here I am, four years later and still loving Procreate. I've found some great resources over the years that I think every artist should know about. They have truly changed my life and the way I create art and see myself as an artist!

Below you'll see art I created using Procreate. If you are interested in taking any of the courses mentioned, please know that the instructors encourage you to use traditional art as well. The courses are equally useful if you only use traditional media.

BARDOT BRUSH \$

Website: bardotbrush.com

Instagram: [@bardotbrush](https://www.instagram.com/bardotbrush)

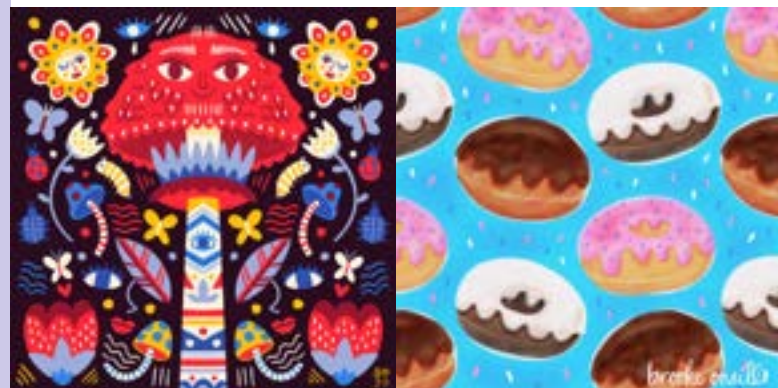
Facebook: [Making Art Everyday // Bardot Brush](#)

Run by California natives Lisa and Geoffrey Bardot, this husband and wife team has you covered on all things Procreate and more! Lisa is an artist and creator of all the digital brush sets, whereas Geoffrey helps on the technical side of things.

Lisa's [digital brush sets](#) are fantastic (I own several of them)! My personal favorites are the Gouache Paintbox and Pencil Box sets. There are a few available for free—YES, FREE—to download. Other sets can run anywhere from \$5 to \$25, or splurge on the Master Bundle for \$88. They always have sales too, so be sure to follow them on social media and sign up for their newsletter to stay in the know.

Don't pass on the Bardots' "[Making Art Everyday](#)" challenge either. If you are looking to kick that "artist's block" to the curb, go ahead and check out these daily prompts. There is even a Facebook group where artists post their "Making Art Everyday" artwork.

And finally, [Procreate tutorials](#)! No need to sign up for Skillshare when you have these amazing free—YES, AGAIN FREE—Procreate tutorials right here.



Prompts from Bardot Brush might include mushrooms, and donuts.



Illustrator's Tips



VICTORIA JOHNSON \$\$

Website: victoriajohnsoncreateexplore.com

Instagram: [@victoriajohnson_createexplore](https://www.instagram.com/victoriajohnson_createexplore)

Facebook: [Victoria Johnson Design](https://www.facebook.com/VictoriaJohnsonDesign)

Soon after I got my iPad Pro and Procreate, I came across Victoria's classes. Victoria is an artist and educator who's worked with big names like Ralph Lauren, DKNY, Calvin Klein, and Gap. Her classes promise to help artists develop skills and confidence to create commercial artwork—and they do just that. There is a wealth of information and beautiful color palettes provided in each class, along with a private Facebook group to join. These classes are live, so be sure to sign up for her newsletter to know when they become available!



*My art from Victoria Johnson's classes
"Create Christmas" and "Explore Florals."*



Illustrator's Tips

MAKE ART THAT SELLS \$\$\$

website: makeartthatsells.com

Instagram: [@makeartthatsells](https://www.instagram.com/makeartthatsells)

Facebook: [Make Art That Sells](https://www.facebook.com/makeartthatsells)

Want to learn how to market yourself? Need inspiration? Want to find a caring and uplifting artist community? Want to get your artwork in front of an agent? Make Art That Sells is for you! Run by Lilla Rogers (an illustrator, author, and entrepreneurial superstar), [these courses](#) will inspire and delight you no end. Seriously, I can't get enough of them!

Lilla Rogers has been in the art industry for almost four decades. Once a full-time, successful illustrator, she now runs Lilla Rogers Studio and represents over three dozen artists. Sometimes she even decides to represent an artist that she finds through her courses!

With numerous live and self-paced courses to pick from, it will be hard to choose what to do first! If you are looking for the most bang for your buck, I suggest joining the

live course called "Assignment Bootcamp," where you'll get four months of assignments and wonderful work for your portfolio! Another favorite was the self-paced course "Portfolio Review," which helped me immensely with my website. If you want to go for it all, check out Lilla's "My Year of Art School." Be sure to sign up for her newsletters to catch those amazing sales, especially around Black Friday and early springtime.

With the live courses, Lilla and her team will often host a Zoom, where you can interact with her in real time and ask questions. Sometimes she even brings a student up for a "pop in" and gives away fabulous prizes (sometimes even a free course)! Each course has a unique Facebook group to join, and let me tell you, the MATS community is one of the most supportive and kind artist communities I've come across. I've made so many friends and connections through MATS.

Lilla's wisdom, kindness, and the wealth of information she gives throughout the courses have really changed my life and the way I see myself as an artist. Even though each course has its price, I find them priceless!



Illustrator's Tips

HONORABLE MENTIONS:

[SKTCHY APP](#)

Never-ending portraits to reference and get some practice in!

[CHARLY CLEMENTS ON SKILLSHARE](#)

Great for learning how to draw face, figures, and making color palettes!

[INSTAGRAM](#)

Be sure to follow hashtags like “drawthisinyourstyle” and the account [@roomportraitclub](#) if you are looking for inspiration!

Again, you don't have to have Procreate to join in on the fun! I came across all of this after I begin using Procreate, so it's been a big part of my digital artistic journey. Traditional media is often used in these courses as well, so get out there and have some fun creating art! 🌟

BROOKE O'NEILL is an illustrator and graphic designer living in the southwest suburbs of Chicago with her husband, two kids, and dog named Donut. She's illustrated several children's books for aspiring authors, including *The Surprisingly Exciting Adventure Series*; *Cock-a-Doodle Sue*; and *Woofs of Wisdom*, and she is the graphic designer for this publication! Brooke is currently represented by [Astound US Illustration Agency](#). You can find her on Instagram [@brookeoneill.illustration](#) and view her website at [www.brookeoneilldesign.com](#).

My art from Make Art That Sells classes: icons and a journal from “Assignment Bootcamp”; a sketch from “Editorial Live”; and a children's book spread from “Illustrating Children's Books.”



Writer's Tips

BALANCING TEXT AND ART IN PICTURE BOOKS

by *Urania Smith*

This topic of balancing text and art in picture books has been touched on a million and one times, so it feels only right that I should speak on it for the one-millionth-and-second time. Why do I feel the need to add my voice to such an over-explored conference topic? Because although many writers know they must balance text with art, they may not know how to do it in practice. And if a picture book writer doesn't understand this concept, they don't fully understand picture books.

Several years ago, I attended a conference workshop with multiple award-winning kids' book author and illustrator Dan Santat. Of course the topic was balancing text with art, which should be a mandatory topic at all conferences. During his talk, Dan said something that stuck with me. He said picture books are art with a sprinkle of words. I think some writers may be annoyed to hear that their precious words should be sprinkled in instead of poured, but he was right. Writers not understanding how to balance text and art is probably the most common thing I give feedback on when I freelance edit.

As a writer of picture books, I like to think that kids will fall in love with my words, but I realize a picture book text is like a Chicago-style hotdog without the hot dog, pickles, relish, tomatoes, and onions—a variety of toppings. If our words are not the actual hotdog and toppings, then what are they? Picture book words are buns, which means that picture book writers are bun-makers. The bun is a very important part of the hotdog. The bun gives it structure, and it's shaped like a hotdog so it signals what type of meat goes in between it. But no one wants an empty bun even if it's fresh and delicious and you've spent years perfecting your recipe. When someone orders a hot dog, they want a hot dog in the bun. Just like if a child picks up a picture book, they want to see pictures along with your words. A good portion of your readers are not reading yet, so it's all about the pictures for them. Whether we like it or not, writers are not the main event, even if we've created the concept, toiled over three hundred words for three hundred years, and our name goes first on the cover of a book. A picture book is a true collaboration. Half of the story is told with images. Sometimes more. The more you write with this

understanding in mind, the more you learn to choose words that lend themselves to illustrations.

EXPERIENCE A PICTURE BOOK WITHOUT READING THE WORDS

Sometimes, when I first read a new picture book, I try to ignore the words as I flip through the book. I do this for two purposes. First, I can experience the story as a child who doesn't read. Secondly, when I go back and read, I'm given a sense of the value and meaning the text adds to the story. I've realized that most of the time I can get the gist of the story just by flipping through the pages. This doesn't mean the words are not important. But I'm able to gain a better understanding of their role in a story. Through this process, I've realized that in many picture books the text serves to provide context—to ground the story in time and place. It gives us the who and the what of the story and connects us to its theme. While the illustrations aid in this, they primarily serve to tell the “what's happening now” part of the story. They show action and allow us to “see” the character's journey.

TYPE OUT THE PICTURE BOOK TEXT

I credit Illinois author/teacher Carmela Martina with giving me this helpful tip early on in my writing. Yes, this can be cumbersome. Using voice recognition can help in the process. But taking the time to type out some of your favorite picture books or mentor texts gives you the opportunity to study the author's words without the addition of illustrations. In some picture book texts, you may realize that you don't fully understand what's going on without the pictures. Some books may have text that does not match the pictures at all. I have found this exercise helpful in studying picture books that do a good job balancing text and art.

THINK VISUALLY AND DRAW OUT YOUR SCENES

If you're attempting to think visually, add visuals to your writing. My little stick figures will not win me a Caldecott or even a kindergarten drawing contest, but it allows me to think visually and imagine illustration possibilities. I'm



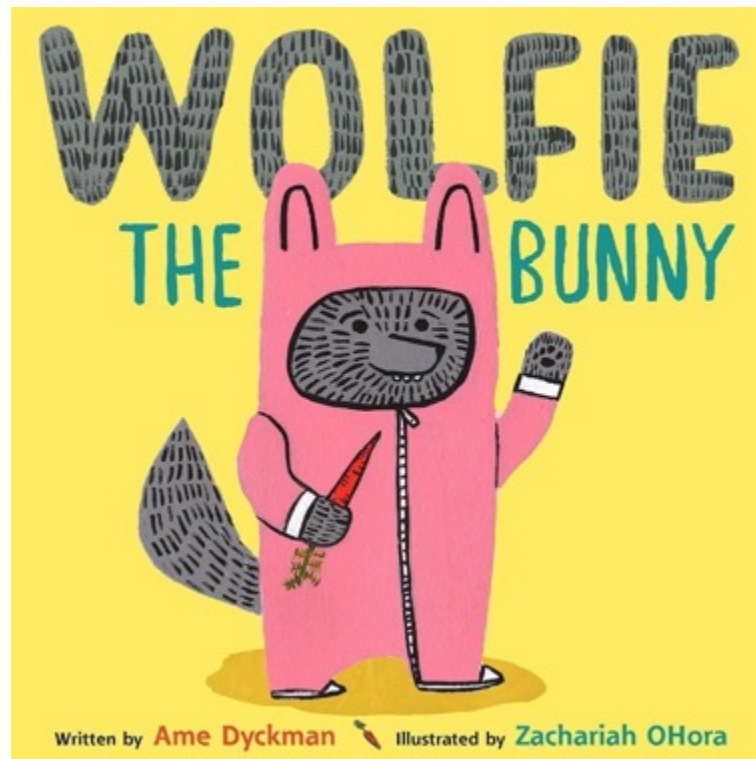
Writer's Tips

always thinking of how I can get out of the illustrator's way. What words can I choose that will allow an illustrator the freedom to take each scene to another level? As a bun-maker, I don't want a hotdog with mystery meat and ketchup added to my bun! I want it all beef, Vienna-style with the right toppings. Although I don't have control of the final product, a good bun will complement the hotdog. Provide a good base so the hot dog shines and your final product will be delicious.



USE ILLUSTRATIONS FOR COMEDIC TIMING

When we talk about “show, don't tell” in writing this also applies to visuals in a picture book. I recall picture book author Mac Barnett saying, “Let the illustrator tell the joke.” As a part-time children's comedian/humor writer I am always consciously thinking of this as I write. In Ame Dyckman's *Wolfie the Bunny*, there is a scene where her main character is lying next to her wolf brother (“Wolfie”) with her eyes wide open. The only words on the page are “Wolfie slept through the night. Dot did not.” Dyckman doesn't say in the text that Dot is lying there with her eyes wide open, afraid of Wolfie. This joke would be a little less funny if she had chosen to say it explicitly in the text.



DON'T BE AFRAID OF ART NOTES

Before I'm dragged into the corner and given a beat-down by an editor who has just given a room full of conference attendees contrary advice, I should rephrase this to say *Don't be afraid to use appropriate art notes when absolutely necessary*. Years ago, the most common feedback I'd receive during a picture book critique was that I needed an art note. This feedback came from editors, agents, and critique group members. And this was at a time when art notes were being treated like the plague. Here I was trying to be the next Mo Willems and nobody could understand my text because in order to be understood, it needed accompanying images. Although using art notes is more acceptable now, editors don't like to see you overuse and misuse them. Also, illustrators may not like feeling confined by your notes. When I write art notes their purpose is solely for understanding the text. I also tend to include a lot of humor in my notes, but they are always important for understanding the progression of the story. I feel my art notes are more like suggestions. If an illustrator can imagine something in a better way, I want them to go there.



Writer's Tips

STUDY BOOKS BY AUTHOR-ILLUSTRATORS

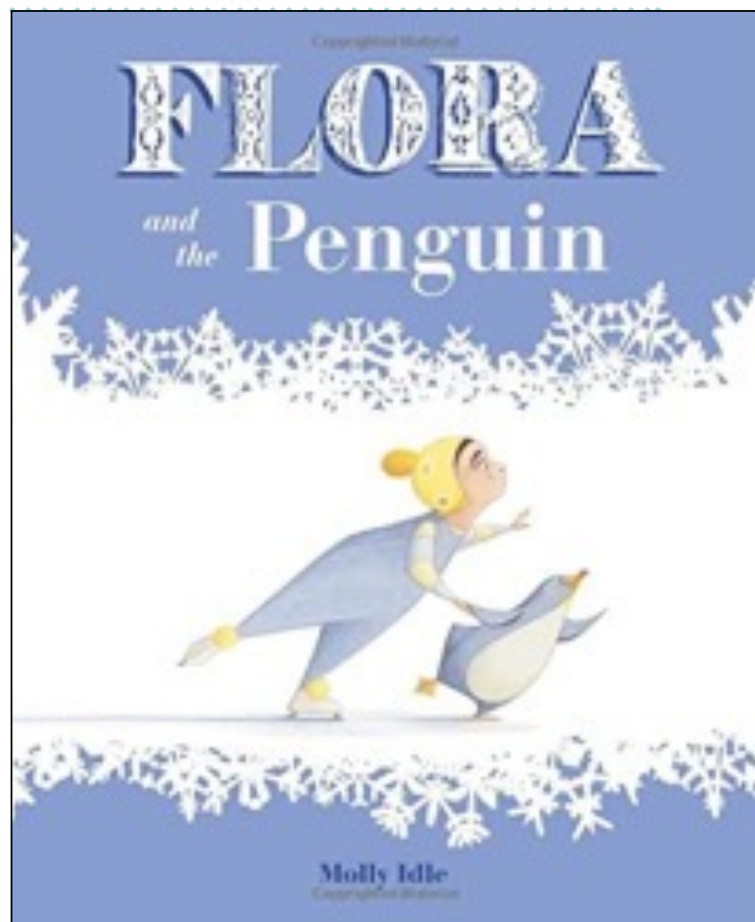
If you haven't figured it out yet, author-illustrators have an advantage when it comes to balancing art. Traditionally, they have had more liberty to write books that depend heavily on illustrations. So pay attention to the part of the storyline that is told through text versus what's told through illustrations. Compare the way author-illustrators balance text and art versus books in which the author is not also the illustrator. My theory here is that most author-illustrators were illustrators first and are used to telling a story in art and don't feel a need to overcompensate with the text.

VISUALIZE ACTIONS AND PAGE TURNS

Think of your words in terms of how they move the images on the page and how they can prompt a change in the images with each page turn. If your characters are having long conversations without any action, your words don't allow for the creation of images that can move on the page. Or, do you have long scenes in which your characters are thinking but nothing is really going on? Then you are not creating words that can be illustrated. This happens when a writer forgets about the illustrator. They straight-up forget they are telling only part of the story. This is the bun-maker who would make you a really big bun and put only an itty-bitty hotdog in the middle. Your words should move the pictures—inspire images, in other words—but also, ideally, cue when it's time for the next image or page turn.

ATTEND WORKSHOPS FOR ILLUSTRATORS

I started doing something recently at conferences that I wish I'd done a long, long time ago. I started crashing illustrator sessions. Well...technically, I signed up for these sessions, but I do feel like a rebel when I attend one. Maybe other writers do this as well, and I am not as groundbreaking as I'd like to think I am. The first illustrator session I took was at the annual national SCBWI conference in L.A. taught by Mollie Idle. The workshop was helpful in allowing me to understand how illustrators could create movement on the page. Idle's *Flora* series of wordless books is a testament to how powerful visual storytelling can be. Studying wordless picture books is a great way for you to examine the illustrator's role as a storyteller without the presence of



text. Try writing text for a picture book that you envision as wordless. Ask yourself, *Did my words add anything to the story?*

RESPECT THE COLLABORATION

Once you hand over your text to be illustrated, it's out of your hands. But you should be thinking of that moment as you write. Leave room in your story for the second creator to add their own ideas. Create moments that someone would love to illustrate. Use the minimal amount of words possible to tell the story. If you go into writing a story with the mindset that it will eventually be y'all's book instead of your book, you will perfect your bun-making. And who doesn't love a perfect bun with a perfect hot dog? 🌻

URANIA SMITH is an SCBWI-IL Diversity Committee member, co-founder of KidLit Nation, and winner of the 2017 We Need Diverse Books Mentorship in the picture book category. She lives in Chicago's south suburbs with her family.

Writer's Bookshelf



A FINGER POINTING AT THE MOON — THREE BOOKS THAT HAVE CHANGED MY WRITING

Reviewed by Amy Alznauer

When I was in my early twenties I spent a summer in Oxford, England, visiting my sister. Aside from long country walks to various inns, what I remember most about that summer is dutifully trekking every morning to the public library to work on fiction exercises from the book *What if?*

Everything came out dull and forced and even in the solitude of my little cubicle I felt ashamed by my failures. I remember in particular trying to describe a scene in which a woman sat at a table with a coffee mug. I didn't know or care about the woman, or the mug, or the table, and had no idea why any of it was there or why it mattered. It never once occurred to me that I might be that woman and that my true material was right there, within and about me. Words felt like bricks, blunt and boring, and I lugged around, trying to keep faith that in the lugging some sort of magic would happen. It didn't.

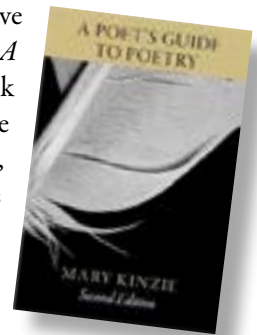
Recently, when I read Laura Montenegro's [beautiful Q & A](#) (published in this issue!), I thought back to that miserable summer. "The drawings come first," Laura says, "and the words follow." She calls the very first drawing she makes for a project the gestational image and describes it as "the spark and springboard from which all my other images will take their cue." That's exactly what I hadn't yet learned as I sat in my cubicle. I now know that before anything coherent can emerge, I must have a story kernel in mind, something originating from that deep interior well, an image or question or metaphor that feels both fundamental and full of unexplored meaning. And, conversely, if I don't lay hold of this kernel, any attempt will come out forced and be likely to fail.

That's why traditional craft advice is such a difficult place to start—it doesn't get to the heart of the matter. It's like Flannery O'Connor once said, "Discussing story-writing in terms of plot, character, and theme is like trying to describe the expression on a face by saying where the eyes, nose, and mouth are." You must begin with a vision of the whole face, the gestational image, before any of that brass tacks advice can matter.

And yet when I'm confronted with the blank page I yearn, like all of us do, for advice. So I've been collecting books that offer wisdom of a more organic nature, that act themselves more like gestational images, informing the whole process of writing, rather than just aspects or details. I thought I'd talk about three books that I've found particularly compelling—one old, one fairly recent, and one hot off the presses—and isolate one gestational tidbit from each.

READ AS IF YOU ARE WRITING

No book has been more transformative for my writing than Mary Kinzie's *A Poet's Guide to Poetry*. It's an odd book to recommend, a bit of a tome and quite technical, but the exercises at the back, which mimic those she uses in her famous poetry workshops, are worth the whole book. From these exercises I learned two essential things. First, that if you imitate another writer's style but apply it to your own material, something all your own will emerge. Second, that form is inescapable and so not to be resisted, that we are always writing within fairly heavy constraints (the demands of history, fact, time, personality, page count, genre, etc.), and it's precisely these constraints that make it possible to create.



But the tidbit that has really stuck with me over time is her general approach. "To become better acquainted with poetry [and the act of writing it] you must read poems as if you were writing them," she says. I have always known that reading acts for me as the very best writing advice. But here Kinzie nails the reason why: "The reader follows, via the poem as a ghostly map, the many paths that were not taken by the author. Eventually the writer and reader see their present way more clearly than the paths not taken."

When we read as writers, we sidle up close to the author of the text, imagining that provisional state as the author sits before a blank page and contemplates the near future. This is both consoling (someone has braved this before me) and instructive (ah, this is how she went forward, how

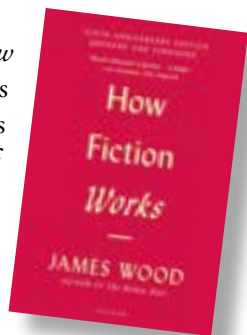


Writer's Bookself

might I?). So now when I read and especially when I read in preparation to write, I intentionally try to imagine my way into (or behind) the story and experience it as if it's just being told. And when I write, I try to imagine myself as that reader who is charting the course with me.

SHARE LANGUAGE WITH YOUR CHARACTERS

Next, there's James Wood's *How Fiction Works*. He posits his book as one that will ask a critic's questions but offer a writer's answers, and all of these answers will collapse into what he calls "the real," which he says is at "the bottom of his inquiries." So right off the bat, with this talk of something underlying everything, I'm thinking he too cares about the whole face. And his book reads that way, as an attempt to reveal the heart of fiction.



For me the heart of Wood's book is his description of what he terms *free indirect style* (which has also been loosely called third person attached or close third person). "As soon as someone tells a story about a character," he says, "narrative seems to want to bend itself around that character, wants to merge with that character, to take on his or her way of thinking and speaking." He beautifully calls this merging "a secret sharing" and imagines the author, "in a rush of sympathy," handing words to her character. He goes through example after example, even one from Robert McCloskey's *Make Way for Ducklings*, showing how this works in practice. By the use of free indirect style McCloskey allows us to inhabit Mr. Mallard's confusion upon seeing the enormous, floating swan while not being confused ourselves. Now when I write (or read) I'm always thinking about how I might make language hover more effectively between my character and me so that I both suffuse the narrative with my character's being but also bring in my own observations without breaking the mood.

MAKE YOUR WAY LINE BY LINE

Finally, I'm currently reading a book that is sure to find its place at the top of my list, *A Swim in a Pond in the Rain* by George Saunders, subtitled: "In which four Russians give a master class on writing, reading, and life." It is both anthology (containing the full text of seven Russian short stories) and workshop, written conversationally as if you are sitting with Saunders himself in his Syracuse classroom. Borrowing from Buddhism, which describes teaching as "a



finger pointing at the moon," Saunders says any advice he offers is merely a finger pointing at the essential, moon-like thing, the story. And with this, once again, we have the idea of aiming at a vision of the whole face.

It's not surprising then that Saunders says he's never found terms like "plot" or "character development" or "theme" very helpful. He calls them placeholders and says that one should try to find "a more useful [or I might say organic] way to think about whatever they are placeholder for." For example, he says we might think of structure simply as "an organizational scheme that allows the story to answer a question it has caused its reader to ask."

But here's my favorite gestational tidbit so far (I'm only halfway through!). Early in his career Saunders was working with Bill Buford, a fiction editor at *The New Yorker*. In a fit of insecurity Saunders probed, "But what do you *like* about the story?" And Buford replied, "Well, I read a line. And I like it...enough to read the next."

Saunders says that he's taken great comfort in this idea over the years. "I don't need a big theory about fiction to write it," he says. "I don't have to worry about anything but: Would a reasonable person, reading line four, get enough of a jolt to go onto to line five?" Of course the rest of his book discusses what he calls the million-dollar question: "What makes a reader keep reading?" But still, that simple idea on its own, proceeding line by line (that is, if you already have that first, gestational image hanging on your mental wall), really does contain a whole theory of writing. ✨

AMY ALZNAUER, a recipient of the Annie Dillard Award for Creative Nonfiction and the Christopher Award, is the author of *The Boy Who Dreamed of Infinity* (illustrated by Daniel Miyares), a Booklist Top 10 Biography for Youth; *The Strange Birds of Flannery O'Connor* (illustrated by Ping Zhu), named by the New York Times as one of the Best 25 Children's Books of 2020; and *Flying Paintings*, illustrated by the modern art duo the Zhou Brothers. Amy also teaches mathematics at Northwestern University. Find Amy at www.amyalz.com.

Mentor Texts

TOOLS IN THE SANDBOX: THE STRUCTURE OF A PICTURE BOOK BIOGRAPHY *by Jeannette Lee*

Have you heard Shannon Hale’s description of her writing process? “I’m writing a first draft and reminding myself that I’m simply shoveling sand into a box so that later I can build castles.”

With a few picture book biography manuscripts under my belt, this analogy resonates with me. My writing process follows a predictable pattern. I adore the research phase. I joyfully jot down notes on 3x5 cards, as if back in school working on a term paper. Then, sitting in front of a blank page on my computer screen, I attempt to make sense of these facts and quotes I’ve accumulated. The result: a first draft that reads like the term paper I felt like I was researching. This is the sand in my box. Unformed. Definitely not a castle. Now is when the self-doubt creeps in. Who do I think I am to write this book?

After the wallowing period is over, I think back on that sand castle analogy. Okay, I’ve got the sand in the box. Facts, quotes, timeline—they’re all there. Now, it’s time to form those grains of sand into something beautiful. A theme, a storyline, a structure—these are the buckets and shovels I need to build my castle.

While sorting through stacks of picture book biographies I’ve borrowed from the library, I’ve noticed some books that really stand out—not necessarily because of the subject matter, but because of the creative way each author transformed the sand into something unique. Not just any ordinary upside-down-bucket shaped sandcastle, but an intricate sand sculpture with curves and curlicues and character.

Here are a few of the picture book biographies I think are true sculptural masterpieces.

BEFORE SHE WAS HARRIET

by Lesa Cline-Ransome, illustrated by James E. Ransome



When I think “biography,” I think of the standard structure: someone is born, they grow up and do interesting stuff, then they die. But Lesa Cline-Ransome inverts this structure by starting with the end of Harriet Tubman’s life and going backward in time through the obstacles and accomplishments that made up her extraordinary life. It’s a beautiful way to illustrate her path to freedom.

FIGHT OF THE CENTURY: ALICE PAUL BATTLES WOODROW WILSON FOR THE VOTE

by Barb Rosenstock, illustrated by Sarah Green

This was the book that started me thinking about the structure of picture book biographies, and I love its incredibly playful and creative structure! Barb Rosenstock uses a boxing match to tell the story of how Alice Paul and Woodrow Wilson disagreed over voting rights for women, until Wilson finally



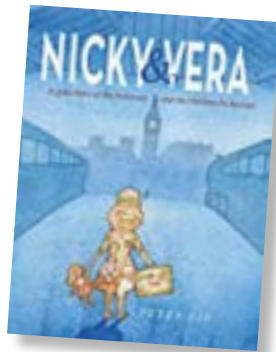
relented and the 19th Amendment was born. Four “rounds” of scenes illustrate the various methods the suffragists used to get Wilson’s attention. Alice Paul is introduced as “The Challenger” while Wilson is “The Champion.” There are supporters for each opponent, with headers of “In Woodrow’s Corner” and “In Alice’s Corner.” Barb, a multiple award-winning SCBWI-IL member, uses playful language and boxing metaphors throughout, but without being so heavy-handed that it takes away from the story.



Mentor Texts

NICKY & VERA: A QUIET HERO OF THE HOLOCAUST AND THE CHILDREN HE RESCUED *by Peter Sis*

A story that switches between two different lives could be difficult to follow. But this expertly written and illustrated book is easy to understand. Scenes—first from Nicky’s life, then Vera’s—show how Nicky was instrumental in Vera’s escape from Czechoslovakia, and how they eventually met for the first time late in life. The use of illustrated maps and colors help highlight which character’s story is depicted on each spread. This is a powerful story, made even more so by utilizing both Nicky’s and Vera’s perspectives.



words per page, *Yusra Swims* shows the obstacles Yusra, a young but very courageous girl, faces when fleeing war-torn Syria. Once she arrives safely in Berlin, a simple spread offers these words: “Strangers stare,/Looks accuse./Sudden kindness,/Given shoes.” It only takes eight words to evoke so many emotional obstacles in this story. A short “About Yusra Mardini” section in the back matter fills in details of her story. The facts of the story are distilled to their essence. I imagine Julie Abery must have used incredible restraint. It’s likely she could have included so many more heartbreaking details, but they wouldn’t have added any more emotional power to this already wonderful story.

KAFKA AND THE DOLL

by Larissa Theule, illustrated by Rebecca Green



This book isn’t actually a biography, but rather historical fiction. Based on a real-life encounter Franz Kafka had with a young girl, the story is told through fictional conversation and letters recounting their relationship. The book reads like a slice-of-life biography, focusing on one short vignette

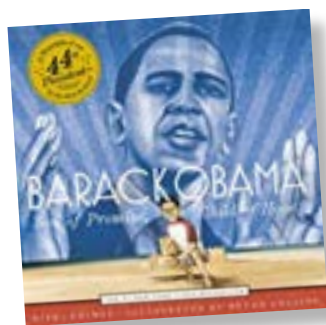
from Kafka’s life. There are two sections of back matter. The first explains what the actual facts are versus the embellishments the author added in the process of creating her work. The second is a short biography of Franz Kafka. This book displays an interesting approach to a real-life event by applying creative license to make the story come alive. 🌟

BARACK OBAMA: SON OF PROMISE, CHILD OF HOPE

by Nikki Grimes, illustrated by Bryan Collier

On the first page, a fictional boy named David watches Barack Obama on TV with his mom. Each following page illustrates the story

of Barack Obama’s life, with just a sliver of copy showing the conversation between David and his mom as he learns about Obama. The biography is about Barack Obama—about the effect he wants to have on people and the hope he has for the future. Meanwhile, we see David compare his life with Obama’s. In the end, David’s announcement of his desire to someday be president illustrates Obama’s effect on this one boy, and exemplifies how Obama’s hope for the future is realized in him.



YUSRA SWIMS

by Julie Abery, illustrated by Sally Deng

It is truly amazing how this author manages to tell such a vivid story with such spare language. Written in rhyming verse and averaging only eight



JEANNETTE LEE is an aspiring children’s book author. She is currently querying a picture book biography and writing a middle grade historical fiction chapter book. She especially loves researching and learning about fascinating historical women who weren’t in her history books in school. You can reach Jeannette on Twitter at @jnetalee.

Springfield Area Network

by Debra Daugherty

A BIT OF HISTORY ABOUT THE NETWORK

Almost twenty years ago, Kimberly Hutmacher joined SCBWI and searched for a network. The nearest Central Illinois network at that time was midway between Decatur and Champaign, an hour's drive away. She emailed Esther Hershenhorn, the SCBWI state rep, and they made arrangements to speak by phone.

Kim recalls that time. "I remember being so nervous. Esther was like a rock star to me. She represented what I hoped to do someday."

Esther encouraged Kim to move forward with her plan to start an SCBWI network in Springfield. In September 2002, Kim and her co-rep, Christina Mandelski, held a meeting at the west branch of the Lincoln Library in Springfield. Kim shared her hope that, as members of SCBWI, with its beneficial information and opportunities, the 20 attendees would grow as writers. The Springfield Area Network was born!

The first official meeting for this new network took place on October 12, 2002, at the Illinois State Museum. The program featured guest speaker Alice McGinty, who gave a presentation on "The Submissions Process."

In 2006, Kim passed the reins to her co-rep at that time, Toni Leahy. Following Toni, Cynda Strong took over as network representative with meetings being held at the Springfield Barnes and Noble. Our network meeting locations changed several times after that, from a restaurant to a church and then finally settling at the Chatham Library, a ten-minute drive from Springfield. Cynda recalls guest speakers Esther Hershenhorn and Alice McGinty, now our Regional Advisor Emeritas. Other featured guest speakers included author Andrea Beatty and literary agent Jodell Sadler, who gave their presentations via the internet before there was Zoom.



Cynda says, "Our members have always covered a broad spectrum of writing. They write not just for children, but also adult novels, grants, and plays, and some are visual artists as well."

In 2017, Cynda passed the baton to me, and I became the rep for the Springfield Area Network, now known as the Scribes.

The members of the Springfield Network amaze and astound me with their writing, their illustrations, and their presentations. We are a critique group, and everyone's input is spot-on. Their comments and suggestions have made me a better writer.

According to Kim Hutmacher, two of our Scribes—Louann Brown and her daughter Juli Caveny—have been around since the beginning. Kim remembers them attending the first meeting. So when the Springfield Scribes celebrate their twentieth anniversary in the fall of 2022, it will also be a celebration of all the years Louann and Juli have dedicated to SCBWI and the Illinois networks. (Besides being members of the Scribes, Louann is co-rep along with Jerry Barrett, also a Scribes member, for the Downstate Illustrators' Network, and Juli is co-rep for the Edwardsville Network in Southern Illinois.)

A BIT OF HISTORY ABOUT ME

In 2010, I attended a Scribes meeting at the Pasta House in Springfield. I don't remember the guest speaker, but I



Springfield Area Network

do remember meeting Cynda, Louann, and Juli. Although I was greatly impressed by the group, I didn't join SCBWI, or the Scribes, at that time.

In April 2012, while having tea in Grassmere, England, with two ladies in my tour group, Ilana Ostrar and her friend Sarah Schoon, I mentioned that I wrote children's stories. Ilana, a writer and illustrator, encouraged me to join SCBWI. She is now a co-rep of the North Suburban Network.

I took Ilana's advice and joined SCBWI in May of that year, and in June attended my first conference, SCBWI-IL's annual Words in the Woods. My critique partners, AKA the Wood Nymphs, were Jenny Wagh, our co-regional advisor as well as rep for the Dundee Area Network; Anny

Rusk, co-rep of the North Suburban Network; Jeri Baird, who has gone on to write and publish three novels; and Meg Fleming, now the author of several children's picture books. At that time, we were all striving to find our niche in the writing community. I consider myself lucky to have been paired with these amazing authors, especially since I had never given or received a critique. Their input started me on my path to publication.

While at Words in the Woods, I reconnected with Cynda Strong. She invited me to attend her group's monthly meetings, and I've been a member of the Springfield Scribes ever since.

Five years later, when Cynda invited me to take over as representative. I hesitated. Follow Cynda as group leader?

The Springfield Scribes: Cynda Strong, Pam Miller, Debra Daugherty, Jerry Barrett, Juli Caveny, Jean Ferratier, Louann Brown. (2016)



Springfield Area Network

She has done such a great job. How could I take her place? But she had faith in me, so I accepted.

During my time as rep, our group has been fortunate to have had many awesome guest speakers, including authors Jennifer Ward, Lori Degman, and Michelle Schaub. I'm so glad we were able to share Lori and Michelle's presentations with everyone, thanks to Zoom.

Other presentations that stand out included an amazing talk on the elusive topic of voice by Jessica Rubinkowski, who lives in Chatham, where the Scribes meet each month. At that time, June 2017, Jessica was seeking a publisher for her YA series. *The Bright and the Pale* debuted during the pandemic, and book two in the series, *Wrath & Mercy*, is scheduled for release in March 2022. One more local success story.

Another time, 120 people registered for Lori Degman's presentation on editing picture books. Prior to her program, Lori had generously offered to critique any PBs sent to her, some of which she would comment on during her talk. I submitted a rhyming Christmas Eve story. She wrote back: "Debbie, I just read your Christmas Day Jingle—it's fabulous!...I won't be able to use it in the webinar because there's really nothing that needs editing! Congrats on writing such a fun story!"

I'll never forget the feeling I had when I read Lori's email. This famous author, whose work I admire and love, liked my story! The second manuscript I sent Lori needed help, and her suggestions were completely on the mark. In all, she critiqued 23 PB manuscripts that night!

A BIT ABOUT THE SPRINGFIELD SCRIBES

The members in my network are amazing, and I strive to keep up with them. My writing is better because of them. Only a few live in the Springfield area. Most travel from 15 to 55 miles one way to attend our monthly meetings at the Chatham Library. That's dedication!

One of my first duties as rep was to ask Jerry Barrett to be our editor. Each month after our meetings, he writes an editorial about what we discussed. This keeps anyone unable to attend in the loop. I look forward to Jerry's newsletter each month.

Pam Miller is our treasurer. For each month that we do not receive a rejection, we donate a quarter to the treasury. (A

rejection shows that we are querying, putting our work out there, and that is why if one gets a rejection, he or she doesn't have to contribute to the fund.) We use the money we collect to reward ourselves during our yearly outing at a café, winery, or sweet shop, treating ourselves to a bottle of wine or a pastry.

In 2019, we donated to a book program developed by Juli Caveny. Our 9-dollar donation bought books for one of the students in Juli's school for an entire year. We've also used our rejection fees to buy a holiday gift for the librarians at the Chatham Library, to thank them for all their help and kindnesses.

Long-time members Louann Brown and Juli Caveny continue to share their knowledge and love of writing and illustrating with the group. Other active members include Pam Stone, Gail Wilkinson, and Suzy Leopold. Sonja Glad and Michelle Cruz Hines, our newest members, are eager to learn all they can about writing for children.

Even if they can't attend our meetings, Cynda Strong and Kimberly Hutmacher continue to be a vital part of our group. During our meeting this past March, Kim, now an author of over 25 books and 150 magazine articles, graciously offered critiques on members' poems.

Our group is inclusive and welcomes all to attend our meetings, even those who aren't members of SCBWI. We have been blessed to have had many talented writers join us. I'm honored to be a part of this writing community. ✨

Children's book author DEBRA DAUGHERTY recently signed a contract with Young Dragons Press for three picture books, with release dates starting in 2023. She lives in Central Illinois with her two dogs, Honey, a rescued Pit Bull, and CeCe, a Chihuahua. She looks forward to traveling again and hopes to visit her niece and family in Texas soon. Check out her blogs at www.writing-for-children.com. You can contact her at ddaugherty329@gmail.com.

News Roundup



Compiled by Malcolm Newsome

Events

ANDERSON'S BOOKSHOP

Information is subject to change. Some events require tickets. For more information on these and other upcoming events, visit the [Anderson's website](#) or call:

AB Naperville

(630) 355-2665 • 123 W. Jefferson Ave., Naperville

AB Downers Grove

(630) 963-2665 • 5112 Main St., Downers Grove

AB La Grange

(708) 582-6353 • 26 S. La Grange Rd., La Grange

- **October 5** – **Caitlin Sangster**, author of *She Who Rides the Storm* (YA), 7:00 p.m. Location to be announced or virtual. Presented by Anderson's Bookshop, Naperville.
- **October 6** – **Rex Ogle**, author of *Punching Bag* (YA), 7:00 p.m. Virtual event. Presented by Anderson's Bookshop, Naperville.
- **October 10** – **Rick Riordan**, author of *Daughter of the Deep* (MG), 2:00 p.m. [Virtual event](#). Presented by Anderson's Bookshop, Naperville.
- **October 14** – **Chuck Wendig**, author of *Dust & Grim* (MG), 7:00 p.m. Virtual event. Presented by Anderson's Bookshop, Naperville.
- **November 11** – **Neal Shusterman**, author of *Roxy* (YA), 7:00 p.m. Virtual event. Presented by Anderson's Bookshop, Naperville.
- **November 15** – **Sharon Draper**, author of *Out of My Heart* (MG), 7:00 p.m. Virtual event. Presented by Anderson's Bookshop, Naperville.

SHOP AROUND THE CORNER: BOOK TABLE

Book Table is located at 1045 Lake Street, Oak Park, Illinois. For more information on upcoming events, visit their [website](#), email (mail@booktable.net), or call (708-386-9800).

TEENTOBER

What: Hosted by libraries every October, TeenTober aims to celebrate teens and promote year-round teen services as well as the innovative ways in which teen services help teens learn new skills and fuel their passions in and outside the library.

When: October 1-31, 2021

More information at

<http://www.ala.org/yalsa/teentober>

SCBWI BOUTIQUE CRITIQUE

When: Opportunities for authors and illustrators to learn about craft with agents and other authors and illustrators. Industry professionals (Samantha Fabien, Saritza Hernandez, Aneeka Kalia, D. Ann William and more) provide tailor-made advice and fashion-forward feedback to get you on the runway to publication.

When: November 12- 13, 2021

More information at

<https://illinois.scbwi.org/events/>

ILA ANNUAL CONFERENCE

What: The Illinois Library Association (ILA) annual conference is attended by librarians, trustees, library assistants, educators, and others interested in libraries. In addition to our featured programs, you'll have an opportunity to attend a combination of live and recorded sessions, visit your favorite exhibitors at their virtual "booths," and celebrate the ILA award winners on the closing evening.

Where: Held virtually

When: October 12-14, 2021

More information at

<https://www.ila.org/events/annual-conference>



News Roundup

Events continued...

44TH DAY OF READING CONFERENCE

What: This conference, presented by the Secondary Reading League (SRL), focuses on literacy for grades 6–12. It is primarily for librarians and educators. Keynote speakers include educator Cornelius Minor. Minor works with teachers, school leaders, and leaders of community-based organizations to support equitable literacy reform in cities (and sometimes villages) across the globe.

Where: Held virtually

When: TBA in November 2021

More information at <http://www.dayofreading.org>

Awards

BOSTON GLOBE– HORN BOOK AWARDS

The Boston Globe–Horn Book Awards are a set of American literary awards that have been conferred by the Boston Globe and The Horn Book Magazine annually since 1967. One book is recognized in each of four categories: Fiction and Poetry, Nonfiction, and Picture Book.

WINNER

Fiction & Poetry: *A Sitting in St. James* by **Rita Williams-Garcia** (Quill Tree Books/HarperCollins)

Nonfiction: *From a Whisper to a Rallying Cry: The Killing of Vincent Chin and the Trial That Galvanized the Asian American Movement* by **Paula Yoo** (Norton Young Readers)

Picture Book: *I Talk Like a River* written by **Jordan Scott**; illustrated by **Sydney Smith** (Neal Porter Books/Holiday House)

HONOR BOOKS

Fiction & Poetry

- *Fighting Words* by **Kimberly Brubaker Bradley** (Dial Books for Young Readers/Penguin Random House)
- *Punching the Air* written by **Ibi Zoboi** with **Yusef Salaam**; illustrated by **Omar T. Pasha** (Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins)

Nonfiction

- *All Thirteen: The Incredible Cave Rescue of the Thai Boys' Soccer Team* by **Christina Soontornvat** (Candlewick Press)
- *Unspeakable: The Tulsa Race Massacre* written by **Carole Boston Weatherford**; illustrated by **Floyd Cooper** (Carolrhoda Books/Lerner)

Picture Book

- *I Am Every Good Thing* written by **Derrick Barnes**; illustrated by **Gordon C. James** (Nancy Paulsen Books/Penguin Random House)
- *Watercress* written by **Andrea Wang**; illustrated by **Jason Chin** (Neal Porter Books/Holiday House)

2021 SCBWI MEMBER AWARDS & CONTESTS

Need financial help to complete your current project? Look no further.

Note: Applicants may only apply for one SCBWI grant per calendar year.

For more information, visit [SCBWI's awards webpage](#).

SCBWI NARRATIVE ART AWARD

What: Each year, a rotating panel of judges will provide an assignment and will judge the submissions. The theme and specific assignment will change year to year, but the general goal will be to show sequence and narrative. The prize details can be found on the SCBWI website. Additionally, an online gallery will display all submissions made to the competition.

Deadline: Submissions are due by midnight Pacific Standard Time, **October 20, 2021**.

More information at [SCBWI's awards webpage](#).

SCBWI ON-THE-VERGE EMERGING VOICES AWARD

What: This grant is given to two writers or writer/illustrators from an ethnic and/or cultural background that is traditionally underrepresented in children's literature in America.

Deadline: Applications accepted between **September 15 and November 15, 2021**, only.

More information at [SCBWI's awards webpage](#).



News Roundup

Grants & Contests

JANE YOLEN MID-LIST AUTHOR GRANT

What: This grant awards \$3,000 to mid-list authors and aims to help raise awareness about these authors' current works in progress.

Deadline: Entries are due by **November 1, 2021**.

More information at [SCBWI's awards webpage](#).

SPARK AWARD

What: This award recognizes excellence in a children's book self-published either through an established self-publishing enterprise or individually self-published. Any current SCBWI member whose membership has been renewed through at least April 2022 may submit one title published in 2021 for the 2021 award.

Deadline: SPARK 2021 opens November 15, 2021. Deadline is **December 19, 2021**.

More information at [SCBWI's awards webpage](#).

GOLDEN KITE AWARDS

What: The only children's literary award judged by a jury of peers. These awards recognize excellence in children's literature in six categories: Young Reader and Middle Grade Fiction; Young Adult Fiction; Nonfiction for Young Readers; Nonfiction for Older Readers; Picture Book Text; Picture Book Illustration; and Illustration for Older Readers. Any current SCBWI member (renewed through at least December 2021) may submit a traditionally published book of theirs that was published in 2021.

Deadline: Entries must be received by **December 15, 2021 (for books published between July-December 2021)**. Deadline is closed for books published in the first half of the year.

More information at [SCBWI's awards webpage](#).

SID FLEISCHMAN HUMOR AWARD

What: Award for authors of published books whose work exemplifies the excellence of writing in the genre of humor. Books nominated for the Sid Fleischman Humor Award are still eligible to receive the Golden Kite Award but must be additionally submitted for that award as per the guidelines.

Deadline: Books published from July 2021 through December 2021 must be received by **December 15, 2021**. Deadline is closed for books published in the first half of the year.

More information at [SCBWI's awards webpage](#).

LEE BENNETT HOPKINS POETRY AWARD

What: Recognizes and encourages the publication of an excellent poetry collection for children and/or young adults. The submission can be a book that has been published by an individual poet or multiple poets. This award is given every three years, with a prize of \$1000.

Deadline: **March 15, 2022** (for books published in 2019-2021)

For more information, visit [SCBWI's awards webpage](#).

BOOK LAUNCH AWARD

What: Provides authors or illustrators with \$2,000 in funds to help promote their newly published work and to take the marketing strategy into their own creative hands.

Deadline: **July 1, 2021**

More information at [SCBWI's awards webpage](#). ✨

MALCOLM NEWSOME is a cyber security engineer by day and a kidlit author by night. He has two picture book deals that will be announced soon.

Season's Crop

by Jenny Wagh

Picture Books

FICTION

Bathe the Cat
by Alice B. McGinty
Illus. David Roberts
Chronicle, Nov. 2021
ISBN: 9781452142708

Bumoni's Banana Trees
by Mita Bordoloi
Tulika Books, Sept. 2021
ISBN: 9789390834259

Little Squiggle's Lake Adventure
by Laura Smetana and Stirling Hebda
Illus. Laura Smetana
Flying Cardinal Press, LLC
Aug. 2021
ISBN: 9781737140917

Original Cat, Copy Cat
by Sarah Kurpiel
Illus. Sarah Kurpiel
Greenwillow, Aug. 2021
ISBN: 9780062943835

Original Cat, Copy Cat
by Sarah Kurpiel
Illus. Sarah Kurpiel
Greenwillow, Aug. 2021
ISBN: 9780062943835

Saturday at the Food Pantry
by Diane O'Neill
Illus. Brizida Magro
Albert Whitman & Co., Sept. 2021
ISBN: 9780807572368.

Step By Step
by Alice B. McGinty
Illus. Diane Goode
Simon and Schuster, Aug. 2021
ISBN: 9781534479944

Follow JENNY WAGH at
www.facebook.com/jennifer.wagh
or [@jennymariewagh](https://www.instagram.com/jennymariewagh)

The Raindrop and the Bubble
by Jimmy Ryan
Illus. Julie Ann Voigt
Austin Macauley Publishers, USA
July 2021
ISBN: 9781638291381

*Three Ways to Be Brave:
A Trio of Stories*
by Karla Clark
Illus. Jeff Ostberg
Rise X Penguin, Aug. 2021
ISBN: 9780593222423

What the Cluck?
by Gwen Neiman
Illus. Anna Currey
Simon Sawyer Publishing
Aug. 2021
ISBN: 9781737060901

NONFICTION

My Israel and Me
by Alice Blumenthal McGinty
Illus. Rotem Teplow
Kalaniot Books, Sept. 2021
ISBN: 9781735087535

The Universe and You
by Suzanne Slade
Illus. Stephanie Fizer Coleman
Sleeping Bear Press, Aug. 2021
ISBN: 9781534111080

*Tu Youyou's Discovery:
Finding a Cure for Malaria*
by Songju Ma Daemicke
Illus. Lin
Albert Whitman & Company
Oct. 2021
ISBN: 9780807581117

CLICK TO BE ADDED
TO FUTURE
SEASON'S CROP

Middle Grade

FICTION

*Cat & Cat Adventures:
The Quest for Snacks*
by Susie Yi
Illus. Susie Yi
HarperAlley, Sept. 2021
ISBN: 9780063083813

*Egg Marks the Spot:
A Skunk and Badger Story*
by Amy Timberlake
Illus. Jon Klassen
Algonquin Young Readers, Sept. 2021
ISBN: 9781643750064

Miles from Motown
by Lisa Sukenic
Regal House/Fitzroy Books
Aug. 2021
ISBN: 9781646030644

The Battle of the Werpenguins
by Allan Woodrow
Illus. Scott Brown
Viking, Aug. 2021
ISBN: 9780593114261

NONFICTION

*What to Do When the News
Scares You*
by Jacqueline B. Toner
Illus. Janet McDonnell
Magination Press, Oct. 2021
ISBN: 9781433836978

Middle Grade

FICTION

The F Words
by Barbara Gregorich
City of Light Publishing, Sept. 2021
ISBN: 9781952536267