

# Prairie Wind

Newsletter of the Illinois Chapter of SCBWI



Spring 2019



## From the Editor

I am truly excited to bring this Spring 2019 issue of the *Prairie Wind* to you, the members of our wonderful Illinois chapter. I have cried, laughed, and cheered my way through reading this round of submissions. So, I have one recommendation: READ THIS ISSUE! Packed full of powerful stories, deep insight and diverse perspectives, all drawn from our local community, these columns will make you proud to be part of SCBWI-IL and inspire you in your own work...



### Greeting

**Debbie Topolski** encourages us to share the road as we make our path...



### A Fly on the Wall

**Joe Franco** covers **Lee Wind's** conversation with **Susanne Fairfax**...



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### News Roundup

**Kelly Darke** compiles events, award-winning books and grants...



### Tales from the Front

**Malyna Evans** spikes life's pesky lemons into a debut novel...



### Writing Tips

**Patricia Hruby Powell's** tips and tricks on voice and first lines...



### Don't Miss

**LA Conference, Laura Crawford Memorial Mentorship** and more...



### Illustrator Tips

**Louann Mattes Brown** details her struggle to commit to one particular medium...



### Writer's Bookshelf

**Susanne Fairfax** reflects on late poet **Mary Oliver's** collection of essays *Upstream*...



### Season's Crop

**Alexandria LaFaye** compiles spring and summer books...



### The Inside Story

**Carol Coven Grannick** explores deeper motivations for the creative life...



### Shop Around the Corner

**Chelsea Elward** shares her bookstore journey...



### Perspectives

**Kate Hannigan** interviews **Gillian King-Cargile**...



### A Short Goodbye

**Susan Tarcov** bids farewell...



### Illustrator in the Spotlight

Whatever **Jan Spivey Gilchrist** endeavors she does so as an artist...



### Voices of Change

**Urania Smith** narrates her losses, salvation, and quest to find herself in a book...



### Classes

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





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**Debbie Topolski** [kicks off the issue](#) with her standard warmth and humor as she muses about feeling a bit up in the air now that we've taken flight.

**Susan Tarcov** briefly [reflects on the joy, inspiration and adventure](#) she found in editing the *Prairie Wind* for over a decade. It's with great gratitude and also sadness that we bid her farewell. But we are also thrilled to welcome our new editor, **Jennifer Kay Loescher**, to the PW team.

[Illustrator in the Spotlight](#) showcases prolific artist and author, **Jan Spivey Gilchrist**. In this intimate interview, Gilchrist tells of her early life. "When I was a child, I had only a pencil," she writes. "Later I was thankful when I had perfected the pencil so much that critics praised my black and white drawings for giving the illusion of color."

In our second iteration of [Shop Around the Corner](#), we profile Booked, the newly opened children's bookstore in Evanston. Owner **Chelsea Elward** shares her journey: "I literally said out loud, this is what I want to do for the rest of my life."

[A Fly on the Wall](#) covers the April event, Marginalized Voices Out Loud: Queer Indie YA Author **Lee Wind** in Conversation with **Susanne Fairfax**. Writing from a passionate #ownvoices perspective **Joseph Franco** paraphrases Wind: "It is our job to let queer youth know who they are and where they come from. It is our job to stand and shine."

**Malayna Evans**, author of *Jagger Jones and the Mummy's Ankh*, chronicles her [Tale from the Front](#), which she characterizes as "chugging a fat glass of lemonade made from scratch using nothing but my creativity, hard work, and one of the most painful challenges life has hurled my way."

In a simultaneously harrowing and hopeful [Voices of Change](#) **Urania Smith** narrates the tragic loss of a brother and father, the salvation of reading, and the quest to find oneself in a book. "Just as I don't remember my first book," she writes, "I also don't recall the first time I heard the sound of a gun."

**Kate Hannigan** conducts a [lively interview](#) with **Gillian King-Cargile**, the founder and director of Northern Illinois University's STEM Read, a program designed, as Hannigan writes, "to use

engaging fiction to explore STEAM concepts and careers." Gillian not only wants to connect with local writers but wants to get the word out about the July 2020 STEM Read conference "Future Telling: Science Fiction Writing Conference."

Spurred by an unwelcome question – *How long did it take you to write that book?* — **Carol Coven Grannick's** [Inside Story](#) explores the deeper motivations for the creative life. "I thought about what my book means to me," she writes, "how much a part of me it is."

**Patricia Hruby Powell** focuses her [Writing Tips](#) on the elusive subject of voice, using opening lines as a way to narrow down her analysis and help us "develop our own voices." Those crucial first lines introduce voice, she writes, "It's the seed from which the entire book will grow." Do you have questions that will take the discussion deeper? Share your ideas on Twitter with #writersvoice.

[Illustrator Tips](#) offers **Louann Mattes Brown's** whirlwind tour of artistic media, which, she says, often become "an inseparable part of [an artist's] brand." Brown also details her own struggle "to commit to one particular media." Do you have a favorite illustrator or illustration media? Share your ideas on Instagram or Twitter with #IllustrationFaves.

And finally, for [Writer's Bookshelf](#), Susanne Fairfax gives a personal and moving take on the late poet **Mary Oliver's** recent collection of essays *Upstream*. "When I heard of Mary Oliver's passing," she writes, "I felt a tangible sense of loss." And later, "Mary's words washed over me, carried me both away from winter's storm and deeper within."

Again, READ THIS ISSUE, and hopefully find yourself, too, moving away from winter's storm and deeper within. If you want to continue the conversation we are offering two social media opportunities. So, use #IllustrationFaves on Twitter or Instagram and #writersvoice on Twitter, to add your own examples of how different creators use media and voice to light up their unique corners of the children's book world.

Thank you to **Alexandria LaFaye** for compiling [Season's Crop](#), **Kelly Darke** for [News Roundup](#) and **Jenny Wagh** for [Don't Miss](#). And, of course, a big thank you to our team.

Amy Alznauer

**Jenny Wagh**, Editorial Advisor  
**Amy Alznauer**, Managing Editor  
**Jennifer Loescher**, Editor  
**Cedric Gliane**, Webmaster



# Greeting

## ***Grounded***

You're off to a flying start. But what happens when you hit turbulence, and now you're feeling a bit up in the air? Just when you're "wheels up," they all fall off and you need to put them back on one at a time. This is exactly when I feel that I need to get grounded. What's the best solution I can offer for getting grounded? Two words: *road trip*.

Usually for those who take flight, getting grounded is a bad thing, meaning you're no longer allowed to fly. As a pilot, your aircraft doesn't pass muster—or perhaps neither do you! But this is the other kind of grounded, the kind where you get back in touch with yourself and find your own road.

Each year, before the Sangamon overflows, I usually head out with my best friend on a road trip. The place is always the same—[Allerton Park and Retreat Center](#), in Monticello, Illinois. Gifted to the University of Illinois by **Robert Allerton**, this was the site of our final project design brief in our second year at the School of Architecture. Later, we escaped here to avoid the stresses of campus life. Post-graduation, we returned to picnic and fly kites in the meadow with other classmates. Over many years, it's become a sacred place of pilgrimage for my friend and me. Allerton is our destination to



refill the well and a literal point on the map of our life's journey. When my metaphorical kite gets stuck in a tree, I'm able to unwind walking through Allerton's formal gardens, each punctuated by dozens of beautiful sculptures. And rain or shine, it's always a great day out.

### **Kicking the Tires**

Preparation is key before setting off on your journey to get grounded, and kicking the tires is essential. Every year at Allerton is different—blazing sunshine and 80-degree temperatures call for a straw hat and sunscreen. This year warranted rain hats and sweatshirts! In any case, the road calls to adventure! We have a strict division of labor, too, as we prepare for our road trips. My friend drives and therefore spearheads all things transportation. He's the man with the map—or GPS these days. I'm in charge of food and beverage, of course. But as in all good stories, this is where the "plotting" ends and the "pantsing" begins. I get away from the planning and preparation and

try to get in touch with my college self. We put on the music of our youth and engage in silly traditions like biting off the ends of licorice wands and using them as straws. We've prepared all we can, and now the trip takes on a life of its own. For me, Allerton Park has always been a place of contemplation and companionship, a touchstone I use to go back in order to move forward.

Perhaps you've got a road trip destination of your own? Is there a special day, place, or tradition that inspires you? Perhaps take your sketchbook or journal, watercolor paints and brushes. Most importantly, take a friend—maybe a trusted [critique group](#) partner or colleague you've met in one



of our diversity, writing, or illustrating [Networks](#). Pack up the car and see where the road takes you. Enjoying the road trip with a companion is a great way to make a connection and inspire future collaborations.





With friends in the Fu Dog Garden, October 1994. My bestie and I at center.

### Filling Your Pack

Each year I arrive with my day pack to find Allerton changed. We remark on its glorious decay and revel in the endowments that have brought about recent revitalization and preservation. But as always, we talk about what has transformed and what has stayed the same.

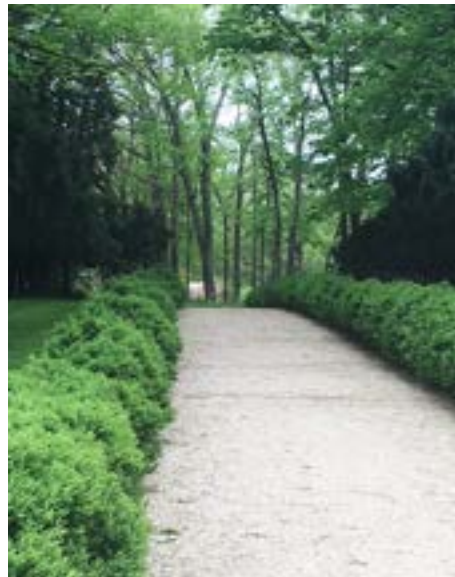
This year I wondered if Allerton waits each year for me. Do her trees look down on our car as it enters the gates? Do the formal gardens whisper *hello* on the wind? Do the Fu Dogs bark about my glorious decay or revel in our return? I like to think that they are the guardians of all our best days and those road trips yet to come.

What has changed in your work life—and what has stayed the same? Of that which remains constant—do you like it enough to hold onto it as a style, a genre, a vocation? When getting grounded, realizing that time flies is important. Sometimes we collect things in our pack that weigh us down. A road trip gives you time to reassess, to keep what makes sense and what is working and most of all—what gives you joy.

Give yourself permission to set the rest down at the side of the road and leave it behind. Sometimes losses and missed opportunities seem like they're filling that rear-view mirror. Take this time to look back—to acknowledge what they once meant to you and your work—but leave them there. Today and tomorrow are what matters. Jettison that which has become too heavy and make room to fill your pack with what you need for the road ahead.

### Walking the Path

So you sling your pack over your shoulder and get moving. Yet, here



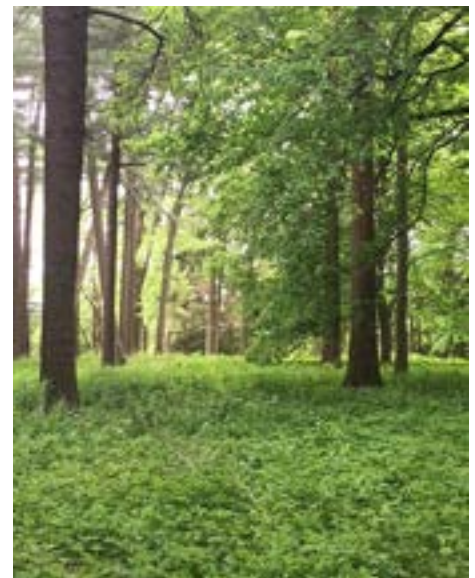
lies the conundrum. Which path do we choose? We don't want to waste precious time on our day out by going down the wrong path. In the children's book industry, there are lots of paths to choose from—will you write or illustrate—or both? Is your publishing path via a trade, educational or independent publisher? Will you focus on one format, like picture books, or branch out into chapter books, novels, or even graphic novels? Will you choose to have a companion alongside you in the guise of an agent, or will you walk it alone?

If you're walking the path while looking at your mobile device—something I do not recommend—you may veer off the path—or worse, encounter a rattlesnake at Allerton! Keep your eyes on the road. Over the past months, I've found myself judging my progress against that of my friends and colleagues online, thinking that they seem to be making their way down the path better or faster than I am.

### *Walker, there is no road.* —Antonio Machado

But in all these thoughts, the presumption here is that *the path already exists*. In getting grounded, we get back in touch with our own journey and realize that our path is truly individual and of our own making. Instead of looking down *A Road Not Taken* (**Robert Frost**), remunerate on the words of Spanish poet **Antonio Machado**: “Walker, there is no road. The road is made as you walk.”

So, do take the time to check in on social media and to revel with your friends and colleagues online in celebrating the signposts of their paths—tomorrow. But just for today, set down your device and focus on walking your own path.





## Devour the Traveler

Sometimes walking your own path is a very scary thing. You may fear that you'll encounter a mythological beast—contract caviat, or deadline—that might devour you. Happily, at Allerton Park, all the sphinxes are stone! Still it can give you pause that perhaps there are those things that may pop up along your newly trod path that could run you off your road.



*Sphinx, one of two that guard the retreat center and mansion*

Remember you have friends in SCBWI! Log in and check out online resources like [The Book: The Essential Publishing Guide for Children](#), the [SCBWI Bulletin](#), [INSIGHT](#) or [podcasts](#). Your colleagues may have encountered similar challenges along the way and can perhaps suggest a work-around or resource. Find out about agents that might walk that path with you too.

Other literary organizations provide great resources. KidLit Nation offers [online webinars](#), scholarship opportunities, a newsletter, and a blog to provide diverse creators and allies with up-to-date resources. We Need Diverse Books offers [panels](#), opportunities for writers, and more.



*Green Fu-Dog in the Herb Garden*

Closer to home, check out our new [Read Local blog](#) or post your questions and conundrums on one of our [Member Listservs](#). There's nothing that as a community we can't riddle out together!

## Share the Road

One of our favorite places to visit is the Herb Garden, behind the mansion. It's a bit of a forgotten plot. There are remnants of what was once a lovely kitchen garden, but also some forgotten areas and weedy beds. "What if we endowed this garden?" my friend asked. What a mind-blower—I've never considered something like this—but what if it was forgotten no more, but rather place for opportunity and growth, a living manifestation of our friendship and time here?

How can you share the road you've walked? Blog about it, sponsor a SCBWI-IL scholarship or mentorship, volunteer at an event or as a Network Representative, or write an article for *Prairie Wind*! Most of all, reflect on what has kept you grounded and share your experience with others.

## The Road Home

Our last stop is always to rejoice with *The Sun Singer*, reaching skyward to celebrate the end of yet another wonderful road trip with my friend at my side. In getting grounded, we are reminded of the touchstones of our past

that beckon us to walk the paths to our future. We acknowledge what we have, what we've chosen to leave behind, and with whom we've decided to walk this road. Moreover, we face the fear of the unknown journey and know there are mentors to guide us. We share the road and are the best companions that we can be.

Getting grounded encourages us to walk that path only we alone can walk, so in the end, finding it is like road-tripping with a best friend.



*The Sun Singer*

**Deborah Topolski** dedicates this article to SCBWI-Illinois' new *Prairie Wind* Team members, Managing Editor **Amy Alznauer**, and Editor-In-Chief, **Jennifer Kay Loescher**! The *PW* is overseen by ARA **Jennifer Wagh** and is designed by IC **Cedric Gliane**. Thanks to you and all our contributors for shepherding this wonderful publication and for sharing the road with our SCBWI-IL members! To write for the *PW*, [email Amy Alznauer](#). To my best friend, **Doug Kimball**, I'm grateful that our paths crossed 31 years ago at the UIUC School of Architecture.



# Season's Crop

## Spring & Summer 2019

By Alexandria LaFaye

### Picture Books

#### Fiction

*Bear Out There* by **Jacob Grant**,  
Bloomsbury, ISBN: 978-1681197456,  
June 2019.

*Crunchy, Not Sweet* by **Amy Ward**,  
KWiL Publishing, ISBN: 978-0-  
9991437-2-8, Mar. 2019

*Dress Like a Girl* by **Patricia Toht**, Illus.  
**Lorian Tu-Dean**, HarperCollins, ISBN:  
9780062798923, Jan. 2019

*Follow Me Down to Nicodemus Town*  
by **A. LaFaye**, Illus. **Nicole Tadjell**,  
Albert Whitman & Co, ISBN:  
9780807525357, Jan. 2019

*Peekity Boo—What You Can Do* by **Heidi  
Bee Roemer**, Illus. **Mike Wohnoutka**,  
Christy Ottaviano Books, ISBN: 978-1-  
250-12232-2, March 2019

*I'm Very Ferris* by **Tess Kossow**, Illus.  
**Carla Castagno**, Outskirts Press, Inc.,  
ISBN: 978-1-9772-0466-0, Jan. 2019

### Picture Books

#### Non-Fiction

*A Computer Called Katherine: How  
Katherine Johnson Helped Put America  
on the Moon* by **Suzanne Slade**, Illus.  
**Veronica Miller Jamison**, Little Brown,  
ISBN: 978-0316435178, March 2019

*Dancing Through Fields of Color:  
The Story of Helen Frankenthaler* by  
**Elizabeth Brown**, Illus. **Aimee Sicuro**,  
Abrams Books for Young Readers,  
ISBN: 978-1-4197-3410-6, March 2019

*Daring Dozen: The Twelve Who Walked  
on the Moon* by **Suzanne Slade**, Illus.  
**Alan Marks**, Charlesbridge, ISBN: 978-  
158089773, March 2019

*The Girl Who Named Pluto: The Story  
of Venetia Burney* by **Alice B. McGinty**,  
Illus. **Elizabeth Haidle**, Schwartz &  
Wade, ISBN: 978-1524768317, May  
2019

*Just Like Rube Goldberg: The Incredible  
True Story of the Man Behind the  
Machines* by **Sarah Aronson**, Illus.  
**Robert Neubecker**, Beach Lane Books,  
ISBN: 978-14814-7668-3, March 2019

*Pancakes to Parathas: Breakfast Around  
the World* by **Alice B. McGinty**, Illus.  
**Tomoko Suzuki**, Little Bee Books,  
ISBN: 9781499807127, Feb. 2019

### Middle Grade

#### Fiction

*Beyond Cabin Fourteen* by **Kelly  
Polark**, Vinspire Publishing,  
ISBN: 9781732711121, Feb. 2019

*Jagger Jones and the Mummy's Ankh* by  
**Malayna Evans**, Month9Books, ISBN:  
978-1-948671-62-0, May 2019.

*The Wish List #4: Survival of the  
Sparkliest* by **Sarah Aronson**, Scholastic,  
ISBN: 978-0-545-94165-5, Feb. 2019

### Middle Grade

#### Non-Fiction

*The Universe Began with a Bang and  
Other Cool Space Facts* by **Kimberly  
Hutmacher**, Capstone, ISBN: 978-1-  
5435-5769-5, Jan. 2019

*Lakes in the Ocean and Other Cool  
Underwater Facts* by **Kimberly  
Hutmacher**, Capstone, ISBN: 978-1-  
5435-5767-1, Jan. 2019

*Your Nose Never Stops Growing and  
Other Cool Human Body Facts* by  
**Kimberly Hutmacher**, Capstone,  
ISBN: 978-1-5435-5766-4, Jan. 2019

*The World Was Once Covered by Giant  
Mushrooms and Other Cool Earth Facts*  
by **Kimberly Hutmacher**, Capstone,  
ISBN: 978-1-5435-5768-8, Jan. 2019

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**A. LaFaye** is the author of over a dozen books for young readers, including *Follow Me Down to Nicodemus Town* (Albert Whitman and Company), which is in this *Season's Crop*. She also wrote the Scott O'Dell Award winning *Worth* (Simon and Schuster). She is an associate professor of creative writing and children's literature at Greenville University and in the low-residency MFA in writing for children and young adults at Hollins University. You can learn more about her at [www.alafaye.com](http://www.alafaye.com) or [www.facebook.com/sylvanocity](https://www.facebook.com/sylvanocity) or on Twitter or Instagram [@Sylvanocity](https://www.instagram.com/Sylvanocity)



# News Roundup

## Spring 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).

- **May 28** – **Dana L. Davis**, author of *The Voice in My Head*, 7:00 p.m. at Anderson's Bookshop, 123 W. Jefferson Ave., Naperville, (630) 355-2665. (Young Adult)
- **June 8** – **Sarah Dessen**, author of *The Rest of the Story*, 2:00 p.m. at Community Christian Church, 1635 Emerson Lane, Naperville. Presented by Anderson's Bookshop, 123 W. Jefferson Ave., Naperville, (630) 355-2665. Tickets exclusively at [SarahDessenAndersons.brownpapertickets.com](http://SarahDessenAndersons.brownpapertickets.com). (Young Adult)

#### SHOP AROUND THE CORNER: BOOKED

Information is subject to change. Booked is located at 506 Main Street in Evanston. For more information on this and other upcoming events, visit the website at <https://www.bookedevanston.com>, email [info@bookedevanston.com](mailto:info@bookedevanston.com), or call 847-701-5707.

- **May 18**–Local Illustrator **Diana Sudyka** introduces her new book *When Sue Found Sue*, 10:00am.

- **June 9**–**Jacob Grant** introduces his new book *Bear Out There*, 11:00am.
- **June 15**–Skokie Library hosts author/illustrators **Drew Brockington** and **Svetlana Chmakova**. Books will be available for purchase from Booked.

#### ANNUAL SCBWI CONFERENCE

**When:** August 9–12, 2019

**Where:** JW Marriott at LA Live, Los Angeles, CA

**Details:** For more information, visit [www.scbwi.org/annual-conferences/](http://www.scbwi.org/annual-conferences/)

### AWARDS

#### JOHN NEWBERY MEDAL (ALA)

##### Winner

- *Merci Suárez Changes Gears* by **Meg Medina** (Candlewick Press)

##### Honor Books

- *The Night Diary* by **Veera Hiranandani** (Dial Books for Young Readers/Penguin Random House)
- *The Book of Boy* by **Catherine Gilbert Murdock**, illustrated by **Ian Schoenherr** (Greenwillow Books/HarperCollins Publishers)

#### MICHAEL PRINTZ AWARD (ALA)

##### Winner

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

##### Honor Books

- *Damsel* by Elana K. Arnold (Balzer+Bray/HarperCollins Publishers)
- *A Heart in a Body in the World* by Deb Caletti (Simon Pulse/Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing)
- *I, Claudia* by Mary McCoy (Carolrhoda Lab®/Lerner Publishing Group)

#### RANDOLPH CALDECOTT MEDAL (ALA)

##### Winner

- *Hello Lighthouse* illustrated and written by **Sophie Blackall** (Little, Brown and Company/Hachette Book Group, Inc.)

##### Honor Books

- *Alma and How She Got Her Name* illustrated and written by **Juana Martinez-Neal** (Candlewick Press)
- *A Big Mooncake for Little Star* illustrated and written by **Grace Lin** (Little, Brown and Company/Hachette Book Group, Inc.)
- *The Rough Patch* illustrated and written by **Brian Lies** (Greenwillow Books/HarperCollins Publishers)
- *Thank You, Omu!* illustrated and written by **Oge Mora** (Little, Brown and Company/Hachette Book Group, Inc.)

#### REBECCA CAUDILL YOUNG READER'S BOOK AWARD

*For readers 4th-8th grade:*

**First Place:** *Ghost* by **Jason Reynolds** (Atheneum)

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

#### MONARCH AWARDS

*For readers K-3rd grade:*

**First Place:** *Creepy Pair of Underwear!* by **Aaron Reynolds**, illustrated by **Peter Brown** (Simon & Schuster)

**Second Place:** *Claymates* by **Dev Petty**, illustrated by **Lauren Eldridge** (Little, Brown Books for Young Readers)

**Third Place:** *Bob, Not Bob!* by **Liz Garton Scanlon & Audrey Vernick**, illustrated by **Matthew Cordell** (Disney-Hyperion)

More information at [www.aisled.org](http://www.aisled.org)





## BLUESTEM AWARDS

*For readers 3rd-5th grade:*

**First Place:** *Wish* by **Barbara O'Connor** (Farrar, Straus & Giroux)

**Second Place:** *City of Ember* by **Jeanne DuPrau** (Random House)

**Third Place:** *Fish in a Tree* by **Lynda Mullaly Hunt** (Nancy Paulsen Books)

More information at [www.aisled.org](http://www.aisled.org)

## ABRAHAM LINCOLN AWARDS

*For readers 9th-12th grade:*

**First Place:** *The Hate U Give* by **Angie Thomas** (Balzer + Bray)

**Second Place:** *Scythe* by **Neal Shusterman** (Simon & Schuster)

**Third Place:** *One of Us is Lying* by **Karen M. McManus** (Delacorte Press)

More information at [www.aisled.org](http://www.aisled.org)

## GRANTS

### BOOK LAUNCH AWARD

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

**Deadline:** July 1, 2019.

**More information and requirements:** <http://www.scbwi.org/awards/book-launch-grant/>

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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.

## Don't Miss

By Jenny Wagh

### Annual Summer Conference

The Annual Summer Conference spans three days with an optional fourth day of craft-specific intensives. The conference is held each year in Los Angeles. Many of the biggest authors and illustrators in children's books will be joining a bevy of agents, art directors, and editors.

**When:** August 9–12, 2019

**Where:** JW Marriott at LA Live, Los Angeles, CA

**Details:** For more information, visit <https://www.scbwi.org/events/48th-annual-summer-conference-in-los-angeles-la19/>



### 2019 Laura Crawford Memorial Mentorship

**Online Application:** June 1–7

**2019 Novel Mentor:** Kate Hannigan

**Details:** For more information visit <https://illinois.scbwi.org/scbwi-il-mentorships/laura-crawford-mentorship/>

### 2019 Prairie Writer's & Illustrator's Day

**When:** Saturday, November 2, 2019. Registration begins at 8:00am, program runs from 9:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m.

**Where:** Wojcik Conference Center, Harper College 1200 W. Algonquin Rd. Palatine, IL 60067

**What:** Join SCBWI-IL for its 15th annual Prairie Writer's and Illustrator's Day at the Wojcik Conference Center of Harper College. Details coming in August. Registration begins in September.

**Contest:** Illustrate the PWID 2019 Masthead Banner based on this year's theme: **Game On!** Entries must be received before July 1 (11:59pm) to Cedric Gliane at [illinois-ic@scbwi.org](mailto:illinois-ic@scbwi.org)

**Details:** For more information visit <https://illinois.scbwi.org/events/2019-prairie-writers-illustrators-day/>



## Tales from the Front

### *Making (Spiked) Lemonade. A Recipe for...Progress*

By Malayna Evans

Sometimes life lobs lemons—lemons you can't avoid or run away from. Once in a while, we manage to squeeze those lemons into lemonade. At our best, we even add a dash of sugar and vodka...and maybe track down a few friends to share it with.

It was my quest to make (spiked) lemonade out of life's pesky lemons that led to the publication of my debut novel, *Jagger Jones & the Mummy's Ankh*.

It started over lunch with my son, then nine. It wasn't one of those fun-filled mommy kiddo lunches. It was a painful, we-gotta-talk lunch. I was leaving his dad. It couldn't have come as a huge surprise, but no kid wants to go through that agonizing process.

I don't remember how the conversation turned to ancient Egypt. It's one of my favorite topics and, at the time, was one of his as well. I'm an Egyptologist by training and my son was, well, nine! I suspect one of us just wanted to lighten the mood. My son, who is biracial and adorable (even at his current sixteen), asked me what ancient Egyptians looked like. When I told him he'd fit right in, he said someone should write a book about a kid who looked like him falling back in time to ancient Egypt.

Later that day, Lil' Man (who's now 6'-2") and I drafted a first chapter. I didn't imagine it would ever get published. I was trying to spend quality time with my kid as he went through a tough time. I was trying to be a good mother, not become a published author, although, to be honest, that had always been the dream. In fact, when I went back to grad school, I harbored a secret

desire to grow up and write historical fiction. I thought maybe I'd be the next **Robert Graves**.

When the dreaded "parenting schedule" showed up and my kids were with their dad every other weekend, leaving me childless for the first time since the day my son had joined the world, I needed a hobby so I wouldn't go mad. I'd recently spoken to a just-divorced girlfriend who admitted she spent her solo weekends in bed, crying. That didn't sound like the right way to spend my newfound time. I wanted to thrive, for myself and for my kids. And I've been knocked around by life enough to know that dealing with loss is made a bit less painful when paired with embracing something new.

So every other weekend, I'd get my household duties done on Friday nights so I could spend all day Saturday and Sunday writing my brilliant MG time travel novel. It was unexpectedly calming, curative even.

Until that last word magically appeared on my screen.

Most writers celebrate the end of a draft. I just felt lost. What was I going to do with myself? Worrying about my main character's next move had become therapeutic. Without Jagger's problems to fret over, I'd be stuck spending nights awake, with nothing but catastrophic thoughts about my own situation playing in my head.

Fortunately, a girlfriend had advice. (Don't they always?) She suggested I reach out to Chicago's illustrious writing coach, **Esther Hershenhorn**.



And because I've also learned to listen to good GFs, that's exactly what I did.

Esther gushed over my manuscript, right before asking me—in the nicest and most productive possible way—if I was willing to revisit the draft. With her advice echoing through my head, I started all over, from scratch, following a road map Esther helped me devise.

Crazy thing is, I was thrilled Esther suggested a redo. I took her advice so well, in part, because I'd become dependent on my hobby. But I'd also started to believe maybe I could launch *Jagger Jones* into the world if I was willing to put in the work, and be vulnerable enough to put myself out there. And of course, by this time, my kids had heard every word; they'd worked through plot twists and character arcs with me. They both had skin in the game, too. I wanted to show them, especially in that tough moment, we could win if we worked hard at it.

And there was something else, something that had nothing to do with my divorce, my parenting goals, or even my new found writing goals. There was Egypt. I'd worked my butt off to earn that big, fat Ph.D. from University of Chicago. My passion for ancient history has never lagged. I don't work in the field...but I do pay a huge student loan each month. The idea of getting something out of all I'd invested appealed to me. The thought of sharing my passion with fifth and sixth graders, well, that was—still is—a rush.



So, a few years after Lil' Man and I had written the first line, I had a solid second draft in hand along with a good-enough query letter. I promised myself I'd send five queries a week until I found an agent. I was a few months in when I sent Jagger to an agent who happened to know and love a Jagger of her own! (Sometimes, the Universe wants to help us make that lemonade.)

My bright, and mercifully kind, agent, **Liza Fleissig**, put the manuscript through the paces, pushing me to rethink and rewrite until she thought it was ready. Even then it was a tough slog, but Liza stuck with me. Finally, she found Jagger his perfect home. *Jagger Jones and the Mummy's Ankh*, book one of my three book series, is scheduled for publication on May 28th, with books two and three coming in 2020 and 2021, from Month9Books. Before the ink dried on the deal, more rounds of edits came hurtling my way.

This is the stage in the process where I finally wrapped my brain around that oft-quoted writing advice: show, don't tell. While different readers flagged different issues, sometimes giving me contradictory advice, the one thing that had been problematic from the start was the way the book started. Jagger is in Egypt with his travel-writer mom and his little sister when he discovers a tomb, complete with a mummy, wearing an *ankh* amulet that turns out to be a portal to the past. (I had to get them back in time somehow, after all.)

The problem with this beginning was that I had to weave in information about Jagger's day-to-day life, such as what the South Side of Chicago is like, that he lives in a two-flat next to his grandparents, and that his dad is flakey. This backstory was necessary because Jagger's deepest desire is to wiggle out of being homeschooled across the globe, while looking after his little

sister, to attend a prestigious middle school with his best friend, Andrew. I had to communicate all these details while Jagger was wandering around an Egyptian desert, which is a complicated way to say there was an awful lot of telling going on in the first ten pages of the book.

We were deep into the editing process when my brilliant publisher, **Georgia McBride**, asked if I was willing to try starting the book in Chicago so Jagger's backstory could be more naturally woven in. I'll admit, this time the advice didn't land quite so gently. But here's the thing: she was right. Two hours after our call, I sent my editor a new beginning, a few simple pages of Jagger and his family en route to O'Hare. And all those pesky details that were so clunky in my first two-thousand-and-eighty-four drafts, faded into the background, shown, rather than told.

Lesson learned.

So now I'm a real life published author, chugging a fat glass of lemonade made from scratch using nothing but my creativity, hard work, and one of the most painful challenges life has hurled my way.

Looking back on the journey, there's only one thing I'd have changed, bumpy as it was. It's something I'm just now realizing but wish I'd known sooner, something that will change how I make my lemonade moving forward. (Yes, yes, I'd also prefer to leave out the painful challenge next time, but I'm talking about something else.)

Only my kids read the first draft of this book. I toiled alone, crafted alone, and created alone, because I thought of writing as a solo activity. Asking someone to read my book and share feedback felt, well, selfish. Plus, what if they hated it? Were they really going to say that? Friends and family supported

me in a million different ways, but I didn't have any writer friends to go to for help.

That's something I'll do differently—I am doing differently—moving forward.

Here's the thing: if your book gets published, eventually, people are going to read it. They'll pay for the privilege. Some of those people may hate it. Hopefully, more will love it. But there's no way to get to where you want to be—a writer making progress—without exposing your work to the world.

So now, with this lesson learned, I'm working on building a network of people willing to read and share feedback on my work. SCBWI is a great place to start—it's led me to some terrific critique partners and other writers to share highs and lows with. My debut group, Novel19s, is an unexpected perk of being a debut author, adding more depth to my writing network.

Turns out, fellow writers are a sprig of mint to top off your spiked lemonade recipe.

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**Malayna Evans** was raised in the mountains of Utah and spent her childhood climbing, skiing, reading *Sci-Fi*, and finding trouble. Many years later, she earned her Ph.D. in ancient Egyptian history from the University of Chicago. She's used her education to craft a time-travel series set in ancient Egypt. Book one, *Jagger Jones and the Mummy's Ankh*, is out in May of 2019. Malayna lives in Oak Park, IL, with her two kids, a rescue dog, and a hamster.

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# Writing Tips

## Voice and First Lines

by Patricia Hruby Powell

Literary voice can refer to an author's complete body of work—their quality, style, and character of writing. We might be able to identify the voices of **Charles Dickens**, **Stephen King** or **Shel Silverstein** by their unique syntax, attitude, style—without seeing a credit line. And then there's the voice of an individual work by a specific author. In her book *The Magic Words*, **Cheryl Klein** defines voice by the equation: Voice = Person (POV) + Tense + Personality.

These two definitions of voice overlap. I want to concentrate on the individual work—to help us all read analytically and to develop our own voices.

When you read a book you should always analyze the point of view. Is it told in the first person? The unusual but doable second person? Or third person? And is that third person limited to one character or is it omniscient—a God-like narrator who can see what each character is seeing and feeling? Omniscient viewpoint is rarely used in children's literature, but any rule can be broken.

The first line (or lines) of any book should introduce the entire work. In that first line, we'll identify the point of view of the character, the tense used, a sample of the narrator's vocabulary, grammar, tone, (which is part of the "personality" of the above equation) and maybe other elements such as the setting or the topic. That first line introduces the voice. And it's the seed from which the entire book will grow.

### First Person

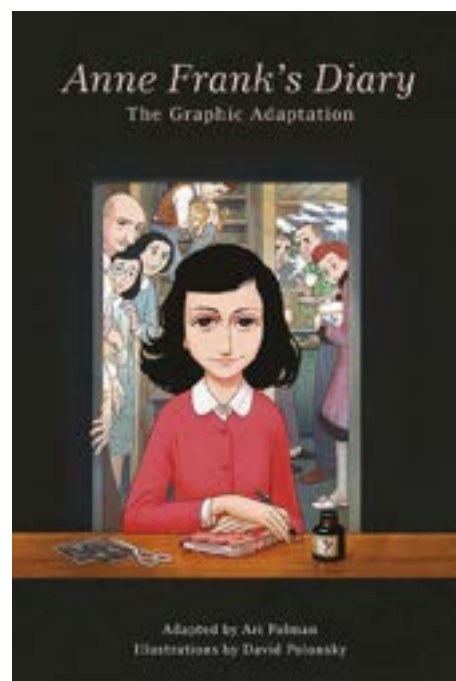
*Anne Frank's Diary: The Graphic Adaptation* (Pantheon 2018) adapted

by **Ari Folman**, is, by definition, told in the first person. It's a diary. (The original is *The Diary of a Young Girl* by **Anne Frank**). The opening line of the adaptation is:

*No one would believe me, but at the age of 13, I feel totally alone in this world.*

"I" indicates 1<sup>st</sup> person and is the young Jewish girl, Anne Frank, who survives for two years by hiding from the Nazi regime, in the attic of a warehouse in the Netherlands, 1942-1944. Anne speaks in the present tense unless she's describing a story from the past.

The first line is a powerful seed. The central character is 13 years old, lonely, and "no one would believe" this because—as we'll eventually find out as we read—she puts up such a cheerful and feisty front.



Just to throw a wrench in the works, because this is a graphic novel adaptation we also see Anne in the remarkable illustrations of **David Polonsky**. So in a way, we get two points of view, Anne's 1<sup>st</sup> person text, and then a 3<sup>rd</sup> person limited view in the artwork. Someone might argue that it's an omniscient 3<sup>rd</sup> person point of view. It could be either. The illustrator is looking in on the Frank and van Daan families and Mr. Dussel in the Secret Annex, plus Miep and other helpers on the "outside," as well as SS Officers. But we're still seeing all these characters driven by Anne's 1<sup>st</sup> person narrative, and oftentimes through her visual fantasies.

### Third Person Limited

*Fox the Tiger* (Balzer & Bray 2018) by **Corey R. Tabor**, an award winning first reader, begins:



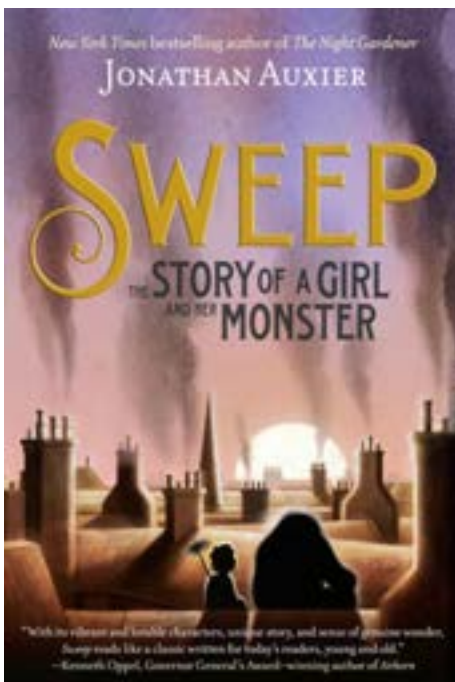


*“I wish I were a tiger,” says Fox.*

The words “...says Fox” shows that this is present tense, 3<sup>rd</sup> person limited from Fox’s viewpoint. This is Fox’s story. The dialog is in first person, as is natural, but the book is in 3<sup>rd</sup>. The author uses the subjunctive, “I wish I were.” The grammar is impeccable, which seems right for a first reader. Overall, an author establishing voice doesn’t have to use correct grammar if her voice character wouldn’t. But this is an erudite fox. Incidentally, the satisfying ending is: *Fox is glad to be a fox.*

## Second Person

Second person is most likely to be used in a self-help book, where an author is directly addressing *you*. In literary work, second person might be used for brief moments when the author breaks from the story to address her reader.



In *Sweep: The Story of a Girl and Her Monster* (Amulet 2018) by **Jonathan Auxier**, see how the author speaks to the reader in the Prologue.

*...if you are very, very lucky, you might even catch a glimpse of the girl and her Sweep.*

*Look! Here they are now, approaching through the early fog: a thin man with a long broom over one shoulder, the end bobbing up and down with every step. And trailing behind him, pail in hand, a little girl, who loves that man more than anything in the world.*

The author “breaks the 4<sup>th</sup> wall” (to use a theater phrase) and addresses the reader: “if you are very lucky . . . Look!” He introduces his characters to you the reader, personally—2<sup>nd</sup> person point of view. The rest of the book will become, 3<sup>rd</sup> person limited from Nan’s point of view:

*It was dark in the coal bin, but Nan could tell it was Newt who was asking. Newt was the newest to Crudd’s crew.*

And what else do these early lines show us? “Fog,” “long broom,” “pail,” “coal bin,” “crew.” They’re a team of child chimney sweeps in London. The characters’ names (Newt, Crudd, Nan) are Charles Dickens-like, as is the setting, as is the theme—impoverished laboring nineteenth century children.

*When Angels Sing: The Story of Rock Legend Carols Santana* (Atheneum 2018) is told very effectively in second person by author **Michael Mahin**.



*When you were born, your tia abuela called you el cristalino, the crystal one. She thought the light of angels shined through you.*

*Your father wanted to name you Geronimo, after the brave Apache freedom fighter. He was proud of his mestizo blood.*

At first, the intimate stories sound like a mother’s lullaby—but a little later the author mentions “your mother.” The reader realizes that the voice is an omniscient God-like voice giving an overview of Carlos’s life. So instead of speaking to “you” the reader, the author is speaking to his subject, **Carlos Santana**.

## Which Should You Use?

So how do you choose to use 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, or even 2<sup>nd</sup> person point of view? You should probably experiment with some scenes from your manuscript(s).

First person allows us, as writers, to get inside the brain and eyes of our main character. But more importantly it allows us to feel what our character is feeling and convey these emotions to the reader. This can certainly be done in the third person, but sometimes doing the exercise of revising your third



person work into first person can be a great exercise for getting closer—so close you’re inside—your character. It’s much more than doing a universal change of “she” to “I” and adjusting the grammar. You have to do the work of becoming another person. Acting can help. Become your character—each of your characters—get inside their skin, walk like they do, greet people as that character might greet people. Go through the day, or the hour, being this character. Once you’ve changed a passage or chapter or entire novel to first person, then you might want to return it to third person, with the added insights and closeness which you developed while it was in first person. Or maybe you want to keep it in first person.

The author has certain advantages, using 3<sup>rd</sup> person point of view. The author may use somewhat more advanced (and therefore specific) vocabulary or even use ideas that your young and/or naïve character might not be able to use authentically.

Consider syntax, grammar, tone, and dialogue. Look at more examples.

What about this first line and the few lines that follow?

*I don't mean to be dramatic, but God save me from Morgan picking our set list. That girl is a suburban dad's midlife crisis in a high school senior's body.*

*Case in point: she's kneeling on the floor using the keyboard stool as a desk, and every title on her list is a mediocre classic rock song.*

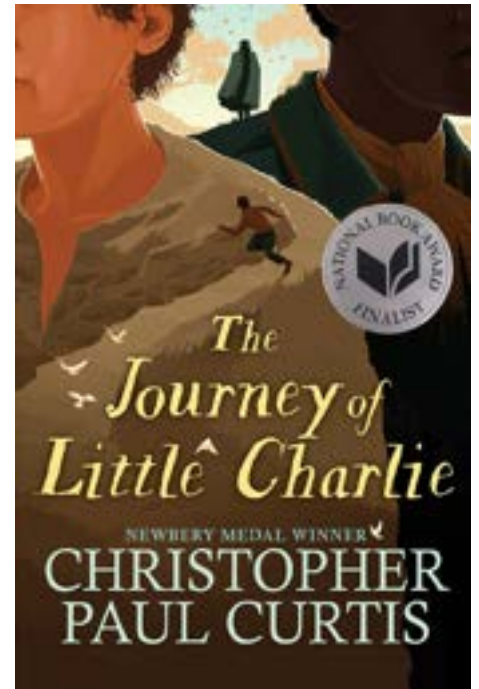


1<sup>st</sup> person, present tense. If you don’t pick up “set list” in the first line, you’ll catch “keyboard” and “rock song” in the next paragraph. Our character is a musician. Our point-of-view character is more sophisticated than Morgan, or thinks she is. Superior? Dramatic? Oh yeah. Profane throughout. Hip, contemporary, sarcastic and distinctive. This is the young adult book, *Leah on the Offbeat* (HarperCollins 2018) by **Becky Albertalli**, which delivers voice in spades.

Try these lines.

*I'd seent plenty of animals by the time I was old 'nough to start talking, but only one kind worked me up so much that it pult the first real word I said out my mouth.*

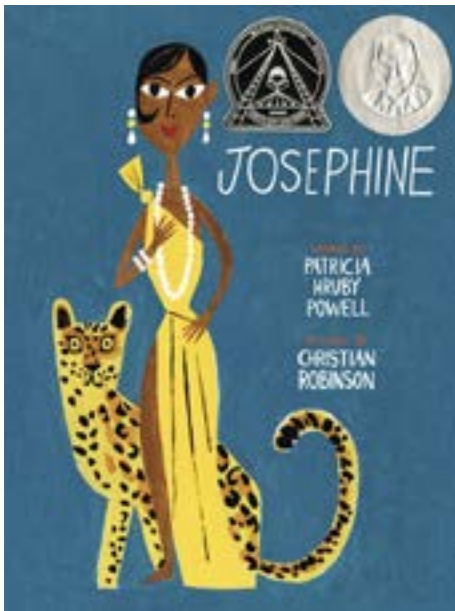
1<sup>st</sup> person, past tense. Using dialect can be tricky. I admit that at first I was



annoyed because it slowed my reading considerably. But, one, I got used to it; two, the author lets up somewhat once he’s established his voice; and three, it’s done by master multiple Newbery winner, **Christopher Paul Curtis**. This is the middle grade *The Journey of Little Charlie* (Scholastic 2018).

What does the author’s unique vocabulary and syntax suggest to you about who the speaker might be? About his level of education? About his imagination? Do you wonder about his race? Curtis never tells us the answers to these questions, but shows us by many small actions who Little Charlie is. Read the book and see if you think Curtis is playing with our preconceptions of dialect?

Analyze everything you read. That is, read like a writer. Here are a couple to analyze:



*Josephine*  
danced a sizzling flapper dance—  
the Charleston.

Does it suggest attitude, setting, theme?  
This is the middle grade picture book,  
*Josephine: The Dazzling Life of Josephine*  
*Baker* (Chronicle 2014).

How about:

*Yessir, Lillian Hardin*  
*was proud to be who she was.*

Do you detect attitude? Theme? Could  
this be the woman who had enough  
ambition for both herself and **Louis**  
**Armstrong**? This is the middle grade  
*Struttin' With Some Barbecue: Lil Hardin*  
*Armstrong Becomes the First Lady of Jazz*  
(Charlesbridge 2018). What point of  
view and tense are the last two?

How about:

*Garnet and I walk in the grass*  
*alongside the road*  
*to keep our shoes clean,*  
*but Lewis doesn't care.*

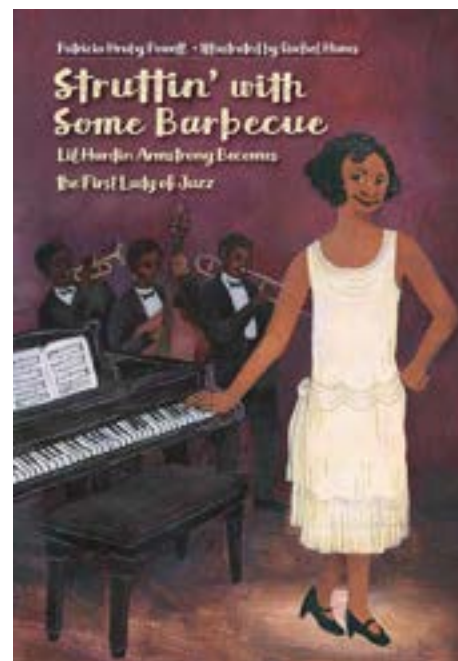
What person? 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, or 3<sup>rd</sup>? What  
tense? What does it suggest about who  
she is? This is Mildred's opening in  
the young adult *Loving vs. Virginia: A*  
*Documentary Novel of the Landmark Civil*  
*Rights Case*, which begins with civil  
rights photos and documents. Mildred's  
chapters alternate with Richard's.

So look at the first line of whatever  
you're working on now. Is it a seed from  
which your entire story can grow? Is  
the voice powerfully indicative of your  
narrating character? Does the first line  
offer a hint of the setting or the theme  
or the plot?

Do you have questions that will take  
the discussion deeper? Do you take  
exception to any of the samples I've  
offered? Disagree? Have examples of  
your own? We'd all love to hear from  
you. Share your comments on Twitter  
with #writersvoice.

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**Patricia Hruby Powell** writes in  
*Champaign, IL*, mostly about remarkable  
women who threaten to be lost to history:  
*Josephine*, *Lil Hardin Armstrong*, *Mildred*  
*Loving*; upcoming are *Ella Baker*, *Alice*  
*Paul*, *Lucy Burns* and others.



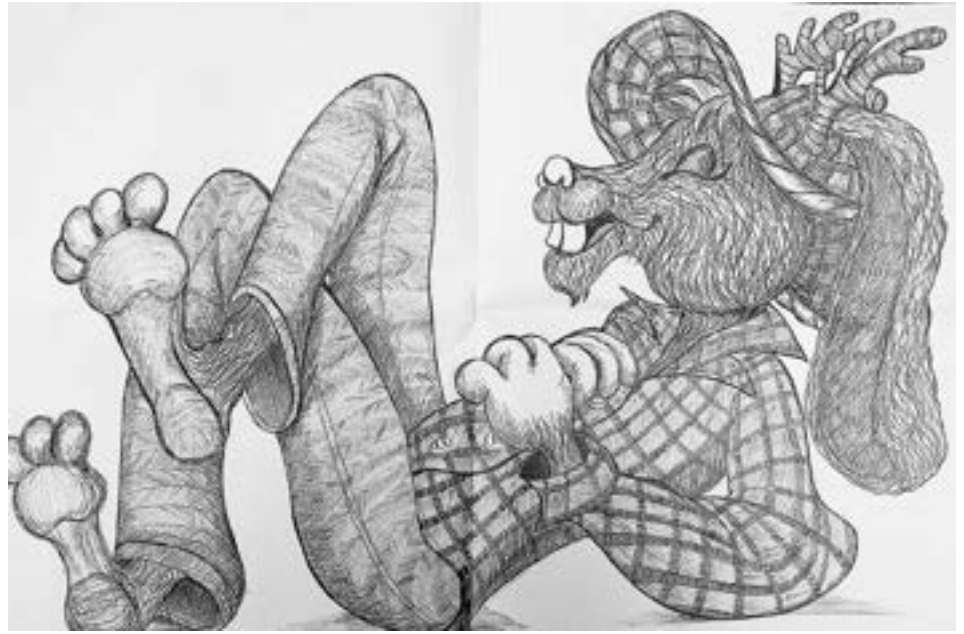


# Illustrator Tips

## ***Pencils, Paints & Photoshop: Media in Children’s Book Illustrations***

By Louann Mattes Brown

Let’s talk artistic media: the stuff we use to make our illustrations. The choice of media has helped define the voice of iconic illustrators like **Eric Carle**, **Tomie de Paola**, and **Chris Van Allsburg**. Their choice of media is what we visualize when we hear their names. Bold colors and swirling paste papers have become Eric Carle’s trademark. Soft, rounded images with soothing colors help Tomie tell his stories. The whispered softness and dark shadows of Chris Van Allsburg’s mysterious gray-toned drawings create an atmosphere that helps you recognize something unexpected is about to happen. These illustrators’ choice of media has become an inseparable part of their brands.



*Backwoods Jack-A-Lope Sketch (ballpoint pen)*

### **Enhancing the Tone of the Story**

Choosing what media to use is often based on the tone of the story you’re illustrating. Soft watercolor images might be the right choice for a sweet bedtime story, but collage or gouache

images might be a better choice for an energetic circus book. Media and color choices help set the mood of the story. An author’s media choice can help us experience a dry, dusty Western town or the slick, metallic deck of a

space station. Real or implied textures enhance setting, define costume, and portray the feel of a main character. Choice of media helps us imagine what we can’t actually touch.

### ***Some of Louann’s Favorite Examples***

#### **Drawn Illustrations**

*Pen and ink, pencil, colored pencil, charcoal, oil pastels, and crayons.*

The texture of scratchy lines on paper always make my heart beat fast.

#### **Chris Van Allsburg**

*Jumanji* (Caldecott 1982, graphite)

*The Polar Express* (Caldecott 1986, oil pastels)

#### **Robert McCloskey**

*Make Way for Ducklings*

(Caldecott 1942, sepia toned drawings)

#### **Brian Selznik**

*The Invention of Hugo Cabret* (Caldecott 2008, pencil)

#### **Crocket Johnson**

*Harold and the Purple*

*Crayon* (Ironically, the most famous purple line in his book was not made with a crayon!)

#### **Oliver Jeffers**

*The Day the Crayons Quit*, written by **Drew Daywalt** (crayon)

*continues*





## How Much Detail Will I Need?

The amount of detail necessary to tell a story is also a consideration when thinking about what media to choose. If I were to illustrate a book with sweeping vistas of old European cities, I would probably opt for a drawing tool where I could execute many small details and save broad brushstrokes for a concept book about line and movement.



Sketching and refining the character (marker)



At night he sketched ideas (Photoshop)

However, if you love working on details, pen and ink, pencil, or markers might be the best choice. Illustrator **Joan Steiner** painstakingly pieced together found objects to recreate cityscapes in her many *Look-Alikes* books where small objects became detailed architectural images.

## What is the Age of Your Target Audience?

We've all seen numerous versions of classic children's stories, such as *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, illustrated with different media and styles. Depictions often range from elaborate, realistic versions to simple, cartoon-like bears filled in with flat

### Quentin Blake

*Matilda*, written by **Roald Dahl** (pen and ink)

### Anne Yvonne Gilbert

*The Wild Swans*, written by **Hans Christian Anderson** (colored pencil)

### Painted Illustrations

*Watercolor, gouache, acrylic, and oil.*

**Watercolor:** Produces transparent, typically soft, and delicate images. Often include ink outlines.

### Beatrix Potter

*The Tale of Peter Rabbit*

### Joan Rankin

*Today at the Bluebird Café, a Branchful of Birds* text by **Deborah Ruddell**

### Felicia Bond

*If You Give a Mouse a Cookie, If You Give a Pig a Pancake*, etc. written by **Laura Numeroff**

### Gouache:

#### David Weisner

*Flotsam* (Caldecott 2007)

#### Jerry Pinkney

*The Lion and the Mouse* (Caldecott 2010)

#### Tomie De Paola

*Strega Nona* (Caldecott Honor book)

*continues*



On Monday, he made a mermaid (Photoshop)

of my writing doesn't match my illustration style. I tend to draw comical, anthropomorphic characters. If I wrote something that's sentimental and sweet, I know I'd have a hard time making my images fit that kind of story.

A few years ago, I used a ballpoint pen to draw a jack-a-lope, (a 1950's imaginary jackrabbit with deer horns). The sketch was a backwoods, shoeless jack-a-lope. I stuck him in a drawer and forgot about him.



Bavarian Pig (digital collage)

color. In the current market, it appears that simpler versions of this particular text are aimed at a preschool audience and the more elaborate versions are targeted to a slightly older audience. (Of course, there are always exceptions, like *Wimpy Kid*.) When choosing media you have to imagine who will be hearing

or reading that story. Think about your target audience. What kind of image would engage them? What might distract them?

### What Fits Your Style?

I often write stories that I don't dummy up, because in my opinion, the tone

#### Will Terry

*Armadilly Chili* written by Helen Ketteman (acrylic)

#### Kadir Nelson

*Moses: When Harriet Tubman Led Her People to Freedom*, written by Carole Boston Weatherford (Caldecott Honor Book, oil)

#### Printmaking

*Woodcuts, linocuts, and lithography.*

**Woodcuts:** Woodcuts are carved from a slab of wood and the prints traditionally have thick repetitive black lines.

#### Mary Azarian

*Snowflake Bentley*,

written by Jacqueline Briggs Martin (Caldecott 1999)

#### David Frampton

*Whaling Days*, written by Carol Carrick

#### Linoprints:

#### Kazuno Hohara

*Here Comes Jack Frost*

#### Lithography:

#### Randolph Caldecott

*The House that Jack Built*

*continues*



*Christmas Eve Snow (digital)*

give an overall tone of whimsy and to execute the metal sculptures.

### **So how do you know what media will work best for you?**

Go with what excites you, what you love to work with, and what best

expresses your personal vision of the story. In my own work, I've struggled to commit to one particular media. There are so many great things out there to use. If you feel the same way, perhaps you can be clever like **Brendan Wenzel** and use a variety of media in one book.



*Koalas in the Treetop (black/white colored pencils)*

A few years later, I came up with a story about a lonesome Jack-A-Lope living on a forgotten stretch of Old Rt. 66. He welded together metal parts, made giant sculptures, and saved his town from dying. My original Jack-A-Lope was rustic and textural, but in this story I knew I'd wanted the Jack-A-Lope to be a desert hippie who worked with shiny metal, so I decided to use Photoshop to

### **Collage**

*Collages include cut and pasted paper as well as assemblages of found objects that combine to make an image.*

#### **Eric Carle**

*The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (pasted paper)

#### **Lois Elhert**

*Snowballs* (Found objects: knit cap, corn kernels, plastic forks, and jingle bells)

#### **Steve Jenkins**

*What Do You Do With A Tail Like This?* co-author Robin Page (Caldecott Honor Book, cut paper)

#### **Melissa Sweet**

*The Right Word: Roget and His Thesaurus*, written by **Jen Bryant** (Caldecott Honor Book 2015, collage, watercolor, and mixed media)

### **Photography**

*Photography in illustration can be used traditionally or combined with other media.*

#### **Carl Sams, Jean Stoick, and Carl R. Sams II**

*A Stranger in the Woods* (deer encountering snowman)

*continues*



Hippo Diva (oil pastel)

In *They All Saw A Cat*, he used colored pencil, oil pastels, acrylic paint, watercolor, charcoal, Magic Marker, and #2 pencils.

If you have a favorite illustrator who works in one particular media, I'd love to hear about them. Share your comments on Instagram or Twitter with #IllustrationFaves.



**Louann Mattes Brown** taught elementary art and currently does children's programs at her local library. She is the co-author of *How To Create Spectacular Halloween Costumes* and has had writing published in *Baby Bug*, *Lady Bug*, and *Family Fun*. Her illustrations have appeared in *The SCBWI Bulletin* and the *Illinois Reading Council's Journal*. She is the SCBWI-IL Downstate Illustration Network Rep.

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**William Wegman**

*Little Red Riding Hood*  
(dogs dressed in costume)

**Ty Smith, Mark Bush and Don Rutt**

*The Bird in Santa's Beard*

**Saxon Freymann and Joost Effferts**

*Dr. Pompo's Nose*  
(vegetable characters)

**Digital Media**

*Because the computer can replicate any media, it can be difficult to identify digitally illustrated books. Most children's books published today have some digital work in them, but these illustrations were primarily digital.*

**Bob Staake**

*Mary Had a Little Lamp*  
written by **Jack Lechner**

**Peter Brown**

*Mr. Tiger Goes Wild*

**Will Terry**

*Bonaparte Falls Apart*,  
written by **Margery Cuyler**

**Jon Klassen**

*Sam & Dave Dig a Hole*  
written by **Mac Barnett**  
(Caldecott Honor Book)

*continues*



*Bouncing Pigs (marker)*



**Other Media**

*Books have been illustrated with quilted images, felted characters, 3D clay scenes, paper sculpture, scratchboard, and even cake icing!*

**Sally Mavor** *Mary Had a Little Lamb*, written by **Sarah Hale** (textiles)

**Susan Eaddy** *My Love for You Is the Sun*, written by **Julie Hedlund, Emma Walton-Hamilton**, et al. (modeling clay)

**Robert Sabuda** *America the Beautiful: A Pop-Up Book* (paper sculpture)

**Beth Krommes** *The House in the Night*, **Susan Marie Swanson** (Caldecott 2019, scratchboard)

**Let's Continue This Conversation:**

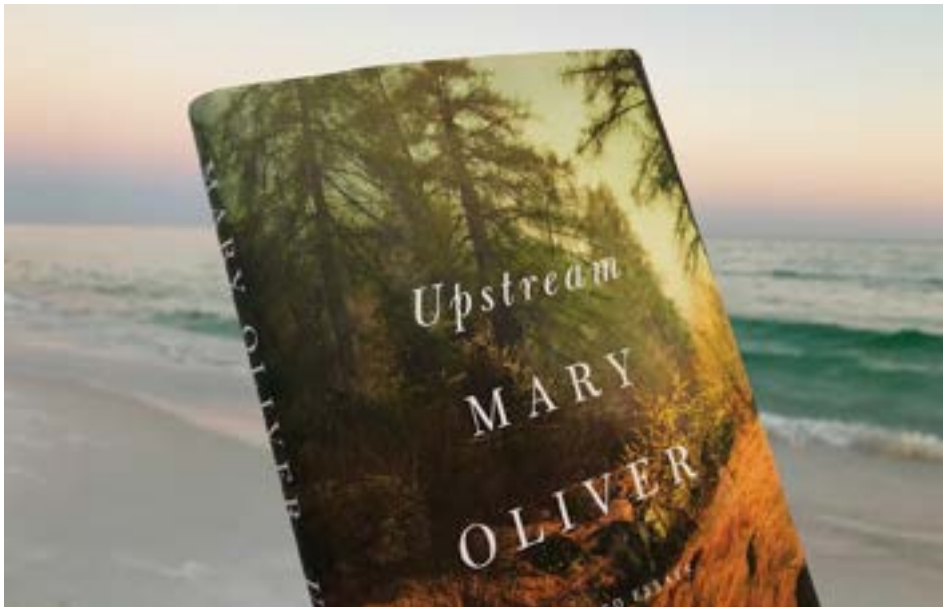
Do you have a favorite illustrator? Or a favorite illustration media? I'd love to hear about them. Share your comments on Instagram or Twitter with #IllustrationFaves.



## Writer's Bookshelf

### Upstream by Mary Oliver

Reviewed by Susanne Fairfax



Mary Oliver's *Upstream* is a welcome new resident on my writer's bookshelf. This collection of essays, many previously published between 1995 and 2013, immerses us in the world of this great wordsmith. We're invited to soak in her exquisite attention and her "inherited devotions of curiosity and respect"<sup>1</sup> from writers such as **Wordsworth, Whitman, Emerson and Poe**. We swim in streams of thoughts on writing, on building a life, on death and dying, on time and space. She introduces us to her friends: those of flora and fauna as well as writers who came before and kept her "sane, alert, and loyal to (her) own best and wildest

inclinations."<sup>2</sup> We become acutely aware of her interconnected place in both the natural world and the world of thought and ideas.

#### Collections

I have a fondness for curated collections of creative work. There is something fresh and new that arises from the placing together of individual pieces. Though written at different times and about different topics, they speak to each other, to the reader, within the reader and between the writer and the reader, unique to that particular amalgamation. This is also true of collections of visual art, film, or music

as they relate to the viewer or listener. When I was in film school I started a collective with two other women that distributed curated programs of short films by women. Each post-screening discussion surprised us with some new perspective. Reading this collection of works by Mary Oliver reminded me of the aliveness of those programs. The lines one draws among the disparate elements construct an intimate and personal conversation across space and time. In this collection, one of the most deeply piercing essays was *Bird*. Without threads picked up from other essays, such as Oliver's multifarious passages about eyes, this essay would not have resonated as powerfully.

*"Do you think there is anything not attached by its unbreakable cord to everything else?"<sup>3</sup>*

#### Branching Streams

My copy of *Upstream* has scarcely a page without scribbles and notes. Elements of my life are tagged here and there with arrows to her text: my zen buddhist practice, Dogen, Trinh Minh-ha, my recent interview with **Lee Wind, Cauleen Smith** and her **Gwendolyn Brooks** banners, a First Nations Cultural Landscape Tour, macro photography, writing at **Sallie Wolf's** Red House and Wallace the bear,





the crab friend I met swimming in the waters of Florida while vacationing with 13 in-laws, the great blue heron who watched the sunset with me and Mary Oliver on the brief but much needed stint of solitude on that trip. Life's struggles show up too, and the balm of language, attention, connection. As I sit to write this I have so many branching streams that I want to share with you, quotes upon quotes from this juicy volume to offer up, but I also want to leave you to your own unique path to discovery – of Mary Oliver, of cultivating attention, of lessons on writing, of yourself. If you are looking for a surface how-to-write instruction manual, this is not your book, but if you are open to travelling upstream to the source, you will find many treasures. I am so grateful to have landed with the assignment to write about Mary Oliver's *Upstream* in the wake of her death.

*“But the rough-and-tumble work of the dying was going on, even in the quiet body... When I picked him up the muscles along the breast were so thin I feared for the tender skin lying across the crest of the bone. And still the eyes were full of the spices of amusement.”*<sup>4</sup>



*“All things are meltable, and replaceable. Not at this moment, but soon enough, we are lambs and we are leaves, and we are stars, and the shining, mysterious pond water itself.”*<sup>5</sup>

## Loss, writers, friends

When I heard of Mary Oliver's passing I experienced a tangible sense of loss, a friend gone, though I never met her. When famous people die I am not usually absorbed into the public mourning that occurs, but Mary Oliver and other writers or artists who have, in some way, let me into my own life, well, that is another matter. To know that I will read or see no more shining observations or intrepid thoughts from these friends feels startling and unfathomably real. Welcome medicine was found in *Upstream*. In the second essay Oliver shares “I never met any of my friends, of course, in a usual way – they were all strangers and lived only in their writings. But if they were only shadow-companions, still they were constant, and powerful and amazing. That is, they said amazing things, and for me it changed the world.”<sup>6</sup> Then mid-stream of the book a poem ends “But, wait! I've made a mistake! How could these makers of so many books that have given so much to my life – How could they possibly be strangers?”<sup>7</sup>

*“... that immeasurable fund of thoughts and ideas, from writers gone into the ground – inseparable from those wisdoms because demanded by them, the responsibility to live thoughtfully and intelligently. To enjoy, to question – never to assume, or trample. Thus the great ones (My great ones, who may not be the same as your great ones) have taught me—to observe with passion, to think with patience, to live always caringly.”*<sup>8</sup>

## To live thoughtfully and caringly

Two days after Mary Oliver passed, the 23rd anniversary with my partner fell on one of those brutally cold days in January. Not the extreme Polar-Vortex-don't-even-think-about-leaving-your-house days, but one marked with

severe storm and travel warnings. My partner, Deb, knows that I relish some sort of exploration or engagement to mark occasions - something in the creative realm or nature, but this was not a day to venture far. To Deb, food is love, so for Plan A I made reservations at a nearby romantic restaurant and for Plan B I shopped for salmon, artichokes and ingredients to make Grand Marnier Soufflé, just in case we became housebound. We both deeply wanted Plan A to pan out. You see we recently moved both of our offices home to our already replete 800 square foot bungalow. We needed to get out. Gratefully, we did make it the short distance through subzero temps and howling winds to a delicious meal and back home. Then Deb surprised me with the richest of gifts. External explorations out of the question, she improvised. With Mary Oliver books gathered and stacked on the nightstand, we pulled up the warmth of our duvet, called our pup Raku up and Deb read to me. Warm and protected, Mary's words washed over me, carried me both away from winter's storm and deeper within, nature and creativity intertwined. This was utter perfection.

*“Attention is the beginning of devotion.”*<sup>9</sup>

On another anniversary I gifted Deb (also a photographer) with *Our World*, a graceful volume of words by Mary Oliver and photographs by Mary's partner of over 40 years, **Molly Malone Cook**, a photographer. The fact that this valued writer was also in love with a woman has offered strength and sustenance. As lesbians we are often hidden, denied or “tolerated”. To see Mary Oliver become one of the most purchased poets who is frequently quoted helps to balance the scales. We feel less invisible. Sometimes we need characters or stories that reflect us, but sometimes we just need mentors who



reflect us. Like many lesbians, family for me includes people with no shared genetic material. My dear friends are more like sisters, though we didn't grow up together. Their kids are my nieces and nephews, and I'm their Auntie Sanne. In February our family, as such, gathered in a cottage in Michigan for RoiAnn's fiftieth birthday. Many of us are writers, photographers, creatives or thinkers in some way. We decorated *a la Alice in Wonderland* and presented a group gift that included the print below and a writing notebook with a



hummingbird on the cover. Just before that weekend, right after we wrapped this gift in preparation, Amy called and asked me to write this column.

It is the nieces and nephews in this family of mine who first drew me to writing for children and to a meeting of SCBWI. Their nascent wonder

and attention reawakened that part of me. They also helped me to see more sharply what I already knew of the disparities in representation in children's literature. They are now teens, so a performative studied indifference is more common than extended investigations of rocks or insects. I too have lost some of that wonder and attention, my time stretched taught and thin. *Upstream* has returned me to my source and to thoughts of so many "Forbears, models, spirits, whose influence and teachings I am now inseparable from, and forever grateful for."<sup>10</sup>

I am carving out time and space for writing again, and more nature. Mary Oliver calls to me:

*"Teach the children. We don't matter so much, but the children do. Show them daisies and the pale hepatica. ... Give them the fields and the woods and the possibility of the world salvaged from the lords of profit. Stand them in the stream, head them upstream, rejoice as they learn to love this green space they live in, its sticks and leaves and then the silent, beautiful blossoms."*<sup>11</sup>



*"I keep if I can some essence of the hour, even as it slips away. I do not accomplish this alert and loving confrontation by myself and alone, but through terrifying and continual effort, and with this innumerable fortifying company, bright as stars in the heaven of my mind."*<sup>12</sup>

### Endnotes

<sup>1,8,10,12</sup> p. 57 *Sister Turtle*

<sup>2,6</sup> p. 9 *My Friend Walt Whitman*

<sup>3</sup> p. 5 *Upstream*

<sup>4</sup> p. 132 *Bird*

<sup>5</sup> p. 61 *Sister Turtle*

<sup>7</sup> p. 63 At the start of Section 3

<sup>9,11</sup> p. 8 *Upstream*

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**Susanne Fairfax** writes picture book and YA manuscripts in the interstices of making a living in photo/video and life with her partner of 23 years, Deb, and their energetic pup, Raku. She has just finished a 4-year term as SCBWI-IL Diversity Committee Chairperson. She'll continue to champion diversity, equity and inclusion. She also hopes to carve out more space for writing. Oh, and submitting, which rumor has it, is a requisite to getting published.





## Perspectives

### *STEM Read with Gillian King-Cargile*

By Kate Hannigan



**Gillian King-Cargile's** mission with STEM Read is straightforward: use engaging fiction to explore STEAM concepts and careers.

As the founder and director of Northern Illinois University's STEM Read, Gillian introduces young readers to the science, technology, engineering, and math concepts behind popular fiction books. And as a card-carrying member of SCBWI, Gillian understands what it's like to try to pull these concepts into her storylines because she's written a variety of books herself. She's the author of the fun and fast-paced Stuffed Bunny Science Adventure Series, which incorporates STEM concepts aligned with Next Generation Science Standards for Kindergarten through second grade.

Gillian is eager to get the word out to SCBWI creators that in 2020, STEM Read, NIU's libraries, and Argonne National Laboratory will be partnering to present "Future Telling: Science Fiction Writing Conference." This is an event that will draw writers of all experience levels to converge in DeKalb, Illinois, and get the opportunity to learn from STEM experts in a variety of fields,

including robotics, engineering, energy storage, disaster management, economics, chemistry, and more.

The conference will be a chance for writers to network with

real-live scientists and pick their brains on everything from the origins of life to robot rights to the death of the sun. Also featured will be science-based stand-up comedy, break-out sessions with sci-fi writers, lab tours, and an exclusive look at NIU's collection of rare sci-fi, dime novels, pulps, and the archives of the Science Fiction Writers of America. Says Gillian, "We are going to learn so much and geek out so hard!"

I was lucky enough to work with Gillian last year when she used my book in an incredible STEM Read detective project. She took time out of her busy schedule to talk about STEM Read and how SCBWI members can get involved in the next year.

**Q:** *How is STEM bubbling up in our consciousness? As readers, writers, illustrators, as well as teachers and librarians? What does it mean for kids?*

**Gillian King-Cargile (GKC):** STEM has been a buzzword in education for the past few years, and that's a wonderful thing. We need to prepare more students for the careers of tomorrow. We need more engineers and roboticists and cyber security experts. We need

more under-represented groups designing our software and building our bridges and making sure robots don't destroy us all.

And there are so many amazing programs getting kids hands-on experience with STEM. But no matter how many 3D printers we put in libraries, not every student is going to want to become the next STEM expert, and not every teacher is going to get super excited about adorning their bulletin board with the engineering design cycle. That said, every student and every educator **must** become STEM literate to thrive both now and in the future.

As educators and librarians and writers and illustrators, as creative people in general, I think we have the responsibility to make learning fun, to get kids asking questions and being curious about the world, to show them the connections between what they learn and what they will do in the real world. I want to show kids that STEM is really really cool, and STEM plays a really really huge role in nearly every aspect of their lives.

**Q:** *What are you doing at NIU around STEM and STEAM?*

**GKC:** At Northern Illinois University, we created [NIU STEAM](#) (science, technology, engineering, the arts, and math), a variety of community programs that provide hands-on activities, demonstration shows, and educator resources to help increase STEAM literacy.

I run STEM Read, a program that explores STEAM concepts and careers



## A Short Goodbye

By Susan Tarcov

Now that I no longer have to worry about those dreaded spring, fall, and winter deadlines, I find myself looking back nostalgically on my time as editor of the *Prairie Wind*. The lovely breakfasts in Roscoe Village with **Jeanne Becker** and **Sara Shacter**, hearing about Jeanne's work organizing the orchid show. Then after Jeanne left, breakfast in Oak Park with **Dana Easley** and Sara, and skype meetings with **Tara Haelle**, who was always just back from a reporting trip somewhere far away. Our regular columnists, although I never met them, I felt I got to know. In every issue I looked forward to **Molly Backes's** exquisitely written Writing Tips, to **Carol Coven Grannick's** painfully honest depictions of her struggles with rejection, to **Laura Montenegro's** beautifully illustrated and just as beautifully written Illustrator Tips.

Certain articles stand out in my mind. **Ruth Spiro's** Tale from the Front where she gave some really specific tips for how to get an agent and get published. **John Sullivan's** Tale from the Front in which he struggled with the question of how important writing and publishing should be in our lives. A super clever Fly on the Wall about Prairie Writers Day, written very convincingly from the point of view of a real fly. An article about word counts that inspired me to write a counting book in which the objects to be counted were the words themselves (that got me a prize at Prairie Writers Day). It has been an adventure. Now I look back, maybe I shouldn't have resigned after all!

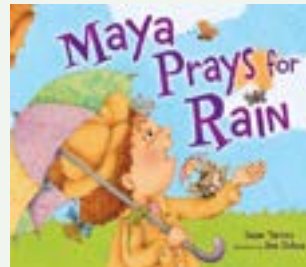
Now I look forward to seeing where the *Prairie Wind* will go next. Already there's a new column, "The

Shop around the Corner," about local bookstores and booksellers, **Lisa Katzenberger's** wonderful idea. I never thought to ask who came up with all the old columns, especially my favorite "Tales from the Front."

Well, this article was supposed to be up to 1,500 words and I've written 343. That's what fifty years of editing will do. I'd better stop now before this gets even shorter. Goodbye!

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**Susan Tarcov** edited the *Prairie Wind* from 2011 to 2019. She is the author of two picture books, *Maya Prays for Rain* and *Raisins and Almonds*, both published by Karben.



through fun, fast-paced fiction books. We create hands-on activities, expert videos, online games, and free educator resources to get students and teachers excited about reading and learning. We also create day-long field trips that allow students to live their favorite books while solving standards-aligned STEAM challenges based on each book's plot.

But we don't always pick the books you'd expect. They don't always scream "STEM EDUCATION!" and we don't exclusively browse the sci-fi shelves. We define STEM Read books as great stories with a basis in real STEM concepts. Books like **John Green's** *The Fault in Our Stars* or Kate Hannigan's *The Detective's Assistant* are contemporary YA and historical

fiction respectively, but they're great books that can help students explore everything from cancer research and adaptive technologies for the blind to cryptography and computational thinking. **Lauren Tarshis's** *I Survived* series can introduce everything from meteorology and climate change to the probability that you'll be eaten by a shark. **Mike Mullin's** *Ashfall* is a primer



on surviving volcanoes and thwarting cannibal attacks. Spoiler alert: there's a lot of math involved in doing both those things! **Kiersten White's** *The Dark Descent of Elizabeth Frankenstein* helped us show teens how to create electrical circuits, suture body parts, and avoid toxic relationships. *Quarantine: The Loners* by **Lex Thomas** is a modern-day mash-up of *Lord of the Flies* and *The Breakfast Club*, but damned if it isn't also the best book I've found to teach economics and scarcity.

STEM Read is all about finding fun, unique books that students want to read and then helping students draw connections between the text and real-world concepts and careers. You can do that with **Andy Weir's** *The Martian* just as well as you can do it with **Deborah Diesen's** *The Pout Pout Fish*.

**Q: How are you engaging authors, artists, and book creators? And why?**

**GKC:** Some book creators have done years of research on the STEM behind their books and understand exactly why STEM Read is selecting their book. Others smile and nod like I'm a crazy person while I tell them how great their book would be for STEM education. But the common denominator (math term!) is that they dreamed up great stories and lively characters, even if they didn't realize their books could be tied into STEM.

Just like those reluctant learners who have never believed there was a place for them in STEM, some creators are reluctant to see how they can play a role in STEM education. However, by imagining new worlds, persevering through rejection and failure, engaging in plotting, revising, and creative problem solving, and imagining worst-case scenarios, book creators often possess the very characteristics we're

trying to instill in students. They think differently. They see what's possible.

**Q: Are you looking toward world domination? What are you hoping to accomplish with your conferences and projects?**

**GKC:** Absolutely! I want to overrun the world with great thinkers and dreamers and readers. I want to topple stupidity with scientific facts. The best way that I can resist is by sharing great stories and by showing connections that will help people solve problems.

One of the connections that I've been most surprised by is how similar STEM experts and storytellers actually are. I like showing the STEM behind fiction, but I also love showing the creativity behind STEM.

As a writer, I love talking with scientists because my brain starts buzzing with endless questions, crazy possibilities, and imagined applications of their work. I also love seeing how STEM experts engage in their own version of storytelling to test hypotheses, create new products, and improve our world.

**Q: Why SCBWI?**

**GKC:** I'm very excited to share this opportunity with SCBWI. As a member myself, I have benefited from amazing sessions on the art and business of writing for young people. SCBWI is great about mentoring and supporting the next generation of writers and illustrators as they learn their craft. But there are fewer opportunities for aspiring and even established writers to interact with subject matter experts, to hear a wide variety of new ideas in science and research. I want to give other storytellers the opportunity to gaze into the future, imagine the possible, and create the books that will inspire young learners, dreamers, and innovators.

**Q: How can we get involved?**

**GKC:** You can learn more about STEM Read and register for NIU's Future Telling Conference at [stemread.com](http://stemread.com). And stay tuned here at SCBWI for more information!

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Chicago children's author **Kate Hannigan** writes fiction and nonfiction for young readers. Her historical fantasy for middle-grade, *Cape* (Simon & Schuster/Aladdin, August 2019), includes graphic novel elements and draws upon early comic book heroines. It is part of a three-book series titled *The League of Secret Heroes* that blends superheroes and real-life women from World War II — original computer programmers, brilliant code-crackers, courageous spies, and daring pilots. Her historical mystery *The Detective's Assistant* (Little, Brown) about America's first woman detective won SCBWI's Golden Kite Award for best middle-grade novel and was a California Young Reader Medal nominee. Her picture book biography of Belva Lockwood, *A Lady Has the Floor* (Boyd's Mills), spotlights an early suffragette and first woman on the ballot for president. It was named a Society of Midland Authors 2019 Honoree. Visit her online at [KateHannigan.com](http://KateHannigan.com).



# The Inside Story

## What Does That Mean?

By Carol Coven Grannick

*This column is unusual for me, and I'm writing it for my community of children's writers and illustrators.*

*I have a number of non-writer friends and acquaintances who are aware that I write for children, and have done so for many years. Their comments about my work have ranged from complete disinterest to incredible support and validation.*

*However, I've never experienced what I write about in this column, perhaps because it's about my first book.*

*So – here's what happened...*

About one month ago, I received a contract for my debut middle grade novel in verse.

Then one day my husband came home from an event I hadn't attended and

said, "\_\_\_\_\_ asked how long it took you to write your book." I felt an unusual and visceral response so powerful that it required me to ask myself, *What is it about this question that is so disturbing to me?*

I came up empty.

But I wondered: would other creative pursuits be subject to the same question? For example,

- How long did it take you to paint that?
- How long did it take you to learn to play that?
- How long did it take you to make that film?
- How long did it take you to learn that dance?

Strange, yes?



And then I asked myself what would it feel like to apply the question to specific artists with recognizable fame, brilliance, and/or genius, such as:

- How long did it take to paint that, Mr. **Rembrandt**?
- How long did it take to learn to play that, Ms. **Anne-Sophie Mutter**?
- How long did it take to make that film, Mr. **Spike Lee**?
- How long did it take you to learn to dance *The Swan*, Ms. **Maya Plisetskaya**?

This seems to intensify the distressing nature of the question.

Certainly, there are times we want to know how long someone has been practicing – surgeons, for example – because length of time implies expertise (mistakenly, I think, because the real issue is how many procedures have been done).



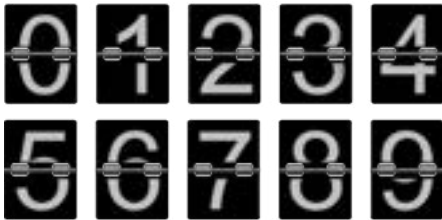


But for an artist, the time it takes to create a work holds little importance.

*How many years did it take you to write the book that now received a contract? Why does the answer to this matter?*

What need or belief had tucked itself subtly into the question? I'm pretty sure I didn't want to know.

I thought about what my book means to me, how much a part of me it is, how deeply I dug to include significantly painful, meaningful, joyful experiences into the verse.



I thought about the challenging revision requests from others that sometimes did and sometimes didn't resonate with the story I dreamed my book could be, sometimes took me so far from the heart of the story that what I was reading seemed meaningless. The *counting* of days, weeks, months, or years had nothing to do with the creation of the final draft.

It would be like asking:

- How long did it take you to make a good marriage?
- How long did it take you to grieve for your parents?
- How long did it take you to make a life?

Why not ask:

- What ups and downs did you encounter during the time you spent writing your story?
- How did you get to the story as you tell it in this final draft?

- What have you learned in the time it's taken you to work on this book?

These feel like questions of sincere interest, and are questions I'd be happy to ponder and discuss. They convey *value* and *meaning* to the creative process. I am warmed by those questions, and look forward to sharing my thoughts and feelings during presentations, school visits, workshops, discussions with other writers and readers.

I believe that sharing the ups and downs of our journeys is important and meaningful to maintain the supportive community we have, and to support new writers and illustrators as they begin their journeys.

So I have no answer for why my friend asked the other question. I'm not sure what I would have said had she asked it directly of me.

The last thing my creative journey is about is the *number* of years (or days, weeks, months) we work on any project.

The last thing I've been doing is counting the time, even though I'm certainly aware as a person of time passing, and of wanting to use whatever time I have to the best of my ability.

Maybe that's my answer. It's not that time doesn't matter. It's that time *has* to be unimportant.

Why?

I had a doctor's appointment just before I began this piece – a new doctor who asked me about my work history. I said I was a children's author and a clinical social worker, and that I'd retired from my private practice several years ago, taken another job I loved for six years, then retired from that at the end of June 2018 to write full time.

"So – writing is your hobby," she said.

"No. I write full time."

"But you don't make money from it."

"I actually occasionally do. But in any case, it's not a hobby."

"Oh – but it's still, like, not a regular job."

"No," I said. "It's my life."

---

**Carol Coven Grannick** is a poet and children's author whose poetry and short fiction have appeared or are forthcoming in *Highlights*, *Hello*, *Cricket*, and *Ladybug*. She also writes picture books and at least one novel in verse (*Reeni's Turn*, Fitzroy Books, Fall 2020). You can respond to Carol at [carolcovengrannick@gmail.com](mailto:carolcovengrannick@gmail.com) or find her at Facebook or Twitter (@carolcgrannick).



# A Fly on the Wall

## ***Marginalized Voices Out Loud: Queer Indie YA Author Lee Wind in Conversation with Susanne Fairfax***

By Joe Franco

I have no idea what I am doing. Really. I don't. Aside from a few articles for Chicago's own LGBTQ press and a now-defunct men's style magazine, I remain largely unpublished. As a queer writer, the April 8, 2019, event held at Open Books in the West Loop was both oddly familiar and wildly foreign. I have never been in the company of that many writers who didn't have "Esq." after their names. So being curious, I just had to be there.

**Lee Wind** seems exactly like the person you would think he might be simply by glancing at his photos. Funny. Charismatic. Passionate. Yet, there was so much more. **Susanne Fairfax** sat down with Wind in the most honest conversation I have ever heard from two artists. Wind is like most of us – a writer who needs a day job to survive the travails of daily life. Wind is the director of marketing and programming at the Independent Book Publishers Association and the official blogger for the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators. He also writes a fabulous blog called *I'm Here. I'm Queer. What the Hell Do I Read?*

Wind's book, *Queer as a Five-Dollar Bill*, is out in more ways than one. In a non-spoiler nutshell, Wyatt, a young man



coming to terms with his own sexuality, has a school project on Lincoln. During his research, he finds a letter from Lincoln to one **Joshua Fry Speed** that strongly suggested Lincoln and Speed were in love.

Given the queer themes of his book, Wind spent some time at this event talking about the effects of the Trump election on mainstream publishers as the uncertainty of marginalized individuals, and his book deal, hung in the balance. Sadly, Wind lost his original deal to publish this book. While he discussed the book itself, and was kind enough to poetically read an excerpt, the real meat and potatoes of the conversation (or since I'm supposed to be a fly, the real bowl-of-four-hour-old-potato salad) was Wind's creative journey.

Wind, whether he recognizes it or not, is a master craftsperson. His basic lesson for author-publishing a book? Practice.

Perseverance. Persistence. Plot. The journey of *Queer as a Five-Dollar Bill* is worth knowing about. After his book deal was rejected because suggesting **Abraham Lincoln's** top hat was full of glitter would devastate 46.1% of the population, Wind set out to self-publish or author-publish this book.

Abridged version of the difference in these two terms: Self-publishing is the wholly amateur way to get a book out there. It's when a writer uses Photoshop once and thinks, "I can do this!" It will end in disaster. Author-publishing is the acknowledgement that one does not have every necessary skill or talent, like some publishing **Leonardo Da Vinci**, and that hiring a team to do the tangential work is smart.

Wind originally set out to get a few hundred copies of the book into the hands of adolescents through a Kickstarter campaign. His Kickstarter not only fully funded his original goal,



he raised enough to double the number of available books, and that number continues to grow past 1,000.

For Wind, honing his craft became the most important aspect of bringing a professional novel to market. “I invested time in my craft,” he said. Doing that required him to mentor with National Book Award winner **M.T. Anderson**. Wind also went through eight edits of his manuscript. He noticed that most queer characters in novels, television programs, or Disney movies were introduced as a villain. If they aren’t villains, they were often killed off before the end of the narrative. In *Queer as a Five-Dollar Bill*, Wind did not kill off any queer characters. He pointed out that it is indeed characters that drive the plot and it is character development that is crucial to the authenticity of any work.

While writing *Queer as a Five-Dollar Bill*, Wind not only wrote chapters from the point of view of his protagonist, he wrote several additional versions from the point of view of the other characters. He also wrote additional scenes not included in the book to get to know his characters better. Much like the deleted scenes on a DVD, it’s

decent material, but not essential to the plot. What is essential is making sure one’s characters do not sound like, as Wind put it, “robots.” When characters are developed, they speak with their own voices.

Fairfax stated from the beginning of her conversation that she wished a book like his had been around when she was growing up. As a queer writer, I could not agree more. What would it matter if Lincoln were gay? Everything. When you are growing up gay, and the world hates you, you grab on to whomever you can. For me, the only openly gay characters in the 80s were Baron Maximilian Von Heune from *Cabaret* and Dr. Frank-N-Furter from *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. Sure. We had our very suggestible gay actors like Bugs Bunny in drag, **Paul Linde**, and **Charles Nelson Reilly**, but the straight folks still had the mainstream. (And yes, if **Pat Robertson** can consider me less than human, I can consider Bugs Bunny a person.)

Wind suggested the term “homoloveual.” He believed that using a term like this would remind others that same-sex relationships are far more than just sex. If queer youth and queer young adults could read in a history book about Lincoln, or **Michaelangelo**, or **Eleanor Roosevelt**, those figures would no longer be just some wooden figureheads, but real queer people who did amazing things outside of their bedrooms.

Wind stressed that his biggest mistake, through the writing and the rejection and his struggle, was believing that his voice could only matter if he could just convince that one, big publisher that what he was saying mattered. Wind quoted from **Anne Lamott** saying, “Lighthouses don’t go running all over an island looking for boats to save; they just stand there shining.” He added that

it is our job to let queer youth know who they are and where they come from. It is our job to stand and shine -- to be that lighthouse and maybe save a few boats. Wind ended with a quote from his current agent. “If you have a story to tell, and you do so from the heart, you will find your champions.” *Queer as a Five-Dollar Bill* and Lee Wind not only found their champions, but because of his efforts in the outreach and dissemination of his work, are now a champion for thousands more.

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**Joe Franco** is a Detroit native, now living in Chicago. By day, he works as an attorney. By night, he writes for *Windy City Times* and his own personal blog, [Missorganza.com](http://Missorganza.com). He has won no awards, but is not bitter. He lives in the South Loop with his partner, their dog, a moody Wheaton terrier, and a menagerie of Buddhas.

### Awards and appreciations



Jackie Alcántara and Urania Smith announcing the 2019 winners of the Many Voices Prize and Diverse New Member Pathway. Winners Soton Rosanwo and Samina Hadi-Tabassum not pictured.



Floral tribute to our retiring Diversity Committee chair, Susanne Fairfax.



# Shop Around the Corner

## Booked

Chelsea Elward, Owner



**Chelsea Elward** opened Booked, which she beautifully subtitled “A Bookstore for Youthful Readers” in Evanston, Illinois on September 13, 2018. We asked Chelsea to tell us about her journey to opening the store, how she decides to stock its shelves, and her vision for making Booked a vital part of the community.

### *What is the backstory of Booked?*

I walked into a children’s bookstore called The Wild Rumpus in Minneapolis, and I literally said out loud, “This is what I want to do for the rest of my life.” I had been teaching for seven years and, while on maternity leave, decided I was going to change careers. As soon as I got home from Minnesota, I started searching for Booked’s location. Best decision of my life. I’m finally doing something that doesn’t feel like work, even while working about 60 hours a week.

I knew I wanted to stay on the South side of Evanston for many reasons: there’s a lot of foot traffic on Main Street from the L and Metra trains; I live close by and wanted to walk to work each day; and I knew my community needed a bookstore, the closest being over a mile away. After looking for about 9 months and not finding the right price, layout, or landlord with the same vision as me, I got a tip from a good friend about 506 Main Street. As soon as I hung up, I ran over, looked through the glass at the horrific sight inside, and knew it would be perfect. It was a complete gut rehab. The business that had just left the space was a leather repair shop, and it looked more like a disused dry cleaner than a bookstore. The only thing that stayed was the original tile floor, discovered under several more layers of flooring.

When Booked first opened, regular customers that would come in several

times per week must have been concerned that I wasn’t taking any breaks. “Are you always here? Have you seen your family lately? Are you tired?” I have so much fun being at the store and want to see my love for reading develop with little ones, so they grow up to be readers and never stop learning. For every book I read, whether it be a memoir, a picture book, a mystery, or something lighter, I learn something new. The last book I read taught me all about bees and how we should be desperate to save them all. I know I become a better human being from each book I read and want that for our world. My next book is about an Arab girl, which I’m excited about as I have not read many books set in the Middle East.

### *How have you shaped the kinds of book you stock in your store? And how do you organize your collection?*

I get asked this question a lot. I know authors don’t have much input into the illustrator’s work, but I love diversity. If I see a new book, and it only has white people in it, I get a little uncomfortable and have to think long and hard as to what the benefit of stocking it in Booked would be. I love strong messages; stories that make me have emotions; oversized, intricate, eclectic-looking books; and books that aren’t in major big box stores.

When you first walk in the store, at your left are the books for the youngest readers. Wrapping around the store clockwise are sections for each age group: Board Books, Picture Books, Early Readers, Graphic Novels, Middle Grade, and Young Adult. Finally, we





have a grown-up section with our latest favorites.

### *What defines Booked as unique from other bookstores?*

Our wonderful community is our most unique asset. We've had amazing support since well before we first opened our special doors! We maintain a space that is clean, inviting to all, organized, happy and comfortable, providing three story times a week and a toddler jam every Thursday. If I was going to be at the store for most of my waking hours, I needed it to feel like a second home. I wanted a safe and happy environment where anyone could talk about anything, not feel judged, breastfeed, relax, and, of course, read. We have wonderful shops and restaurants around Booked that have earned their loyal clientele, and I wanted Booked to be another community staple. I love when people bring their pets for a quick visit to Booked, just another comforting part of being in a bookstore!



We have a special front entrance with a wicket door, which is a door within a door. Customers can choose to use the full size outer door or the smaller inner door. The door was "illustrated" by

**Diana Sudyka**. She lives in Evanston, and I met her in line at an author event at our local library. She gave me her business card, and when I went online to look her up, I instantly fell in love with her work. Trying to find someone to make the custom wicket door was tricky. I called every door company around Illinois to ask if they could make such a thing, and I was dismissed as soon as I described it. I ended up finding door expert **Joe Kerin**, who wanted to give it a try. He had such a positive attitude about it, so I knew it would work. I sketched out my idea, and he made it functional and one of a kind.

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

The librarians in Evanston are amazing! I've become great friends with many -- I'm in a book club with **Betsy Bird**. I have admired many librarians for their story times and help raising my children in the book world.

I adore Evanston. I grew up here and want the best for our community. More books in every hand makes a better world, in my opinion. Booked works to donate a lot of books, as we know not everyone can afford a brand-new book every month. Several customers come in regularly to buy several books to donate. We're happy to help donors get books to schools and other local organizations with the most need. Not only do we want to succeed as a business, but we want our whole community to succeed.

Booked wants to partner with book events and with other local businesses, whether that be promoting neighbors such as the taco shop, chocolatier, clothing shop, or down the street where used books and records are sold. We collaborate frequently with the Evanston Public library, hosting authors and special story times, and featuring

the top 101 children's books of the year in the store. Recently we were on hand for the 90 Second Newbery Festival at the Harold Washington Library, selling copies of all the Newbery award books.

Our next event will be dinner at Booked hosted by a local nonprofit organization. Across the Table breaks down race and socio-economic barriers by uniting people at a dinner table. The topic of conversation during dinner at Booked: is telling the truth always the right thing to do? With books surrounding us, this topic will surely not have any awkward silences.

### *How does Booked interact with authors, both traditionally published and Indie authors? And what might that relationship look like?*

My advice to traditionally published authors who want a relationship with Booked is just to email us! We LOVE author events in the store and even at local libraries. We work directly with publishers of all sizes. We also work with many Indie-published authors in a similar way.

When we host authors, we find a time that works for everyone (always considering nap times for our younger reader events!). Booked has never hosted an author event with no audience. We have a large community of readers who are excited for authors to come in to read and sign their books. Beyond events in the store, we are also happy to arrange and host local school visits. We announce all special events on social media and remind our customers at checkout who is coming next.

Before we opened, we researched local authors and illustrators and stocked their books. Many of those books have been quite popular. It's always extra special when local authors can join us for an event!



With so many books available, we strive to have high standards for the books we carry in the store. Books meeting that standard can potentially come from anywhere, but we have found more success with traditional publishers of all sizes. Some of the favorites are from small publishers, such as Enchanted Lion.

*Have there been any challenges?*

Our biggest challenge is having to say no to self or author-published books. Because our store is on the smaller end, we don't currently have the staff-power to read each author-published book to make sure it is appropriate for our market, engaging, and something we can stand behind. However, we are searching for ways to support this growing and dynamic part of the market. In particular, we are compiling a list of author-published books for a

future special sales event. So, please stop in and share your title with us.

The other challenge that comes to mind: the word on the street right now is that we have the cleanest bathroom...we do! I am a bit obsessive when it comes to cleanliness, so some people come in the store just to use the washroom then quickly leave

*On a personal level, what do you love most about your job?*

Hand-selling a book and hearing, "this is perfect." Or at checkout, having a customer thanking me for a book recommendation because either they loved it or the kid they gave it to was gratefully obsessed.

I'm also so grateful that my two boys are big readers and they see how important books are. I recently asked my seven-

year-old what makes him the happiest. His response: reading ARCs, bike riding, and watching movies. We've been reading books with him every single night since he was a baby, and we still cuddle up in bed before lights out to read.

*We hear you have a new business partner as of Jan. 1st. How is that going?*

I asked one of my booksellers, **Mary Mollman**, if she'd like to be my business partner on Christmas Eve. I was thrilled when she said yes. She's so kind, a complete book-lover, smart, and we have the exact same vision for Booked. I LOVE working, but knew if I didn't have help on running a business, that I would be burnt out after a few years. I want Booked to be around for decades to come, and I knew after working closely with Mary that she was the perfect fit to help grow the business. If you've come into Booked, you'll understand: she's a blessing!

*What are you looking forward to for Booked?*

Every day there is something new to look forward to. Whether it be a new release that comes in or the various groups of kids at story times, author events, and book clubs. We love it all!

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*Booked is located at 506 Main St. Evanston, IL. Please stop in or contact us at 847-701-5707 or **Chelsea Elward** at [Chelsea@BookedEvanston.com](mailto:Chelsea@BookedEvanston.com) or **Mary Mollman** at [Mary@BookedEvanston.com](mailto:Mary@BookedEvanston.com). Find us on both Facebook and Instagram @BookedEvanston.*



# Illustrator in the Spotlight

*Jan Spivey Gilchrist*



*Image of The Girl Who Buried Her Dream in a Can  
Illustrations copyright 2015 by Jan Spivey Gilchrist; ISBN #978-0-679-01614-9*

## Career/Technique Questions:

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

I consider myself an artist first. I am an illustrator and author, in that order. I have written poetry and sculpted; however, I would never say that I am a poet or a sculptor. But I was born an artist, so whatever I endeavor to do, I do as an artist.

### *What is your preferred medium to work in?*

When I was a child, I had only a pencil. Children with thirteen siblings learn to live without colors. I was thankful later, when I had perfected the pencil so much that critics praised my black and white drawings for giving the illusion of color.

My preferred medium today to work in is watercolor. Watercolor gives me the same feelings pencil does. I can be soft and gentle or crisp and sharp.

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

From the time I could hold a pencil in my hand, I would try to capture every person in my life in drawings and paintings.

I majored in art in high school and exhibited in art fairs all over the country. I attended workshops, taught, and lectured. I received a B.S. in Art Education, an MA in Painting, an MFA in Writing, and a Ph.D. in English.

In 1986, I met **Eloise Greenfield**, who gave me a lead to Putman and Grosset. There I met the Editor in Chief,



*Studio Picture: This picture was taken by Jan Spivey Gilchrist on April 12, 2019 showing her home studio and workspace.*



Picture of Ashley Bryan and Jan Spivey Gilchrist was taken by Kelvin Gilchrist on September, 2018 on Ashley home island in Maine.

**Patricia Lee Gauch**, who gave me my first book, *Children of Long Ago*, by **Lessie Jones Little**. That was over 90 books ago. Later I met **Phoebe Yeh**, Executive Editor, and we worked together for over 25 years. I have been living my childhood dream since then.

### *What does your workplace look like?*

My studio is attached to the back of my house. My house is on an acre of land. It's as if I am sitting outside. There are two glass walls, from ceiling to floor. I walk from the kitchen into the studio. In the summer the glass doors open to screened walls. In the winter, I'm toasty, surrounded by subzero temperatures. I have regular visits from hawks, red foxes, gray foxes, skunks, coyotes, rabbits, chipmunks, deer, etc.

### **The Person behind the Pencil Questions**

#### *What's one thing that may surprise people about you?*

I spent my childhood physically challenged and graduated from Jesse Spalding High School for the Physically Handicapped. I sat on my porch and drew the children playing, when I couldn't play. The children came to my porch to watch me draw. I was soon the most popular girl on Green Street.

#### *Which illustrators are your favorites now?*

**Ashley Bryan**. I love his vibrant colors and use of geometric shapes. We illustrated the same words in my pictures book, *My America*. At readings preschool children can distinguish between our styles. They would scream, "Ashley!" or "Jan!" when I turned the pages

### *Tell us a little about winning the Coretta Scott King Award and if/how it changed your career as an illustrator*

The voice on the phone spoke. I heard only, "Nathaniel Talking" and "won!" I thanked the lady and slammed the phone down, then phoned Eloise Greenfield to congratulate her. She laughed and informed me that I had won for my illustrations. I had felt helpless for months, watching my all-powerful mother wither to bones. I hadn't been able to make her smile. But the 1990 Coretta Scott King Committee had made her smile. This gave me the strength to go forth to complete ninety more picture books.

Mama died on April 26, sixteen days after her sixty-eighth birthday. I accepted the award that June. I had my mother's smile to keep me strong enough to overcome my intense shyness and deliver the first speech I had ever delivered, without throwing up. It's corny, but I know Mama was smiling down on me.



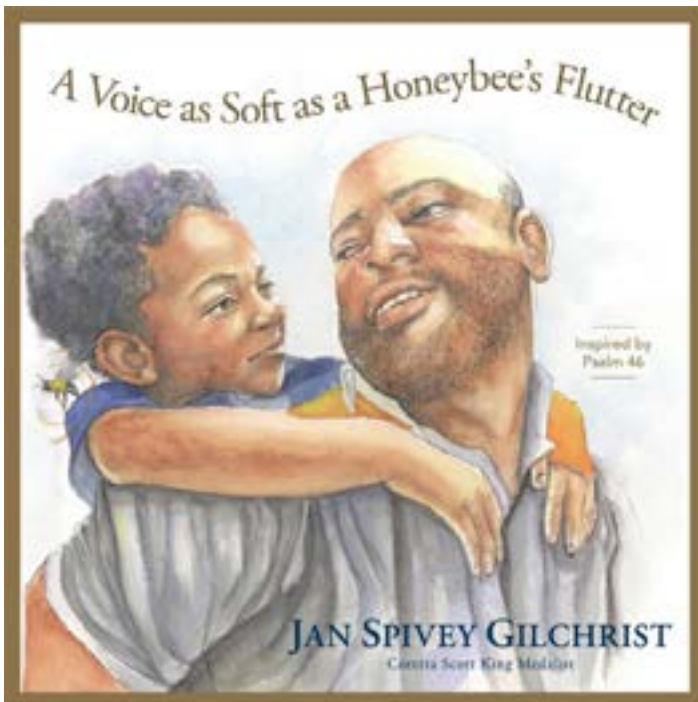
The pencil drawing was done by Jan Spivey Gilchrist.



My mother deserved that happiness. A painfully shy child artist, going in and out of the hospital, along with thirteen other children, had to have been a challenge to raise. I have been thankful to the 1990 Committee since that smile.

I returned in 1992 to receive the Honor Award for *Night on Neighborhood Street*, also by Eloise Greenfield.

I may not receive another award, but I would have worked extra hard for every award I have.



### *What are you currently working on?*

I'm working on a three-book contract with Our Daily Bread Publishers. The books are picture books based on my family stories. A preacher's family of fourteen children. The first book is about my younger brother, Junior. Junior was the neighborhood terror, but he was the preacher's namesake. Coming in June 2019. The second book will be released in January 2020, based on my life on the porch. A physically challenged child. The third book will be a collaboration with gifted children, released in the fall of 2020. The series was inspired by a need to see children of color in Christian children's picture books around the world.

Also, a documentary about my struggle to my childhood dream to become an artist. It is a full-length feature to be debuted at ALA 2019. The title of the film is *Colors of Love: The Jan Spivey Gilchrist Story*.



### *Where can we find you?*

[janspiveygilchrist@comcast.net](mailto:janspiveygilchrist@comcast.net) and [janspiveygilchrist.com](http://janspiveygilchrist.com)

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With over 90 books to her credit, **Jan Spivey Gilchrist's** career as a fine artist has spanned a quarter of a century. She has exhibited extensively throughout the United States, Canada, Europe and the Caribbean. Ms. Gilchrist has won numerous awards and commissions throughout her career, including the Coretta Scott King Award.



# Voices of Change

## News from the Diversity Committee

By Urania Smith

### Black Girl Reading

I don't remember the first time I held a book. However, my earliest memory of reading, I was about three. I climbed into my brother **Reese's** crib holding a hardcover picture book with a golden spine. I'm not sure if I actually read to him, or if I'd only memorized the words—but I do know, it was something I loved to do, and I loved him. I believe I fell in love with both at the same time.

Just as I don't remember my first book, I also don't recall the first time I heard the sound of a gun. What I do recall is being about five and ducking to the ground as a barrage of bullets rang out from the housing project, while my brothers and I played nearby at the playground. Reese, **Keenan**, and I lay pressed to the pavement for what seemed like forever.

At one point, we started to count. When we reached three, we leapt from the ground and sprinted towards our grandmother's house. Hearts pounding, out of breath. We didn't stop until we reached her front door. I knew this wasn't my first experience with the sound. The instinct to drop to the ground was already ingrained in me—in all of us. This instinct was our bodies' fight for survival, even before our brains could process the danger.

Growing up in inner city Chicago, I was exposed to the threat of gun violence, and I also was exposed to the love of reading. I spent more time in the city's libraries than ducking gunfire. My mother made sure of that. There were long bus rides downtown on Saturdays to The Chicago Cultural Center and The Harold Washington Library. We

spent hours there. They seemed so far away from my neighborhood. My love for reading blossomed, allowing me to escape, even when I returned home. The more gunfire I heard in the distance, the more I buried my head inside the pages of a book. As if words could stop the carnage, I clung to the lives of fictional characters—making their worlds my own.

This worked for a while, but bullets have a way of bringing you back to reality. No matter how many books I read. No matter how much I blocked the sound of bullets with words, the threat of danger was ever present. It remained in the background. Taking the lives of nameless, faceless victims. Every time I heard the sound of gunfire and ducked away from the window, or fell to the ground as I walked down the street—I knew potentially, I'd heard the end of a life. Those lives, I could forget. I could rewrite their endings with my imagination. But as I read, the danger crept closer. Until the victims had names, and they had faces. They were people I knew—someone in my neighborhood...a distant acquaintance...a schoolmate...a friend.

I started to attend the funerals of children. Now, I witnessed the grief that comes after someone pulls the trigger.

It was too close...

Then, one day, it hit home. My brother was gone. Reese, the brother I fell in love with at the same time I fell in love with books.

One moment was all it took. A single bullet to his heart—and I was no longer

a black girl reading to shut out the violence in my world...I was a black girl reading to survive it.

### Where Are the Black Girls Like Me?

As a child, I read a lot. To provide a small sample of my addiction, I will confess to reading at the dinner table, sneaking and staying up late on school nights to read, reading while walking to school, and hiding novels between my text books in my classes. In gym, I'd lie in between the bleachers with a book in hand—forced to dodge the occasional volleyball that drifted in my direction. To my eternal shame, I once failed. How the heck do you fail gym?

Being a voracious reader, I saw some black girls in books. None were inner city black girls like me. I didn't think much of it. The whole point of reading was to escape my reality. Get a glimpse into another world.

But then, my own world changed. At eleven, my father suddenly died of pneumonia. I needed books to help me deal, so I started paying more attention to the black girls in them. Looking for girls like me. Hoping they'd help me make sense of what happened.

It didn't take me long to realize there were only two types of black girls in the books I read. One of these types were contemporary black girls—one-dimensional caricatures of what someone thought a black girl should be. They were sassy, loyal sidekicks who stood on the sidelines of the white protagonist's existence. They didn't have crushes or dreams—were never the stars of their own reality. I knew I



couldn't look to these black girls. They didn't have a problem in the world.

The other type of black girls were extraordinary. They were historic. Literally. Sometimes fictional like Cassie in *Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry* or Sethe in *Beloved*. More often, they were real historical figures. Fierce girls who persevered and pioneered and refused to accept the circumstances of their birth. On a deeper level, I connected with these girls. They were the origins for the current term Black Girl Magic. I learned from them that in order to make it out of my surroundings, I couldn't be good—I had to work twice as hard. I had to be extraordinary.

Instead of looking for myself in books, I assumed that present day black girls like me were not worth writing about—until I found **Terri McMillian**. Terri McMillian's black girls weren't exactly girls—they were women. Funny, sexy, black women who embraced their intelligence and success. I was no longer reading about present day black girls who were the sideline acts. The black women in McMillian's books shined bright. I wanted to fall in love like Stella in *Stella Got her Groove Back*. At that point, I hadn't had a groove yet—but if I ever lost it, I definitely knew how to get it back. These women loved and felt the pain of love. I saw my future self in McMillian's characters. I wanted to be them.

I found black girls that inspired my dreams, but they did little to help me deal with the reality of my present. I was still dealing with the loss of my dad—and there was that ever-present threat of violence.

### Reading Through Tragedy

A year after the death of my father, I met a guy and fell in love. He was a couple hundred years too old for me and long dead, but his world was like

my world. Tragic with a bit of comedy thrown in. Sometimes he could be complicated, as all guys were. But if you listened carefully, he had a lot to say, and I needed to hear it.

In 9<sup>th</sup> grade, my English teacher made my class keep journals. She told us to write whatever we wanted in it. The entire year I wrote about my dad. At the end of the school year, she pulled me to the side and told me that she loved my journal. She said I sounded a lot like Hamlet. Reading Shakespeare helped me express how I felt about the passing of my father, and I felt myself beginning to heal. But things begin to happen around me even Shakespeare couldn't explain.

What do you read when the children in your neighborhood are dying?

One afternoon, my two brothers and I watched the body of our friend lowered into the ground. Overcome with grief Keenan's knees buckled, and he fell to grass. Reese and I picked him up and held him, forming a circle. Each had an arm around the other. We stood that way for a long time as we cried, repeating over and over again, "We're all we have. We'll always be there for each other."

What do you read when the world doesn't make sense?

A few years later, my mother, Keenan, and I stood at a closed casket. She asked the ministers to open it one last time. I think they were afraid of prolonging the experience for us, because they refused. They didn't understand. Our need to see one last glimpse of Reese was like our need for air. My mother gripped the side of the casket. My brother Keenan and I gripped the side of the casket, too. We felt desperate. We couldn't breathe. We held on until someone grabbed us from behind, and forced us to let go. We each were carried out of the sanctuary

screaming. We never saw Reese's face again.

What do you read when your world has fallen apart?

You read everything, and you read nothing. Nothing that makes sense of your loss. Everything that drowns out the madness of this world until you are numb.

Five months later, when my grandmother died, I was too empty to grieve, but I kept reading.

### A Black Girl Like Me

Nineteen years after the death of my brother Reese, I lay on the couch with my daughter listening to a debut YA novel.

*The Hate U Give* had already sat in the New York Time's Bestseller list for several weeks now, so I expected it to be a good book. I didn't expect to cry the entire time I listened.

**Angie Thomas'** character Starr was the black girl I'd searched for long ago and didn't find.

Like Starr, I too was once that inner city black girl struggling with the internal conflict of my double consciousness—like so many inner city black girls.

When Thomas' characters Starr and Khalil were profiled and stopped by the police, I remembered the countless times I'd been stopped by the police. The hurt, anger, and humiliation from the last time I was racially profiled raced through my mind. It was several years ago. My car was pulled over and searched for drugs with my children in the back seat.

When Thomas' character Khalil was shot by the police officer, I stopped the recording.



Not only did I relive the pain of the death of my brother, but of those that came before and after—so many that I’ve lost count.

During the course of the book, I thought of the fear I have for my own sons, and how I gave my son, Reese, “the talk” after the death of **Tamir Rice**.

And I recalled the night officers came to my door, when I was a teen, after a shooting outside. My brother Reese and I were home, and he’d gone out after we heard the shots. Like Starr feared talking to the cops, I feared Reese telling the officers what he saw. Even when they told us that the kid being transported to the hospital probably wouldn’t make it, my fear for Reese’s safety was greater than my will to do

the right thing. He was braver than me. He told what he saw.

In no particular order, scenes from my life came to me—memories I couldn’t forget. Some, I tried burying long ago.

By the end of the novel, I was exhausted. Mentally fried. My eyes were puffy. My voice was hoarse. My daughter, who’s only known suburban living most of her life, probably didn’t understand why I’d just ruined a good book.

No one could’ve told this story, but someone who’d seen the things I’d seen—who’d shared my lived experiences. As I listened, I thought about poverty, gun violence, police brutality, and race.

I realized that this was not only the book I needed growing up as an inner city black girl reading...

It was the book I needed now.

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**Urania Smith** is an SCBWI-IL Diversity Committee Member, Co-founder of KidLit Nation, and the 2017 We Need Diverse Books Mentorship winner in the picture book category. She lives in Chicago’s South Suburbs with her family.



If you’d like to help combat violence in Chicago, please visit the website [www.helphealchicago.org](http://www.helphealchicago.org). Created by SCBWI-IL’s own **Sara Shacter**, Help Heal Chicago is a database of organizations on the frontlines of Chicago’s inner city gun violence. Help Heal Chicago makes it easier to search for, volunteer your time, or donate to organizations that are making a difference in the lives of Chicago’s children.