

# Prairie Wind

Bulletin of the Illinois Chapter of SCBWI

WINTER 2021



illustrator in  
the spotlight:  
Carrie Carlson

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Illustration by  
Carrie Carlson

# In This Issue

by Amy Alznauer

To kick off this new year, we have a slightly slimmer but still mighty *Prairie Wind* for you. Carrie Carlson's cover illustration alone—stunning in its simultaneous beauty, humor, and whimsy—will lift your spirits. And there's so much more inside. Here are some short takes on the wisdom, inspiration, and tips from our columnists to entice you:

In her [Greeting](#), Debbie Topolski starts us off with a characteristically warm and exuberant summary of the many ways our chapter has risen (heroically, I might add) to the virtual requirements of this time.



*Illustration by  
Carrie Carlson*

## IN THE SPOTLIGHT

The art, nature journal excerpts, and career story of this issue's [Illustrator in the Spotlight](#) Carrie Carlson will be sure to delight and inspire your own artistic endeavors. And similarly, in Keir Graff's beautiful [Tale from the Front](#) we get an inside look at an author's creative process ("working backward" from title to book, thinking up wildly inventive promotion ideas).

We put together our [Creative Sparks](#) section a little differently this time. We first chose the simple yet probing and lyrical moon poems by Sallie Wolf. Then we passed these along to illustrator Andrea Hill Fitzgerald, asking her to select images she thought might sit nicely on the page beside each poem. The pathos and beauty of Fitzgerald's paintings both light up the page and the poems.

## FEATURES

Karla Valenti's piece, [How to Write a \(STEAM\) Superhero Story](#), charts the origins of her new illustrated series on superhero scientists who battle against various oppositions (which in the book take the form of clever and adorable little devils). And she simultaneously challenges all of us "to show up and continue facing our Antagonist" until we come out triumphant.

Alina Celeste Hevia's [The Songs in Our Stories](#) tells a remarkable history of the interplay between lullabies and picture books that will leave you with a deeper appreciation of both: how they both gain their power in rhythm and repetition and how both speak to child and adult, soothing and yet also acknowledging the darker side of parenthood. Read this piece also for Hevia's insight into how picture book structure takes its form from our oldest human stories and her wonderful tips for singing a picture book aloud.

## COLUMNS

In [Voices of Change](#) Lisa Sukenic offers a compelling evolution of LGBTQIA+ literature, which makes a lovely companion piece to Nathan Lyon's annotated list in our previous issue. And Carol Coven Grannick's [Inside Story](#) focuses this time on flexibility and strengthening resilience, taking metaphoric cues from winter prairie grass that "is cold and frozen, but still bends with the wind, rooted deeply in the earth."

Josh Cohen interviews Suzy Takacs, owner of [The Book Cellar](#), who tells stories of a dream realized, a woman-owned business, a community formed, and a lock-down weathered. And in [Mentor Texts](#), continuing the focus on bilingual books (begun [on page 18](#) by Hevia), Jenny Morales provides an irresistible list of Spanish/English titles.

In [Illustrator Tips](#) Matthew Atkins takes us into the fascinating world of user experience design (or UX, as it's known in the industry) and in doing so illustrates the power of story (and storyboarding!) to transform



# In This Issue

our lives and work. And Patricia Hruby Powell's [Writer's Tips](#) moves from the premise that "the underlying object of reading is to have an emotional experience" to how we might bring that about on the page through character development.

Last but not least, Natalie Rompella takes a new approach to [Writer's Bookshelf](#), diving not into books on craft but blog posts on craft. Here you will find, as she puts it, little gems, enticing and truly helpful posts on everything from a brass-tacks analysis of voice (literally tools for counting types of words and phrases) to tips on tightening sentences to wonderful pieces on how writing affects the brain.

A big thank you to Kelly Darke for rounding up all of our [SCBWI news](#), and as always, I'm grateful to our *Prairie Wind* team of hard-working, inspiring, and supportive women. ✨

Director [Amy Alznauer](#)

*who joyfully plans and acquires content for each issue*

Editor [Pamela Dell](#)

*who expertly tweaks and polishes all of our content*

Designer [Brooke O'Neill](#)

*who creatively designs and lays out every page*

Advisor [Jenny Wagh](#)

*who remains our faithful and supportive  
Regional Advisor*



*Illustration by  
Carrie Carlson*

# Greeting

*Decker Dog, patron  
saint of those who  
wait.*



by Deborah Topolski, Co-RA SCBWI-IL

## REACH

Over these many months, dog was my co-pilot. What better companion is there in a world of waiting? Dogs are champion waiters because when one lives in the now, time flies. My spouse maintains that a dog's life is short because canines live every moment fully, so theirs is a sped-up time line. Because they experience time more quickly, dogs are one step ahead. They catch the ball every time and are first to reach that morsel. When reunited with a dog, you pick up right where you left off, as if you parted only a moment before. When you exist for simple joys, every day has promise; every encounter is new; every moment is fleeting; and every reunion is worth the wait.

When I was growing up, my mom said the only thing I had patience for was my art. Simple joys and everyday comforts elude the impatient. For a person without patience, living in the moment is a bit of a reach. So, over the past months, with my dog as my role model and coffee as my comfort, I learned to reach.



*A pre-pandemic cafecito  
and a Cubano at  
Bodega, St. Petersburg*

## A BIT OF A REACH

So, what is a Co-Regional Advisor when she's (literally) at home? With events being cancelled, a volunteer event-planner is not in much demand. How can anyone steward a region that thrives on meet-ups and supports itself with in-person retreats and conferences for hundreds?

I was picking up my spouse from what would be his last regular commute when I got a call from Sarah Aronson, our PAL & Published Coordinator. Sarah suggested she would like to use Zoom to host a Monday Night Chat—or hour-long hangout—for members to check in and be in the moment. We would plan what we would come to call “the show” with Sarah's trademark 3Cs—craft, creativity, and community.

What we thought would last a half-dozen weeks stretched into October! Highlights included a LGBTQ+ book talk with Nathan Lyon, a celebration of Equity & Inclusion Prize-winners Erica Thomas and Alina Celeste Hevia, and

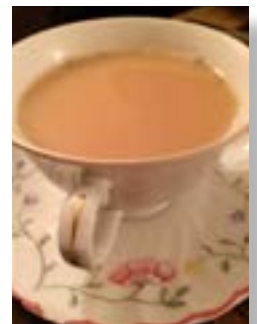
a sneak peek into the Illustration Mentorship with Robin Hann and mentor Terri Murphy. Everyone who attended another session, with Wendy McClure, an editor at Albert Whitman & Co., was invited to submit to her there. As a result, Carolyn Crimi's work-in-progress was taken to acquisition!

There were many more great Monday chats as well. Allan Woodrow gave us tools to make a living as writers. We celebrated Indigenous Peoples' Day with Carole Lindstrom, dared to be our true selves with Chicago YA author Gloria Chao, and celebrated the power of poetry with Nikki Grimes. Michele Weber Hurwitz hosted a fun trivia night to help us all learn more about each other and our work!

With each attendance, participants were entered into a monthly drawing. Winners received a signed book, membership renewal, or a free webinar package—just to keep things fun. Monday Night Chats also helped our community and planners with their Zoom meeting skills. What at first seemed a bit of a reach—maintaining community in the midst of a pandemic—turned into something I looked forward to every Monday night thanks to Sarah Aronson and all our weekly contributors.

## OUT OF REACH

For many, the book launch is a celebration years in the making. Debut creators, along with family, long-suffering critique group partners, and friends, especially look forward to their first book talk. When social distancing forced independent booksellers to close their doors to literary gatherings, the elusive book launch was suddenly out of reach.



*Finest china to toast our  
fairly-godmother RAEs!*

During our first regional team brainstorming session to decide how to confront the constraints imposed by COVID-19, Esther Hershenhorn and Alice McGinty, our Co-Regional Advisors Emerita, came up with a plan. To promote members' 2020 books, SCBWI-IL would host, on



# Greeting



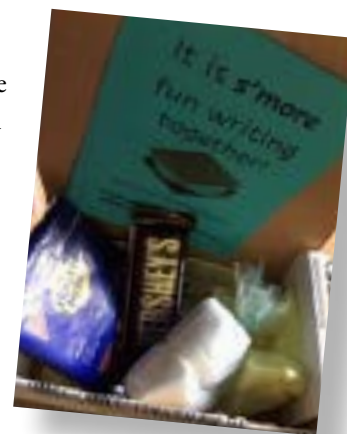
*A comforting cup reminds us that new ideas bloom from adversity.*

its new [YouTube channel](#), a weekly virtual book launch for each participating member. Combined with promotion on social media, a book giveaway with #ReadLocalILLINOIS/iCARE grant funds, and links to order from PAL members' favorite independent bookstores, each author got the spotlight their books deserved during the pandemic.

Our new SCBWI-IL YouTube channel would become a lifeline, hosting [Virtual Book Launch Parties](#) well into November. In April, teachers, librarians, SCBWI members, and enthusiasts celebrated with debut authors Karla Arenas Valenti, Amy Alznauer, and Kim Oclon. May was made exquisite with the collaborations of author Suzanne Slade and illustrator Cozbi Cabrera as well as author Alice McGinty and illustrator Alan Havis. My own Decker Dog particularly enjoyed *Lone Wolf* (HarperCollins) by debut author-illustrator Sarah Kurpiel. By June, art reflected life. Lisa Katzenberger taught us how to celebrate every day and Patricia Hruby Powell's timely biography *Lift as You Climb: The Story of Ella Baker* (McElderry/Simon & Schuster) reflected social struggle in the streets. Karla Clark's *You Be Mommy* (Macmillan) became an anthem for quarantined parents everywhere and Kate Hannigan's graphic novel *The Great Chicago Fire: Rising from the Ashes* (First Second/Macmillan) spoke of the resilience for which Chicagoans are known. Fall brought still more parties with Ruth Spiro, Kier Graff, Malayna Evans, Joy Michael Ellison, Carol Coven Grannick, Jennifer Grant, and Denise Tracey McGowan.

## REACH OUT

Despite finding these work-arounds to maintain community and celebrate our accomplishments, it looked like, if we wanted to create real opportunity for our members, we'd have to rebrand our much-loved regional events. Being *better together* was going to have to happen online.



*Campfire in a box*

After cancelling a sold-out Spring Thaw: Pitch Perfect 3, Co-Regional Advisor Jen Wagh and I collaborated with Assistant Regional Advisor Deb Aronson and longtime Words in the Woods team member John Bowen to reimagine our biennial summer retreat. Our solution, Words on the Web—with its Wired Walk and Connected Campfire—was a WOW of an event, spanning three days and five U.S. time zones!



*In the fall, by using Illinois Interactive's Cosmic Concierge, we navigated our way to a virtually perfect conference.*

WOW taught us a lot about creating meaningful connections through Zoom and about what translated effectively from an in-person event. Our Connected Critique Groups had the benefit of meeting several times via Zoom before the weekend conference even began. Many of these groups stayed together afterward, reviewing and supporting each other well after the event concluded. Plus, Jenny Wagh's "S'more attendee care packages" closed the distance as we reached out to support one another and our work.



# Greeting



*Illinois Interactive team care package from chair Jen Wagh.*

## REACH FOR THE STARS

Just as with the first cosmic explorers, it took a leap of faith for Rich Green, Lisa Bierman, Rachel Ruiz, Sarah Hammond, Darcy Zoells, and the regional team to go big in planning our rebranded fall conference—*Illinois Interactive*. Although it had been a year in the making, the team struggled in the initial days of lockdown to reimagine the in-person event as a virtual trip into outer space, where attendees could reach for the stars.

But we got there! With an opening keynote by astronaut and children’s author John B. Herrington, the first Native American in space, planners focused not on what we couldn’t do in person—but what we achieve *only virtually*!

The result was an outta-this-world online experience, with many aspects that could never be offered in-person. A virtual Portfolio Showcase allowed industry professionals everywhere to view illustrators’ work. Our online conference bookstore gave all published attendees an opportunity to promote and sell their books. Small group sessions fostered a truly interactive experience, with professional feedback and Q&A with industry professionals in every live session. And the SCBWI-IL Crystal Kite Gala promoted 2020 PAL books throughout the galaxy! Plus, our PAL faculty created five amazing craft breakouts—more than we could ever attend in-person.

It was such an honor to work with our faculty and team of volunteers on this watershed event! And much of what we learned together in planning and innovating will be reflected in programs for years to come.

## WITHIN REACH

With a Covid vaccine close at hand, we look forward to coming together again in person. Until then, Illinois network representatives are doing more than ever to create connection and to continue reaching out to our wider kidlit communities.

This year, writing, illustrating, and diversity networks have migrated to Zoom and are still free to Illinois residents—both

members and not-yet-members. Plus, with distance barriers swept away, more can attend. Among the many value-added programs we offered were a morning with Rahele Jomepur Bell, courtesy of Louann Brown and Jerry Barrett of the Downstate Illustrator’s Network; Liesl Shurtliff’s time management presentation through the North Suburban Network, and the Springfield Area’s Debra Daugherty hosting rhyme-master Lori Degman.



My mom always used to invite neighbors over for *coffee and...* something sweet. When in-person network events return, we hope to offer a little something extra too by building upon a hybrid model of in-person/streamed events. Creating this flexibility will make more programs accessible to members who are immune-compromised, caring for families, or working evenings or weekends when most in-person events are traditionally scheduled. Gratefully, our network representatives have kept us connected while keeping knowledge within reach.



# Greeting

## REACH FOR THE BEST IN YOURSELF

So much of our experience during these past months has been a balance of taking the good with the bad, cancelling out uncertainty and a lack of confidence by simply reaching out for help.

Rich Green said to me, “We’ll learn more in adversity than we ever will in good times.” All

of our Illinois volunteers and kidlit literary partners really reached beyond their comfort zones these past few months to help our region thrive. They tried things they’d never tried, found new ways to connect and serve, and put themselves out there while sheltering in place.

Despite the uncertainty, we’ve reached for the best in ourselves. We’ve learned not only what we can do but what we can do without—what’s unnecessary to our process. Going forward, we’ll keep what’s working and focus on what really matters.

## WHEN YOU REACH ME

I hope I was here for you. I hope I picked up—returned your call—that I replied. I hope my responses were timely, helpful, and courteous, even when I was having a bad day in pajamas. (And on those days, I hope you couldn’t tell!) As Rebecca Stead writes in her middle grade novel *When You Reach Me* (Wendy Lamb Books, 2009), “Pajamas are good for the soul.”

We appreciate everyone who was able to maintain their membership despite financial strains. Thanks to lapsed members who emailed us notes of gratitude for keeping programs free and accessible. Gratitude to scholarship supporters and donors who provided opportunities for fellow creators facing hardships and to mark achievements. These include Elizabeth Fama, KidLit Nation, Patricia Hruby Powell, and several anonymous benefactors.



*A cup shared at the 2020 NY Conference.*



*A fitting motto for the SCBWI-IL Regional Team: We never close.*

Thank you for giving me agency, as your volunteer servant, to create positive change. Nothing is achieved alone within SCBWI-Illinois. I’m so grateful for all my willing collaborators, volunteers, representatives, teammates, kidlit partners, independent booksellers, bloggers, tech gurus, and fairy godmothers. I cannot say more about the collaboration, true grit, grace, perseverance, mad

skills, and friendship of Jen Wagh, Cedric Gliane, and Deb Aronson. *Thank you for keeping it fun.*

Because I had plenty to do, 2020 really did fly by for me. Maybe I learned more than I thought about simple joys and living in the moment from Decker Dog, my constant studio companion. Because when we reach—beyond our comfort zone, out for help, and for the stars—possibilities that were once out of reach end up within our grasp. As a community, we reach not only for the best in ourselves but for the best in one another. Because, despite the obvious limitations, we’re still better together.

When you reach me, I hope you will find me changed but only for the better and definitely for good. It will have been because of you. And for me, it will have been well worth the wait. 🌟

DEBORAH TOPOLSKI dedicates this article to SCBWI-Illinois members who have suffered loss these past months and all who have recovered from the coronavirus. May you find hope and healing when you reach for your fellow members.



# Illustrator in the Spotlight

## SPYING ON BUMBLEBEES

by Carrie Carlson

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

I am an illustrator with high-flying dreams to also become an author/illustrator.

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

My go-to is pen and ink with watercolor, but I love to play with different materials. I often use those ink sketches as inspiration to create something else, like paint markers on wood or linoleum block prints.

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

Like many of my illustrator friends, as a kid I loved to draw and started keeping sketchbooks in high school. I went off to college as a biology and art double major (with plans to become a veterinarian) but picked up work-study as a tutor and found I really loved to teach. So I added secondary education to my course load and became certified to teach high school.

Before entering the classroom on the weird side of the desk, I got an MFA in Scientific Illustration, which really honed my skills in drawing animals and plants. I've been teaching fulltime for twenty years now (where did the time go??) and still love to fill up sketchbooks. Favorite places to sketch are the Field Museum (where everything holds still) and any aquarium or zoo (where only tortoises hold still). I'm also an avid printmaker and really enjoy turning my sketchbook work into linoleum block prints. Besides SCBWI, I'm an active member of the [Guild of Natural Science Illustrators \(GNSI\)](#).



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

I really love to draw animals, especially those in unusual friendships, like an octopus and seahorses or an emu and a flock of butterflies.

### 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.

While sketching at the [Cheyenne Mountain Zoo](#) in Colorado, I met Damien, a full-grown emu. He had such a personality! I must have stood there close to an hour working on my drawing, just enjoying his company. I later used that sketch to paint an emu on my portfolio box. Recently I painted a bunch of common grass butterflies (native to Australia) and added them digitally to the emu painting. I'm brainstorming emu adventures and would just love to create a book dummy for an upcoming SCBWI conference.



# Illustrator in the Spotlight



## THE PERSON BEHIND THE PENCIL

**What three words best sum you up?**

Curious, creative, patient

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

Richard Scarry, Dr. Seuss, Garth Williams

**Which illustrators are your favorites now?**

Timothy Basil Ering, Shaun Tan, Mae Besom, Uri Shulevitz, The Brothers Hilts

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

I'm working on my PhD in Art + Design Education at Northern Illinois University with plans to become a college professor.

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

I'm completely inspired by nature. Watching perfect blue robin eggs hatch and become adorably ugly fledglings, or monarch caterpillars turning into chrysalises and later flying away in spectacular new orange clothes; daffodil bulbs sending up their brave little noses right through the snow, spying on bumblebees while they go about

their busy days...there's always something to learn, and to draw! My favorite kind of day is one I get to spend outside, quietly field sketching.

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

I've never been stuck for ideas, only time. My challenge instead is to prioritize and keep some balance in my day. Being a teacher can be all-consuming, especially during this crazy year of remote learning. Making time for my own art practice has been very important for my mental health. 🌞



**Where can we find you?**

Website: [www.carriecarlsonart.com](http://www.carriecarlsonart.com)

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

Email: [humla@cscarlson.com](mailto:humla@cscarlson.com)

I also teach classes at the [Morton Arboretum](https://www.mortonarboretum.org/) (everything from drawing birds and nature journaling to linoleum block printing and watercolor).

# Tales from the Front

A STAY-AT-HOME BOOK TOUR by Keir Graff

*I set my most recent book in a tiny house.  
I never suspected I'd end up living in one, too.*



## WORKING BACKWARD

Moments of genuine inspiration are all too rare for me. Instead of a single “aha!” moment, I’m usually forced to work with repeated instances of “ah . . . huh?”

Following my middle grade novels *The Matchstick Castle*, a romp set in a huge, dangerously dilapidated wooden house that is home to a forgotten family of adventurers, and *The Phantom Tower*, which takes place in a haunted, Depression-era Chicago high-rise, I wanted to write something the same but different.

Starting with the title—as we should never, ever do—I pondered Dark Lighthouses and Sad Funhouses and all kinds of contradictory abodes until I hit paydirt with *The Tiny Mansion*. Setting my next book in a tiny house felt like both a nice twist and a writerly challenge: Could I tell an even bigger story in an even smaller home?

Working backward, I found story elements in my own past as I recalled a childhood trip to Northern California, where my family visited an artist friend living in a trailer in the redwoods. (I slept on the ground outside, underneath a tree that seemed as tall as a skyscraper, and woke up covered in thick, sticky spiderwebs.) I thought back to author visits in Oakland and a tiny school in the magical town of Canyon, where, after my presentation, a teacher showed me hand-hewn wooden houses hidden among the trees.

I ended up writing about Dagmar, a 12-year-old girl whose family’s financial situation goes from bad to worse when her handyman father finances and builds a tiny house for a client who then backs out of the deal. Evicted from their apartment, they move into the tiny house, squatting on land next to a forest owned by a reclusive tech billionaire. Determined to return home to her friends, Dagmar begins a campaign to “sabotage summer.” But an even bigger problem arises when a wildfire begins raging through the forest . . .

## TOURING FROM HOME

I completed the first draft in October 2018, days before the deadly and destructive Camp Fire began raging through the Golden State. As I continued preparing the book for its eventual September 2020 publication, I knew there was a good chance it would be released during another raging fire season—but I certainly didn’t see the COVID-19 pandemic coming.



*Caffeinating before another virtual visit.*

When Chicago went into lockdown in March, I was relatively sanguine. I naively assumed our country would quickly pull together and take the steps needed to get the pandemic under control. But gradually it began to dawn on me that my book would be released into a different world.

My publisher repeatedly pushed back promotion planning: they weren’t sure what to do. And who can blame them? Middle grade sales have long been structured around in-person school visits, and I’m sure they were also hoping the pandemic would recede in time to get things back on track. But there was no Plan B. On September 8, my book’s birthday, I found myself with a timely tale I was sure kids would want to read—and no sure way to reach them.

Complicating matters, I was now living in a tiny house. Not literally. But where once I enjoyed hours each day with our entire Chicago condominium to myself, my high-schooler sons and architect wife were all home ALL THE TIME,



# Tales from the Front

attending school and working remotely. And for some strange reason, none of them wanted me to appear, wearing my pajamas, in the background of their Zoom calls. Where once I took phone calls while pacing through every room, or spread out work on the dining room table, I was now confined to my office—the smallest room in the place.

Just like Dagmar, I was stuck with my family, missing my friends, and pining for the way things used to be.

But I had one thing Dagmar did not: Wi-Fi.

If I couldn't bring myself to the kids in person, I was going to have to do it virtually. I wrote a new presentation that was shorter, faster-moving, and had more slides than ever. I invested in a professional-quality green screen. I learned how to use a green screen.

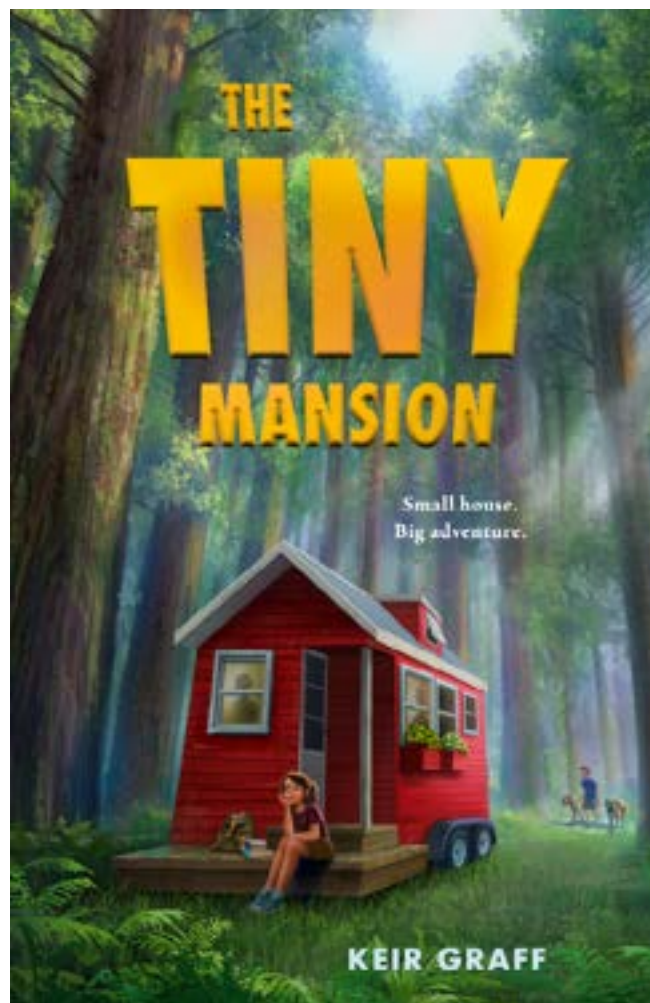
At the same time, I was reaching out to every teacher and librarian I'd ever worked with, one email at a time, writing personal notes and asking if they wanted to connect. Some were struggling to adapt to new remote learning requirements, but others were eager and ready, and I received a steady stream of bookings. I worked with indie booksellers to adapt book ordering and signing to a hands-off environment.

Following the advice of my genius friends James Kennedy and Angela Sherrill, I launched an architectural contest for kids, called "Design Your Own House with a Story," where submissions would be judged by actual architects. The idea was to fill my social feed with adorable kid art—and to keep my books in the conversation without having to talk about them all the time.

I also partnered with [Bookish Chicago](#) on a gift set of signed hardcovers with an architectural drawing kit (stencils, a metallic pencil, and a pad of "Graff Paper"). It *was* the holiday season, after all.

Yes, it's been a crazy amount of work, and book sales still lag behind pre-pandemic days. But like Dagmar, I've been reminded that, even when circumstances are against us, there are still some things under our control.

And best of all, my fear that virtual school visits would be sterile and unsatisfying has been proven completely wrong. I may not be able to hear the kids laugh at my jokes, but I can see the smiles on their faces. And that makes my tiny house feel a whole lot bigger. ✨



KEIR GRAFF is the author of funny and fantastical middle grade adventure novels including *The Tiny Mansion*, *The Phantom Tower* (a Chicago Tribune Best Children's Book), and *The Matchstick Castle* (an official Illinois Reads selection).

Visit [www.keirgraff.com](http://www.keirgraff.com) to learn more about the "Design Your Own House with a Story" contest and to sign up for his newsletter, [Graff Paper](#).

# Creative Sparks

POETRY BY SALLIE WOLF

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ANDREA HILL FITZGERALD



## THE MOON AND I

Hide and seek  
Playing games  
Teasing, but  
Not calling names.

Now I see you  
Now I don't.  
Sometimes you shine  
Sometimes you won't.

Fool me once,  
twice, and then  
Fool me time  
and time again.

Outside, light side,  
dark side, gone.  
Always hunting  
For the moon.



# Creative Sparks

## LONG BEFORE I KNEW WHAT I WAS DOING

Long before I knew what I was doing,  
What I was doing was looking for the moon.  
Looking for the moon and drawing what I saw.  
Drawing what I saw each day that I could find it.  
I could find it more and more, the longer I looked.  
The longer I looked, the more I saw.  
The more I saw, the more I knew what I was doing.  
What I was doing was looking for the moon. ☀

SALLIE WOLF is an observer and avid journal keeper, with degrees in Anthropology and Art. The Moon Project grew directly out of a few casual notations in her journals which developed into an obsession. Visit her website at [salliewolf.com](http://salliewolf.com). She is a co-rep for the Oak Park/near west Network and the author of *The Robin Makes a Laughing Sound: A Birder's Observations*; *Truck Stuck*; and *Peter's Trucks*.

ANDREA HILL FITZGERALD is an illustrator, painter, and art educator based on the Southside of Chicago. Andrea is known for her mixed media work combining drawing, painting, and beeswax. Andrea is the winner of the SCBWI Illinois Interactive Illustration Contest. Visit her website at [andeahillfitzgerald.com](http://andeahillfitzgerald.com)



# How to Write a (S T E A M) Superhero Story

by Karla Valenti

## ACT 1 (OR THE SETUP FOR AN EPIC CONFRONTATION)

You know that little voice in the back of your mind that tells you you're no good, that you'll never reach your dreams, that it's not even worth trying? Or maybe it's a real person standing in your way, shooting down all of your good ideas. Perhaps it's circumstantial: a lack, a loss, a limit to what you feel you can actually achieve.

Let's call that force "Mr. Opposition." And Mr. Opposition's job is to lay down obstacles and challenges every step of the way.

*I am Mr. Opposition!*



Illustration by Annalisa Beghelli

Obviously Mr. Opposition is good at what he does—that's how he's earned the coveted role of Antagonist. The question is, how good of a Protagonist are *you* going to be?

At first, Mr. Opposition will be huge and scary, full of spikes and fangs and biting commentary. He'll eat your dreams and aspirations for lunch, he'll laugh at your dismay. He'll make you feel small and oh-so-vulnerable. You'll take a cautious step toward your goal and inevitably trip on a well-placed criticism.

*(Bwah-ha-ha)*

But you will not retreat because you know that a good story—a truly satisfying story—requires more than just one attempt. So you'll try again.

A-ha! But Mr. Opposition knows plot structure too, and he tricks you into imbibing a substantial dose of self-doubt, foiling your attempt a second time around.

*(rubs evil hands gleefully)*

Your goal is so shiny though, so appealing. Worth at least another shot. But alas! Your courage is rewarded with another resounding defeat as Mr. Opposition serves up your worst nightmare (in all caps): REJECTION

*(fireworks and much fanfare in Mr. Opposition's lair)*

You have reached the "all hope is lost" moment!

## ACT 2 (OR THE "BIG REVEAL")

You may be in the pit of despair, but you are not defenseless.

*(cue Protagonist's musical theme with heroic undertones—i.e., the Rocky soundtrack)*

You, my friend, have an arsenal of real superpowers at your disposal, and this is your time to shine. First and foremost, you have persistence! And every time you flex your superpower and persist in the face of opposition, you shrink your Antagonist—your very own Mr. Opposition—a little bit more.

Sure, the Antagonist starts off pretty big, with those sharp fangs and claws and pointy things on its back. It requires loads of persistence and endless attempts to fend him off. Yikes!



But here's the secret to this story: that unceasing effort is precisely what makes your story worth telling! What matters to your fans is the fact that you suffered greatly at the hands of Mr. Opposition, but you persisted anyway. We know it wasn't easy, but you did it nonetheless. You had every justifiable reason to give up. (We would have given up long ago!) And yet, you showed up, time and again. And because you did, you made us love you even more.



# How to Write a (STEAM) Superhero Story

And here's the big reveal: *Your strength as a Protagonist is measured directly by the strength of your Antagonist (or how difficult it is to defeat him/her/them/it)*. And it's the same for our characters.

## ACT 3 (OR WHY IT MATTERS)

As readers, and as human beings, we know all too well what it feels like to suffer, to face our own Antagonists. So when an author presents a Protagonist who suffers and despairs and wants nothing more than to give up, we see ourselves in that main character. We relate. We connect to the character and their plight, and we desperately want them to succeed. Which is why, in the end, when they're battered and bruised but triumphant, they shine like the superhero they really are...with a great story to tell. The BEST story ever.

This superhero journey is exactly how the *My Super Science Heroes* series was born.

## EPILOGUE (OR HOW THE ADVENTURE GOES ON)

There I was, struggling to prove I deserved the title of "author," trailed by an awfully large Antagonist who had, for over a decade, fed me a steady diet of self-doubt, criticism, and "capital R" Rejection. One day, a seemingly teeny tiny opportunity came along in an email from a science association looking to partner with an author to create a book about Marie Curie. They had put out a call for proposals and were planning on crowdsourcing the book to pay for publication costs.

The stage was set between me and my Antagonist, and the obstacles were clear:

Obstacle 1: I had never written nonfiction.

Obstacle 2: I had zero background in science.

Obstacle 3: There were hundreds of (far more qualified) authors around the world entering this contest.

This was a no-brainer for my Antagonist.

But I persisted and I "showed up" anyway.

I began by reading anything I could about Marie Curie, trying to get a sense for who she was (not just what she'd

accomplished). I wanted to tell her story from an angle that had not yet been explored, a common thread that would allow me to connect with *her*. The more I read, the clearer it became. We shared something very important—persistence!

I certainly do not have Marie Curie's brilliant capacity for science, but I know what it feels like to face off against opposition, to try and fail a million times and then try again. Like Marie, I had a choice, every day, as to whether I was going to let my nemesis defeat me or whether I would continue fighting the good fight.

As my idea took shape, I realized that the best way I could honor this remarkable woman was by showcasing her quality as a real-life superhero doing the hard work of never giving up.

Like all of us, Marie Curie was a multifaceted and complex individual, defined by many traits—not just her success as a scientist. My goal was to retell the story of Marie focusing on who she was rather than *what she did*.

I went out on a limb and framed my story proposal as a superhero narrative, featuring Super-Evil Nemesis, his army of minions (including the aptly-named Mr. Opposition, who was sent out to defeat Marie Curie), and a heroine with the power of persistence. To my great delight, my proposal was selected (and my own Antagonist had quite a reckoning that day)!

I began working with the Marie Curie Alumni Association (MCAA) to develop the story (and thankfully they were able to provide the very important factual and scientific vetting). I also collaborated closely with Annalisa Beghelli (the illustrator) since the concept relied quite heavily on the art. The crowdsourcing campaign went live and before the month was over, we had far exceeded our goal. Even better, we received an offer from Sourcebooks for world rights to what has become the *My Super Science Heroes* series.

*Marie Curie and the Power of Persistence* was published in April 2020 and will be followed by *Alan Turing and the Power of Curiosity* (with his minion, Miss Enigma, as a worthy antagonist) in March 2021.

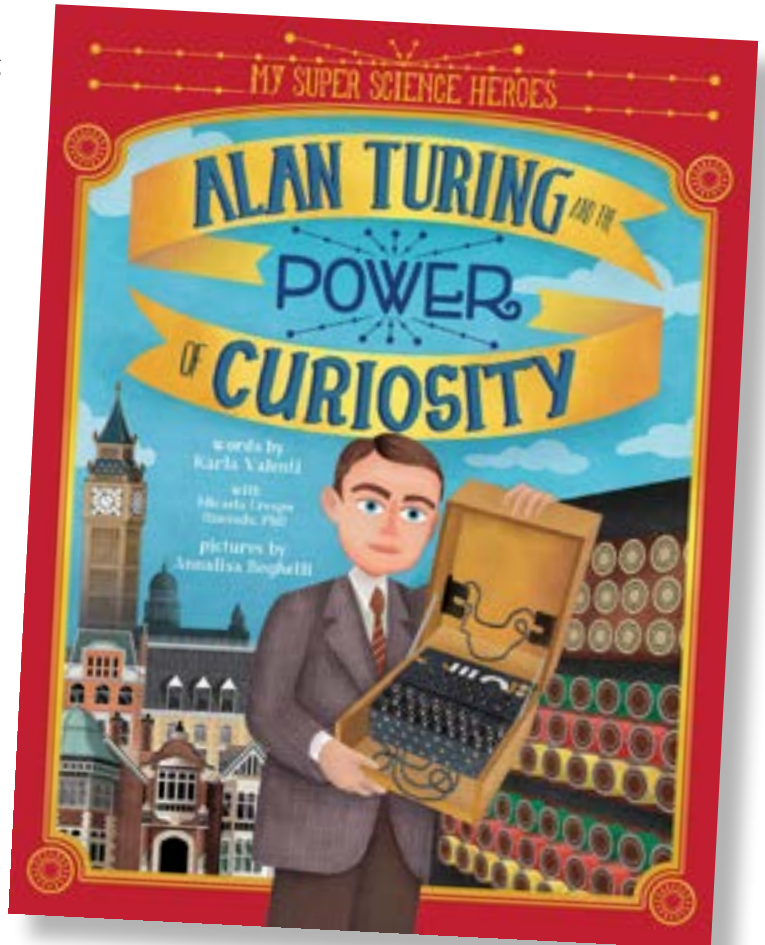




# How to Write a (STEAM) Superhero Story

I continue to work closely with MCAA to identify scientists we would like to feature, their superpowers, and possible Antagonists.

It has been a remarkable and profoundly rewarding journey, although not without its challenges and opposition. Nevertheless, this experience stands as a reminder that sometimes, when we have the courage to show up and continue facing our Antagonist, we do come out triumphant (and maybe, as in my case, with a great (STEAM) Superhero story worth telling). ✨



KARLA VALENTI writes stories for and about kids, taking readers on journeys steeped in magical realism and philosophical questions. Her storytelling is heavily influenced by her Mexican heritage and layered with ideas and concepts she's picked up in her many travels around the world. She currently resides in the Chicagoland area with her husband and three kids, two cats, and hundreds of books. Karla writes picture books and middle grade novels. You can learn more about her books at [karlavalenti.com](http://karlavalenti.com).

# The Songs in Our Stories

by Alina Celeste Hevia

The [oldest known lullaby](#) is etched onto a clay tablet. It is written in cuneiform and was crooned to babies in ancient Babylon. Like many folk lullabies, it's a little threatening. The baby is warned that its crying has woken the household god, and if it doesn't stop and go to sleep the god will eat it up. Frankly, that's nicer than some of the things I have gently promised recalcitrant babies.

There is something reassuring, though, in the idea that the act of caring for a young child hasn't really changed much in the last 2000 years. The feelings of joy and frustration are a perpetual part of the baby experience. So are lullabies, stories, and lack of sleep. Because of this, lullabies, as a genre, are deeply embedded in the human psyche. In fact, some [cognitive scientists](#) in England published a study in 2018 in which they asked the subjects to identify songs from 86 different societies by their function, i.e., "songs to soothe a baby" and "songs to dance to." The lullabies were among the easiest to identify, across the board. As far as I know, there is not a culture without them.

Lullabies tend to share traits across all known cultures: They are typically simple, repetitive, and soothing. They often have a higher pitch than other songs, and a rocking, lilting feel. In western cultures, they tend to have a 6/8 or 3/4 meter, also known as waltz time, a rhythm almost impossible not to sway to. Since so many of us discover that a swaying or rocking motion does the trick, it makes sense we'd build that into our songs.



*Folklorist Atahualpa  
Yupanqui*

Most cultures also seem to contain a vast repertoire of celebratory (wonderful baby!) and threatening (go to sleep or X will eat you) songs that shift and change and yet endure for generations. One [South American classic](#), for example, collected by renowned folklorist Atahualpa Yupanqui, tells the baby that if it doesn't sleep the white devil will eat its



*Illustration by  
Brooke O'Neill*



# The Songs in Our Stories

feet but, you know, lovingly. Regardless of the lyrics, lullabies live on and are often loaded with feelings of safety and peace, long after the words have lost all meaning.

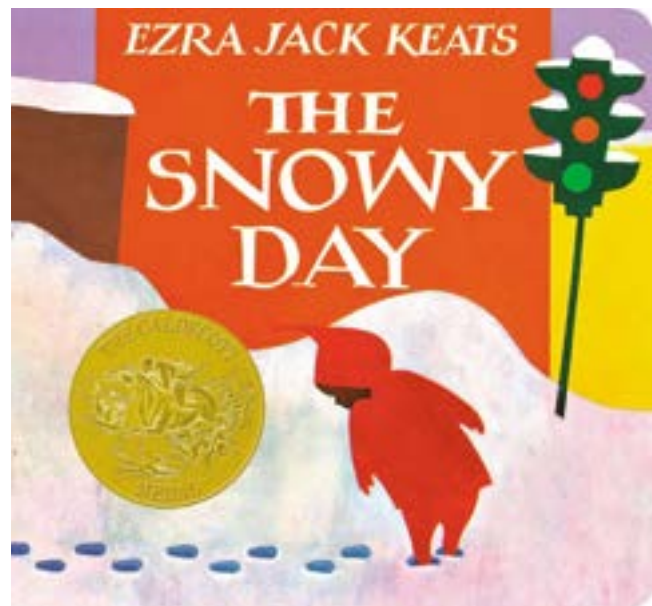
I suspect this is partly because lullabies don't just lull babies to sleep. They create a relationship between the singer and the audience. They often tell stories or give voice to feelings the caregiver needs to express within a context that feels safe and natural, or they simply serve as a more artful appeal to the baby than a gently growled, "JUST SLEEP, DAMN YOU." In other words, they soothe the singer as much as they do the singer's audience. They are a ritual in and of themselves, carried through generations of memory and hardship and love.

Lullabies aren't the only foundational form of the early childhood repertoire. Most grownups discover early on that if you aren't making noise, the baby is. Any adult who finds themselves in the company of a young child often discovers that vocal and auditory interaction is the path of least resistance. Babies crave it and often reward their caregivers with that most magical sound: the baby laugh. So we sing, rhyme, clap, and babble away.



*Margaret Wise Brown and her classic children's book, Goodnight Moon.*

Because of this, learning through music is most children's earliest educational experience. It remains a highly effective technique throughout our lives. I can remember only one equation from my years studying math. My tenth grade teacher taught us to solve the quadratic equation to the tune of "Row Your Boat." To this day, it's the only math problem I can successfully perform without using my fingers. If you ever need to find the roots of something (lullaby or equation), I'm your girl.



The advent of the picture book, rather than diminishing the role of lullabies and nursery rhymes, has given these small, timeless traditions new voice. Trailblazing educator and writer Lucy Sprague Mitchell once said that "communication is not the earliest impulse that leads to the use of language." What young children responded to, she observed, was "rhythm, sound quality, and patterns of sound." Not surprising, given the soundtrack of most early childhoods is a collection of singing, rhyming, and clapping. The importance of the rhythm inherent in language is key in the most enduring picture books, such as *Goodnight Moon* by Margaret Wise Brown. The hypnotic meter of that classic has been written about and examined often since its publication in 1947. Other classics share an undeniable rhythm and flow. Even a book like *The Snowy Day* by Ezra Jack Keats, which is neither rhyming nor obviously rhythmic, has an engrossing pull created by the words as they are read aloud. With books written in verse, the connection is even more obvious.

After children grow too old for lullabies, they move on to other forms. For most of human history this included a repertoire of folk songs. People sang, played music, and told stories for countless generations around fires, hearths, and tables. The weight of so many voices and a human preference for predictable patterns means those forms and tropes are still ubiquitous in music today. Thousands



# The Songs in Our Stories

of years of folk songs, ballads, and epic poetry also created a standard for verse. That standard has transferred seamlessly into picture books.

My first deliberate look into the connection between folk music and picture books was prompted by Chicago educator Brigid Finucane, who taught a workshop on musical storybooks. I was struck by the obviousness of her assertion that, by their very nature, picture books in verse lend themselves to folk music.

Part of this easy partnership is due to the physical structure of picture books. The pages of most modern picture books come in multiples of 4 or 8. Most western folk songs are in 4/4 time. The standard 24 to 32 pages become that many measures in a song. Music and language developed to support each other and that relationship made its way onto the page.

I challenge you to try this: Pick up a rhyming picture book in your home. Any one will do. As you read through it, try singing the words to a common tune. Not all will work. It can take a little massaging, but it's amazing how easy it is to find a match, once you are looking for one. Some of my favorite examples are:

- *Oh, No!* by Candace Fleming and illustrated by Eric Rohmann, sung to the centuries-old classic "Froggie Went a-Courtin'"
- *I Like Myself!* by Karen Beaumont and illustrated by David Catrow, sung to "Skip to My Lou"
- *Welcome to the Party* by Gabrielle Union and illustrated by Ashley Evans sung to "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot"

The language carries the music with it into the world of the book. One of the more magical aspects of this relationship is that most of these books can be sung to several different melodies. For example, *One Red Rooster* by Kathleen Sullivan Carroll and illustrated by Suzette Barbier can be sung to "Skip to My Lou" and "London Bridge is Falling Down." In fact, whenever I teach this method in workshops, I encourage teachers and librarians to try several different melodies when singing their books and to choose the one that works for them.

It is a slightly mystical process. You'll hear a story sung to one melody, but when you try it yourself, another melody may flow most naturally for you. Perhaps it has to do with how your

brain processes language, perhaps it is simply because you know one melody better than the other. What this means is that each sung book becomes a unique, personal experience informed by the reader.

As my work began to involve more Spanish language and bilingual programming, I became curious as to whether the same relationship between folk songs and picture books existed in Spanish, especially in the case of a translation.

It does.

- *Buenos Dias/Good Morning* by Meritxell Martí and illustrated by Xavier Salomó can be sung to the tune of "Arroz Con Leche."
- *¡Me gusta como soy!* by Karen Beaumont and illustrated by David Catrow can be sung to "Los Pollitos Dicen."
- *La Llama Llama Rojo Pijama* by Anna Dewdney can be sung to "Los Elefantes."
- *El Artista Que Pintó un Caballo Azul* by Eric Carle can be sung to "Que Linda La Manita."

Not every picture book can be sung, of course. Many cannot, nor should they be. I see the ones that can as a thread between the old and the new. Given the prevalence of rhyming picture books, that thread isn't going anywhere. It just adds to the tapestry begun with a clay tablet in Babylon. 🌟

ALINA CELESTE HEVIA is an educator, musician, and writer from Miami, Florida. Her YouTube channel, Alina Celeste Music, won the Parents' Choice Gold Award in 2018 and keeps kids laughing and learning with one new video a week. With her partner, Hamlet "Mi Amigo" Meneses, she teaches, performs, and presents workshops for educators, librarians, and children living all over the world. Find them at [gocreativeprograms.com](http://gocreativeprograms.com). She is a Jubilation Foundation Fellow of 2020 and won the SCBWI Illinois Many Voices Prize in 2020 for an unpublished manuscript. When she's not writing, teaching, or singing, she is cooking! Be sure to reach out if you want the best sweet potato brownie recipe ever.

# A Fly on the Wall

## FULL ZOOM AHEAD! by Debra Daugherty

This past November SCBWI-IL launched Illinois Interactive, its first virtual online conference, with the hashtag and theme #FullZoomAhead. From blastoff to touchdown, the organizers' mission proved a tremendous success. Our out-of-this-world flight included keynote speeches by astronaut John Herrington and author-illustrator Vanessa Brantley-Newton as well as contributions by editors, agents, art directors, authors, and other illustrators. These guest presenters provided a wealth of knowledge to their "crew." Many shared their own personal writing journeys and all provided insights to help the attendees improve their work, make their writing stronger, and navigate the world of publishing.

As the lucky winner of the Kathryn O'Connor Memorial Scholarship, I was able to be a fly on wall in the five breakout sessions. Here's a glimmer of what I learned.

### BREAKOUT #1 Secondary Characters Get the Spotlight with Sarah Aronson



Sarah Aronson, PAL coordinator and winner of the 2020 Crystal Kite Award, Midwest division, for her picture book *Just Like Rube Goldberg* made me realize I have been neglecting my secondary characters. They are just as important as the protagonist, even if it's only a tertiary character

with a walk-on role like the fairy godmother in *Cinderella*. Secondary characters, good or bad, highlight the protagonist's story and give insight into the protagonist's weaknesses or strengths. Something we might forget to consider is that all settings act, in a way, as secondary characters. Settings often play a huge role in the reader's ability to understand the protagonist and may also reveal what shaped the protagonist's life.

Another gem that Sarah shared: The most important secondary character must be present during the most important moments. Hearing this, I made a mental note to return to my manuscripts to be certain I have done this.

Sarah also pointed out that sometimes a writer's subconscious holds clues that need to be uncovered. Her handout was filled with questions to answer about one's own writing process, characters, and scenes. "Where were you when the idea for your story popped into your head?" "Why is this story important to you?" "What do your characters want? Why?"

Sarah's pet peeve in fiction is dead parents. She noted that there is no one more important in a child's life. Too many stories have just one parent or none at all. But including a living, breathing mother or father harping on their kid to do the right thing, for instance, can heighten the tension.

In the course of Sarah's presentation, I filled seventeen pages in my notebook for future reference!

### BREAKOUT #2 Picture Books and So Much More with Vanessa Brantley-Newton

Vanessa Brantley-Newton's enthusiasm and vibrant personality sparkled. She said she wanted to challenge us to try something new, something different, to free ourselves. Her suggestion? Create a collage. She believes ripping and tearing paper can, among other things, provide a healing process.



For her own art, Vanessa uses a variety of papers: tissue paper, newspaper, the blue plaid design inside an envelope, construction paper, even computer paper. She also uses "under paper," the paper she lays beneath her artwork.

Her supplies include acrylic paints, Liquitex paints, markers, crayons, and Posca pens (acrylic paint markers). She mixes colors on paper and spreads them with a spatula. Don't have one? A used credit card will do.

Vanessa shared several of her finished works—beautiful designs that glowed in all colors of the rainbow. She also



# A Fly on the Wall

shared her sketchbook, which was filled with collages she's made. As she turned each page, I marveled at her amazing artwork. My favorites were the roly-poly birds because they made me smile.

Collaging—the freedom of playing with paper and paint—is not only fun but can also be a stress-breaker. And, an added bonus, you can scan your colored papers into your computer to use over and over again!

Another great part of Vanessa's presentation was her focus on the illustrations in *The Snowy Day* by Ezra Jack Keats, all created as collages. Vanessa chose a page from this book and designed her own collage for it—similar but not exactly like the original. She added her own vision to the page with a smiley, rosy-cheeked sun, brightly colored buildings, and she gave Peter a scarf.

I had given my copy of *The Snowy Day* to my nephew, but after viewing Vanessa's session, I ordered another one for myself. I want to relive Peter's snowy day and study the art.

## BREAKOUT #3 Finding the Heart of your Story with Cozbi Cabrera



encouraged her audience to find the things that stir, touch, and move them, the things that make them cry because of their tremendous beauty.

My thoughts sprang to a rosy sunset, a child's smile, and a furry kitten curled in my arms. As Cozbi emphasized, as artists we need to surround and immerse ourselves in these objects of beauty each day, in whatever we do. We also need to feed our hearts with life experiences in order to create.

Cozbi's artistic talents are vast. She illustrates and paints. She designs quilts. And her exquisite handmade dolls wear clothing detailed with Cozbi's hand-sewn beading.

Soft-spoken Cozbi touched on finding and feeding the heart of a story. She

I loved the term Cozbi gave illustrators—*visual translators*. An illustrator's capacity to color, add shadow or light, and to change texture shows the story's intent.

Cozbi also noted that illustrators have two powers available to them: the power of immersion, in which they turn themselves over entirely to the project, and the power to infer. This second power involves discovering something they can add to the story, something not in the text. Perhaps a feeling they have for a special heirloom vase, or for their own children at play. Cultural nuance is a way to apply inference, such as showing cornbread on a table or using rich colors that pertain to a character's heritage.

The takeaway, as Cozbi expressed it, is that illustrators have the ability to leave a piece of themselves in every project they do.

## BREAKOUT #4 Understanding the Basics of Graphic Novel Writing with Kate Hannigan

Kate Hannigan's presentation took me into an uncharted area. I had no idea how to write a graphic novel. I grew up with comic books, and loved them, but never thought of them as literature. But Kate made it clear that they share the same properties as a novel. They have a beginning, a middle, and an end, as well as characters, dialogue, and, ideally, a strong plot.



During Kate's breakout I learned the basics, including how to envision a six-panel page with active images and words that move the plot from scene to scene. Graphic novels contain captions and thought and speech bubbles. And powerful art!

Graphic novels are especially beneficial to struggling or reluctant readers. Such books can be an educational aide by teaching English and helping kids build their vocabulary. And they aren't always focused on superheroes. Graphic novels come in all genres. They may be memoir, fiction, or nonfiction and are often developed as series.



# A Fly on the Wall

My interest piqued when Kate said sales for graphic novels are up 42 percent in the North American book market. This report came out in October 2020, during the pandemic! Another amazing fact: All told, the *Captain Underpants* series, including chapter books and graphic novels, has sold 90 million copies!

Kate's helpful handouts explained how to write a graphic novel. Each page is based on illustrated panels, usually six per page, as noted above, but some pages can have less. When writing the action and dialogue, the author needs to think visually and give the artist room.

Using Kate's script as an example, I converted one of my picture books into a graphic novel. It's in its early stages, but I'm excited to be trying something new, something out of my realm!

**Kate's list of great sources for more information:**

- *Comics and Sequential Art* by Will Eisner, considered the father of the graphic novel

**And, all by Scott McCloud:**

- *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*
- *Reinventing Comics: The Evolution of an Art Form*
- *Making Comics: Storytelling Secrets of Comics, Manga and Graphic Novels*

## BREAKOUT #5

### Making Story: Narrative Nonfiction Picture Books with Barb Rosenstock



I write fiction, so I wondered how Barb Rosenstock's presentation on nonfiction would help me. What I discovered surprised me. Much of what she spoke about could be applied to fiction as well!

Just like fiction, nonfiction usually has characters with desires and obstacles to overcome. It has tension and a climax, and, finally, a resolution. Like a fiction narrative, a nonfiction story needs a good hook from the start, and the words and the art are meant to work together.

Barb taught that nonfiction uses words and art in synergy.

From the beginning, the action increases with internal logic, and the story must end in a purposeful way, usually by answering an important and/or emotional question, such as "What makes someone brave?" or "Why does the planet need our help?"

Barb also explained that authors shouldn't say "my illustrator." Instead, say "my book's illustrator" or "my story's illustrator." Authors and illustrators are writing partners. Respect the illustrator. If you're not the illustrator, allow him or her to tell as much of your story as you have.

"So what?" is a question Barb asks herself many times as she's writing. "So, what changes happened in the world because of this subject?" "So, what is so important about this topic that kids need to know about it?" She also asks "So what?" when revising. "So, what about this specific subject is most interesting for kids?" "So, what am I really trying to say?"

When it's time to revise, think of it as Re-Vision. Revision your story into something better. Use strong verbs! Relate those verbs to your theme. Banish adverbs. Vary your words in a sentence, and vary your sentence structure within each paragraph.

After returning to Earth at the Sunday evening conclusion of the conference, a feeling of sadness engulfed me. My space odyssey was over. But then I remembered. I had eight more days to watch the breakouts!

Before signing off, I'd like to congratulate the SCBWI-IL faculty, hosts, committee, and volunteers who planned this cosmic trip. They did a remarkable job! Thank you for this inspiring adventure. It was a blast! 🌟

DEBRA DAUGHERTY writes children's stories, PBs through YA. Her publications include the picture book *Calamity Cat*; *The Dragon's Ring*, a YA romantic fantasy; and two short stories in *Guardian Angel Kids'* e-zine. Debra joined SCBWI in 2012 and is the network representative for the Springfield, Illinois, area, known as The Scribes. When she is writing, her dogs, Honey, a rescued Pitbull, and CeCe, a Chihuahua, can be found sleeping at her feet.

# Voices of Change



## LGBTQIA+ MIDDLE-GRADE LITERATURE EMERGES AND EVOLVES by Lisa Sukenic

### HISTORY

In the last twenty years there has been a lot of growth in the availability of books for children and young adults that feature LGBTQIA+ main characters and secondary characters. When my children were growing up they were lucky to have Leslea Newman's *Heather Has Two Mommies* (1989), which accurately depicted our family configuration, but not much else.

Early in the 1990s I was teaching kindergarten at a small progressive school and one child told another that she couldn't have two mommies and that one was probably a babysitter. The girl's best friend rose to the occasion as an ally and said, "She does too have two mommies." A 5-year-old brawl at the drinking fountain was broken up as we settled into circle time to have a conversation about all kinds of families. At the end of the discussion a student raised his hand and asked if it was okay that he had a mom and dad living at home. I was fortunate to be teaching in a progressive school with values that honored all members of our community. But even at this very progressive school, we had a parent challenge *Heather has Two Mommies*. Our librarian responded by letting the family know that our books reflected the diversity of the families at our school.

As my own children grew into their elementary years I found there was a substantial lack of middle-grade books representing their world or our family structure. We relied on picture books and on being part of an active LGBTQ community in our college town. My children always saw their family realistically mirrored back to them in our community but not in the literature they read.

### SOME BUT NOT ENOUGH

Some of the first middle-grade books representing gay and lesbian families were *The Accidental Adventures of India McAllister* (Charlotte Agell, 2010), *My Mixed-Up Berry Blue Summer* (Jennifer Gennari, 2012) and *The Misadventures of the Family Fletcher* (Dana Alison Levy 2014). These books are examples of stories that began to include same-sex parents as positive members of their communities in the earlier years.

### THINGS BEGIN TO CHANGE

Two factors influenced this change to "normalize" gay and lesbian relationships in families—the Supreme Court 5-4 ruling that struck down the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) on June 26, 2013, which stated that same-sex couples could be married. A year later, in 2014, the nonprofit [We Need Diverse Books](#) was created in order to hold publishers accountable for representation of diverse authors, which included people of color, gender diversity, the LGBTQIA+ community, people with disabilities, and ethnic, cultural, and religious minorities. The culture was beginning to change. During this time, my partner and I received so many wedding invitations it was unbelievable. Still, some changes come slowly as was evidenced in one case of a wedding photographer and cake decorator who refused to take on customers in the LGBTQIA+ community.

### THE WAY THINGS LOOK NOW

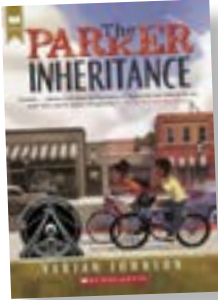
In the last seven years there has been an increase in children's literature that depicts gay and lesbian families. These stories have diverse themes and plotlines and at this point enough titles exist to allow comparison of themes and topics. Even though every LGBTQIA+ family has its own unique dynamics they all share the same complexities as other families, including the challenges of family dynamics, parenting differences, coping with love, loss, marriages, divorces, and death.

*The List of Things That Will Not Change* (Rebecca Stead, 2020) and *The Parker Inheritance* (Varian Johnson, 2017) deal with families moving and changing and with blended family structures. *The List of Things That Cannot Change* relies heavily on the main character Bea learning how to cope with her parents' divorce. This book allows a child to question their family's configuration as Bea asks her dad, "Will you be gay forever?" and as number 9 in a new list writes "Dad is gay." Her new stepsister Sonia, who is Bea's age, does not readily allow Bea into her world.





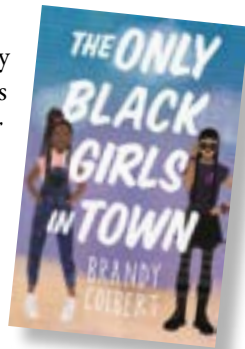
# Voices of Change



*The Parker Inheritance* does a masterful job of creating a rich historical mystery with complex plot twists. Due to her parents' divorce, Candice has to move back to the town where her mom grew up, and there she begins to unravel her grandmother's mystery. The secondary character, Brandon, is dealing with a lack of acceptance by his dad due to not being a "typical boy." This

undertone is threaded throughout the story and the theme of historical racism runs deep as Candice and Brandon uncover her grandmother's story.

*The Only Black Girls in Town* (Brandy Colbert, 2020) is a story that features two dads. This story and *The Parker Inheritance* both incorporate a rich chronological backstory whose history helps to drive each story along. In both cases, the main characters find a journal in their house, which provides a vehicle for going back in time and gives the reader the opportunity to dive deep into the historical context of some unexpected mystery characters. These plot devices impact the story and the LGBTQIA+ themes take a backseat. This is a newer change, and a significant one—stories in which the LGBTQIA+ issues are not the primary focus.



than focusing on the parents being part of the LGBTQIA+ community. Erskine definitely dives more into the two moms' different parenting styles but this disparity is imperative to the main character Julian's journey and specifically to the story.

## MOVING FORWARD AND RESOURCES

LGBTQIA+ middle-grade literature has made great strides in the last ten years. Children growing up in this new year of 2021 and who haven't had the chance before will begin to see their parents represented in literature too. This is important to them and it's also important for their peers to read such books, so that they can develop empathy and understand all kinds of families.

As an educator, it is a comfort and relief for me to know that books like these are now readily available, serving as both mirrors and windows for children growing up at this time. We cannot go back in time, but my children's children will be able to read books about what their parents' families looked like and hopefully these books will start conversations about their own childhood experiences.

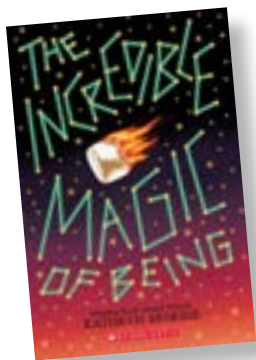
Many books that explore LGBTQIA+ issues are now available, and I especially recommend these websites as a way to find wonderful and diverse LGBTQIA+ reads for middle-graders!

[We Need Diverse Books](#)

[Rainbow Book List](#)

[16 Great LGBTQIA+ Books for Kids and Teens](#) ☀

LISA SUKENIC is a poet, author, and fourth grade teacher at the University of Chicago Lab Schools, where she also co-coordinates the school's Global Reading Challenge. Her poetry and fiction have appeared in *Everyday Haiku* and *Off Campus Writers' Workshop* anthologies. In 2019, *Miles from Motown*, Lisa's historical novel in verse, was named a finalist for the Kraken Book Prize for Middle-Grade Fiction, awarded by Regal House Publishing. *Miles from Motown* will debut in August 2021.



Here are a few titles that have similar family configurations: *The Incredible Magic of Being* (Kathryn Erskine, 2017), *Hazel's Theory of Evolution* (Lisa Jenn Bigelow, 2019), and the above-mentioned *The Only Black Girls in Town*. In the first two, the parents are two moms and in the third book, two dads. The books' plot lines differ but all do involve a move or a change in schools, a common theme for elementary-aged students.

Colbert's and Bigelow's books rely heavily on seventh- and eighth-grade new and old friendship challenges and changes. The search for identity requires that the main characters grow and ultimately to decide who they want to be and what is right for each of them. The authors highlight their main character's growth rather



# Shop Around the Corner

## THE BOOK CELLAR *by Josh Cohen*

Since I moved to Chicago over a decade ago, I've always lived within walking distance of Lincoln Square. The neighborhood boasts plentiful park space, an impressive slate of concerts and festivals, and dozens of independent shops and restaurants. And while the area has seen some commercial turnover in recent years, The Book Cellar (4736-38 N. Lincoln Ave.) is one establishment that has stood firm. For anybody who has shopped there, this success will not come as a surprise. Between its café, cozy reading nook, and floor-to-ceiling bookshelves speckled with handwritten staff recommendations, The Book Cellar is a true Chicago gem.

Eleven years after first visiting The Book Cellar, I finally met its owner, the gracious and humble Suzy Takacs. Despite an internet outage and a vestibule brimming with contact-free book orders, Suzy was kind enough to sit down with me and answer my many questions. Thank you, Suzy, for your generosity and your commitment to the Lincoln Square community.

### What prompted you to open The Book Cellar?

I have been an avid reader and book lover since childhood. I opened The Book Cellar in 2004 after a career as a women's health care nurse practitioner. At that time, there wasn't a bookstore in the Lincoln Square neighborhood. Books and wine were two of my favorite things. I was watching *You've Got Mail* with my husband and some friends, and I said, "I should get out of the rat race and work in a bookstore." My husband replied, "You should get out of the rat race and open your own bookstore." I met with the alderman to present my business plan, and he told me that he was trying to recruit an independent bookstore. He said the neighborhood had been requesting one. So I went to work learning all that I could about the book business.

### Please tell us about your experience as a bookstore owner during COVID. How has the community rallied around you?

It has been a humbling and eye-opening time. I didn't know what to do—close the store or try to fight the battle to keep going. The governor closed down businesses that were deemed "non-essential." Just prior to that, I had cancelled



my events for March, April, and May, which included 12 events that would have drawn over 200 people. Those events are critical to our paying the bills. I always sold books at offsite events and in-store events to reach the volume of sales necessary to meet all the bills. The sales from walk-in traffic did not meet the volume. The COVID restrictions took away all the event sales, so we were only able to sell books through delivery and shipping orders.

An author talked to me about [GoFundMe](#). She said, if it's the difference between staying open and closing, I should seriously consider doing it. It was such a difficult decision, because so many businesses and families besides The Book Cellar were struggling. A neighbor told me there were also people who were now working from home who wanted to do something to help. So I decided to go forward with GoFundMe. I was astonished and touched and tearful and speechless and humbled to meet our goal in just three or four days! My heart was full. I had my answer. The community rally to meet the goal told me they wanted The Book Cellar to continue to be here. I needed to fight the fight to stay in business. I am still fighting the fight. The walk-in and online traffic has really increased. It will be a long time before I will be able to sell books at in-store or offsite events, but with our adjustments to our day-to-day business, we have been able to meet the bills these past months.



# Shop Around the Corner

And as promised, I gave 10 percent of our GoFundMe donations to [Book Industry Charitable Foundation \(Binc\)](#).

## What do you miss most about “the way things were” pre-COVID?

Oh, I miss everything. The people, story time, events, book groups, the people. Did I say the people? Photos with Santa. Halloween. People hanging out in the cafe with a glass of wine.

## How do you view your role as a bookseller in the children’s market?

Story time was always an important part of the store for me. I hired Nili Yelin, [The StoryBook Mom](#), before I even opened the store. She hosted story time here until she moved to New York City about four years ago. Since then, a number of storytellers (Miss Jamie, Miss Tonya, and Mr. Scott) have helped us continue story time. All of these people have been essential to my philosophy of The Book Cellar planting seeds in children to become readers and book lovers.

## Please tell us about your relationship with the community at large.

Prior to the pandemic, we participated, in some fashion, in most of the events hosted by the Lincoln Square Ravenswood Chamber of Commerce—Halloween happenings, Wine Stroll, Apple Fest. We helped host author events at local schools, sold books for Harold Washington Library and for various conferences ([Chicago Writers Association](#), [Murder and Mayhem](#), [StoryStudio Chicago](#)). We would do maybe 10-20 offsite events a month.

Currently, we are helping [Common Pantry](#) and Queen of Angels Elementary School with their book drives.

The neighbors have really supported us and rallied. And the book readers. We have certain customers who I know haven’t finished what they’ve bought already, but they are continuing to pile up books in their homes. People have been super-generous.

One publishing rep described our style as “board books and angst.” There are so many kids in the neighborhood. When we had story time, you would see 20 strollers lined up outside. So we sell a ton of board books. To juxtapose

that, there are a lot of young people who like dense, angst-y fiction, not contemporary, breezy fiction.

## Can you briefly describe your selection process?

Initially I had a little composition book on the front counter, and neighbors would write down the authors and books they wanted us to carry. It took a lot of input from the neighborhood to get a feel of the demographic and what we should carry. Now that I have learned that, I have about 20 reps, from publishers of all sizes, whom I meet with three or four times a year. We’ll go through their catalogs, title by title, and determine which are good books for this demographic and how many I think we can sell. Now that we’ve been open 17 years, I have history to go by. It’s also definitely the people who work here. If you can sell 10 copies of some book because you’ve read it and you love it, that’s what we’ll order.

We carry some self-published authors if they’re neighbors or connected to the store. But a book has to earn its spot on the shelf. You have to sell four times a year to have a spot on the shelf.

## Please tell us about how The Book Cellar interacts with local authors specifically. How do you help support and bring attention to local authors?

I receive emails from local authors and/or their publicists. That is our main form of communication. Sometimes local authors also stop in. We bring attention to local authors through Local Author Night, our staff picks, the signed book section on our website, our Book Cellar Selects subscription program, and through hand selling.

## What is the Book Cellar Selects subscription program?

You can buy a 6-month or a 12-month subscription. Once a month, I write a little card stating why I think a particular book is a good choice and I mail it out to subscribers. I try to pick little gems that people may not have heard of.

## What is your role in supporting BIPOC authors?

It is important to me to respond to the need for BIPOC voices to be heard. It’s important for my own education and increased awareness and to be able to have titles for others to read as well. As a result of the events in June, a customer



# Shop Around the Corner

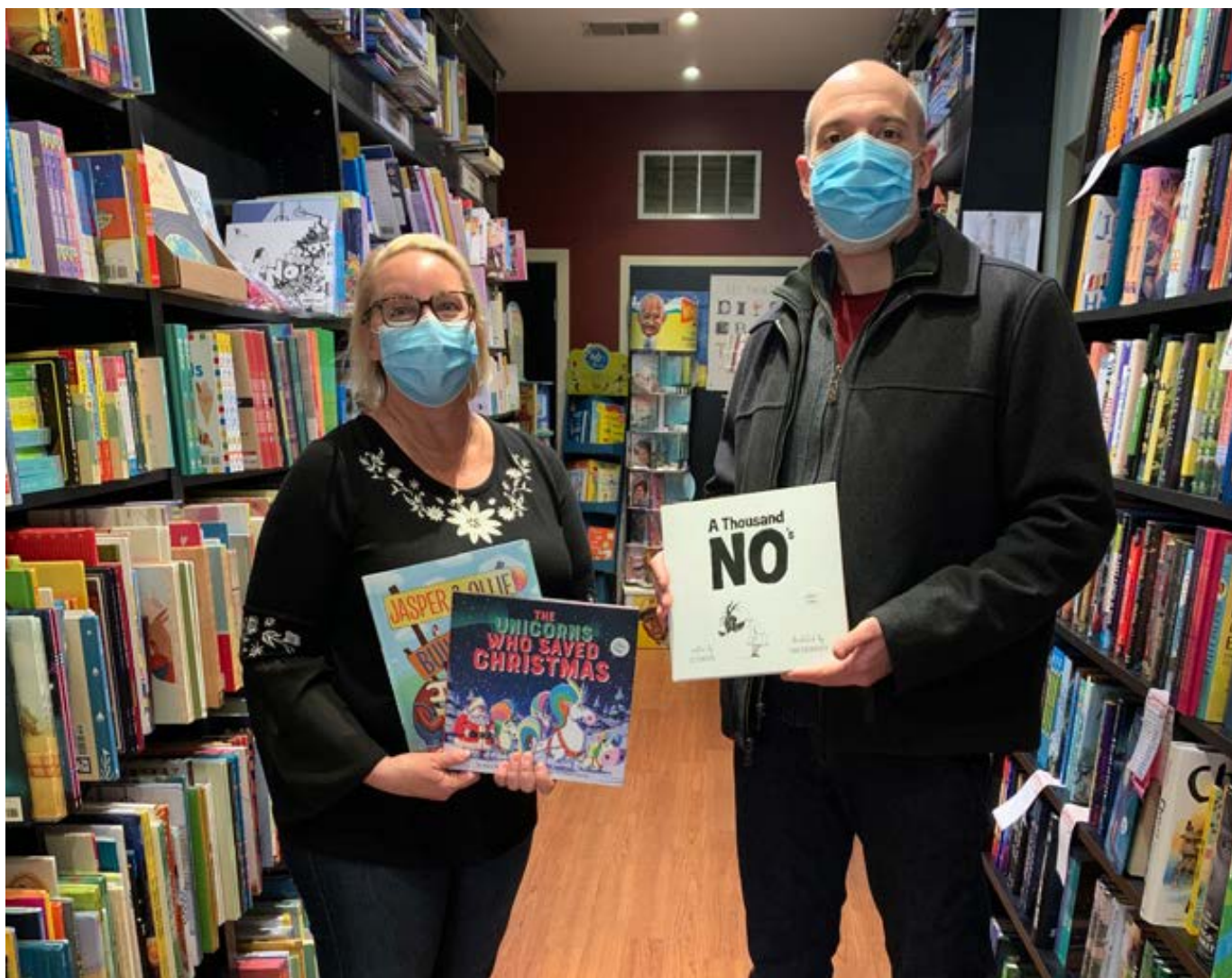
requested that we begin a racial justice book group. I was thankful to be able to offer a platform for the customers to meet.

On September 7, 2019, we were honored to be able to host Ibram X. Kendi for the release of his book *How to Be an Antiracist*. We had a packed store and sold a ton of books. *How to Be an Antiracist* was one of our staff picks for the year.

## How is The Book Cellar unique from other bookstores?

Initially, I thought we were unique because we had a cafe with beer and wine in addition to coffee drinks. Now many bookstores have a beverage selection. But what makes us unique is the feeling of coziness, community, and inclusiveness we provide to the entire demographic spectrum of our neighborhood. ☀

JOSH COHEN is a Chicago-based writer, poet, and cartoonist. In his former life as an attorney, he proudly advocated for survivors of domestic violence and, less proudly, consulted for multinational corporations. You can find him online at [www.theoriginaljoshcohen.com](http://www.theoriginaljoshcohen.com) or connect with him on Instagram (@theoriginaljoshcohen and @littleguysunlimited).



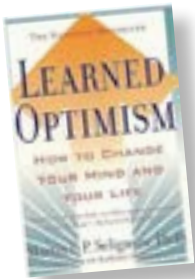
# Inside Story

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## FLEXIBILITY—A STRENGTH FOR ALL TIMES

by Carol Coven Grannick

The prairie grass is cold and frozen, but still bends with the wind, rooted deeply in the earth. I love our Midwest prairies not only because I love wild and wide-open spaces, but because the prairie is my reminder and symbol of emotional resilience, returning each spring and summer with waving green and prairie flowers. Even when the prairies are burned for ecological reasons, tiny green sprouts show quickly in the dark earth. We all have reminders, and this is mine.



Even the most naturally resilient people have felt challenged by our mix of horrors in 2020, moving now into 2021. Healthy, “purposeful” optimism does not ignore hard reality. Martin Seligman, [founder of the Positive Psychology movement](#), writes, “We must be able to use pessimism’s keen sense of reality when we need it, but without having to dwell in its dark shadows.”

Our dark shadows, comforts, and pleasures differ. But very few of us would not welcome more positive emotions in our lives, and therefore feeling optimistic more often. And we can generate positive emotions from both challenging and joyful experiences. In our current situation, I have not been troubled by, nor have I judged, the occasional shadows that come and go for me, because I am lucky enough to have a home and enough money for food, and my limitations seem

less significant given the suffering of others. I have been humbled by the resilience and hope and persistence I’ve seen in families, one after the other, who are evicted and/or without food, sick themselves, or having lost loved ones.

### A COMPANION IN THE PANDEMIC AND EVER-AFTER

Nevertheless, one characteristic of emotional resilience has been front and center in my life. Perhaps it will be helpful to you as well.

That characteristic, or competency, is flexibility. Flexibility, also called *mental agility*, is the ability to adjust thoughts, beliefs, and actions based on new and incoming information. It is a teachable (and therefore learnable) skill. Flexibility diminishes negative thoughts and beliefs and opens your brain to the new experience, whether it’s positive, neutral, or difficult.

I’ve noticed throughout my three decades of discovering, studying, practicing, and then writing and consulting about emotional resilience that I’ve become much more flexible than I was as a child and young adult. This last year in particular has repeatedly highlighted opportunities for flexibility. I’ve noticed this in several ways.



## 1. DISRUPTED SCHEDULES: DISCOVER PLEASURE/PURPOSE VS. RESENTMENT

Schedules offer calming structure and remind us of our priorities, different for each of us. They structure the days and provide a concentrated occupation for our brains. But these schedules can also become repetitive and boring. *Periodic* disruptions—planned or accidental, positive or challenging—trigger our brains to adjust, to turn toward a new path, however briefly. And that requires flexibility. The more easily we turn to the new path that appears (or that we're deliberately creating), the less we worry about what we're leaving (temporarily) undone.



Priscilla du Preez,  
*Unsplash*

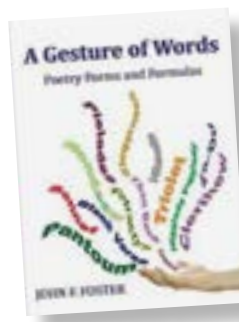
And of course, vice versa. In the transition from schedule to spontaneity (whether that transition is difficult, neutral, or fun), you test and grow your flexibility. I've had welcome disruptions for fun (you'll see below) and for essential service to family and community. Both create valuable meaning and positive emotions.

## 2. EXPERIMENT WITH "NEW," "DIFFERENT," OR "MORE CHALLENGING"

Some of us are having trouble writing or drawing and some of us aren't. As many articles have said, "It's all okay." But the tendency to judge and to find your head filled with negative comments about *what you're not doing* can loom large. My own situation has included launching my debut novel in verse, writing over a dozen guest blog posts pre-launch, and realizing that I longed for a project as new and all-enveloping as *Reeni's Turn* had been for the previous few years. But no such thing was anywhere to be found.

In the absence of a meaningful new project, I filled my writing time with a variety of experiments and researching submissions for poetry. I played with reasonably challenging new poetic forms, spent some time attempting to turn a first novel into a chapter book (too challenging), wrote out narratives for a school visit (extremely helpful in getting me to feel comfortable not even using written notes), pitched and wrote more blog posts, answered interview questions, and wrote a lot of postcards to Wisconsin, South Carolina, and Georgia.

What I learned? Anything that used my hand/brain connection and a pen was worthwhile. Everything was "new"; enough things were challenging. And I was writing, writing, writing. I judged nothing, tried anything that sparked my interest if not passion and generated positive emotions about my writing time. And then one day, just before I began working on this PW column, a new project took hold in mind and heart. I absolutely believe that keeping my hands and brain busy led me there. And I didn't have time to think about all I can't do because of the pandemic.



One resource that could inspire anyone wishing to try new poetic forms!

Trying new, different, and gently challenging activities changes your brain as you transition from familiar to unfamiliar, known to unknown, comfort to the slightly more challenging. In this transition you teach yourself flexibility, and you create positive emotions.

## 3. KEEP YOUR BRAIN OPEN TO SURPRISE.

This is my favorite thing. If you're not judging yourself for whatever is going on or whatever you're feeling, negative feelings don't crowd your brain. You're likely to experience an increased sense of curiosity and a greater openness to "new information." Equally important, you are able to be "in" whatever the new experience is, and whether it's joyful, neutral, or difficult, I believe we function better when we are not bound up with negative emotions. Feelings and thoughts come and go, and flexibility allows you to have a greater ability to notice opportunity, possibility, objects and events that create positive emotions. For me, these are great times to browse new submission possibilities, catch up on contest opportunities, discover a new poetic form, and more. During these times when your mind is relaxed and open, surprises may come your way. By looking for and being receptive to surprises during the past many months, these unexpected benefits came my way:

- Found an agent by reading an interview that made it clear she was someone whose interests matched my writing better than any connection I'd ever made in the past.
- Discovered new submission opportunities for my



# Inside Story

poetry for adults—and submitting to potential good matches creates an abundance of positive emotion (hope) for me. And ultimately, more acceptances!

- Received requests for blog posts and more articles.
- The best surprise of all!

One morning I felt a bit blue and went to browse the internet. While sipping my coffee I noticed an email from Paula Morrow on our SCBWI-IL listserv. She had an extra copy of *Celebrate Cricket: 30 Years of Stories and Art* and was offering it to the first person who asked. My body gushed with a sudden explosion of excitement, and I'd answered Paula's email as fast as my fingers could type (pretty fast!).



Published in 2003  
by Cricket Books

I was the first person to respond! I'd "won"! My blue morning turned to sparkles.

So why was this so important to me?

My son had loved *Spider* and *Cricket*, the stories and the illustrations, especially those by Trina Schart Hyman. He'd decorated our *Sukkab* with his own version of Spider's adventures. And he'd encouraged me to submit my first children's story, written in 1999. After he'd read it, he said, "Mom, this is a *Cricket* story!" He was right. They

accepted the story almost immediately, and in 2001 it became my first published work for children. At the time this *Cricket* collection was published, I hadn't purchased the book because it was beyond my budget.

That blue morning my husband and I cast off our schedules in the name of joy and spontaneity and drove downtown in way more traffic than we imagined—but it was all good! We met Paula on her corner, all of us masked, and she handed me the book through our open window.



Writer, editor, and  
consultant Paula Morrow

Note that this surprise incorporated all three of the items I've listed:

- Disruption of our schedules—yay!
- Something "different": driving downtown for the first time in 2020—yay!
- Surprise! A wonderful book to give to our son (paying forward the positive)—yay!

Thank you again, Paula! Your gift had me bubbling the rest of the day, and I'm smiling even now as I write about it.

## BRUSH UP YOUR FLEXIBILITY

Learning skills for resilience means doing (or thinking) things you may not quite feel like doing. It may also mean using new language to change your thoughts in a way that doesn't feel authentic until you practice it for a while. (I will be teaching this technique at the February North Suburban Network meeting, so watch for the announcement!) In the meantime, try to integrate any or all of these activities to practice psychological flexibility, and I'm guessing your brain will thank you.

1. **Disrupt, or welcome occasional disruptions to, your schedule.**
2. **Try the "New," "Different," or "Gently Challenging."**
3. **Keep your brain open to surprises—search for them and respond to them.**

Each of these activities nudges your brain to transition from familiar/expected to different/unexpected. In that transition, your brain exercises and strengthens flexibility. And in flexibility, there are positive emotions. Even when we "turn" with flexibility to handle difficult disruptions or obstacles, we feel accomplished in handling them well.

And positive emotions build and sustain emotional resilience, a strength that is foundational to our lives and work. ✨

CAROL COVEN GRANNICK is an author, poet, and chronicler. *Reeni's Turn*, her novel in verse, which explores a young tween's journey to find courage, body-acceptance, and her own strong voice, debuted in September 2020 from Fitzroy Books, a small traditional PAL publisher. Carol's children's fiction, poetry, and chronicles appear in numerous print and online venues. Come say hi at her website: [www.carolcovengrannick.com](http://www.carolcovengrannick.com)

# Illustrator's Tips

## PARALLELS IN STORYBOARDING: HOW STORYBOARDS WORK IN USER EXPERIENCE DESIGN *By Matthew Atkins*

You're probably wondering what user experience design, commonly applied in the technology industry, has to do with writing and illustrating books. Well, I've done both and I can say that Pixar is right: "Story is king!" (whether you are in film, tech, or publishing). I'll give you a bit of an overview of what user experience design (UX) is, why it's used, and how tech-based exercises can help with your writing or illustrating.

### WHAT IS UX DESIGN?

In my own words user experience design is a field that applies research, design, and psychology to understand how people use an interface (a program or design that enables one to effectively interact with a computer) and then applying that understanding to design interfaces that are easier to use. The process of designing an experience has many facets, including but not limited to UX. Other primary areas are user research, user interface design, and development. Each of these has its own areas of expert focus and influence on the final product.

#### User Researcher

Those in this field seek to understand the psychological needs of a user as well as the challenges a product might present to those users. Typical methods include surveys, in-person interviews, and the testing of prototypes. The accumulated data is then used to inform the design and direction of the product.

#### User Experience Designer

This is where storyboarding comes in. Based on the research that's been done and an understanding what the users' needs are, the UX designer creates a new *or improved* design. The process of conceiving such a design can include storyboards, wireframes (a layout of the experience with just grey boxes to help visualize where final content will go), an interactive prototype, and a final mock-up of the concept. This probably sounds somewhat familiar to anyone in the publishing world who's played around with storyboards!

#### User Interface Designer

Some companies employ user interface (UI) designers to design the look and feel of an interface. Someone in this role would determine things like what colors should be used

in the design, how a button shape would look on a website, and the type fonts to be used. They are also responsible for assuring overall consistency in the visual details.

#### Design Developer

After all the research and design is done the next step is building the product or software app. A developer, which might be an individual, a team, or an entirely independent company, takes the specifications from the UX designer and/or UI designer and builds out the design in code (computer language) so that users can try it out for themselves.



*A rough sketch of a storyboard on post-its before creating more refined drawings*

### WHAT IS A UX STORYBOARD?

Now that you have a brief overview of the tech process of design, let's talk about what a storyboard is in the context of UX. UX storyboards are illustrated panels that use a story format to describe the user's challenges and the designer's solution to those challenges. Typically, the purpose of a storyboard is to pitch an idea for a new concept of some kind or an improvement to something that already exists. The benefits of using a storyboard are that it can save time and resources when it comes to developing a "live" version of, for instance, a website or an app; it can create empathy in potential users by making the experience relatable; and it also allows everyone involved to visualize the overall experience.

### WHAT GOES INTO CREATING A UX STORYBOARD?

In illustrating children's stories, we usually begin by developing a hero who embarks on a journey, faces one or more challenges, and then ultimately overcomes them. UX storyboards are constructed in the same way.





# Illustrator's Tips



*This is Anne, our target customer for a new loyalty program. She is 37 years old, works in Corporate Strategy, is married with one child, and is interested in taking the family on a summer vacation.*

## CREATING THE HERO

As I mentioned above, in any story there is a hero. In UX that hero, called a “persona,” is the embodiment of the user research data. In other words, the persona reflects all the information that’s been gathered about who is using your product, website, or app. A hypothetical example might be that research shows that most of your users are between the ages of 24-35, interested in technology, and have an average income of \$65,000. Based on this data, you would create a persona like “Jennifer is a 32-year-old financial consultant who has two kids and likes to stay up-to-date on new trends.” The research identifies, or defines, who your average user is and this informs the persona. Developing a persona also helps you understand how most of your users will likely interact with your product.

## THE JOURNEY

Once you’ve created your persona—or, for kids’ book illustrators, your main character—you can create the story around a particular task they are trying to accomplish. Mind you, in the field of UX, these won’t be fantastical stories of slaying dragons and far-off lands but they are real-life examples of someone using the product in context. The story could be about booking a flight or registering for a conference. It might be as simple as checking the weather. These examples are not overly emotional moments in our everyday lives but they help your audience connect with a relatable experience.



*We begin our journey showing Anne at work and then picking up her kid after school. While she waits she browses family vacation ideas. She gets a few recommendations from her son and continues browsing until she comes across the “it trip” promotion.*

## THE SKETCHES

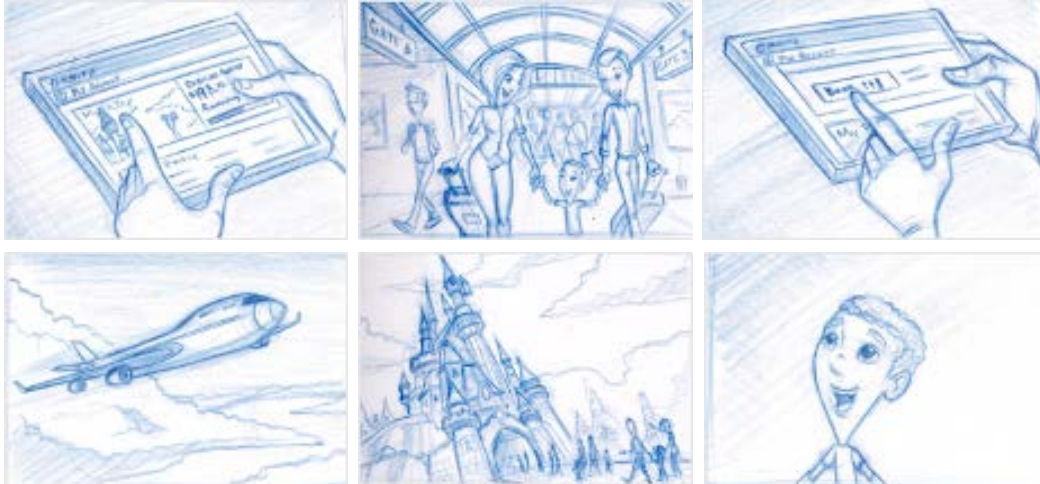
In the same way, when you’re sketching out a book idea, you want to capture the moments that matter. After you’ve created your text of the story, you want to break it up into scenes and determine where the page breaks will go. Once you’ve done that you can start sketching. With my background in illustration my storyboards are often more like finished drawings than rough sketches but any fidelity is acceptable as long as it communicates your vision. I’ve seen anything from stick figures to detailed comic book panels for a UX storyboard so, as is true in the kidlit industry, it really comes down to the amount of time you have and the audience you are presenting to.



*Anne has joined the loyalty program and found a trip for the family. These panels show Anne racking up rewards points in different ways until it’s time to book the trip.*



# Illustrator's Tips



*The trip is booked, the family is headed to a magical theme park, and no one is more excited than Anne's son Spencer. The last few panels sum up the benefits of the program and how it impacts the user emotionally.*

## HOW CAN YOU USE THESE METHODS?

So, as pointed out above, UX storyboarding is very similar to storyboarding an illustrated kids' book. And as an illustrator you may already be using storyboard techniques, but a few reminders never hurt.

### Know your audience

Who are you pitching your idea to? Who will be viewing your storyboard or reading your manuscript? And what level of fidelity is appropriate—meaning how detailed do your drawings have to be? These are all questions I ask myself when diving into a project.

### Research your hero

Who are they? Where do they come from? What is important to them? What are their circumstances? etc. The more research or character development you do, the more relatable and believable your characters will be.

### Create compelling context

In the UX world, the interactions are not grand, but the details of the interaction in context could be highly influential to the design direction. Similarly, in creating a storyboard for a scene you will probably want to consider what your character is doing at the moment. Where are they? Is the setting noisy or quiet? Are they alone or around others? In both creating books and creating user experiences, the details and context help your audience (or your readers) immerse themselves in your character's life—or put themselves in your character's shoes.

### Use fidelity that makes sense

The point of a storyboard is usually to sell a concept before more detailed work is done. When you're creating a book dummy it doesn't make sense in most cases to create final art for the concept or pitch stage. With that in mind you may be able to get away with using simple stick figures as long as this method clearly communicates your idea.

People who aren't in the tech industry usually aren't thinking about the many parallels between UX design and developing a story idea for kids. So I hope I've given you a glimpse into another world where illustrated stories come to life and offered some helpful tips. It seems that no matter the industry it always comes back to great storytelling. ✨

MATTHEW ATKINS has been designing user experiences for over eight years and has been illustrating for fifteen years. He has a passion for simple and delightful user experiences that are accessible and engaging. Most importantly, creating a vision and a story that inspires is a passion of his. Matthew's background in illustration has influenced his storytelling and user experiences by enabling the "user-based story" to drive the projects and elicit empathy in the stakeholders. This dual focus allows Matthew to offer the best possible user experience while incorporating business requirements into every project he takes on. His approach to design is to always consider the audience/customer first and design from there. Compromises will be made along the way but the user is always first.

Instagram: @matkinsart

Portfolio: [matkinsart.com](http://matkinsart.com)

# Writer's Tips

## CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT by Patricia Hruby Powell

### CONJURING, CHOOSING, OR CHECKING YOUR CHARACTER

The underlying object of reading is to have an emotional experience. Generally, we want our readers to experience the emotions that our characters feel—to empathize with our characters. So we as writers must do the work of developing characters our readers can love, be inspired by, laugh and cry with—whether we're writers of fiction or nonfiction; whether we write picture books, middle grade, or young adult books. How is this done?

If you're just thinking up a character, maybe you want to start with an issue. A problem. An external problem or obstacle and an internal goal. For instance, an external obstacle of racism and poverty and an internal goal of wanting to dance.

Or maybe you're midway through your story and need to think more deeply about your character. You might write more intuitively than analytically, as I do, but it might help to scrutinize your character in order to deepen that character on the page. Or to help you write your next character.

In the course of teaching writing I've had to analyze how to develop characters. Along the way, I've devised a template, incorporating my discoveries with the teachings of workshop leaders, writers of how-to-write books, and input from my wise editor Melissa Manlove, who analyzed the character development of *Josephine*, my biography of Josephine Baker, in order to educate me. Let's look at these ten elements of character development. And note that it's not easy to extract character development from plot, nor to cleanly divide each of these ten from the others, but for the sake of simplicity, I'm going to try.

### 1. NAME & AGE

You might not name your character right away, or maybe you'll rename them a dozen times during the process of writing your fiction. Or maybe you're writing about a real person. I'm lousy with the hypothetical so in order to make this more concrete, please go along with me as I use *Josephine* as a model.

Name: Josephine Baker.



Age is particularly important when writing for children, because one or two or five years makes so much difference in the development of children, in what interests them, how they behave, and what they know about the world. Generally, your character should be the age of your reader or a bit older (kids read up) and your characters should have issues that concern your reader. The age of your main character should be delivered imaginatively (e.g., She showed them just how strong her eight-year-old muscles were. Or: He got his driver's license the day after his birthday). A biography is different. For instance, *Josephine* goes from "cradle to grave."

### 2. GOAL

You've heard it before: What does your character want? Sometimes the "goal" can be described as your character's *internal situation* or *want*. Josephine wanted to dance. It was her internal desire. Along the way, maybe she wanted to become famous as well. The goal can change a bit during the course of your story.

### 3. OBSTACLE

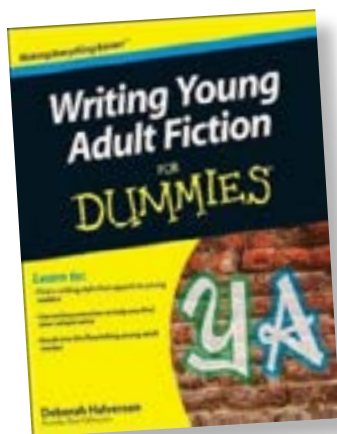
Yep, we've all heard this: What stands in your character's way? That obstacle has to be big enough that the reader cares. What would failure mean to your character? The bigger the consequences, the more tension you can create. It's what keeps your reader turning pages. That usually means tension for our character. This can be described as the *external situation*. For Josephine, that primary obstacle was racism. And racism is a huge obstacle. No, she didn't conquer her obstacle, but she worked her whole life to overcome that obstacle (by working for civil rights and by adopting twelve children of different races, ethnicities, and religions to prove they could be brought up together in harmony—to name a couple of Josephine's struggles against racism).



# Writer's Tips

## 4. CHANGE

*Why* and *how* does your character change? Your character changes according to what happens—that's the action or plot of your story. Josephine wanted to dance, but repeatedly hit a wall of racism against black people in the U.S. Why does she change? She has to fight racism and poverty to achieve her goal—to dance. Here's one of several threads. Josephine grows in self-assurance and gains strength as she risks her life spying for the French and the allies during WWI—all in order to help grant individuals' freedom. *How* does she do it? With determination, relentless energy, and imagination—by writing her notes in invisible ink and hiding those notes in her underwear, believing that border patrol would not search someone like her—a superstar. (She was right).



## 5. CORE STRENGTH

In most stories your main character is your hero, so they must have heroic qualities. Deborah Halverson in her *Writing Young Adult Fiction for Dummies* (Wiley 2011) calls those qualities “core strength”—those traits that will allow your character to overcome their obstacles. I'd say Josephine's *core strength* was her exuberant energy. You can see that overlaps with how she *changes*.

## 6. KEY FLAW

In her book Halverson also discusses the *key flaw*, or the trait that undermines your character and her core strength. This is essential for creating plot tension. No one is interested in a flawless character. That's just not real. For Josephine I'd say her key flaw is impulsiveness. Usually the flaw is in opposition to the core strength. Exuberant energy—impulsive energy. Josephine made a lot of mistakes due to her impulsive nature—accompanied by her innocence.

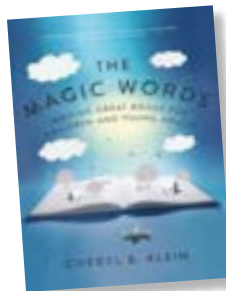
## 7. MOTIVATING BELIEF

*Motivating belief* is a term coined by the wonderful writer and workshop leader Kathi Appelt. What does your character believe about herself? Once you know this, it will pull your character along through every page of your journey. It directs every step your character takes. *Josephine believed she could do anything she set out to do*. She was fearless. And this is what makes her a great role model for young readers. We hope that readers will follow Josephine's example and follow their own dreams—and believe in themselves.

## 8. VOICE

Cheryl Klein, in her book *The Magic Words: Writing Great Books for Children and Young Adults* (W.W. Norton 2016), defines voice by this equation:

Voice = Point of View (POV) + Tense + Personality



When writing a biography one generally writes in third person POV and past tense. But not always. In fiction, you have more choice. Often you have to experiment to see what combination of POV and tense works for your story. Telling your story in first person, using *I* and *me*, can help

you get inside the skin of your character. As the writer, you must identify strongly with your character—understand how your character ticks—in order to have that character evoke emotions in your reader. You might want to rewrite a chapter in third person, using *he*, *she*, or *they*. You might even try *you*—or second person. For example, write to your character, like it's a letter; or talk directly to your reader as Daniel Nayeri does in *Everything Sad is Untrue* (Levine Querido 2020). You might try writing your piece in present tense, then change the whole thing to past tense. Keep trying your options until you find the right combination of POV and tense for your particular story.

And then there's your character's personality—which is pretty much everything we've been addressing so far plus word choice. Choose words from your character's world. Be imaginative yet authentic. Using metaphors and similes can help illuminate your character—either by how the character uses metaphor or how you, the narrator, describes your character. I use the metaphor of a volcano throughout *Josephine* to describe how the effects of racism built up and compressed in her being, then released:



POOF! A funny face.

That used to be fear.

POOF! She'd mock a gesture.

That used to be anger.

Until finally there is a huge explosion of energy and she becomes a star. *Josephine's* equation: Third person + past + exuberant, empathetic, compassionate, wild, razzmatazz.



# Writer's Tips

(You can find more about the use of voice or metaphor by reading the former *Writer's Tips* [talesforallages.com/voice-and-first-lines-by-patricia-hruby-powell](https://talesforallages.com/voice-and-first-lines-by-patricia-hruby-powell) [talesforallages.com/metaphors-and-similes](https://talesforallages.com/metaphors-and-similes)

## 9. HOW YOUR CHARACTER MOVES

Does your character take big strides? Or little mincing steps? Do they twitch? Are their heads held high? Are they slumped? By knowing how your character moves, you can employ those details to show them moving through their world. When Josephine dances the Charleston, her

knees squeeze, now fly  
heels flap and chop  
arms scissor and splay  
eyes swivel and pop.

She makes faces. She used her tongue like a scarf. She “stumbled off-balance on elastic legs—on purpose.” She was a clown as well as sexy; she was sexy as well as boyish. She could move like the dickens. All these things make her likeable... which brings us to the final checkpoint.

## 10. EMPATHY (AN UMBRELLA CATEGORY FOR ALL THE OTHERS)

Your character must draw your reader in emotionally. This brings all of the points together. In addition, your character should have a balance of *universal* and *unique* traits.

Characters need *universal* traits so your reader identifies with them. Perhaps your character is fun or funny. Humor can go a long way in connecting character to reader. Perhaps your character is poor, an orphan, or a refugee. People generally sympathize with the underdog. Does your character become powerful? Or selfless? Can your reader identify with your character? That's what you must ask.

Your character's *unique* qualities make them stand out as one of a kind. Maybe they have a remarkable talent. Again, maybe they're funny, or bold in a charming manner. Or humble. Perhaps your character is a social justice activist and your reader admires that. Many traits are universal, prompting your readers to empathize with your character and their plight, but it's the details that bring your character into sharp focus. These *details* are the way you show each character trait in a unique manner.



# Writer's Tips

## HOW TO USE THIS INFORMATION

If you get stuck while writing, fill out this chart for main and/or secondary characters. It will give you something to do during those times you just can't work on your manuscript itself. You will learn about your character and hopefully that will get you back to writing. If you're a planner, make this chart before you begin to write. Make a quick chart right now of your main characters from a yet-to-be-published manuscript as well as your already published books. See what you discover.

Here are a few to consider. And maybe you see the checkpoints differently than I do. Let me know.

## WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE

by Maurice Sendak (Harper Collins 1963)

1. name/age: Max, about 4
2. goal: to get what he wants
3. obstacle: parental rules
4. change: with imagination, takes a journey and comes back home wanting to be with his parents
5. core strength: confidence
6. key flaw: naughty
7. motivating belief: I am all-powerful.
8. voice: Third person + past + playful, wildly imaginative
9. move: able to swing in trees, agile
10. Empathy: **Unique** → imagination  
**Universal** → like every 4-year-old; naughty and loving (& confident)



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 her adult students and 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](mailto:phpowell@talesforallages.com) or at [talesforallages.com](http://talesforallages.com)

## LAST STOP ON MARKET STREET

by Matt De La Peña, illus.  
Christian Robinson  
(Putnam 2015)

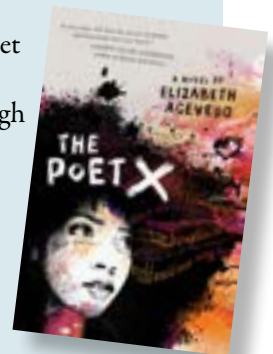
1. name/age: CJ, about 4
2. goal: To get answers. (He asks why why why?)
3. obstacle: traveling through rainy, dirty, broken neighborhood by bus (life's hardships)
4. change: with Nana's guidance he sees beauty in everything, as she does
5. core strength: inquisitive; pretty respectful
6. key flaw: a teensy bit rude
7. motivating belief: I love my Nana.
8. voice: Third person + past + inquisitive, sweet
9. move: skips, agile as a child ;-)
10. Empathy: **Unique** → sweetly inquisitive  
**Universal** → sweet but cranky



## THE POET X (HARPERTEEN 2018)

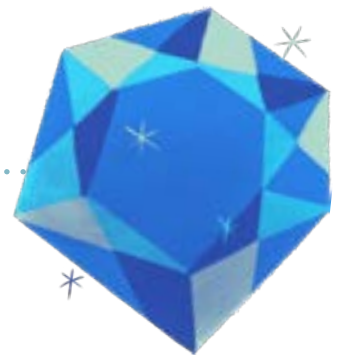
by Elizabeth Acevedo

1. name/age: Xiomara or the Poet X, 15
2. goal: freedom; to move through the world unimpeded
3. obstacle: sexist misogynist society; her Catholic mami
4. change: self-actualizes due to writing and slamming poetry
5. strength: strength
6. flaw: anger
7. motivating belief: I'm not what I'm told I am.
8. voice: First person + present + sassy, strong, confident
9. move: sexy
10. Empathy: **Unique** → cares for twin brother, talented poet  
**Universal** → rebellious teen



What about your stories? 🌟

# Writer's Bookshelf



## ONLINE GEMS: WHY I LOVE BLOG POSTS & HOW TO FIND THEM *by Natalie Rompella*

When I was asked to share one of my favorite craft books in this column, I panicked. I realized I hadn't opened a craft book in quite a while. My first thought was, *Wow! I'm lazy. I should be continuing to educate myself in my craft.* Then I realized, I actually had read a lot, but in the form of online blog posts and articles.

The great thing about online posts is:

1. They are often written on specific, quirky topics. I find an original nugget of something I hadn't thought of before.
2. They usually offer links to more articles on similar topics.
3. If I like the author's topics and style, I can find more of his or her articles instantly.
4. They are bite-sized chunks of information. I can get through a post in one sitting. This is especially nice right now when my attention is really being pulled in many directions.

I have tons of favorite children's author blog websites, many of which you've probably already discovered. But here are some blog posts and online articles not in the children's realm that may be of interest to you.

### LOOKING TO TIGHTEN YOUR WRITING?

I enjoyed the article "[Shorten Your Sentences, Improve Your Writing](#)" by Mia Botha. And there are links to more of her articles at the end of her post that sound interesting.

And how many of these filler words do you find yourself using? Find tons to cut from "[298 Filler Words & Phrases That Rob Your Writing of Its Power](#)" by Shane Arthur.

### WANT TO ANALYZE VOICE IN YOUR WRITING?

I am currently working on a book written in two first-person voices. I realized that sometimes the two voices sounded too

similar, so I wanted to know more about what makes a voice authentic. Through my research, I learned the terms "phraseology" and "stylometry" (If you don't know them, look them up—quite interesting!) and eventually stumbled across "[Analyze My Writing](#)." This site allowed me to enter a section of my manuscript, and it spit out all sorts of fun information (more than what Word gives you): graphics and percentages of various things, including my most common word pairs (for me: "next door"). I found that although I had written as two different characters, both had similar sentence structures.

Although I don't feel comfortable uploading my whole manuscript into this website, the small snippet I entered gave me an idea of various analytics about my writing voice. [Disclaimer: I have yet to find information on the security of this website: Enter your text at your own risk.]

Another post, "[How to Discover Your Writing Voice in 5 Simple Steps](#)" by Rachel Giesel Grimm, has tons of useful, thought-provoking questions on finding your voice.

### NEED TO DISCOVER YOUR WRITING ROUTINE?

Here's yet another juicy post by Rachel Giesel Grimm (Her site will keep you busy for hours!): "[How to Find Your Best Writing Routine](#)."

### HOW CAN YOU FIND HIDDEN GEMS LIKE THESE?

I do a lot of wacky online searches to discover blog posts on quirky topics. I try strange combinations and see what pops up. For instance, I had wondered how reading and writing affect parts of the brain and found these:

"[What Do You See When You Read?](#)" by James Wallace Harris and "[How Does Writing Affect Your Brain?](#)" by Monica Olteanu on her blog NeuroRelay.



# Writer's Bookself



Illustration by  
Brooke O'Neill

Once I find a blogger I like, I also look for where their posts are listed on the site and browse through them for ones of interest to me. I discovered [Andrew Wille's site](#) by searching “writing and the four elements” (earth, air, fire, and water), which led me to his piece “[The Four Elements of Writing.](#)” By poking around his site, I found he has multiple posts on the topic of the four elements. One interesting post, called “[Looking for the Four Elements,](#)” gives some guidelines on how writers and readers can identify these elements in a piece of writing, such as fire representing energy, water representing emotion, etc.) There is also a section of posts under the heading “[Writing Experiments.](#)” How fun is that?

In addition to doing my own searching, great posts can be discovered through word-of-mouth from fellow writers and illustrators on social media such as Facebook and Twitter. *You* can also post requesting suggestions on whatever topic you're searching for and wait for responses. (Be sure to share your favorites on social media as well!)

So if you can't make it to a library or bookstore, or you don't want to invest in reading a book cover-to-cover right now, I definitely recommend taking advantage of all that's out there online in the form of blog posts and articles. ✨



NATALIE ROMPELLA is the author of more than sixty books and resources for children, including an insect picture book titled *The World Never Sleeps* (Tilbury House), a 2019 IL Reads selection; the #ownvoices middle grade novel *Cookie Cutters & Sled Runners* (Sky Pony Press 2017); and her newest—a writing workbook, *Secrets of Storytelling* (Rockridge Press 2020). She is a former elementary and middle school teacher, as well as a former museum educator and curriculum coordinator for the [Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum](#) in Chicago. Find out more at [www.natalierompella.com](http://www.natalierompella.com).



# Mentor Texts

## BRINGING BILINGUAL BOOKS TO THE TABLE

by Jenny Morales

*¿Hablas español?*

With over 50,000,000 Spanish-speakers in the United States, chances are good that you may be one of them. If you speak any additional language, consider incorporating your language skills into your next book project. Parents hoping to pass along a native language to their children may prefer bilingual books over English-only stories. In addition, with the increasing popularity of dual language programs, teachers are also actively seeking books that expose children to a second language from a young age—the time when the brain responds best to language development. Of course, a bilingual book won't make children fluent in the target language, but it will expose them to rich vocabulary and, more importantly, an expanding world perspective.

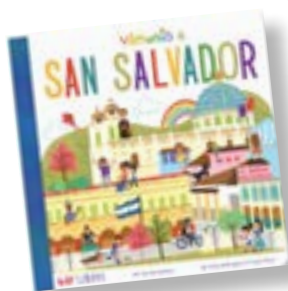
From a structural standpoint, bilingual books often follow a side-by-side, two-language format. In such cases, bilingual readers may choose to read the entire book in one language or the other, or they may prefer to simply read a section at a time in both languages. Alternatively, bilingual books may present a text that emphasizes one language while presenting words and phrases in the second language throughout.

Below you will find a sampling of eight exemplary English/Spanish bilingual books. These stories delight with their memorable characters, beautiful settings, and strong themes.

### FOR THE LITTLEST ONES/ PARA LOS MÁS PEQUEÑOS

#### VÁMONOS A SAN SALVADOR

by Patty Rodriguez & Ariana Stein  
Illustrated by Ana Godinez

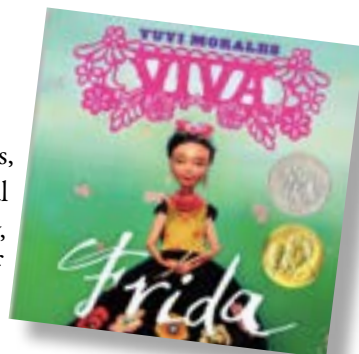


What a charming way to introduce baby to world geography! This title is one of five in the series, each one profiling a different, often underrepresented city. The side-by-side English and Spanish phrases rhyme in both languages while celebrating San Salvador's most famous monuments, animals, and foods.

#### VIVA FRIDA

by Yuyi Morales  
Photography by Tim O'Meara

Using fewer than sixty words, this gorgeous bilingual book honors the curiosity, imagination, and talent of Mexico's esteemed Frida Kahlo. Winner of the Pura Belpré Award and a Caldecott Honor title, *Viva Frida* features beautiful illustrations and photographs that work together with the sparse text to create a dreamy literary wonderland.



#### SALSA LULLABY

by Jen Arena  
Illustrated by Erika Meza

While the energetic beat of this uplifting nighttime story may not lull baby to sleep, it does exude plenty of warmth and love. The heavily English text introduces six Spanish words and phrases throughout, mostly in the catchy refrains. *Salsa Lullaby* is a simple song that celebrates culture, music, and family.

### FICTIONAL PICTURE BOOKS / LIBROS ILUSTRADOS DE FICCIÓN

#### GALÁPAGOS GIRL/GALAPAGUEÑA

by Marsha Diane Arnold  
Illustrated by Angela Dominguez

Sprinkled with similes, this lyrical story introduces children to the beautiful setting of Floreana, a Galápagos Island off the coast of Ecuador. Readers follow Valentina from birth to young adulthood, when she returns to Floreana as a biologist—determined to



# Mentor Texts

protect her beloved land. Although fictional, *Galápagos Girl/Galapagueña* also includes several pages of factual information on fifteen fascinating Galápagos animals. Impressively, Arnold presents everything from the dedications to the prose to the Author's Note in side-by-side English and Spanish.

## MANGO, ABUELA, AND ME

by Meg Medina

Illustrated by Angela Dominguez

A Pura Belpré Honor Book, this sweet story creates a beautiful intersection between two cultures, countries, and languages when Abuela comes to stay at Mia's house. In the predominantly English text, fifteen Spanish words/phrases are included in Abuela and Mia's sometimes messy conversations. If heartfelt stories of connection and belonging appeal to you, be sure to read *Mango, Abuela, and Me*—another Medina masterpiece.



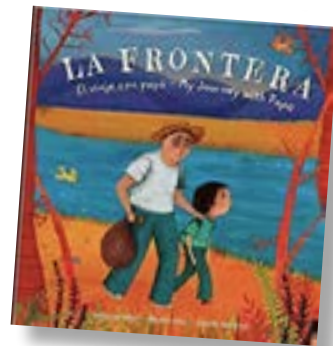
## NONFICTION PICTURE BOOKS / LIBROS ILUSTRADOS DE LA NO FICCIÓN

### LA FRONTERA: EL VIAJE CON PAPÁ / MY JOURNEY WITH PAPA

by Deborah Mills and Alfredo Alva

Illustrated by Claudia Navarro

Author Deborah Mills teams up with neighbor Alfredo Alva to tell this profound story—a story that personalizes the immigration experience. The co-authors succeed in taking readers from moments of desperation and struggle to moments of resilience and hope as Alfredo and his papa journey from Guanajuato, México, to Texas, U.S.A. This bilingual book concludes with four interesting informational pages related to Alfredo's life, the concept of borders, and immigration practices and policies.



## RAINBOW WEAVER / TEJEDORA DEL ARCOÍRIS

by Linda Elovita Marshall

Illustrated by Elisa Chavarri



In *Rainbow Weaver*, another book featuring an underrepresented setting (the mountains of Lake Atitlán in Guatemala), readers learn about the importance of weaving in Mayan culture. Ixchel, the protagonist, longs to help her mother weave but must procure her own weaving materials, a task that requires creative

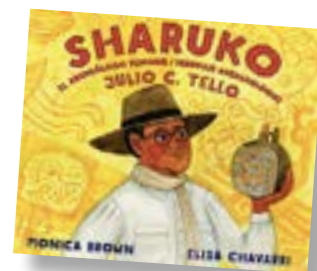
solutions. Rich thematic layers of cultural preservation, interconnectedness, and female empowerment come together to create an inspirational story told in both English and Spanish.

## SHARUKO: EL ARQUEÓLOGO PERUANO JULIO C. TELLO / SHARUKO: PERUVIAN ARCHAEOLOGIST JULIO C. TELLO

by Monica Brown

Illustrated by Elisa Chavarri

In this #ownvoices book, Monica Brown (daughter of a Peruvian immigrant) amplifies another Peruvian voice, this time the voice of indigenous, Quechua-speaking archaeologist Julio C. Tello. This important book not only takes readers through Tello's life milestones, but it also sends a strong message of respect for the past, present, and future in cultivating cultural pride. Readers of all ages will enjoy this fully bilingual story. 🌟



JENNY MORALES is a dual language teacher, aspiring author, and active SCBWI member. You can find her fueling her picture book obsession on Instagram at @landoflibros, where she writes a 10-word review of favorite Spanish and English picture books (almost) daily.

# 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

### FOOD FOR THOUGHT WITH LICENSED THERAPIST KEVIN ASHWORTH

**What:** PAL and published members (magazine & indie), you're invited to join Kevin Ashworth, a licensed therapist as well as the co-founder and Clinical Director of NW Anxiety Institute for a timely look at how artists and writers can learn to manage anxiety. Kevin will provide some tried and true tricks from his own clinical practice, as well as some profound thoughts about the role anxiety plays in all our lives.

**Where:** Held virtually via Zoom.

**When:** March 6, 2021, 10am-12pm.

More information at <https://illinois.scbwi.org/events>

### SHOP AROUND THE CORNER: THE BOOK CELLAR

The Book Cellar is located at 4736-38 N. Lincoln Avenue, Chicago, Illinois. The Book Cellar is an independently-owned, community-oriented bookstore, cafe, and wine bar located in the heart of Lincoln Square on Chicago's north side. For information on upcoming events, visit the Book Cellar website, email [words@bookcellarinc.com](mailto:words@bookcellarinc.com), or call (773) 293-2665.

## Awards

### NATIONAL BOOK AWARDS

#### WINNER, *Young People's Literature*

*King and the Dragonflies* by Kacen Callender (Scholastic Press)

#### FINALISTS

- *We Are Not Free* by Traci Chee (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt)
- *Every Body Looking* by Candice Iloh (Dutton Books for Young Readers / Penguin Random House)
- *When Stars Are Scattered* by Victoria Jamieson and Omar Mohamed (Dial Books for Young Readers/ Penguin Random House)
- *The Way Back* by Gavriel Savit (Knopf Books for Young Readers/Penguin Random House)

### YALSA (YOUNG ADULT LIBRARY SERVICES ASSOCIATION) 2020 TOP TEN BEST FICTION FOR YOUNG ADULTS

- *The Field Guide to the North American Teenager* by Ben Philippe (HarperCollins/Balzer+Bray)
- *Girls on the Verge* by Sharon Biggs Waller (Holt)
- *Heroine* by Mindy McGinnis (HarperCollins/ Katherine Tegen)
- *Like a Love Story* by Abdi Nazemian (HarperCollins/Balzer+Bray)
- *Lovely War* by Julie Berry (Viking)
- *On the Come Up* by Angie Thomas (HarperCollins/ Balzer+Bray)
- *Patron Saints of Nothing* by Randy Ribay (Penguin/ Kokila)
- *Pet* by Akwaeke Emezi (Random House/Make Me a World)
- *The Stars and the Blackness between Them* by Junauda Petrus (Dutton)
- *With the Fire on High* by Elizabeth Acevedo (HarperTeen)



# News Roundup

## Grants & Contests

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

**What:** An annual prize for young adult and children's literature. There are three categories: Young Adult (YA), Middle Grade (MG), and literature for younger audiences (e.g., board books, picture books). One overall first place winner receives \$1,000 and online publication. One runner-up receives \$100 and online publication. Submit your unpublished piece of under 8,000 words via Submittable [here](#). Your entry may be a short story or a novel excerpt, but if it is a novel excerpt, it should stand alone. \$20.00 entry fee.

**Deadline:** March 1, 2021

More information [here](#).

### 2021 SCBWI MEMBER GRANTS

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

**Note:** Applicants may only apply for one SCBWI grant per calendar year. For more information, visit [SCBWI's awards webpage](#).

### WORK-IN-PROGRESS GRANTS

**What:** These awards showcase outstanding manuscripts from SCBWI members. The selected works will receive a special platform to be showcased to the most prestigious publishing houses in the field. One winner in each of the following categories will be chosen: Picture Book Text, Chapter Book/Early Reader, Middle Grade, Young Adult Fiction, Nonfiction, Multicultural Fiction, and Nonfiction.

**Deadline:** Applications must be submitted electronically and only from **March 1 – April 1, Midnight PDT, 2021**.

More information at [SCBWI's awards webpage](#).

### DON FREEMAN ILLUSTRATOR GRANTS

**What:** Established to enable picture book illustrators to further their understanding, training, and work in the picture book genre. Two grants of \$1,000 each are awarded annually, one grant to a published illustrator and one to a pre-published illustrator.

**Deadline:** Applications will be accepted between **March 1 – April 15, 2021**.

More information at [SCBWI's awards webpage](#).

### KAREN AND PHILIP CUSHMAN LATE BLOOMER AWARD

**What:** For authors/illustrators fifty years of age and older who have not been traditionally published in the children's literature field. Grant of \$500 and free tuition to any SCBWI conference anywhere in the world.

**Deadline:** Applications will be accepted **March 1-31, 2021**.

More information at [SCBWI's awards webpage](#).

### LEE BENNETT HOPKINS POETRY AWARD

**What:** This award is given every three years to a book of poetry for children and/or young adults. Submissions may be books by one or more poets (anthologies welcome) and must have been originally published in English. The prize is \$1000.

**Deadline:** **March 15, 2022** (for books published in 2019-2021)

More information at [SCBWI's awards webpage](#).

### SCBWI 2021 WINTER CONFERENCE

**When:** Feb. 19-21, 2021.

**Where:** Held virtually via Zoom.

**Cost:** \$150 SCBWI members; \$250 nonmembers.

More information at the [SCBWI website](#).



*Illustration by  
Carrie Carlson*

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