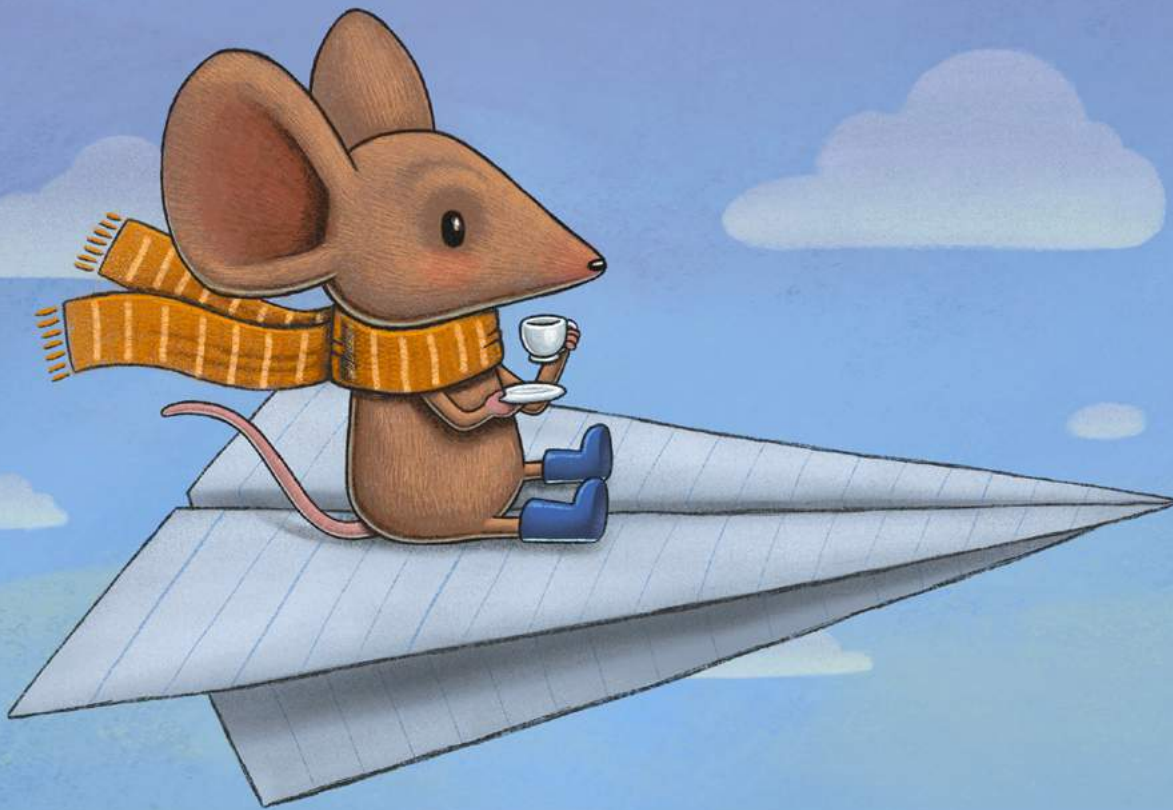


Prairie Wind

Bulletin of the Illinois Chapter of SCBWI

FALL 2022



illustrator in the spotlight:
Alex Willan

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Illustration by Alex Willan

In This Issue

by Shirin Shamsi



With a new season underway, I'm also embarking on something new—I'm thrilled and so very grateful to be joining the *Prairie Wind* team as its new director. I'm indebted to [Amy Alznauer](#) for passing the baton on to me after nearly five years in this position, and for the step-by-step help and guidance she's given me these past few months as I began to take on this role.

When Amy asked me to consider accepting this position, I immediately said, "Yes!" even though I felt totally unprepared for the job. It's an honor I do not take lightly. I owe this writing and illustrating community so much, and it is with great joy that I approach this new venture. For all I've gained through SCBWI-Illinois, I hope one day to pay it forward.

I'm in awe of the talent I've seen displayed in the past issues of the *Prairie Wind*, and it's been a joy to connect and collaborate with so many writers and illustrators over these last few months as this issue has been coming together.

So we have a real treat for you all in this fall issue!

First, Jenny Waugh's [Greetings!](#) and Deb Aronson's [Network News](#) bookend the issue, with both giving us a glimpse of some of what goes on behind the scenes at SCBWI-Illinois and all the teamwork and support it takes to run this amazing organization. What an honor to be part of it all.

With this issue's [Illustrator in the Spotlight](#), we welcome Alex Willan, whose cover art is absolutely lovely. It fills me with joy and optimism, and I smile every time I look at the mouse sipping tea on the paper airplane. In one of his responses to our typical Q&A, Alex makes a point that really rings true with me: "We put too much pressure on ideas to be perfect from the start. I love getting the inkling of an idea and letting it run every which way." [Tales from the Front](#), by J.S. Puller, is a fascinating and inspiring read, in which she reveals the steps that took her from being lost to found several times over. Her tale reflects the struggles we all face on our personal journeys. In [Creative Sparks](#), Molly Cranch shares her fanciful art as well as words and an illustration for a book dummy she's working on. I look forward to seeing her debut picture book in spring 2023.

In our [Voices of Change](#) column, Tamara Barker uses the analogy of crayons in a box and asks, "Where do I fit in?" As complex creative beings we cannot be limited. "Boxes are confining," Tamara argues. A compelling reflection on discovering where one fits in. In [Shop Around the Corner](#),

Linda Davis takes us on a nostalgic trip to the Book Bin in Northbrook, a 51-year-old bookstore she's been visiting since she was a child. And this issue's [Illustrator's Tips](#), by Kelly Leigh Miller, comes to us in the uniquely fun form of a comic strip. I had no idea what DPI meant until now, and I'm just getting the hang of drawing on Procreate, so this was super-helpful.

After my summer of travel, Kate Hannigan's [Writer's Tips](#) are just what I needed to get back into the creative mode. If you feel stuck in your writing, the "one-sentence summary" that Kate recommends might be invaluable. "As we do this exercise," Kate says, "we can try to imagine how a description of our new book might read." Author Diane O'Neill brings a slight shift in her approach to our [Mentor Texts](#) column this time. Rather than covering a list of children's books, Diane tells us how her own experiences with poverty, along with three powerful poverty-related adult novels, influenced her debut picture book, *Saturday at the Food Pantry*. And of course, Jenny Wagh has again gathered our wonderful [Season's Crop](#)—the latest list of freshly minted books, always a delight to see.

Finally, I'd like to say that as this issue marks my beginning with the *Prairie Wind*, sadly we're also saying goodbye to Deb Aronson, who has moved on to North Carolina after serving as an SCBWI-IL assistant regional advisor for many years. Her [Network News](#) column points out the importance of having a pit crew—a "team on the sidelines that stands ready to change a tire, replace a brake pad, or hydrate the driver." An apt and moving analogy as Deb sails off to further shores. Best wishes and many thanks to her!

Director [Shirin Shamsi](#)

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*

Proofread by the skillful Sheila Path-McMahon.

Greetings!

by Jenny Wagh

Greetings from Jenny Wagh and the SCBWI-Illinois regional team! As I write this, I'm at the dealership prepping my car for the trek to Monticello, Illinois, site of the annual volunteer luncheon. Oil change✓, transmission fluid✓, patch on front driver's side tire✓.

These are some of the "behind-the-scenes" tasks that need to be done before embarking on a road trip.

Similarly, book creators also have to undertake behind-the-scenes tasks—like doing research, working through multiple drafts, revisions, and more. This part of the job can be a fun and exciting adventure, like hunting down an historic female innovator for an interview, exploring a messy new art

medium, or choosing the perfect word for a translation. It can also include quiet moments thumbing through a thesaurus, taking an inspiring walk, or contemplating while sipping a cup of coffee. This is a small list of steps writers, illustrators, and translators take as they build the books we love.

Behind the scenes of SCBWI-Illinois is a treasure trove of volunteers performing their own behind-the-scenes tasks. For example, every issue the *Prairie Wind* team edits, designs, and manages a talented group of creative contributors. Our statewide network representatives build community both online and offline with critique groups, speakers, and motivational support. Our PAL coordinator and Food for Thought team provide opportunities for published members to learn more about the business of writing. And as a regional team we meet weekly to plan and pull together all the pieces that make SCBWI-Illinois such a unique region.

We know our members are juggling not only creative endeavors but careers, family, and friend connections as well. And we appreciate your own behind-the-scenes tasks, which create a richness that makes your writing, art, and translations unique. Thank you for taking the time to read the *Prairie Wind* and glimpse behind the scenes into other members' creative processes. And thank you to all the volunteers who make SCBWI-Illinois a vibrant community. Next on my to-do list is register for [Boutique Critique, October 21 & 22](#)✓, meet with my critique group✓, and enjoy the Fall 2022 *Prairie Wind*✓. ☀



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

Illustrator in the Spotlight

I'M FILLED WITH LOTS OF NONSENSE

by Alex Willan

Are you an illustrator or an author/illustrator? And what is your preferred medium to work in?

I write and illustrate my own books, and also illustrate books written by others. I create my illustrations digitally using my iPad Pro.

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

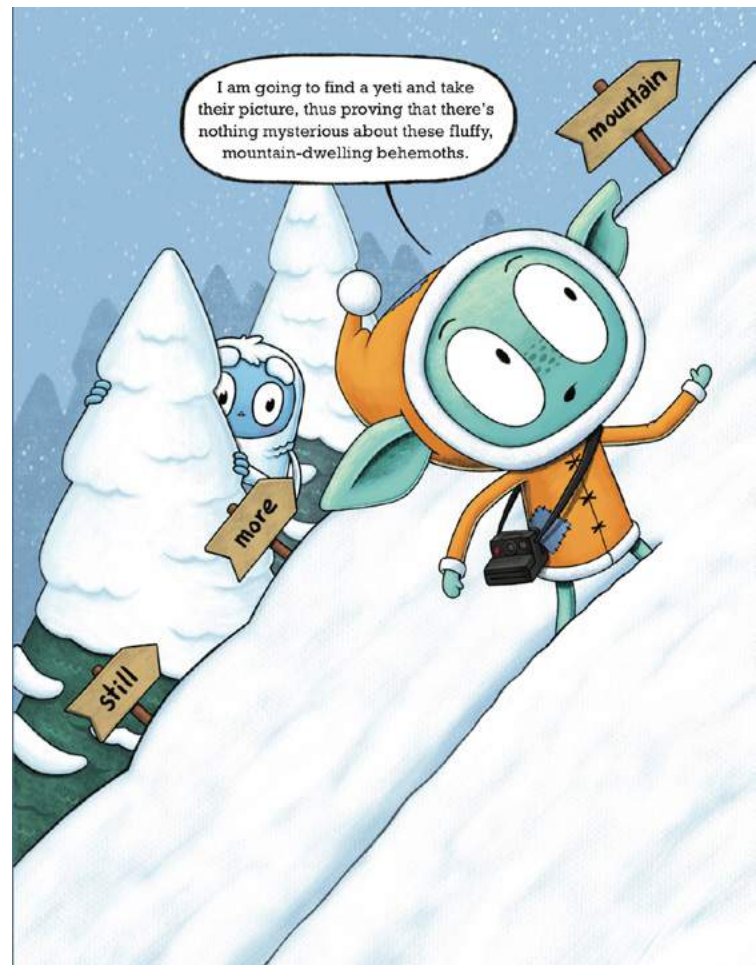
Growing up, I loved to draw and carried a sketchbook with me everywhere I went. That love of drawing eventually led me to Savannah College of Art & Design, where I got a BFA in illustration. After I graduated, the idea of getting a book published was so daunting that I ran away from it for several years, working on various other artistic endeavors. Eventually, my love for children's books outlasted my fear of failure, and a friend recommended that I join SCBWI. After joining, I immediately attended one of the annual summer conferences and was blown away by this community of creative and encouraging people.

I spent the next several years working on my illustration portfolio and learning everything I could about the business. My goal was to get my foot in the door illustrating other people's stories and then maybe one day I'd be able to write and illustrate my own. However, after failing to get much interest as an illustrator, I figured I had nothing to lose and started working on developing my own stories. Once I finally had a complete dummy that I felt good about, I submitted it to the wonderful Lori Kilkelly, who would eventually become my agent. She liked it and asked if I had any other stories I could send to her. Despite having no other stories written at the time, I said, "Of course!" and rushed home to write something new. That story ended up being the first book I ever published, *Jasper & Ollie*.

Please share an illustration and give us a brief step-by-step of your process.

This is a piece from *Yetis Are the Worst!*, the third book in my series starring a grumpy little goblin named Gilbert. Once my editor approves a manuscript, I like to start by storyboarding the entire book. This involves drawing very rough layouts of each spread on index cards and pinning them up on a bulletin

board, which allows me to get a zoomed-out view of the entire book. I then make tighter sketches of each spread and send those along to my editor and art director for feedback. Once we've landed on a version of the sketches that we are all happy with, I move on to full color using the Procreate app. I like the freedom that comes from working digitally, being able to undo any mistakes with the click of a button. This has allowed me to experiment more without having to risk ruining an entire illustration.



Do you ever tuck little personal homages or details into your illustrations? Please give us a peek at one of your favorites.

I do! It's always fun to insert a little bit of my life into an illustration here and there. There are sunflowers in *Jasper & Ollie* because when I was little I used to love the massive



Illustrator in the Spotlight

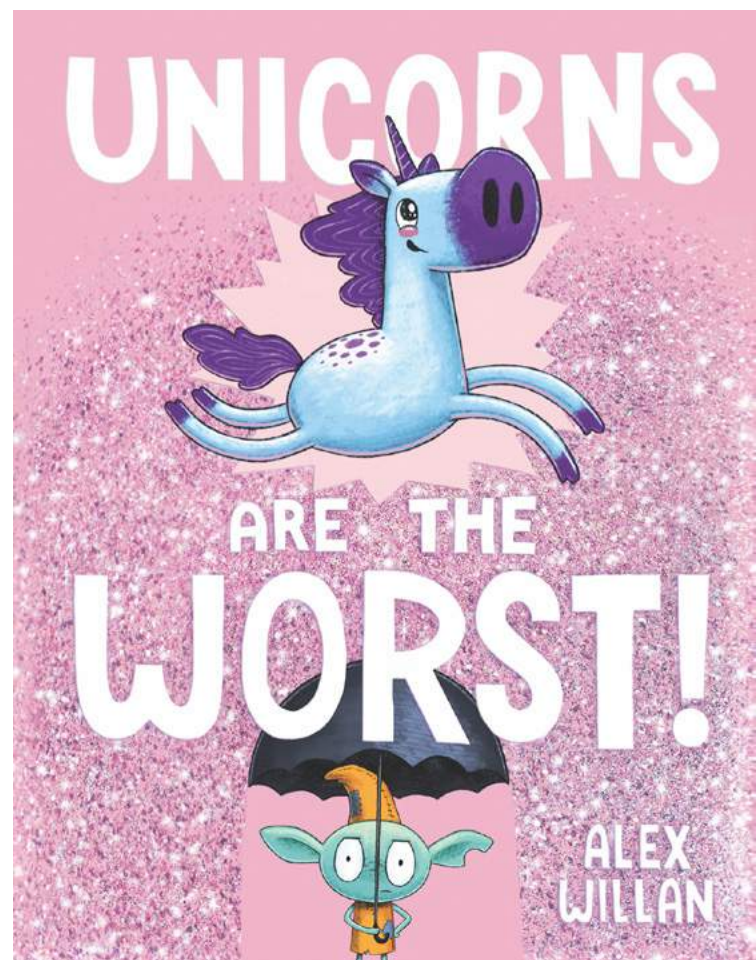


sunflowers that my grandfather grew in his garden. I added my dog, Harley, to a scene in a book I illustrated called *Got Your Nose!*, written by Alan Katz. In *Yetis Are the Worst!*, there is a small magnet on Gilbert's file cabinet that has a flying saucer and reads "I want to believe," which is a reference to *The X-Files*, a favorite show of mine. It seemed fitting since Gilbert is searching for proof of the unknown. With *The Worst* books, in particular, I really like having characters from the previous books make a cameo in each new book. So a unicorn, a chicken, and a sock slug show up at least once in each book.

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 was out holiday shopping a few years ago, looking for gifts to buy my nieces and nephew, and it seemed like everywhere I turned I saw some version of a unicorn;

unicorn stuffed animals, unicorn slippers, unicorn backpacks. And while I have nothing against unicorns, it did make me wonder why they get so much attention over all the other magical creatures. That made me wonder how it would feel to be another magical creature, like a goblin perhaps, and walk into a store that had wall-to-wall unicorn paraphernalia. That idea became my book *Unicorns Are the Worst!* When I first wrote that story and sketched it out, the main character was a Gnome named Gnelson, but after some feedback from my agent I changed him to a goblin instead. I think that ended up working so much better since goblins have a bit of a bad reputation and might be more prone to having a chip on their shoulder.



Which illustrators were your favorites when you were little?

I always loved detail-heavy illustrations when I was a kid because I could pour over them time and time again, and always spot something new. So I loved books by David Wiesner, and the book *The Eleventh Hour* by Graeme Base



Illustrator in the Spotlight

was another favorite. I also loved the humor of Shel Silverstein's books. I grew up loving comics too, and I am so thrilled that there are now so many great graphic novels being made for kids.

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

I feel like there are two things I subconsciously keep including in my books: characters running and screaming and birds. I like adding birds because they are sort of expressionless spectators. I think having a bird or birds staring blankly while something chaotic is happening only makes the chaotic thing funnier. And I don't know why I always end up with characters who are running and screaming, but they do seem to be a through line. Not sure what that says about me.

What inspires you creatively, spiritually, or emotionally?

I definitely think you can find inspiration all around you

if you are open to it. I think that too often we are taught that daydreaming or getting lost in your imagination is a bad thing, that it is not a productive use of our time. Or we put too much pressure on ideas to be perfect from the start. I love getting the inkling of an idea and letting it run every which way. Having some of those ideas twist and turn only to end up going nowhere is, for me, just a part of the process. Just grab hold of the next one and see where it takes you.

Also, my niece once said of herself, "I'm filled with lots of nonsense." and I've never heard a sentence that I've identified with more. 🌟

ALEX WILLAN has written and illustrated several books for children, including *The Worst* series starring Gilbert the Goblin and the *Jasper & Ollie* series. He has also illustrated *Got Your Nose!* by Alan Katz and the *Rever the Speedway Squirrel* books by Sherri Duskey Rinker. Alex lives in Chicago with his dog, Harley.



Tales from the Front

LOST AND FOUND (AGAIN) by J.S. Puller



When I tell people that *The Lost Things Club* was a hard novel to write, most of them make the logical assumption that it had something to do with the subject matter. After all, it is not (nor should it ever be) easy to talk about the impact of a school shooting on a seven-year-old boy. And in working through the story of Leah and TJ, I had to revisit trauma in many different ways.

But that's not what this "Tale from the Front" is about.

The Lost Things Club was a difficult novel to write not just because of the tricky story, but because of the frenzied set of circumstances behind the scenes as well. Because of a lesson I learned that publishing a novel is never the straight line we imagine it's going to be.

FOUND: AN AGENT AND PUBLISHER

As those of you reading this article are painfully aware, the publication process often starts with finding that agent who believes in your work enough to market it to editors, then being lucky enough to have an editor fall in love with your story. I started looking for an agent for the first time in 2008, with a long-since-discarded manuscript about the Trojan War from Cassandra's point of view. Five manuscripts and many years later, I had the good sense to enroll in Esther Hershenhorn's MG/YA novel workshop at the University of Chicago Graham School. It was through Esther's incredible insight—and the advice of my classmates—that I finally ended up with a manuscript and query letter worthy of attention. And I was fortunate enough to land my first agent, eager to represent *Captain Superlative*, my first published novel.

In what can only be described as a Cinderella-like dream, not only did I find myself an agent, but I found myself in an auction for the rights to both *Captain Superlative* and a book to be named later! It was with a sense of great joy and pride

that I signed with Disney Hyperion and began the journey to becoming a published author.

LOST: A SECOND STORY

The process for publishing *Captain Superlative* was incredible. If I could take the energy and excitement I felt in those early days of 2016-17 and bottle them, I would. Not to sell. Just to revisit in the subsequent days when I was feeling down. And believe me, those days came. Especially when I found myself faced with producing the "book to be named later." *Captain Superlative* was a standalone story. It didn't have room for a sequel. What was I going to do?



Suggestions came and went, but nothing stuck. Nothing was a worthy successor to the Captain.

FOUND: A SECOND STORY

I know it's cliché, but inspiration often comes when you least expect it. In my case, it came with the work I was doing at my nine-to-five job at the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research. Through some persistent nagging, I'd managed to win myself a seat as a research assistant and co-author for a project titled [*Arts Education and Social-Emotional Learning Outcomes Among K-12 Students*](#). This project consisted of two components: a review of literature and an interview-based fieldwork component with educators, administrators, students, and parents in Chicago Public Schools, or CPS. My primary responsibility was working on the literature review. It was only when I got to read a segment of the fieldwork that lightning struck:

[A teaching artist] designed an activity around "showing up": having each student stand up, one by one, while the other students clapped, and recite a line using a



Tales from the Front

“performance voice.” At the end of the activity, a classroom teacher approached the theatre teaching artist, so moved that she herself could barely speak, and said, “That child doesn’t talk.” The teaching artist noted that this was normal—sometimes students did not wish to talk in front of their peers. The classroom teacher replied “No, you don’t understand, it’s on his IEP. We try to get him to speak, he doesn’t speak. He has elective mutism.” But in the context of this theatre activity, he chose to use his voice.

ARTS EDUCATION AND SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING OUTCOMES AMONG K-12 STUDENTS: DEVELOPING A THEORY OF ACTION

ingenuity **UCHICAGO Consortium on School Research**

Camille A. Farrington, Joseph Maurer, Meredith R. Aska McBride, Jenny Nagaoka, J. S. Puller, Steve Shewfelt, Elizabeth M. Weiss, and Lindsay Wright

Reading about this incident for the first time, I felt just like that shocked classroom teacher. Moved. Elated. And then inspired. What was this strange boy’s story? I would never know the truth, so I would have to make one up to satisfy my curiosity. I had the beginnings of my second novel, I had the basis for *The Lost Things Club*.

LOST AND FOUND: PUBLISHER

I was well into editing the second or third draft of *The Lost Things Club* when I got a surprising email in my inbox. “Welcome to Little, Brown Books for Young Readers!” No one knew that Disney Hyperion had sold over 1,000 titles to Little, Brown. One minute, I had an editor I knew and loved. The next, I’d been traded like a baseball player.

I was lucky again. Lucky to be matched to a wonderful new editor. Lucky to find a publishing team that believed in *The Lost Things Club*.

LOST AND FOUND AND LOST AGAIN

I’d always thought that publishing was something of a straight line. Write the novel. Find an agent. Find a publisher and editor. And everything would follow from there. It’s not a straight line. It’s a jagged mountain range of highs and lows and highs again. As I write this, I’ve found and lost two wonderful editors, two wonderful agents, and, in some ways, I’m back where I started before I ever had the good sense to get to know Esther Hershenhorn. Once again I’m on the hunt for an agent. Once again, I have to sell myself and a story.

I don’t have parting wisdom, exactly. I’m still riding high and low. But I have hope. The ultimate conclusion that Leah comes to in *The Lost Things Club* is that “there was a life to live after surviving. And [TJ] and his friends] were figuring out how to do just that.” Things are lost. But there’s always hope that they can be found again, found even better than before, in some cases. So I guess my parting wisdom is to have faith and patience. And understand that, in publishing, there really is no such thing as that straight line. ✨



J. S. PULLER is a playwright and author from the Windy City, Chicago. She is an award-winning member of the American Alliance for Theatre and Education. When not writing, she can usually be found in the theatre. She is the author of two novels, *Captain Superlative* and *The Lost Things Club*, as well as several plays.

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Facebook: facebook.com/puller.writes

Creative Sparks

LOST AND FOUND: A STORY ABOUT ECHOLOCATION

Story and Illustrations by Molly Cranch

“Click clack clickerreeeee!”

Baby Dolphin splish-splashes her way through the ocean, always staying close to Mama.

Together they coast down into the deep dark blue looking for food.

Yum, yum!

Turning around, they trundle and bumble back up to the surface.

Gulp, gulp! Ahhh, fresh air.

Baby Dolphin and Mama swim together like dancers in the water.

If Mama twirls, then Baby Dolphin twirls.

If Mama bounds, then Baby Dolphin bounds.

One day, however, Mama zips. Baby Dolphin zooms.

Oh no! Where did you go, Mama? Baby Dolphin is all alone.

“Click clack clickerreeeee!”

Baby Dolphin makes special sounds that flow out into the ocean and bounce back to her as echoes. She looks for the shape of Mama in the waves of the echoes.

“Click clack clickerreeeee!” Mama, is that you?

No, it's FISH!

“Click clack clickerreeeee!” Mama is that you?

No, it's BOAT!

“Click clack clickerreeeee!” Mama is that you?

Yes, it's you, MAMA!

I found you, Mama! *“Clickety Clackeroooo!”*

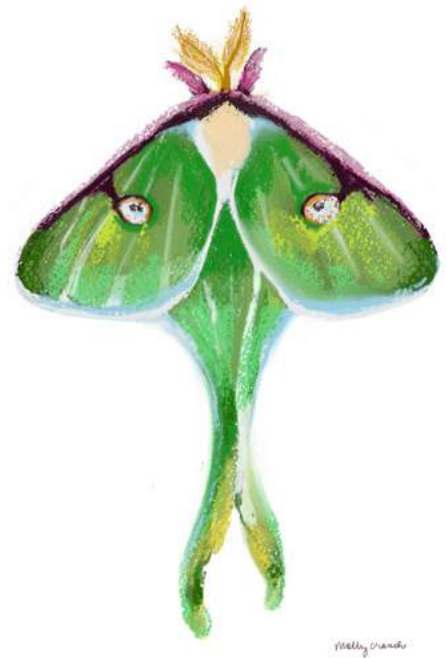
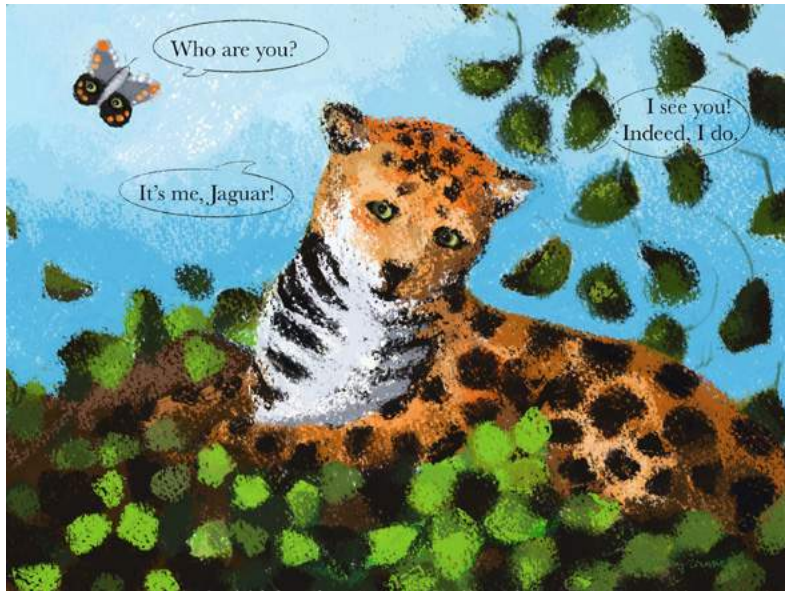


*Molly says:
This short story
and illustration
combines science
concepts and
social-emotional
learning. It's a
work in progress
and will hopefully
one day become
a picture book
dummy ready for
query!*



Creative Sparks

ILLUSTRATIONS by Molly Cranch



MOLLY CRANCH is a children's picture book author-illustrator, professional artist, and arts educator living in Chicago. She received a BFA in painting from Washington University in St. Louis and a K-12 certificate in art education from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Her first picture book is scheduled for publication by Clavis Press in spring 2023. www.mollycranch.com <https://www.instagram.com/mollycranch>



How I Spent the...

MESOZOIC ERA by Robin Currie

Does it seem to take *forever* to get a brilliant (they all are!) book published for kids? Even if you're a published author with an agent, months and years pass between the burble of idea and book in hand.

PALEOZOIC: DEVONIAN

Somewhere between the Construction Equipment phase and the Superhero phase, the dinosaurs roam. Kids are fascinated by these huge lumbering beasts. One theory is that small children, feeling powerless, imagine themselves as awe-inspiring predators with gigantic teeth! *Roar!*

The original inspiration for the story we're talking about here—my story—came in the fall of 2014, when my youngest grandson was three years old and had many things on his mind to do with dinosaurs but few with getting dressed. James was in the dinosaur phase, where he couldn't pronounce "broccoli" but could say "Pachycephalosaurs" and correct my mispronunciation. He also owned dinosaur-themed shirts, hats, socks, jackets, and underwear. And hundreds of plastic painful-to-step-on-in-the-dark dinosaur figures.



So how about a book that empowers the child to feel the capabilities of a dinosaur channeled toward the mundane task of getting ready for the day?

PALEOZOIC: PERMIAN

It was a brain burble that first became a badly rhyming text—what rhymes with Diplodocus? (Hopped aboard a bus? Oozing green pus? Super-flu-i-us?). In 2016, I shared my "Dressing a Dinosaur" 12-page board book with my critique group. They found things to improve in the 199-word manuscript—and that is why I appreciate them!

Then came a year of tweaking, renaming to *How to Dress a Dinosaur*, and trimming to 181 words. My group reviewed it again in 2017 and thought *Dinosaur* was ready to roar. So in February 2019, I sent this manuscript to a critique service, and it received a "GO"!

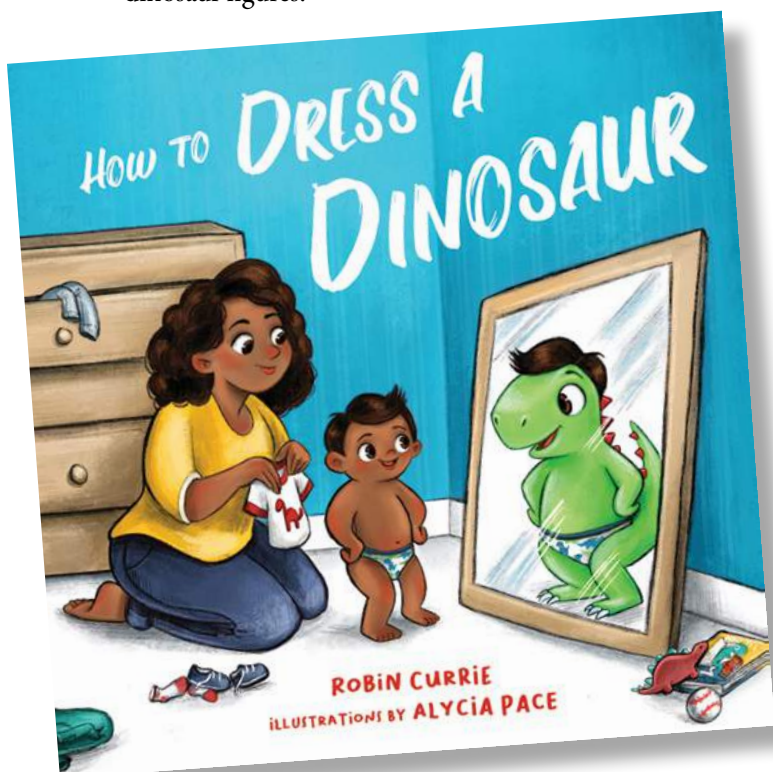
On to my agent, who asked for a full proposal with marketing ideas, sales of earlier work, and ten recent comp titles—far more than 181 words. Luckily, in the meantime no one else thought of this and wrote it! My agent liked what I'd sent and finally called with the good news.

SOLD!

MESOZOIC: TRIASSIC

From dinos in my brain to seeing them in book form is like waiting to see a first-born child. Finally, the editor approves the illustrator and *How to Dress a Dinosaur* has a cover reveal! Over-the-top cuteness, I put it on my website, Facebook, and send it to a couple friends for their blogs. Then at a conference, I hear that book sales require much more effort: Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, LinkedIn, TIKTOK!! Freak out from media overload.

So I hire a virtual assistant to post daily on Instagram. She requests pictures of kids and dinosaurs. Hugging dinosaurs.



How I Spent the Mesozoic Era



Looking at dinosaurs. Screaming at dinosaurs. Dressing like dinosaurs. I contact my family and friends, who share pictures of their children and grandchildren. I buy four stuffed dinosaurs, dinosaur-themed shirt and socks.

Also, through SCBWI, I join a terrific launch group, all publishing the same year and supporting each others' promotional efforts. Best move ever!

MESOZOIC: JURASSIC

Shrieked from my computer: "I got a positive *Kirkus* review!!! Aaaaaah, I got a *Kirkus*!" Other than librarians, not many are impressed. Book launch group reports shipping delays in California, which has everyone on edge for release dates. *How to Dress a Dinosaur* stays on track.

Confidently, I contact local preschools, bookstores, and libraries for the Big Launch event. That's when I'm informed that with a *pandemic* (I already had shots) going on no kid programs are being scheduled in March. And everyone is tired of Zoom.

In the meantime, I build a Pinterest board for dinosaur-related crafts, food, games, and costumes. And order the cutest-ever dinosaur-themed dress. I offer to write articles for blogs and newsletters on any topic just to get out into the cyber world. I have not left my computer chair for months!

THREATENED COMET STRIKE

Copies of my book arrive. I get so excited to tear into the packaging that I forget to take the usual "box opening" video. And finally, one preschool agrees to let me visit, but we will be outside, wearing masks.

Still, I ramp up the countdown on my Facebook author website. I drag a grandchild to a dinosaur display and make him pose wearing the dinosaur-themed socks and shirt. (Get it? *Dress a dinosaur!*) I sneakily check all my area libraries to see if they have *How to Dress a Dinosaur* on order and, as a "local author," request them to purchase it.

My launch group comes through with reviews on Goodreads. I start micro-watching the Amazon New Books page and get very excited when *How to Dress a Dinosaur* gets to number 11! This is going to be *big*!

March 15! This is it! Launch Day!...crickets...I read *How to Dress a Dinosaur* to one group of preschool kids outdoors on a blustery day in a heavy coat—which covers my cute dinosaur dress. Sigh.

MESOZOIC: CRETACEOUS

Dino has come and gone off Amazon New Books and the launch group is supporting other spring releases.

But a local bookstore is willing to live-launch *How to Dress a Dinosaur* on International Dinosaurs Day at the end of May!



How I Spent the Mesozoic Era

I put the virtual assistant on high alert and research dinosaur facts for her to post. Not sure who is following, but there are hashtags! Then I bribe my teenage grandchildren to dress in blow-up dinosaur costumes and come to the launch. I also reprint business cards, make a poster, and advertise in local newspapers.

My own *International Dinosaur Day* is a real-time event with people who want an autographed copy! Book launches. Post pictures.

CENOZOIC

I write an adorable sequel to *How to Dress a Dinosaur* and am informed the dino market is glutted. Time to move on to mammals...

EPIC EPOCHS

If you're counting, that's a total of *eight years for a board book!* Takeaway: Know your reader, edit, edit, edit, and wait, wait, wait, but believe that the best ideas out there will find a home. 🌻

Award-winning author ROBIN CURRIE led the children's departments at Midwestern public libraries before being called midlife to ordained ministry. She serves in Chicago-area parishes and volunteers to teach English in developing countries. Robin has published seven library resource collections and more than 40 picture books. She writes stories to read and read again!



You Are Not a ...

WRITER/ILLUSTRATOR

by Sara F. Shacter

Whether you are pre-published or published, I'm sure you've heard the following mantra in the kid lit community:

If you write, you are a writer.

If you illustrate, you are an illustrator.

Own the title.

And why not? Regardless of your journey to date, you've toiled over your craft. Searched out classes. Invested in conferences. Studied the industry. Submitted. Been rejected. Tried again. But I'm here to tell you, the mantra is wrong.

Don't define yourself as a writer or an illustrator.

Allow me to explain.

I joined SCBWI in 1993. (Please don't do math.) Prior to that, I had taken a class in writing for children. Several of my classmates were serious about pursuing this elusive goal and we formed a critique group. Over the years, our group morphed, dropping people who lost interest or became discouraged, picking up others with a passion for the art form.

I revised my work. Thought it was great. Submitted via snail mail. Got rejected, over and over. Still, I persevered. Professional critiques made me realize how far I had to go. But once I understood where I needed to be, I grew that much more determined to get there. More classes. More submissions. More rejection.

At this point in my saga, I'm sure most everyone reading this is nodding. You've been there. You know what it takes.

And then in 2001, via SCBWI-IL, I met the editor of a new magazine: ASK. We hit it off. She assigned me an article for the debut issue. I labored over it. She suggested refocusing the piece and cutting the word count in half. I did, and the article sprang to life. It was published. My very first credit. I went on to write more for ASK and other magazines.



Then came a call in the SCBWI Bulletin from a small publisher that specialized in gift books. I sent in a quirky picture book manuscript about wedding guest etiquette. They loved it and they bought it. I couldn't believe it. I was officially a published picture book author!

I had entered the Kingdom.

Cue the next ten years. Writing more books, submitting. Nothing.

Then, at a 2014 SCBWI-IL conference (go SCBWI-IL!), I received an encouraging manuscript critique. The editor asked for revisions. A year later: contract! From a real New York publishing house. I queried agents to represent me. Two offers!

This was it. The Big Time. I wasn't just in the Kingdom. I had crossed the moat and entered the castle.

My book, *Just So Willow*, came out in October of 2019. I had a joyous book launch party. My schedule filled up with signings and school visits. The book sold well for the first six months.

Then came March of 2020. We all know what that means.

Like so many of my colleagues, I saw my book sales screech to a halt during quarantine. All of my carefully planned signings and schools visits—cancelled.



You Are Not a Writer/Illustrator

Book Launch Party - Sara with high school pals.



I slogged along, trying to figure out online marketing. I also used the forced time at home to finish a huge rewrite of my middle-grade novel.

As the world began to right itself, I scheduled a call with my agent. We were going to start submitting my novel. I couldn't wait. But the call did not go as expected. Recent events in her life had led her to conclude that she could not take on new novels. As an editorial agent, the projects were just too time-intensive for her at that juncture. So we (very amicably) parted ways.

Not too long after that, my NY publisher sent me a note. Sales for *Just So Willow* had not rebounded enough. It was put out of print and remaindered.

The castle door slammed shut.

It was a recipe for self-doubt and depression. But something saved me: Months before, I had stopped defining myself as "a Writer."

Again, allow me to explain.

After my agent and I parted ways, I moped...and then decided to take action. It was time to shake things up.

During quarantine, I realized how much I missed being in an actual classroom. A former teacher myself, I find the energy in a roomful of kids to be addictive. I love being their cheerleader, celebrating their successes, and helping them when they falter.

So I cold-called a school within walking distance of my house. They needed a part-time kindergarten teaching assistant, a far cry from my old role as a high school English teacher. But the idea of working with little cuties in the morning and writing in the afternoons was intoxicating. Sold!

And I rediscovered one of my old titles: Teacher.

Suddenly, my days took on new life. My teacher brain caught fire. I felt energized. My sense of accomplishment, of self-worth, no longer marched in lockstep with the vagaries of publishing. My list of credits did not define me.

The realization was liberating. My writing started to feel more organic—something I once again longed to do, not something I was expected to do. I fell back in love with one of my stalled manuscripts and found the key to move it forward.

Seeing myself in a new light had removed the pressure to produce and publish. Hence, when my book went out of print, even though that castle door seemed to have shut, I didn't despair. Instead, I bought a boatload of remaindered copies. Being in control of them is empowering. I get to decide how to price them and where to sell them. I'm my own cottage industry!

The power of redefining myself took hold. I began to embrace my other titles:

I'm a daughter. I am lucky to still have my mom, and helping her is an honor.

I'm a parent, a title easily taken for granted by society. This fall, when we dropped our twins off for their freshman years of college, I was reminded of all it took to get them there. (The college drop-off experience itself should earn me the titles of Transportation Coordinator, Counselor, and Moving Consultant.)



You Are Not a Writer/Illustrator

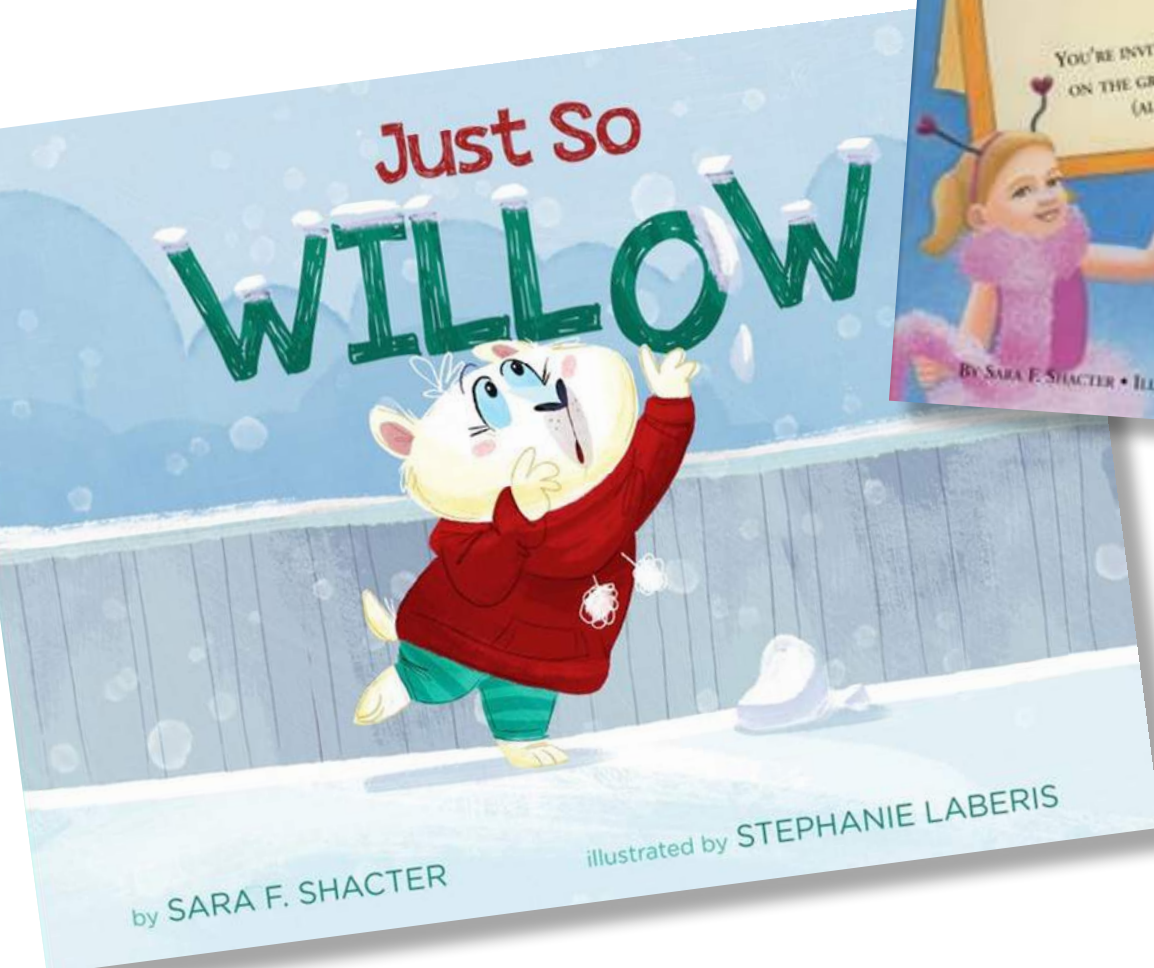
I am also a Wife.
An Engaged Citizen.
A Climate Warrior.
A Volunteer for multiple causes.
A Friend.
A Good Neighbor.

Am I a Writer? Yes. But I am not *only* a writer.

And I encourage you not to restrict the way you define yourself. No matter what we do as creators, there is a great deal of rejection and frustration in the publishing industry. Resiliency lies in the diverse ways in which we see ourselves.

You are many things. Many *wonderful* things. Embrace them all. 🌟

SARA F. SHACTER holds several titles, one of which is Writer of picture books, middle-grade novels, and nonfiction articles. She recently joined Braver Angels, an organization working to bridge our country's political divide. Learn more at sarafshacter.com.



The Art of Collaboration

by Mary and Rich Chamberlin

“Which of you is the illustrator?”

Ah, the inevitable first question every PB writing team faces.

When we ‘fess up
“neither, we write together,”
we get a strange look.

At first collaboration may seem odd to some. Certain writing genres are more adaptable to it than others. Screenwriting is one; often in TV credits you’ll see two, three, or four names listed under “written by.” In fact, every phase of a movie or television production is a giant collaboration.

Even though the picture book is also a synergy of writing and art, PB collaboration between author and illustrator has traditionally been discouraged. But writing teams have been around a long time, and they work. Think of JRR Tolkien and CS Lewis, who mailed stories back and forth, revising with a fresh point of view each other’s work, including updates to a single Tolkien poem for over 30 years. In the illustrator world, consider the great Leo and Diane Dillon, who collaborated for decades on their fantastic art. It was said that they were “a seamless amalgam of both their hands.”

So, we’re a writing team. Together, how do we make stories?

First, we agree upon an idea. Often, we sift through something we call IDAD’s (our Idea A Day file) and choose one or two or more. We either individually start writing, ready to combine our efforts later, or we sit down to a riff session. These “exercises” are fun as we parry thoughts back and forth, writing them down in our document as notes. Some will end up in the story, some not. No idea is dismissed, as you never know where it can lead you. Next, we discuss, tweak, and chat some more, molding the piece like pottery. Often, we pass the computer back and forth between us, each taking a turn at typing. Eventually our efforts are whittled down to a first draft with choice words, scenes, and flow.

This is 180 degrees the opposite of the lonely-writer journey so many have committed to. When collaborating, once “your” idea is on the page, you must realize and celebrate that it’s not just yours anymore. Take a deep breath, trust your partner or partners, and follow the steps below. You’ll be stunned at the leaps your work will take.

STEP 1: GETTING STARTED

Make sure that each of you is invested in the initial idea. The creators should begin by expressing the concept from top down, starting broad and honing to finer detail. Feel free to create scrap notes, stick-figure sketches, or even verbally compare lines like a poetry reader or stand-up comic. Then consult further, writing down construction notes as you go along.

Here’s an example: We teamed up with two other screenwriters on a dramedy—a drama-comedy television series. At first, each of us wrote separate ideas for an agreed upon pilot. Then we got on a series of Zoom calls and shared our efforts. We talked about everyone’s ideas, combining what we all felt was great. This is where the magic happens, and the story transforms. You’ve united to create a new entity—and a lot of laughs when you’re writing a comedy.

STEP 2: CHECK YOUR EGO AT THE DOOR

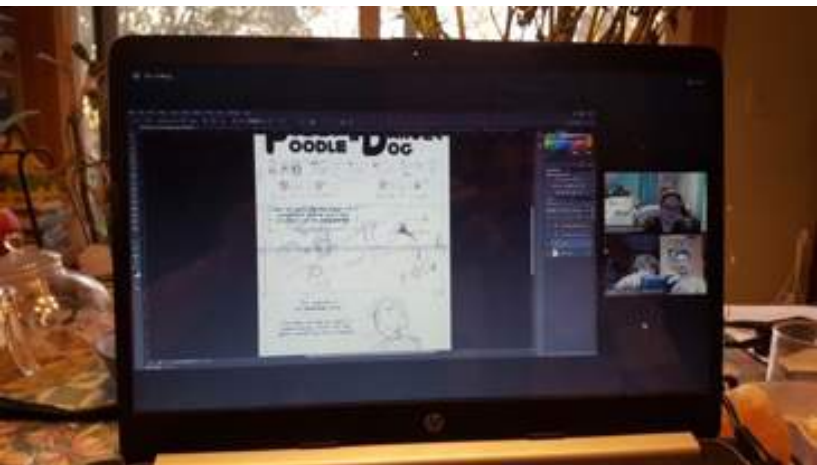
It’s never “my way or the highway!” You *need* the fresh directions that come from your original ideas, and one sudden turn could become the biggest breakthrough in the story.

On a well-functioning team, everyone has something to contribute. It’s fun to see the story from perspectives different than your own. It might be something you’ve never thought of, or a new clarity that was missing. Your partner may have a juicier word or hear the voice better, giving depth and meaning to the simplest book text. Trust each other. A fresh direction is tucked inside the collective consciousness of the creative team just waiting to be coaxed out. They don’t do surveys with bunches of people for nothing.



The Art of Collaboration

As an example, we can relate our experience creating a graphic novel for a charity called [The Hero Initiative](#). We worked with an illustrator, Amanda Snyder, on Zoom during the pandemic. Each week, we'd spend hours online with our script and her sketchpad. In the process of drawing and talking, we honed the words and pictures to create our superhero story, "Power Poodle and Danger Dog." This charity book for children in hospitals is powered by collaboration, hopefully giving therapeutic entertainment and fun. We had a great time ourselves online, with her cats and our dog often making camera appearances, especially her cat, Misha, who loved to sit on her sketch pad, giving us some great furry views.



Collaborating on line with our illustrator for our comic, "Power Poodle and Danger Dog," for the Hero Initiative

STEP 3: OPEN YOURSELF TO THE POWER OF PLAY

Play with ideas, words, art, structure. Try new things. Discover.

For example: Play the "title game" to become the Grand Poohbah of titles. Brainstorm to create at least 50 story titles, with each person spontaneously coming up with as many good (and bad—no editing or critiquing while doing this) ones. It's a fun process and often very funny.

Did you ever watch *The Man on Lincoln's Nose*? Or *In a Northwesterly Direction*? You probably did, although those are draft titles for the film you may know as the epic *North by Northwest* from Alfred Hitchcock. Good thing he collaborated on the title.

You can get really crazy and playful with this name game. So keep on going, even to 100 titles or more. Afterward, you'll see which ones stand out and which fall flat. Often, some of the twisted titles you've come up with will lead to other ideas and stories. A rule of thumb we've discovered is: When you can read the title and instantly get a mental picture of the pitch, it's a great one.

The title often sells the story, believe it or not. From a marketing point of view, sales in the book industry are led by strong titles with great characters and plot. Collaborating with your agent and/or editor to get this right is key. These skill sets you develop with your partner become a marketing advantage.

STEP 4: BE A GREAT LISTENER (AND BE KIND WITH COMMENTS WHEN YOU SPEAK)

Be willing to listen to each other. Often, we find ourselves half-listening as we ponder how we will respond. It's a challenge to keep from focusing on what we will say next, as we've all been programmed for this. Using a pad of paper to jot down notes as someone speaks helps get your own ideas off your mind for the time being.

Perhaps try a "My Turn" sign, which only one person can hold at a time, or a penalty jar, its contents going toward future workshops and seminars. When it is your turn to speak, remember that your partner is at their most vulnerable. Be kind with remarks, acknowledge areas of agreement, and repeat that which you don't understand to get clarification. Like doubles in tennis, a team is a finely honed machine when it is working well. Remember to honor your complementary but different skills.

Can't say this enough—unique ideas dwell in everyone. Remembering this makes you respond with kindness even if you don't agree. Have a nice tone to your voice and be considerate of others' feelings.

STEP 5: NOTHING ON THE PAGE IS SACRED

Use the Power of Consultation. In other words, after hearing everyone's ideas, it's time to consult on which is the best path to take. It might be a combination of what others have suggested or maybe one idea or thought stands



The Art of Collaboration

out from the rest. Everyone wins because each is invested in making the story great. The process of consultation facilitates communication, with results that will be more than the sum of the parts. It's time well spent, in our view.

The words and art you've put to the page are always changeable, just as the universe is always changing, just as a flower blooms, just as the light from the sun shifts, just as the moon waxes and wanes.

After a bit of consulting, for instance, we did a rewrite of the above paragraph:

As a flower opens its petals to the light of the sun, so will your story bloom under the light of collaboration. Don't be afraid of change.

Collaboration may not be for everyone. It can be a slightly more time-consuming way to write and create art. But something we can all take away from this experiment is the concept of unity in diversity. At our core, we are all united as

humans and we should celebrate the wonders of diversity in a collaborative context as well as everywhere else. Working together, we can share stories and change the world. 🌟

MARY AND RICH CHAMBERLIN are a dynamic duo who write in many kid-focused genres, including comedy that's "milk spraying out the nose" inducing. Our motto is "A good line edit is its own reword." We love to travel and experience diversity firsthand, which led to our award-winning picture book *Mama Panya's Pancakes*. That book continues to receive positive feedback from children around the world. Check out a preview of the "Power Poodle and Danger Dog" graphic novel on our website:

www.marynrich.com

Twitter: [@maryandrichc](https://twitter.com/maryandrichc)

LinkedIn: [mary-and-rich-chamberlin](https://www.linkedin.com/company/mary-and-rich-chamberlin)



Voices of Change

WHERE DO I FIT IN AND IS THERE ROOM? by Tamara Barker

I sometimes ask myself, *Where do I fit in?* I think about how crayons fit into a box. When you insert a crayon into its box, it's supposed to fit nice and neat, lined up straight with the rest. But if you're not careful, then you begin shoving the crayons into spaces where they're not intended to be. Trying to fit the crayons in may even cause accidental damage because there is simply no room for them.

My parents always told me as a teen that being different was good. They would say, "Embrace who you are and who God created you to be. Never give up, and soar!" My child-like mind at the time could barely grasp what they meant except to encourage me. Was it because I was the only Black crayon in the box? Or was it because they didn't want me to fit in perfectly?

WHO WAS I?

It would take me becoming an adult to understand the full potential behind my parents' words and why the portrait of my life, being illustrated, goes beyond the color lines.

Color number one, Christianity. Color number two, Black. Color number three, Author. Ironically, the colors I pulled from the box now try to keep me in a box. Although choice number two was a given color.

Boxes are confining, as we all know. When you're an author, the industry tries to give you a slot in the box—and keep you there. But as we know, not every crayon fits in perfectly. I'm that one. A Black Christian author who writes for both markets (Christian/general market) in children's and adult literature.

My problem is, I'm looking for a space where I fit in. But it hasn't been that easy. I feel like the lonely beige crayon that always gets shafted in the book *The Day the Crayons Quit*.

MULTIPLE SLOTS

My color is not just black. Rather I'm a mixed-up swirl of colors all-in-one. There aren't too many of us (authors) out here—or at least not who've come to be known yet—who fit multiple slots in the publishing box.



Becoming a traditionally published author is difficult in and of itself, but when I add on that I'm a Jesus lover and/or Christian, my odds of finding an agent who represents both "mainstream" and religious markets are very slim. Why? I'm not totally certain, but it may be that if my views differ from theirs, they don't want anything to do with me. It's just my guess, but I also could be totally wrong.

Christianity is my identity. It's who I am and what I am made up of. It's as established for me as when I check off "Black" in the race box and post she/her as my pronouns.

Just because I identify as some particular thing, that shouldn't limit me in terms of what genre or section of the market I should write in. Being put in a box is just wrong. Maybe my parents were right. They didn't want me to fit in perfectly. I don't want limits on the kinds of readers I can reach. For example, if I want to write an educational book about science one day and Jesus the next, then I should be able to do that.

So I find myself scrolling through Manuscript Wish List (MSWL) or QueryTracker trying to see where I fit it in.

But honestly, finding the right agent to represent authors who identify in multiple ways is difficult. Most are not willing to cross the bridge. And if they don't, then the hopes



Voices of Change

of authors like me who want to be published traditionally are melted down like a wax crayon. And we all know the rules of the game: no agent equals no solicitation to most large houses. I'm not going to lie, I'm a little hurt. Just like those other shoved-in crayons that accidentally get broken.

It's a cold world. But it is what it is.

FLAWS AND SECRETS

To make matters a little more interesting, let's look at the four-corner box that I was placed in. It has flaws and secrets.

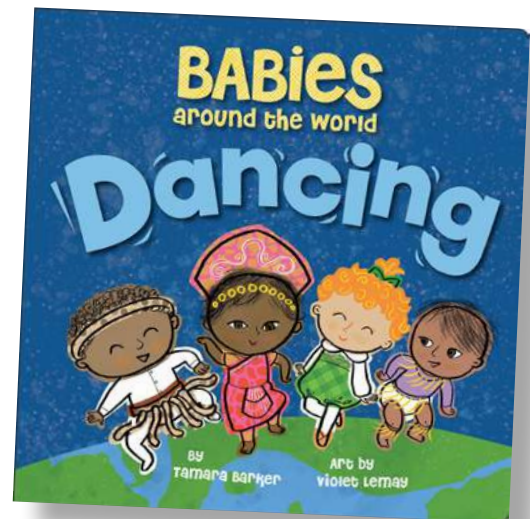
For years the publishing industry has included a limited number of people of color and other diverse groups because of its one-sided narrative. [Lee & Low](#) conducted a survey in 2015 and then again in 2019 called *Where Is the Diversity in Publishing?* The survey revealed biases and disparities in terms of race, gender, disability, and orientation. There's no erasing the crayon-stained truth of what the survey found. [We Need Diverse Books](#), a nonprofit organization that advocates for diverse authors (including LGBTQ; racial, religious, and gender orientation minorities; those with disabilities) has also started holding publishers accountable and to a higher standard.

Now, it's the industry's responsibility to improve their "crayon box." It's up to them and the professionals working in publishing to find ways to upgrade things. When they figure it out, there should necessarily be room for everyone. Especially the mixed-up, spiraled, half-length, and chubby-stubbed crayons.

For me, I'll continue to color outside the lines whether there's room for me or not. Thanks again, Mom and Dad, for the encouragement. 🌟



TAMARA BARKER is the author of *Babies Around the World Dancing* (DuoPress 2019). Her inspiration for writing came shortly after the birth of her second daughter. Tamara loves writing children's books that display love, culture, laughter, diversity, education, and religion. Find her online at [Tamarabarker.com](https://www.tamarabarker.com), [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/booksbybarker), and [Twitter: @booksbybarker](https://twitter.com/booksbybarker)



Shop Around the Corner

THE BOOK BIN by Linda Davis

I've been a loyal Book Bin customer for fifty years. My mother tells me that as a little girl, my favorite place on Earth was the children's section, where I'd perch myself on one of their tiny stools and slowly and carefully consider my selections. Once my best friend and I were old enough to bike to downtown Northbrook by ourselves, we made the Book Bin one of our regular stops, usually landing there after we'd loaded up on penny candy from Ben Franklin. Our tastes in books felt quite sophisticated—we started with *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*, graduated to *My Darling, My Hamburger*, and then plowed through all Stephen King and V.C. Andrews had to offer. I like to think that the Book Bin and I grew up together. It is still my favorite Northbrook destination and has nurtured my passion for reading—although I stay away from horror novels now. I treasure my chats with owners Alli Gilley and Amy Morrison about our shared love of books and enjoyed our recent conversation about the Book Bin.



Tell us about how the Book Bin got its start.

The Book Bin opened its doors in November of 1971 when four dedicated women, brought together by their common love of books, became a part of Northbrook history. Within one year, three of them had to move on, as their husbands' employment sent them out of state. Sue Warner, the woman who remained, was joined by Janis Irvine, who hired Alli on her sixteenth birthday.

In September 2015, after forty-three years of ownership, Janis sold the store to Alli, her sister Amy Morrison, and some extended family. Alli says, "Under our watch, we hope that generations to come will love being in a bookstore, an environment of discovery, and have a chance to hit the pause button on this moment right now. We aim to spread kindness through books and hope you'll join us."

What is unique about the Book Bin? How do you account for your success?

As a fifty-year-old business, we have a long-standing relationship with our community and customers. While we don't do much traditional advertising, word of mouth accomplishes a lot. Just this morning we heard about a

sideline conversation at a weekend soccer game singing our praises. What this creates is a special feeling when you walk in our door—you know that you are going to receive excellent service.

We work with local schools and places of worship and we are proud to partner with [CATCH](#), a Northbrook organization dedicated to erasing the stigma of mental illness and empowering families to foster resilience and prioritize mental health in their kids. We are currently hosting a Red Ribbon Station in the store, where people can stop by to write a message of hope, struggle, or compassion in order to start conversations about mental health.

What do you look for in the books you choose to offer at the store?

We look for lots of variety on our shelves; all subjects and all people deserve to have their stories told. But at the same time, we need to be able to hand-sell books to everyone who comes in, so our books need to have universal appeal. We love a good, old-fashioned funny book that can also present a moral question or teachable moment.



Shop Around the Corner



A cozy place to find a new favorite.



Book Bin's staff is always ready to make a great recommendation!



Rich Brown and his daughters, Alli Gilley and Amy Morrison, celebrate the store's fiftieth Birthday!

What trends are you noticing in kid lit?

Graphic novels are still so popular, as well as books that feature stories from many cultures.

What would you like our community of local children's book authors and illustrators to know?

We would love to have you visit us at the store! We are committed to supporting local Northbrook authors by offering a contract for our consignment program and by hosting book launch events.

Are there other ways to connect with your store?

We have been working on enhancing our social media presence. Please visit us on Facebook ([Book Bin Northbrook](#)) and Instagram ([@bookbinnorthbrook](#)). We also have a monthly e-newsletter with store events and reviews of past and upcoming releases. 🌟

LINDA B. DAVIS has been a member of SCBWI for ten years. She recently enjoyed a moment of fame when a tweet about using her LFL to spread the word about Banned Books Week went viral. Her first novel is the story of a overnight class trip that becomes a survival mission for an eleven-year-old super picky eater. *Food Fight* will be released by Regal House Publishing in June 2023.

Twitter: [@lindabdavis65](#) • Instagram: [Linda_d65](#)



Right: Linda at her favorite bookstore.

Left: Come visit Hardcover Jay and Lily in Turtle Cove just inside the store entrance!



Illustrator's Tips

WELCOME TO
ILLUSTRATOR'S TIPS
BY ME, KELLY LEIGH MILLER



I'VE WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED
MANY BOOKS, SUCH AS:



I'VE BEEN WORKING
IN PUBLISHING
PROFESSIONALLY FOR
ABOUT FOUR YEARS,
NOT COUNTING YEARS
I WAS PITCHING.



I'VE BEEN DRAWING
SINCE I COULD HOLD A
CRAYON. I LOVED ART,
COMICS, AND PICTURE
BOOKS.



ILLUSTRATOR ONLY



#1 HAND EXERCISES!

NOW I KNOW
WHAT YOU'RE
THINKING:
THIS ISN'T
DRAWING

BUT THIS
MIGHT BE
ONE OF
THE MOST
IMPORTANT
TIPS!

DRAWING IS LIKE A SPORT WHEN YOU DRAW FOR LONG PERIODS OF TIME. YOU HAVE TO TREAT YOUR HAND AND WRIST MUSCLES RIGHT OR YOU COULD SERIOUSLY INJURE YOURSELF.

HAND EXERCISES

WRIST EXERCISES



Illustrator's Tips

I TRY TO DO MINE EVERY TIME I DRAW.



FOR MORE IN-DEPTH READING ON THE TYPES OF EXERCISES TO DO, I HIGHLY RECOMMEND DRAW STRONGER BY KRIOTA WILLBERG!



A SKETCHBOOK DOESN'T HAVE TO BE A PHYSICAL BOOK. IT JUST HAS TO BE A PLACE TO PRACTICE AND EXPERIMENT!



THEY COULD BE PRETTY...



...OR SUPER MESSY!



THE IMPORTANT PART IS THAT IT'S A SAFE SPACE TO DOODLE, EXPERIMENT, AND LEARN.



I PERSONALLY LIKE PHYSICAL ONES BUT MINE ARE SUPER MESSY AND MOSTLY FILLED WITH BALLPOINT PEN DOODLES.



Illustrator's Tips

**#3 WORK BIG!
OR SCAN BIG!**

NO, I'M NOT TALKING ABOUT MURALS OR ANYTHING. THIS IS MORE ABOUT RESOLUTION.



WHETHER YOU'RE WORKING TRADITIONALLY OR DIGITALLY, IT'S IMPORTANT TO MAKE SURE YOUR DPI (DOTS PER INCH) IS AROUND 400-600.

| | | |
|------------|-----|-------------|
| WIDTH | 8.5 | INCHES |
| HEIGHT | 11 | INCHES |
| RESOLUTION | 450 | PIXELS/INCH |

I ACTUALLY PREFER TO DRAW SMALL SO THIS HELPS KEEP MY DRAWINGS CRISP!



#4 FLIP YOUR ART!

IT HELPS YOU FIND ERRORS YOU MIGHT HAVE MISSED!



THE OLD-FASHIONED WAY OF DOING THIS IS TO HOLD YOUR DRAWING UP TO A MIRROR, BUT MOST PROGRAMS HAVE A WAY TO DO IT TOO.



IDEALLY THIS IS FOR YOUR SKETCH PHASE SINCE IT'S EASIER TO FIX ERRORS IN THE SKETCH PHASE.

HMM, THAT EYE LOOKS WEIRD. LET'S FIX THAT!




#5 LIFE DRAWING!

LIFE DRAWING WILL IMPROVE YOUR ART SKILLS EVEN IF YOU WORK IN A CARTOONY WAY!



DRAW PEOPLE! ANIMALS! PLANTS! YOUR ROOM! EVERYTHING AROUND YOU! IF YOU GET BORED OF WHAT'S AROUND YOU, GO TO A DIFFERENT LOCATION TO DRAW OR LOOK UP SOME FUN REFERENCE PHOTOS TO STUDY!



Illustrator's Tips

#6 PERSONAL PROJECTS

IT HELPS TO ALWAYS HAVE A PERSONAL PROJECT TO POUR YOUR CREATIVITY INTO!



PERSONAL PROJECTS CAN ACT AS PORTFOLIO PIECES TO SHOW FUTURE CLIENTS WHAT YOU COULD MAKE FOR THEM.



WANT TO GET INTO PICTURE BOOKS? MAKE A DUMMY!
WANT TO GET INTO COMICS? DRAW SOME COMICS TO SHOW OFF YOUR SKILLS!

CLIENTS NEED TO SEE WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR THEM.



#7 PORTFOLIO WEBSITE


YOU NEED A PLACE WHERE CLIENTS CAN EASILY SEE ALL YOUR WORK.

SOCIAL MEDIA DOESN'T COUNT.



THIS SHOWS CLIENTS THAT YOU ARE SERIOUS ABOUT THE WORK. THE SITE DOESN'T NEED TO BE FANCY. JUST EASY FOR CLIENTS TO CLICK THROUGH YOUR WORK.

IF IT TAKES THEM A WHILE TO FIND YOUR WORK, THEY MAY GET IMPATIENT FROM THE HUNT.



THOSE ARE ALL MY TIPS FOR NOW!

IF I DON'T STOP MYSELF, I'LL JUST GO ON AND ON...



THANK YOU FOR READING AND I HOPE THESE HELPED!



Visit KELLY LEIGH MILLER'S website at www.kellyleighbiller.com, and follow her on [Instagram](#) & [Twitter](#)!

Writer's Tips

by Kate Hannigan

LET'S TALK MECHANICS OF GETTING STARTED

I never really know what I'm doing when I begin a new writing project. Every time I set fingers onto laptop keys, a voice in my head begins buzzing. *How in the world am I going to do this? Do I really have 40,000 words in me? How do I even start?* So the first order of business is to **shut off the voices of self-doubt** in our heads.

Previous *Prairie Wind* Writer's Tips have shared fantastic advice about character, setting, voice, and beyond—writing that happens when we have a completed first draft to shape and mold further. Most of writing, after all, is revision. Refining. I want to take a few steps backward from that spot and share tips for getting ourselves started. Doing the front-end work that gets us on track toward that glorious moment of having a completed first draft in our hands.

What follows are the mechanics I use to produce a first draft. Some tricks to help move a great book idea from inside our heads to outside. To see our stories on a page instead of feeling them knocking around in our minds. Simply put, how to start the process.

My dream with a new book idea is that some unsuspecting editor somewhere will fall in love with my manuscript and rush down the hall (we're no longer working virtually in this fantasy) and exclaim to a colleague about what's landed on their desk. Because I need this editor to be able to share the gist of my story succinctly, first I need to know exactly what I'm writing.

ONE-SENTENCE SUMMARY

When I'm turning a new book idea around in my head, the first thing I do is open up a page in Google Docs and write up a quick summary. I try to paint the idea onto the page with broad brushstrokes, then sharpen it with each pass.

Once I have a sense of what I'm going for, I **sum up my project in one sentence**. A sentence I could put in a pitch letter to that unsuspecting editor. I consider this the Walking the Dog

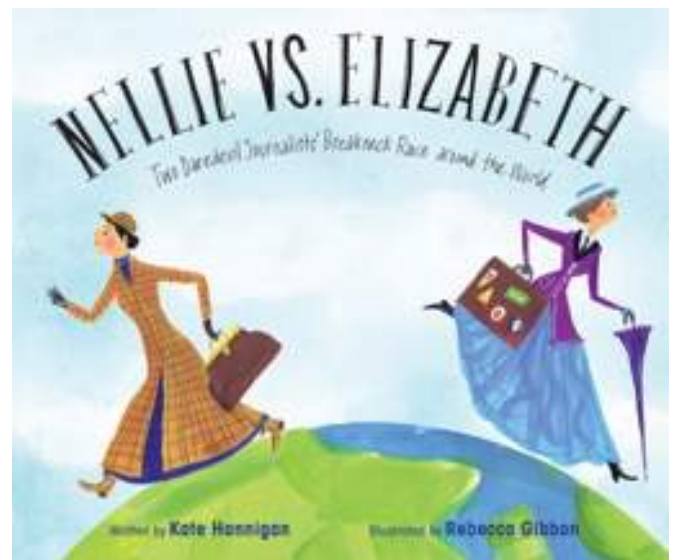


line. As in, we're out in the neighborhood, we run into an old friend, they ask what we're working on, we give them this line. One sentence. It's the elevator pitch only tighter. They do not have time for a long-winded explanation. There are dogs tugging on leashes. There are walks to be taken. There are squirrels.

As we do this exercise, we can try to imagine how a description of our new book might read, like these from *Kirkus*:

The real-life story of two intrepid female journalists and their competition to circumnavigate the globe.

Culinary mishaps ensue when 9-year-old cousins conspire to avoid being flower girls in their aunt's wedding.



JACKET FLAP

After boiling down my book idea to its essence with the one-sentence summary, next I **write the jacket flap** copy. I find this exercise useful because it makes us step back and consider how a young reader might feel when they first pick up our book. What will entice them to open up the pages? What sets our book apart from the others clamoring for this reader's attention?

The jacket flap summary typically consists of only a paragraph or two of text, and writing it can help us visualize getting a reader interested—not only the young reader holding our finished project in their hands, but also an agent and a book editor who can make our dream a reality. And as a front-end exercise as we're teasing ideas out of our heads and onto pages, it helps give us accountability. When we get lost during the long process of writing our book, we can look back at the jacketflap material and remember what we've promised our reader.

SERIOUSLY, WRITE AN OUTLINE

All of us have our own approaches to writing our books. There are those who love the giddy, wind-in-the-hair thrill of flying by the seat of our pants (known as “pantsers”) and those who prefer the reassuring cashmere-sweater comfort of writing with an outline (known as “plotters”).

I am a firm believer in the latter. And my reason is rooted in personal experience: The books I've written as a pantsers are unfinished, while the books I've outlined are completed and even published. But that's just what works for me. Every writer is different, so we should explore whatever techniques work best for our own writing style. But at the end of the day, I encourage outlining.

THE 5/10 SPLIT

My outlining style is something I have dubbed the “5/10 Split.” It is incredibly basic. There are shelves of books on writing that offer ways to get started and much more sophisticated approaches than what I offer. But for me and my cluttered brain, this process works. Writing is so hard. It's lonely and complicated and often humiliating. Like a Zumba class. I try to keep things as uncomplicated as possible.

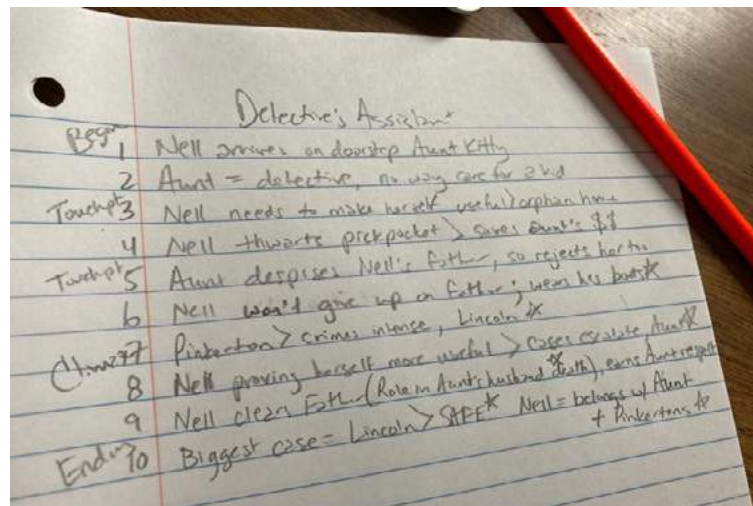
Any tools can be used for this technique: index cards that are easily moved around—sticky notes tacked up on a wall, spreadsheets, pencil-to-paper sketches. For me, it's just a list I scribble on paper or type out on my laptop.

With the 5/10 Split, I am trying to get an overview of my book. So I can see where I'm writing action scenes and where I'm offering rest and reflection. I'll be deep in the trenches soon enough, but at the start, I write out **the five big hits** of the story that's ricocheting around in my head: a few words (like bullet points) about the opening, the ending, and the climax, and then two items I call “touchpoints,” which are plot twists or emotional moments.

Before we begin writing, we should know generally how we want our story to end. And that's because we write to the ending. As the authors, we're the all-knowing hands that move these characters around. So having the ending in mind as we first start writing helps us get to that ending more effortlessly. Less gnashing of teeth, ideally.

1. Beginning
2. Touchpoint
3. Touchpoint
4. Climax
5. Ending

Next, I flesh out each of these bullet points into a few sentences. I expand about what the main character wants, the conflict or obstacle in their way, and a little backstory for the various characters. Once I've fleshed out these five points, I split each of them into two points and write some more. So now we go **from five points to ten**. Please note: There's no set number here. For the sake of the exercise, I start with five and build to ten. But we can add more as needed.



The author's rough outlines for her middle-grade mystery that eventually became *The Detective's Assistant*.



Writer's Tips



Now, with our ten plot points established, we can see where our inciting event should be and, even better, *what* it should be. We can see how we want the plot to flip in an exciting way. We can track the external action of our story and the internal heart of it. And we can move things around to heighten those action scenes and emotional moments to propel our story to its exciting climax and conclusion. And we can chart our main character's change throughout their journey.

What comes next? Once we have our ten outline points taking us from opening to ending, we have something incredibly exciting. We have the framework for a ten-chapter book. *Our next step is to write it.* ✨



KATE HANNIGAN writes fiction and nonfiction and, in an ongoing quest to better understand storytelling, has taught middle-grade novel-writing classes with [StoryStudio](#). Her historical fantasy series *Cape, Mask, and Boots* (Simon & Schuster/Aladdin) is now out in paperback, and the first book in the series has been optioned for film. Her historical mystery *The Detective's Assistant* (Little, Brown Books for Young Readers) won the 2016 Golden Kite Award for middle-grade works and also was optioned for film. Visit her online at [KateHannigan.com](#).



Writer's Bookshelf

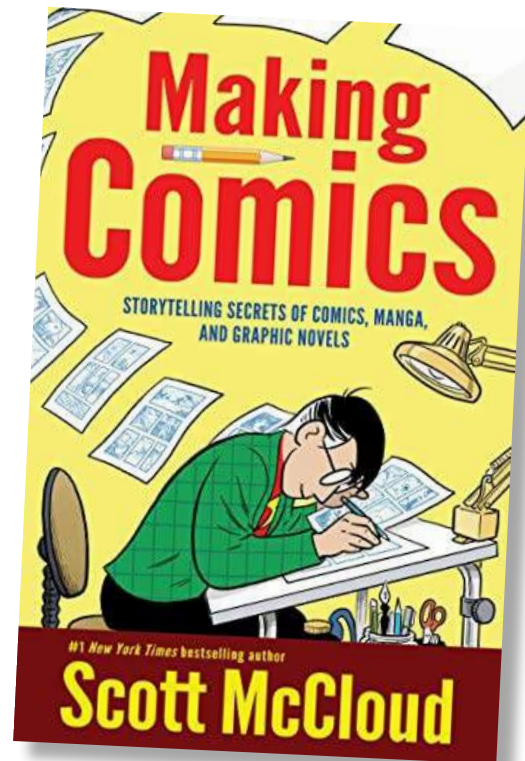
UNLOCKING THE SECRETS OF SEQUENTIAL ART: HOW I USE COMICS TO IMPROVE MY PROSE

Reviewed by Reese Eschmann

The main character of my debut novel, *Etta Invincible*, writes and illustrates her own comics. I worked with illustrator Gretel Lusky to add a few of Etta's comic panels to the novel, and I enjoyed the process so much that I decided to try writing an entire graphic novel script. So I delved into the world of sequential art, seeking to gain a better understanding of the craft of merging words and images on a page. What I didn't understand immediately, though, was how learning about comics would improve my writing across all formats. One craft book, in particular, showed me how the parameters involved in comic creation can inform and improve the way I write prose.

Making Comics: Storytelling Secrets of Comics, Manga, and Graphic Novels, by Scott McCloud, is a brilliantly illustrated book on comic writing that covers everything from world building and character design to the type of pen one should use if they want to draw comics. In my favorite section of the book, McCloud states, "There are five arenas where your choices can make the difference between clear, convincing storytelling and a confusing mess."

He's speaking mostly to an audience of illustrators, talking about how to keep readers grounded in a story while they jump from image to image. But I found his explanation of the five arenas particularly helpful for prose writers too, especially as someone who often sacrifices scene-setting in favor of moving the plot and story along at a quicker pace. One of my critique partners recently reminded me of the importance of showing my characters and how they're inhabiting the space around them, especially at the beginning of a new scene. Working through McCloud's five arenas is a useful exercise for making sure that you have all your scene-setting bases covered.



THE FIVE ARENAS OF STORYTELLING

The five arenas of storytelling, as described by McCloud, are Choice of Moment, Choice of Frame, Choice of Image, Choice of Word, and Choice of Flow.

- Choice of Moment requires us to slow down and visualize which specific moment needs to be shown in order for the scene you're working on to propel the story forward.
- Choice of Frame reminds us to highlight the most important parts of that scene—is it the pain on a character's face? Or a wider shot of the battle raging on around them?
- Choice of Image propels us into the action of a scene and encourages us to draw from all of our character's senses in order to create a full, rich image.
- Choice of Word reminds us of the importance of thinking about how our dialogue is interacting with the other elements and images shown in a scene.
- And finally, Choice of Flow makes us question how to get our characters from A to B so we can decide whether a time jump or an uninterrupted story flow is the best choice for the transition between scenes.

Writer's Bookself



In sequential art, every image and panel should give the reader a hint at what's to come, and prose needs to do the same. Sometimes, we can draw on common experiences that we share with our readers to fill in the gap between what's happening and what comes next. At other times, we must bridge gaps in action with new information: showing how our characters think about the future or providing hints through images and environment.

Thinking about the five arenas in the visual way described by McCloud, as though writing for a comic or screenplay, is an excellent way for me to slow down and consider every aspect of a scene. After all, if we want our readers to be able to picture our stories in their heads, we must first be able to do the same ourselves. ✨

REESE ESCHMANN holds a master's degree in Social Work from the University of Illinois-Chicago and worked in schools for six years. When she's not writing or taking naps, Reese enjoys rock climbing, baking, and making movies with her family. She lives outside of Chicago with her husband and their hound dog. Reese is the author of *Etta Invincible* and the *Home for Meow* series. You can find Reese on Instagram and Twitter [@reesepieces21](#) or on her website at [ReeseEschmann.com](#)

Mentor Texts

FINDING THE HEART: HOW ADULT LITERATURE CAN HELP

by Diane O’Neill

My debut picture book, *Saturday at the Food Pantry*, almost didn’t happen—and in creating it, I didn’t use the kind of mentor texts you’d suspect.

Although I’d grown up on food stamps and visited a food pantry once with my mother, I’d never thought of writing anything for kids about these experiences, but I *had* written pieces for adults. The *South Side Weekly* published my poem “Are There No Workhouses?” and the *Chicago Sun-Times* printed my op-ed “Growing up on food stamps, I had no idea I was despised.”

I bragged about the op-ed on the SCBWI-IL listserv, and Andrea Hall of Albert Whitman & Co. emailed, asking if I had any picture book manuscripts on food insecurity, or any ideas for one.

I was one-millimeter away from responding, “Sorry, no. Hope you find another writer.” *But wait*, I thought, *what about the time we went to a food pantry, and my mother wouldn’t let me get any of the desserts?* “No!!” she told me. “They’ll want us to get sensible stuff.” What about eating chili for days and days, or going to the Wonder Bakery and getting a cartload of bread and sweet rolls because they were cheap and filling?

Hmm—What if the chili pot becomes empty and a child goes with Mom to a food pantry?

Andrea liked the idea.

But except for the chili pot and the food pantry visit, I didn’t know what was going to happen or who my characters were. I left notebooks around the house and wrote ideas as they occurred to me. Luckily, this was January, the month of [Tara Lazar’s Storystorm](#), a challenge to come up with an idea a day. Sometimes my idea was a plot point, and other times a detail about a character. I also kept a computer document in which I wrote scenes and ideas. My child character originally was “Sean,” a boy who loved superheroes, before morphing into “Molly,” a girl who liked to draw.

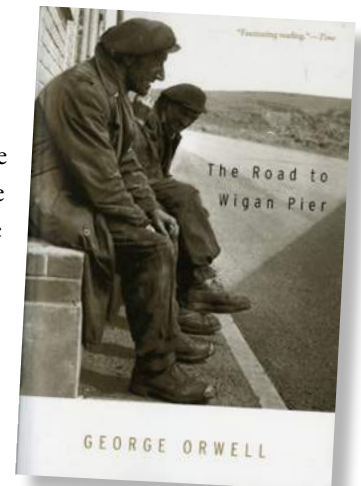
But I knew that the heart of the story had to be social justice, with an emotional core that protested against stigma. I kept thinking of a George Orwell book I’d read years before. In that book, Orwell wrote about people on unemployment and the foods they preferred—basically, comfort foods rather than salads. I felt driven to read Orwell’s words again, wanting to absorb his passion about the dignity of people who are poor, hoping to convey that respect in my story. I ordered the book, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, two days after I got Andrea’s email. I also found my son’s high school copy of John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*.

THE ROAD TO WIGAN PIER

by George Orwell

Orwell was from a middle class background, but he wanted to know about the lives of people who were poor. For a while, he lived in a mining community where many were unemployed.

I found the passage I remembered:



Would it not be better if they spent more money on wholesome things like oranges and wholemeal bread or...saved on fuel and ate their carrots raw? Yes, it would, but...no ordinary human being is ever going to do such a thing. The ordinary human being would sooner starve than live on brown bread and raw carrots. And the peculiar evil is this, that the less money you have, the less inclined you feel to spend it on wholesome food...When you are unemployed, which is to say when you are underfed, harassed, bored, and miserable, you don’t want to eat dull wholesome food. You want something a little bit “tasty”... Unemployment is an endless misery that has got to be constantly palliated.



Mentor Texts

Orwell wrote this in 1937, in a different land and a different time, but it rang psychologically true to me, both decades ago and now.

Then as now, people on benefits are judged by their purchases. My op-ed was a response to a letter in the *Chicago Sun-Times* that complained about people using SNAP cards to buy iced coffee and energy drinks; the writer urged for restrictions. I cringed, still remembering my horror, years before in my high school history class, learning that my classmates' moms peeked in the carts of people using food stamps, tsk-tsking if they saw anything as frivolous as a sweet roll.

We bought sweet rolls sometimes.

My grandmother, who lived on meager Social Security benefits after a life of working as a maid, would buy treats—a jar of herring, ice cream, Heinemann cake—when she got her check. By the end of the month, she was down to bread and milk—but at the beginning, she wanted something “tasty.”

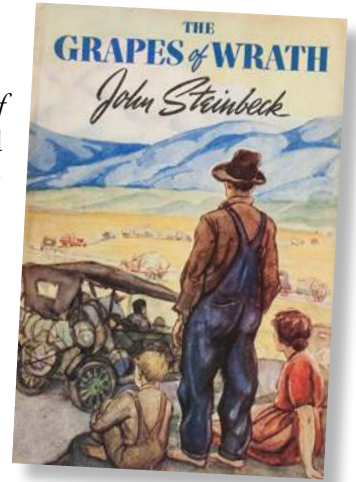
There's an assumption, I've noticed, that money brings wisdom, that people who are poor are ignorant and unaware of nutritional best practices. One time my mother had to go to a presentation on nutrition in order to keep getting food stamps. Orwell clearly gets that that isn't the issue. Moreover, healthy foods aren't cheap—a box of macaroni and cheese is cheaper than salad supplies. And let's not forget “food deserts”—neighborhoods with few if any supermarkets that sell healthy foods. *Food insecurity* doesn't only mean hunger and having no food—it also refers to not having access to nutritious food. Just recently, Aldi pulled out of a Chicago South Side neighborhood, leaving shoppers stranded.

I wonder if the negative reaction to people on benefits purchasing treats is because they aren't deemed worthy. In my story, I wanted my child character to ultimately get dessert.

I glanced through George Orwell's book periodically as I worked on my story. Since the heart of my book was social justice, I wanted to make sure I was in the correct zone, and Orwell's words felt like a good compass.

THE GRAPES OF WRATH by John Steinbeck

I hadn't read *The Grapes of Wrath* in years, but I recalled Steinbeck portraying unity among people who were poor. I thumbed through the book for inspiration—I wanted to tap into Steinbeck's fervor for the rights of people who are poor.



Here's just one interchange:

The stout woman smiled. “No need to thank. Ever’body’s in the same wagon. S’pose we was down. You’d a give us a han.”

“Yes,” Ma said, “we would.”

“Or anybody.”

“Or anybody.”

It was matter-of-fact—of course they'd help each other. *Or anybody.*

This sentiment is at the heart of my book—everybody needs help sometimes, and everybody has something to give.

In Steinbeck's book, some characters reach an almost spiritual sense of unity. When taking leave of his mother, Tom talks of Casy, the preacher:

Maybe it's like Casy says, a fella ain't got a soul of his own, but on'y a piece of a big one...Then I'll be all aroun' in the dark. I'll be everywhere—wherever you look. Wherever they's a fight so hungry people can eat, I'll be there.

And in a powerful ending scene, Rose of Sharon nurses a starving man.

So, while I wanted the pantry in my book to be a welcoming place, with kind people working there, I wanted the characters coming for food to feel empowered. Molly and Caitlin, a classmate who is also visiting the food pantry, draw pictures for everybody in line, and in the end their families join together for a meal. In this scene, I hoped to channel a bit of the unity Steinbeck described.



Mentor Texts

A TREE GROWS IN BROOKLYN

by Betty Smith

Although I didn't specifically consult this book when writing my manuscript, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* is as much a part of me as any experience I've lived, the characters like part of my extended family. Likewise, the values in the book became mine, values I wanted my story to reflect.

When I read the book at fourteen, it immediately became my favorite book—and whenever I reread it now, I love it just as much.

In the 1960s, there weren't many "mirrors" if you were growing up in an extremely dysfunctional home. My mother lived with paranoid schizophrenia, and we bounced around a lot, living on public aid and food stamps. I was a bookworm but accepted that my life wasn't the kind that authors wrote about.

But then I met "Francie" in this remarkable book. Not only is her family poor, but her father has an alcohol use disorder, something to be kept absolutely secret. Her mother even makes her edit her diary! When Francie starts writing about her actual life for English class, her teacher tells her to burn her homework and say, "I am burning ugliness."

Finally—a book about someone who, too, had family secrets difficult to share.

But although this book shows the messiness and cruelty of life, its focus is beauty. When Francie, as a baby, is sick, the neighbors say it would be best if she died. Her mother retorts, "Who wants to die? Everything struggles to live... Look at that tree growing up there out of that grating... If there was only one tree like that in the world, you would think it was beautiful."

To me, the heart of the book is the part where Francie and her brother go for vaccinations; on the way, they play in the mud. The doctor and nurse "tsk-tsk" as they ready



the needle for Francie: "There is no excuse for these people living in filth." The doctor even comments that it would be better if "that kind of people" were all sterilized.

Smith lets us know the nurse is from a poor background herself and then breaks the authorial "wall":

A person who pulls himself up from a low environment... has two choices. Having risen above his environment, he can forget it; or, he can rise above it and never forget it and keep compassion and understanding in his heart for those he has left behind him in the cruel upclimb.

Poverty, or having been poor, then, is no cause for shame; the shame is in forgetting where you came from and losing your compassion. I wanted my characters to hold their heads high.

DON'T LIMIT YOURSELF!

Each writer has their own writing method and way of using mentor texts, and isn't that the glory of being a writer? But don't rule out literature written for adults, as well as books for children! What books have shaped you and made you you? Which have most informed the values you live by? Let these works inspire you in your own writing! For me, the writings of Orwell, Steinbeck, and Smith helped me zero in on the heart of my story. 🌟

DIANE O'NEILL's debut picture book, *Saturday at the Food Pantry*, illustrated by Brizida Magro, was *Parents Magazine's* October 2021 book club selection and one of the Chicago Public Library's Best Picture Books of 2021. Her works have appeared in *Ladybug Magazine*, *The Chicago Tribune*, the *Journal of Modern Poetry*, and *It All Changed in an Instant: More Six-Word Memoirs by Writers Famous & Obscure*.



Network News

AN ODE TO PIT CREWS *by Deb Aronson*

Perhaps it's because I've moved to North Carolina, the birthplace of NASCAR, but I find I've been thinking about the importance of pit crews lately. You know pit crews—the team on the sidelines that stands ready to change a tire, replace a brake pad, or hydrate the driver.



Deb and her husband, Ben Williams, out for a sail.

We all have pit crews in our lives, though you might not think of them in that way. For example, I have a pit crew when I race my Sunfish. My husband, also a sailor, helps me launch my boat into the water, lifts it onto the trailer when we're done, fixes things when they break, and adds improvements to my little boat that make my experience more fun and successful. And there's another pit crew that's been really important to me.

I've served as SCBWI-Illinois's assistant regional advisor (ARA) since 2019 and, among other jobs, I've coordinated these network columns. Normally, Network News has covered what's been happening at one or two of Illinois' many networks (20 at last count!). It's been our Prairie Wind way for all of us to become more familiar with the various networks throughout the state. But to continue my analogy, I'm inspired to give a shout-out to our Illinois regional team—the pit crew for all of SCBWI-Illinois' kidlit creatives. I'll also explain SCBWI-IL's volunteer structure and, finally, bid you all farewell.

YOUR ILLINOIS CREW

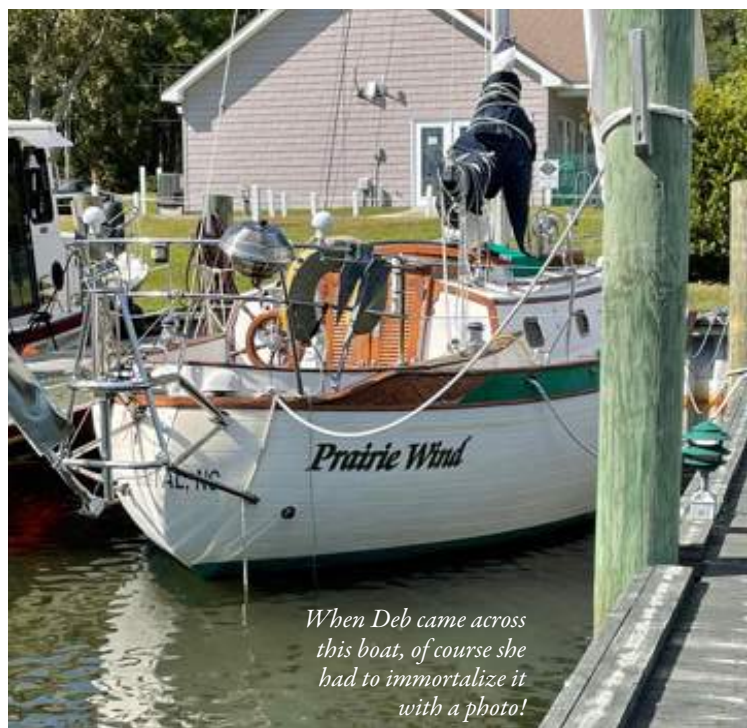
Our Illinois "pit crew" is headed by two regional advisors (RAs), currently Debbie Topolski and Jenny Wagh; one ARA (me, until now); and one IC, or illustrator coordinator (formerly Cedric Gliane and now NaShantá Fletcher).

You can find us listed on the [SCBWI-IL homepage](#) on the upper left side.

Then there are our networks. Most of you are probably familiar with these. It's my understanding that Illinois is actually the only SCBWI region divided into networks and that they're the brainchild of our first-ever RA, Esther Hershenhorn, now regional advisor emerita.

The networks are geographically based, so members usually belong to the one closest to their home, although the boundaries are fluid, and any Illinois member is welcome at any Illinois network.

The pit crew, or regional team (RT), works to make your participation in the kidlit world more fun and successful by planning region-wide events (think Prairie Writers and Illustrators Day), providing speakers, mentorships



When Deb came across this boat, of course she had to immortalize it with a photo!

Network News

(the Laura Crawford mentorships), diversity and inclusion opportunities (Many Voices), prizes, and other recognition as we all journey along our individual paths. We also provide opportunities to get together (IRL or via Zoom) to support and celebrate one another.

All this coordinating, planning, and presenting is done by people who serve as volunteers, although the core regional team gets some perks, such as (pre-COVID) the opportunity to attend one of the two annual national SCBWI conferences for free or at a discounted cost.

Before I became part of the crew I had no idea how the system worked or how much work the regional team actually does, so I'm assuming most readers don't know either. SCBWI is an enormous international organization. Within the US alone, it's split into numerous regions, Illinois being its own region. But some regions, like the Carolinas, combine two states or more. Others, like California, have seven regions within a single state.

JOIN THE CREW

SCBWI-Illinois has been making my efforts as a writer more fun and enjoyable since I first joined in 2008, after

hanging out with my friend, neighbor, and running partner, prolific kids book author Alice McGinty. She showed me the way to write for those middle-grade readers that I so closely identify with. (I guess Alice has always been part of *my* pit crew!)

Because I believe strongly in supporting those organizations that I've benefited from (SCBWI-IL, US Sailing, various progressive causes), I've been deeply pleased and honored to be part of SCBWI-Illinois, including my time as the ARA.

Perhaps you, too, would love to find a way to lend a hand to the kidlit community, but are worried about finding the time. I won't lie: These kinds of volunteer opportunities can be very consuming, and with COVID, my role was far more consuming than I had originally envisioned, in terms of time, emotion, and just general bandwidth.

But I never regretted stepping up. In large part, that's because the benefits far outweighed the costs. Those benefits—camaraderie, fun, and learning experiences—have been absolutely priceless.

That's another great part of being a volunteer, particularly within SCBWI-Illinois—as you work with other volunteers



Deb's boat, Wild Rumpus. Its name is a tribute to Where the Wild Things Are by Maurice Sendak



Network News

on projects you share a passion for, you make friends and develop relationships you wouldn't necessarily have if you were on the sidelines.

Meanwhile, because I've moved out of state, I must pass my monkey wrench (there's that pit crew metaphor again!) to another stalwart volunteer. But before I go, I want to say I stand in awe of all that Debbie and Jenny do, and it's been so energizing to get to know NaShantá, the newest member of the core team. I take pride in the small amount of support I've provided during my tenure as ARA, and I can't wait to see what the future holds for SCBWI-Illinois!

For those of you considering applying for the ARA position, you would be joining a fabulous team, and I don't mean *just* the RT, but also Alicia Boemi, our social media coordinator, and all our hardworking network representatives, not to mention the dedicated and talented team that assembles this very *Prairie Wind*, a truly outstanding publication!

Whether or not the Network News column returns next issue, I'm happy, proud, and honored to have been part of this team.

DON'T BE A STRANGER!!

deb@debaronson.com

www.debaronson.com

[@debaronson](https://twitter.com/debaronson) (Twitter)



A DAY IN THE LIFE OF AN ARA

While our roles are only loosely defined, my primary responsibility as ARA has been serving as liaison for the networks as they plan their programming. I reached out to network reps to find out their plans, sorted through those that need funds to pay a speaker, cleared those with Debbie and Jenny, and made sure (now that we are often on Zoom) that not too many events were being held the same night.

I was also the main RT liaison who worked with the committee that organized and ran Words in the Woods (or Words on the Web during COVID). In addition, I lent a hand with the Read Local initiative by overseeing the Read Local Blog, a post written monthly by a rotating list of PAL authors/illustrators. I also ran the Read Local Ambassador project, which was envisioned as a team of Illinois kidlit creatives going into schools to talk to teachers and librarians about the amazing authors and illustrators they can invite to their schools from all over Illinois. This effort, however, ended up being social-media-based because of, again, COVID. 🌞

DEB ARONSON is a former archaeologist and award-winning non-fiction writer. When she's not gardening, sailing or designing her dream Derby hat (hint, it will include snack food), Deb enjoys writing about ordinary people doing extraordinary things. She lives in Urbana, IL — land of corn, soybeans and cows, and source of the "mighty" Kaskaskia River — with two cats, five sailboats [they are small!], and one husband.

EDITOR'S NOTE

With Deb departing after her stellar job as ARA, we are planning to include the Network News column in future *Prairie Wind* issues only sporadically—or discontinue it. This depends on our readers. If any members from around the state would like to volunteer to write a Network News column that would be great! If no one steps up to volunteer, we'll skip the column. Your article could include actual news about your network, upcoming events you're hosting, stories about how the network formed, fun or interesting network anecdotes—or whatever! We'd be glad to cover any network we haven't highlighted in the past year or two, and you don't necessarily have to be a network leader to submit. If interested in contributing, please email our new director, Shirin Shamsi at shirinshamsi@gmail.com and let her know so we can schedule you in and give you further details.

Season's Crop

CLICK TO BE ADDED
TO A FUTURE
SEASON'S CROP

by Jenny Wagh



Picture Books

Middle-Grade

FICTION

NONFICTION

Brand New Bubbe

by Sarah Aronson
Illus. Ariel Landy
Charlesbridge, Aug. 2022
ISBN: 9781623542498

Ice Cream with Grandpa: A Loving Story for Kids About Alzheimer's & Dementia

by Laura Smetana
Illus. Elisabete B P de Moraes
Flying Cardinal Press, June 2022
ISBN: 978-1737140924

Imagine That

by Renee Bolla
Illus. Ellie I Beykzadeh
Renee Bolla, Sept. 2022
ISBN: 979-8-9864015-0-8

Malik's Number Thoughts:

A Story About OCD
by Natalie Rompella
Illus. Alessia Girasole
Albert Whitman & Company,
Sept. 2022
ISBN: 978-0807549506

The End

by John Bray
Illus. Josh Cleland
Starry Forest Books, Aug. 2022
ISBN: 9781951784126

The Monsters on the Broom

by Annemarie Riley Guertin
Illus. Shauna Lynn Panczyszyn
Little Simon, July 2022
ISBN: 9781665911467

The Moon from Dehradun:

A Story of Partition
by Shirin Shamsi
Illus. Tarun Lak
Atheneum, Sept. 2022
ISBN: 9781665906791

The Ghostly Tales of the Midwest

by Diane Telgen
Arcadia Children's Books, Sept.
2022
ISBN: 1467198757

Under Armour (Sports Brands series)

by Sarah Roggio
Abdo Publishing Essential Library,
Aug. 2022
ISBN: 1532198167

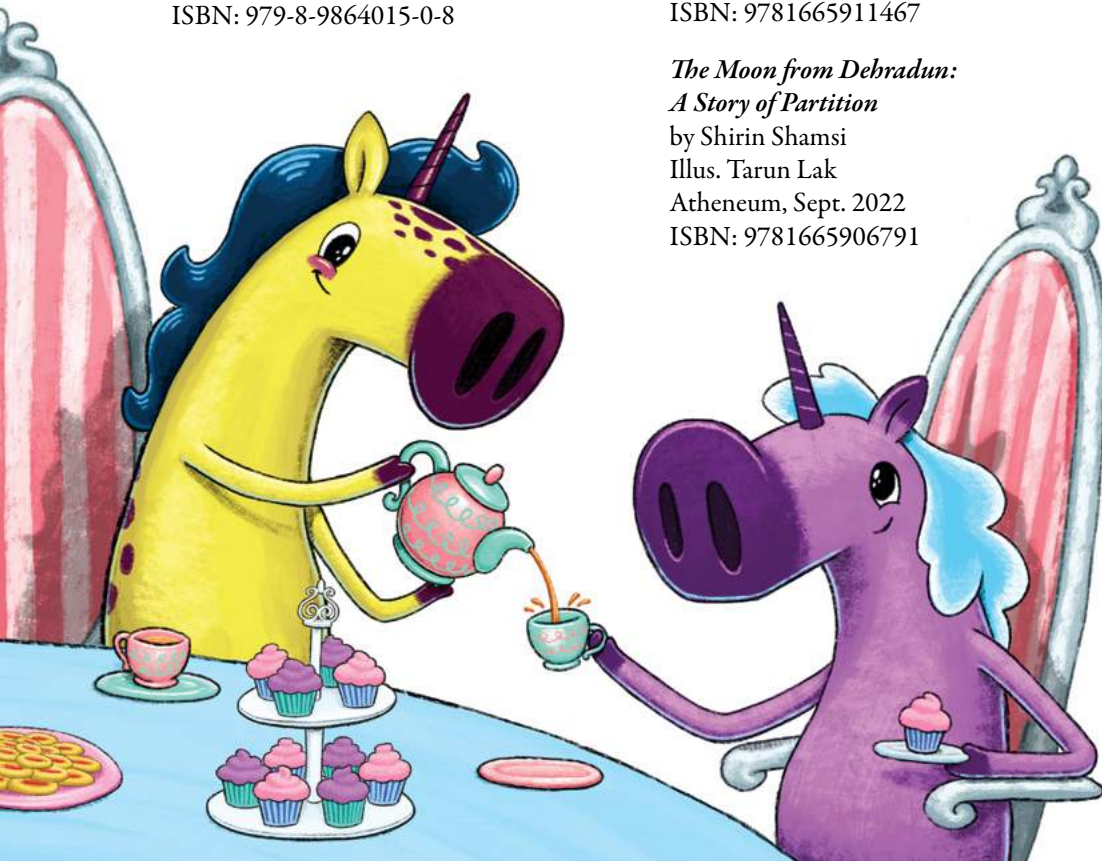
Young Adult

FICTION

First Love: The Art of Making Donuts (anthology)

by Sammi Spizziri and others
Freedom Fox Press, Sept. 2022
ISBN: 1939844866

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or [@jennymariewagh](https://www.instagram.com/jennymariewagh)



Illustrations by Alex Willan