

Prairie Wind

Bulletin of the Illinois Chapter of SCBWI

SPRING 2020



illustrator in the spotlight: Sarah Kurpiel

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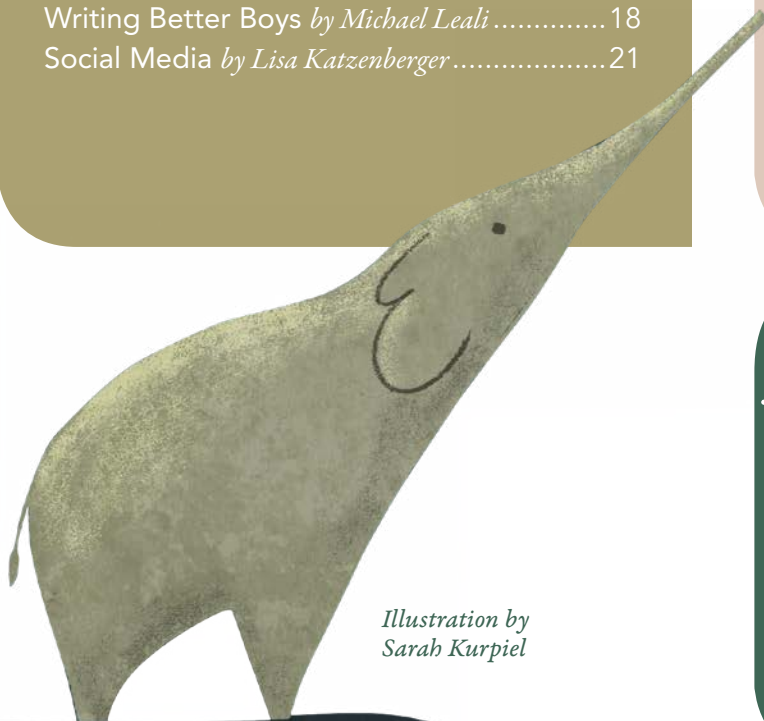
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*Illustration by
Sarah Kurpiel*

In This Issue

by Amy Alznauer

One day last fall, I was staring at the big, unused garden plot in front of my house, wondering how I could make it pretty. Within an hour, I kid you not, there was a knock at my door. A neighbor needed a place to plant her thousand tulip bulbs. Could she use my garden? This morning, so many months later, in a world that is utterly changed, the first bright yellow crop bloomed. I thought I'd share it with you:



I'm also thrilled to share with you a newly designed and truly lovely *Prairie Wind*. Last winter, after a long search, we brought **Brooke O'Neill**, a graphic designer and illustrator from Hickory Hills, Illinois, onto our team. Ever since, she has delighted us with her creative ideas and enthusiasm.

In this issue, we've tried to strike a balance between speaking directly to this pandemic moment and maintaining some sense that life and thought and art are still going on. I hope you will find these columns as inspiring, grounding, moving, and even at times as hilarious as I did.


Our new *Features* section offers an insightful and moving piece, on *Writing Better Boys*, by **Michael Leali**; a *Prairie Wind Retrospective* by **Esther Hershenhorn** (and links to three of Esther's wonderful issues from the 90s!); and finally, much needed and cogent advice on *Using Social Media in Times of Struggle* from **Lisa Katzenberger**.

Gathered in our new *Spotlights* section, we have **illustrator Sarah Kurpiel**, whose gorgeous art also shines on our cover and throughout this issue; **author Rebecca Siegel**, who poignantly and powerfully tells the tale of her new book *To Fly Among the Stars*; and finally, a **poem by Heidi Bee Roemer** and an **illustration by Nashanta Fletcher**, both of which, metaphorically and whimsically, speak to the time, especially as it might be viewed from the eyes of a child.

In our *Columns* section, we bring you two laugh-out-loud funny but also instructive pieces on humor: **Mary Winn Heider's** tips on *writing humor* and **Urania Smith's** annotated *list of subversive children's titles*. And **Carol Coven Grannick** offers us wise and studied *advice for staying sane* during this moment.

Instead of *Writer's Bookshelf*, **Ilana Ostrar** gives us a great personal glimpse into a favorite title from her *Illustrator's Bookshelf*: **James Gurney's** *Imaginative Realism*. And instead of a particular *Shop Around the Corner* we list advice, resources, and a challenge for helping out indie bookstores.

Brian Wilson provides his *Librarian's Take* and links to some of the good work he's been doing while sheltering at home. And finally, **Christine Mapondera-Talley** brings us a personal and incisive look at *Africans in Children's Literature*.

A big thank you goes out to **Kelly Darke** for rounding up the *news* and to **Jenny Wagh** for gathering in our *Season's Crop*. Check out our new *Don't Miss* section for new SCBWI-IL happenings and resources. 

In This Issue

Finally, I want to close with an excerpt from Esther's opening *Prairie Wind* letter from the fall of 1993, for it speaks beautifully to our moment now and its central demand:

E. M. Forster was the first writer to use these two words "Only connect", implying, in *Howard's End*, that a need exists to "gain understanding through the linking of one world with another."

Next *Mary Poppins'* author Pamela Travers borrowed Forster's words for a Library of Congress address, underscoring her belief that to truly write we must connect with our worlds, we must connect with each other, we must connect with ourselves.

[CLICK HERE TO READ THE FULL LETTER](#)

I hope this issue of the *Prairie Wind*, like a sudden bunch of tulips left by a neighbor, offers you just that, connection with our world, with others, and with yourself. And finally, I hope you enjoy reading it as much as we have enjoyed creating it. ✨



This issue of the *Prairie Wind* was brought to you by:

Director **Amy Alznauer**

who joyfully plans and acquires content for each issue

Editor **Pamela Dell**

who expertly tweaks and polishes all of our content

Designer **Brooke O'Neill**

who creatively designs and lays out every page

Advisor **Jenny Wagh**

*who remains our faithful and supportive
Regional Advisor*



Greeting

LOSING SIGHT OF SHORE by Deborah Topolski

An enjoyable vacation is awaiting you on an island.

Late last summer, we packed our dogs in the SUV and headed down to visit family in their small beach town on a post-war, man-made island south of Tampa. Most years, we drive down later in the fall after Prairie Writers' & Illustrators' Day, when the sun is warm but the water holds a definite chop. This time, Gulf waters were calm and warm and beckoning. Perfect conditions to try something I had been wanting to attempt for years—paddleboarding.

Trying something new seemed exciting and a bit of an adventure last year, didn't it? When I towed my paddleboard into waist-high waters for the first time, I couldn't imagine that trying something new would become an everyday necessity by the spring of 2020. Nor that the lessons I learned far from shore that day would help carry me through the challenges to come.



Apparently every nereid has one.

“Man cannot discover new oceans unless he has the courage to lose sight of the shore.”
— André Gide, French Nobel Laureate

One month earlier, at the 48th Annual SCBWI Summer Conference in Los Angeles, I hopped into an elevator to avoid a larger crowd, only to find it was already occupied by another woman.

“Have you ever had a psychic reading?” she asked me.

“No, I haven't,” I replied.

She pointed to my arm. “You see that cuff you're wearing?” It looked like a golden starfish, wrapped around my wrist. “That cuff tells me that your soul is shared with the sea—you're half-human and half sea-spirit.”

Later, on that sparsely populated Gulf beach, as I tethered the paddleboard to my ankle with the velcro strap and walked it into the surf, that woman's comment came back to me. The board was heavier than I'd expected, but I had this. I was gonna be a *natural*. After all, wasn't I half sea-spirit?



A 2019 LA Conference visit to the shore at Venice Beach, CA

HUBRIS

I may not have had fins, but my board did. The sun was high, my board was a 3-hour rental, and my sunglasses were perched on top of my head so I could focus on the task at hand—getting up on the board.

The next hour was a blur of the sandy ocean floor through saltwater-stung eyes. Far from being a nereid from an ancient myth, I needed one. I sacrificed my sunglasses to the gods early on but was able to keep hold of my paddle. And thank goodness for that velcro anklet! Each time, I managed to get up onto the board and perch on my knees, but the process of actually getting to my feet—without falling off—proved more of a challenge. Eventually, by crouching and shifting my weight, paddle grasped at the end of outstretched arms, I steadily rose, using the paddle like a tightrope walker's pole. Standing at last, I raised my paddle overhead and yelled, “I am Gaia!” But I was quickly tossed into the salty depths for my hubris. Was the ocean trying to reclaim this half-sea-spirit after all?

Letting go of the familiar and discovering something new about our work as writers and illustrators is a similar challenge. Have you been contemplating trying a new genre or format? Would that work-in-progress benefit from a rewrite in a different tense or a shift from prose to poetry? If you're an illustrator, would converting from traditional to digital media save you time and costs and free you to work anywhere? The fails are epic and the hits are real, but the time spent is unwasted as you work toward that new ocean.

Greeting

NEW OCEANS

After each fall into the Gulf, I'd get back up on the board, reminding myself that *I wanted this*. Others made paddleboarding look so effortless. But in almost any situation, including within the world of kidlit, it's all too easy to compare yourself to others, thinking that friends or colleagues have gotten up on that "board" faster or more successfully. But no one accomplishes something new without a few falls.

At one point, I rose slowly, steadily, purposefully from a crouch to a standing position, people in the surf cheering me on. But my triumph was short-lived. No sooner had I gotten to my feet than I began worrying whether I could stay up and actually paddle.

I'd had similar feelings the month before when, for the first time, an agent requested the full manuscript of my work in progress, a novel. She had invited me to send it "when it's ready." Initially, I was giddy. It was like getting to my feet for the first time. But as in paddleboarding, the doubts set in. *What made me think I could write an entire novel? How long would the agent wait? What if someone else got there first with a similar theme?*

In both cases, I started getting wobbly. In the ocean, that led to a stunning fall, cracking my knee on the edge of the board. Getting to that place you've always hoped for can be scary, I thought. *Be careful what you wish for!*

Happily, as writers and illustrators we can navigate uncharted waters—especially when we get wobbly and confidence falters—with the help of critique group partners, friends, and SCBWI-IL Google Groups! And even with small successes, remember, you did this—YOU got yourself up on the board! Allow yourself this small victory and take a moment to claim this new ocean for yourself.

COURAGE

Tired by now, I walked my board out of the water to check in with my husband, Brad. My knee hurt, and I was ready to call it a day. But as I slumped over my board to rest, he said, "Give it another chance. You'll feel better ending on a win."

It was much easier to get up on the board this time back in the water. I think it was because I knew now what to expect. Standing upright, I took a stabilizing breath and checked my

posture. I was ready to actually start paddling! Although... the guy at the rental shop had never really gone over what I should do next, and instead of pushing the water I was digging into it, making very little headway. It seemed like I wasn't really going in the direction I was paddling, but rather, moving farther away from shore. How the heck had I gotten all the way out here? Despite my paddling, I'd forgotten all about the current. I had spent a lot of time falling and getting back up on the board without recognizing the unseen force taking me farther and farther away from safety.



CURRENT

Life is full of unseen forces too. Two months later this scary moment on the paddleboard vividly came back to me. The day before I was supposed to kick off Prairie Writers' and Illustrators' Day with a welcome speech, Brad had open-heart surgery—something we'd barely seen coming. Before surgery I'd asked him more than once, "How the heck did we get all the way out here?" We were further away from any shore we had ever known, and I didn't want to leave his side. But he'd been insistent. He wanted me to open the event my friends and I had been planning for a year.

Backstage at PWID, Sara Shacter helped me dress into my shoulder pads and jersey for my *Ready for Kick-Off* speech to open the event. It meant so much to me to have a friend in that moment. The whole PWID team had actually been the first, after my mother-in-law, to hear about Brad's heart condition.

Once I was fully dressed—shoes, socks, padded pants—we laughed as I looked so ridiculous. What was I doing? Brad was going to be okay—but I was about to give a speech after

Greeting

a week during which it seemed my whole world might crash on the shore I was desperate to reach. What was I thinking? But...

He wanted me out there.

I am with friends who want me to succeed.

I got this...breathe.

When panic strikes, consciously stop and take a deep, cleansing breath. Let the breath fill your lungs, make your body solid, fill up the space, and do what comes next. *The only way forward is through.* Whether it's a world pandemic, a medical crisis, or getting that next chapter written or that next spread finished, you need to keep going. Do it scared.

Far from shore that end-of-summer day, I had collected myself and worked to turn my board toward land. I paddled and paddled, becoming increasingly exhausted until I lost my footing and fell in once again. Swimming and treading, I finally got to a place where I could stand and slowly walk the board in. Brad met me halfway, just as he would do through his surgery and recovery. Leaning on one another we walked to shore together.

THE NEW AND NOVEL CORONAVIRUS

These days, it seems we've been *forced* to try something new—a multitude of things! Now, the phrase “new and novel” has become “new with novel coronavirus.” Many days are like the rest but with a new set of challenges—poor internet connection, too many virtual meetings, distance learning, working from home, and being apart from those who depend upon us. We must keep ourselves and our families safe, carve out some financial stability, and focus on mental wellness.

And, find joy in what's constant—that tomorrow is a new day, that the sun will rise and set, and that everyday heroes are working toward a cure. But celebrate this time of change as a moment of reinvention—for yourself, your work, your routine. Dig down and take this opportunity to assess what's in you. On *Downton Abbey*, the family's American grandmother, Martha Levinson, wishes Lord Grantham well as he faces yet another challenge. “Well, let's hope that what's in you will carry you through these times to a safer shore.”

A SAFER SHORE

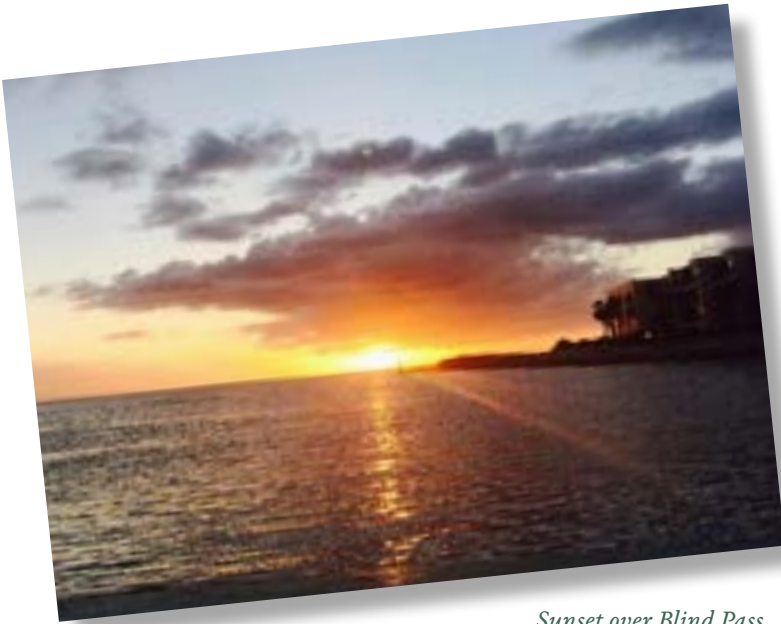
When the San Francisco Bay area was among the first to go into lockdown, I called my longtime illustration critique group partner, who had relocated there, to check on him. He reminded me that as artists we're great little social-distancers! We have an innate mechanism for dealing with uncertainty too. *When will I get my next freelance illustration project, part-time teaching gig, or book deal?* We do a great job of keeping the faith and working toward our futures. This was never more true than now.

It's true our world will never be the same. Many of us will sustain terrible losses and endure real sadness. Take this time to look back. Acknowledge and honor any losses—but release, as if back to the sea, what no longer has value, like a too-small fish. Jettison what isn't working like so much flotsam and jetsam on the beach. Far from being overwhelmed with frustration, you will be overcome by possibilities. Will your critique group continue to meet virtually? What new things have you begun doing in your writing and illustrating that you'll keep in your routine



*My puppies at Paws Playground,
Fort De Soto Park, Pinellas Co, FL*

Greeting



*Sunset over Blind Pass,
Gulf of Mexico*



going forward? What programs and events are more accessible and better when held virtually? What can we do online that, before, we imagined could only be done in person?

For example, this year for the first time, I was able to attend the Bologna Children's Book Fair—virtually! Plus, SCBWI and other literary organizations like Highlights Foundation are offering more free, online programming than ever. Remember to support them and your local indie bookstore with your membership renewal, a small donation, or a purchase if you can. Check out SCBWI-IL's Stay Safe at Home—Together webpages for upcoming programs, free opportunities, and resources for wellness and financial aid. Got a book coming out during the pandemic? Sign up for your free SCBWI-IL Virtual Book Launch Party! And if you've never had the chance to attend the national summer conference due to other commitments and responsibilities, sign up for this year's SCBWI Online Summer Spectacular from July 31 to August 4!

We may be very different when we return to shore. And the shore will have changed too. Governments, institutions, and organizations will uncover the inequities highlighted by this pandemic and work to level the playing field to make resources more accessible to all. Now, too, it's our opportunity as children's book creators to envision a better, safer shore.

In losing sight of the shore we leave all we know, giving us a chance to reassess what we can truly possess and to recognize that which has most value for us. It forces us to square our shoulders, take a breath, and then paddle like hell toward a safer shore we alone can visualize. So when we finally arrive there, it's like a day at the beach where all we've lost is our fear...and a cool pair of cheap sunglasses. ✨

DEBORAH TOPOLSKI dedicates this article to our members who are on the front lines like first responders, medical professionals, teachers, and essential service providers—and all those who might become ill with COVID-19. Thanks to all SCBWI-Illinois members and volunteers who have pulled together to keep this wonderful community vibrant during this most challenging time. It's members like you who make our SCBWI-IL region great!

Illustrator in the Spotlight

SARAH KURPIEL

Are you an illustrator or an author/illustrator?

I'm an author/illustrator but an illustrator foremost.

What is your preferred medium to work in?

I love the possibilities and flexibility of working digitally. I often sketch in pencil, pen, or marker, but I make my final illustrations in Photoshop using a Wacom tablet.

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

I've always loved to draw, but I don't remember ever thinking as a kid: "I want to be an illustrator!" I don't think I even knew it was a job. Drawing was just something I did. A lot. It was—and still is—very relaxing for me, which is probably why I've never stopped. When I was 11, I was diagnosed with a form of Muscular Dystrophy. So by middle school, I was pretty sure I wasn't going to be "an artist," whatever that meant to me at the time. Still, I drew. A lot. One of the best gifts I ever received was a set of Derwent Studio colored pencils, the kind that comes in that special tin box. They felt so professional.


I doodled as a hobby throughout high school and college. Along the way, I checked out many a book from my public library: books about drawing with graphite, ink, and charcoal. I was all about black-and-white art. (I tried calligraphy at one point. It did not go well.) In college, one of my English professors included graphic narratives in his course. This opened a whole new world to me. I remember thinking, "I want to do that."

After getting my bachelor's degree, I went on to get my master's degree in library science and started working in libraries. At that time makerspaces were the latest and greatest thing (and I still think they're pretty great). It was through researching makerspaces that I first learned about graphic tablets. Before then, I knew people drew digitally, but I didn't know how. I bought one for myself right away but couldn't get used to it, so I set it aside. Around the same time, I was cataloging books at one of my part-time library jobs when in came *A Sick Day for Amos McGee* by Philip Stead and illustrated by Erin Stead. Naturally, I stopped cataloging immediately and read the whole thing right then and there (and then cataloged it). There it was again, that feeling: "I want to do that."

After I settled into a full-time library job, I decided now was the time to try that whole digital drawing thing again. It was 2016. This time, I purchased Photoshop, watched a bunch of YouTube how-to videos, read lots of picture books, followed illustrators on social media, and started posting my doodles on Instagram under a pseudonym. I loved participating in Instagram challenges, and one of those challenges helped me find the beginnings of my current style.

In 2018, an illustration account on Instagram shared one of my drawings and my followers tripled overnight. That's how my agents, Allie Levick and Rebecca Sherman at Writers House, found me. And I feel so lucky they did, because I'm not sure I ever would have had the confidence to query an agent. They helped me develop my portfolio and dummy over the course of a few months and then signed me and helped me get my first book deal. My debut picture book, *Lone Wolf*, about a husky who gets mistaken for a wolf so many times that she starts to believe she really is one, will be published by Greenwillow/HarperCollins in May 2020.

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

I'm very much still finding my voice. *Lone Wolf* is about identity, belonging, and family. My next book touches on those same themes, but in a different way. In my personal drawings, I often return to characters interacting with the night sky. Also, as a power wheelchair-user myself, I sometimes draw human characters who use power wheelchairs, such as Avery in *Lone Wolf*. 



Illustrator in the Spotlight

What does your workspace look like?

I have a small desk near a window. On the desk I keep my laptop and drawing tablet, a sketchbook, a lamp, a few pens and pencils, and (simply because I love the color) a Himalayan salt lamp. If I didn't have a cat who loves chomping on leaves, I'd also have a plant! Nearby is a small bookshelf filled with my favorite picture books and a collection of antique books. During the summer, though, I prefer drawing outside.

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

Not all of my personal illustrations start with a clear idea, but in the case of the illustration on the cover of this issue of *Prairie Wind*, I knew what I wanted to draw. First, I made a digital sketch in Photoshop and made sure it would fit into a square so I could share it on Instagram. Next, I brought down the opacity of the sketch and colored in the drawing on subsequent layers. When I talk about enjoying the flexibility of drawing digitally, I'm usually talking about color. I know I can choose colors and not feel absolutely stuck with them later because I can always adjust—which is a good feeling for a chronically indecisive person like me. After I finished the colors, I added texture, highlights, and details and adjusted the colors until it felt right. The little brother peering out the window wasn't part of my original idea. Finally, I hid the sketch layer. And I saved, saved, saved as I went. I've lost more than a few drawings from lack of saving!

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

When I was a kid, my town, Downers Grove, had an ice festival with a professional ice carving competition. You could go and watch artists carve these huge blocks of ice with chainsaws. This memory popped into my head one day last winter and inspired me to draw a series of three pictures. The ice sculptures I drew are, of course, imaginary and probably physically impossible, but it was more about capturing that sense of awe I remember feeling as a kid. ↘



Illustrator in the Spotlight

THE PERSON BEHIND THE PENCIL

Which illustrators were your favorites when you were little?

I was a 90s kid, but many of the books on my shelves were from decades earlier. Of course, I didn't know that at the time. My favorite illustrators were E.H. Shepard, Virginia Lee Burton, Tomie dePaola, and Arnold Lobel—though I didn't think of them as "illustrators." My favorite picture book was contemporary at the time: *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* by Jon Scieszka and illustrated by Lane Smith. My original copy still sits on my bookshelf today.

Which illustrators are your favorites now?

Too many to name! I'll limit myself to just ten: Erin Stead, Christian Robinson, Molly Idle, Oge Mora, Catherine Rayner, Julie Flett, Richard Jones, Jon Klassen, Ian Falconer, and Rebecca Green.

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

Lone Wolf is inspired by my second childhood dog, a Siberian husky named Mikayla, but I made sure to sneak in a tiny illustration of my first childhood dog, a German shorthaired pointer named Sandy.



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

Before 2017, I rarely drew animals. I almost exclusively drew people. I still draw people often; I just haven't been sharing them online.

What inspires you creatively, spiritually, or emotionally?

Nature, animals, my pets, people, the cosmos, feelings, memories, art, color . . . the list goes on!

And, of course, please tell us where we can find you!

Website: sarahkurpiel.com

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

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

SARAH KURPIEL is a librarian and author/illustrator from the Midwest. Her stories are inspired by nature, animals, and everyday life. Sarah has been doodling in the margins of notebooks for as long as she can remember. She started drawing digitally in 2016 and never stopped. Sarah uses a power wheelchair and considers her disability an important part of her identity. Her debut picture book, *Lone Wolf*, will be published by Greenwillow/HarperCollins in May 2020.

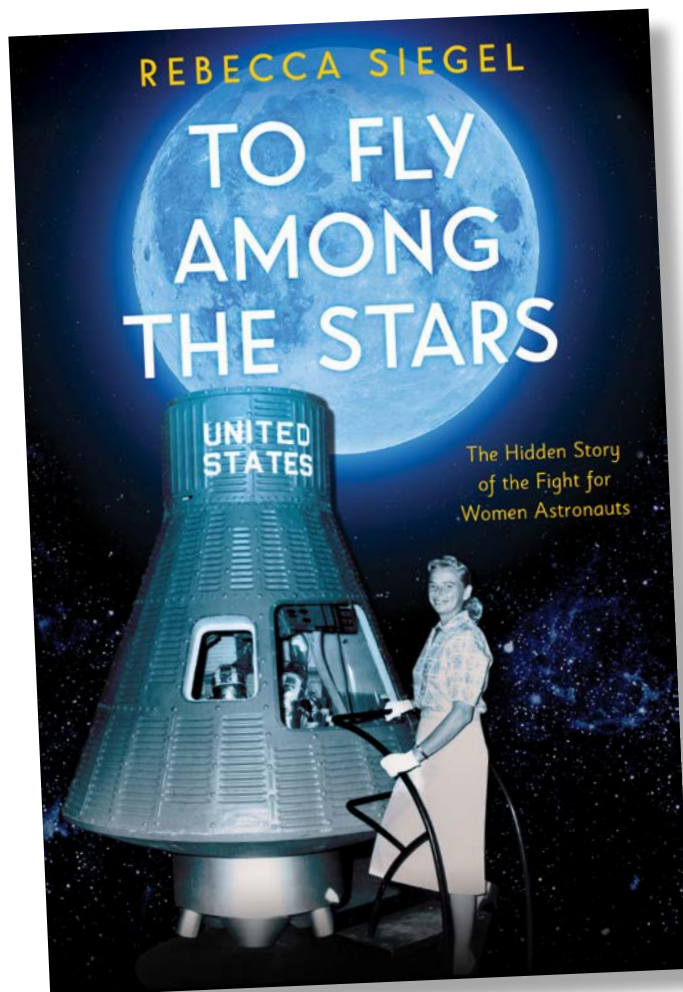


Tales from the Front

I THOUGHT I WAS READY by Rebecca Siegel

I thought I was ready for anything.

In the months leading up to the release of my book *To Fly Among the Stars: The Hidden Story of the Fight for Women Astronauts*, I mentally prepared for countless scenarios: I pictured the book being a raging success, a tepid and unremarkable release, and a humiliating flop. I spent my sleepless nights picturing detailed scenes, some pleasant (what if Terry Gross interviews me on Fresh Air?) and some not (what if my agent drops me out of sheer humiliation?). I imagined getting terrible, scathing reviews. And then I visualized a generation of kids falling in love with the story—kids who would grow up to become astronauts themselves! I allowed my imagination free rein and rode each storyline to the finish. I existed almost entirely inside foggy, invented futures.



As the weeks ticked past, it looked like I might be able to live out some of my more enjoyable fantasies. The early reviews were glowing. And the cultural climate could hardly be better suited for a book about the women pioneers who fought for the chance at spaceflight. It had been just a couple of months since NASA astronauts Jessica Meir and Christina Koch had made history with the first all-women spacewalk. NASA had a shiny new space program called Artemis, named after Apollo's twin sister, which aimed to land the first woman and next man on the moon. Spaceflight seemed primed to achieve gender equality, and I'd written a book about the dawn of that struggle. It was perfect! Serendipity!

My Scholastic publicist began filling my digital calendar with author visits, and I racked my brain for any additional stops I could add to my little tour myself. Podcast interview requests came in. A space museum in Florida asked me to participate in a Women in Space event. I actually cried from excitement.



When launch week finally rolled around, I was hardly able to sit still from the sheer excitement of it all. I landed a couple of fantastic interviews—one on the Scholastic Reads podcast and one live on ABC Chicago. I was getting better publicity than I'd ever dreamed possible. On March 3, 2020, *To Fly Among the Stars* officially published. Friends sent flowers. My phone nearly buzzed itself off my desk. I hosted a night of space trivia at Anderson's Bookshop and tossed astronaut ice cream treats to a packed house. My incredible writing group and I went out for drinks and celebratory snacks. I smiled so hard my face hurt. But still, I struggled to remain present. Over and over I found myself thinking, This is just the beginning. I had a long road ahead, filled with school visits, interviews, and travel. A fantastic tomorrow beckoned.

And then, coronavirus. ➡

Tales from the Front

Of all the futures I'd considered, I'd somehow neglected anything to do with my book coming out on the eve of a global nightmare. I hadn't thought about what it would be like to promote a book when bookstores, schools, and libraries were shuttered. I hadn't considered how silly it would feel to mourn the loss of a book's moment in the spotlight amidst the real horror of a pandemic.

I thought that, in the month after my book's big release, I'd often find myself exhausted in some hotel room, answering emails late into the night, and cramming events into my crowded calendar. I thought I'd be growing comfortable with this new, busy, public life.

Instead, I am in quarantine. I spend my days homeschooling my children and admiring their teachers. My tour—which now seems like the least important thing in the world—has long been canceled. Most of my interviews have been postponed, my school visits rendered impossible.

In my more graceful moments, I can feel thankful for the perspective this pandemic has given us all. We've been reminded of what really matters: our families, our friends, our moments together. But I am not always graceful.

Though I still think about my book every day, my thought patterns have changed. I don't spend much time conjuring its fantastic future anymore. There are more important things to do, like reading with my daughters, baking bread, and offering my physician husband the bravest smile I can muster as he leaves for work each morning.

I live inside each day now, moving from pancake breakfasts to grilled cheese lunches. My calendar still sits behind my coffee maker, but its power has faded. I don't think of it as a beacon anymore. It's just a piece of paper marking time. There's some comfort in that. Relief, too.

I wasn't ready for this. Nobody was. But it won't last. Tomorrow will come. And my book and I will meet you all there when it does. ✨

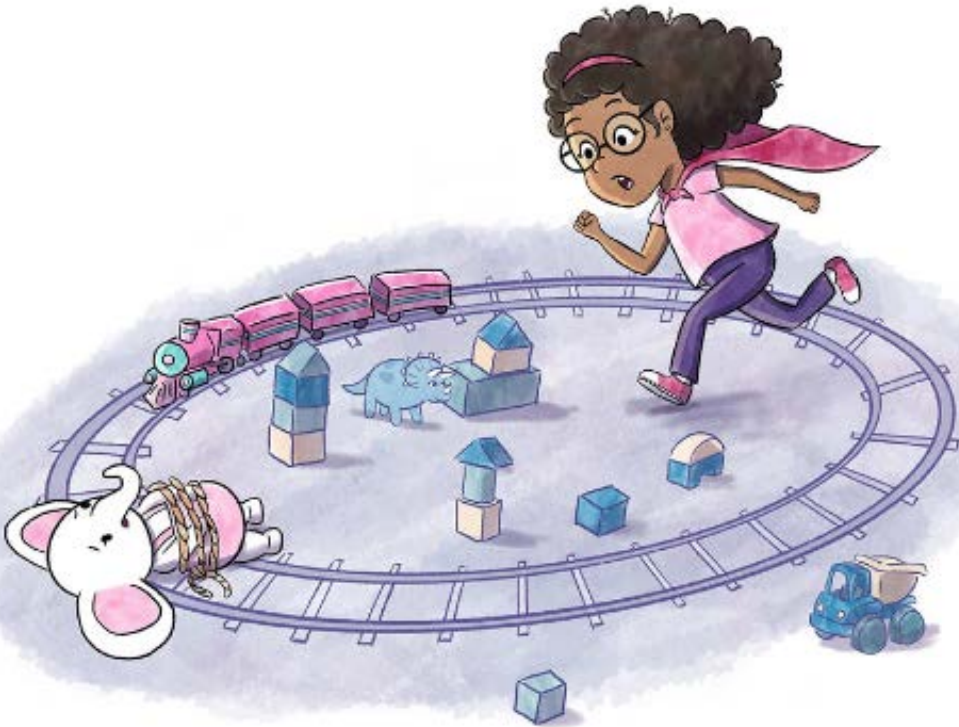


Creative Sparks

MEMBER ART AND POETRY

TO THE RESCUE

*Illustration by
Nashantá Fletcher*



NASHANTÁ FLETCHER is an illustrator and graphic designer, based in the Northwest suburbs of Chicago. She currently works as a graphic designer for cable network WGN America. When she's not at work, she loves to illustrate cute and colorful characters. NaShantá is also a previous SCBWI Draw This illustration contest winner for the theme "Girl Power." www.nashanta.com.

SPRING FLING

*An Action Rhyme by
Heidi Bee Roemer*

Caterpillar,
you're a cutie!
Kick your heels.
Shake your booty.
Chomp green leaves
and lick your lips.
Morph into a chrysalis.
Wiggle out.
Your wings will dry.
Hello, pretty butterfly!

*Illustration by
Brooke O'Neill*



A member of SCBWI-IL since 1994, "HEIDI BEE" launched the first Networks group in Chicago's southside. Since then she's published 9 board books/picture books, and sold well over 450 poems and stories to a variety of children's magazines and anthologies. Her newest picture book is *Peekity Boo—What You Can Do!* (Henry Holt). Heidi's most exciting news of all is that she will become a first-time grandma in May, 2020.

www.steampoweredpoetry.com

Retrospective



THE PRAIRIE WIND: Way Back When...

by Esther Hershenhorn

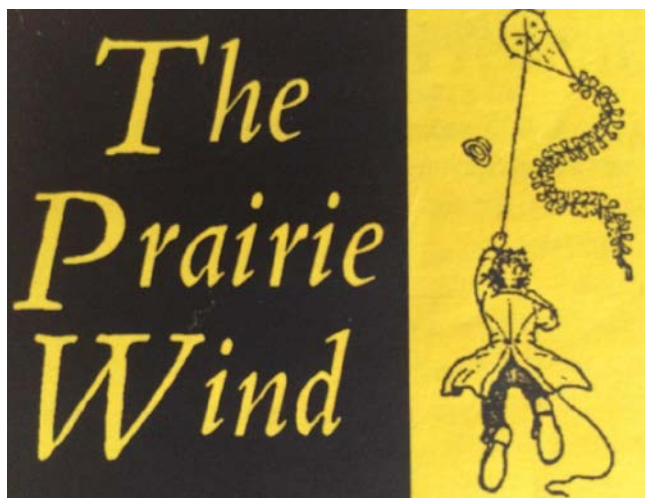
The more things change, the more they stay the same.

This epigram's truth spoke volumes to me as I re-read the early *snail-mailed paper* editions of our venerable newsletter while readying to share its 28-year-long history in this Spring 2020 issue.

Way back when in 1992...there were maybe 250 card-carrying members of what was then simply SCBW scattered across Illinois, mostly in the Chicagoland area, but socially distant and needing to connect. Now, in April 2020 our vibrant, vital chapter boasts close to 1,000 SCBWI members, representing all of Illinois, and here we are again, socially distant, this time because of Covid-19, desperate to connect.

It gladdens my Regional Advisor Emerita's heart that the *Prairie Wind* holds us together to help us get through.

That was our intention when we launched the first issue.



Portable car phones and answering machines were the height of technology then. The very idea of a regional newsletter, of all it could do and all it could be, glimmered. Our chapter's first official Regional Advisor, Sharon Darrow, chose the newsletter's name, playing on the implied flight that SCBW's golden kite represented to members. Our

one-page two-sided issue would sail across the Prairie State, carried by the wind! Illustrator Holly Pribble designed the pages and logo and oversaw the printing. Working from her dining room in Los Angeles, SCBW board member and author Sue Alexander sent out our state's membership labels. A few members helped editor Julie Stackiwicz stamp and mail. And as expected, our chapter began to come together.

When Sharon handed me the Co-Regional Advisor reins in 1993 to share with Phyllis Mandler, editing the newsletter became my responsibility...and, if truth be told, my joy. What better way to come to know our growing membership and help build a caring community of like-minded, like-hearted children's book creators here in Illinois?

ENVISIONING FOR THE FUTURE

Making my way through the first 13 years of *Prairie Wind* issues, as well as 15-years-worth of digital issues in order to chronicle our newsletter's history, had me—joyfully and proudly—reliving our chapter's ever-growing story. (Thanks for the assignment, Amy!)

From the get-go, we had questions.

What did our members *want*?

What did our members *need*?

What did they *wish for*?

The *Prairie Wind*, it turns out, was the perfect vehicle to deliver many of the wants, needs, and wishes our members sought.

Each of the three newsletters per year—Fall, Winter, and Spring—supported a single theme. For instance, “Picture This,” “Telling Our Stories,” “Six Degrees of SCBWI.” And over time, the newsletters grew in size from two to four to eight to twelve and finally to sixteen pages to accommodate the mounting requests for so many different types of content. Claiming their place on the page were seasonal programs, conferences, classes, workshops, and marketing



news. Early on we also came up with columns titled “Inside Illinois Bookstores,” “The Illustrator’s Story,” “Tales from the Front,” “For Your Bookshelf,” and “For Your Interest.” Some of these still remain, in some cases with slightly revised titles.

In every issue we also welcomed new members, sharing their names and even their addresses! We offered “News from National” and always “Congrats & High Fives” to celebrate successes. (I still smile recalling the announcements of Carolyn Crimi’s and Candace Fleming’s first sales.)

Best of all, we affirmed our members and their talents, inviting as many as possible to contribute their words and art. (Lisa Cinelli, Sheila K. Welch, and Carmela Martino always said, “SURE!”) My very first themed message to our members was “Only Connect.” We were the ribbons on the kite tail our logo depicted, carrying the message that if we came together, all of us could fly.

BUILDING COMMUNITY

But stories have turning points, yes? 1995 was our chapter’s—and thus our *Prairie Wind*’s—first, when chapter coordinator Patricia Rae Wolff came up with the brilliant idea of creating *networks* so our members could come together *in person* and *in small groups* geographically!

At first, the *Prairie Wind* listed seven networks across the state: one in Chicago, six in various suburbs of the city, one downstate, and one in northern Illinois. The networks pages grew and took prime placement inside each issue.

Today? Our SCBWI-Illinois website lists 21 networks, which span our state north to south, east to west, with several located smack dab in the middle. And that number includes two illustrator networks and one diversity network as well.

The Fall 1995 table of contents includes a column focused on Illinois critique groups, yet another new offering. And due to our shrinking treasury, we added a *Prairie Wind* subscription form in that issue—three issues/\$10 for members. What a steal! Also, a new name appeared on the masthead beside Newsletter/Design & Production: northwest Indiana SCBWI member Karen Kulinski. (By

then, SCBW had changed its name to SCBWI, adding that all-important “I” for illustrators.) She was in for the long haul, literally and figuratively, until we went digital—driving printed issues across the state border from Griffith so we in Illinois could stamp and mail them.


We were a lucky chapter, and not just because of Karen’s volunteer efforts. Chicago’s and Illinois’ literacy-loving communities and the events that came out of them were there to seed us and feed us. Some of these resources included the faculty of notable colleges that offered degrees in children’s literature and library science; the Printers Row Book Fest; the American Library Association and its publications *Booklist* and *Book Links*. Additionally, the Illinois Center for the Book celebrated local authors and illustrators annually and the Great Lakes Independent Booksellers Association made possible many connections. The American Bookseller’s Association’s annual convention that in time became BookExpo brought publishers, editors, and children’s book creators to town.

Our “Behind the Scenes” and “Fly on the Wall” columns soon claimed *their* space too, so members could “attend” events vicariously by reading about them. Our content increased to include “Illustrator News,” “Inside Illinois Publishers,” and “Illinois Connections.” Oh, and new SCBWI chapters began to be founded around the world!

AND SO IT GOES...

By then the internet was clearly a “thing” and here to stay. Our chapter’s webmaster, Carol Brendler, designed our first website. Jim Danielson oversaw our chapter’s first listserv. We created a Speakers Directory so schools and libraries could find us. Heidi Bee Roemer took on Pat Wolff’s role as chapter coordinator, growing our networks further.

We lived each year’s annual newsletter theme. We were pure “Show-and-Tell,” moving “Onward and Upward.” If Mr. Lincoln were alive, he would have been tipping his stovepipe hat. Until the world turned upside-down on September 11, 2001.

By then the fall issue had already arrived in subscribers’ mailboxes, with its theme “And So It Goes.” So we couldn’t *NOT* keep keepin’ on. We were children’s book creators. 

Retrospective

We did important work, and because of 9/11 it was never more needed. There to remind us, courtesy of as-yet-to-be-published illustrator Larry Day, was our chapter's and newsletter's brand-new logo: our "Little Lincoln Guy," flying a kite tailed with SCBWI-Illinois' name. The noun "brand" says it all because, truly, Larry's Little Lincoln Guy branded our chapter in a gazillion different ways.

He appeared throughout the hard copy issues of the *Prairie Wind*, but also on all sorts of promotional items we were now distributing to Chicago's as well as greater Illinois' professional gatekeepers, such as school visit handbooks; writing tips to help young authors; bookmarks and conference and convention signage. To booksellers, teachers, librarians, and literacy leaders, we became SCBWI-Illinois-identifiable.

GOING DIGITAL

How terrific that Larry's Little Lincoln Guy saw us through our next *HUGE* turning point: 2006, the year the *Prairie Wind* went digital! Kate Hannigan led the march, working tirelessly with our then webmaster and designer Chris Vasilakis to make our newsletter available to all members online. For a Luddite such as I, the move was an eye-opener. Yet it was necessary, timely, and soon proved transformative. Still serving as the chapter's Regional Advisor, I had to admit: Now that we weren't restricted to a finite number of pages we had the freedom to offer our members so much more essential information *beyond* what a limited number of hard copy pages allowed. Now we had further possibilities for members to contribute their know-how, their insights, their experiences and opinions. In other words, going digital allowed for even more affirming and celebratory opportunities to showcase our members' talents and strengths, including Larry Day's continuing Little Lincoln Guy images.

And so it went.

And so it *still* goes.

Our chapter's membership continues to grow. How could the *Prairie Wind* not do the same? Our children's book world continues to change. How could this singular newsletter not reflect that world and change—for the better—right along with it?

There have been so many along the way, too many to mention, who have changed, improved, and updated our *Prairie Wind* so it continues to meet our members' needs.



This current issue, in fact, offers not only a new design but a new team—director Amy Alznauer, editor Pamela Dell, designer Brooke O'Neill, and advisor Jenny Wagh.

And as today's Covid-19 Moment reminds us...*the more things change, the more they stay the same!*

Each digital issue of the *Prairie Wind*, no matter the creators, no matter the variety of content, holds us together to help us get through. Which was our very intention way back when, when we launched the *Prairie Wind* to build our caring SCBWI-Illinois community.

P.S. To the hundreds of members who since 1992 have contributed words and art to our newsletter, and whose names aren't included in this article due to space limitations, I offer my most sincere apologies. You ramped up *Prairie Wind's* velocity and strength, ensuring each issue soared to new heights. I remain ever grateful. ✨

PAST ISSUES OF PRAIRIE WIND

FALL 1993

WINTER 1994

FALL 1994

ESTHER HERSHENHORN proudly serves as the Regional Advisor Emerita of our SCBWI-Illinois Chapter. She authors picture books, poetry and middle grade fiction, teaches adult Writing for Children workshops at the Newberry Library and the University of Chicago's Graham School's Writer's Studio, and coaches writers of all ages to help them tell their stories. To learn more, visit www.estherhershenthorn.com.

Writing Better Boys

WHO HE IS UNDERNEATH THE MASK

by Michael Leali

When I was young, I rarely felt like a “real” boy. Media, society, and family told me, explicitly and implicitly, I should be good at sports, listen to heavy metal, and crush on girls. I was quiet and a loner. Reading was my escape. *The Sound of Music* was my favorite movie. I was a closeted gay boy too ashamed and embarrassed to discuss my feelings, not just about my sexuality, but about me. I never questioned my boyhood; I just didn’t think I was very good at being a boy.

What I wish I’d had back then: books that reflected the boy I was. While they almost certainly existed, I didn’t know about them or they were too few and far between to make me feel seen. I enjoyed the stories I read about boys, but they felt aspirational, as if they were showing me what a boy *should* look like, not what a boy *is*.

As a writer for kids, understanding what it means to write authentic, nuanced boys is at the center of my work. Like so many of my writer friends, I often write for the child I once was. Unpacking what it means to be a boy can be uncomfortable, but I believe it’s necessary work, for us and our readers, and will ultimately strengthen the stories we tell.

I want to share one approach I use, which I call “unmasking.” Boys are first and foremost people, and at the heart of every story is a broken person in need of fixing. When it comes to writing boys, we need to figure out, in whatever capacity is appropriate for our stories, how our boy characters’ understanding of their gender factors into their brokenness. As Jessica Brody says in *Save the Cat! Writes A Novel*, “It’s your job to not only diagnose the real problem in your hero’s life, but cure it as well.”

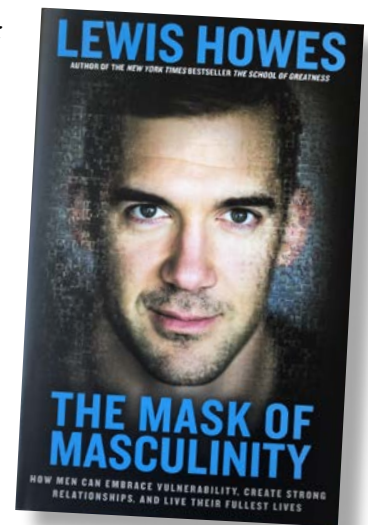
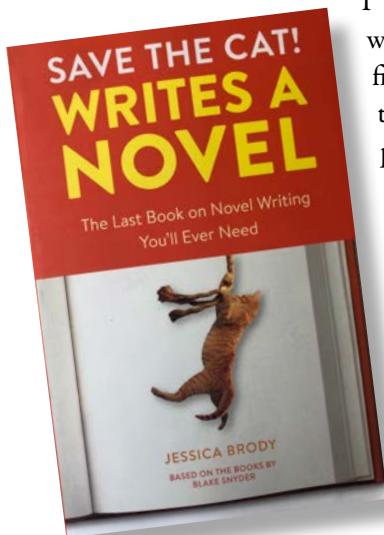
Yikes! That’s a lot of pressure but think about how the stories you read as a child shaped your understanding of self. That’s probably one of the main reasons we got into the storytelling business in the first place, isn’t it? We want to affect someone with our stories as deeply as we were once affected.

Central to writing transformative stories is crafting authentic and nuanced characters. Buried in our characters is what Brody calls a “shard of glass...a psychological wound that has been festering beneath the surface of your hero for a long time. While I suspect very few of us have degrees in psychology (I do not), we need to uncover our boys’ often wounded relationship with their masculinity to create characters that breathe on the page.

I’m sure he didn’t intend for it to become a craft book, but Lewis Howes’s *The Mask of Masculinity* has become a quintessential text for how I analyze and write boys. To very briefly summarize, Howes identifies nine “masks” most boys (and men) wear to avoid the vulnerable and often painful work of living life.

His nine masks are:

- The Stoic Mask (“Pain doesn’t effect me.”)
- The Athlete Mask (“I am my touchdown.”)
- The Material Mask (“My stuff is my worth.”)
- The Sexual Mask (“I’m king of the bedroom.”)
- The Aggressive Mask (“What? You wanna fight?”)
- The Joker Mask (“But have you heard the one about...?”)
- The Invincible Mask (“I’m not afraid of anything.”)
- The Know-It-All Mask (“Well, actually, darling...”)
- The Alpha Mask (“I’m the pack leader.”) ➡



Writing Better Boys

These masks are often mistaken as a boy's true identity, when they are actually a toxic defense mechanism systemically supported by media, culture, and society. We can use Howes's masks for crafting better boys in three steps:

1. **Show:** Show the mask in action. Explore the damage and problems the mask creates for your protagonist.
2. **Reveal:** Reveal the mask to your protagonist. Let him grapple with how this mask is affecting his life.
3. **Unmask:** Remove the mask. Show him he can live a different way.

Now, let's focus on one mask—the Joker Mask—and how it applies to Moby, the protagonist in Chris Crutcher's *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes*. (Beware: spoilers ahead.)

SHOW

Moby doesn't seem to take life too seriously. His Joker Mask appears immediately in the opening lines of the novel: "My dad left when I still had a month to go in the darkroom, and historically when people have tried to figure me out (as in, 'What went wrong?'), they usually conclude that Mom spoiled me; gave me everything I wanted because I had no pappy." Moby refers to his time in utero as being "in the darkroom," a humorous metaphor that draws attention away from the painful fact that Moby's father abandoned him and his mom. This cultivates an emotional distance that makes it safe for Moby to open up. While we're amused by Moby's assertion that his fetal self was like a developing photograph, the severity of his father's abandonment is diminished. Then, Moby takes on a comical, colloquial voice: "...gave me everything I wanted because I had no pappy." Moby becomes a caricature of himself. An actor with space between who he is and the very real, painful event that shaped his understanding of self.

Howes says, "beneath the jokes is often a sadness or some problem. Behind the mask—no matter how funny or entertaining—is a real person." Just because we're writing a better boy, it doesn't mean they are "better" from page one. Show their struggles. Discover how they cope. Pinpoint what

it takes to raise their hackles or go on the defense. Showing the mask in action allows writers (and readers) to work beyond it. What mask (or masks) is your boy hiding behind?

REVEAL

Moby's transformation begins when he discovers no joke can patch up the hurts of his best friend Sarah Byrnes, who has been physically and emotionally abused. Early in the novel Sarah Byrnes goes to a psychiatric hospital to escape her abusive father and Moby is constantly at her side. He continuously tries to reach her, but each time he fails. It isn't until he comes to the following realization that things begin to change:

“In truth, the only reason I don't allow people up close and personal with my emotional self is that I hate to be embarrassed. I can't afford it. I spent years being embarrassed because I was fat and clumsy and afraid. I wanted to be tough like Sarah Byrnes, to stand straight and tall, oblivious to my gut eclipsing my belt buckle, and say, 'Up yours!' But I was paralyzed, so I developed this pretty credible comedy act—I'm the I-Don't-Care-Kid—which is what I assume most other kids do. But I'm not stupid; I believe there is important shit to be dealt with.”

Moby realizes he's been using his "comedy act" to hide his pain. As Brody tells us, a character cannot change until they recognize the shard of glass within themselves. Getting your boy character to acknowledge his mask is the first step in taking it off. What will it take for your boy to finally see the version of himself he's been showing to the world?

UNMASK

Once Moby acknowledges his Joker Mask, he is more assertive, honest, and open. He transitions, not without challenges, from an amiable oaf to an admirable young man because he is able to honestly grapple with his world. Look at how Moby's thinking has changed in this passage:

“So I'm lying here, thinking I may have a girlfriend or something. And you know what scares me?...[U]p until recently my friendship with Ellerby has been a couple of guys loaded up on testosterone yukking it up. When the class is discussing abortion, I can't sit back with no real opinion if I have a girlfriend who's had one.”



Writing Better Boys

Now, Moby chooses not to ignore his discomfort, but confront it head on. He recognizes he “can’t sit back with no real opinion.” He reveals his vulnerability to the person who needs to see it first and foremost: himself. Many boys don’t like to admit they don’t have it all together. A lack of preparedness or answers is viewed as a sign of weakness. But boys need to be able to admit that they are capable of imperfection or need assistance. It’s a sign of strength and an essential part of coming of age we don’t talk enough about. So what is your boy afraid to face? What is he trying to hide?

Here’s one last example of removing the mask. In this emotionally bulldozing moment, Moby confronts Sarah Byrnes:

“Being fat was a choice, even though I didn’t know it at the time. But when I did know it, I was still willing to stay that way so you wouldn’t think I’d get all svelte and leave. That’s how much your friendship meant. I hated being fat, but it was worth it not to lose you. And that has to make you something, at least to me.’ I stop for a breath and realize tears are streaming down both our faces. I grab her and hold her, and though she doesn’t grab me back, once again she doesn’t push away.”

Speaking truth can require the most painful words. To be emotionally honest and vulnerable with the people you love requires courage, strength, and determination. Sarah Byrnes is the definition of tough. Moby’s poignant, hard-hitting words demonstrate a tremendous transformation. And the reaction his words elicit prove his sincerity and effectiveness. They both physically let their guards down, crying and holding each other. Tears and hugs are often seen as weaknesses or exclusive to women. Crutcher proves that way of thinking wrong. There are no two characters stronger than Moby or Sarah Byrnes, and it takes all their strength feel their deepest, darkest truths.

That’s the crux of it, isn’t it? Writing truthfully. Being honest. It took me a long time to recognize my own masks—stoicism, perfectionism, performative optimism—and set them aside. The masks cycle. They are revealed, they come off, they go back on. It’s a never-ending journey of discovering self.

What I’ve learned in all of this is that “writing better boys” really means “writing authentic, nuanced characters that avoid stereotypes and tropes that are damaging, untrue, and misguided.” And you know what? *All* characters deserve to be represented this honestly. Perhaps every identity has something it hides behind. When it comes to boys, it’s our job to reveal their mask for what it is, explore the problematic nature of the mask, and show our characters and our readers how to set those masks aside. This is one small piece of the “writing better boys” puzzle, but I hope that, in some small way, this helps you write your boys and dig deeper into who they really are.

This is by no means a complete list, but here are some titles I believe feature well-rounded, authentic boy characters:

MIDDLE GRADE

- *Ghost Boys* by Jewell Parker Rhodes
- *As Brave As You* by Jason Reynolds
- *Ghost* by Jason Reynolds
- *The Season of Styx Malone* by Kekla Magoon
- *The Parker Inheritance* by Varian Johnson
- *Nowhere Boy* by Katherine Marsh

YOUNG ADULT

- *The Knife of Never Letting Go* by Patrick Ness
- *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* by Benjamin Alire Sáenz
- *Darius the Great Is Not Okay* by Adib Khorram
- *Dig* by A.S. King
- *The Prince and the Dressmaker* by Jen Wang
- *Patron Saints of Nothing* by Randy Ribay
- *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* by Chris Crutcher
- *Calvin* by Martine Leavitt

MICHAEL LEALI is a writer for kids of all ages, including those simply young at heart. Formerly an educator and bookseller, he currently works as a marketing specialist for *Sourcebooks*. He graduated from Vermont College of Fine Arts in July 2019 with an MFA in Writing for Children and Young Adults. Find him on Twitter and Instagram @michaelleali

Social Media

USING SOCIAL MEDIA IN TIMES OF STRUGGLE

by Lisa Katzenberger

Social media can mean lots of different things to authors and illustrators. A place to engage with readers. A confusing land of technology. One more thing to keep track of in our moves-too-fast world. But right now, during a world pandemic, social media can easily be described as a welcoming online environment to keep us all connected.

ONLINE INTERACTION

With social distancing requirements, many people are turning to social media to interact with others. Platforms that have been at times considered by some as too invasive, too political, or too toxic are now flooded with love and support. This rings true especially within the kidlit community.

Authors and illustrators are flocking to Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to offer content for children stuck at home and to parents trying to keep their little ones entertained. Publishers have even lifted copyright restrictions on reading books aloud online.



CONNECTING WITH CHILDREN

Educators and librarians are also using this stay-at-home situation as an opportunity. They're creating videos of themselves reading children's books to their community and finding other entertaining ways to let their students know they're thinking of them.

Southbury Elementary School in Oswego, Illinois, has been posting daily on Facebook to stay connected to their

students. They even brought their "You've Been Caught Reading" program onto Facebook. Students uploaded a picture of themselves reading a book, then Reading Specialist Mrs. Landers took a video as she picked two names from a hat. The selected students will each receive their own copy of a book to keep once school resumes.

WEBINARS AND LIVE VIDEO OPTIONS

An off-shoot of social media are webinars, and there are many available. Writing centers are finding creative ways to use social media during these times as well. The Writing Barn is offering low-cost webinars with agents and editors. SCBWI has created SCBWI Digital, which provides free webinars with authors like Kate Messner.

I asked Cat Galeano, Social Media Manager, Instagram, for The Highlights Foundation to share some of the creative ways they've leveraged social media. She replied, "The Highlights Foundation is all about fostering the kidlit community, learning and growing together. We've been able to take those core and fundamental values and quickly adapt them to an online setting with our wonderful staff and giving creatives. We've been offering up a sampling of free sessions that we are calling the #HFGather. A virtual classroom of sorts led by our staff and faculty discussing anything from meditation, illustration, writing prompts, and now craft talks, with an optional critique add-on where you can have your work reviewed by the webinar leader for a small fee. While the world is at a standstill right now, we're hoping that with our sessions, people will let their creativity flow, even if it's for that short window of time."

Facebook Live has become a popular way to stream read-alouds and it allows interaction through live commenting. The other plus of Facebook Live is that if you post from a Facebook Page (not a personal account), it doesn't require a Facebook account to view. So let your non-Facebook friends know they can still reach you—or view live events happening there that are open to anyone!

Instagram's live capabilities present another avenue authors are taking advantage of to connect with readers. Kids book author Mac Barnett does campy (in the best way) videos in which he reads his own work and brings on guests such as illustrator Christian Robinson. Josh Funk, a picture book

Social Media

author and software engineer, does live read-alouds of his books on Facebook and Instagram and has even brought on a sign language interpreter.



Image-driven Instagram is an extremely popular platform with illustrators, and many have been using this format to showcase how they create their work. Illinois' own Caldecott medalist Matthew Cordell has shared videos demonstrating how he draws characters from a book he illustrated titled *Gone Camping*.

CREATING CONTENT

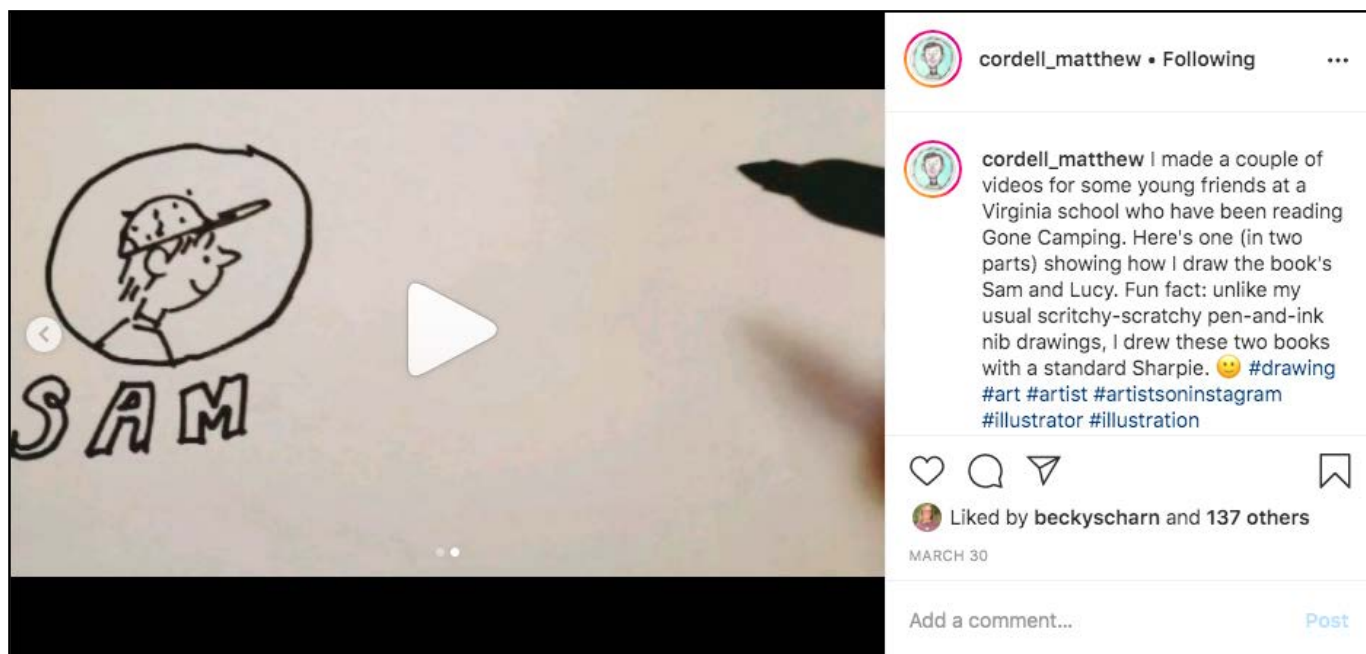
So what can we, as authors and illustrators, do to join in the fun during these times? Right now, as the above examples indicate, what people are looking for on social media is content. Read-alouds, live story times, sharing sketches, illustration tutorials are all great content to provide readers. Do you have an activity kit available that complements your book? Tweet out the link again with a picture of your materials and encourage kids and parents to go online and check it out. Ask them to upload a photo of the completed activity or of their child reading your book and have them tag you. Say hello back and start a conversation—kids will love it!

For pre-published authors, take a look at the hashtag #MSWL on twitter. This is a feed where agents and editors post what's on their Manuscript Wishlist—the types of stories they are looking to represent or buy. #MSWL has seen a resurgence in activity during the pandemic, as agents and editors reflect more on what they're hoping to find — Oftentimes these days, and not surprisingly, they want to see lighter, happier stories land in their inboxes.

TO PROMOTE OR NOT TO PROMOTE?

Authors and illustrators may also wonder if now is the right time to self-promote on social media. Cat Galeano sees the positive in connecting with followers as it “allows your fans to feel close to you and there's less possibility that they'll unfollow and move on. It's important to be mindful of what you're posting because there are even more available eyeballs out there that have the time to browse. So if you have something to share, now would probably be the time.”

Andrea Brown literary agent Jennifer Laughran agrees. In her *Ask the Agent* newsletter she advises, “Keep promoting books and authors you love! If you ARE an author—PLEASE keep talking about your own book and the books of your friends! I promise—we all actually REALLY DO want to hear good news and things that are NOT doom-related! I PROMISE that you are not already talking about books too much!”



Social Media

SUPPORTING OTHERS

But using social media is still a delicate mix of supporting your work and supporting others. Josh Funk is a great example of sharing one's own work and giving back to the community. As well as his read-alouds, he's also been supporting independent bookstores through the twitter hashtag he created: #IndieBookstorePreorderWeek. On Facebook and twitter, he called for authors with books for pre-order to provide their book's information along with the name of their local independent bookstore. Josh shared this information from his twitter account to his 22, 000 followers.

"Independent bookstores are a critical part of the publishing pipeline and it's important to support them so they make it through this crisis as healthy as possible," Josh says. "By *preordering* books from independent bookstores, you're ensuring they stay funded and functional NOW, even if you'll get the book later, once things (hopefully) veer more toward normalcy."

THE FUTURE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

What will normalcy look like in the future? It's too hard to predict. But I do believe that the new ways we've found to connect with readers and the kidlit community these days can provide a great foundation for our future. Social media is constantly changing, and this is a great time to look at the positives of this form of communication and join in the fun.

And fun is what social media should be about. These are overwhelming times. If digging into social media doesn't feel right at the moment, it's okay to take a break. It will be there when you're ready to return. But if you're looking for ways to connect, remember to do what makes you—and only you—happy and comfortable. Stick with a single platform that's your favorite. Post pictures of books you're reading. Cuddle up on the couch and listen to a story from your favorite author. Do whatever works to help you get through these times when so many people are struggling. ✨



LISA KATZENBERGER is the Social Media Coordinator for SCBWI-Illinois and the author of the picture book *National Regular Average Ordinary Day*.

You can find her on Twitter as @FictionCity or Instagram as @lisakatz17.

Voices of Change

AFRICANS IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

by Christine Mapondera-Talley



It's been 20 years since I left my home country of Zimbabwe. As a 16-year-old, I had a very "whatever" attitude about my transition. Not scared, not worried, but excited to a degree. Having previously spent four years in boarding school, it felt like another chapter in my life, where I would get to escape the authority of my parents and maybe have a boyfriend.

As I settled into my new life in Houston, Texas, I began to make new friends. Each time someone asked about my origins I proudly stated, "I am Zimbabwean." Sometimes the question was, "Are you African?" My response in those situations came with slight hesitation. Nevertheless, I would confirm that, yes, I was indeed African and I'd also state that I was from Zimbabwe. I couldn't figure out what felt awkward about being asked whether I was African. After all, it was true. So I decided I'd go with the flow.

I gravitated naturally toward students from other African countries—Liberia, Cameroon, Nigeria, Eritrea, etc. There was something comforting about my time with them. I found we had so much in common culturally. Growing up, I really enjoyed playing geography games, so meeting people from those countries, who had grown up in those capital cities I had memorized, was even more thrilling. I saw in them people who loved their countries and were homesick just like I finally was, and yet they were so disciplined and committed to their studies for fear of disappointing their families.

MY INCREASING DISCOMFORT

One puzzling thing were the images of Africans I saw on TV. Back then it seemed like 100 percent of the images showed people who were walking in circles in desperate search for food, half-clothed children with flies lingering on their tiny malnourished bodies, women carrying buckets of water and walking mile upon mile to reach their destination. For only one dollar a day you could save a child by providing food, shelter, and an education. The images were so depressing and so one-sided. I wasn't brought up in a wealthy family by any means, but I had never seen so many helpless Africans. I remember feeling agitated each time any promotional program like "Save the Children" came on, so much so that I would instantly change the channel.

Over time, I became increasingly uncomfortable when the question of me being African came up. I grew tired of explaining that my family back home was fine and safe from any imaginary wars, and why I spoke English so well. I also grew tired of disappointing yet another person who wanted to know if I knew their former coworker from Nigeria named Tunde. Even worse, some would tell me how I was so beautiful and that I didn't even look African. OMG!

It wasn't until recently that I figured out the root of all these misconceptions. Since becoming a mother, I've become acutely aware of the messages my two children receive through mass media and literature. They need truly wholesome messages that aide in their perception of themselves and the people in the world around them. While the conversation about the need for diverse books has been great for the publishing industry and our society as a whole, there's an aspect I feel is often overlooked. That is, the way Africa and/or Africans are often misrepresented or under-represented in books.

POVERTY ISN'T THE WHOLE STORY

When I pick up books to read with my children and possibly sneak in a quick geography reference, I'm often disappointed. The problems range from too many stories that focus on poverty and hardship to generalized references about how amazing Africa is. We should all know this by now, but maybe it needs to be made more clear: Africa is a continent comprised of 54 separate countries. I can't remember a time where someone stated they were from North America. Rather, they explicitly name their home country as Canada, the United States, or Mexico. But if I hadn't been born and raised in Zimbabwe, I too would feel perpetually sorry for any person from Africa, never mind whatever country they might come from. ↘

Voices of Change

Recently I read a beautiful story about a young girl who had to fetch water daily with her mother, so the two of them spent most of their day trying to complete this task. While I enjoyed the writing and the gorgeous illustrations, I cannot see myself picking up another book like that anytime soon.

Yes, these stories matter. However, they show children only one side of what an African person or family looks like. Stories about escaping war and life in a refugee camp get more attention from publishers than stories about a child like me, who grew up with two parents in a middle class family. A girl like me, who spent most of her early childhood with grandparents who would be considered living near the poverty line by American standards and yet I experienced the richest and happiest times with them in Zimbabwe.

Some people believe there's widespread poverty on the African continent, which to them justifies the focus on publishing these stories specifically. But who defines whose poverty? And who defines whose happiness? Well-meaning westerners perpetuate the idea that Africans need so much help and that groups of volunteers should be in constant rotation to save them. This in turn leads to a narrative about Africa and Africans from only one vantage point: It's a place with beautiful landscapes and the kind of people who always need food, running water, and electricity.

BUILDING CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE

I would like to see Africans portrayed in all their many different aspects. Better yet I'd like to see them being referred to by their nationality. It's respectful and doesn't strip people of their pride and dignity. Of course if you're doing something life-changing for a poor child in a small Zimbabwean village, yes, do share the good news. But please do not say you're helping poor little African children. Recognize them as individuals with a specific national identity.

When you write stories about an African jungle, please tell us where the jungle is. If it's a deep tropical rainforest in the Congo, make that clear. Do not let readers imagine the entire continent of Africa (which might as well be considered, though erroneously, a single country at that point) as one vast jungle. Our young readers are counting on us to entertain and enlighten them with our stories. I hope

someday my kids and their friends will see collections of stories set in a Kenyan high school, a suburban playground somewhere in Egypt, a small town in Zimbabwe, or a beach town in Ghana. Certainly these books will be the windows we all need in order for us to become culturally intelligent. ★



CHRISTINE MAPONDERA-TALLEY is the author of *Makanaka's World*, a picture book series designed to teach young children about our world cultures, geography, and language in a fun and engaging way. Christine was born in Chinhoyi, Zimbabwe, and now resides in Chicago with her husband and two children. She's driven to write books for children that elevate and celebrate the diversity of Africa and the African diaspora. Christine is also co-founder of KidLit Nation, a nonprofit organization whose mission is to help educate and provide opportunities for children's writers and illustrators of color.

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Shops Around the Corner

HOW TO HELP

Instead of profiling a particular shop this time, we wanted to offer a quick guide to helping out our invaluable local partners in this book making, buying, and reading business. So, what follows are a few general DOs and a list of links to Covid-19 announcements provided by previously profiled *Shops Around the Corner* that we've covered as well as a few we hope to get to in the future. And finally, we offer a challenge!

DO ...

- **Order books directly** from independent bookstore websites (See links at right).
- **Order books from [Bookshop.org](https://bookshop.org)**, which gives back to all affiliate independent bookstores.
- **Donate what you can** to [Book Industry Charitable Foundation](https://bookindustrycharitablefoundation.org) or to funds for individual stores (See links at right).
- **Buy sidelines** (all that lovely bookstore merch)! Sidelines make up at least 20 percent of sales. Oren Teicher, the CEO of the American Bookseller's Association, calls them "*an absolutely indispensable piece of the pie*." It often makes the difference between profit and loss.
- **Buy audiobooks** from libro.fm.

WHAT OUR PAST AND FUTURE SHOPS ARE DOING NOW...

They all offer gift cards and various ordering options. But also look out for Go Fund Me campaigns, newsletter signups, and virtual offerings. Here are links to all their Covid-19 pages:

- [Anderson's Bookshops](#)
- [The Book Cellar](#)
- [Booked](#)
- [Bookends & Beginnings](#)
- [Bookie's](#)
- [Harvey's Tales](#)
- [Open Books](#)
- [Women and Children First](#)
- [57th Street Books](#)

Oh, and there are so many others, only a short Google search away!

A ONE-TWO CHALLENGE...

1. Go to one of the above links and order a book or some merch. And better yet, double the local impact by buying a book from our *Prairie Wind* list—[Season's Crop](#).
2. Learn about [Bookshop.org](https://bookshop.org), libro.fm, and [Book Industry Charitable Foundation](https://bookindustrycharitablefoundation.org).

Illustration by
Sarah Kurpiel

A Librarian's Take

by Amy Alznauer

Our hope for this column is to have Read Local ambassadors interview librarians from all over Chicago and the entire state in order to offer insights on the children's book industry from a librarian's perspective. Our objective is always to choose a different library each time. However, our originally planned pairing of author-interviewer and librarian fell through this time, so at the last minute I reached out to children's librarian Brian Wilson of the Evanston Public Library, who kindly agreed to answer these questions. Mr. Brian, as the children call him, has been on the Caldecott Committee in the past, was just chosen to chair the 2022 Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC) Legacy committee, and is an all-around wonderful guy.



Photo Credit:
Sam Schumacher

In what ways are you working as a librarian from home?

I have been working on several projects. I have created eight fairly extensive online bibliographies for our library's website, two of which list titles patrons can download in ebook form from a service called Hoopla ([for younger readers](#), [for older readers](#)), and the other six celebrate award-winning titles (lists [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#), [6](#)). I've also worked on ordering materials. Thankfully many of the review journals have temporarily unlocked their reviews so I can access them online. (We usually rely on print versions at work.) I have recorded some quick videos for our YouTube channel of me doing some songs I usually perform in my preschool storytimes. I have attended webinars on everything from upcoming middle grade titles to battling misinformation during the COVID-19 age. I have been researching how to offer more programs virtually—everything from full-length preschool storytimes to book discussion groups for older children. We have also worked as a team to locate and promote sites that offer educational materials, thespians reading picture books, and other topics. I have been incredibly busy—there is a lot to do!

How are you staying on top of new children's books?

The aforementioned review journals help quite a bit. Plus, I started firing up my NetGalley account (which allows me to

access ebooks of upcoming titles) and I have tried reading some of the more intriguing and acclaimed titles. Our library (Evanston Public Library) has an annual "101 Great Books for Children" list and I'm on that committee, so I'm trying my best to stay on top of it all. Hoopla is a fabulous site that allows access to new titles in ebook form. I also visit publisher sites and look at online catalogs. In terms of upcoming picture books, I must give a shout-out to the indefatigable Dylan Teut, whose blog Reading With Mr. Teut (also titled Mile High Reading) provides an ongoing display of these books' covers.

Do you have any concerns for your career and your library in the future and if so which is your biggest?

I have been impressed with the way people in the field have been looking out for each other, offering information and advice, reminding each other that we are all here for each other. We want to provide access to information and great materials and we also want to engage our communities with songs, books, and activities. The biggest challenge? For me, learning new technology, and seemingly simple things like how to light a [video of me singing a storytime favorite](#) when the lighting in my apartment isn't the greatest. It's tapping into a whole new skill set in order to remain connected. ★

Inside Story

EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE IN THE TIME OF CORONA

by Carol Coven Grannick

My husband and I began sheltering in place when we returned from New York City on March 2. It was clear to us that this would be the wisest course of action for the COVID-19 pandemic.

NAVIGATING THE UNKNOWN

Other than watching the news and waiting for glimpses of Dr. Fauci, I scratched out my usual phrases and half-complete thoughts that would gradually evolve into my *Prairie Wind* column. I allowed myself to unfold gently into being home all day, as if paddling a canoe into an unknown wilderness.

A short sentence repeatedly appeared in my brain like the words in a broken Magic 8 Ball: *Expect anything and judge nothing.*

I did. I noticed the ebb and flow of varied emotions and greeted them with interest. Beyond the essential daily health and safety requirements (non-negotiable), joyful and meaningful priorities surfaced that I welcomed. The priorities were perfect matches *for me*, and *for me right now*. And I welcomed them with the knowledge that they might change or evolve over the coming weeks or months.

It occurred to me that while this particular adversity was new, the learned skills and strengths I was using—those that created and maintain my emotional resilience—were not. I've been writing about them for decades. These skills may surely be easier to learn during less challenging times, but practicing them now is not a bad idea at all.

Each suggestion below can help you create days that are in sync with your abilities, home situation, and meaningful priorities. One day at a time.

A FEW TIPS FOR BUILDING AND MAINTAINING EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE IN THE TIME OF CORONA

CHECK IN WITH YOURSELF FREQUENTLY ABOUT YOUR THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS

- **Notice, Don't Judge.** Thoughts and feelings do not have moral equivalence. They simply exist. They are interesting. When you accept whatever feelings you have without judging them, your brain enables you to be more flexible and to problem-solve more easily.
- **Expect Anything.** Each day, and sometimes each hour of the day, can feel different. Plan a schedule *if that works for you* but expect disruption as well as wonderful surprises. Aim for flexibility, even if that hasn't come naturally to you before now—*now* is a great time to practice. *Make it as easy as possible* to accomplish whatever *you want* to accomplish (rather than what others say you “should” be doing). ↘



CREATE AS MUCH POSITIVE EMOTION AS POSSIBLE

- **Check your language**—focusing on *here and now* (vs. how am I going to handle 30-60-90 days of this?), on what you *can control* (vs. whatever is out of your control), and on the *external cause* of our social isolation (i.e., the coronavirus) (vs. why did this happen to me?). Your brain reacts differently to optimistic vs. pessimistic language.
- **Make your daily priorities things that have meaning for you.** Rather than wondering “what to do,” think about *how you’d like to feel* and what kind of activities will lead to that feeling. This includes comforting and calming yourself when needed—the trick here is to find something that comforts and calms without you yelling at yourself about it afterwards. *Keep your mind open to surprises about anything and everything (within the confines of home) that might meet your needs on any particular day.* Something old? Something new? Your regular work? A beautiful photo?
- **Rely on your strengths** while respecting (without judgment) your vulnerabilities. If you don’t have a sense of your strengths, or you feel you’ve lost sight of them, try taking this survey: authentic happiness.sas.upenn.edu/testcenter

FIND AND MAKE MEANING IN CONNECTIONS

- **Connect with people in ways that leave you feeling emotionally nourished.** Moderate your online involvement with friends, colleagues, community as it serves your particular needs.
- **Connect with the outside** in a safe and distant-from-others way. Your brain needs and loves it.
- **Reach out for help if you need help:** community/state-wide resources, a friend, colleague, clergyperson, etc. Let someone know you need help. We are all at home.
- **Keep others in mind.** Although your own basic shelter and food needs may be met, many people are in dire straits. Do what you can to provide monetary donations, food, and/or equipment to help those in need.

With wishes for safety and health for all, comfort in loss, connection in our isolation, and the freedom to survive and even thrive in this difficult time. 🌟



“Morning”
by Darcy Day Zoells



CAROL COVEN GRANNICK is an author, poet, and chronicler. Her middle grade novel in verse, *REENT’S TURN*, is an #ownvoices #bodypositive story that debuts from Regal House Publishing/Fitzroy Books on September 13, 2020. Her children’s fiction and poetry has appeared and is forthcoming in *Cricket*, *Ladybug*, *Babybug*, *Highlights*, *Hello*, and *Hunger Mountain*, and her poetry for adults appears in a variety of literary magazines. To be in touch visit her website at: carolcovengrannick.com.

Illustrator Tips

COLLAGING FOR ILLUSTRATION = FORAGING & ARRANGING = SURPRISING YOURSELF

by Ruth Goring

In 2018–2019 I created a book whose original pages were each a quarter-inch thick: 10×10-inch plywood squares cut for me at Clark-Devon Hardware and 10×10-inch canvas squares ordered from Jerry’s Artarama, an art supply chain. The book had 40 pages, plus cover (11×11 inches) and endpapers. These pages took over my house and it was the happiest work I’ve ever done.



I developed my idiosyncratic style after taking a couple of mosaic workshops. Afterward, at home, I tried making a “mosaic” by gluing ceramic pieces on a painted canvas with no grouting. I liked the effect, which I call open mosaic.

PUTTING IT TOGETHER

Before Beaming Books, my publisher, accepted my proposal for the book that came to be *Picturing God*, I had already been collecting supplies for art that would go beyond typical mosaics: not just glass and ceramic tiles (both Amazon and the local Tiny Pieces shop were great sources for these) but also fabric and braid, acrylic paints, sponges, the E6000 adhesive that my friends and I call The Glue That Sticks as well as plain old Elmer’s Glue, spools of twine, embroidery floss, beads, lengths of wire. Friends sent me broken jewelry, fabric pieces, handmade paper, and, from a potter, ceramic samples.



It was all so inspiring!

My editor was willing to work with me in an unorthodox way. My storyboard consisted of sketched-out squares containing almost no drawings or layout, just a phrase or two noting a particular “God-picture” (Light, Living Water, Bread of Life, etc.) for each spread or short series of spreads. Next I wrote

text, and we revised it as I began to put together art inspired by what I’d written. I glued down the first few spreads—which essentially made them into finished art even before my editor and designer had had a chance to review them! Fortunately, most of these were fine as they were or just needed something added to make them pop.



Final Light image on the verso page, first Water image on the recto. The only change my editor required was to remove sequins from the center of the recto sky, as they would interfere with the text.

However, we soon altered this M.O. to make actual art editing possible: I would assemble collage pieces without gluing, snap a photo, then gather the pieces and stash them in a Ziploc bag. I soon found that indirect morning light on my back porch was best for rendering close-to-true colors in the pics. My editor responded to the photos, which served as references as I reassembled and revised the art, then glued down the individual pieces once we agreed the design was final.

Because the book’s text provides meditative moments rather than the typical telling of a story, the art needed to help move the reader along in subtle ways. To accomplish this, I ran a border along the bottom of each spread, which ultimately resolved into the Way (path) of the final spread. Similarly, I positioned many of the human characters facing or moving toward the right. ➡



PRACTICAL BITS

A note on glue: E6000 needs to be used with good ventilation, and it sticks stubbornly to one's fingertips. So I used Elmer's whenever possible. For example, fabric doesn't need a powerful adhesive to stick to wood.

Speaking of fabric: Some kinds retain glue spots, while others dry out perfectly. Cotton works better than thin synthetics. The fabric I used for the top and bottom dunes in the desert spread (God as a Rock) spotted badly. I solved this little setback simply by painting over it. Of course I should have tested it before gluing, but I'm not known for my patience.



The desert scene in process.

I used tiles and round glass “gems” to form human figures shown in the distance, but eventually I figured out that cardboard would be best for closer-up humans. Wanting braided hair for one child, I ended up gluing lengths of black twine between cardboard circles, setting a weight on this “sandwich” to get a firm attachment as it dried, then creating the braids. Fabric from discarded clothing served as her cap. For curly hair, I wrapped black twine around mosaic tools, soaked them thoroughly in a thin flour paste, and let them dry.



CHALLENGES AND FINISHING TOUCHES

My most challenging page was the Mother Hen. First I used small tile pieces to make a hen brooding in a nest, but she looked truly demented—I laughed and laughed. Next I tried embroidering a fabric shape, stuffing it, and adding adorable pale yellow chicks running across the page toward her. My editor said this was too “crafty,” which I understood as too cute. I needed a powerful hen image as a model.

Googling finally took me to a remarkable piece of mosaic art on the wall of a Franciscan church on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. I was gobsmacked. I could adapt her classical form to make her a more familiar kind of chicken while still maintaining her muscular, protective pose. As I sorted and broke white and brown abalone tiles and ordinary cream and white tiles, I studied the way her wings were constructed and the shading that gave her body dimensionality.

Then I made her.

She's my editor's favorite image in the book. ↘



Illustrator Tips

For the final photography, I hired Michael Bracey, a skilled photographer friend, and spent a couple of days at his home watching him shoot the pages and then clean them up with Lightroom (a photo-editing program). And since I haven't yet developed my digital art skills, the Beaming Books designer chose the font and laid out the text as well as adjusting color here and there.

At times as I worked, what I was creating surprised me, even stirred something deep inside. I have no tips to offer to conjure up this experience! But maybe it's happened to you: You're engrossed in crafting art you hope will speak to children, and suddenly it speaks right back to you. ✨

RUTH GORING'S author-illustrator debut, *Picturing God* (Beaming Books, 2019), was named a Junior Library Guild Gold Standard Selection. She's also the author of *Adriana's Angels* and its Spanish version, *Los ángeles de Adriana* (Sparkhouse, 2017), and is working on new fiction, nonfiction, and wordless picture books, some solo, some in collaboration. Her kids are grown up and her only pets are dust bunnies, too many to count.

*God's love pours over us
and never stops.*



THE SECRET* TO WRITING FUNNY** STORIES THAT YOU'LL NEVER SEE COMING***

by Mary Winn Heider

*not a secret **humor is subjective ***very definitely guessable

Early-ish in February, I got a lovely email asking if I'd contribute to this issue. I put it on my calendar and then tended to the other projects that would be due before this essay.

This essay on writing funny stories.

Then we started the year that was March.

I did not feel like I knew how to write funny stories. I barely knew how to write. Maybe this is you, too. I spent March walking around (inside my house, obviously) like a person made entirely of exhaust, just a dirty ghost cloud of worry.

Today, with March in the rearview mirror but no clear path ahead, I'm thinking a lot about how any of us write funny stories when real life still feels brittle and dangerous.

When I feel unmoored, I usually go to structure for help. Structure is healthy for comedy, and there are a lot of specific structural tools we can use to bring out the humor in our stories. For example:

- The mysterious truth that the rhythm of odds is funnier than the rhythm of evens. (Look to our old friends three and five especially!)
- The comedy of juxtaposition. (The Odd Couple would have been considerably less fun if they'd used a roommate app to match points of compatibility.)
- The assorted formulas suggesting that comedy equals pain, time, and/or other people. (Feel free to mix and match, although I expect pain needs to be the constant, because if you end up with only time and other people, you probably get Benjamin Button.)

Those are all useful, structured approaches to bringing out humor. But for the purposes of this column, I'm going to focus on my favorite part of writing funny stories. Surprise!

By which I mean, I want to talk about the element of surprise.

SURPRISE IN STORY

Creating opportunities for meaningful surprise in our stories seems, at first approach, daunting. It has terrific comedic payoff, but it's less of a calculated tactic than the ones I mentioned above. And what if you're a plotter? Maybe you're thinking you don't have room for surprise. I'm going to propose—nay, insist—that it's possible to surprise yourself (and consequently your readers), even when you have meticulously plotted out your story. In fact, you might even have a leg up.

In her craft book *Take Joy: A Book for Writers*, Jane Yolen doesn't strictly consider humor, but she returns several times to the ways that surprise is inextricably already part of our work. She suggests that fiction is "reality surprised," and later, that poetry is "emotion surprised."

Surprise is more than a rush of endorphins; it jolts us into understanding. It's like those videos of babies getting glasses for the first time. Suddenly, we *see*, and whether it's the truth of a situation or simply ourselves, seeing can be wondrous and hilarious.

SURPRISING OURSELVES

So how do we effectively surprise ourselves when we write? It sounds a bit suspicious, like that dreamy thing writers sometimes say, that their characters take over and begin to tell the story *they* want to tell. It sounds like magic. How do we trick that kind of magic into being?

By making sure everybody involved—from your protagonist all the way to your least significant extra—is totally prepared for this trip. (I see you, plotters.)

Heads up: Spoilers don't exactly abound here, but there are a few in the paragraphs below, spread out at respectable lengths, as if they, too, were waiting to enter Trader Joe's.



So much, *so much* of comedy comes from character. A character with a strong point of view sees the world—or thinks they see the world—so clearly. That, much more than wackiness, opens the gates for comedy. But how does thoughtful character development lead to surprise? In a very basic sense, if they aren't us, they won't make the choices we'd make. If we give them real needs and opinions, we'll imbue them with the agency to surprise us in ways that go deep into the bones of our story.

For example, when I was drafting *The Mortification of Fovea Munson*, I originally called my main character “Dinah.” As I got to know her super-surgeon parents, I realized they would never pass up an opportunity to name their kid something medical, which is how she ended up being called Fovea, a Latin anatomical term (and one that Fovea herself loosely translates to “eyeballs”). That single decision—for me, as the author, to take a cue from her parents and understand what *they* would want to name their kid—led me down a long, very eyeball-filled path that I never would have stumbled upon if I'd gone with a name *I'd* have chosen.

I'll add that, for me, this is the work. It rarely happens in that sought-after state of flow—I have to stop and deliberately think through what my character would do/say/want. It doesn't always feel easy. But it's through this work that my stories surprise me, and where, down the line, they have the potential to surprise readers. There's an absent character in *Fovea*, and I'd written nearly the whole story before I realized where he was—and figured it out because I finally asked myself where he would *want* to be. It's such a simple question, but it's one of the biggest surprises of the book.

SURPRISE THROUGH WORLD BUILDING

The world of our story is also a character, and it, too, can throw obstacles or answers at us from time to time.

One of my favorite examples of this is in the climactic moment in the short story “One Hot Mess” by Carmen Agra Deedy, from the anthology *Funny Girl*.

Deedy expertly sets up life with her germaphobic mother (for whom I now have deep empathy). Her mother's technique for cleaning every new apartment they live in includes setting aflame (and thereby sterilizing) each new bathtub.

They move, and the cleaning begins. We are *so ready* for the big show, the moment of shock and awe when the ceramic tub lights up and then burns itself out. Deedy leads us in with the ritual of the preparation, and then the gorgeous rhythm of the languorous penultimate moment.

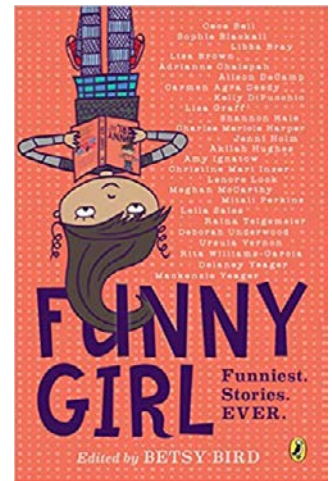
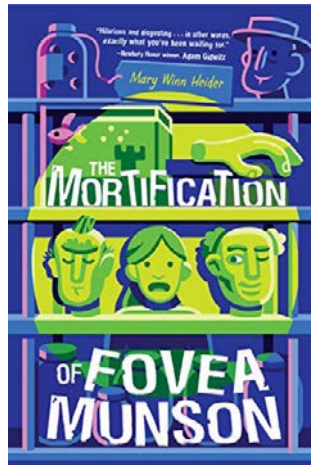
“...all eyes watched as she struck the match and tossed it in a perfect flaming arc into the bathtub. The brand-spanking-new FIBERGLASS bathtub. The thing lit up like kerosene-soaked kindling.”

Reader, I screamed.

That bathtub had its own agenda.

That's the key to surprise, right there. We tell the story we want to tell, but we populate it with a living world and characters who have their own agendas. We give our stories that respect, and they will surprise us. They will bring us joy and they make us more resilient, and I suspect we could all use both of those right now. ★

MARY WINN HEIDER is the author of *The Mortification of Fovea Munson*, as well as the forthcoming middle grade novel *The Losers at the Center of the Galaxy* (Little, Brown 2021) and the picture book *The Unicorns Who Saved Christmas* (Running Press 2020). She has an MFA from the Vermont School of Fine Arts and lives in Chicago, where she moonlights for the Mystery League.



Illustrator's Bookshelf



IMAGINATIVE REALISM: HOW TO PAINT WHAT DOESN'T EXIST by James Gurney

Reviewed by Ilana Ostrar

I first discovered James Gurney's artwork when my mom brought home *Dinotopia*, a gorgeous picture book Gurney had written and illustrated. I was hooked. What's not to like about dinosaurs and humans who survive on a hidden island together? This wasn't *Jurassic Park*, where dinosaurs ate humans and fear reigned. This was a magical place full of peace. The words helped, but the illustrations were what pulled me in. It was then, at probably around seven years old, that I decided I wanted to be an author-illustrator.

Fast forward and I'm just out of college. I have a shiny new fine arts degree after taking all the writing courses I could, along with a wide range of art courses. I'm totally unprepared for the real world, but then I discover my own hidden world: SCBWI (thank you, Patricia Polacco). As I became familiar with the organization I began to learn more about writing and publication than I ever had in school. But the illustration side of things still seemed a bit of a mystery, mostly because art is completely subjective.

Still inspired by *Dinotopia*, I decided to write to Gurney for advice and to tell him how amazing he was. I sent my letter in a neon green envelope to make sure it wouldn't get lost in his pile of fan mail. He sent me back a post card and his first sentence was, "Wow! Real mail!" I'd forgotten we were living in the email era.

ANOTHER DISCOVERY

Gurney's website, which listed his P.O. box for fan mail, also listed all his books. That's where I discovered his second gem: *Imaginative Realism: How to Paint What Doesn't Exist*.

Although published in 2009, *Imaginative Realism* is as relevant and informative today as it was when it was first released. The book isn't a how-to, although Gurney does touch on specific techniques. It's more a way of thinking, of seeing the world and imagining to create a realistic rendering. It opened my own imagination to thinking and creating beyond anything I'd learned in the past.

As Gurney writes in the book's introduction, *Imaginative Realism* "is intended not only for artists interested in fantasy and science fiction but also for anyone who wants to recreate history, visualize extinct wildlife, or simply tell a story with a picture." Although Gurney mostly works in traditional media

such as oil paints, graphite pencils, charcoal, and pens, even an artist who primarily works in digital media can benefit from this book. And writers who have no intention of being visual artists will find *Imaginative Realism* helpful for visualizing scenes and having a deeper understanding of how an illustrator thinks.



AN IN-DEPTH LOOK

The book first looks back in history at how imaginative realism has been applied in various artistic traditions. From there it turns to the all-important basics of creating a studio space; drawing and painting media; sketching from imagination and real life; and storyboarding ideas.

Next, Gurney's focus gets a bit deeper, with an in-depth look at how he thinks about and sets up real-life imagery for possible illustrations. In this section he includes chapters on History and Archeology; People; Dinosaurs; Creatures and Aliens; Architecture; Vehicles; and Plein-Air (painting outdoors) Studies. I've found that all of these can help as references to imagined items. Full of great advice, sample images, and funny anecdotes from his experiences, these chapters both inform and entertain.

From there Gurney goes on to explain in more depth about composition, including the basics such as silhouette, chiaroscuro (light and dark), and shape placement. Especially worth noting, he even delves into two compositional aspects that illustrators rarely think about—eye tracking and heatmaps, or graphic representations of data that use colors to represent values. ↘

WHAT STUDIES SHOW

"Eye-tracking scanpath studies show how individual viewers actually explore an image. This information can be valuable... because it allows us to test our assumptions about how the design of a picture influences the way people perceive it," Gurney writes. Most artists learn in general about how to set up a composition to catch and direct the viewer's eye. But computer software for eye-tracking provides a different perspective, showing that although most viewers look at certain specific points throughout the duration of their viewing, their individual eyes don't necessarily follow the path the artist has specifically intended them to.

Computer software for heatmaps show something similar. According to Gurney, "By aggregating the eye-movement data from a group of test subjects, we...learn where most people look in a given picture." The heatmap studies showed that most people's eyes are drawn first to the main subject of the work and then to the surroundings. Which parts of the surroundings depends on the image. For example, in an illustration of a carnivorous dinosaur and a human in camouflage hiding from the dinosaur, after people noticed the dinosaur and the human, they looked at other objects or areas in the painting that might also be hiding something or pose another threat.

"The lesson to take away from these studies," Gurney concludes, "is that abstract elements play a role in influencing where viewers look in a picture but the human narrative and narrative elements are far more powerful...The job of the artist in composing narrative pictures is to use abstract tools to reinforce the viewer's natural desire to seek out a face and a story."

GET A JOB!

After touching on procedure in the second-to-last chapter, Gurney finishes with career possibilities. This section is interesting because it's something that's rarely addressed in books or art classes or even in college art or illustration classes aimed at those majoring in these fields. Either that or I went to the wrong school. Gurney highlights so many applications for art that few people specifically think about or, if they do, it's unlikely they know how to break into these fields. Trust me, I speak from experience.

For anyone not sure where their art might take them professionally, Gurney covers several possibilities. He starts with paperback cover design and illustration, giving some detail and direction about that market. From there he moves on to movie design, including storyboarding, character and creature design, production design, and matte painting. Finally, he covers video game design, toy design, and theme park design. Although there are many more career paths for artists that he doesn't touch on, it's nice to have a few detailed.

This book makes for an easy read, especially with the humor Gurney throws in. And who knows? Whether you're an artist or a writer, you might learn one small thing that helps you look at creating art, visual or written, with a whole new imagination. But you'll probably come away with much more from this generous, insightful author. "There is no line between fine art and illustration; there is no high or low art," Gurney assures us. "There is only art, and it comes in many forms." ★



ILANA OSTRAR is an artist, creator, and writer. She has a weakness for paper crafting supplies and a passion for dinosaurs (excluding velociraptors). She writes picture books, chapter books, MG, YA, and graphic novels in all genres. She also works as a nanny and is an amateur dog trainer, which continually gives her inspiration. Now all she has to figure out is how to speed up the creative process to get all her ideas on paper.

Mentor Texts

DELVING INTO YOUR DARK AND FUNNY SIDE *by Urania Smith*

When we are in crisis, one of the many things to suffer is our creativity. I, for one, haven't written much since sheltering in place and I've barely slept. My mind is constantly on the people I know who are battling COVID-19 and worrying about who's next. One thing that hasn't suffered through this time, though, is my sense of humor. I have clung to it as I clung to my last hair weave. Eventually, I had to let it go (the weave, not my sense of humor). Now I'm rocking a natural. But Facebook and Google have discovered I'm Black and without a stylist in the middle of a pandemic—and I've been met with a barrage of natural hair products to last an apocalypse—if this should turn into that.

For me, humor has been a coping mechanism and judging by the amount of coronavirus-related memes and videos on my timelines, I'm not the only one who needs to laugh to keep my sanity. The one million memes of Chicago mayor Lori Lightfoot stalking and yelling for us to stay in the house have had me cracking up for weeks. Still, I find it weird that so many are finding ways to laugh at the serious situation we find ourselves in. When I thought about this the other day, it occurred to me that as a writer of subversive picture books, I'm often looking for ways to find humor in taboo topics.

Subversive picture books overthrow rules and remake what we think is normal. Writers often obscure the lines between what's "good," "bad," and acceptable behavior. There must be the right balance, so I often look at how other writers approach this genre. Fortunately, libraries and bookstores offer scores of subversive books to use as a guide.

When choosing a subversive, humorous book as a mentor text for my own writing, I usually think about the following questions:

1. Is the concept funny?
2. How does the humor in the book work with the subversive theme?
3. What do kids find appealing about the story?
4. Most importantly, why didn't I think of this myself? (The concept is so simple, AHHHH!)

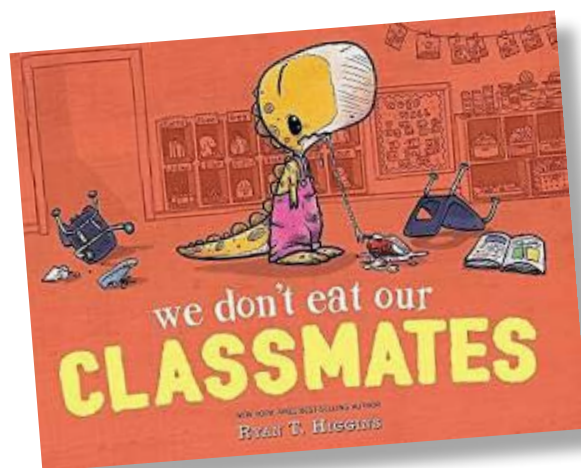
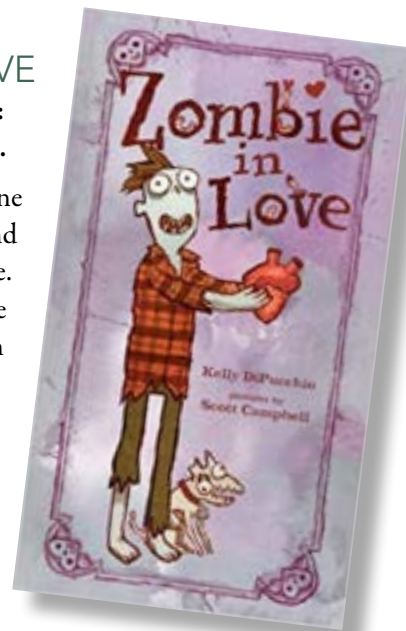
The following are humorous picture books with subversive themes that I've used as mentor texts and why I think they work.

ZOMBIE IN LOVE

Why this book works:

There are no surprises.


The title of this one is catchy, funny, and definitely subversive. Readers understand the concept before even opening the book. If I'm working on a subversive story that's concept-driven, I like to examine how DiPucchio uses her concept—a zombie searching for his "boo"—to drive the narrative of this story.



WE DON'T EAT OUR CLASSMATES

Why this book works:

Kids identify with the theme (especially the biters)

Penelope's urge to eat her classmates while being new to school puts a fresh twist on a familiar story. This is a good mentor text if you have a concept that deals with classic themes that you want to subvert. 

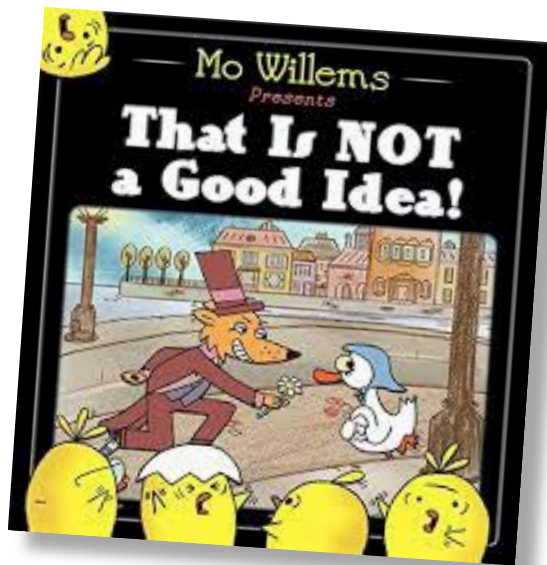
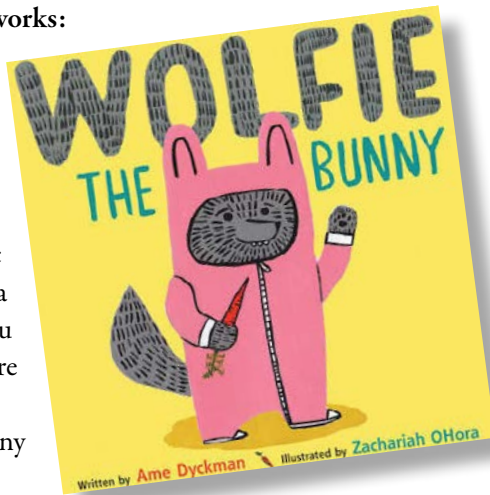
Mentor Texts

WOLFIE THE BUNNY

Why this book works:

It's a light approach to a sensitive topic.

This book puts a funny subversive spin on the topic of adoption. It's a great model if you want to explore how to tell a subversively funny story that has a sensitive underlying theme. Pay attention to how Dyckman balances the fear of suddenly having a new sibling with the fear of being eaten.



THAT IS NOT A GOOD IDEA!

Why this book works: The Ending

Subversive stories are filled with bad characters, and sometimes it's hard to tell who's who. This book is a good mentor text if you have a surprise ending and a bunch of shady characters in your story.

JOHN KLASSEN'S HAT SERIES

Why these books work: The characters are animals.

No matter how many murder mysteries you've read, we can't have people killing people in modern-day children's literature. If you want to have something taboo in a story, like a murder, it's best to use animals.

The Hat Trilogy books are perfect mentor texts for stories in which you're trying to push the boundaries of what is or isn't acceptable. Klassen shows us *How to Get Away With Murder* even better than Annalise Keating.



With so many good subversive picture books out there to use as mentor texts for your writing I could go on and on. When you're exploring these books and others, notice that death or the fear of death is a common theme. There are few "good" characters in these books—and even the cutest will eat you. But they allow us to explore the forbidden aspects of human nature and laugh at even our deepest fears. In times like these, a good laugh is welcome. What is your favorite subversive picture book?

URANIA SMITH is a member of SCBWI-IL's Diversity Committee and the winner of the 2017 We Need Diverse Books Mentorship in the picture book category. She is co-founder of KidLit Nation, a nonprofit that, in partnership with SCBWI-IL, has provided 22 conference scholarships for writers and illustrators of color.

News Roundup



Compiled by Kelly Darke

Events

SCBWI-IL WORDS ON THE WEB 2020

What: Come on a virtual escape with Words on the Web, an intense, wired weekend of revision and up-close critique with faculty and fellow writers! Enjoy multiple opportunities to connect in small groups with fellow participants and faculty! Socialize at our *Connected Campfire* and take a *Wired Walk* to kickstart our WOW of a weekend!

When: August 14-16, 2020

Details: To register or for more information visit illinois.scbwi.org/events/scbwi-il-words-on-the-web-2020

ANDERSON'S BOOKSHOP

At the time of publication, Anderson's Bookshops was unable to confirm any spring or summer events due to the COVID-19 pandemic. For information on upcoming events please visit the [Anderson's website](#) or call:

- **AB Naperville:** (630) 355-2665
123 W. Jefferson Ave., Naperville
- **AB Downers Grove:** (630) 963-2665
5112 Main St., Downers Grove
- **AB La Grange:** (708) 582-6353
26 S. La Grange Rd., La Grange

Some events require tickets.

SCBWI ONLINE SUMMER SPECTACULAR LIVE

What: SCBWI is proud to announce our Online Summer Spectacular – a historic virtual gathering of the pantheon of children's book creators! We are calling this online extravaganza The Summer Spectacular because it truly is spectacular. It features the biggest names in children's literature including a rare first: an online conversation between famed fantasy author **Philip Pullman** and editor **Arthur A. Levine**.

When: July 31-August 4, 2020

Details: Available for convenient viewing during the entire month of August! [Click here for more information.](#)

Cost: \$100 SCBWI members; \$175 nonmembers

Awards

JOHN NEWBERY MEDAL (ALA)

Awarded to the author of the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children.

WINNER

New Kid by **Jerry Craft** (HarperCollins)

HONOR BOOKS

- *The Undefeated* by **Kwame Alexander**, illustrated by **Kadir Nelson** (Versify/Houghton Mifflin Harcourt)
- *Scary Stories for Young Foxes* by **Christian McKay Heidicker**, illustrated by **Junyi Wu** (Holt/Macmillan)
- *Other Words for Home* by **Jasmine Warga** (Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins)
- *Genesis Begins Again* by **Alicia D. Williams** (Atheneum/Simon & Schuster/a Caitlyn Dlouhy Book)

MICHAEL PRINTZ AWARD (ALA)

The award honors the best book written for teens, based entirely on its literary merit.

WINNER

Dig by **A.S. King** (Dutton Books for Young Readers, an imprint of Penguin Young Readers, a division of Penguin Random House)

HONOR BOOKS

- *The Beast Player* by **Nahoko Uehashi**, translated by **Cathy Hirano** (Godwin Books/Henry Holt, an imprint of Macmillan Children's Publishing Group)
- *Laura Dean Keeps Breaking Up with Me* by **Mariko Tamaki**, illustrated by **Rosemary Valero-O'Connell** (First Second/ Macmillan Children's Publishing Group)
- *Ordinary Hazards: A Memoir* by **Nikki Grimes** (Wordsong, an imprint of Boyds Mills & Kane)
- *Where the World Ends* by **Geraldine McCaughrean** (Flatiron Books, an imprint of Macmillan Publishers)



News Roundup

Awards

RANDOLPH CALDECOTT MEDAL (ALA)

Awarded to the artist of the most distinguished American picture book for children.

WINNER

The Undefeated, illustrated by **Kadir Nelson**, written by **Kwame Alexander** (Versify/Houghton Mifflin Harcourt)

HONOR BOOKS

- *Bear Came Along*, illustrated by **LeUyen Pham**, written by **Richard T. Morris** (Little, Brown/Hachette)
- *Double Bass Blues*, illustrated by **Rudy Gutierrez**, written by **Andrea J. Loney** (Knopf/Random House Children's Books/Penguin Random House)
- *Going Down Home with Daddy*, illustrated by **Daniel Minter**, written by **Kelly Starling Lyons** (Peachtree)

REBECCA CAUDILL YOUNG READERS' BOOK AWARD

Awarded annually for the book voted most outstanding by Illinois readers in grades 4-8.

WINNER

Refugee by **Alan Gratz** (Scholastic Press)

More information at www.rebeccacaudill.org

MONARCH AWARDS

ILLINOIS' GRADES K-3

READERS CHOICE AWARD

First Place: *Baby Monkey, Private Eye*, written and illustrated by **Brian Selznick** (Scholastic)

Second Place: *The Bad Guys* by **Aaron Blabey** (Scholastic)

Third Place: *Do Not Lick This Book* by **Idan Ben-Barak**, illustrated by **Julian Frost** (Roaring Brook Press)

More information at www.aisled.org

BLUESTEM AWARDS

ILLINOIS' GRADES 3-5

READERS CHOICE AWARD

First Place: *Real Friends* by **Shannon Hale** (First Second)

Second Place: *Last Kids on Earth* by **Max Brallier** (Egmont Books)

Third Place: *The Bad Guys* by **Aaron Blabey** (Scholastic)

More information at www.aisled.org

ABRAHAM LINCOLN AWARDS

ILLINOIS' TEEN READERS CHOICE AWARD

First Place: *They Both Die at the End* by **Adam Silvera** (HarperTeen)

Second Place: *The Sun Is Also a Star* by **Nicola Yoon** (Delacorte Press)

Third Place: *The 57 Bus: A True Story of Two Teenagers and the Crime That Changed Their Lives* by **Dashka Slater** (Farrar, Straus and Giroux)

More information at www.aisled.org

2020 SCBWI Member Grant

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

Note: Applicants may only apply for one SCBWI grant per calendar year. For more information, visit www.scbwi.org/awards

BOOK LAUNCH AWARD

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

Deadline: July 1, 2020

More information and requirements:

www.scbwi.org/awards/book-launch-grant



KELLY DARKE is a mathematics educator and aspiring picture book writer. She blogs at www.mathbookmagic.com about math picture books that inspire wonder and joy.



Illustration by
Sarah Kurpiel

Season's Crop

SPRING & SUMMER 2020 by Jenny Wagh

Picture Books

FICTION

Jasper & Ollie Build a Fort
by Alex Willan
Doubleday Books for Young Readers
ISBN: 9780525645245, May 2020

Lone Wolf
by Sarah Kurpiel, Greenwillow,
ISBN: 62943820, May 2020

National Regular Average Ordinary Day
by Lisa Katzenberger
Illus. Barbara Bakos
Penguin Workshop
ISBN: 1524792403, June 2020

Our World is Whole
by Gail Bush, Illus. Jennie Poh,
Sleeping Bear Press,
ISBN: 9781534110274, May 2020

Travel Guide For Monsters
by Lori Degman
Illus. Dave Szalay
Sleeping Bear Press
ISBN: 1534110372, April 2020

NONFICTION

Baby Loves Political Science: DEMOCRACY!
by Ruth Spiro, Illus. Greg Paprocki
Charlesbridge
ISBN: 1623542276, April 2020

Baby Loves the Five Senses: SMELL!
by Ruth Spiro, Illus. Irene Chan
Charlesbridge
ISBN: 1623541530, August 2020

Baby Loves the Five Senses: TOUCH!
by Ruth Spiro, Illus. Irene Chan
Charlesbridge
ISBN: 1623541557, August 2020

Baby Loves the Five Senses: TASTE!
by Ruth Spiro, Illus. Irene Chan
Charlesbridge
ISBN: 1623541549, August 2020

The Boy Who Dreamed of Infinity: A Tale of the Genius Ramanujan
by Amy Alznauer
Illus. Daniel Miyares
Candlewick Press
ISBN: 9780763690489, April 2020

Dream Big, Little Scientist
by Michelle Schaub
Illus. Alice Potter, Charlesbridge,
ISBN: 9781580899345
February 2020

Exquisite: The Poetry and Life of Gwendolyn Brooks
by Suzanne Slade
Illus. Cozbi A. Cabrera
Abrams Books for Young Readers
ISBN: 1419734113, April 2020

Lift As You Climb: The Story of Ella Baker
by Patricia Hruby Powell
Illus. R. Gregory Christie
S&S McElderry
ISBN: 9781534406230, June 2020

The Sea Knows
by Alice B. McGinty and Alan B. Havis
Illus. Stephanie Laberis
Paula Wiseman Book S&S
ISBN: 9781534438224, May 2020

The Strange Birds of Flannery O'Connor: A Life
by Amy Alznauer, Illus. Ping Zhu,
Enchanted Lion Books
ISBN: 9781592702954, June 2020

Middle Grade

FICTION

Aria Jones & the Guardian's Wedja
by Malayna Evans
Illus. Tatiana Makeeva
Month9 Books,
ISBN: 9781951710149, Aug 2020

Hello from Renn Lake
by Michele Weber Hurwitz
Penguin Random House
ISBN: 9781984896322, May 2020

The Revenge of the Werepenguin
by Allan Woodrow
Illus. Scott Brown, Viking,
ISBN: 97805931114230, Aug 2020


NONFICTION

TO FLY AMONG THE STARS: The Hidden Story of the Fight for Women Astronauts
by Rebecca Siegel, Scholastic Focus,
ISBN: 9781338290158, Mar. 2020

The Great Chicago Fire: Rising From the Ashes
by Kate Hannigan, Illus. Alex Graudins, First Second,
ISBN: 9781250174253, June 2020

Young Adult


FICTION

Man Up
by Kim Oclon, Trism Books
ISBN: 9780999388631, April 2020 

JENNY WAGH is excitedly awaiting the release of her debut picture book *Eggasaurus* (Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, Fall 2021). When not writing she's wrangling a classroom of preschoolers. You can find out more about her at facebook.com/jennifer.wagh or Instagram @jennymariewagh.

Don't Miss

For these and all other news sign into [SCBWI.org](https://scbwi.org)
and go to "[My Region.](#)"

A graphic featuring a blue circle with a red starburst at the top. Inside the circle is a yellow book with the words "BOOK LAUNCH PARTY" written on it. A red rocket is launching from the bottom of the book. Below the circle, the words "VIRTUAL SAFE" are written in orange.

SCBWI-IL
VIRTUAL BOOK LAUNCH
PARTIES
EVERY WEDNESDAY
3:30 PM CST
illinois.scbwi.org/scbwi-il-2020-virtual-book-launch-parties

A portrait of Sarah Aronson, a woman with long brown hair, smiling. Below her are two book covers: "Wish List" and "Just Like Rube Goldberg".

SCBWI-IL Weekly CHAT
all SCBWI-Illinois Members
invited
Care, Community & Creativity!
Sarah Aronson
Every Monday 7PM CST
[click for schedule](#)

BE WELL & WELL-INFORMED
resources for well-being

+ **SCBWI-IL Stay Safe at**
Home — Together

<https://illinois.scbwi.org/be-well-well-informed-scbwi-il-resources-covid-19/>