

# Prairie Wind

Newsletter of the Illinois Chapter of SCBWI



Winter 2019



## From the Editor

The holiday hustle and bustle is over, and the kids are back to school. It's now time for me to get my "butt in chair" as **Jane Yolen** says. Our winter *Prairie Wind* issue is full of inspiration to kick off this year.

This month we bid farewell to **Janet McDonnell** as Illinois Illustrator Coordinator, giving us the opportunity to see her shine as [Illustrator in the Spotlight](#). Janet has worn many hats in the publishing world from editor... >



### Shop Around the Corner

We welcome a [new column](#) inspired by **Lisa Katzenberger** featuring local independent bookstores... >



### Read Local

**Sarah Aronson's** Op-Ed, "[Read Local](#)," is a shout out to why SCBWI-IL is a great chapter... >

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### Classes

Visit [illinois.scbwi.org/area-classes-retreats-and-workshops/](http://illinois.scbwi.org/area-classes-retreats-and-workshops/).





## From the Editor

The holiday hustle and bustle is over, and the kids are back to school. It's now time for me to get my "butt in chair" as **Jane Yolen** says. Our winter *Prairie Wind* issue is full of inspiration to kick off this year.

This month we bid farewell to **Janet McDonnell** as Illinois Illustrator Coordinator, giving us the opportunity to see her shine as [Illustrator in the Spotlight](#). Janet has worn many hats in the publishing world from editor to author and art director to illustrator. We wish her well in 2019 as she "finds ways to incorporate creativity into activism."

We welcome a new column [The Shop Around the Corner](#), an inspired idea **Lisa Katzenberger** took note of when another chapter featured local independent bookstores. Read more about Anderson's Bookshop, with three Chicago locations. "Anderson's isn't just a bookstore. It's a community hub."

**Sarah Aronson's** Op-Ed, "[Read Local](#)," is a shout out to why SCBWI-IL is a great chapter. When **Erica Weisz** learned of a Read Local program on the East Coast and shared it, Sarah was ready to jump in! "I am a person who eats locally. I shop locally. Reading Locally made perfect sense." With the help of two wonderful grants and amazing volunteers, this program is off to a great start.

**NaShanta Fletcher's** Op-ed introduces the meld of "[Children's Illustrators and Album Covers](#)." Natasha walks us through her process of creating an album cover for a Chicago youth folk band, The Young Stracke All-Stars. NaShanta is not the only children's illustrator to design album covers: she's in the company of **Kadir Nelson** and **Maurice Sendak**.

For our [Illustrator Tips](#) **Doug Cenko** asks, "Is the iPad Right for You?" Today there are many devices and programs. Choosing what combination is right for you can be a tough decision. Doug shares what has worked best for him through trial and error, as well as programs to look forward to in the future.

**Patricia Hruby Powell's** [Writing Tip](#) gives us tips and tricks to throw a toe tapping Book Launch bash even when working on a shoe string budget. "Consider your community—both your friends and your town... Is there an attractive bar/restaurant near you that you frequent? Try them out. Go regularly and sit at the bar. Make friends with the management."

**Amanda Caverzasi's** [Book Look](#) emboldens us to look at fables for inspiration beyond picture books. "In *Aesop Lake*, Vermont based writer **Sarah Ward** looks at bullying, sexual assault, and gay rights through *Aesop's Fables*. Taking care to avoid preaching, Ward makes morality something to be talked about."

For [Writer's Bookshelf](#), **Beth Finke** takes a fresh look at *Elements of Style* by **William Strunk** and **E.B. White**. "Known to some as

a word bible, *Elements of Style* is jam-packed with easy-to-follow gems like 'Be Clear' and 'Do not overwrite.'" After failed eye surgeries for retinopathy, Beth took heart from this *Elements of Style* line: "Remember, it is no sign of weakness or defeat that your manuscript ends up in need of major surgery." She shares her personal writer's journey and how *Elements of Style* helped her tackle *Long Time, No See*; *Hanni and Beth: Safe & Sound*; and her memoir about teaching craft, *Writing Out Loud*.

**Shanah Salter** and **Rich Green** give a unique [Fly on The Wall](#) of Prairie Writer's and Illustrator's Day from both a writer's and an illustrator's perspective. Author/illustrator **Kelly Light's** keynote reminded Shanah "... not to lose sight of why we create – to benefit our child reader." Rich's takeaway from that same keynote: "... we had all better get to work on sending out postcards and creating those book dummies. You never know whose career will be the next to take flight."

[Our Tales from the Front](#) comes from **Zakieh Mohammed**, whose new picture book, *A Girl Named October*, was started over 20 years ago in this formative encounter: "...I walked into our living room one day. My little sister, who was battling leukemia, looked at her feet, then looked at me, and said, 'I'm touching the world.'"

With [Inside Story](#): "The Way You Want to Feel," **Carol Coven Grannick** navigates the ever present "shoulds" of the writing life – all those stories that pull at our attention - to find her true passion, at least for now.

**Jacqueline Alcántara's** [Voices of Change](#): News from the Diversity Committee addresses with humor and heart our responsibility as creators. Jackie opens herself up to share, "I still find the same questions on my mind: Should I illustrate this story? Am I the right one for this project?" With grace and tact she reminds us, "It's the responsibility of everyone - editor, author, illustrator, and consumer - to look critically inward at their own prejudices: at their art, at their writing, and even at the books they are reading."

Thank you to **Kelly Darke** for [News Roundup](#), to **Sallie Wolf** for updating us on [Food for Thought](#), and to **Deborah Topolski** for [Don't Miss](#).

Finally, thanks to Amy Alznauer, Cedric Gliane, and Jennifer Loescher for making this issue possible.

**Jenny Wagh**, Editorial Advisor

**Jennifer Loescher**, Editor

**Amy Alznauer**, Managing Editor

**Cedric Gliane**, Webmaster



# Greeting

## Take Flight

The plane is getting ready for take-off. The pilot has done her pre-check, the crew is set, the go-ahead given. Engines roar and the plane rolls down the runway, faster, until it takes to the skies!

Anyone who attended Prairie Writer's and Illustrator's Day in October experienced **Debbie Topolski's** clever introduction, bringing to life our Take Flight theme with flight checks, a seatbelt, and a breathing bag (which came in very handy when technical problems arose).

We all took to the skies during that conference, spreading our wings and soaring toward greater heights with our writing, illustrating, and marketing skills.

Like a competent pilot, we as writers and illustrators need to develop the skills to get off the ground and take flight. Actually, if we think of ourselves as pilots working to take flight creatively, we've got a big job to do. It's our responsibility to be the best pilots we can to allow ourselves to reach the greatest heights in our creative lives and careers.

### What's necessary to be a great pilot?

First, we must make sure our equipment is functioning properly. We won't fly far without a good engine! For you and me, our engines are our bodies, brains, and imaginations; we need them firing on all cylinders. How can we make sure this equipment is functioning well? For everyone the answer is different, but the key is to know what works for you and to give yourself what you need. Is it regular exercise, enough sleep, and social time? Is it morning



journaling, fresh air, or good, strong coffee? What do YOU need to oil your gears and make sure your equipment is functioning at its best? Think about it, make your checklist, and do your best to give your equipment what's needed to perform at its best.

Next, a good pilot sets the course for her flight and then works to stay on course. What course have you set? Have you thought about where you're heading? Do you have goals for your creative projects? For submitting your work? For marketing yourself or your books? Set goals. Write them down. Then work to meet them.

As far as staying on course, the key word is trajectory. Just like a strong, direct trajectory is the key to a good plotline and a successful flight, it's also critical to our careers. What are we doing to keep on trajectory to meet our goals? Do we have a regular schedule for working? Do we make lists of things to do? How are we accountable? And who keeps us on track?

This leads us to the next thing every good pilot needs – a crew. The flight crew supports the pilot in doing what's needed for a successful flight and helps make sure the ride is smooth and enjoyable. Who is on your flight crew and how do they support you? Do you have a critique group? Are there people in your Network who encourage you, bouncing ideas or problems back and forth? Do you have an agent? An editor? Somebody to help you with marketing? In this industry where much of what we do is isolated, it's key to recruit a crew, and to utilize them to support you on your flight.

And then there's the weather. You're going to run into snowstorms, fog, and heavy rain. It can't be helped. A good pilot is aware of the weather at all times and is ready to adjust accordingly to assure the flight is safe and successful. Do you have a plan for bad weather? What's going to help you through the storms? And if heavy winds blow you off course, how will you get back on track? Will you enlist the help of your flight crew? Follow steps you've already set into place, such as mapping out who your next submission goes to, so that after suffering the blows of a tough rejection you're set to send it out again.

You are the pilot of your creative journey. Therefore, do what you can to be the best pilot you can be! Is your equipment functioning? Your course set? Crew ready? Bad weather plans in place?

Sounds like you're ready to go. Go, pilots! Fasten your seatbelts, start your engines, and take to the skies!

**Alice McGinty**



# News Roundup

## Winter 2019

Compiled by Kelly Darke

### EVENTS

#### ANDERSON'S BOOKSHOP

Information is subject to change; some events require tickets. For more information on these and other upcoming events, visit the website at <http://www.andersonsbookshop.com/event>, or call (630) 355-2665 for AB Naperville (123 W. Jefferson Ave., Naperville), (630) 963-2665 for AB Downers Grove (5112 Main St., Downers Grove), or (708) 582-6353 for AB La Grange (26 S. La Grange Rd., La Grange).

- **January 14 – Adib Khorram**, author of *Darius the Great is Not Okay*. 7:00 p.m. at Anderson's Bookshop, 5112 Main St. in Downers Grove, (630) 963-2665. YA.
- **January 15 – Dan Gemeinhart**, author of *The Remarkable Journey of Coyote Sunrise*. 7:00 p.m. at Anderson's Bookshop, 26 S. La Grange Rd., La Grange, (708) 582-6353. MG.
- **January 24 – Paul Noth**, author of *How to Properly Dispose of Planet Earth*. 7:00 p.m. at Anderson's Bookshop, 123 W. Jefferson Ave., Naperville, (630) 355-2665. MG.
- **January 26 – Patricia Toht** (*Dress Like a Girl*) and **Josh Funk** (*Lady Pancake and Sir French Toast: Mission Defrostable*), 11:00 a.m. at Anderson's Bookshop, 123 W. Jefferson Ave., Naperville, (630) 355-2665. PB.
- **January 28 – Tom Watson**, author of *Stick Dog Gets the Tacos*. 7:00 p.m. at Anderson's Bookshop, 123 W. Jefferson Ave., Naperville, (630) 355-2665. MG.
- **February 7 – Gary Schmidt**, author of *Pay Attention, Carter Jones*. 7:00 p.m. at Anderson's Bookshop, 5112 Main St. in Downers Grove, (630) 963-2665. MG.
- **February 8 – Angie Thomas**, author of *On The Come Up!* 7:00 p.m. at Community Christian Church, 1635 Emerson Ln, Naperville. YA.
- **February 10 – Robin LaFevers**, author of *Courting Darkness*. 2:00 p.m. at Anderson's Bookshop, 5112 Main St. in Downers Grove, (630) 963-2665. YA.
- **February 11 – Jessie Sima**, author of *Love, Z.* 7:00 p.m. at Anderson's Bookshop, 123 W. Jefferson Ave., Naperville, (630) 355-2665. PB.
- **February 15 – Beth Ferry & Tom Lichtenheld**, author & illustrator of *Ten Rules of the Birthday Wish*. 7:00 p.m. at Anderson's Bookshop, 26 S. La Grange Rd., La Grange, (708) 582-6353. PB.
- **February 19 – Kamilla Benko**, author of *Unicorn Quest: The Secret in the Stone*. 7:00 p.m. at Anderson's Bookshop, 5112 Main St. in Downers Grove, (630) 963-2665. MG.
- **February 23 – Liz & Lucy Lareau**, author of *Geeky Fab 5: Mystery of the Missing Monarchs*. 2:00 p.m. at Anderson's Bookshop, 123 W. Jefferson Ave. in Naperville, (630) 355-2665. MG.
- **March 12 – Alyssa Wees**, author of *The Waking Forest*. 7:00 p.m. at Anderson's Bookshop, 123 W. Jefferson Ave. in Naperville, (630) 355-2665. YA.
- **April 5 – Vera Brosgol**, author of *The Little Guys*. 7:00 p.m. at Anderson's Bookshop, 123 W. Jefferson Ave. in Naperville, (630) 355-2665. PB.

#### ANDERSON'S BOOKSHOP 17th ANNUAL CHILDREN'S LITERATURE BREAKFAST

**What:** Illinois authors and illustrators, full breakfast, door prizes, giveaways, book sales and more! CPDU credits

**When:** Saturday, February 23, 2019.  
8:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

**Where:** 6440 Double Eagle Dr., Woodridge, IL.

**Details:** Advance registration and fee required, authors and ticket details pending

**More information:** Bobak's Signature Events, Tickets available at [www.eventcombo.com/e/andersons-17th-annual-childrens-literature-breakfast-32822](http://www.eventcombo.com/e/andersons-17th-annual-childrens-literature-breakfast-32822)

#### THE 5th ANNUAL Chicago Young Adult Book Festival

**What:** Young adult author panels and book signings

**When:** Saturday, April 6th, 2019

**Where:** Hamilton Elementary School, 1650 West Cornelia Ave, Chicago, IL.

**Details:** Authors and panel details pending

**More information:** <https://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/3916363>

**Sponsored by the Book Cellar and StoryStudio.** See <http://www.bookcellarinc.com>, or call (773) 293-2665 for details.

### AWARDS

#### NATIONAL BOOK AWARDS

The 2018 winner of the National Book Foundation's National Book Award for Young People's Literature is:

- **Elizabeth Acevedo**, *The Poet X* (HarperTeen/HarperCollins Publishers)

The finalists are:

- **M. T. Anderson** and **Eugene Yelchin**, *The Assassination of Brangwain Spurge* (Candlewick Press)
- **Leslie Connor**, *The Truth as Told by Mason Buttle* (Katherine Tegen Books/HarperCollins Publishers)



- **Christopher Paul Curtis**, *The Journey of Little Charlie* (Scholastic Press / Scholastic, Inc.)
- **Jarrett J. Krosoczka**, *Hey, Kiddo* (Graphix / Scholastic, Inc.)

### YALSA (YOUNG ADULT LIBRARY SERVICES ASSOCIATION) 2018 TOP TEN BEST FICTION FOR YOUNG ADULTS

- **Arnold, Elana**. *What Girls Are Made Of*. (Lerner/Carolrhoda Lab)
- **Bardugo, Leigh**. *The Language of Thorns: Midnight Tales and Dangerous Magic*. Illus. by **Sara Kipin**. (Macmillan/Imprint)
- **Lee, Mackenzi**. *The Gentleman's Guide to Vice and Virtue*. (HarperCollins/Katherine Tegen)
- **Moon, Sarah**. *Sparrow*. (Scholastic/Arthur A. Levine)
- **Reynolds, Jason**. *Long Way Down*. (Simon & Schuster/Atheneum)
- **Taylor, Laini**. *Strange the Dreamer*. (Little, Brown)
- **Thomas, Angie**. *The Hate U Give*. (Balzer+Bray)
- **Watson, Renee**. *Piecing Me Together*. (Bloomsbury USA)
- **Zappia, Francesca**. *Eliza and Her Monsters*. (HarperCollins/Greenwillow)
- **Zentner, Jeff**. *Goodbye Days*. (Crown Books for Young Readers)

### 2019 MEMBER GRANTS

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

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

**For more information**, visit <https://www.scbwi.org/awards/>

### THE ANN WHITFORD PAUL— WRITER'S DIGEST MANUSCRIPT AWARD

- The Ann Whitford Paul-Writer's Digest Manuscript Award is an annual award given to a Most Promising Picture Book manuscript.
- The winner will receive a \$1,000 grant to encourage the development of an excellent picture book manuscript
- Submissions are open February 1, 2019 through April 1, 2019. The winner of the grant will be announced mid-May.

### WORK-IN-PROGRESS GRANTS

- The Work-in-Progress Awards showcase outstanding manuscripts from SCBWI members. The selected works will receive a special platform to be showcased to the most prestigious publishing houses in the field.
- One winner in each of the following categories will be chosen: Picture Book Text, Chapter Books/ Early Readers, Middle Grade, Young Adult Fiction, Nonfiction, Multi-Cultural Fiction or Nonfiction, Translation
- Applications will be accepted March 1 – March 31, Midnight PDT 2019 only.

### DON FREEMAN ILLUSTRATOR GRANTS

- Established to enable picture book illustrators to further their understanding, training, and work in the picture book genre.
- Two grants of \$1,000 each will be awarded annually, one grant to a published illustrator and one to a pre-published illustrator.
- Applications will be accepted March 1 – 31, 2019

### KAREN AND PHILIP CUSHMAN LATE BLOOMER AWARD

- For authors/illustrators fifty years of age and older who have not been traditionally published in the children's literature field.
- Grant of \$500 and free tuition to any SCBWI conference anywhere in the world.
- Applications should be submitted in conjunction with the Work-In-Progress e-mail submission from March 1–31, 2019.

### LEE BENNETT HOPKINS POETRY AWARD

- Recognizes and encourages the publication of an excellent book of poetry or anthology for children and/or young adults. This award is given every three years.
- Award of \$1,000.
- Deadline March 1, 2019 (for books published in 2016, 2017 and 2018)

### KATHERINE PATERSON PRIZE FOR YOUNG ADULT & CHILDREN'S WRITING

- An annual prize for Young Adult and Children's Literature. Three category winners receive \$100 each and publication. The categories are Young Adult (YA), Middle Grade (MG), and Picture Book or Writing for Young Children. One overall first place winner receives \$1,000 and publication.
- Submit by email or postal service an original, unpublished piece under 10,000 words. Your entry may be a short story or a novel excerpt, but if it is a novel excerpt, it should stand alone. \$20.00 entry fee. Further instructions can be found at: <http://hungermtn.org/contests/katherine-paterson-prize/>
- Deadline: March 1, 2019.



## CONFERENCES

# Food For Thought

### SCBWI 2019 Winter Conference

**When:** Feb. 8-12 2019

**Where:** Grand Hyatt New York, 109 East 42nd St.

**Cost:** \$525 – SCBWI Members, \$625 – Non-members;

**For more information:** visit <https://www.scbwi.org>

**Note:** Registration was full as of 12/11/18, but you can follow the conference on the official blog: <http://scbwiconference.blogspot.com/>

### 2019 Wild Wild Midwest

**When:** April 3-5, 2019

**Where:** Chicago Marriott Naperville, 1801 N. Naper Blvd., Naperville, IL

**Cost:** \$295 for early bird SCBWI members, \$315 for early bird Not Yet SCBWI members

**Hosted by** six SCBWI regions: \* INDIANA \* IOWA \* MICHIGAN \* OHIO NORTH \* WISCONSIN \* This event only happens once every three years. 400 + people will attend with lots of opportunities to learn, meet industry players, and connect with your community. For more information: visit <https://illinois.scbwi.org/events/2019-wild-wild-midwest/>

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**Kelly Darke** is a mathematics educator and aspiring picture book writer. She blogs at [www.mathbookmagic.com](http://www.mathbookmagic.com) about math picture books that inspire wonder and joy.

### *Programming for Our Professional Members*

By Sallie Wolf

Food For Thought is occasional, member-generated programming for PAL and INDIE published members of SCBWI. **Sallie Wolf** has been in charge of organizing FFT for a number of years, and she is reaching out for one or two volunteers who would like to help generate program ideas and arrange the programs. FFT operates on a very low budget, relying on local experts and professionals to present on topics that further our professional development.

Past programs have included a presentation by **Rachael Ruiz** on how and why to create a book trailer; how to read a royalty statement; and different options in publishing. We will be coordinating more closely with **Sarah Aronson**, who is the PAL & Published Coordinator, to provide the programming that both established and emerging authors and illustrators request.

If you are published and interested in being more involved in SCBWI-IL, and are willing to help brainstorm and plan future programs, please email Sallie Wolf, [salwolf@comcast.net](mailto:salwolf@comcast.net), to let her know. Planning can be done by phone, email, or meet-ups. This is a great way to get the programming you want and need with minimal expenditure of time.

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**Sallie Wolf** is the author of *The Robin Makes a Laughing Sound*, *A Birder's Observations*, *Imagine!* (imprint of Charlesbridge); *Truck Stuck*, *Charlesbridge*, and *Peter's Trucks*, print on demand through Amazon. When she is home she lives in Oak Park. Her husband of many years is determined to travel the entire world as quickly as possible, so she may be in India, the Bay of Cortez, or Croatia—upcoming trips for 2019. She spends as much of her summers as possible in Center Sandwich, NH, where her art is represented by Patricia Carega Gallery. She works out of Calypso Moon Studio on Harrison St. in the Oak Park Arts District. Visit Sallie's website at [www.salliewolf.com](http://www.salliewolf.com) to view her panoramic watercolor landscapes and the Moon Project.



# Tales from the Front

## Finding Focus

By Zakieh A. Mohammed

I can't take a selfie; there is something about framing the picture, finding the button, smiling, and pressing it in one unified action that eludes me. I don't look at the screen because I'm looking for the button; I don't have the dexterity to press a button and hold the camera steady. I have realized I don't smile while I am thinking, which is what I do when I am trying to figure out how to take a selfie. Why is this relevant? Because I will continuously try until I get it done in my own way.

## Framing the Picture

When I think about what has transpired before this start to my public writing persona, I can say the world has changed. My typewriter has been replaced with a computer, my glue envelopes and stamps now have a sticker adhesive for simple use, and queries with enclosed self-addressed stamped envelopes have been replaced with queries via email. Despite all the evolution on the query letter, the pages my mom turned for me, and the pages I turn for the little people in my life, are a constant.

For as long as I can remember, I regularly made time to send out queries. Writing happened as inspiration popped its head into my day-to-day life. I work in the Chicago Public School system, where there are endless moments that inspire ideas. I have family and friends that are insightful and witty. The children in my life are always reintroducing the world to me in unexpected ways.

When my nephew was three, he looked up at the moon one night and said, "Oh, they fixed it."



Yes, indeed, that crescent moon he had looked up at earlier in the month was now a full moon, and the Starlight Construction Company mended that mozzarella moon so it was full and bright. (I did not share that it may need repair again.)

Finding inspiration has never been the problem. The discipline to have the perseverance and belief that my writing should be shared, and that the conversation and the reading of the

book will benefit others, is where I waver.

## Looking for the Button

My debut picture book, *A Girl Named October*, was started over 20 years ago. The core idea was introduced when I walked into our living room one day. My little sister, who was battling leukemia, looked at her feet, then looked at me, and said, "I'm touching the world."





I asked what she meant, and she showed me how her feet touched a rug, that led to stairs, that led to the front door, that led to the sidewalk, that led to, well, everything.

She was not wrong. The statement stayed with me, even after she passed away. Understanding that we influence the world with merely our presence is a big concept for an adult, yet here was a nine-year-old touching the world and letting me know that I, too, was making that sort of impact as well.

That statement was the spark and is the heart of the book. Over time, as I finished college, went on to graduate school, started my teaching career, became a school administrator, and finished my doctorate, pieces of the story found their way to me. One line, one situation, one component at a time. It was far from disciplined, but each component was born from the world in which I was participating.

I knew when the story was done, and then I began to share it with agents and publishers. I workshopped the manuscript, and received positive feedback, but there were no concrete offers. Doubt crept in, and then it no longer snuck in, but owned the space that dreams of being a published author who can share powerful ideas with young people lived. The truth of the matter was that I was debating whether I needed to stop setting time aside to pursue publishers and agents. I was at that age where I was giving into the idea that maybe, despite how much I believed in my work, it was a personal effort - not a public one. I had stopped looking for that publisher to reach back.

## Smiling

When a publisher did reach back, I no longer trusted there was an audience out there for my work. Truth be told, when the publisher called, I actually

almost screened the call. I did not recognize the number and assumed it was a telemarketer. When he asked if *October*, the original title, was my manuscript, I said, "Yes." When he asked if I had received his email, I said, "No."

In actuality, I had. The title of the email was "October," and, in my advertisement-inundated inbox, I thought it was a pitch for some great deal - possibly cable, possibly a gym membership - for the month of October and, therefore, did not open it. The opportunity I had waited for had been reduced to spam. I am fortunate that Ripple Grove Press felt the story resonated with them enough to pick up the phone.

The conversation the publisher and I had was about the relationship of the characters, the voice of the protagonist, and the arc of the story. The understanding of the publisher aligned with the words and ideas I had written. The publisher shared that he had briefly considered the characters as animals, but decided the book would not be served if the characters were turned into animals. It never dawned on me that my empathy story could look like two bears or two foxes; it was always my sister and I. The issue was not that bears or foxes could not have a story about empathy and impact, it was that when I wrote the story, or I talked about the book, it was about how powerful our presence can be in the world, not about two foxes that had a powerful presence.

## Putting it all Together

I am immensely proud of the story, the wisdom that I can share on behalf of my sister, and, hopefully, the conversations that will be had with children and adults about why everything they do can make our world better. The excitement of having a publisher value the story and core ideas was

overwhelming, and, after the contract was signed, and I knew the story was in safe hands, I found myself inclined to visit my portfolio of completed manuscripts. The enthusiasm that had waned was cautiously returning. Was there a place for a picture book about hide-and-seek? A series about three little boys who continuously try to defy the "little brother" stigma? What about short stories that were not for little readers, but explored questions about disappointment and distress? How about the young adult novel inspired by my own students and my need to reframe classic literature? Could I revive my query routine, despite my fears and the long road I just traveled to my debut book? Time will tell, but I do know that I hope *A Girl Named October* will be shared so little people, and the adults who love them, know how they can touch the world, too.

So whether a finger sneaks into a picture, I crop out a head, or a grimace appears instead of a smile, I will continue to try and work to get that better selfie. There are too many pictures that I want to take, too many special people with whom I want to share a picture, and too many experiences that I want to remember.

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**Zakieh Mohammed** was raised in Chicago and lives there still with her family. Working with children of all ages, she is an award-winning teacher, who has served in the Chicago public school system for over twenty years. The genuineness and humorous imagination of the young people she interacts with regularly are reflected in the stories she writes. Her debut picture book, *A Girl Named October*, was illustrated by **Andrea Tripke** and published by Ripple Grove Press. <http://www.ripplegrovepress.com/a-girl-named-october>



## Writing Tips

### The Book Launch Event

by Patricia Hruby Powell

In the same way that we bring our experience to writing, we bring our experience to launching a book. I hope to give you some ideas that might help you launch your baby. The book, of course, helps dictate the party theme. Holiday books are great party inspirers. I know what I'd do if I had a tea party depicted in a book. Dog or cat washing? I'd throw a wet and messy bash. If I happened to have a book about a construction site, I'd throw a site-specific event. We have a massive square mile construction site a couple miles west of town. My hound loves it. Boy children would go nuts. Some girls, too.



Lil, my hound, named after Lil Hardin Armstrong

#### Talent and Community

My book *Struttin' With Some Barbecue: Lil Hardin Armstrong Becomes the First Lady of Jazz* (Charlesbridge) will have released December 11, 2018, and is an early jazz story about **Lil Hardin Armstrong, Louis Armstrong's** wife and a jazz pianist and composer in



Esquire Bar and Grill, my venue

her own right. WOW za DOO! I'm throwing a jazz party the very next day—which, praise the heavens, falls before Christmas and Kwanzaa.

For planning your party, consider your talents.

Talent. I know how to do things on a shoestring. Having run a dance company, One Plus One, for many years, I can attest to the fact that Necessity is the Mother of Invention. Necessity has given me an ability for shoestring operation. Shoestring, folks. I've got shoestrings. AND there will be dancing!

Next consider your community—both your friends and your town. You know, like character and setting. So, where will your event take place?

#### Where and When

Is there an attractive bar/restaurant near you that you frequent? Try them out.

Go regularly and sit at the bar. Make friends with the management. Perhaps this is easier after you've consumed a beer or a pineapple margarita. Do they have music events at least occasionally? That could help you choose the venue. I guess I'm suggesting you start frequenting nearby bar/restaurants. That can be fun. Start in plenty of time, maybe even before you write the book. Unless you're a really good drinker who can chug down pint after pint in venue after venue.

You might be thinking, Wait, this is a kid's book. Why launch at a bar? Well, it's usually adults who buy the books—even young adult books. Having your book launch before a gift-giving holiday is a plus, of course. But that's the luck of the draw. Your publisher will be deciding when your book releases.

So, the bar part is important (but not essential), because you want your attendees to have the option of drinking. The more people drink, the



more generous they become, the more books they buy. Trust me. I know this to be true. And you won't have to pay for their beverages. Or the food.

And the restaurant part is important. The establishment will love you because you'll bring in a load of people—perhaps new customers—who will buy food and drink so you shouldn't have to rent the place. It's a symbiotic relationship: win/win. This is what you must convince the management of your chosen venue, while drinking that pineapple margarita at the bar.

“My” restaurant/bar makes a menu item to honor my book. For *Struttin'* they'll make a barbecue sandwich. For *Loving vs. Virginia* they made Brunswick stew, which is, apparently, a traditional Virginia down-home dish. At another wine bar, for *Josephine* I had soul food catered. Through experience I learned this expense wasn't required. Find a restaurant/bar that serves food.

## Music

Music makes it a party. I want music performed which pertains to my book. This is easy for *Struttin'*. That would be my husband's band, Traditional Jazz Orchestra. “Struttin' With Some Barbecue” is the name of a tune that Lil Hardin Armstrong wrote with Louis Armstrong on their back stoop, and is the name of my book. Yep, I've got an advantage, having a jazz musician for a husband, but use your perks. (Maybe you married a massage therapist. That's a good perk). But I married a musician. So for my previous book, *Loving vs. Virginia*, I hired a string band led by **Robin Kearton**, because **Mildred Jeter Loving's** father and step brothers played in a “hillbilly” string band. Actually, I didn't hire the band, I traded my husband talking to them about improvisation—their request. That **Morgan Powell**, jazz trombonist, is quite a perk.

If you're not married to a musician, you'll need to make friends with musicians. That's on you. And I don't suggest you ask the band to play for free. It's important to pay the band members. That is my only real expense—\$50 per player, plus I strutted around with a tip jar for another \$150 to add to their pay.

I guess you could substitute canned music and make an appropriate play list to be played during the event. But it's not the same as live music, which actually helps draw a crowd to your event.

## Book Sales

Ask your local bookstore to sell books so you don't have to do the sales. I work with Jane Addams Bookstore, which is primarily a second hand bookstore in downtown Champaign. Because we hope to sell 100 books at that party, they make out. They'll sell your book at its full amount and you'll make your complete royalty.

Yes, some people will come with books that they've purchased from Amazon and that's fine. But, if you book your launch party the day after the release date, people probably can't get your book through the mail in time. Just a thought. And how mine happened to work out. And you can explain to your friends, your students, interested people, that they are supporting the author/illustrator by purchasing your book at its full amount. They don't want you to starve or anything, so they'll usually (oftentimes) understand and be willing and excited to pay the publisher's list price for your book.

## Publicity

Chronicle Books gives its authors and illustrators business cards, displaying the image of the book cover. On the backside are the creator's social media contacts. That's all you need. Back



in the day, Salina Bookshelf made postcards of my books. I made postcards for my first book, *Blossom Tales*. I'd hand out my Vista Print-made postcard, with a notice of a book event, and watch people fold my \$.25 card in half and put it in their pocket. Agh. No one has to fold a business card. It fits in pockets, wallets, palms, you-name-it. So I begged Charlesbridge to make me a business card of *Struttin' With Some Barbecue*. If they hadn't, I would have gone to Vista Print to make my own. But I'd have asked my publisher/publicist to design the card (to my specifications), because I don't even own Photoshop. But, yep, you could design it on Vista Print, too.

So let's say you have 1,000 beautiful business cards with the image of your book on the front. Leave enough room on the back—at least 1 ½” wide by 1” high—where you can affix your specific announcement.

**BOOK Launch Party**  
**Wednesday, Dec. 12**  
**5:30 – 7:30 pm**  
**Esquire Lounge**  
**Music by TJO**  
**Jane Addams book sales**

Then go to Staples or some other Office Supply denizen and purchase full-page labels (that is, 8 ½ x 11). Format a page on your computer, using Times New Roman, 8 point font, which is compact and legible. Format 6 columns and



margins set at .2. Succinctly designate:

- What: Book Launch Party
- When:
- Where:
- Music by:
- Book Sales by:

Print, slice lengthwise or whatever direction allows the peeling seam to be accessible. Peel, cut one announcement, affix to back of business card, and repeat. I only do a few at a time so I don't go nutty. Or nuttier.



I hand them out months ahead of time as I see people who I think might be interested (aka everyone I know or meet who lives locally). This way you get to a whole lot of participants and build excitement for your book birth. I tell anyone who's interested some pithy detail about the book. For instance:

- Lil and Louis were each other's second marriage.
- We named our Tree Walker Hound Lil after Lil Hardin Armstrong.
- Lil's papers, including the first 5 chapters of her autobiography, were stolen from her house at the time of her funeral, which is probably in part why so little is written about her.
- Lil's extended family is owed loads in royalties, but they can't be found; their names would probably be Hardin or Martin and might live in Tennessee.

- Louis remarried a couple times, but Lil never remarried.
- A month after Louis Armstrong died, Lil collapsed while playing the piano at a commemorative concert in his honor in Chicago; she died shortly after.

I give a stack of the cards to Jane Addams Bookstore, a stack at my body-worker / massage therapist's waiting room, and wherever people might pick one up. I still won't use all 1000 cards, so I'll leave some without the affixed Book Launch invitation and will hand them out whenever I meet people. My husband hands them out, too.

I'll make a few 8x10 images of the book for a poster announcing the party. I'll post one each at Jane Addams Bookstore, my public library and the Esquire Lounge where the party will take place.

### Social Media Invitations

About a month before the party, I create a Facebook Event page and invite all local Facebook Friends. This has become so easy on FB. Check out "Create" on your home page. It's so straightforward it nearly does itself.



I also send an e-mail message with the book image to local friends, first as a Save the Date, then a week before. After all, not all your friends are on FB. But if you overlap, I think it's okay. To receive occasional announcements is a way to help create buzz.



I also send a press release to my local newspaper, the paper for which I review YA books. They'll definitely list the event. Maybe they'll even write an article. We'll see.

What will I do at the event? Tell some anecdotes about Lil, about the research, and read a bit. Then talk to people as I sign books. But mostly the band, the community of people, and the venue provide the entertainment.

Outcome: Some people bought multiple books. Some people didn't buy books, but just came for the party, which is fine. More than 150 people attended, Jane Addams sold about 90 books. I signed the rest of the books and the bookstore expects to sell those. We created buzz for the book. And the party was extremely fun.

**Patricia Hruby Powell** has six published books and a mess of unpublished manuscripts in her file cabinet in the sparkling university town of Champaign. A few more books are on the way. [talesforallages.com](http://talesforallages.com)



## Don't Miss

### Save the Date for Going to the Fair, 2019 Wild, Wild Midwest!

#### Date/Time

Dates: 5/3/2019 – 5/5/2019

12:00 am

#### Location

Chicago Marriott Naperville

1801 N. Naperville Blvd • Naperville, IL 60563

#### ILLINOIS \* INDIANA \* IOWA \* MICHIGAN \* OHIO NORTH \* WISCONSIN

The 2019 Wild Wild Midwest Conference (WWMW), “Let’s Go to the Fair!” will be held May 3-5, 2019 at the conference center of the Chicago Marriott Naperville, in Naperville, Illinois.

We’ve got a list of blue-ribbon faculty lined up, including:

- **Silvia Acevedo**, author
- **Jacqueline Alcántara**, illustrator
- **Julie Berry**, author
- **Betsy Bird**, librarian and author
- **Jack Cheng**, author
- **Shutta Crum**, author
- **Sharon Darrow**, author
- **Stephen Fraser**, senior literary agent, The Jennifer De Chiara Literary Agency
- **Josh Funk**, author
- **Clelia Gore**, literary manager, Martin Literary Management
- **Wendi Gu**, literary agent, Janklow and Nesbit Associates
- **Esther Hershenhorn**, author
- **Linda Howard**, associate publisher, Tyndale House
- **Angie Karcher**, author
- **Cheryl Klein**, editorial director, Lee & Low Books
- **A. LaFaye**, author
- **Dandi Daley Mackall**, author
- **Christine Mapondera-Talley**, author
- **Sarvinder Naberhaus**, author
- **Debbie Ridpath Ohi**, author/illustrator
- **Kathleen Ortiz**, literary agent, New Leaf Literary



- **John Parra**, illustrator
  - **Carrie Pearson**, author and consultant
  - **Sharismar Rodriguez**, art director, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Books
  - **Kashmira Sheth**, author
  - **Linda Skeers**, author
  - **Ruth Spiro**, author
  - **David Stricklen**, author
  - **Eliza Swift**, senior editor, Sourcebooks
  - **Natasha Tarpley**, author
  - **Tracy Vonder Brink**, contributing editor, author
  - **Cyle Young**, literary agent, Hartline Literary Agency
- ...and there are more to come!

**Registration will open in early February.**

**SAVE THE DATES!**



# Illustrator Tips

## Is The iPad Right For You?

By Doug Cenko



Last December, I had to take a work trip to Australia and at the same time had a looming book deadline. That 40-plus hours in the air (an entire work week, minus a nap or two) was a lot of time that could be spent drawing. I wanted to illustrate the book traditionally, but a cramped airplane seat is not the best place for a large pad of paper and messy supplies. The answer was to find the right portable digital drawing device.

### Which Device?

I've used other tablets in the past for drawing. I owned a smaller Wacom Cintiq for about 10 years, which I loved, but it always needed a computer connected to it, along with a bunch of cables. It's great for a home or office, but not on the road. There is a portable version of the Cintiq with a built-in laptop, but that cost more than I was looking to spend. I've also used the Microsoft Surface Pro, which I know some people really like, but for me, I didn't enjoy working on it. It just felt clunky.

After a lot of online research, the iPad seemed like the best choice for me. It's definitely not for everyone, but I'll go through some of my experiences with it so that you can decide if it's the right solution for you.

There were two size options: 10.5 inches and 12.9 inches. I was going to go with the smaller size, but my wife talked me into the larger one, and I'm glad she did. The smaller one would have been fine, but the extra room is nice. The screen is almost identical to an 8 1/2 x 11 inch piece of paper. The Apple Pencil costs extra. It isn't required for using the iPad, but it is required to get the most out of the drawing programs. The total cost ended up being around \$1,200.

### Customization

Hardware-wise, after spending some time with the new toy, it wasn't perfect right out of the box. I thought there were a few extras that I needed to get. The pencil had an easy-to-lose removable cap (the newer version doesn't have this problem). So, I found a cheap rubber holder called a [MoKo](#) cap to keep it in place. Also, the screen on the iPad is made of glass and very slick. I really like having a little bit of tooth to the paper I draw on and

found a company called [Paperlike](#) that makes a screen protector that gives the drawing surface more of a drawing-on-paper feel.

### What About the Software?

Now that I was happy with the iPad itself, what about the software? If you look at all of the drawing apps available, it's pretty overwhelming. I downloaded 4 or 5 of the highest rated apps and gave them all a trial run. Some were free, others were very reasonably priced (less than \$10).

Autodesk Sketchbook, ArtRage, and Adobe Sketch were solid apps, but Procreate seemed to have the most functionality as well as being the easiest to use. It's also the one that most of the pros go with, so I ended up spending the most time with that one. It took a little while to get the hang of the controls, but once you do, it's pretty straightforward, especially if you're familiar with other software like Photoshop.

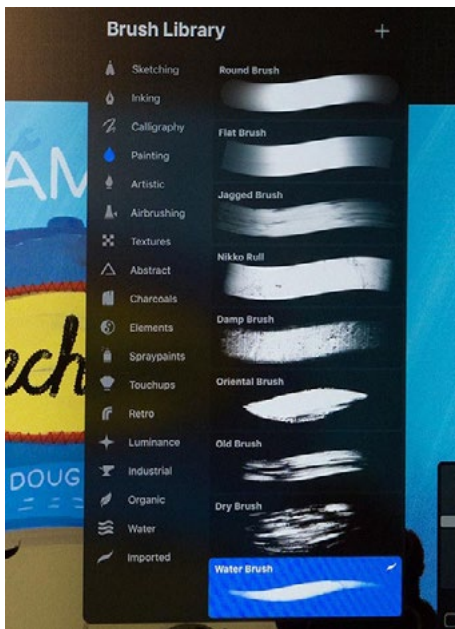




## Using Procreate

When you open up Procreate, you can click on the (+) to open up a new canvas. Be careful, because once you set a canvas size, you are unable to change it without bringing it into another program like Photoshop. That is one of the biggest current problems with Procreate.

From there, the controls are very clean and minimal. There are buttons for the multiple brushes, erasers, smudge tool, layers and various other settings and options. You are able to customize the look and layout to some extent.



The default brushes are really nice and are broken up into different categories including: Sketching, Inking, Painting, Charcoals, and Artistic. Inside of those categories are brushes like: Oil Paint, Gouache, Watercolor, Dry Brush and Vine Charcoal. I've found with a little bit of work, you can tweak them to look very close to how they would if you worked traditionally.

One of the coolest features in Procreate is the time-lapse replay option. It remembers every stroke that you make while drawing and replays it at a much

faster speed. You're then able to export that as a video you can email or [post online](#).

## What's Not Great in Procreate

Procreate really is an excellent program to use, but of course it wasn't perfect. There were a few other things, in addition to the canvas sizing issue, that I didn't like:

It's only RGB. If you want to work in CMYK, you have to import your file into another program to convert it.

It doesn't handle scaling well, especially crisp lines. It tends to blur lines slightly when scaled up or down.

Limited number of layers. I think that it depends on how large your canvas is, but it will only allow a certain number of layers for you to work on.

The program is updated often, so some of these issues might be fixed in the near future.

## Other Software

Outside of Procreate, there are a couple other programs that I use regularly. One is called Amaziograph. It's mostly just fun to use, but worth checking out. It takes whatever you are currently drawing and flips it or rotates it several times so that you are basically drawing a kaleidoscope. My five-year-old daughter is a big fan of this app.

Another program that I use is called Astropad. It is currently only supported on Macs, but it allows you to send what's currently displayed on your Mac's monitor to the iPad wirelessly so that you can draw directly in Photoshop or similar program. It's incredibly useful.

## What's Not Great with the iPad

As nice as the iPad is for creating artwork in general, I do have some

minor gripes:

File-saving is a little tricky. It's hard to figure out where it saves the actual file sometimes.

It's much easier to use an iPad with a Mac than a PC because you're able to transfer files back and forth with Airdrop.

Like any Apple product, there's always better versions coming out. On the flip-side of that, if you're OK with not having the latest technology, this device should last several years.

## What's Next?

The future of the iPad looks incredibly strong. Adobe announced that in 2019, it will release a full version of Photoshop on the iPad. That will eventually erase the need for programs like Astropad. Also, Adobe has announced a drawing program that will be coming out called Project Gemini. If it lives up to the preview videos, it might even end up beating Procreate. The watercolor brush functions exactly like a real watercolor brush, which is something Procreate is not great at.

Overall, what it comes down to for me is that the iPad is fun. It's so enjoyable to use that I end up drawing a lot more than I would if I was just drawing traditionally. It's definitely not for everyone, but if what I've described above still sounds good to you, it just might be worth giving it a shot.

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**Doug Cenko** lives in Chicago with his wife and daughter. He has illustrated four children's books and has recently released his first book as an author/illustrator, *My Papa is a Princess*. The follow-up book, *My Mama is a Mechanic*, will be released in Spring 2019.



## Writer's Bookshelf

### The Elements of Style by William Strunk and E.B. White

Reviewed by Beth Finke

*The Elements of Style* was required reading when I was a 19-year-old in journalism school. Young people flocked into journalism in the 1970s, some for good reasons, and some who hoped to become Woodward or Bernstein. I was one of the latter, certain the job I'd get as one of the few female investigative reporters in America would eventually land me a book deal a la *All the President's Men*.

But then the spots showed up.

"Retinopathy," the eye specialist told my husband and me. During my months in the hospital for eye surgeries, a social worker suggested I keep a journal. Good idea. Only one problem: my eyes were patched shut. How could I write?

I'd met **Mike Knezovich** in journalism school. I was twenty-five years old, we were newlyweds, and my new husband came to the rescue. Mike bought me a cassette recorder. I filled tape after tape with daily thoughts and impressions. If nothing else, maintaining that audio journal helped me through those long, long hours of darkness in the hospital.

Eye surgeries didn't work. A year after my diagnosis, I was totally blind. The Americans with Disabilities Act wouldn't be passed until four years later, in 1990. I lost my job.

Mike arranged for low-interest loans with friends and bought me a very expensive Christmas present that year: a talking computer. Revolutionary technology combined special screen navigation software with a speech synthesizer to parrot the letters I typed. I could hear — and fix — typos as I

went along, and when I was finished, I could check grammar and spelling errors by manipulating the keys to make the synthesizer read a page of type by character, word, line, or paragraph.

I set myself to work transcribing my hospital recordings. Entries provided me with cheap therapy, and boy, did I need it! I had already tried finding inspiration from audio books by blind authors, but most of them wrote about finding God or performing amazing feats, like sailing across the Atlantic alone or climbing Mt. Everest. Was the world ready for a book by an unathletic pagan who'd gone blind? One way to find out: start writing it.

#### Revise and Rewrite

Writing my book took three years. Revising and rewriting it took ten. I found inspiration from "Strunk & White," the informal title sometimes used for *Elements of Style*.

"Remember, it is no sign of weakness or defeat that your manuscript ends up in need of major surgery," they say in Chapter V, An Approach to Style. "This is a common occurrence in all writing, and among the best writers."

*Long Time, No See* was published by University of Illinois Press in 2003. My first NPR essay aired on Morning Edition that year, too. Coordinators of conferences, book fairs, schools, libraries and writing workshops began inviting me to do presentations. No matter where I spoke, or what the occasion, when it came to the Q & A part of my book presentations, nearly every question was about one thing: my Seeing Eye dog.

"Where'd you get your dog?"

"What breed is it?"

"How old is your dog?"

"Can that dog tell a red light from a green light?"

"How does your dog know where you want to go?"

I may have been born at night, but it wasn't last night. I knew my next book should be about dogs. Not a memoir, though. And not just any dog. A picture book for young children about a Seeing Eye dog who doesn't always like his job.

Other dogs get to play Frisbee in the park, but day after day, this dog has to follow commands and lead a blind woman around. She doesn't always go where he wants to go, either. And speaking of going...other dogs get to lift their legs on any tree they want, but this dog has to wait until his human companion takes his harness off and gives him permission. The book would be a sequel of sorts. *Long Time, No Pee*.

The rejections came quickly. Most arrived via postcard, which meant poor Mike had to read them aloud to me. Months passed. Magazines and newspapers began accepting stories and queries online. With the help of my talking computer, I wrote articles for everything from *Woman's Day* to *Dog Fancy*, and the *Chicago Tribune* started counting on me as a freelancer. Bigwigs at Easterseals National Headquarters in Chicago who saw my byline offered me a part-time job moderating their national blog — a position I still have today.





I'd almost forgotten about *Long Time, No Pee* when, ding! A note from Blue Marlin Publications popped up in my inbox. **Francine Rich**, the publisher there, liked my writing. "But the story needs to be about *you* and *your* Seeing Eye dog," she wrote, insisting I rewrite the book. "The kids will be meeting you and Hanni during school visits, so the book has to be about *you*."

## Be Clear

Picture books are only 900 words long. Surely this one wouldn't take me ten years to edit and revise. Or would it? Back to Strunk and White.

The "White" of Strunk and White is **E. B. White**, a highly regarded writer and contributing editor for *The New Yorker*. White was so taken by the writing tips he learned at Cornell from Professor **William Strunk** that he revived his professor's guide into *Elements of Style*, a small 71-page book published by Macmillan in 1959. E.B. White is also the author of the children's classics *Charlotte's Webb* and *Stuart Little*. He must have followed his own rules when rewriting and revising the manuscripts of those masterpieces. So I did, too.

Known to some as a word bible, *Elements of Style* is jam-packed with easy-to-follow gems like "Be Clear" and "Do not overwrite." Each short declaration is followed by a couple longer sentences explaining the importance of that rule. Examples:

- Write with nouns and verbs. "In general...it is nouns and verbs, not their assistants, that give to good writing its toughness and color."
- Avoid fancy words. "Do not be tempted by a twenty-dollar word when there is a ten-center handy, ready and able."

## Avoid Fancy Words

"Omit needless words" is probably the

most famous guideline from *Elements of Style*, but "Write with nouns and verbs," "do not overwrite," and "avoid fancy words" are sensational supporting actors. After months sending rough drafts back and forth, Blue Marlin Publications and I came up with a manuscript (and a new title) we both liked. We found an illustrator we both liked, too. Even when **Anthony Alex Letourneau** told us he wanted to work with oils, and it'd take a year for him to finish the project, we signed him on anyway.

And that's when the Commissioner of Mayor Daley's Department on Aging heard me give a presentation about *Long Time, No See*. She gave me a call afterwards. "Have any interest in leading memoir-writing classes for senior citizens?" Thanks to the yearlong wait for Tony's paintings to dry, I could say yes.

## Omit Needless Words

*Hanni and Beth: Safe & Sound* was published by Blue Marlin Publications in 2007. I joined the Illinois chapter of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators, and my book won the ASPCA's **Henry Bergh** award for children's literature the next year. I've been visiting schools regularly ever since, talking with kids about disability, trust, adapting to change, bonding with animals, service dogs, teamwork, diversity and dealing with bullying.

I still teach memoir-writing, too. Every week I give a prompt, and they do their writing at home. I limit writers to 500-word essays and encourage those who struggle with the word count to email their essay my way for help. "I learned to use email," I tell them. "So can you!" *Elements of Style* is not required reading for my classes, but I borrow tips from Strunk & White when editing my writers.

When I started writing my third book, *Writing Out Loud*, I pictured it as a how-to book for writing memoir. Each chapter was based on what went on in class Week One, Week Two, and so on. Readers were encouraged to work on the same assignments I gave in class and get their memoirs off the ground.

Publishers and agents were intrigued by how I manage to lead my classes without being able to see, but they were convinced the world didn't need another "Get Started on Your Memoir" book. The rejection letters said the thing that makes my story interesting is the ways I manage to live in a big city and lead these classes without being able to see. "Write about that."

So I did. The National Endowment for the Arts awarded me a writing fellowship in 2013, and I used that time to polish my new manuscript about my experiences working with all those wonderful writers – and my life outside of class, too. *Writing Out Loud* is about living with blindness – how writing and teaching memoir classes helps me lead a full, creative, and pleasurable life after losing my sight.

What a privilege it is to spend hours a week with people 65 and better, and then make a school visit that same week with kids 14 or under.

Funny. Spending time with both age groups leaves me feeling young!

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*A proud member of the SCBWI-IL Diversity Committee, **Beth Finke** teaches five weekly memoir-writing classes now and can't squeeze in any more! In response to the need for teachers, she has developed a short course on how to organize and lead memoir-writing classes, available online at [www.bethfinke.com/masterclass/](http://www.bethfinke.com/masterclass/)*



## Book Look

### **Aesop Lake** by Sarah Ward

By Amanda Caverzasi

Coming of age and dystopian stories are often fodder for modern YA books. *Aesop's Fables* – not so much.

Fables are for picture books readers. At least we might be led to believe this. Nearly every new book published about fables is a picture book. On the surface, it makes sense. Fables are about talking animals. Gorgeous, wordless adaptations like **Jerry Pinkney's** *the Mouse and the Lion* is the stuff bedtime dreams are made of, but can young children understand the morals of Aesop's stories?

Not well, experts say. **Seeta Pai**, the Executive Director of Education at Boston's PBS member station explains, "The capacity to understand a so-called moral of the story involves several cognitive and logical steps," and children under 10 aren't often able to make them.\* If older readers comprehend the fables better than younger ones, why are there so few YA adaptations of them?

Fables are synonymous with morality and nearly three thousand years old. Some YA readers may dismiss the fables as heavy-handed moral lessons, but fables can be used to explore topics of importance to today's teenagers.

In *Aesop Lake*, Vermont based writer **Sarah Ward** looks at bullying, sexual assault, and gay rights through *Aesop's Fables*. Taking care to avoid preaching, Ward makes morality something to be talked about.

*Aesop Lake*, published by Green Writers Press, is the story of Leda Keogh, who witnesses a violent hate crime against two of her classmates, a gay couple. The

perpetrator is her boyfriend, David, and his best friend. When these two young men are accused, Leda must decide if she will testify for or against them. Her decision is made more complicated when David threatens to tell Leda's family's secret - a secret that, if reported, would send Leda's mother to jail. Alternating between Leda's perspective and Jonathan's, one of the victims of the hate crime, Ward's story explores what it takes to find courage and speak the truth.



The book has three parts. Each opens with one of *Aesop's Fables*. "A bad excuse is good enough for a bully" is the morality tale at the novel's start. After a concise telling of the fable illustrated by **Lindsay Ward**, the author's daughter, Ward begins her novel. The fable is reflected in the story-line when David, motivated only by intolerance, attacks Jonathan and his boyfriend, who are

skinny dipping and thus particularly vulnerable. Jonathan's boyfriend is "the lamb waiting for the wolf." When Leda tries to persuade David to leave with her, he turns on her, pinning her against the car. Imagery-rich writing like, "[David's] anger is a python squeezing the warmth from the air," set tone and atmosphere.

Structuring her novel with the fables is intriguing. On the one hand, it helps anchor the reader in a fast-paced narrative. On the other hand, it's a risk. Reminiscent of writers in eighteenth-century England who wrote novels for moral instruction, it could be perceived as didactic. In her children's book *Original Stories from Real Life*, **Mary Wollstonecraft**, the feminist philosopher, dedicates each chapter of her book to a moral lesson. Writing at a time when morality was expressively taught to children and fashionable to speak of, Wollstonecraft's story did not read as heavy-handed to its readers in the eighteenth century, but it does today. Similar to Wollstonecraft's book, *Aesop Lake* could, too, but it doesn't because Ward never preaches. Neither do the fables she selects for her story.

The fables selected for the novel are not of the right or wrong variety, but rather aphorisms about the world. "A bad excuse is good enough for a bully" isn't advocating certain behavior as, let's say, the *Tortoise and the Hare*, which teaches that slow and steady is better than quick but unintentional. No one wants to be told what to do, least of all young adults. An observation about the world, however, is not likely to offend. Using

***Continues on page 23***



# The Inside Story

## The Way You Want To Feel

By Carol Coven Grannick

I'm an emotional soul. I've always felt things deeply and, as a young person, was accused of being "too sensitive." As an adult I learned that the reaction to my oversensitivity had more to do with the perceiver's *undersensitivity*. That was a first step in letting go of the negative self-judgment I'd carried with me. Gradually I came to experience my perceptiveness and sensitivity as a strength (as well as acknowledging that it can be a vulnerability). I've always been exquisitely interested in the ebb and flow of emotional states and the meaning those had for my life and the lives of others.

Because of that, I suppose, I monitor my own internal process (and obviously, write about it, too). I trust my feelings and feel things deeply, from delirious joy to painful despair, and everything in between. I don't judge. I cherish and am grateful for the joy, while accepting and not fighting against the more difficult, painful emotions.

And I'm glad I do. I believe that with all the guidelines we hear and learn, and all the "Shoulds" that we internalize, the truest anchor is inside us. But that anchor can change positions over the course of our journeys. If we don't pay attention, we can find ourselves lost.



For a couple of years after I'd "finished" my middle grade novel in verse, I experienced a period of writing limbo. I had lots of ideas for what *Next* might be, but nothing took hold in that can't-wait-to-begin place.

I continued to write scraps of this and snippets of that in my 4:30-6:00 a.m. writing time before heading to work at 7:00 a.m. I also began to realize my time outside of my beloved day job felt saturated with exhaustion, and that my writing and my life outside my job had begun to suffer.

At the end of June 2018, I retired from my day job in order to become a full-time writer. After tweaking and polishing every manuscript I felt was submission-worthy, I researched and submitted, submitted, submitted. But I'd also reached the end of my fairly patient journey to *Next*.

So I registered for two summer classes, each matching a strand of my strong emotional pulls: poetry for children and memoir. I'd published several poems for children and adults, and I'd written many memoir-related pieces. I loved poetry, but also had a nagging feeling that somehow I needed to write about the year my father died, when I was twenty-two.

Both class experiences – **Heidi Bee Roemer's** poetry intensive and StoryStudio's memoir workshop – were excellent. I wrote many poems and short pieces of memoir each week and felt stimulated, energized, and excited.

It wasn't until I came to the end of the classes, when unstructured writing time stretched out before me, that I

felt uncertain about my direction. My final assignment in the memoir class had been to share my plan for a longer piece. When I'd pulled out a journal that chronicled the year my dad died, my mood plummeted. *I already wrote this memoir. And then, I don't want to write it again.*

But another voice said, *It's painful. Maybe you're afraid to go there. You **should** write the memoir.* After all, I believe in exploring what is painful. I believe in pursuing what may be difficult, in going deeply into myself to write things that feel true and important.

Then I thought about how I felt during the poetry workshop and afterwards, at home writing poem after poem, challenging myself to create verses worthy of young listeners and readers. I'd felt joyful. And I'd gotten lost in my work without any sense of time, laughing as I read finished products out loud to my husband.

A scale tipped back and forth in my brain. On one side: pain, exploration of what I might be afraid of, sadness, and possible closure on certain issues. On the other side: joy, new challenges as I become the poet for children I want to be, and deep and satisfying pleasure in the work itself.

- Write what you love.
- Write what you fear.
- Write what you know.
- Write what you want to know.

Nothing helped. Then I heard my own voice.

**Continues on page 23**



# A Fly on the Wall

## Prairie Writer's and Illustrator's Day 2018

By Shanah Salter (Writer)

The 2018 Prairie Writer's and Illustrator's Day (PWID) was held at Harper College in Palatine, IL, on October 27, 2018. This was my third PWID. Instead of feeling like I'd flown into an alien land of unfamiliar faces and foreign lingo, this time I actually felt like I'd returned home. Home to my crew of caring and supportive critique partners and my growing number of writing friends and mentors, to talk about the thing we love most — writing.

The energetic **Deborah Topolski** began our day with her usual flair, and wonderful leopard print platform shoes, as a flight attendant preparing the PWID flyers for take-off. There was some technology turbulence, but Deborah kept the crowd engaged and entertained.

For me, the highlight of the day was the inspiring and very personal keynote by author/illustrator **Kelly Light**, creator of the *Louise* series. She advised us not to lose sight of why we create—to benefit our child readers. I don't think there was a dry eye in the auditorium as Kelly shared her creative journey. She also reminded us to consider the impact the creative journey has on our personal lives and loved ones, as well as the impact our lives have on our creativity.

**Barbara Fisch** and **Sarah Shealy**, from Blue Slip Media, also delivered a keynote on marketing. It was interesting to learn about the various social media platforms, in particular the usefulness of Twitter in establishing connections with educators, readers, and fellow creators. Instagram is also becoming popular for book reviews and



Russell Busse

showcasing illustrations/art samples. Their advice to form connections with local booksellers, librarians, and educators as early as possible in the publication/book promotion process was also invaluable.

The writing break-out sessions I attended were spot on, as usual.

- *Building A Plot* was presented by Abrams editor **Russell Busse**. He provided graphical ways to organize our story structure and bravely allowed the audience to outline a plot that veered in a zombie-eating-turtles direction that I don't think anyone anticipated!
- The sincerity and encouragement from **Michael Joosten**, an editor at Random House, in his break-out *Tackling Tricky Topics In Picture Books* was wonderful. He spoke about the benefits of telling stories from a unique point of view—a process which avoids the story reading like a dot point fact guide and allows better engagement with

younger audiences. For example, in a recent project he worked on, *Pride: The Story of Harvey Milk and the Rainbow Flag*, the flag acts like a character.

- **Sherri Duskey Rinker** shared her infectious enthusiasm for writing across age levels in *PB/ER/CB: So Similar, So Different*. She even read us a few pages from her hilarious debut middle-grade novel. More details coming soon, but I have a feeling it will be just as successful as her picture books.
- Other break-out sessions were also offered on illustration, querying, and marketing.

The revision panel discussion I attended included Russell Busse, **Weslie Turner**, and Michael Joosten. I found the discussion on the importance of having work vetted by as many experts and sensitivity readers as possible eye opening. Two other revision-themed panels were also offered: illustrators and agent/client duos.



This incredible day also included a heartwarming tribute to the magnificent, Batman-loving, artist **Michael Bricis** (former Northern Suburbs network rep). SCBWI President **Stephen Mooser** and Executive Director **Lin Oliver** recorded a message to celebrate and show thanks to the retiring SCBWI-IL advisors/coordinators **Terri Murphy**, **Janet McDonnell**, and **Sara Shacter**. The PWID prize winners were also announced. **Darcy Zoells** won the illustration contest. **Karen Land** and **Brian Shutters** won the manuscript contest.

I left PWID flying high, with a tank filled with energy and enthusiasm to continue to WRITE, REVISE, REVISE, REVISE SOME MORE, GET WRITING VETTED, and finally-SUBMIT! Here's to hoping we all take off and soar to new heights in the coming year!

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**Shanah Salter** started her career as a *Family Physician*. These days, when she's not being poked and prodded by the two mini doctors in her life, Shanah provides medical education to children and parents, sneaks time alone (thank goodness for long hide-and-seek games!) to craft children's fiction, and reviews books for [@kidlitexchange](https://www.kidlitexchange.com).

## A Fly On The Wall

### *Prairie Writer's And Illustrator's Day 2018*

By Rich Green (Illustrator)

I went into PWID with a bit of a different perspective than in years past. This was now my fifth year attending, but it was my first year on the planning committee. I had an all-new sense of excitement and energy for the big day. WOW— this year's faculty did not disappoint.

As **Shanah Salter** noted in her article, **Kelly Light's** keynote was incredibly personal and yet very encouraging. Packed into her personal journey, Kelly reinforced the power of illustrators mailing out promotional postcards. She noticed that one of her sketches was getting a higher rate of positive comments on social media and had been singled out in a portfolio review. So, she decided to turn it into a postcard. Kelly had her list of the top publishing houses and art directors that she dreamed of working with, and off the postcards went. They arrived at their destinations the next day, and her phone rang non-stop that afternoon with calls from art directors. One of those calls resulted in a seven-book contract, all because of that single postcard.

and at times quite humorous, presentation brought us along on the journey a book cover takes from concept to completion. The cover art generally faces several rounds of revision and must be signed off on by several groups and individuals before ever making it to print. Sales and Marketing teams, for example, have a large say in the final art. Quite often they really do have to be able to sell the book by its cover. Typography, design, composition, colors, and characters all play critical roles in conveying the story and compelling a reader to pick that book up off the shelf.

- *Picture This: The Making of a Picture Book* was presented by **Jim Hoover**, art director at Viking. Sometimes the book concept that you begin with can be quite different from what you end up with. Jim shared how a reader's ability to suspend disbelief is so common in books, and yet for one project he worked on the test audiences could not get past the premise that the book was leaking. That led to some changes to the plot and transformed the book into the buddy adventure *The Story of Fish and Snail* by **Deborah Freedman**. Jim also talked about the initial challenges he faced proposing that the illustrations for the book *Shy* with Deborah Freedman would not show or reveal the main character. It was really fascinating to see the transformations in both books based on the artwork revisions.
- PAL Author/Illustrator **Kelly Light** began her breakout *Drawing Out the Character: How Many Drawings Does It Take to Make a*

I attended the illustration specific breakout sessions:

- First up was Random House editor **Michael Joosten's** *All You Need to Know About Creating a Memorable Book Cover*. Michael's informative,



Kelly Light



*Picture Book?* by sharing countless drawings, sketches, thumbnails, and concepts she made in the process of creating her *Louise* series. She also gave a peek into her process for a forthcoming book which takes place over an extended time period and family generations. To conclude her session, she really peeled back the layers by answering very personal industry-related questions in full detail. She shared the ins and outs of her multi-book contract. She was completely transparent when she talked about the money, sharing the specific details of how much she earned from her books (both the advances and royalties) so that up and coming illustrators can be educated as to what to expect and what is possible. She discussed how life setbacks impacted her momentum in creating follow-up books, which then directly impacted sales and those much sought after royalty checks. All of this was information she said she wished someone had told her along the way. It was some of the most helpful information a faculty member has ever shared in any of the sessions I have ever attended over the years.

There were several panel discussions to choose from, and I of course went to the illustration focused revision panel featuring **Jim Hoover**, Kelly Light, and **John Sandford**. I enjoyed the series of questions the panelists were asked, as they had been submitted by illustrator members leading up to the conference. It was very interesting to hear responses from both an art director's point of view as well as an author/illustrator's point of view. Specifically, John Sandford is an Art Director at Cricket Media and has also personally illustrated over 60 books and counting. So, he was able to expand upon certain questions and challenges based on all his experiences,



*Eileen Meyer, Deborah Warren and Taylor Martindale Kean*

which made for an interesting discussion.

Each year at PWID, attendees have the option of adding on manuscript and portfolio reviews. I choose to have a portfolio review this year and was paired with John Sandford and **Erin Hookana**, both art directors at Cricket Media. The review began with John informing me that he had taken the time the night before to have a look at my website to get a feel for my work. He remembered in detail a few of the pieces and was very happy to see I had selected one of them as the opening page in my portfolio. John and Erin both shared specific advice and ideas for moving forward with my work. I left feeling very inspired and energized in a way I had not been expecting. Then much to my surprise, about a week after the conference, John emailed everyone he had reviewed, giving us all some follow up advice. He included some great documents that will come in handy while working on book dummies. It was unbelievably generous of him and greatly appreciated.

At the end of the conference, the Mix and Mingle Portfolio Showcase was

bustling with activity once again. It is a chance to see all the wonderful portfolios on display as well as to chat with the faculty members directly. It is also a fun time to catch up with industry friends old and new. The hour flew by so quickly that several illustrators requested more time to be able to chat and hang out with each other. So, I have it on good authority, there will be an Illustrator Social during lunch at PWID 2019. Something new for all of us artists to look forward to next year!

In the meantime, we had all better get to work on sending out postcards and creating those book dummies. You never know whose career will be the next to take flight.

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**Rich Green** is a Co-Rep for the SCBWI-IL Chicago-Area Illustrators Network. He is an artist and illustrator of several children's books including *A Girl With A Cape* (Full Hearts Publishing) and the forthcoming *Chicago Treasure* (Lake Claremont Press). He serves as an Executive Board Member for the Artist Guild of Lockport and you can see his work at [www.richgreenart.com](http://www.richgreenart.com).



**Continued from page 18**

fables that don't preach ensures that Ward doesn't alienate her readers, but rather invites them in.

Likewise, Ward's decision to turn Aesop's animal characters into humans for her novel and make them complicated and flawed also helps young adults relate to the fables. None of Ward's characters are models of righteousness. Leda, for instance, after trying unsuccessfully to stop her boyfriend from attacking their classmates, calls her brother to pick her up, not the police who could have helped. While she knows her boyfriend is a bully, she excuses him, even likes him. Why? Because he's gorgeous and popular. Some readers may identify with Leda's internal conflict. Others may find her unlikeable at times, but we know this hardly matters in literature. It's her transformation that counts, and while we expect Leda to change from the opening of her novel, Ward still manages to keep us turning the pages, eager to see how Leda's story will end. This is a testimony to Ward's superb pacing and ability to sustain the tension for the 204 pages of her book.

*Aesop Lake* could stand on its own without the fables sectioning it. Why include them then? It seems important to Ward that her book be understood as one about morality. With Aesop in her book's title as well as used for structure, Ward is not shrinking from being associated with morality, but declaring it. This is big. It is not often seen outside of religious publishing houses since the eighteenth century. In a world where bullying and intolerance are growing problems at school and on-line, it seems timely that morality return to the forefront of young adult literature. It may just be what the world needs now.

**\*Blair, Elizabeth.** "And the Moral of the Story is...Kids Don't Always Understand the Moral." npr.org.

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**Amanda Caverzasi** is passionate about writing for children and telling stories about motherhood and marriage. Her debut children's book is under contract with Tiger Stripe Publishing. She is the 2016 winner of the SCBWI's Wild Wild Midwest Contest for narrative non-fiction and a regular storyteller at [www.thepeopletree.org](http://www.thepeopletree.org). Learn more about Amanda at <https://acaverzasi.com>

**Continued from page 19**

- Write what makes you feel the way you want to feel.



I had to pay attention. I *wanted* to pay attention. And as soon as I did, memories of my love of poetry from an early age flooded in: books of verse that I'd received as gifts, poems I'd read

aloud with love and care at Illinois State Speech Contests that diminished my social discomfort and gave me a voice, and files of verses that needed overlooked revisions.

Maybe I would have chosen differently at a different time in my life. But at that moment, I chose poetry – and joy. For me, for right now, it's the absolute right place to be.



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**Carol Coven Grannick** writes poetry, picture books, and articles that explore the writer's inner journey. Her middle grade novel in verse, *Reeni's Turn*, was an Honorable Mention in the 2018 Sydney Taylor Manuscript Competition, and is out on submission, along with picture books and poetry. She can be reached at: [carolcovengrannick@gmail.com](mailto:carolcovengrannick@gmail.com) or through her website at: [carolcovengrannick.com](http://carolcovengrannick.com).



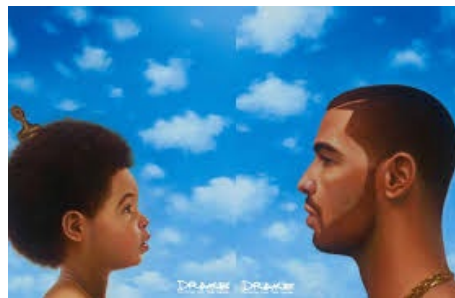
# Perspectives

## Children's Illustrators and Album Covers

By NaShantá Fletcher

Books are not the only form of storytelling. Music can also generate strong emotions, lift spirits, and spin the wheels of imagination. Just as illustrators bring life to picture books, they can also bring music to life with incredible cover art.

A number of children's book illustrators have also illustrated album cover artwork. Award-winning picture book author/illustrator **Kadir Nelson** illustrated **Michael Jackson's** posthumous album, *Michael* (2010). Nelson also illustrated two separate covers for **Drake's** album, *Nothing Was The Same* (2013). Before the release of Caldecott Medal-winning *Where the Wild Things Are* in 1963, **Maurice Sendak** illustrated cover art for *Cynthia Gooding Sings Turkish and Spanish Folk Songs* (1953). Sendak later wrote the lyrics and illustrated the cover art for *Really Rosie Musical* (1975), performed by **Carole King**.



### The Opportunity

While I haven't had the opportunity to illustrate a children's book yet, I had the pleasure of illustrating an album cover for a Chicago youth folk band, The Young Stracke All-Stars. 2018 marked the 10-year anniversary of the band's creation. In celebration, they released a single on vinyl with a fully illustrated front and back cover.

This opportunity came to me after a chance meeting with the band's Music Director **Jason McInnes** at the 2017 Urban Sketchers Symposium in Chicago, where artists from around the world walked the city to sketch and paint. Several months later, Jason reached out to me after seeing my art posts on Instagram and Twitter. He thought my art style would be perfect for his vision of the album's cover art.







## Design and Sketches

Jason wanted the cover to illustrate a diverse group of kids performing music to represent the band members over the years. This was a great opportunity for me to illustrate kids of different ethnicities. I even designed the boy with the ukulele after my son.

Jason also wanted to feature **Win Stracke**, the band's namesake and co-founder of the Old Town School of Folk Music in Chicago, and legendary folk singer **Ella Jenkins**, a friend, and mentor of the band. I was given reference images of Win, Ella, and the band performing. I did a series of rough sketches, first in my sketchbook and then digitally, and sent them to Jason. He gave me feedback on the poses and character designs, then I revised and sent new sketches.

Once the characters were designed, Jason sent me the names of locations where the band had performed around Chicago to help me find inspiration for the background of the cover art. When I saw the Welles Park Gazebo, I absolutely fell in love with it. Jason also loved the idea of using the gazebo in the background. He gave me a few notes on adjusting the character poses and requested I add him to the artwork as well.

Because I was illustrating Ella Jenkins on the cover, my sketches needed to be approved by her manager before I could move forward with the final art. I grew up listening to Ella's folk music and watched her guest appearances on *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood*, *Sesame Street*, and *Barney & Friends*. The idea of Ella, or her team, seeing my artwork was

very exciting! Ella's team loved the art and gave me the green light to use her likeness.

Soon after I was given the approval to start the front cover final art, Jason asked to commission a second piece of art. He loved the gazebo so much he wanted to include it on the back cover as well. The band was recording two songs for the record, one about the sun and one about the moon. The front cover design included the sun, so Jason suggested featuring the gazebo at night on the back cover.

After negotiating a new price for two pieces, I was eager to get started on the back cover design. The back cover was much easier to design. The gazebo would be the main subject with a single child playing guitar on the steps.



from the characters that are in the foreground. I would then combine the two paintings in Photoshop. This way, if I messed up painting the characters, I wouldn't have to completely trace and repaint the background as well. I wasn't sure where the text was being placed on the front cover, so having the background and the characters as separate files that could be layered on top of each other helped give the graphic designer a little flexibility as well.

I used various colored Micron pens for the line art, and I mixed Dr. Ph. Martin's liquid watercolor with my variety of watercolor tube paints to get a nice vibrant pigment. The daytime background of the front cover was easy to paint, but the nighttime background was a little tricky for me. I painted the back cover twice because the colors didn't seem cool enough. For the second attempt, I painted a light blue wash over the entire page, then layered my colors on top. That really helped achieve those night time tones on paper.

The next challenge was trying to paint all the characters. This was the most frustrating part of the process. When I digitally drew the line art, I would zoom in to get all the details I couldn't really see normally. However, when you work on paper you can't "zoom in" on the page to draw your details. I ended up with characters that were too detailed for the size I was trying to paint them.

After several failed attempts trying to trace and paint these characters the same scale as the background, I gave up and

## Final Art

Although I did a lot of rough drafts and final line art digitally, my original vision was to use watercolor to paint the final pieces. There was a lot of trial and error during this entire process.

I drew my lines digitally, printed them, then traced them onto watercolor paper. I was using a heavy 300/gsm cotton cold press paper. It was difficult to see some of the intricate details using my lightbox because the paper was so thick. I had to resort to using tracing paper to transfer the line art to my watercolor paper.

I took the print of my line art, traced it onto the tracing paper. Then I flipped the tracing paper over and traced those lines on the backside of the paper with a pencil. Then I would take the pencil side of the paper, lay that on top of my watercolor paper, and trace over that, which transfers the graphite from the pencil onto the watercolor paper. It's a time-consuming process.

Because transferring the line art was such a lengthy process, I decided to paint the background of the front cover separately



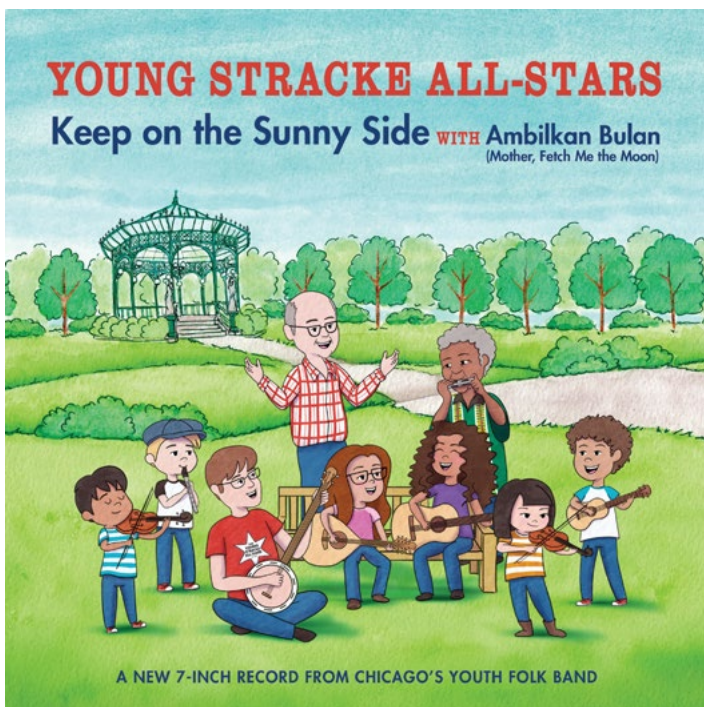


Painted them digitally. I didn't want the digital characters to contrast too much with the watercolor background, so I added a watercolor paper texture to the digital art.

From conception to completion, this project took me two months. Three months later, the physical record was recorded and printed! The publishing world has a lot longer turnaround time. A picture book could take a year or two to complete.

At my day job, most of my graphics and illustrations are used online or on TV. Something I could spend hours creating might appear on-air for 3-10 seconds and then it's gone. In contrast, it is magical having your art printed on something tangible you can hold and share with people. I attended The Young Stracke All-Star's live performance and saw people buying and admiring something I painted. It's wonderful to be a part of a project that may inspire other children to play music or pick up a paintbrush someday.

**NaShantá Fletcher** works as a Graphic Artist for WGN Morning News in Chicago. Aside from basic art classes, NaShantá is mostly self-taught as an artist. She used her passion for illustration to create opportunities to bring original artwork to WGN-TV, both on-air and on social media.





# Read Local

By Sarah Aronson



One of the best parts of being an SCBWI–Illinois member is that there are so many energetic, smart people to brainstorm with, talk to, and help advocate for reading and writing and art. As a region, we don't just share ideas. We don't just talk about nice ideas and then shelve them. We act on them. We take some risks. It's just like writing a novel. We welcome inspiration and intuition, and then we add fuel with intellect.

That's how READ LOCAL got started.

And because it is still a work in progress, it is still getting better.

It started with an idea. PAL member, **Erica Weisz**, was totally impressed with the Read Local programs on the East Coast. To Erica, this idea seemed like the perfect fit for our region.

She shared her idea with our leadership.

And we got excited.

The truth is, the second I heard about this idea, I was ready to jump in! (Actually, I am always a person ready to jump in.) I am a person who eats locally. I shop locally. Reading Locally made perfect sense.

I thought about the obstacles we battle as a reading community. Many writers and illustrators can't travel far from home. It's hard to get the word out about your book. And of course there are budgets on every level. I know a lot of teachers who are having trouble fitting author/illustrator visits into their schedule.

We all want to share books.

We all want to share the joy of reading.

But sometimes, it's hard.

Note: We knew launching READ LOCAL would be a lot of work. But we ignored that part.

Instead, we brainstormed with **Debbie Topolski**.

If you are involved in SCBWI-Illinois, you know Debbie. She is the leader that makes everything happen. She asks the right questions. She finds enthusiastic people. Every creative mind and organization needs a friend like Debbie! She helped us set goals. She brought more amazing people to the brainstorming.

We talked to teachers and librarians.

We dreamed of every possibility.

We talked to everyone we thought might like this idea.

Quickly, all this intuition paid off!

We were also most fortunate to receive financial support from the wonderful board at I-Care, the Illinois Council for Active Reading Education. Right away, the enthusiastic and dedicated women believed in the mission of Read Local—to connect Illinois teachers and librarians with Illinois authors and illustrators.

With funding, we could begin to overcome both obstacles to people finding Illinois books: awareness and budget.

Now we are prepared to help schools fund author and illustrator visits.

We were also fortunate to receive a second PAL grant from SCBWI to help fund our amazing trailer! Check it out! Huge thanks to Storyteller Chicago,



**Cedric Gliane** created the amazing banner at the top of the website. He also (pretty much singlehandedly) put the website together. **Alice McGinty**, **Sara Shacter** and **Jenny Wagh** also provided necessary feedback and enthusiasm at every step of the way—and every email. Authors and illustrators signed up quickly to help distribute information.

operated in part by PAL **Rachel Ruiz**, for creating this video—and giving ME the thrill of this adventure—recording the narrative!

Then, it was time to get to work.

It was time to toss around ideas. Discover what we could do in this first year...and what had to wait.

(Note: waiting is really hard for me.)

And now we have a site!

In 2019, we will have a newsletter.

We will have more swag.

We will have more opportunities for other authors and illustrators to participate.

Do you have an idea?

Let us know!

Email [read.local.illinois@gmail.com](mailto:read.local.illinois@gmail.com).

Link to the trailer:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pt6jicGm5C8>



**Sarah Aronson** began writing for kids and teens when someone in an exercise class dared her to try. Since then, she has earned an MFA in Writing for Children and Young Adults from Vermont College of Fine Arts, and published three stand alone novels: *Head Case*, *Beyond Lucky*, and *Believe*. Her most recent books are part of a new young MG series, *The Wish List* (Scholastic, 2017-2018) as well as a forthcoming picture book biography, *Just Like Rube Goldberg* (Beach Lane Books), illustrated by **Robert Neubecker**.

When Sarah is not writing or reading (or cooking or riding her bike), she is talking to readers about creativity, writing, social action, and of course, sparkle power! She loves working with other writers in one of her classes at the amazing Highlights Foundation or Writers on the Net ([www.writers.com](http://www.writers.com)). She has served as an SCBWI mentor in both Illinois and Michigan, and is now working on the READ LOCAL initiative in her role as PAL coordinator for Illinois. She loves sports. She overuses exclamation points. When she's excited, she talks with her hands. Find out more at <http://www.saraharonson.com>.



# The Shop Around the Corner

By Lisa Katzenberger

With three locations in the Chicago area (Naperville, Downer's Grove, La Grange), Anderson's Bookshop is a well-established Chicago-area independent bookstore.



We asked **Michael Leali**, Children's Department Manager at the Anderson's Bookshop La Grange location, to give us the inside scoop on how Anderson's works with authors. Michael is a writer and SCBWI member himself, so he has special insight on what authors are striving to accomplish with their stories.

## What is Anderson's children's section like?

Our children's book section caters to infants all the way to young adults transitioning into adulthood. We pride ourselves on offering a diverse selection of compelling, compulsively readable stories featuring stellar voices, bold characters, and page-turning plots. Our major children's sections include board books, picture books, early readers, second and third grade titles, middle grade, young adult, and teen interest. While our selection is largely comprised of newer titles, we do stock many classics and less recent bookseller favorites. If you don't see a particular

title on our shelf, our booksellers are always happy to special order it or transfer it from another Anderson's location if possible.

## How do you view your role as bookseller in the children's market and community?

Being a bookseller is less of a job and more of a vocation. I'm not just selling books to customers - I'm sharing my passion for literature with my community, especially young readers just venturing out into the wide world of books. In a world of ever-increasing screen time, I take the reader-book match up very seriously. The book I introduce to my customer might be that one story that hooks that kid and transforms them into a life-long reader. That's the goal: selling customers, especially kids, on becoming readers - people who can't help but fall from one story to the next.

As an ambassador for stories, I love chatting with customers about what

they're reading and sharing my most recent bookish experiences. There's nothing better than talking books. In addition to those delightful everyday conversations, I have also started two book groups for children, one middle grade and one teen, that meet every other month. (Details can be found on the Anderson's website.) Along with the children's managers at our two other locations, I often go to schools to book talk, especially for our Mock Newbery program, which is a great way to get kids involved in the world of kid lit. It gives them a chance to make their voices heard. I love that we create an opportunity that empowers kids to use their voices for good.

## What defines Anderson's as unique from other bookstores?

Anderson's isn't just a bookstore. It's a community hub. It's a home away from home. It's a second family. That's what it was for me as a child (I was always in the Naperville store growing up) and continues to be for me as an





adult. We are an independent, family owned and run business (going on six generations now!) that is dedicated to every community our stores inhabit. Throughout the year, we invite customers into our stores for hundreds of events: author signings, book parties, book groups, story times, and more. We also host larger events like our annual YA Conference and our Children's Literature Breakfast. Wherever we are, be it at a large event or in store, we love getting to know our patrons, some of whom we see nearly on a daily basis. We also strive to give back in whatever ways we can. Two of my favorite programs that we offer are Jan's Book Angels, which ensures that children in need in our communities receive a book during the holiday season, and Books for Troops, which provides literature to the people serving our country in the armed forces. What I love about Anderson's is that we aren't a major corporation — we exist because of our communities and for our communities.

### **Can you describe Anderson's Local Authors program for indie-published authors?**

We love our local, indie-published authors! Each store offers consignment opportunities for authors living within a 15-mile radius of that particular store. All local authors need to do is bring the completed application from our website and a review copy of their book to their local Anderson's for our consignment manager to assess. From there, we review the book and decide if it will be a good fit for our store and community. Here are two pro tips: 1) the most successful local authors are those who are involved in their communities and work hard to publicize themselves, and 2) we do not consign books created through Amazon publishing services, so carefully consider your route to publication as you develop your work!

### **Do you have advice for traditionally-published authors who want to forge a relationship with Anderson's? What makes you choose to stock a book?**

The very best thing a traditionally-published author can do is make sure an ARC of their book finds its way to all three of our stores. All three have children's booksellers eagerly awaiting their next great read with bated breath! The best way for us to get excited about your book is to read it well in advance of publication and get our other booksellers excited about it, too. As soon as we read a book, we go straight to Edelweiss, write a review, and send it off to the publisher!

We stock a significant number of front list titles, but whether we restock that book once it has sold is a bigger question. Here are the top three qualities of a children's book I hand-sell and restock frequently: delicious, poignant writing; a diverse, inclusive cast of characters; and a story that keeps me guessing until the very end, no

matter how big or small the narrative question might be. I am also particularly fond of selling books from debut authors. There is something so thrilling about introducing the world to a fresh, new voice!

### **How does being a writer yourself help you in your role?**

Writing and reading are two sides of the same coin. The more voracious a reader, the better a writer can become. The same goes for becoming a more discerning reader. As I grow as a writer, I'm becoming choosier about my reading selections. As much as I want to read every book that comes my way, I can't. There simply isn't time. I only want to read the best, most well-written stories. My patrons do, too.

Honing my writing skills has certainly helped me identify the best books, not just in terms of writing, but story and characters. I was reading an ARC recently that was all action and very little story. As much as I love fast-paced, action-packed narratives, I come to stories more so for those moments in between the action. I need the emotionally resonant bits. The parts that stir something within me, be it a feeling or a question. A knock-out plot is great and all, but if it doesn't have characters or voice or heart to carry it, it falls flat. Stories that achieve both action and story are the ones that patrons, and myself, love most. My goal is to get those types of stories into my reader's hands.



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**Lisa Katzenberger** is the author of *Triceratops Would Not Make a Good Ninja* (Capstone 2018) and *National Regular Average Ordinary Day* (Penguin Workshop 2020). She is the Social Media Coordinator for SCBWI-Illinois and lives in La Grange.



# Illustrator in the Spotlight

**Janet McDonnell**



## Are you an illustrator or an author/illustrator?

I'm an author and illustrator.

## What is your preferred medium to work in?

I usually work in ink and watercolor, and then I tinker with it in Photoshop. Lately I've been using a dip pen in India ink, and I've taken to Schmincke pan watercolors.

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

I took a ziggy, zaggy path to illustration. I majored in English and minored in art, and my first job out of college was teaching high school English. When I got married and moved to Chicago, I worked as a freelance journalist, and then became an editor and author at The Child's World, a small educational publisher. Because it was so small, I got to learn every aspect of publishing, from soup to nuts, including writing and art directing books. Along the way, I got to know a lot of illustrators, and that reignited my love of art and drawing. I took classes at night and on weekends and began educating myself about illustration. Eventually, a bigger publisher bought our little company and we were all laid off. When the former president of The Child's World decided

to launch a new publishing company, she asked me to write for a series of educational books. I said, "Sure, if you let me illustrate them, too!"

## What does your workspace look like?

I work in a small but cozy spare bedroom. I have my drawing table, my computer, bookshelves, and a closet full of art supplies. My dog has a bed in there, and he comes to keep me company from time to time, or to beg for cookies and walks.

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

I always start with a thumbnail sketch, and then move to a tighter drawing. Then I trace it onto watercolor paper, using my lightbox. I usually trace with ink, but for this piece, I wasn't sure how much outlining I wanted to do in ink, so I traced it in pencil first. Then I painted in the color and finally







inked the outlines. I scanned it into Photoshop and punched up the colors a bit.

### Which illustrators were your favorites when you were little?

Looking back, the pictures embedded in my young brain were by **Garth Williams**, **Bill Peet**, and **Tomi Ungerer**. But I didn't think of them as illustrators, of course. I just loved the stories they brought to life, especially *Charlotte's Web*, *Chester the Worldly Pig*, and *Cricotor*.

### Which illustrators are your favorites now?

These days, my favorite illustrators are **Sophie Blackall**, **Isabelle Arsenault**, **Emily Hughes**, and **Matt James**. They all bring such emotion into their art.



### What inspires you creatively, spiritually or emotionally?

I'm inspired by the majesty and mystery of nature, and by the curiosity, creativity, and hilarity of children.

### What gets in the way of your creativity?

My hero **E.B. White** once said, "I arise in the morning torn between a desire to improve the world and a desire to enjoy the world. This makes it hard to plan the day." That pretty much sums up the biggest obstacles to my creativity. My goal in 2019 is to find ways to incorporate creativity into activism. (This will likely not pay well.)

### And, of course, please tell us:

#### Where can we find you?

You can find me at [www.janetmcdonnell.com](http://www.janetmcdonnell.com)

I'm also sporadically on Instagram at [www.instagram.com/janetmcdonnellillo/](http://www.instagram.com/janetmcdonnellillo/)





# Voices of Change

## News from the Diversity Committee

By Jacqueline Alcántara



As an illustrator, I ponder what types of stories I should work on. What should my connection be to the cultures and people in the stories I illustrate so that I can represent them properly?

I think back upon my childhood when I grew up in a predominately ‘white’ suburb of Chicago. When my third grade teacher announced that we would be doing *Aladdin* for our class play, I knew I would be picked to play Jasmine. I was the only girl in the class with tan enough skin. So despite my curly hair and freckles, I landed the role. The part of Aladdin went to Italian Angelo, the only boy with tan enough skin.

I felt so proud of being the girl in the class who most resembled Jasmine, who was the epitome of beauty and bravery to me at the time. My classmate Molly ruined it, though, when she reminded me that Jasmine kisses Aladdin. I would have to kiss Angelo in front of everyone. I became terrified of being in the spotlight and desperately wished someone else could play Jasmine! I

suddenly felt extremely self-conscious of the differences between our skin tones, something I had been so proud of a moment earlier. Perhaps our teacher sensed the delicate situation. In the end she changed the play to *101 Dalmatians*, and I got to wear a dog costume and blend in with the rest of the puppies. I was totally thrilled.

As I think about what projects I can/ should do as an illustrator, I wonder about my responsibility to have an authentic connection to each project. Realistically, Molly (a red headed Irish American girl) had as much in common with Jasmine (an Iraqi princess with a pet tiger) as I did (a curly-haired, Latina/white, tan, freckly girl from Chicago). Is that why, ultimately, our teacher decided to change to a much easier story about missing puppies? Or perhaps she just couldn’t sort out the flying carpet bit of the performance or navigate the kissing scene?

The movement toward encouraging more diverse books and welcoming

more new voices can get tricky. There’s always a fear of stepping on toes, misrepresenting someone or something. Things can feel like they are changing quickly. What is acceptable for the book I am working on today might be frowned upon in two or three years, when the book finally reaches bookshelves. But the opposite can happen as well. We might avoid taking the risk of telling certain stories for fear of the “hard parts” and subsequently miss out on opportunities for real stories that all children need to hear.

This past fall, the [Southern Poverty Law Center\\*](#) (SPLC) asked me to illustrate a few short stories for their “Teaching Tolerance” curriculum. I was thrilled to be asked. But when I began to read “Hercules’ Daughter,” a short story about **George Washington’s** chef, I cringed. It reminded me of the misbegotten attempt to tell this same story in the 2016 picture book *A Birthday Cake for George Washington*, which was pulled for obvious and valid reasons. It had portrayed “happy slaves” in the illustrations, and had been labeled as a “true story,” despite many historical inaccuracies. Knowing all that, I worried about how this current SPLC version of “Hercules’ Daughter” would be perceived. I was also afraid of illustrating such a sensitive topic.

What to do? What all illustrators must: I researched Hercules and looked into the banned book scandal, too. I came to realize that the SPLC version did a sensitive job of revealing the “hard truths” of Hercules’ story and incorporating them into the heart of the story. This stood in contrast to *A Birthday Cake for George Washington*,



which dealt with some of the hard truths in the author's note while completely avoiding others.

The SPLC author found a way to celebrate the talents of a man forgotten in history but also told the complexities of Hercules' relationship with George Washington, with slavery, and with his children. This current storyline is not only more honest, but also much more interesting than the problem of a lack of sugar for the cake in the previous book. The complicated father/daughter relationships present a universal struggle that all readers can connect to. It is ironic that the creators of *A Birthday Cake for George Washington* were attempting to create "teachable moments" for children with their book, but ended up creating a huge teachable moment for everyone - especially authors, illustrators and editors.

As we learned from *A Birthday Cake for George Washington*, anyone can make the mistake of perpetuating a false narrative, even when writing or drawing from inside one's own culture. Finding out which stories we want to tell is a process of pulling away layers of preconceived notions about our history and ourselves and trying to be honest about who's voice is being heard. It requires a lot of research on the subject as well as soul searching to question whether you should be the one to tell this story.

I still find the same questions on my mind: Should I illustrate this story? Am I the right one for this project? I love that I have a mixed background (Irish, German, Mayan, Honduran) because I have a big range of people, experience, histories, cultures, etc., to draw on. At the same time, this has always left me with a lot of questions of personal and cultural identity. Now I wonder, which part of me is "authentic" enough?

When I try to answer the question, "What types of stories do you want to illustrate?" my very well crafted answer remains, "hmm...I don't know." Of course I want to work on a book with a really authentic voice and a universal story that all readers can connect with and enjoy. But for me, it's a very gut reaction that tells me whether I can be true to the story. And then it's the process of research, reading, traveling, meeting people, sketching, napping, thinking, and staring into space that helps me find my visual narrative, which is based on the truest connection I have found within the story.

**Neil Gaiman** said, "I write to find out what I think about something." I feel lucky that I get the opportunity to draw to find out what I think about something, especially on a subject I wouldn't necessarily have asked to illustrate, such as a soccer game, a Haitian soup, a biography of a writer, etc. The journey of diving deep into that subject and coming back to the surface with new knowledge about the subject - and even more about myself - is pure joy to me. It's the reason why I answer, "I don't know".

I don't think there's a perfect illustrator for any project. A lot of people can interpret and execute a book brilliantly. But I know that because of my background, I will bring a much different visual narrative idea that anyone else. This is the reason we are thirsty for "new voices." Currently, I feel that our industry is missing out on a lot of potential voices.

The new demand for diverse books thrills me and seems to have given me a lot of opportunity. But it also presents a danger of the commercialization of diversity with works being made that misrepresent, perpetuate stereotypes, or are not well thought out — to perhaps fill a new quota. I think it's the

responsibility of everyone — editor, author, illustrator, and consumer — to look critically inward at their own prejudices: at their art, at their writing, and even at the books they are reading.

I will continue to dive deeply into tearing apart narratives that I create about myself and about others. But I will also try to avoid stepping into the land of inaction due to the fear of a misstep. In the end, maybe it was better that the team behind *A Birthday Cake for George Washington* attempted to tell Hercules' story, because it served as a wake-up call and lesson to us all. Books like this make us realize how deeply and sensitively we need to dive into the narrative and help each other recognize when we are producing a genuine project worthy of the subject.

I lose sleep over how my next book will do, what future projects might come my way, and all the things that can go wrong by misrepresenting someone or something; but in the end we have to take that risk, cautiously and honestly, and spend the time to do the work to tell stories that present the beautiful diversity of our world.

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**Jacqueline Alcántara** was the inaugural winner for the 2016 "We Need Diverse Books" Illustration Mentorship Award. Her first published book titled *The Field*, (written by **Baptiste Paul**) was released March 2018 with NorthSouth Books and received multiple starred reviews. Her upcoming projects include *Freedom Soup* (Candlewick, Fall 2019) and *Jump At De Sun* (Caitlyn Dlouhy Books/Atheneum Spring 2021).

\*"The Southern Poverty Law Center is dedicated to fighting hate and bigotry and to seeking justice for the most vulnerable members of our society. Using litigation, education, and other forms of advocacy, the SPLC works toward the day when the ideals of equal justice and equal opportunity will be a reality."