

Prairie Wind

Bulletin of the Illinois Chapter of SCBWI

FALL 2020



illustrator in the spotlight:
Cozbi A. Cabrera

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*Illustration by
Cozbi A. Cabrera*

In This Issue

by Amy Alznauer

When I sat down last June to plan our Fall 2020 Prairie Wind, the historic movement following George Floyd's death had just begun. In honor of this movement, I thought it would be wonderful to have an issue largely devoted to Black creators. So I reached out to Urania Smith our Equity and Inclusion Committee liaison who graciously agreed to help put this issue together. And now, as I write this letter, I am filled with the same feeling I always have when I introduce a new bulletin: admiration for the amazing illustrators and writers who are represented within these pages and a desire to get everyone in our chapter to read these insightful, inspiring, and creative columns. So let's dive in.

Jenny Wagh, our chapter's resident advisor, opens our issue with a few thoughts on the pandemic and how for her Indian-American family "the importance of Rudine Sims Bishop's 'mirrors' became clear on a Saturday afternoon."

Ever since I met **Cozbi A. Cabrera**, I've been hoping she would agree to be our *Illustrator in the Spotlight*. So I'm particularly thrilled that her stunning, lyrical work is not only on our cover, but our **Spotlights** section begins with a glimpse inside her evolution and process as an artist.

Jiton Sharmayne Davidson's *Tales from the Front* is an inspiring story of double serendipity, not only "the "serendipitous events" that led to the founding of Serendipity Literary Agency but also the "serendipity that brought [Davidson] to a new career."

And speaking of serendipity, our two *Creative Sparks* are both about names, where names come from, how we feel about them. **Donna Beasley** and **Edwin Harris** offer a charming illustration-text pairing of two girls pondering the origin of their names. And **Sandra Jackson-Opoku** gives us a small but powerful excerpt from a work-in-progress, all about a girl struggling with her unusual first name.

Our **Features** section begins with Urania Smith's personal and compelling take on *Black Lives Matter, Black Stories Matter, Black Voices Matter*. Then Jacqueline Alcántera

brings us an engaging interview with April Powers, the new Chief Equity and Inclusion Officer for SCBWI. And finally, **Barbara Binns** writes with humor and passion about *Voice* and her journey from romance-writer for a largely white audience to young-adult novelist telling stories about Black boys.

Jestine Ware opens our **Columns** section with *Voices of Change*. "As a queer, black editor and writer, I wonder if I'm the only one of my kind," she says and then goes on to explore her own experiences in the industry, reaching toward the hope that "we can all move the needle in the right direction." And in *Mentor Texts*, Nathan Lyon annotates a beautiful list of LGBTQ+ books, saying, "Queer children's books can be life rafts that are so desperately needed."

Tiombe Eiland introduces a relatively new *Shop Around the Corner*—the Black woman-owned Semicolon Bookstore—calling it a "fascinating, alluring place." And **Tamara Barker** talks with the wonderful Essie Harris of Douglass Branch Library in Champaign, Illinois, to get her *Librarian's Take*. ↘



Cozbi A. Cabrera's
art palette

In This Issue

NaShantá Fletcher details her *Illustrator Tips* for creating webcomics, which become both snapshots of daily life and a powerful way “to expand your portfolio, stretch your storytelling muscles, and connect with followers.” And in *Writer’s Bookshelf*, Karen Walker-Ward discusses not only her first, but one of her all-time favorite craft books, Walter Mosley’s *This Year You Write Your Novel*.

Adrian Miller details his experience of being *A Fly on the Wall* (or computer screen!) attending Words on the Web with literary agent Adria Goetz and editor Erin Siu. He comments in particular on the value of one-on-one critiques.

Our regular columnists return with two lovely pieces. Patricia Hruby-Powell gives her *Writer’s Tips* on all the myriad ways we can do research for both fiction and nonfiction. And Carol Coven Grannick brings us the *Inside Story* of her long-awaited book *Reeni’s Turn* and shows us that those pre-publication years might actually be the most precious. ✨

A final thank you to Kelly Darke for compiling our *News Roundup* and to Jenny Wagh for putting together *Season’s Crop*.

And as always thank you to our marvelous team:

Director **Amy Alznauer**

who joyfully plans and acquires content for each issue

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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*

*Dolls handmade by
Cozbi A. Cabrera*



Greeting

Jenny & Poojan
Wagh Puja selfie



by Jenny Wagh, Co-RA SCBWI-IL

Never Have I Ever quarantined with my family for an entire summer.

This summer was a first. I spent 24/7 with my husband, 18-year-old daughter, and my 16-year-old and 14-year-old sons. I have never been so grateful for the second bathroom in the basement and a working sump pump. (That could be another article.)

Initially I had an enthusiasm for careful meal planning, cleaning closets, and washing the siding. But that wore off, and the kids found corners of the house to seclude themselves, binge-watching *Netflix* or playing endless hours of *Animal Crossing*. The quieter they were the less likely I was to ask them to unload the dishwasher or take out the recycling.

Mealtime was a great unifier. I am now banned from ever making quinoa again. And surprisingly no one complained about mandatory Sunday morning walks or family movie nights.

Family movie nights were used to stir conversation on what was happening in the world around us. We watched and talked through *Jo Jo Rabbit*, *BlackKkKlansman*, *Do the Right Thing*, and *On the Basis of Sex*. I hoped to take the words of Rudine Sims Bishop to heart and provide my children with “windows and sliding doors.”

The importance of Rudine Sims Bishop’s “mirrors” became clear on a Saturday afternoon. My husband, Poojan, and I curled up on the couch to watch Mindy Kaling’s *Never Have I Ever*. One by one the kids joined us, and together we binge-watched all 10 episodes in five hours. By the end of the first episode, we were texting friends and family that they had to watch. Episode 4 was a family favorite, titled “Never Have I Ever...felt super Indian.” (If you want a window into Ganesh Puja, it is a must-see.) We have re-watched that episode at least three times and laughed till our sides ached every time, because we saw a reflection of our *Amma* and aunts. It stirred nostalgic feelings with piles of shoes at the door, the smell of incense, and choreographed dances. It was a mirror that my children needed, one they rarely get in the films they watch, the books they read, or even in the world around them.

Never Have I Ever been so thankful to be a part of SCBWI.

I am so proud to be a part of an organization that is providing windows, sliding doors, and mirrors through our community of authors and illustrators sharing their talents in the *Prairie Wind*. I am thankful for our SCBWI-IL Equity and Inclusion Team for spearheading our Diversity Network, LGBTQ+ Social, and creating resources for Expert Readers. Additionally, I am over the moon with the industry faculty that has agreed to join us at our Fall Conference, *Illinois Interactive*, with keynotes by Vanessa Brantley Newton and John B. Herrington, the first Native American in space... *Never have I ever* hosted a virtual conference, and I can’t wait to see you there. ✨



Top: Ganesh Chaturthi Puja 2016

Bottom left: Ganesh Immersion Procession

Right: Cousins celebrating Ganesh Chaturthi



JENNY WAGH is Co-RA of SCBWI-IL. She is excitedly awaiting the release of her debut picture book, *Eggasaurus* (Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, Spring 2022). When not writing Jenny is wrangling a classroom of preschoolers.

You can find out more about her at <https://www.facebook.com/jennifer.wagh> or Instagram @jennymariewagh

Illustrator in the Spotlight

IT ISN'T ALWAYS A STRAIGHT LINE by Cozbi A. Cabrera

Are you an illustrator or an author/illustrator?

I'm both an illustrator and an author/illustrator.

What is your preferred medium to work in?

I prefer to paint in acrylics and also love working with textiles.

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

I was standing by our artwork on the wall of our preschool classroom and my teacher pointed out to my mother that my painted portrait had very well-placed features. "Look at the nose!" Teacher said. She leaned in and whispered to my mother, "Notice that there aren't any other noses?" My mother peered at the other portraits on the wall. "Look at the ears!" They both stood back and marveled. I looked down at my shoes. I was four.

After that, my mother always gave me, out of our four-sibling set, the white cardboard with rounded corners from the packaging of her stockings to draw on.

In first grade, during a rare time for drawing, our principal Sister Mary Josephine, who was quick to go down a line with her wooden ruler and rap every knuckle of every outstretched hand, paid a visit. Each of my classmates took a turn quaking in the shadow she cast as she walked the aisles between our rows of desks. She stopped beside me. I caught a glimpse of the crisp hem of her long habit and the toe of her wingtip shoe. I was mortified. My neck went stiff as she addressed me. I looked up. Was that the beginnings of a smile? Her yellowed teeth signaled yes. "That's amazing!" she said, eyebrows raised, the usual crease between her eyes now relaxed. "When, you're finished, bring it down to my office."

Oh no! A worse nightmare than a witch turning me into a birthday cake or being chased while losing my shoe in a New York City subway! The pencil went slack in my clammy hand. My mind went blank. What on earth to do? Sister Mary Josephine left the classroom and Paul DeSantis, who sat in front of me and would later on in the year profess his love for me, spun around and blinked an "I'm sorry" with extra long lashes. I decided right then and there what I'd do to avoid her office. I wouldn't finish. I put my pencil down.

While still in grammar school I went on to decorate the narrow wrap-around spaces above our blackboards. I dreamed up themes and played with classic letterforms (similar to what I saw on my father's drafting board) and drop shadows, and I cut shapes with fine serifs into the wee hours of the night.

In high school, I had every intention of majoring in chemistry. I went to Brooklyn Tech, one of the three high schools of science in New York City. One look at the curriculum for industrial design and I was salivating. I went for ID with lots of scale model interiors, mechanical and freehand drawing, product design, woodshop pattern-making, machine shop, foundry, and strength of materials. In junior year I was selected to participate in the Cooper Union's Saturday Program, painting life and still life studies in oils. While at Tech, my art teachers encouraged me to continue in the arts; my science teachers persuaded me to pursue the sciences.

I opted for pre-med at State University of New York at Stony Brook, continued with life drawing, and was soon running the Black campus newspaper. I took some history courses with the late Amiri Baraka and began questioning every assumption, including "Why calculus?" I left after two years—feeling unmoored, rudderless, lost. One of my professors arranged for me to do two internships back in NY while I went to night school (more life drawing)—one at the nonprofit International Women's Tribune Center, illustrating instructions with detailed line drawings, and the other at the African-American Institute (now called the Africa-America Institute), researching and writing for their scholarly journal called *Africa Report*. There I met a woman from Zimbabwe, who wore me down daily, urging me to apply to Parsons School of Design. Finally, on a day off, I picked up an application just to quiet her down. In filling it out, when it came to campus preference I checked the box marked Paris. I was accepted, purchased a one-way ticket, and flew off, tuition totally unaccounted for.

In Paris, while all my classmates were jet-setting to London on the Eurail and taking weekend flights to Geneva, I was upstairs in my *chambre de bonne* (maid's quarters) when I



Illustrator in the Spotlight

wasn't in class or au pairing, working my tail off, finding my focus again. After my grades came in that first semester I was called into the dean's office and awarded a full academic scholarship.

I majored in communication design, then spent years working in the best advertising agencies and design studios until I landed at a pharmaceutical advertising agency. That job paid well and I kept getting promoted as they recognized both talent and conscientiousness. But every day I wrote Dear God letters in the margins of my legal pads. This was not the epicenter of creativity and I needed out! "Dear God, how do I get out of here? I have pharmaceutical advertising in my portfolio and have offers for other pharmaceutical advertising art director positions and I hate pharmaceutical advertising!"



Fast forward a few years: I made my way to Atlantic Records. At last, I was again part of a real creative team with creative leadership doing creative work. I incorporated illustration into design where appropriate. I illustrated children's books here and there at night. The first books I delivered in oil, my preferred medium. Imagine trying to deliver with oil paint that won't dry in time? I found a Krylon spray to solve that problem. Later I moved to Sony Music, continuing in design and art direction. Eventually I became design director for the Legacy record label, while making handmade dolls, which I ultimately committed to doing fulltime.

After seeing my dolls, an editor at a children's book publisher approached me. She FedExed an offer with a manuscript she wanted me to consider, thinking I might deliver with textile art. She and her art director seemed surprised when I delivered the first set of sketches, rendered in pencil. The final paintings were done in acrylic. Back then, I didn't insist on handling the type treatment.

I kept going. You know, we're never done. 



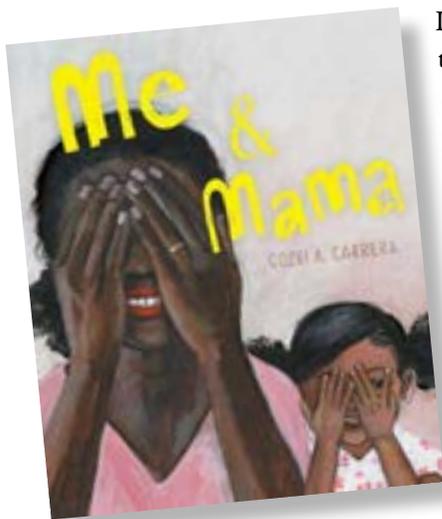
Illustrator in the Spotlight

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.

It started with a cup.



My favorite cup, broken by my three-year-old, who was trying to get her mama a drink of water, unsolicited.



It was at that moment I realized that joy sits squarely on the shoulders of equanimity. I wanted to record this and enough of the delicious moments that march toward the place where the days are long and the years are short, where my daughter's soul was being nourished by the seemingly "uneventful time" I was spending with her. This became my book *Me and Mama*.

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

First I decide how I want to "say it" visually. As an example, the young Gwendolyn Brooks is sending her words out into the world with the hopes of getting published. It's also her eleventh birthday. Here are a couple of possibilities. Why not merge them?



Next, scrounge around an obscene number of fabric bins for a little inspiration. Look for the things you love that fit the period. After all, don't we want to leave a bit of ourselves, our point of view, in every painting while honoring/stewarding the truth of the story?



Begin. Surface isn't "friendly" after a few crosshatched coats of gesso and some fine sanding between coats on cold-pressed illustration board. Block out solid colors on this chalky surface, leave a few clues for her features, the candles, and the sheets of paper. The acrylic polymer dries quickly, so it can't blend in the same way as with oils. I keep the paint moist on parchment paper in an airtight container lined with wet paper towel.

This is where I decide to cross her fingers to further emphasize that she's hoping for a great outcome. ↘



Illustrator in the Spotlight



Keep going. Bring in our tablecloth pattern. Bring in our lovely ribbon motif.

Argh!! “Lovely ribbon motif” is proving to be my customized brain twister. What exactly is going on in this pattern? This little row’s taking longer than the entire floral tablecloth! Do I love it that much, enough to proceed?



Silence any monkey brain and keep going!



Done.

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

Yes, I make it a point to do so in every project. That’s the fun! I almost never go for “repeats,” but here’s an instance where I did. It’s one of my 1930s French chairs, covered in a mossy mohair and brocade.



What advice would you give to aspiring illustrators or author/illustrators?

I’d pass along a golden clue given to me by a life drawing instructor during those “lost” years: “Talent is cheap. It’s the work that makes the difference.” ...Even if your path isn’t always a straight line.

Where can we find you?

Website: cozbi.com

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

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



COZBI A. CABRERA is a multimedia artist and author/illustrator. Her handmade dolls are collected around the world. Cozbi’s illustrated titles include *Beauty, Her Basket* by Sandra Belton (HarperCollins/Greenwillow Books 2003); *Thanks a Million* by Nikki Grimes (HarperCollins/Greenwillow Books 2006); *Stitchin’ and Pullin’: A Gee’s Bend Quilt* by Patricia McKissack (Random House Children’s Books 2008); *Most Loved in All the World* by Tonya Cherie Hegamin (Houghton Mifflin 2008); and *Exquisite: The Poetry and Life of Gwendolyn Brooks* by Suzanne Slade (Abrams Books 2020). Cozbi has authored and illustrated *My Hair Is a Garden* (Albert Whitman 2018) and *Me and Mama* (Simon & Schuster/Denene Millner Books 2020).

Tales from the Front

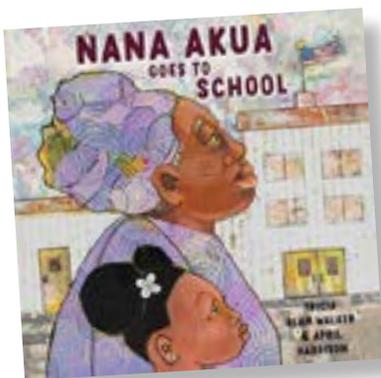


THE MAGIC OF SERENDIPITY

by Jiton Sharmayne Davidson

In 1997 the Alexander Publishing Group / Black Words, launched by a young upstart named Kwame Alexander, published its second novel. It was my only adult novel, titled *Antiquated Journals*, and they did a 500-unit print run with a mini-tour of conferences and festivals. It is possible that at some point in that year I met then editor Regina Brooks or maybe I'd seen her mentioned in *Publishers Weekly* or another trade publication. I truly cannot remember if our paths actually crossed, but the idea of this young black woman in the publishing industry planted a seed. My Black Power/Womanist outlook was the soil. I did not know that 20-plus years later a pandemic (or was it an act of God?) and We Need Diverse Books (WNDB) would bring that seed to bear the most serendipitous fruit.

I worked up the nerve to meet Regina in early 2019 at the Kweli Color of Children's Literature Conference. She was by then founder and president of Serendipity Literary Agency. I told her about my children's book works-in-progress, and she seemed genuinely interested. When she asked me to send her something, I immediately panicked. There was no way any of it was ready, no way it was good enough. So, since I'd received my MFA in Writing for Children and Young Adults at Vermont College of Fine Arts earlier that year, I downsized my entire world in pursuit of the writing life. I needed to live inexpensively, so I could work less and write more. As a writer with dyslexia, I buy time to write like a commodity. I had no idea where the flow would take me. I did know, however, that before restarting my life, I was going to finish those manuscripts and finally send them to Serendipity.

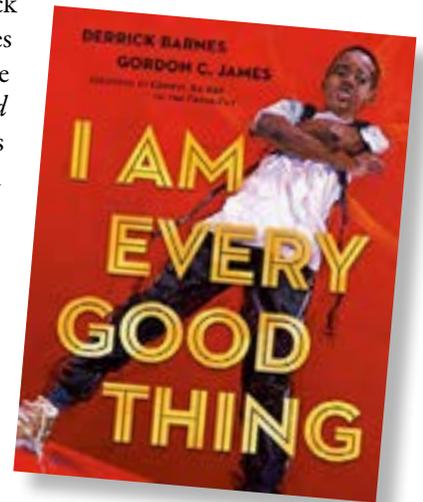


Although it paid for only a room in Baltimore, my part-time job at a bookstore bought me time to write. Then the coronavirus happened, and I lost that job. Suddenly, I had all the time in the world to write, but no income. My anxiety made me fight to maintain faith that I was still on the right path. In particular, I had never considered becoming a literary agent. I never thought about it at all until WNDB announced its extended 2020 literary internship grant deadline. Pre-pandemic, I would not have considered an

internship, specifically because I don't live in New York. Further, such opportunities never seemed open to folks over 40. They usually go to fresh young talent. However, when I saw Serendipity on the list of participants, my inner voice screamed while my quarantine voice, scratchy from cursing at the news, croaked out, "That's my job." I applied and got the internship at Serendipity even before I got the internship grant. But I would have figured out how to work an unpaid internship if I'd had to.

MY SERENDIPITOUS SUCCESS

Regina and I agreed that I would intern in two areas, marketing and editorial. As an editorial intern I have worked on manuscripts in children's and young adult fantasy, speculative fiction, and sci-fi. I am looking forward to middle grade and YA Afrofuturism. I have also worked with Regina and other agents preparing proposals for memoirs by interesting people, as well as some other truly exciting projects. As a marketing intern I have enjoyed working with the author-and-illustrator team Tricia Elam Walker and April Harrison, creators of *Nana Akua Goes to School*. I am also working with Derrick Barnes and Gordon James to market their picture book *I Am Every Good Thing*. Marketing is important for me to learn because diverse books must go beyond diverse communities. Books cannot inspire the kind of change that begins with children if they only reach a limited number of those children.



Working at Serendipity Literary Agency has been a magical journey. Regina teaches patiently, she is nurturing and brilliant. Really, she is brilliant. If you read her bio you would discover that Regina Brooks made history as the first African American woman to receive a bachelor's degree in aerospace engineering from Ohio State University and that she worked for NASA Goddard Space Flight Center, but



Tales from the Front

left that job to begin training to become an astronaut. She is also a pilot. But if you read her whole story as if it were a novel, perhaps submitted by an eager young writer, you would constructively say, *This character is unrealistic*. She's doing too much; she excels at too much. She is too much "Black Girl Magic."

MULTIFACETED BRILLIANCE

Yes, Regina was a black girl who excelled in math and science, but there is so much more to her. She won gymnastics awards. She went to School for the Arts, an alternative high school in Rochester, New York, where she majored in theater, dance, and musical theater and won vocal competitions. Regina uses her whole brain, both hemispheres.



When I asked her how she managed to balance her analytical mathematical side with her creative artistic side, she explained that she uses her engineering skills when approaching a manuscript. Engineers look at a system and troubleshoot for problems. Editors do the same. But for the editor the book is the system and the problems show up in dialog, character development, or perhaps in the plot.

So, as she put it, "Like an engineer, you give the designer—in this case the writer—advice on how to make the whole system work."

A CHANGE OF COURSE

The answer to my next question could have come from the origin story of a superhero crafting her alter ego. I asked Regina, "Why did you choose publishing rather than pursuing your ambitions as an astronaut?" She said that a mentor at NASA told her that if she really wanted to be an astronaut, she would have to get an advanced degree in a specialized area. No problem. But en route to the specialized degree, she took a summer off and completed a certification at the Howard University Publishing Institute...and fell in love with the idea of working with books. She says, "My initial thought was that I would defer this for a year and then come back to it," but publishing had her heart.

An early and fast reader, Regina recalls reading the 1967 Newbery winner *Up a Road Slowly* by Irene Hunt. She

also remembers reading Chaucer. She was blessed with an uncle who was a college professor who taught English and African American literature, so Regina had access to all types of books. She memorized poems by Amiri Baraka, read *The Souls of Black Folks* by W. E. B. DuBois, and *Before the Mayflower: A History of the Negro in America 1619-1964* by Lerone Bennett, Jr. She even presented James Baldwin with an award when she was in high school.

Not seeing images of herself in books was not a problem for Regina. She says, "Affirmations and mantras were poured into" her before she knew what they were. She recalls a community of people that gave her access to the mirrors and windows that people speak of today. She says, "I could walk outside my door and see tomorrow, and that which I could not see I could imagine unfettered. It was this unbridled imagination that allowed me to dream. Space and aviation were just a request away." Regina is hesitant to talk about the diversity of her childhood achievements for fear of seeming like she is all over the place. But is there such a thing as too much Black Girl Magic? Never.

Regina named her literary agency Serendipity because a series of serendipitous events led her to the publishing industry. I can claim the same. It was serendipity that brought me to a new career. I now work for my dream agent, who also has graciously offered to help me polish my own manuscripts. The pandemic is tragic; it breaks my heart and disturbs my spirit. Yet, lockdown was the great cosmic shift that grew and nurtured a seed that was planted over twenty years ago. This is the magic of serendipity. ✨

JITON SHARMAYNE DAVIDSON received her MA in African American literature from Howard University and pursued further graduate studies in African American literature at Penn State University. Since earning her MFA from VCFA, Jiton's mission has been to ensure that children of color see themselves reflected in both #ownvoices and mainstream books, with a diversity of characters.

www.SerendipityLit.com
[Children's and YA guidelines](#)
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Creative Sparks

MEMBER ART AND POETRY

SCHWERNER

Excerpted from a chapter book in progress

by Sandra Jackson-Opoku

Miss Ramos gave us homework for Monday. We have to find the meaning of our names. My name is Schwerner and I don't know what it means. I only know I hate it. I really, really hate it! It's not the right kind of name for a Black girl. In fact, I don't know any Black people named Schwerner. I'm probably the only one in the world!

My sister Chaney's name is normal. My brother Goodman has an okay name, too. He just doesn't like it. But his name is more regular than mine. Way more regular!

On the first day of school Miss Ramos called roll. "Edward E-bear Schwerner. Edward? Are you here?"

I didn't even answer. My name is not Edward. I am not a bear of any alphabet. It's Schwerner Eberé Edwards. Eh-ber-RAY! Get it straight, Miss Ramos! Mama and Daddy said respect your elders, so I didn't say it aloud. I sure was thinking it though.

Elvin Tubbs and Aisha Freeman always bother me about my name. Aisha calls me Squirmer no matter how many times I tell her, No, it's Schwerner. She doesn't even try to say it right. "Girl, I can't fool with that ol' funky name."

When school let out today, Elvin Tubbs followed me down the street. He teased me all the way to the corner. "Schwerner, germer! Wiggle wormer!"

At least Elvin pronounces Schwerner right. Too bad he's such a hater! Elvin's always calling people out of their names. He's so wrong for that.

I do not wiggle or squirm unless Daddy is braiding my hair too tight. I am not a worm. And I definitely do not have germs! I'm very clean.

I get sick of people messing up my name. Making fun of it. Mispronouncing it.

I sure get tired of this ol' funky name.

So I just started running. When I run I always think of the GOATS that came before me. Not the billy goats that go "baaa!" These were Black lady runners, the Greatest of All Time. I had a book with all their pictures. This time I wasn't pretending to be Flo Jo or Wilma Rudolph.



Elvin could chase if he wanted to. He's too big and slow to catch me. I wasn't running from him anyway. I was running away from my name.

It was fast on my trail but I wouldn't let it find me. If I could go fast enough, far enough, the name might leave me.

The Germer would fall away. Poof, be gone! The Wormer would disappear. Presto, change-o! The Schwerner would vanish. Letter by letter, blowing away like leaves in the wind.

S...C...H...

I turned the corner of Ellis and scampered down Marquette Road. Ingleside, Drexel, and Maryland flew by.

W...E...R...

I waited at Cottage Grove, a big, busy street. The patrol guard helped me across.

N...E...

One letter left! I seemed to hear it jogging behind me. I always knew when Langley Avenue was coming up. A Black Lives Matter sign was stuck in a lawn at the corner. It had been there for years.

I turned down the street. When I passed Miss Iverson's house, she stuck her head out the window.

"Girl, don't be getting in my flowers!" she yelled. Miss Iverson always be yelling.

"I'm not getting in your flowers, Miss Iverson!" I shouted back and kept running.

Almost home! If I could beat that one last letter, I'd have a blank space to write a new name in.

SANDRA JACKSON-OPOKU is an award-winning writer of adult and children's literature. Her work has won the Kimberly Colen Award for New Children's Writing and the Maeve Marie Award for Children's Writing at Dairy Hollow. "Schwerner" is excerpted from a novel-in-progress.

Creative Sparks

My mama named me and my sister after her favorite lady pilots. My sister Bess is ten years old and named after the first black woman pilot, Bessie Coleman. My name is Janet; I'm eight years old and named after the black pilot Janet Waterford.



EDWIN HARRIS, JR., “Edwin tha Artist,” creates art that empowers people of color. His purpose is to eliminate the stereotypes falsely placed upon people of color. Edwin at an early age understood he had the ability to emulate what he saw with a pencil and paper. While watching Saturday morning cartoons Edwin would often copy and emulate his favorite cartoon characters. Edwin earned his Bachelor’s Degree in Art & Design from Iowa State University.

DONNA BEASLEY is publisher of KaZoom Kids Books. The company publishes books focused on Black and Latino characters and stories for children ages three to eight. Beasley says, “Our mission is to bring greater diversity to children’s literature.” Donna is also the author of the children’s books *Music In The Family*, *Kason’s Kite*, *Blaze Barton’s First Cattle Drive*, and *My Mama is Flying That Plane*.

Black Lives Matter

BLACK LIVES MATTER, BLACK STORIES MATTER, BLACK VOICES MATTER *by Urania Smith*

I will start by saying, Black Lives Matter. I will say this unequivocally because we live in a country where a White police officer feels comfortable enough to kneel on the neck of a Black man and look into a camera as he takes his life. For seven minutes and forty-six seconds, Officer Derek Chauvin knelt on the neck of George Floyd. It took seven minutes and forty-six seconds to bring us to this moment—to raise the collective consciousness of many in this country to the value that American society has placed on the lives of Black people. Despite witnessing the excessive violence against Black bodies over and over without consequences, it took these moments for many to understand the meaning behind the words Black Lives Matter. Still, there are people in this country who cannot say these words. There are people in this industry, who write for children, who cannot say them.

When you are Black in America, there comes a moment when you realize the value this society places on Blackness—on you. It's a moment that really hits you, and it is profound. My moment came one evening as I left my mother's house in Chicago. My family was pulled over several blocks away by the police. After being given an excuse for the stop—"your car tint is too dark"—the plainclothes officers asked if I had drugs in the car. As the police officers yelled at me to exit the car, I realized there was nothing I could have done to avoid this situation. I was Black and my Black sister had walked over to my car to give my kids a bag of chips before we left the house. That was enough to raise suspicion to the officers who looked on. It didn't matter that I had never been arrested, didn't have a record, or had never experimented with drugs. It didn't matter that I had a degree, was a wife, a mother, and was an aspiring children's book author. It didn't matter that I'd done everything society told me to do to avoid this situation. Here I was, forced out of my car, standing with my legs spread and my hands on the trunk—while the police searched my body and car for drugs, and my children sobbed in the back seat.

I want you to understand how traumatic that moment was—how traumatizing and tiring racism is. This incident

occurred ten years ago, but the memory still brings me to tears and causes me to shake with humiliation and rage. But this experience pales in comparison to the experiences of my sister, who was slapped by an officer, or my cousin, who was tased as she used her body to shield her son from an aggressive officer accusing him of stealing his first car. When it was time for me to give my sons "the talk," I carried these moments with me. I was not only teaching my sons how to survive an encounter with the police, but I was explaining the value that America has placed on their Blackness—on them as Black boys. I knew that even if they did everything I told them to do and everything a police officer told them to do, I couldn't guarantee they'd walk away alive. I also couldn't guarantee they'd walk away without scars.

BLACK STORIES MATTER AND BLACK VOICES MATTER

I need to say Black stories matter because we live in a world where historically Black stories have not mattered, and sadly, our industry has reflected that truth. I want you to understand that Black stories matter not only for Black children who deserve to see positive representations of themselves in books—but they also matter in terms of shaping perceptions of Blackness for non-Black children. Especially White children, who are least likely to have Black friends, Black schoolmates, and Black teachers. Who are more likely to be exposed to stories of Black crime than Black excellence. White children who will one day become adults and carry implicit biases and fears of Black people—and some of those children will become police officers who interact with Black people.

These children need universal Black stories so they are exposed to the experiences and humanity of the Black people who share their world. We need to understand that Black stories are an integral part of breaking down barriers and stereotypes—and creating a deeper understanding of Black people and our myriad of experiences. Black stories teach all children that Black Lives Matter. 

Black Lives Matter



Urania's sons Devin (center left) and Reese (center right) take a knee at a Black Lives Matter rally in Flossmoor, IL, June 2, 2020. photo credit: Adrian Miller

If you are not Black, this is not a call for you to pick up your pen and create stories of Black children or Black lives. This is a call for you to be allies of Black creators. An entire industry exists outside of traditional publishing that is filled with Black creators who write and illustrate for children, and the doors of traditional publishing have been largely closed to them. It is not enough that this industry makes space for a version of Blackness created mostly by White creators through implicit biases or even empathy and observation. This version of Blackness so often makes Black creators conform to it, rather than the other way around. Black Voices Matter, but can we say our industry has valued those voices when they have been overlooked, underpaid, and ignored? In this moment of reckoning, as this country grapples with its racist past and its racist present—I ask you to understand that we not only need Black stories, but we need this industry to give Black creators the space to speak for themselves. 🌸

URANIA SMITH is a founding and current member of the SCBWI-IL's Equity and Inclusion team and cofounder of KidLit Nation. While writing this article she was racially profiled in her South Suburban neighborhood of Flossmoor by a police officer looking for a burglary suspect.

Equity and Inclusion

AN INTERVIEW WITH APRIL POWERS

by Jacqueline Alcántara

This summer, SCBWI created a new role, “Chief Equity and Inclusion Officer,” and we are thrilled to introduce and welcome April Powers to fill that role. April has worked in corporate and nonprofit positions training and educating people on what she likes to call “cultural competence.” She is an aspiring children’s book author herself and feels this is her absolute dream job.

I compiled the following excerpts from a Zoom interview April did on July 25, 2020, with the SCBWI Nevada chapter, with approval from April and SCBWI-Nevada.

SCBWI: Can you tell us in your own words what your background is, and why you are excited about this job?

APRIL: Excited isn’t even the word! So I’m “Bluish,” which is my own way of saying Black and Jewish. My family is very diverse; we have Latinx, non-binary partners of our LGBTQ+ family members, members on the autism spectrum, neurodivergence, and other abilities and disabilities represented. Growing up I just didn’t see representation in an art form, museums, TV, etc., in a respectful, thoughtful way—anywhere that I needed to see it. So I’ve been writing a children’s book with my boys, who are eight and ten, and when they were four and six, they wondered why the girl in our book didn’t have golden hair. It devastated me, knowing how much diversity I infuse around them—in art, friends, books, and experiences. So, just as I finished writing this book, I got an email [from SCBWI] asking if I’d like to be considered for this role. My life’s work is around diversity, inclusion, belonging, civility, and cultural competence. So to see my worlds converge into the job of my dreams was MAGIC! It was so delightful and affirming and everything I wanted—on paper. But if I was to make a [career] move, I had to believe in my heart that they [SCBWI] were seriously committed to the work. Because I have been in spaces and places where they needed the title and weren’t committed to the work. I think Lin



[Oliver, Executive Director of SCBWI], in particular, is committed to this; and when you have the tone from the top, it’s easy to say “this is who we are as an organization.”

SCBWI: Can you tell us a bit about the trainings you are planning?

APRIL: We have already begun equity and inclusion training for our RTs and staff, and we will also be offering training for anyone who volunteers at events, conferences, etc. —so we can make sure anyone who is representing SCBWI around the world as an ambassador for the organization is clued in to how we represent ourselves. As an organization, we are radically “pro-kid.” We’re here for all children and their families. We also have to make sure we create safe and supportive spaces for all of our writers, illustrators, and translators.

SCBWI: Are there plans to look at recruitment efforts for BIPOC members and leaders in the SCWBI organization? Is there a way to get them in as volunteers and RAs eventually so we have more representation?

APRIL: Recruiting is definitely a key part of what we’re talking about. We’re going to be doing what I call “hunting in different fields.” We know we do well in certain circles; what we could do a lot better at is reaching out to underrepresented writers, illustrators, and translators so those stories get told too. To be clear, we’re not excluding

anyone, we're not taking away benefits, we're not going to fail to support telling all types of stories. But what we really need to do is reach out to those people who are not traditionally in this space because we're failing at that. But we have scholarships and I'm actively seeking people to sponsor and to create "full scholarships." What does that look like? I can't make any promises, but I'm aware of scholarships that provide childcare, a stipend, etc. This is more a socioeconomic issue than a BIPOC issue. But my ask for all of you this: I want to know who you are! Email me, find me on social media, contact me if you want to be more active in this organization and haven't had the opportunity to do so. I need to know who you are.

SCBWI: So what are we doing for LGBTQ+ inclusivity?

APRIL: I'm in contact with some of the LGBTQ+ members on a regular basis to figure out how we can reach out to people who are writing and providing content for LGBTQ families. We changed our logo to the rainbow flag for Pride month and I'd like to see underrepresented creatives have a month where their work is highlighted. What we'd like to eventually do is change our membership profile page so that you can say "who you are." It will always be optional, but we'd like to know how we are doing, to make sure everyone feels welcome, included, and counted. Those of you who attended the Summer Spectacular may have seen new questions around this in our post-conference survey. We also plan to launch #SCBWI Voices in 2021 with an LGBTQ+ panel.

SCBWI: Another member asked about addressing disabilities?

APRIL: Another goal is to make sure the site and events are accessible. For example, to do things like, when you tweet out a hashtag, the first letter of each word needs to be capitalized in order for [some] people to receive them and hear them on their translators. This comes down to money and resources. Having virtual events has ensured that many people for whom it may have been difficult previously could attend. We have had ASL translators on all Zoom workshops/conferences recently and we encourage regional events to do the same. Accessibility

is really important. Not everyone reads a website the way you do. As far as content, we will have months where we highlight and ask for books in that genre as well. [Again, if you opt in to identifying yourself on the (future) membership profile page.] Please let me know what we can do better.

SCBWI: For all members, what are first simple steps that they can take to change their behavior or their viewpoints to create a more inclusive environment for the organization as a whole?

APRIL: I strongly recommend starting from your kitchen table, as Kwame Alexander and Linda Sue Park say. Ask yourself how you are living your life. And how do you honestly feel? We have to look at our own prejudice. It is part of the human condition to be prejudiced. We make snap decisions for our safety and when we're given images, throughout our entire lives, of who is and who isn't safe, those have a lasting impact on you. Thus the importance of really good children's books that show normal, underrepresented families and kids—in normal ways, not just the sad ways.

So I highly recommend taking the time to educate yourselves—research, documentaries, books. Try to insert yourself where you might be the minority. Exposure after exposure brings you to another place. As a Black woman, I've had great conversations with friends and I've had conversations where I decide I need to take a year off from people who just won't invest the time to understand me better. The best way to look at this moment for BIPOC people is like it's a funeral. Someone may not want to talk about it, someone may not want to be there. It's probably not the moment to talk about your dead Aunt Sue at Uncle Bob's funeral, right? So we want to make sure we are respecting the moment.

SCBWI: Is there a list of materials that members should probably take a look at? There has been pushback from some members and we are wondering how to handle that.

APRIL: We have posted a [list of resources](#) on our website. Lin is unapologetically leading an antiracist organization, so we can't have an environment where any creativity is



Equity and Inclusion

squashed, squandered, or made to feel “less than” because someone else’s story or values matter more. So much of misunderstandings are values-based. Culture is a values-based proposition, it’s not always about where you’re from or what food you eat; it’s about internal values. If [volunteers/members] are going to deal with issues around diversity, equity, and inclusion, I need to see it first because I want to make sure that you don’t get bashed or trashed and that we’re using consistent language around the organization. And then if you do get pushback, I can help with that and help craft thoughtful responses that have the backing of HQ. But to be clear, we are taking a stance. We are saying Black Lives Matter, we are putting our stake in the ground and saying, “Yes, we are an antiracist organization. We have to be. We’re for kids, why would we be anything else? That’s important to us.

SCBWI: Many BIPOC editors feel burnout because they feel isolated in the industry. Is there a way that we can help support that through SCBWI?

APRIL: I will have to do more research before I answer that question, but I know we have partnered with the Brown Bookshelf and some other organizations that are having BIPOC editors who have been on that side speak, and speak out. We’re supporting those conversations. I would like to know some people and ideas around that and invite them in. But the other thing is, we don’t want to exhaust them if there are only a few. We don’t want to have them take so much on just because of the color of their skin. This is a huge problem. As an industry outsider I don’t know how to tackle that yet, but I know I’m going to have a strong opinion on how to do it.

A lot of what people don’t realize about diversity/inclusion is that bringing different voices from outside is going to give you a whole new lens from which to evaluate what’s happening. That’s what I hope to do for this organization and possibly for the industry as someone who’s still aspiring to be a children’s book writer. ✨

Jacqueline Comments:

I can certainly say I’m in my dream job as well! And the more work I do, the more I realize how our decisions—big and small—as creators have a huge impact on the story, on a child’s interpretation, on what that story tells them about the world and themselves. Educating ourselves can’t remain the responsibility of We Need Diverse Books, Equity & Inclusion committees, or the BIPOC members. It’s something we all have the responsibility for and that work will change our minds and hearts—and therefore our manuscripts, illustrations, and translations—for the better.

**Note: The SCBWI- Illinois Diversity Committee has officially changed its name to SCBWI-Illinois Equity & Inclusion Team per April Powers.*

JACQUELINE ALCÁNTARA is a freelance illustrator and educator living (mostly) in Chicago. She is fueled by dance music, carbs, and coffee. Her debut picture book, *The Field*, written by Baptiste Paul, was named a Best Book of 2018 by *School Library Journal*, *The Horn Book*, *Kirkus Reviews*, and *Shelf Awareness*. *Freedom Soup*, written by Tami Charles, has been named a Kids’ Indie Next Pick, a Kirkus Best Book of 2019, and has received four starred reviews! She’s looking forward to having two books released in 2021, *Jump At The Sun*, written by Alicia D. Williams (Caitlyn Dlouhy Books/S&S) and *Your Mama*, written by NoNieqa Ramos (Versify Books/HMH).

THE DIALOG BETWEEN ME AND MY READERS *by Barbara Binns*

PAST

Once upon a time I wrote adult romances. I bet those of you who know me find it difficult to believe I ever wrote for adults. I felt I was a natural. Back then, people told me I had a great romance writer's voice. Voice is that elusive quality many agents and editors value even more than plot.

I've heard voice described as the sum of an author's lifetime of experiences and beliefs. For instance, different life experiences explain how different authors can create totally diverse versions of the Cinderella story. Some create misunderstood, confused stepsisters; others have stepsisters who fully deserve to have their eyes pecked out by birds.

Romance readers enjoyed my voice so much they nominated my first novel for a Golden Heart, an award from the Romance Writers of America. I was the only black finalist for the 2010 awards. We called ourselves the Unsinkables because nothing could keep us down.

I always spent a ton of time crafting my hero and heroine. I admit I seldom put anything like that level of thought into my audience. I am a black author, but I had unconsciously accepted the (false) "truism" that most romance readers were members of the majority culture—white, cis-het, able-bodied, Christian. To have a hope of selling I had to write stories for members of that audience. At that time, self-publishing was still rare and Beverly Jenkins was the one successful black romance author I knew who specifically wrote with a black audience in mind.

But 2010 was also the year I found a cause. The Association of Writing Professionals held its conference in Chicago that year. I attended a workshop titled "Why Johnny Won't Read." I sat in

the audience and listened to the teen boys discuss their feelings about books. I left the session with a new goal, to write mirror books that would inspire young black males to want to read.



However, I first had to face a major issue. The writing voice I was so proud of was geared for readers who, for the most part, were female, adult and white, as I noted above. That AWP session confirmed what I already suspected, that young readers are different. Especially young boys. Having a clear goal helped me realize I needed something I did not have, a new writing voice capable of reaching out from the page and engaging male teens. I had to grow a new voice. But how?

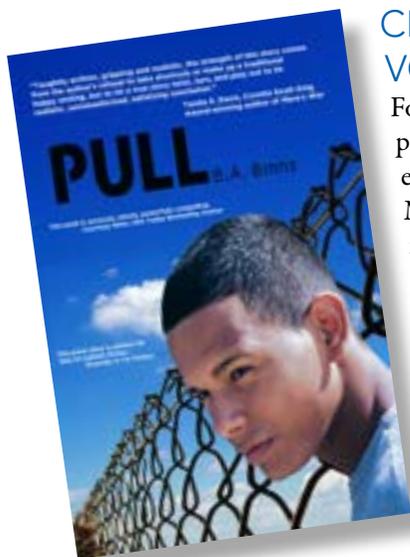
AUDIENCE MATTERS

Voice might be indefinable, but it is not immutable. Sometimes changing a writing voice is as easy as making a decision to do something in a different manner. I once heard a children's author say he had seen the word "seedy" used to describe inner cities too often. He stopped and imagined the impact that word could have on a young reader living in an inner city. Now he makes certain to never use that word or others like it, and notes that consciously seeking better ways to describe city life has changed his writing voice.

While I was still struggling with learning to write like a boy, I heard a panel of award-winning children's authors at a YALSA conference. It wasn't a coincidence; I deliberately chose to attend that panel of diverse male authors. They gave me the piece of advice that changed everything. Each stated that when they wrote they pictured a specific audience, usually their younger selves. They created the stories they wish they had had while growing up.

I decided to write as if I were sitting beside a black boy I knew well and cared about deeply. If I could do that, I knew I could develop a voice capable of reaching out from the pages and grabbing readers' attention. Unlike those male authors, I did not have an inner male teen I could pull up on command. My inner child was female, as was my own child. I couldn't even use my brother. When he was young, well, let's just say we were not close. In the manner of some older sisters, I pretty much ignored him while we were growing up. I had no idea I would want him for research someday.





CHANGING MY VOICE

Forced to look outside my personal experience, I began by engaging in some Margaret-Mead-style anthropological research. I studied and befriended teen boys, got to know them, their habits and attitudes, and their families. Not many children's authors write as if they are telling their story to a black boy or girl they know and care about. While they do worry if their words might be problematic

and may even hire a sensitivity reader, that is often too little too late. Before I wrote the first words of the novel that became my debut YA, *Pull*, I placed a virtual black teen boy at my side. I did not try to satisfy everyone. My job as author was to make sure my primary audience, the black teen boy I wrote to, enjoyed the story. In essence, this teen oversaw everything I did. He helped *Pull* become a 2012 YALSA quick pick for reluctant teen readers. To this day, readers, especially teens, are surprised to find the author of this book is a woman.

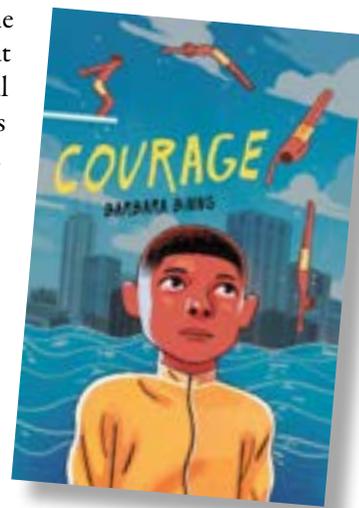
I am convinced that concentrating on a specific reader helped me add depth and punch to the story. Sometimes, an attempt to go for "universal appeal" can result in a bland story that looks like it was designed by committee. I find that concentrating on a specific audience helps me produce a story that actually has general appeal. A mirror book for my audience that also serves as a window book for mainstream kids who get to see my black kids in a positive light.

Before I started my middle grade novel, *Courage* (Harper Collins 2018), I donned my anthropologist hat again. Adolescent boys are a different audience than young adults. That meant I needed to develop yet another voice-style. Fortunately, my writing voice functions a lot like my speaking voice.

The way I speak and the tone of voice I use changes naturally when I am talking to different audiences. I can baby talk with the best of them when facing an infant or toddler. A teen or tween, an acquaintance or friend, coworker or boss, I code switch without needing to consciously think about the change. Turns out, my writing voice does the same

thing. In case you haven't noticed, this is my *conversing with an adult friend/coworker* writing voice. It's nothing like the style I used for any of my YA or MG novels. It's also totally separate from the writing voice I am using for my WIP, a middle grade nonfiction story.

For fiction, I manage fine with an audience of one. But when I work on "Unlawful Orders" (the new book's tentative title) I feel I need more. As I write, I imagine myself surrounded by a multi-racial class of fourth and fifth graders, kids who need a mirror story where black children are valued for the individuals they are. They have already seen more than enough stereotypes.



Unlawful Orders will tell the true story of Doctor James Buchanan Williams, a New Mexico farm boy turned WWII Tuskegee Airman turned chief of surgery at a major Chicago hospital. A man who started off in a one-room schoolhouse and ended up lobbying presidents and serving as physician for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

That said, it's now time for me to get back to writing about Dr. Williams and the state of minorities and medicine in the late twentieth century. Sorry to say goodbye, but I have to call my invisible fifth grade class to order so they can keep me on my toes. In the name of social distancing, my voice travels to them via an imaginary Zoom session. ✨

BARBARA BINNS is an award-winning African American author of contemporary, multicultural children's novels and adult short stories. She is the eldest of five children and grew up on Chicago's south side. A long-term Illinois SCBWI PAL member, she also works with *KidLitNation*, teaches online classes, blogs monthly about multicultural issues with the genre-istas at the *Romancing the Genres* blog, and speaks on topics including ways to encourage reluctant readers and adding diversity to your writing. On Oct. 24, Barbara will be presenting a webinar on diverse writing titled *Imagination is Not Enough* through the Alaska SCBWI chapter.

A Fly on the Wall

SCBWI-IL WORDS ON THE WEB 2020

by Adrian G. Miller, Jr.

Since joining SCBWI in 2017, I've been lucky enough to have experienced many SCBWI-IL events. Yet one event that has eluded me is the annual Words in the Woods retreat. Honestly, I never felt that Words in the Woods was intended for me—the inexperienced writer. However, SCBWI has taught me the importance of working on your craft as well as being an active part of a writing community, so this year I was determined to attend. Then COVID happened, and Words in the Woods seemed as if it would elude me once again. Or would it? Thanks to our wonderful Words in the Woods committee, SCBWI-IL was able to rebrand Words in the Woods into an online intensive and Words on the Web (WOW) was born.

MANUSCRIPTS DUE

WOW is a weekend conference with an intensive manuscript-critique-group component. Several months before the conference, we worked with a critique group along with an industry professional to refine our manuscripts. What made WOW unique is that we were given an opportunity to resubmit our manuscripts after receiving a written critique, after which we had a group Zoom meeting with our assigned industry professional. This year the deadline to submit manuscripts was May 29th. Having a deadline was a new experience for me, and I started to feel like a real writer.

CRITIQUE GROUP

The conference attendees were split into groups led by literary agent Adria Goetz and editor Erin Siu. I was part of critique Group E, whose manuscripts were being critiqued by Adria. The critique sessions were extremely helpful. During our first session, we introduced ourselves and determined how we'd best support one another. Then, after receiving feedback from Adria, we participated in follow-up sessions. The feedback I received from both Adria and my group members was invaluable. I was able to learn more about who my main character was through the eyes of a professional as well as those of my peers. This is an experience every writer should have.

CONNECTED CAMPFIRE

The night before the conference started, everyone came together for introductions around a “virtual campfire.” After months of isolation I was excited to be able to connect with other writers, and there were approximately 30 of us in attendance. At the campfire we also met Erin and Adria. Erin is an associate editor at Macmillan Children's Publishing Group, where she manages the children's paperback book imprint Square Fish and acquires picture books, middle grade, and young adult for the imprint Feiwel and Friends. Based in Seattle, Adria is a literary agent with Martin Literary Management. She represents picture books, middle grade, young adult, and most recently adult fiction, which she likes to call “big kid books.” All in all, the virtual campfire was a wonderful way to kickstart our weekend.

WIRED WALK

The actual conference started as we gathered together for a virtual walk in the woods. The objective was to get to know your main character more intimately. First, we got into the mindset of our characters. Next, we imagined who they were as people. Finally, we reviewed what we had learned about our characters. This was a chance for us to reflect and by doing so I was able to discover who my characters were outside the pages of the story.

GROUP CRITIQUE SESSIONS I

Next came the group critique session, during which we had a chance to interact one-on-one with Adria. It was reinvigorating and thought-provoking. I asked her how we could get our stories to the next level. Adria emphasized staying abreast of what's currently selling and mentioned that it's important to add elements to your story that make it unique. She also provided tips on voice and pacing. I've never had a session like this before, and being able to further pick the brain of an industry professional was an amazing experience. 

A Fly on the Wall



GROUP CRITIQUE SESSIONS II

The next day my group met again, this time without Adria. We recapped our previous day's sessions and set up a time to continue with our critique group once the retreat was over. It was such a positive experience. I felt invested in everyone else's stories and not just my own.

WIRED WRAP-UP WITH FACULTY PANEL

Our WOW wired weekend ended with a Q&A session with Adria and Erin. Here are a few of my favorite questions and answers:

What makes a manuscript stand out to you?

- Adria wants projects to have that *ooh la la* factor. It's all about the concept being very distinctive and unique.
- Erin looks for a compelling and really engaging voice. Things like plot development, character, and setting are things that she feels she can work with the author to fix.

When you think of writers you really enjoy working with, what are some of the characteristics they share?

- Adria feels there needs to be a sense of warmth between she and her clients, and friendliness and kindness are really important to her. But her clients also need to understand boundaries.
- Erin is looking for authors willing to work with her and who are open to criticism. She really enjoys working with writers who are willing to grow and aren't afraid to ask questions. I love this quote from Erin: "I always tell my authors to feel free to disagree with me."

What are some interesting trends you see in the children's lit market?

- Erin said she's seeing a lot of YA and middle-grade contemporary fantasy and #ownvoices manuscripts, with a spike in sensitivity readings—much earlier in the process.
- Adria said that political and current events are always going to be on people's minds and that #ownvoices is definitely a new industry direction and not just a trend.

As you can see, WOW was packed with lots of valuable information. Both Adria and Erin were extremely professional and knowledgeable, and they provided the attendees with insights that are not readily available. I'd also like to thank the wonderful Group E, who were instrumental in helping to strengthen my story. Everyone truly made my first WOW experience a memorable one! ✨

ADRIAN G. MILLER, JR., is an aspiring young adult and picture book author. He has a degree in mathematics and a minor in computer science from the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign. He's a member of SCBWI and lives in Flossmoor, Illinois, with his family.

Voices of Change

EDITORIAL UNICORN

by Jestine Ware

As a queer, black editor and writer, I wonder if I'm the only one of my kind. I have never met another one during my entire ten-year career as a freelancer, full-time editor at three different publishing houses from New York to Los Angeles, and a plethora of nonprofits in the Midwest. We unicorns are a rare and fabled species.

From within publishing, I've been told numerous times by both illustrators and art directors that established black and brown illustrators and authors are "too expensive" and that the inexperienced ones are "low quality," un-coachable, and "too much work" to bring up to snuff. I've been told that LGBTQAI+ representation is "too controversial" or "too adult," even if it doesn't mention sex, gender, or sexuality explicitly.

I felt these people were saying that people like me are not worthy of representation, that my experience was not valid. For a while, I found myself frustrated and disappointed. But then I decided to fight.



THE MARGINS

Most memorably, I attended a magazine editorial retreat with others ranging from highly respected publications to small indie presses. I was the youngest (and only) black or queer person in the room and had decided to present about multiculturalism in magazines above and beyond mere tolerance of different ethnicities, abilities, and races. I also included gender, sexuality, immigration status, religion, and much more. After my presentation, an editorial director of a highly respected publication that reaches millions of children exploded into rage, saying that Muslim and LGBTQAI+ people could not be included in their pages because they were too "inflammatory." Then, a magnificent



argument broke out. Most sided with me, but some did not. I felt both horror and satisfaction twist in my gut as I let the white people duke it out.

A few months later, that very same company was at the center of a scandal around LGBTQAI+ inclusion.irate consumers threatened to cancel their submissions and forced the company to include a same-sex couple in their pages whether they liked it or not. I spoke a quiet: "I told you so," to myself as I cackled at my desk while reading the news. I calmly forwarded the article to my bosses at Cricket Media and warned them...That's how Cricket got its first ever diversity and inclusion statement on its submission page, which took an hour-long meeting to write: "Cricket Media is committed to a diverse literary culture, and we welcome works by writers from underrepresented groups (people of color, people with disabilities, LGBTQAI+ folks, and other marginalized peoples)."

But the fight wasn't over yet. I fought with my art director and other editors about LGBTQ inclusion and the abysmal rate of multicultural content in the magazines. Eventually, I won another small victory. Shortly thereafter, the first-ever LGBTQ multi-racial family written by an LGBTQ writer made it into *Spider* magazine, "The Very, Very, Very Long Hike" by Debbie Urbanski with illustrations by Dave Szalay.

EXIT STRATEGY

I left Cricket Media to pursue book publishing, a lifelong dream. I wound up at a female, LGBTQ-owned company and was over the *moon*. I had visions of being at the table making the decisions that could affect true change in print media. I thought, this has to be better than the dying magazine industry, right? People here will listen to what I have to say and accept my feedback. Wrong. At every turn, I waded through a slew of well-meaning white people in



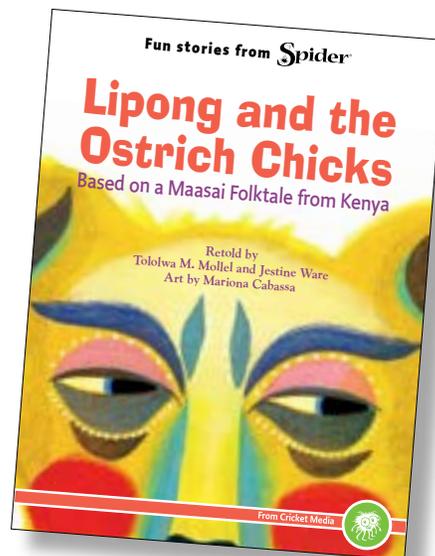
Voices of Change

desperate need of validation and to be on the “right side,” but reluctant to consider my ideas. I carefully cleaned up and re-wrote anti-black, colonialist, and transphobic rhetoric. I advocated for bylines, hiring POC writers, and better pay for all writers. I spent hours combing through piles of submissions in search of hidden gems with wider representation. No luck.

In 2019, the bosses sent me to the Bologna Children’s Book Fair in Italy as an acquiring editor. There, I felt like the only black woman on an alien planet. Publishers from the African and Asian continents floated on the edges of the conference floor like forgotten islands, quite literally pushed to the margins. I walked the floors, hyper aware of my uniqueness. As I rushed from meeting to meeting with international publishers, agents, and editors from fifty or so different houses and agencies, I became acutely aware that I was, yet again, the only one of my kind. I did not meet a single editor or publisher of color, and only a single agent of color. Yet that year, Jessica Love’s *Julian is a Mermaid*, about a black child who bends gender norms, took home a prestigious award for first works. I celebrated by purchasing a copy and consuming lots of fancy cheese and wine at the packed (mostly white) reception.

Eventually I grew tired of the constant battling with well-meaning white people who refused to be checked on their biases, and the long nights and low pay in the editorial world. I yearned to work with black, brown, femme, trans, non-binary, and queer authors and help them climb the nearly inaccessible ivory tower that is traditional publishing. I also longed to do something tangible that would create change *right now*, rather than through what felt like small, square-by-square chess moves in a subtly shifting print landscape.

Last year, I left publishing and took a full-time grant writing position at Heartland Alliance, a nonprofit powerhouse serving thousands of marginalized people through hundreds of anti-poverty and anti-violence efforts. I wield my writing talents as a weapon to raise hundreds of thousands of dollars for the alleviation of systemic and pervasive issues plaguing the black, brown, and LGBTQAI+ communities in Chicago: homelessness, HIV/AIDS, hunger and malnutrition, mental health and substance use disorders, gun violence, criminal justice involvement, multiple chronic illnesses, poverty, and stark inequities in medical care. I’m happier at this company



Two stories I worked on as an editor at Spider Magazine.



than I’ve ever been. I’m *proud* of the work I’m doing.

THE FREEDOM IN FREELANCE

Though I have stepped back from traditional publishing, I haven’t forgotten my commitment to marginalized authors. By keeping my virtual freelance doors open, I’ve actually made myself more accessible. Somehow, the clientele I want to attract find me in creative ways: grant writers who work for LGBTQIA+ organizations; black women on public transit with entrepreneurial visions; radical QPOC activists in need of fundraising advice; aspiring picture book authors from black and brown communities; black-owned publishing houses looking for funding and a critical editorial eye; LGBT newspapers, kidlit organizations, and POC nonprofits who want me to speak to my experience as a QPOC editor; second language learners who need a careful eye before sending their manuscripts out into the



Voices of Change

world; small white-owned publishing houses looking to hire non-white writers and editors; and even people seeking sensitivity reads and book recommendations for brown babies. I've kept the lines of communication open with my old colleagues, and am now also writing for and about people of color as a freelancer. For some reason, I feel much more at the edge of success working for myself than I ever did trapped in an endless editorial feedback loop.

I make my own decisions about which projects I take (or don't). With a reliable, livable income, I am able to turn down projects that are inherently racist, transphobic, or homophobic and articulate to publishing professionals why their requests are problematic. I advocate for dark-skinned black women using my light-skinned privilege. I advocate for transgender writers using my cisgender privilege. I will never stop working on myself and checking my biases. Bit by bit, I hope we can all move the needle in the right direction.

Well-meaning white people have tried to give me advice about my freelancing rates and open-door policy. "Raise your prices," they say. "Don't take clients who aren't willing to pay a flat fee. Writers won't put in the work unless they have boat loads of cash. You won't attract the right kind of energy."

This is bad advice. Charging huge flat fees upwards of \$6,000 would put my services completely out of reach for the types of writers who need me the most: the struggling artist who just needs one person to believe in their story. I know what it's like to live paycheck to paycheck, to be in so much debt that you feel like you'll never claw your way out. There are already so many barriers for marginalized people. I don't want to put up more walls. I want to build a bridge between my clients and the publishing world that otherwise feels so distant, cold, and foreign to marginalized writers. I provide resources on how to write a book, from brainstorming to ink on paper.

Much like Toni Morrison reflecting on her early days working for Random House in the recent documentary *The Pieces I Am*, I want to breathe life into projects that traditional publishing might not care about or understand. To all black, brown, femme, trans, non-binary, and queer authors and publishers: I'm here. I've got you.



JESTINE WARE is grant writer at Heartland Alliance; former editor at the companies behind *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls* and *Spider* magazine for kids; and a freelance writer, editor, and writing coach. Her work has been featured in *Ladybug*, *Babybug*, *Spider*, *Cobblestone*, *Muse*, *Click*, and *Cicada* magazines, and the *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls* the Podcast. She has several pre-publication projects in the works, so keep an eye out!

Find her online at:

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Editorial Freelancer's Association (EFA): <https://www.the-efa.org/memberinfo/jestine-ware-24733/>

Goodreads: <https://www.goodreads.com/jware27>

Shop Around the Corner

SEMICOLON BOOKSTORE by *Tiombe Eiland*

One day I visited an alluring, fascinating place. It felt mystical to me. I was surrounded by giants and I could hear their voices from memory. Their faces greeted me and warmed my heart. I was glad I was there.

I was in Semicolon Bookstore at 515 N. Halsted (several feet north of Milwaukee Ave.) in Chicago. The giants met my eyes from the book covers. I was delighted, remembering books I had read. The authors were Ralph Ellison, Gwendolyn Brooks, Dr. Martin Luther King, James Baldwin, Ta-Nehisi Coates, President Obama, and Mrs. Michelle Obama, and the list goes on. Semicolon is a place that resurrects African American literary giants. This is a Black-woman-owned business. The proprietress is a young woman named Danielle Mullen, PhD.

I consider myself fortunate to have met Dr. Mullen as she was extremely busy on the day I visited, yet she took the time to speak to me. I had visited the store before, just to browse, and I was so impressed. She has created a space that is uplifting, beautiful, and speaks of promise, not just for the business, but for a generation. That day, I explained I was a member of SCBWI and told her how much our members absolutely love books. I added that our main goal is simply to write and illustrate books.

Dr. Mullen walked me through her store, explaining how this gorgeous space is divided and sharing with me that, at one point, her team even helped with renovations. I had no doubts. The staff was helpful in every way.

Dr. Mullen showed me the cozy children's room and told me how important it is to her that children see and handle books they can actually own. I expressed my own desire for all children to see more Black business owners. It is a model for the next generation. During forced segregation, Black businesses were necessary for survival in a Black community. They are necessary now for all children to see what a Black person can become.

At Semicolon, there are books for older children that will encourage reading and books with wondrous illustrations for younger children. If you visit, take home an armful (I did that on my first visit). Or, come back and purchase some select titles (I did that too).

Congressman John Lewis spoke of his pain when he was denied a library card in his hometown of Troy, Alabama, because of his race. Today, Semicolon offers children and adults an opportunity to view history and the future, all in one space. It is precious and the ancestors are watching.

Thank you, Dr. Mullen, for your vision and your graciousness.



What was your most important reason for starting the bookstore? How has that idea continued and grown in your business?

I wanted to create a space that I would personally want to shop in. I add and subtract things regularly as a part of my continued commitment to positively affect more people in the city!

Please tell us about your exciting program called "#ClearTheShelves."

#ClearTheShelves began when the pandemic shut everything down. My heart went out to the children who would only fall further behind in school due to a lack of educational access, so I wanted to fix that by allowing them free educational material via text. ↘

Shop Around the Corner

What does your store offer children and parents that you feel is unique?

I think that my store offers a level of escapism for both children and parents. It doesn't feel like a run-of-the-mill bookstore, so it draws people in who may not have originally had interest in reading.

How do we start to eliminate the many deep prejudices that have been overlooked and minimized?

I truly wish I knew. I like to believe that empathy leads to understanding, so I'd like to think that the ability to feel the plight of others is a good start in wanting to better understand how to fix things.

Briefly, what can a bookstore offer that technology cannot?

Experience. Visitors are able to be fully immersed in an environment with no real distractions.

Your Juneteenth program and collaboration with the organization Calculated Genius is impressive. Would you care to share?

Calculated Genius is near and dear to me because I've been on their board since inception. Minority women have the least representation in STEM programming and we're looking to change that by educating them directly and providing scholarships. It's definitely necessary work!

Note: Calculated Genius is a Chicago nonprofit that helps under-represented youth explore and connect to the field of engineering.

Does your support come primarily from the neighborhood, the greater Chicago area, or from online sales?

Right now, the bulk of our support comes from online sales. I think that's due to COVID, as many people are still fearful of leaving their house, especially to shop in-store. 🌟

SEMICOLON BOOKSTORE AND GALLERY

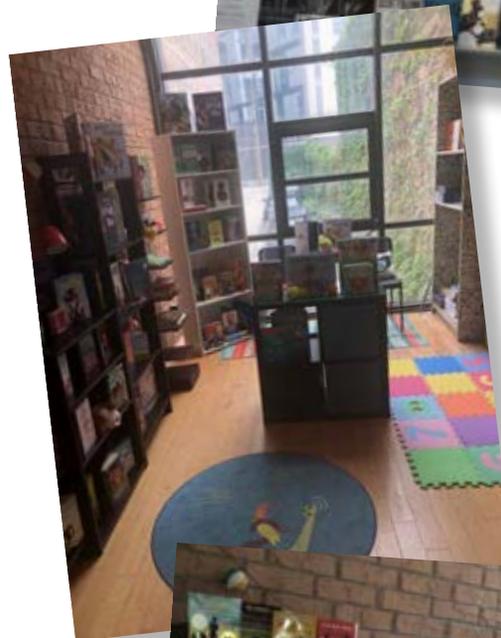
515 N. Halsted St.

Chicago, IL 60642

(312) 877- 5170

Tuesday-Saturday, noon-6:00 PM

Website: www.semicolonchi.com



TIOMBE ALMA EILAND has been a teacher for 46 years. She researches African American history, advocates for the emotional security of young children, and has written a children's play, which was produced at the iconic eta Creative Arts Foundation theater. She has traveled to many countries and worked on domestic violence issues. Tiombe dances in her kitchen, interviews her phenomenal parents, and enjoys time with her daughter and son-in-law, family members, friends, church members, and who else?

A Librarian's Take

by Tamara Barker

I had the privilege to chat over the phone with branch manager Essie Harris, a well-known librarian at the Champaign Library (Douglass Branch) in Champaign, Illinois. She's a recognizable name for many different reasons, including a list of accomplishments a mile long, of which I'll name only a few.

Essie has worked at the Champaign Library for over 50 years. How amazing! Over her many decades of tenure there, she has received numerous awards and accolades because of her endless efforts to provide plentiful resources to the people she loves in her community. In 2018, she was awarded the prestigious Illinois Library Association's 2018 Hugh C. Atkinson Memorial Award. The mayor of Champaign was so impressed with Essie that she named October 9, 2018, Essie Harris Day. Essie's daily commitments, efforts, and contributions to the black community continue to help young black minds grow, so they can be challenged for a bright future. As a black woman myself, I was eager to ask Essie several questions and to know her thoughts about the current race issue and underrepresentation that BIPOC face in the library and publication worlds.

In response to the We Need Diverse Books campaign, there is a push in the publishing industry for more diverse books and books by #ownvoices authors and illustrators. Have you seen a shift in the availability of more diverse titles in the last few years?

"Mrs. Essie" (as the children and teens call her): When I first started there was no diversity at all. It has come along away from the past but it needs improvement. We do not get a lot of books by the big publishing houses unless you're a well-known author. I try to be supportive of authors of color (traditional or self-published) by pushing their books out there. I feel our people have to fight so much harder to get their wishes across on how they want their books published and illustrated. Me being me, I will purchase copies of books by people of color and put them in the collection to be supportive.



Tamara comments: Mrs. Essie is a pillar of the Champaign community, but especially the African American community, for which she is a true advocate. And what she mentions may be the reason for the lack of diverse books available. But if you're a local diverse author looking to get your book into the Champaign Library, go talk to Mrs. Essie! She has been leading the Douglass Branch Library's book club for over 16 years. It's a unique book club because it focuses on books by or about African Americans. If you're looking to join the book club, they meet once a month from September to May at the Douglass Branch.

Mrs. Essie: We try to pick books that lead to good discussions and conversations, like race issues and different things happening in the world.

Why is it important for children of color to see themselves in books?

Mrs. Essie: They say, "Well, that could be me." They see themselves in the books because it's relatable. It gets them thinking, "Maybe I could be a writer." When a child or teen connects to the story they also are connected to the author. Authors, especially #ownvoices authors, share that connection to the reader. It could be a small detail that excites the child or teen. The child may say, "They are writing about something that is happening in my life," and they want to see how the author finishes out the story. Our book club read the award-winning middle grade novel *The Long Way Down* by Jayson Reynolds. The kids fell in love with the book because of those real-life emotions and situations. They simply related. ↘

A Librarian's Take



Tamara comments: To make a big and lasting impression on the reader, Mrs. Essie tries her best to bring in a big-name author annually.

Tamara: Who are your favorite children's book authors and illustrators and what are your favorite children's and YA titles?

Mrs. Essie: *The Skin I'm In* by Sharon Flake; *The Long Way Down* by Jayson Reynolds; and all of Walter Dean Myers' teen books for boys are really good!

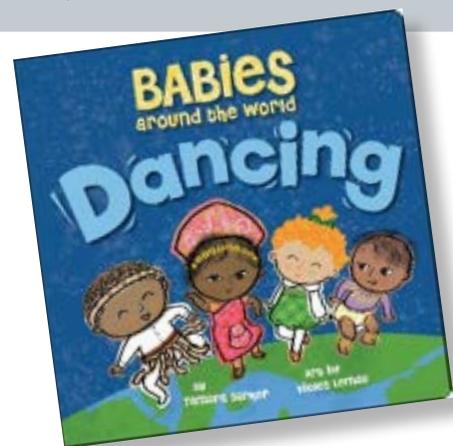
What impact do you feel Black librarians have on children of color?

Mrs. Essie: They see you and they say, "I can do that." There are no limits on what they can do. A few of them who used to come in as children now work at the library. My role as a librarian goes beyond the library. When kids come into the library, I look after them like they are my own. I'm here to teach, guide, inspire, and joke around with them. I try to be that positive influence on them for the little bit of time I have with them. I love children, and I want to help better their lives. My mother was instrumental in my education and she was always on us kids. We could not come home and not have any homework. I treat the kids who come into the library the same way. I treat them as my own. I like to ask them questions to help better their future, such as: *What do you want to be? Are you thinking about your future? What are you going to do with your life? Where do you see yourself in five years? If none of that works, what's your backup plan?*

It's always rewarding when you have kids come back from college and say, "I appreciate you. I thought you were a little mean and tough, but you taught us well and you taught us so much." 🌸



TAMARA BARKER is the author of *Babies Around the World Dancing* (Duo Press 2019). Her inspiration for writing came shortly after the birth of her second daughter. Tamara loves writing books for children that display love, culture, laughter, diversity, education, and religion. Although Tamara loves living in the United States, she loves her Canadian roots and what that truly represents—hard working beavers. She being a true "Canuck," or Canadian, you may hear some "eh's" slip out of her mouth. She looks forward to writing and publishing many books that will make you laugh, smile, and be inspired. Find her online at Tamarabarker.com, Instagram, and Twitter: [@booksbybarker](https://twitter.com/booksbybarker)



Inside Story

YOU WERE ALWAYS ON MY MIND

by Carol Coven Grannick



In early March 2019 an email popped in from a small traditional publisher with a sentence that began with words I'd seen for about nine years: "Thank you for the opportunity to read the full manuscript of REENI'S TURN. I truly enjoyed reading this story..." *BUT*, I expected.

Instead I saw an "and." *And I would be delighted to offer you a contract for this lovely work..."* Huh?

Right here, you might picture some jumping up and down, squealing with joy, laughing, rushing to tell nearest and dearest.

But no. I breathed in deeply, felt a warm internal liquid glow, a sweet, pleasurable warmth, told my husband as if something strange had happened, talked and hugged, then called our son.

The interesting, weird feeling stayed for several days, as if I'd been turned off a comfortable, familiar path, albeit one with bumps, hollows, unexpected craters, some lovely surprises, and no signposts. It had tested my resilience, rewarded me from time to time, and now it had disappeared, like the mythical Scottish village Brigadoon at the end of the day.

The journey had given great meaning to my writing life. *But And* now I was on a new path.

BACK TO THE BEGINNING

REENI'S TURN really began in 1999, after five years of discovering, loving, and turning my reading life over to middle grade novels, newer picture books, and *Spider* and *Cricket* children's magazines. One middle-of-the-night, I wrote my first children's story, "The Inside Ballerina." In fact, in a lifetime of writing poetry for adults, essays, scholarly articles as a clinical social worker, and creative nonfiction, it was the first short story I'd completed.

Side note: In 1992, I discovered Martin Seligman's *Learned Optimism* and left my glass-half-empty tendencies behind. I learned, practiced, and integrated the methods of Seligman and other researchers. This changed my clinical practice, teaching, and life. Emotional resilience became—and remains—the foundational tool in my children's writer's toolbox. I don't leave (or stay) home without it!

With my newfound passion for children's lit, I took classes, went to conferences, wrote many picture book manuscripts, some short fiction, a first novel, and lots of articles, blog posts, essays, and creative nonfiction. There were a few publications and hundreds of rejections.

All this time, though, "The Inside Ballerina" stayed on my mind. There was more about that work to explore. But what, exactly? ↘

Inside Story

Still in practice as a clinical social worker, I specialized in helping women find peace with food, their bodies, and themselves. I found Reeni's story in a pattern many women experienced: around ages nine, ten, and eleven, as they began to develop physically, they learned to disparage their bodies and embarked on yo-yo dieting. They all began to "feel fat." In fact, they were all sizes, but our culture of thinness had taught them to disparage, even hate, their bodies.



STORY AND ISSUES

In 2008-2009, I drafted what would become *Reeni's Turn*. I wrote about a young tween dancer struggling with lifelong shyness and self-consciousness, whose decision to perform a solo and her growing, changing body complicate her search for courage, self-acceptance, and for her voice. It would be important to show how authentic worries and longings become "re-named" as body issues. It was a complicated issue I had to make reader-friendly.

I wrote and revised for a few years, taking every piece of advice and not knowing, or trusting, my own. But with all the changes I made, I never lost the heart of the story.

CHARACTER CONFRONTATION: GOING DEEP

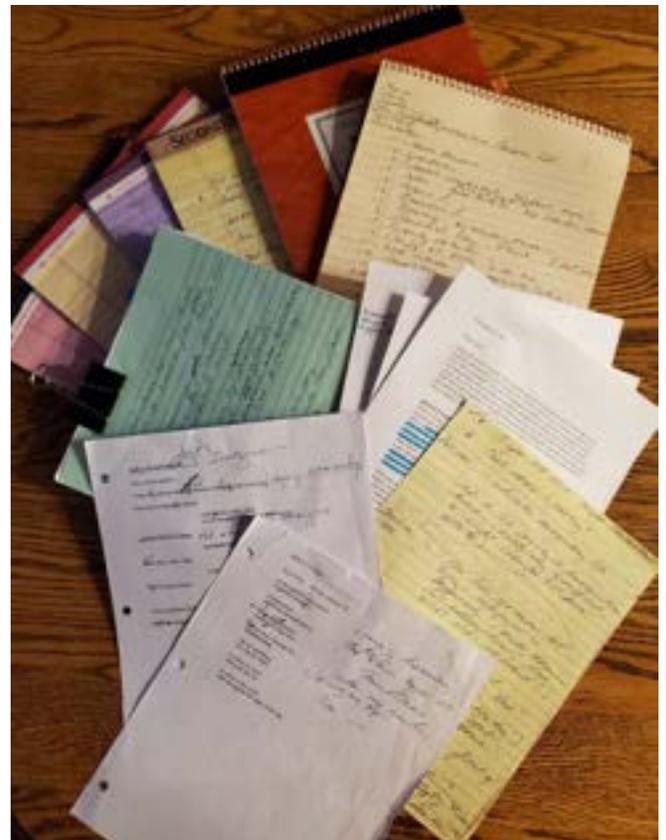
One day I felt stuck, and realized it was because I was skimming over deeper emotions. I wrote a letter from Reeni to me. She yelled at me, challenged me to go deeper. She said she wasn't afraid and wanted to know why I was. My hand shook as I wrote, trusting my awareness of what "my character" was saying.

That day changed the story.

Although I am not Reeni, and her story is not mine, multiple memories, both painful and joyful, now "infiltrate" (thanks to Beth Kephart for that word choice) the character and her journey.

In 2014 *Reeni's Turn* was named Finalist in the Katherine Paterson Prize for Young Adult and Children's Literature, resulting in an agent expressing strong interest in the manuscript. A complicated situation followed, with many revisions, and many concerns of my own about our process. After a [Ragdale Foundation](#) residency during which I did another major revision, followed by six months with a publisher's acquisition committee, the agent and I parted ways. I had an agent who'd lost interest after a first round of submissions, and a book I didn't truly love anymore.

In the meantime, the 2018 Sydney Taylor Manuscript Award committee named *Reeni's Turn* an Honorable Mention and shared excellent ideas. A potential agent supported my interest in returning the story to a more streamlined form but thought I should take out the Jewish content. I did, because at the time it was completely incidental. But I nevertheless missed that aspect of my book.



In October 2018, I added the Jewish content back in. Addressing many universal issues, the Jewish content impacts and is impacted by Reeni's journey and is important to the character, and to me. I finally had the book I'd dreamed of writing. 

Inside Story

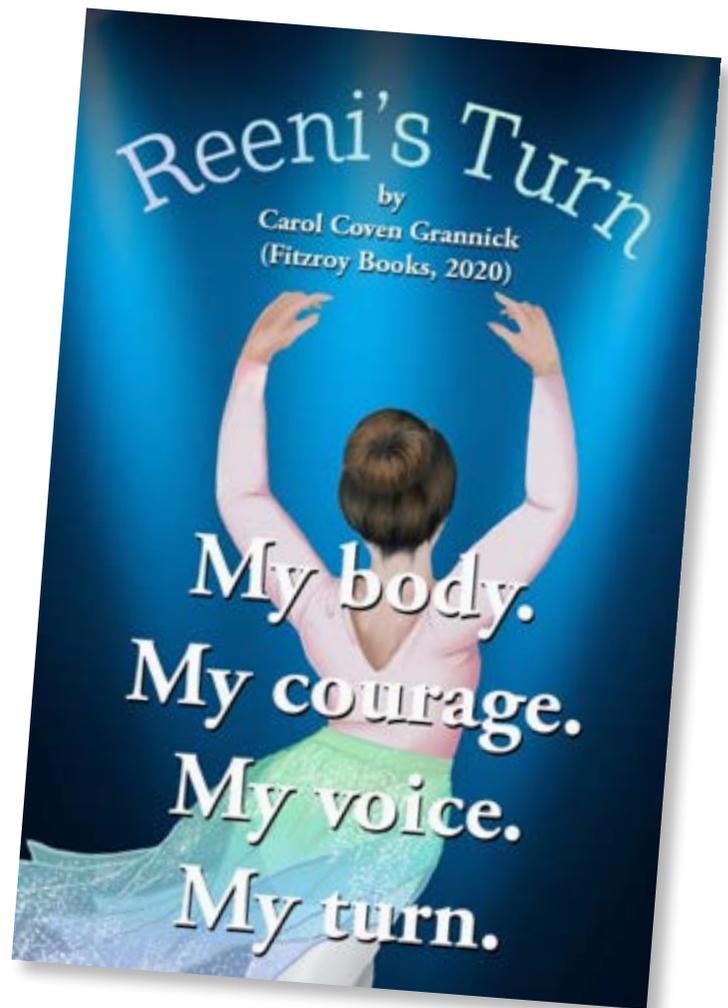
HAPPY BIRTHDAY, REENI'S TURN! NOW, BYE-BYE!

There wasn't a time during my twenty-one years of writing for children when some aspect of Reeni's story, its purpose, and its meaning in my life was not on my mind. Just like Reeni, I had a few misdirected turns on my journey, but I never gave up. And now, *Reeni's Turn* has just had its book birthday. Is it true for all of our stories that once they're published, our characters leave to have a life of their own? If so, then the celebration has goodbyes embedded in it. And that's as it should be.

As I wrote this story for the *Prairie Wind*, I was ready for the almost-sweet sense of loss I felt. I can feel that she doesn't belong to me anymore. But I look forward to discussing her and her story with many children. Reeni surely has taught me a lot.

It's been a long time since the seed of *Reeni's Turn* was planted on a quiet middle-of-the-night in December, 1999.

And...what a precious time it's been. ✨



CAROL COVEN GRANNICK's debut novel in verse, *Reeni's Turn*, is available through multiple links on her website, <https://carolcovengrannick.com> and all the major indie bookstores, big box stores online, and Amazon. Her short fiction and poetry appears in *Cricket*, *Ladybug*, *Babybug*, *Highlights*, and *Hello*. She is a columnist for the *SCBWI-IL Prairie Wind*, Cynthia Leitich Smith's award-winning *Cynsations*, and the *GROG Blog*, as well as a frequent guest blogger. Carol has received a Ragdale Foundation writer's residency and an Illinois Arts Council grant for past work on *Reeni's Turn*.

Illustrator's Tips

MAKING WEBCOMICS by NaShantá Fletcher



Growing up, I loved to read comic books. When I was a kid, people didn't really see comics as "real books." With the rise of all the blockbuster comic book movies, and the great number of graphic novels being published each year by all the major publishing houses, reading comics has become more acceptable and more accessible.

One of my favorite ways to consume comics recently has been online. Webcomics, which are comics published directly to websites or mobile apps, can range from a simple three- or four-panel strip to a multi-chapter epic story. My comic, [Nash Sketches](#), is basically a cartoon version of myself, and some of the funny things that happen in my day-to-day life.

ELIMINATING ART BLOCK

As an artist, I frequently suffer from art block. I don't always know what my next portfolio piece will be, but I can always think of something funny or interesting that happened to me.

When I decided to start my comic, I began writing down funny moments and then I would illustrate them in comic form. Just going through the motions to create one episode of my comic would give me something to draw. The more I created, the faster I got at drawing my comic. Occasionally, after finishing an episode of the comic, I would get an idea for something I could create for my portfolio. Comic-making has been a great way to get my creative juices flowing.

ENHANCE YOUR KID-LIT PORTFOLIO

I started my webcomic just for fun and to give me a reason to draw. But in an unexpected way, it has become an extension of my portfolio. I also have links to the comic on my website and social media pages.

At one of the last in-person SCBWI conferences I attended, I received a portfolio critique from Kokila art director Jasmin Rubero. Before the critique she looked

at my portfolio site. I thought she would just look at the children's publishing gallery, but she pretty much explored my entire website. Jasmin read my comic, and she mentioned it during my critique. I think it only had four episodes at that time, but she told me she laughed out loud in her office reading my comic about eyebrow waxing. She thought I had a great sense of humor, and even though it wasn't a comic for kids, it showed her that I can illustrate humor. You just never know who might read your comic.



If you're interested in illustrating graphic novels, starting a webcomic of your own could be a great way to not only practice creating sequential art, but you can add it to your portfolio as well.

KEEPING IT SIMPLE

In a number of comics or graphic novels, you'll notice a more simplified style or simple shading techniques. You don't want to design your characters with too much detail, because you'll have to draw those details over and over every time the character is in a scene. My particular style of comic is more like a short comic strip you'd read in a Sunday paper, meaning I keep it simple.



Also keep in mind, when readers are reading your webcomic, they'll look at the art in a single panel for a few seconds before they move on to the next panel.

MAKING YOUR WEBCOMIC

SCRIPTS

When I start an episode of my comic, I typically write a script for the dialogue, breaking it down into panels. If there is no dialogue in a panel, I'll usually write a sentence about what's happening in that scene.

SKETCHES

After the script is done, I sketch my whole episode out on a single page on my iPad. I use the drawing app Procreate for

Illustrator's Tips



my sketches, but you can use any drawing software you like, or go analog and use pencil and paper.

LAYOUT

I typically upload my comic to the webcomic site/app Webtoon. The Webtoon format has a vertical scroll instead of a standard page

layout. I take my sketches, cut them up,

and place them in a long vertical canvas in Clip Studio Paint. The minimum image resolution for the web is much lower than for print. Your artwork doesn't need to be more than 72dpi to publish online. However, I create my original comic file at 300dpi, in case I plan on printing these out later.

LETTERING

Next, I create dialogue bubbles and place my text. I do this before I ink the drawings, so I have an idea of how much room I have for the art. This also lets me see if I'll need to break up the dialogue to give more room for the characters.

INKS

I turn off the text layers and start inking my panels on a single layer. If there are background elements, I'll ink the background on a different layer so that, later, I have more flexibility to move things around in my scene.

COLORS/SHADING

I usually have a color layer for characters and a different color layer for any backgrounds or props. I also try to keep the color palette for my comic pretty small for a consistent look. I don't typically use any shading on the characters in my comic, although I may do a floor shadow or save shading for more dramatic scenes.

SLICING AND EXPORTING

If you're going to upload your comic to one of the mobile webcomic apps, like [Webtoon](#) or [Tapas](#), you'll have to slice your comic before uploading it. The comics on these mobile apps have a seamless vertical scrolling format. I create my comic in one long canvas and use the online resource called Croppy. Croppy is a website that scales and slices your long-form comic files for vertical-scrolling webcomic sites like Webtoon and Tapas. If you're using Photoshop, you can use the slice tool and select the "Save for web" option.

PLATFORM

You could create your own webpage for your comic, or post your comic on your favorite social media site, but there are a lot of platforms already out there designed to host webcomics. [Webtoon](#) and [Tapas](#), as I mentioned above, are very popular and free for both readers and creators. These websites and apps also have a built-in readership that frequents these sites, and they're always looking for new content to read.

Creating webcomics can be a great way to expand your portfolio, stretch your storytelling muscles, connect with your followers, and it's a lot of fun! ✨



NASHANTÁ FLETCHER is a children's book illustrator and graphic artist based in the northwest suburbs of Chicago. She works fulltime as a graphic designer/manager for cable network WGN America. NaShantá is represented by Lara Perkins at Andrea Brown Literary Agency. www.nashanta.com

Writer's Tips

RESEARCHING FOR FICTION AND NONFICTION

by Patricia Hruby Powell

Whether we write fiction or nonfiction, we need to research. It's a bit more challenging nowadays, with many of us sheltering at home, but it's still completely doable.

What if there's a scene in your story involving a goat? You don't know any goats? Ask on Facebook who has goats. Visiting goats is an outdoor activity that you could do, whatever sheltering you're practicing.



What if you're writing about a boy who finds the entrance to the Amazon Rainforest in his attic? You must research the rainforest and its peoples and how to find nuts filled with nutritious squirming larvae. If that boy lives in New Bedford, Massachusetts, because your plot requires a place important to the historic whaling industry, look online for a New Bedford museum. Contact the museum. Speak to an expert. (More on experts to come).



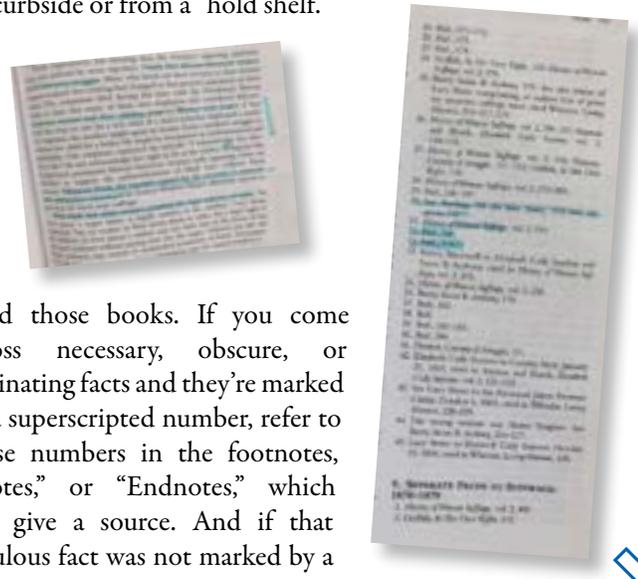
If you can't visit the Amazon, Google Earth the city of Manaus, Brazil, and work outward from there.

Those suggestions cover my unpublished novel—WAITING FOR RAIN. (I have two unpublished novels. But I didn't give up. I kept writing and improving my skills until I found a niche in narrative nonfiction, and now I'm expanding upon that niche).

BOOKS AND LIBRARIES

Begin your research on the internet. Print articles about your subject, including the bibliographies. Maybe a detail in an article will guide you to the slant you'll want to take on a nonfiction project. Or you might realize the plot you'll use for a novel, picture book, or graphic novel.

Using the listings in your bibliographies, search your local libraries via computer; also use keywords or subject headings. For me, "libraries" include not only the fabulous public library system in my town of Champaign but all other Illinois Libraries as well, which anyone can access at <https://www.library.illinois.edu/search-tools/>. Every Illinois citizen is entitled to a library card for checking books out from this extensive system. Alternatively, your public library can connect you to Worldshare: Libraries Worldwide for specific harder-to-obtain resources. Once you might have collected a mountain of books from your library yourself. Now you can request books and pick them up curbside or from a "hold shelf."



Read those books. If you come across necessary, obscure, or fascinating facts and they're marked by a superscripted number, refer to those numbers in the footnotes, "Notes," or "Endnotes," which will give a source. And if that fabulous fact was not marked by a



Writer's Tips

superscripted number, fear not. You can do a little Sherlock Holmes work in the Notes section. Is there a quote in the text that's abbreviated in the Notes and given a source? Work forward or back from that endnote and speculate on the source for your fabulous fact.

Notes at the back of the book are probably divided by chapter, which in turn will direct you to the source used by the author and found in the bibliography, if there is one. That source might well be a primary source. If the source is secondary, get whatever book or item that source may reference, and see if it holds a citation to the primary source. It's good to use both primary and secondary sources.

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SOURCES

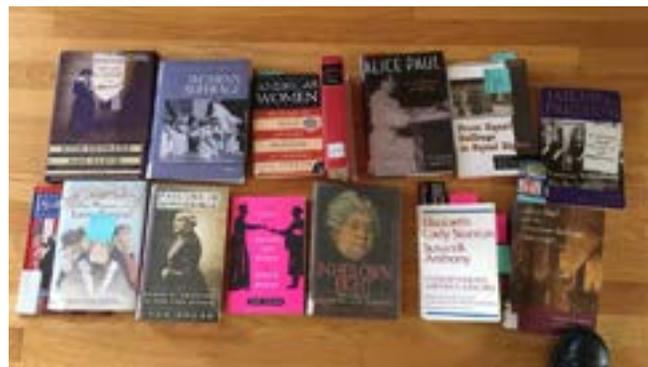
Primary source - a document, first-hand account, or other source that constitutes direct evidence of an object of study.

"Direct" is the keyword here. This might be an "account" or quote or description by your subject; it might be a newspaper article or letter about your subject, contemporary to when it happened. Such sources are "first public accounts," which also include autobiographies, diaries, interviews, oral histories, birth and death certificates, photos, and artifacts such as clothing or furniture, to name a few. These intellectual and emotional "properties" bring you close to your subject. Visiting Emily Dickinson's home in Amherst, Massachusetts, I saw her white dress. What an emotional zinger! She wore it. I felt almost as if I were facing the reclusive poet herself.



Secondary sources - a book, article, or other source that provides information about an object of study but does not constitute direct, first-hand evidence. Authors of secondary sources have interpreted, discussed, or analyzed primary sources. Newspaper and magazine articles after the event, biographies, history books, and dictionaries are secondary sources. And they are valuable.

Both primary and secondary sources could be factual or not. So you must read a whole lot on your subject to be able to discern the "truth."



INTERNET

Just as readers must evaluate books they must also evaluate internet sources. Here are a few dependable sites and internet "avenues."

The Library of Congress owns "collections"—archival materials including photos, theater programs, letters, and much more. When researching *Loving vs. Virginia* I depended on this extensive site for finding photos to be published in that book. For my upcoming book about Martha Graham I used the Martha Graham collection for primary sources—in particular, concert program notes, which spoke of Martha's performance intentions, costuming, and lighting as well as critical reviews contemporary to her performances.

The New York Public Library also has "collections." The Martha Graham Dance Company has just given a load of its archival material to the NYPL, including Martha's letters to composers, "outlines" of dances, old films of her early works, and much more. The bad news: It will take years for the library to digitize these materials, and traveling during the era of Covid-19 is problematic. The good news: Covid-19 has brought a million Zoom experiences, thus providing new paths to research. ↘

Writer's Tips

Due to the pandemic, the Graham Company is Zooming premieres of Martha's past dances, which are accompanied by live and recorded "chats." I started asking small polite questions during those chats and increased my presence little by little. I've now contacted the present director of the Graham Company. We've scheduled an extensive conversation together. Like that director, other experts also chat and I'm developing relationships with them. I mention this here to say, follow leads. Use your imagination to get to leads. I fancy I'm a latter-day Sherlock Holmes. Research is fun.

University and museum archives, often available online, contain interviews with all kinds of people. Interviews with your subject are important primary sources. (How to conduct the personal interview requires its own article).

The **online thesaurus** is invaluable. Dig deeply—the words you choose must be carefully analyzed, considered. Also, by linking from one possible word to another (online) you might find a new way to describe what you were initially looking for. This is good.

Slang dictionaries are useful, particularly for historic fiction and nonfiction. Again, if you find a word once, keep looking. You want it to be authentic. Not everything you find is accurate. Use books written contemporary to the time and within the universe of your subject. While writing *Struttin' With Some Barbecue: Lil Hardin Armstrong Becomes the First Lady of Jazz* (Charlesbridge 2018) I found the memoir *Really the Blues* (Random House 1946) by jazz player Mezz Mezzrow. Mezz and Lil were contemporaries, both working as jazz musicians. Mezz loved slang so much he included an outrageous glossary of slang in his book. And because I know jazz musicians, I know that they are big-time slang users. But you must be sure that any particular phrase was used during the era in which you're writing.

Wikipedia, although useful, has its drawbacks, mainly having to do with "authority." Anyone can write and/or edit a Wikipedia article. Still, I print those general articles (and file them under "Articles") to refer to later. By the time I'm writing, because I've read so extensively, I'm pretty certain of overall facts about my subject. If there are discrepancies—and there always are—keep reading and try to ascertain what is accurate. Flag inaccuracies. The point being that it's important to find several references for any fact you want to use.

Wikipedia might be the first article you read about a subject. You've printed it and highlighted potentially useful sources

from its footnotes. Consider the Wikipedia article about Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who is one of nine "characters" in my (as yet unnamed) Women's Suffrage Project. As I write about Stanton's relationship with Susan B. Anthony through the years, I can check that Wikipedia article for the years of her children's births, which are listed on the first page. I can show Susan B. Anthony visiting Elizabeth and caring for the "correct" baby. Which boys were outside playing?

Historic weather reports can offer pithy details. For *Loving vs. Virginia*, I looked up the Richmond County, Virginia, weather for July 10, 1958—where and when Richard and Mildred Loving, a white man and a black woman, were sleeping five weeks after they married. The hot humid night helped set the tension for the scene. The police, without knocking, entered their house and arrested them.

Google Earth, as I mentioned before, can help you visit a place. Look around. If your setting is historic you'll have to depend on photos, newspapers, historic newsreels. Searching is not always easy, but if you take your time, it's fun. Go from site to site. Who knows what pithy detail will arise?

PHOTOS

You should take photos throughout the research process. I use my phone to snap bibliographies, documents, museum artifacts. Collect your photos in files on your computer. You're never sure what you'll need. If you're writing an illustrated book, it could be helpful to pass these photos to your editor who can pass them to your illustrator. They'll be grateful.

As with conducting interviews, how to properly collect photos for a book to be published requires an article of its own. But start with the Library of Congress database. You'll need to find out if the photos you want to use are in the public domain. If not, who owns them? The creator? What will they charge you?

EXPERTS

To find experts, start your search with the internet. Then follow where it leads you. Experts can be found at museums, historical societies, science institutions—all over the place. Use website "contact" links. Email or telephone your expert. While researching *Loving vs. Virginia*, I phoned the curator of the Tappahannock Historical Society, which was near my subjects' home in Central Point, Virginia. I



Writer's Tips

wanted details about the “whites only” section of the local movie theater in order to write a scene about Richard and Mildred on a date. The curator not only described the urine-smelling stairway to the black section, but why that was. It “made” my scene. He directed me to Cleopatra Coleman, an expert on the one-room schoolhouses of the day that were supported by the Virginia Baptist churches in the area where the Lovings lived. One expert leads you to the next. You get the idea.

Another way to find experts is to read acknowledgements in the back of books to see who is being thanked for what—experts supply an abundance of information and there’s an abundance of experts on limitless topics.

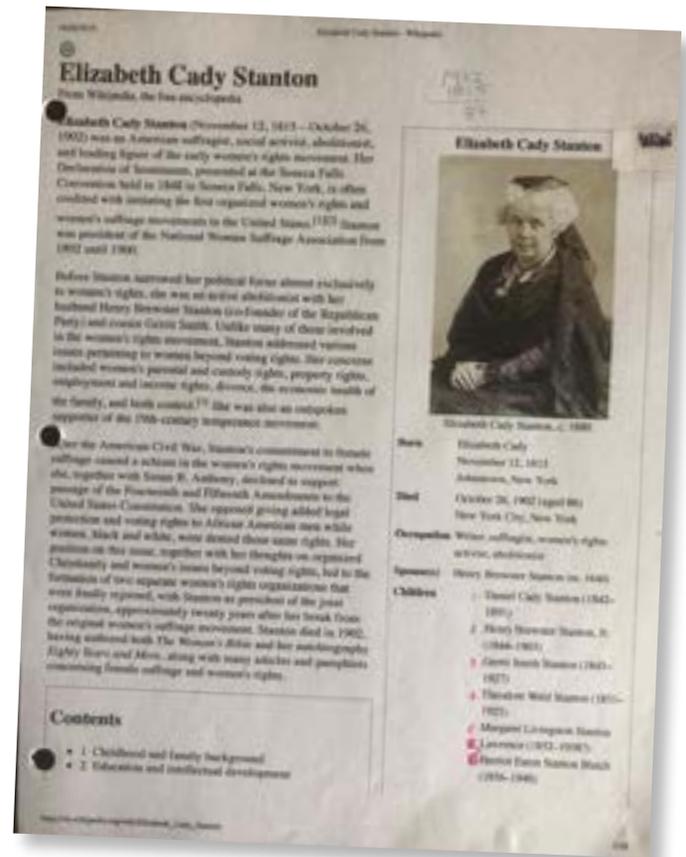
Which doesn’t mean that experts are always correct. My expert reader for Josephine informed my publisher that Josephine was born in East St. Louis, Illinois, rather than St. Louis, Missouri. I felt confident that she was born in St. Louis, so I endeavored to obtain Josephine’s birth certificate. I contacted the county courthouse in St. Louis, which can usually be done via email. I paid the required small fee. Well, darn, I received a letter saying that the records for those particular years of St. Louis births had all been destroyed in a fire. Sherlock Homes doesn’t give up. Josephine’s thirteenth “adopted” child and her one-time manager, wrote a biography of Josephine describing the hospital in which Josephine was born, the address she and her mother went home to, her grandmother’s address, her aunt’s address—all in St. Louis. That thirteenth child was a family member. I trusted him with this information.

Which reminds me to say, keep constant track of your references. I learned the hard way and had to re-re-research *Josephine*. Some people use Scrivener or Evernote to maintain their sources. Being an old-fashioned girl, I include mine in my manuscript Endnotes, a feature of Microsoft Word.

Finally, if you’re writing outside your culture, you’ll need to do more exhaustive research. You’ll need an expert reader at the least and, as the times change, you might need a collaborator.

END BENEFITS

I personally love research. I often start writing and continue to research as I realize I need more information. Or perhaps a new collection has just been released to the New York Public Library. You will find pithy details that will wake up and deepen your writing. Almost certainly, you’ll find your next subject. ✨

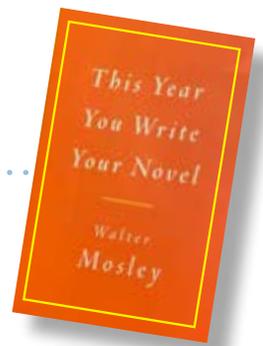


PATRICIA HRUBY POWELL, who writes in Champaign, Illinois, is comforted by her husband and her Tree Walking Coonhound. And really she’s pretty happy, maybe in part because she feels she’s connecting young people to their emotional hearts and helping them build empathy. At least she’s trying to do that. You can reach Patricia at phpowell@talesforallages.com or at talesforallages.com

Writer's Bookshelf

THIS YEAR YOU WRITE YOUR NOVEL by Walter Mosley

Reviewed by Karen Walker-Ward



When I was asked to write the “Writer’s Bookshelf” column, I was both petrified and honored. I have been writing for years and journaling most days since the early 1980s. I am, however, relatively new to SCBWI. My journal writings are not always deep conversations; sometimes they are just ways to keep track of events in my life. To find out how long I had been a member, I went back to my journals.

It was in March of 2014 that I attended my first meeting and it coincided with the finish of my first picture book. My book was based on the *Berenstain Bears* books that had been a bedtime staple in my house. I wanted books I read to my children to reflect what they looked like. Since there were essentially no books that fit that description, my compromise was to read to them books that involved anthropomorphic characters, thus the *Berenstain Bears* series.

I play tennis and happen to play in a group that includes my current SCBWI co-rep. When we began playing tennis together I didn’t know she belonged to SCBWI. I only knew she was a published author. One day after play I asked her if she wouldn’t mind reading my more than 1700-word picture book and tell me what she thought. This was the beginning of my voyage into the writing world. It would also be my first of many critiques.

She was so sweet and very diplomatic. She referred me to SCBWI.org and encouraged me to avail myself of the organization and its resources. I went all in. I signed up for my first conference, I started attending local meetings, I went on a buying spree of craft books, and I managed to revise my book down to a presentable 680 words.



That shopping spree resulted in filling my bookshelf with eight good quality craft books:

- *Bird by Bird* by Anne Lamott
- *Writing Magic* by Gail Carson Levine
- *The Writer’s Guide to Crafting Stories for Children* by Nancy Lamb
- *Creating Characters Kids Will Love* by Elaine Marie Alphin
- *The Magic Words, Writing Great Book for Children and Young Adults* by Cheryl B. Klein
- *How to Write a Children’s Book* from the Institute of Children’s Literature
- *Elements of Fictional Writing: Beginnings, Middles & Ends* by Nancy Kress
- *Writing Picture Books* by Ann Whitford Paul

I was trying to decide which one I would review for this column when I stumbled across what was actually the very first craft book I ever purchased, long before I knew I’d be purchasing others. It was written by one of my favorite authors, Walter Mosley. He had given a lecture that I attended years earlier introducing his craft book. It seemed appropriate that in this time of Black Lives Matter and our push to diversify the publishing world I should review a book by an African-American writer.

Mosley’s book, *This Year You Write Your Novel*, laid the groundwork for my approach to writing. Though it is not specific to children book writers, the tools and guidance are universal to all genres. The book is short but concise. He promises that if you put in the work, by the end of a year you can finish an entire short novel. ↘

Writer's Bookself

He starts by defining disciplines and attitudes he feels all writers must adopt.

- **Writing every day.** He recommends that you set up a daily routine and allocate an amount of time to sit and write every single day.
- **Learn how to write without restraint.** In order to allow your characters to fully develop you have to write freely. Put everything down, edit later. Be true to your story by allowing it to breathe.
- **Avoidance, false starts, and dead-end thinking.** Mosley believes procrastination is a writer's worst enemy. Your time for writing needs to be sacred and barring death should not be encroached upon. He makes the analogy that writing "is like taking a journey by boat. You have to continually set yourself on course. If you get distracted or allow yourself to drift, you will never make it to the destination."

The body of the book is all about craft and the essentials of fiction writing. He talks about plot, character development, and has a section on narrative voice. He also spends time on showing versus telling and getting those first words right to develop the hook. The section ends with a discussion of poetry and the use of metaphor and simile, which he feels are important tools for all fiction writers.

The final section of Mosley's book is spent on the importance of rewriting and editing your work. He describes it as "where you make the story sing." The final chapter focuses on describing the different genres, and some of the ins and outs of the publishing world.

In less than 25,000 words, Walter Mosley was both informative and inspirational. He helped to mold my understanding of fiction writing, so yes, his was my first craft book. I'll get around to reading some of those other books on my shelf, but I am secure knowing that the foundation has already been laid. If I can just stick to those tenets of writing freely every day and avoiding procrastination, then I am positive my stories will flow. ✨



SCBWI-Illinois Oak Park and Near West Suburban co-rep KAREN WALKER-WARD (aka Dr. Karen Walker) has practiced pediatrics in Oak Park for 41 years, but she aspires to be a published author. Besides writing she enjoys playing tennis, golf, and bridge. She is on a bowling league and likes taking photographs and designing miniature houses. She considers her greatest accomplishments being a wife for 47 years, a mother of two and a grandmother of five.

Mentor Texts



CELEBRATING THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY IN CHILDREN'S BOOKS *by Nathan Lyon*

There's no denying how powerful it is for a child to pick up a book and see themselves reflected back. All kids want to feel seen and validated and know they aren't alone in this big wide world. Queer kids deserve to feel this way too. Queer kids also deserve to read books featuring characters who are like them. It's not always easy for LGBTQ+ kids to navigate this world, but queer children's books can be life rafts that are so desperately needed.

Not only do books featuring LGBTQ characters and themes help queer kids, but they also help all kids. They can be windows for kids who don't identify as LGBTQ+. They can lead to understanding and empathy. They can help straight and cisgender kids become allies and advocates for the LGBTQ+ community. Our world needs more allies.

As I compiled this list, I kept quite a few things in mind. First of all, I wanted the books I chose to reflect the *diversity* within the LGBTQ+ community. I've included books that feature boys who love other boys and girls who love other girls but also included transgender voices, non-binary voices, bisexual voices, and asexual voices. I also kept a close eye on *intersectionality*. So many wonderful children's books exist out there that feature queer characters of color. As with any children's books featuring characters from marginalized communities, I was mindful of #ownvoices. Quite simply, I think it's important we read queer books by queer authors who have lived the experience they are writing about. And lastly, I tried to include some books that embrace nuance. A character's queer identity doesn't always need to be at the center of their story.

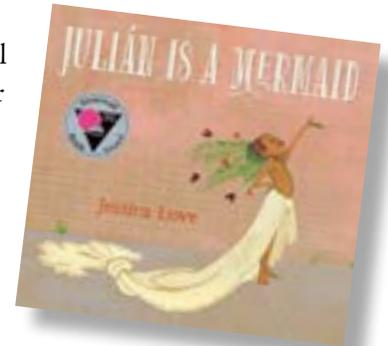
So let's talk about some great children's books featuring queer characters!

PICTURE BOOKS

JULIÁN IS A MERMAID *by Jessica Love*

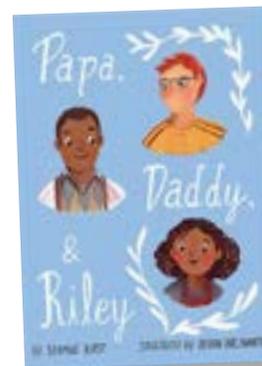
This picture book is all about the gorgeous illustrations and the beautiful message of acceptance. Julián's journey encourages all kids to express themselves without worrying about strict gender norms. The text is sparse but every page

overflows with colorful illustrations. Another book featuring Julián, called *Julián at the Wedding*, is expected in October!



One thing to note, while Julián and his *abuela* appear to be Latinx characters, the author is white and cisgender. This is not an #ownvoices book.

PAPA, DADDY & RILEY *by Seamus Kirst & illustrated by Devon Holzwarth*



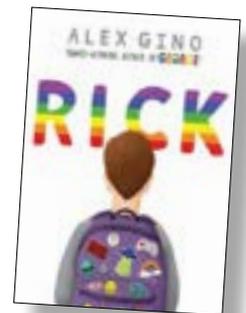
Riley loves her two dads but is thrown for a loop when a classmate named Olive asks her some invasive questions about her family. Which dad is her *real* dad? In the end, Riley learns that families can look different but they all are made of love.

This book is so important for kids of same-sex parents to read. It's essential for kids in these family structures to know they are not alone in their worries and struggles. It's even more important to be reminded that so many two-dad and two-mom families are overflowing with love.

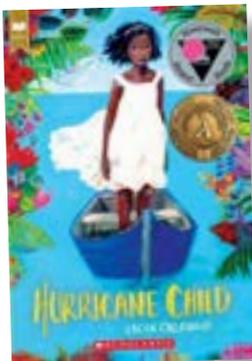
MIDDLE GRADE BOOKS

RICK *by Alex Gino*

There's so much to love about this book. It's rather groundbreaking for a middle-grade novel to tackle the topic of asexuality, and Alex Gino handles Rick's journey with sensitivity and compassion. The story is grounded by Rick's beautiful relationship with his grandpa! The author, Alex Gino, is a part of the LGBTQ+ community and identifies as genderqueer. ↘



Mentor Texts



HURRICANE CHILD

by *Kheryn Callender*

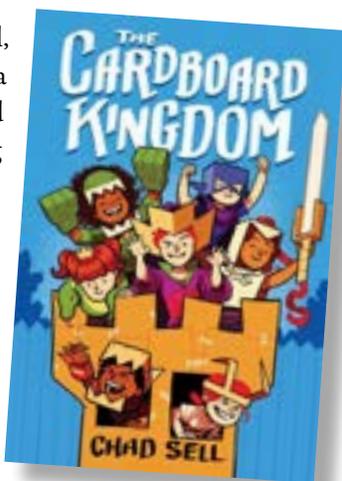
Caroline is an unforgettable character, and despite her being from the U.S. Virgin Islands, I think many readers will identify with her no-nonsense attitude. The way the author handles Caroline's crush on another girl is sensitive and real. The author, Kheryn Callendar, identifies as Black, queer, and trans.

GRAPHIC NOVELS

THE CARDBOARD KINGDOM

by *Chad Sell (and others)*

In this graphic novel, you'll meet well over a dozen kids who spend their time building characters and kingdoms out of cardboard boxes and they also build incredible friendships along the way. Every story is important and heartwarming and many of them break down gender stereotypes for kids. In the Cardboard Kingdom, a boy can be a sorceress and a girl can be a big, green banshee. There are no rules except to be yourself. So many graphic novels out there tackle queer themes, and even though this one might look simple, it's one of the best.

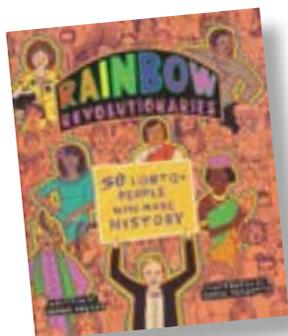


NONFICTION BOOKS

RAINBOW REVOLUTIONARIES: FIFTY LGBTQ+ PEOPLE WHO MADE HISTORY

by *Sarah Prager*
& illustrated by *Sarah Papworth*

This illustrated biography collection details how fifty LGBTQ+ people from around the world made an impact on the arts, sports, technology, civil rights, and much more. For example, did you



know Glenn Burke was the first openly gay man to play for Major League Baseball and possibly invented the high five? What I love about this biography collection is that it highlights the diversity within the LGBGQ+ community but also intentionally includes queer people of color.

Also great: **QUEER HEROES** by *Arabelle Sicardi*

YOUNG ADULT BOOKS

CLAP WHEN YOU LAND

by *Elizabeth Acevedo*

If you've read *Poet X* by Elizabeth Acevedo, you know what an incredible gift she has for writing novels in verse. Each line, every page overflows with heartfelt emotion. Essentially this story is about two girls who each loses her father in a plane crash and the grief that follows. What stands out about the queer representation is the subtlety. Yahaira has a girlfriend who is loyal and wise and strong, but it's not the focal point of the story. We need more books that normalize queer characters and queer relationships.

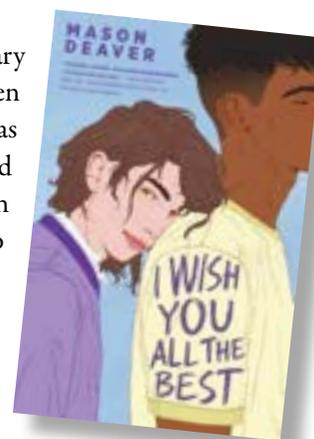


I WISH YOU ALL THE BEST

by *Mason Deaver*

This book is all about non-binary representation. When Ben comes out to their parents as non-binary, their whole world crumbles. But once they switch schools, they meet a boy who helps them be their best self.

This is an #ownvoices book. The author identifies as non-binary. 🌸



NATHAN LYON (he/his/him) is a middle grade author and member of the SCBWI-Illinois Equity & Inclusion Team (formerly the SCBWI-IL Diversity Committee). A recent proud moment was when he won the 2019 Prairie Writer's and Illustrator's Day manuscript contest.

News Roundup



Compiled by Kelly Darke

Events

ANDERSON'S BOOKSHOP

For information on upcoming events at Anderson's Bookshops, virtual and in-person, 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

SHOP AROUND THE CORNER: SEMICOLON BOOKSTORE

Semicolon Bookstore is located at 515 North Halsted Street, Chicago, Illinois. For information on upcoming events, visit the [Semicolon website](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), email info@semicolonchi.com, or call (312) 877-5170.

TEENTOBER

When: October 1-31, 2020

Details: Hosted by libraries every October, TeenTober aims to celebrate teens and promote year-round teen services as well as the innovative ways in which teen services help teens learn new skills and fuel their passions in and outside the library. TeenTober replaces YALSA's previous Teen Read Week™ and Teen Tech Week™ celebrations.

More information at <http://www.ala.org/yalsa/teentober>

SCBWI-ILLINOIS INTERACTIVE 2020: #FULLZOOMAHEAD

When: Launching November 13-15, 2020

Cost: \$100.00 for SCBWI members, \$170.00 for nonmembers (additional opportunities for writers and illustrators available at an additional cost, see website for details)

Details: SCBWI-Illinois Interactive offers multiple ways to interact with professionals and new ways to get feedback. All international SCBWI members and nonmembers welcome. Select the time for each LIVE & Interactive Session that best suits you! Many LIVE sessions are recorded for viewing later. More information at <https://illinois.scbwi.org/events/illinois-interactive-2020/>

44TH DAY OF READING CONFERENCE

When: November 12, 2020, 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Where: Event will be held virtually.

Cost: Based on membership status and which events one attends; see website for prices.

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

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

Awards

BOSTON GLOBE–HORN BOOK AWARDS

WINNERS

Fiction & Poetry: *King and the Dragonflies* by Kacen Callender (Scholastic Press)

Nonfiction: *Infinite Hope: A Black Artist's Journey from World War II to Peace* by Ashley Brian (Caitlyn Dlouhy Books/Atheneum/Simon & Schuster)

Picture Book: *Saturday* by Oge Mora (Little, Brown)

HONOR BOOKS

Fiction & Poetry

- *Clap When You Land* by Elizabeth Acevedo (Quill Tree Books/HarperCollins)
- *When You Trap a Tiger* by Tae Keller (Random House)

Nonfiction:

- *Ordinary Hazards: A Memoir* by Nikki Grimes (Wordsong/Boyd's Mills & Kane)
- *It Began with a Page: How Gyo Fujikawa Drew the Way* written by Kyo Maclear; illustrated by Julie Morstad (Harper/HarperCollins)

News Roundup

PICTURE BOOKS

Fiction & Poetry

- *Birdsong* by Julie Flett (Greystone Kids)
- *Pokko and the Drum* written and illustrated by Matthew Forsythe (Paula Wiseman Books/Simon & Schuster)

Grants & Contests

GOLDEN KITE AWARDS

What: The only children's literary award judged by a jury of peers. These awards recognize excellence in children's literature in six categories: Young Reader and Middle Grade Fiction; Young Adult Fiction; Nonfiction for Young Readers; Nonfiction for Older Readers; Picture Book Text; Picture Book Illustration; and Illustration for Older Readers. Any current SCBWI member (renewed through at least December 2020) may submit a traditionally published book of theirs with a release date in 2020.

Deadline: Entries must be received by **December 15, 2020** (for books published between July-December 2020). Deadline is closed for books published in the first half of the year.

More information at

<http://www.scbwi.org/awards/golden-kite-award/>

JANE YOLEN MID-LIST AUTHOR GRANT

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

Deadline: Entries are due by November 1, 2020.

More information at <http://www.scbwi.org/awards/grants/jane-yolen-mid-list-author-grant/>

SID FLEISCHMAN HUMOR AWARD

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

Deadline: Books published from July 2020 through December 2020 must be received by **December 15, 2020**. Deadline is closed for books published in the first half of the year.

More information at

<http://www.scbwi.org/awards/sid-fleischman-award/>

SCBWI MAGAZINE MERIT AWARDS

What: These awards, given annually, honor original, published magazine work for young people in the areas of fiction, nonfiction, illustration, and poetry.

Deadline: Entries must have been published in 2020 and be postmarked ON or BEFORE **December 15, 2020**.

More information at

<http://www.scbwi.org/awards/magazine-merit-award/>

SCBWI ON-THE-VERGE EMERGING VOICES AWARD

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

Deadline: Applications accepted between September 15 and November 15, 2020 only

More information at <http://www.scbwi.org/awards/grants/on-the-verge-emerging-voices-grant/>

SPARK AWARD

What: This award recognizes excellence in a children's book self-published either through an established self-publishing enterprise or individually self-published. Any current SCBWI member whose membership has been renewed through at least April 2021 may submit one title for the 2020 award.

Deadline: SPARK 2020 opens November 15, 2020. Deadline is December 19, 2020.

More information at

<http://www.scbwi.org/awards/spark-award/>

SCBWI NARRATIVE ART AWARD

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

Deadline: Submissions are due by midnight Pacific Standard Time, October 15, 2020.

More information at

<http://www.scbwi.org/scbwi-narrative-art-award/> ✨

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.

Season's Crop

CLICK TO BE
ADDED TO FUTURE
SEASON'S CROP

FALL & WINTER 2020 by Jenny Wagh

Picture Books

FICTION

It Will Be OK: A story of empathy, kindness, and friendship

by Lisa Katzenberger
Illus. Jaclyn Sinquett
Sourcebooks Explore, Feb. 2021
ISBN: 978-1728222554

Me & Mama

by Cozbi A. Cabrera
Denene Millner Books/Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, Aug. 2020
ISBN: 978-1534454217

Swish!: The Slam-Dunking, Alley-Ooping, High-Flying Harlem Globetrotters

by Suzanne Slade
Illus. Don Tate
Little, Brown, Nov. 2020
ISBN: 31648167

Unicorns Are The Worst

by Alex Willan
Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, Sept. 2020
ISBN: 978-1534453838

NONFICTION

Baby Loves Political Science: Justice!

by Ruth Spiro
Illus. Greg Paprocki
Charlesbridge, Sept. 2020
ISBN: 162354228

Flying Paintings: The Zhou Brothers, A Story of Revolution and Art

by Amy Alznauer
Paintings by ShanZuo Zhou & DaHuang Zhou
Candlewick Press, Sept. 2020
ISBN: 9781536204285

I'm a Saint in the Making

Lisa M. Hendey
Illus. Katie Mitchell Broussard
Paraclete Press, Oct. 2020
ISBN: 978-1640601635

Sylvia and Marsha Start a Revolution!: The Story of the Trans Women of Color Who Made LGBTQA+ History

by Joy Ellison
Illus. Teshika Silver
Jessica Kingsley Publishers, Nov. 2020
978-1787755307

Middle Grade

FICTION

The Circus of Stolen Dreams

by Lorelai Savaryn
Philomel Books, Sept. 2020
ISBN: 978-0593202067

Mask: The League of Secret Heroes book 2

by Kate Hannigan
Illus. Patrick Spaziant
Aladdin, Aug. 2020
ISBN: 978-1534439146

Reeni's Turn

by Carol Coven Grannick
Regal House Publishing/
Fitzroy Books, Sept. 2020
ISBN: 9781646030125

Skunk & Badger

by Amy Timberlake
Illus. Jon Klassen
Algonquin Young Readers, Sept. 2020
ISBN: 9781643750057

Time Castaways #3:

The Forbidden Lock
by Liesl Shurtliff
Katherine Tegen Books, Oct. 2020
ISBN: 978-0062568212

The Tiny Mansion

by Keir Graff
G. P. Putnam's Sons Books for Young Readers, Sept. 2020
ISBN: 9781984813855

NONFICTION

Mayflower: The Ship that Started a Nation

by Rebecca Siegel
Illus. Michael Lauritano and Mike Love
The Quarto Group/words & pictures, Aug. 2020
ISBN: 978-0711248250

A Woman in the House (and Senate): How Women Came to Washington and Changed the Nation (Revised and Updated)

by Ilene Cooper
Illus. Elizabeth Baddeley
Abrams Books for Young Readers, Mar. 2020
ISBN: 978-1419742668

Young Adult

FICTION

How to Pack for the End of the World by Michelle Falkloff
HarperCollins
ISBN: 62680266, Nov. 2020

The Sky Above Us

by Natalie Lund
Philomel
ISBN: 9780525518037, Nov. 2020 🌟

JENNY WAGH is Co-RA of SCBWI-IL. She is excitedly awaiting the release of her debut picture book, *Eggasaurus* (Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, Spring 2022). When not writing Jenny is wrangling a classroom of preschoolers.

You can find out more about her at <https://www.facebook.com/jennifer.wagh> or Instagram @jennymariewagh