

Prairie Wind

Bulletin of the Illinois Chapter of SCBWI

SPRING 2021



illustrator in the
spotlight: Rich Lo

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*Illustration by
Rich Lo*

In This Issue

by Amy Alznauer

When I was planning this issue last winter and the world was cold and closed in, it was hard to imagine how right it would feel now to send this cover with Rich Lo's rainbow kites into the world. Kites, and especially Chinese kites, represent hope for good fortune, which seems perfect for this moment. Working on this issue has been one of the highlights of 2021 for me, and I'm thrilled now to bring it to you. So may these sailing, hopeful kites beckon you inside another *Prairie Wind*, chock full of writing and illustrating wisdom, compelling tales, and inspiration.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Our [Illustrator in the Spotlight](#) Rich Lo gives us a glimpse inside his successful and wide-ranging artistic endeavors and recent children's books, which are full of not only rainbow kites but color-striped trees and winter foxes. Joy Ellison, in telling her [Tale from the Front](#), demonstrates how the books we create have the power to transform ourselves and also others. And finally, our [Creative Sparks](#) artist Nikki Stage made original illustrations (lucky us!) for Jane Hertenstein's lyric flash fiction.

FEATURES

Here we feature three powerful pieces on craft by three amazing authors. First, Barb Rosenstock reveals a concise yet profound secret to [telling true stories](#). "Like my plain-talking grandfather," she writes, "I use one simple question to guide my narrative nonfiction picture book work, and I want to share it with you. The question is, 'So what?'" Next, recognizing that worldbuilding happens not just in fantasy and sci-fi but "in *all* kinds of stories," Ronni Davis shares her wonderfully practical methods for [world building in YA](#). And finally, Alice McGinty leads us through the creative process behind her award-winning picture book *A Story for Small Bear* and, in doing so, demonstrates not only [how to find the emotional heart of a story](#) but how to let that deep place guide how the story is told.

COLUMNS

In [Voices of Change](#) Alina Celeste explores, through her own experience, the power of language to "shape the world we live in, even down to our perception of reality," arguing that linguistic diversity opens windows and reveals worlds. And Carol Coven Grannick's [Inside Story](#) helps us understand and redefine creative motivation so that we might have more of this essential artistic ingredient.

Director [Amy Alznauer](#)

Editor [Pamela Dell](#)

Designer [Brooke O'Neill](#)

Advisor [Jenny Wagh](#)

In [Illustrator Tips](#), Gabriella Vagnoli takes us inside the world of illustrating for self-published authors—how to find such work, carry it out, and make sure the whole process goes off without a hitch, all the while paying the bills and getting invaluable experience. And Patricia Hruby Powell's column [Writer's Tips](#) this time provides a fascinating, intimate look at children's book collaborations and includes a conversation between Patricia and one of her own collaborators, Lesa Cline-Ransome.

In [Shop Around the Corner](#) we circle back around to Anderson's Bookshop, the store that launched this column, but here Michelle Schaub talks with Kathleen March of the Downer's Grove branch, who is full of passion for books and gratitude for the community that has sustained her and her staff through the pandemic. In [Writer's Bookshelf](#) Karla Clark discusses *Dreyer's English: An Utterly Correct Guide to Clarity and Style* with a wit that matches Random House copy editor Benjamin Dreyer's own. And Songju Ma, who sees math books as "beautiful, powerful, and elegant as math itself," curates an annotated list of math [Mentor Texts](#) that have inspired her own writing.

NEWS

Kelly Darke once again does a beautiful job with [News Roundup](#), and I want to give a special shout-out to Kelly for all of her hard work and enthusiastic support over the years as she heads now to her new home in Michigan.

And finally, I'm so excited to announce the launching of our newest column [Network Spotlights](#). The regional networks make so much of our SCBWI-IL magic happen, but only through the hard work of our network reps. So, in this issue, we shine a grateful light on the amazing work and offerings of the Southside and East Central Illinois Networks.

A big thank you to Jenny Wagh for gathering our spring [Season's Crop](#), writing our opening [Greeting](#), and for everything else she does (along with all the other amazing volunteers) to make our chapter such a vibrant and supportive community. And last but not least, thank you, Pamela and Brooke – you make putting each issue together a true joy. 🌟

Greetings!

by Jenny Wagh, Co-RA SCBWI-IL

This year has not been convenient. My debut picture book got pushed to Spring 2022. My high school senior is choosing a college based on virtual tours. And teaching preschool in a mask is exhausting.

With all the inconveniences there are advantages. I have another year to build my author webpage. Instead of a college tour, my son and I spent a day in Lincoln Park getting a vibe for DePaul University. (Can you choose college based on a zoo, pizza, and proximity to the Chicago Music Exchange?) Best of all, with masks I have not caught the sniffles all school year. Yahoo!



Banjo practice at Chicago Music Exchange



Enjoying hot tea at Homeslice Pizza in Lincoln Park



McCormick Bird House, Lincoln Park Zoo

As we continue to social distance, my family's Netflix binge-watching remains strong. We are eagerly awaiting Season 5 of [Kim's Convenience](#). My husband, Poojan, and I argue about whose dad is most like Appa. We laugh about Mr. & Mrs. Kim bickering and cheer for the Kim kids as they follow their dreams.



There is something magical about a convenience store. I remember my parents allowing me and my younger brothers to bike to the corner gas station. We would spend our money on ridiculous candy like wax bottles, dots, and candy cigarettes. It was an honor to be asked to pick up a gallon of milk and walk the long way home.



Nostalgic wax bottle candy



Dot candy from Around the Corner Candy Store in West Dundee



Nostalgic Candy Cigarettes

Now we have new magical conveniences. I can order a gallon of milk and have it delivered to my door. We meet with old friends virtually with the click of a button. And I can take ukulele lessons online wearing my pajamas.

SCBWI-IL has enjoyed the convenience of technology. Suzanne Slade and Claire Reck were able to carry out the Laura Crawford Memorial Mentorship over zoom. Our Equity & Inclusion Team is stronger than ever, selecting Lauren Griffin as winner of the Diverse New Member Pathway, [Gauri Dalvi Pandya](#) as recipient of the Many Voices Prize, and our first-ever Diverse Member Mentorship with Jan Spivey Gilchrist guiding Allie Dawson and Christina Leong. Plus, with networks online, I have been able to attend more programming than ever, covering picture books, poetry, young adult literature, school visits, and more.

I'm excited to move forward through this year with the convenience of virtual platforms, and I look forward to seeing you all in person again. ☀

JENNY WAGH is Co-RA of SCBWI-IL. She is excitedly awaiting the release of her debut picture book, *Eggasaurus* (Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, Spring 2022). When not writing she is wrangling a classroom of preschoolers. You can find out more about her at her unfinished website www.jenniferwagh.com

Illustrator in the Spotlight

AN ARTIST'S JOURNEY by Rich Lo

Are you an illustrator or an author/illustrator?

I am an author/illustrator.



What is your preferred medium to work in?

Though I feel that command of all art media is a requirement for a professional illustrator, I really like working with pencils. Some of my work today is a combination of traditional techniques and digital media.

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

I studied art at Eastern Illinois University, where I was awarded a graduate assistantship. During graduate school, I discovered that I wanted to be a professional artist and felt that teaching was not an option. I prepared for life as an independent artist.

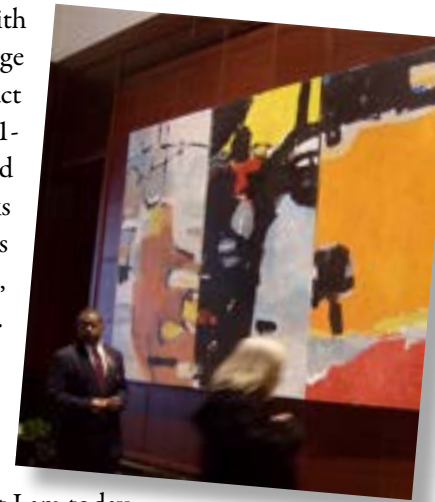
In Chicago, I landed a freelance job with a typography company as an entry level illustrator doing line art for textbooks K-3. I quickly grew out of that position and looked for work in advertising. The creative community was small at that time, so finding work was not difficult if you had the chops.



One of my first important assignments was to do large in-store artwork for Sears—a coup for a young artist. Soon

assignments for national brands followed. This proved to me that I couldn't be overwhelmed by enormous tasks.

In 2004, I played with conceptual art, doing large works, and I studied Abstract Expressionism. From 2011-2017, I was commissioned to do a series of public works in downtown Chicago. I was living in two creative worlds, realism and abstraction. I realize now that I was expanding intellectually and imaginatively, which played an important part in my developing into the artist I am today.



In 2009, I was awarded the biggest commercial project of my career—25 pieces for a Cleveland Clinic ad campaign with the art being the center piece. Peter Norton, a trustee for MOMA and the Whitney Museum, saw the art in the *New York Times* and commissioned a portrait of himself and his wife using the same technique.

From 2009-2014, the Great Books Foundation commissioned a series of book covers and interior art for short stories and posters. My experience as a commercial storyboard artist was instrumental in getting this commission, as I was familiar with telling visual stories.



Illustrator in the Spotlight



In 2012, I met literary agent Anna Olswanger. She took a chance on working with someone with no writing experience. In 2014, my first book, *Father's Chinese Opera*, was an honor title for the 2014-2015 Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature in the Picture Book Category. Five titles followed: *New Year*; *Chinese New Year Colors*; *123 Dim Sum*; and *After the Snowfall*, with *Chinese Kite Festival* coming this year. The best part of creating books is that originality is encouraged. I can use all my capabilities without worrying about boundaries. Most importantly, the books allow me to showcase my Chinese heritage.

I am still developing as an artist today. Exploration is the heart of my repertoire. Every piece of work is a steppingstone for what lies ahead.

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

I find myself incapable of returning. Every series has its moment in time and space. The excitement is to look ahead in search of originality and to exercise imagination.



What does your workspace look like?

I have been working out of my house since 2018, after a fire in my downtown studio. My work area is small, a far cry from the studio with skylights that I had in Chicago's legendary Fine Arts Building. It's about the work, so truly, it doesn't matter where I am.



Illustrator in the Spotlight

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

Here is an interior page for *After the Snowfall*, published by Muddy Boots in 2020. Everything starts with pencil sketches. Watercolor drips, splatter, and bleeds are scanned in. I strategically placed the watercolor in compliance with the black and white composition of the background. I painted the animals in watercolor and placed them digitally. The white of the snow was the ideal place for the text.

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.

The artwork for *After the Snowfall* is a good example. The origin of the technique goes back to a project with the Great Books Foundation and resurfaced in a series called “Winter Trees” for my online catalog. It was the perfect technique for the book, combining hand-done art with digital media.



Illustrator in the Spotlight

THE PERSON BEHIND THE PENCIL

What three words best sum you up?

Hardworking, resilient, and a thinker

Which illustrators were your favorites when you were little?

There are so many, but Norman Rockwell and Marvel comic illustrators especially stand out.

Which illustrators are your favorites now?

The illustrators I like now are Andrew Wyatt, Norman Rockwell (still), Andy Warhol, and Roy Lichtenstein, to name just a few. But at this point in my career, every new piece is a product of all of them.

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

I do. For example, Andy Warhol's line drawings of shoes. I was fascinated by the simplicity. In my interpretation, I used a continuous line to make a minimal illustration. In an illustration for White Mountain Puzzles, I was influenced by Norman Rockwell's attention to details.

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

I have a country house with chickens!

What inspires you creatively, spiritually, or emotionally?

My two children, Paige and Matt. They are smart, ambitious, creative, independent, and honest.

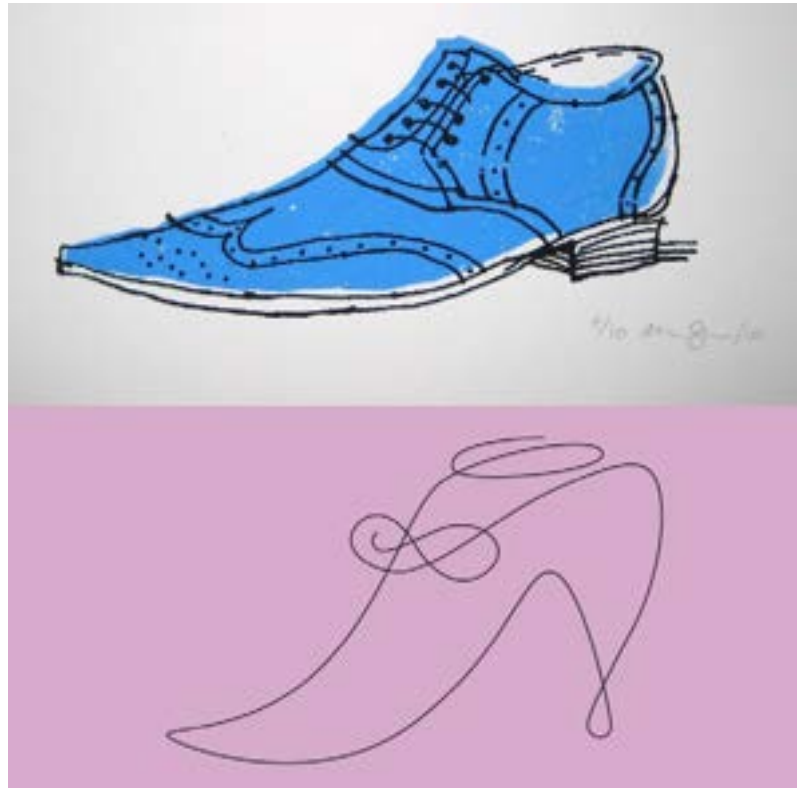
What gets in the way of your creativity?

Nothing. I jump over obstacles. 🌻

Where can we find you?

Commercial art: www.artclicker.com

Paintings and drawings: www.greatsketch.com



My line drawing inspired by Andy Warhol's shoe print



My homage to Norman Rockwell

Tales from the Front

FROM DOUBT TO DETERMINATION by Joy Michael Ellison

In the beginning, no one was more skeptical about my debut picture book, *Sylvia and Marsha Start a Revolution*, than I was.

“I’m going to write an unpublishable picture book,” I declared to anyone who would listen. “It will tell the true story of the Stonewall Riots and Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson, the transgender women of color who helped to start them. I’m sure no publisher will ever be interested!”

Sometimes we joke about our deepest hopes and biggest fears.

I wanted to write about Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson because they were my heroes. During the Stonewall Riots, Sylvia and Marsha changed history by kickstarting a movement for LGBT liberation. Following the rebellion, the two best friends continued their activism by opening up a home for other transgender girls. Their uncompromising love for themselves and their transgender sisters inspired me. They made me proud to be transgender, and I wanted to share that pride with children, especially transgender kids and children of color.

I was certain kids would understand my book because Sylvia and Marsha’s story is about things they can relate to: helping other people, standing up for what’s right, and the power of friendship. I wasn’t at all sure, though, that I could convince a publisher of that.

Then something magical happened.

As I wrote, I spent more and more time with Sylvia and Marsha. I read interviews with them and the articles that Sylvia herself wrote. I watched hours and hours of videos of them. I studied photographs of them. I learned everything I could learn about their determination, kindness, and courage—and slowly, some of their conviction rubbed off on me.

By the time I was ready to begin submitting my work to publishers, I was convinced that my book *should* be published, but I wasn’t at all sure that it ever would be.



FACING DOWN REJECTION

At first, all my fears were confirmed. Rejection after rejection arrived in my mailbox. Agents and editors asked me, “Is it age-appropriate? Should we really be talking about transgender history with our children?” My writing teacher flat-out told me that a picture book about Sylvia and Marsha would never be published.

These questions hurt, but they didn’t surprise me. We often treat transgender identity as an adult topic. While we may claim that we’re simply worried that our children won’t be able to understand terms like “gender identity,” our fears are rooted in decades of misrepresentation of transgender people. Television, movies, and the news media



Tales from the Front

have portrayed transgender people, especially transgender women, as deluded, dangerous, and dishonest. The media has conditioned us to believe that we need to protect children from transgender adults. Even when we reject that message, we may still find ourselves nervous about discussing transgender identity with our kids.

But children usually understand their own gender identities at young ages. By the time they are reading picture books, some children already know they are transgender. Transgender kids need to know that they are loved now, which is something that Sylvia and Marsha knew well.

I could have given up, but because of Sylvia and Marsha, I didn't. I decided to follow their example and do something for my community.

I teamed up with my friend Teshika Silver, an incredible illustrator, and on the anniversary of the Stonewall Riots we launched our book on Kickstarter. To my surprise, we met our goal rapidly. *Sylvia and Marsha Start a Revolution* found the audience I knew was waiting for it.

I thought that would be the end of our story, until I received an email from Jessica Kingsley Press. They were interested in our book! My unpublishable book wasn't so unpublishable after all.

Today, you can find *Sylvia and Marsha Start a Revolution* on the shelves of your local independent bookstore. I'm still a little surprised that my dream has come true, but the good news is that I'm no longer dreaming alone. I'm now represented by Claire Draper of the Bent Agency. Claire believes in my work when I don't and I'm excited to see what we will create together. I'm confident that more books about transgender and queer heroes are on the way.

A FUTURE FULL OF TRANSGENDER STORIES

I still sometimes struggle with self-doubt, but I'm more determined to share the stories of transgender revolutionaries than ever before.

This year a record-breaking 82 anti-transgender bills have been introduced into state legislatures across the country. Most of these bills are aimed at transgender children. They propose to restrict their access to athletics, health care, and safe schools. As transgender children face growing obstacles, the need for books that celebrate transgender people is only increasing.

I'm proud to be a small part of supporting transgender children and I hope you'll join me. 🌟



JOY MICHAEL ELLISON is a writer, teacher, scholar, and grassroots community activist. They are also a loud-mouth, a poet, and a ukulele-playing rock star. Currently, they are earning their PhD in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Ohio State University, where they study transgender history in the Midwest. Their column "Rainbow Rant" appears biweekly in *Columbus Alive*. *Sylvia and Marsha Start a Revolution* is their first picture book, but it won't be their last.

Creative Sparks

STORY BY JANE HERTENSTEIN
ILLUSTRATIONS BY NIKI STAGE

Rustic Pears

I stood paralyzed in the grocery aisle in front of a pyramid of pears.

I've taken to writing in little notebooks. Tidbits, quotes, notes to self, reminders, memories, last night's dream, directions, new recipes, old phone numbers, titles of books I'd like to read, but will probably never get around to, and a running list of exotic colors I hope to incorporate into future essays—once I find out what it is I want to describe: ochre, cinnabar, azure, chalcedony. Writing stuff down helps me to make sense of the world.

“Rustic pears 30 cents”

I slipped my coffee-stained notebook out of my purse and mused. *Rust, the color of old barn wood where the words “Chew Mail Pouch” have faded and chipped, worn down by the years—*

“Miss, miss! Do you mind?”

A woman was trying to get around me with her shopping cart.



Creative Sparks

But I was stuck, suspended over my last thought, imagining deeper. I pulled on a thread of memory, waiting to see what would unravel.

Rustic—the word almost sounds like it needs to be sanded down, primitive, in its native state, beautiful in a tired nostalgic way—

“Ahem.”

A man nudged me as he reached for the burnished fruit.

Harvested hard as a rock, give it a night in the sack and the insides soften, ripen to a sweet readiness. Wait too long and it weeps, easily bruised.

I returned my journal to my bag and continued to the checkout. ✨



JANE HERTENSTEIN'S current obsession is flash. She is the author of more than 80 published stories, a combination of fiction, creative nonfiction, and blurred genre both micro and macro. In addition, she has published a YA novel, *Beyond Paradise*, and a nonfiction project, *Orphan Girl: The Memoir of a Chicago Bag Lady*, which garnered national reviews. Jane is the recipient of a grant from the Illinois Arts Council. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Hunger Mountain*, *Rosebud*, *Word Riot*, *Flashquake*, *Fiction Fix*, *Frostwriting*, and several themed anthologies. She can also be found blogging at memoirouswrite.blogspot.com

NIKI STAGE is an illustrator and art educator, who lives in the Chicago suburbs with her family. Working both traditionally and digitally, Niki enjoys mixing surface textures with digital patterns and experimenting with color. Niki remains passionate about creating whimsical illustrations for children's books and taking life's little moments and bringing them to the surface in a big wondrous way. Please visit her work at www.artistnikistage.com.

Telling True Stories



by Barb Rosenstock

People say I write nonfiction. Though I research real stuff, and write picture books about it, that designation has never felt right. Instead, I would say that I “tell true stories.” Since I don’t have a degree in English (or anything else having to do with children’s lit), I had to be told that this kind of writing is called “narrative nonfiction.” It’s only one of many types of nonfiction writing. Science author Melissa Stewart has done some great work by categorizing modern children’s nonfiction into five kinds. You can read her overview [here](#). However, like making hundreds of thousands of words from only 26 letters, there are many ways to combine these five types of nonfiction to create the best book possible. Narrative, so far, is the kind that works best for me.

THE NARRATIVE JOURNEY

I think it’s because I learned to understand story not by reading but through listening. Specifically listening to one person, my grandfather. Sitting on his lap, walking in the alley, or puttering in the garage, Grandpa told stories. His voice taught me narrative’s common components:

- 1) The Hook, or curious beginning
- 2) The Want/Desire
- 3) The Main Conflict/Problem
- 4) The Obstacles/Events
- 5) The Climax
- 6) The Resolution, or satisfying ending



Grandpa had a 6th grade education. He never studied narrative. English was not his first language. None of that mattered. Whether my grandfather was relating a ghost story or a real-life event from the Great Depression, all the “narrative components” were there. (Grandpa would scoff at those words “narrative component.” He, like acclaimed children’s book author Jane Yolen, would say, “Tell the damn story!” Or more plainly, “I don’t have all day!”) When a piece of the story went missing in Grandpa’s tales, like a climax for instance,

he’d actually point that out, “Yeah, well, turns out this story isn’t goin’ anywhere.” He’d shrug. We’d laugh.

Before I could read, I understood that stories have to “go somewhere” and that sometimes storytellers get lost in the telling. Narrative is a journey. Some journeys don’t start off in the right direction, many spend too much time meandering in the middle, a few just won’t end. Some can be set on the right road and return home; others can’t. At least, not yet; at least, not by this specific storyteller.

A SINGLE QUESTION

It is more than thirty years since my grandfather passed on, but I still think of story in oral terms, which I guess is what makes picture books, meant to be read aloud, my preferred genre. Like my plain-talking grandfather, I use one simple question to guide my narrative nonfiction picture book work, and I want to share it with you. The question is, “So what?”

Are you laughing? It might sound funny, but I don’t mean this questions to be sarcastic at all. The writing process starts with an idea. (I don’t even want to think about what Grandpa would say about fancy-pants words like “writing process”!) In my case, I tend to write about people (which I don’t think of as biography either, but that’s for another day). I have no list of “famous folks” to work from; idea generation for me is a random process. In my daily life, I’ll run across an interesting fact tied to a person—artist Nek Chand built a sculpture garden in India, Otis Barton and Will Beebe invented a deep-ocean craft, Alice Paul and her suffragists were the first group to picket the White House, or Claude Monet painted from a boat. OK, I think, cool, but...“So what?” An idea is not book-worthy until that question can be answered. “So what?” guides me from idea through research, drafts, revision, even marketing; truly every step of the way to publication. Answering that question over and over again always brings me closer to the underlying themes, potential story structures, and the ultimate meaning to be created out of a series of facts.

What do I mean by “So what?” It first uncovers the reasons this topic may be important. *How did the world change? Did*



Telling True Stories

it make other people see things differently? Was something new discovered or invented? And for children's literature, So what is so important about this topic that kids (not you as author, not other adults, but kids!) need to know about it?

Even after I have those answers for my topic, additional “So what?” questions continue to guide revisions, or, my sculpting of the story. For a narrative nonfiction picture book, it works something like this:

ACTION: I run across a photo on the internet while researching another book about van Gogh

IDEA: A guy named Nek Chand built a sculpture garden in India. It's gorgeous, cool visuals, it's huge.

QUESTION: *So what?*

ACTION: research

ANSWER: Chand was a refugee, he missed his rural home when he was displaced to the city, he was not formally taught, he's an outsider or folk artist. He recreated components of his home village using found or recycled objects. It's the largest outsider art environment on earth.

QUESTION: *So what are the coolest parts of this story for kids?*

ACTION: more research

ANSWER: The specifics of how the self-taught Chand built his art from recycled materials. Chand's village childhood. When the sculpture garden was threatened with destruction kids helped save it.

ACTION: drafting starts and stops – still more research)

QUESTION (AGENT/MARKET): *So what classroom topics can this idea connect to that other recent books don't?*

ANSWER: community/village/city, outsider/folk art, refugees, India, recycling, sculpture, mosaic

ACTION: writing in earnest)

QUESTION: *So what is the least background readers need for my story to make sense?*

ACTION: revisions

QUESTION: *So what is the multi-layered, complex message I'm trying to communicate?*

ANSWER: Making art can help us belong; art can feel like home.

ACTION: more revision and final manuscript



MAKING MATERIALS VS. MAKING ART

Does the process always happen in that exact order? No, but pretty darn close. Before coming upon this idea of the “So what?” I wrote many more words and told less successful stories. I think that's because I was confusing making the materials with making the art itself. Painters can buy paint, sculptors can buy clay, but unlike other artists, writers must “make” their own materials—by putting words on a page. And so, especially in the beginning, many of us tend to confuse the materials (words) we make with the art (story) we're making. We all know that paint is not a painting, clay is not a sculpture; yet narrative writers can veer off path by confusing making more materials with making a work of art. Words are not structure. Words are not story.

Since I identified and named it, that “So what?” question has kept me on my story journeys with less backtracking. It has focused research, weeded out irrelevant facts, and eliminated unnecessary words. I ask, “So what?” of my true stories every day in a hundred different ways. It's my hope that this question may help you create your own art with words. If it does, please let me know, I love to hear from our SCBWI-IL members. If not, you will find your own questions, your own answers, and your own path to move forward on your writing journey. 🌟

BARB ROSENSTOCK loves true stories. She's the author of 18 nonfiction and historical fiction picture books including the Caldecott Honor book *The Noisy Paint Box*, illustrated by Mary Grandpré. *Otis and Will Discover the Deep*, illustrated by Katherine Roy, was awarded SCBWI's Golden Kite Award for Nonfiction for Younger Readers, *The Secret Kingdom*, illustrated by Claire A. Nivola, was honored by the NCTE Orbis Pictus committee, and *Through the Window*, illustrated with Mary Grandpré, received a Sydney Taylor honor. Barb loves to visit schools and share ideas about reading and writing with students of all ages. She lives near Chicago with her family and is always working on new ideas to bring nonfiction to life. You can reach her at barb@barbrosenstock.com.

Finding the Heart of a Picture Book

by Alice B. McGinty



When Amy asked me to write this article, she kindly said that my picture book *A Story for Small Bear* had the makings of a classic. Then she added, “It’s not only a bedtime story, a genre that’s already saturated, but a book about BEARS at bedtime. How did you have the courage, the gall, to dive in?”



I said I’d be happy to write about *A Story for Small Bear*—but when I wrote it, I wasn’t thinking of it as a classic or even a bedtime story. And the bears showed up because they had to.

Although I can’t write directly about making classics or bedtime stories or even bear

stories, I can write about my journey in creating *A Story for Small Bear*. And I can take a gander, looking back, at what elements could have led to its being published and the classic feel. This ties in with something I’ve been thinking about a lot lately: Finding the emotional heart of your story.

THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY

Where did *A Story for Small Bear* come from and how did it develop? During the past ten years or so, I’ve been helping a psychologist use what he’s learned from his experience in working with adolescents and their parents to write a parenting book called *Childproofing for Adolescence*. One day, he and I got to talking about how some of the parenting principles in the book might play out as stories for young kids. It was a fun thing to think about! One principle we batted around was what he calls “put the conflict in the kid,” which means that the parent doesn’t have to nag their child if they set things up so the child will be motivated

(and able) to complete tasks themselves.

In bedtime rituals, for example, if stories,—which are a big motivator,—have to end by a set bedtime (say 8 p.m.), the sooner the child completes their bedtime tasks—brushing teeth, getting p.j.s on (tasks they often dilly-dally with)—the more time they have for stories before that 8 p.m. bedtime. Gosh, I wish I’d done that when my kids were young!

Thinking about ways to play with that concept, I came up with the idea of bears and hibernation, since their bedtime is set firmly by nature and not an arbitrary timeframe set by parents. That’s how the bears came in! And once they did, the plotline and characters formed in my mind, and I couldn’t wait to start writing. That said (ha, it’s never that easy!), it took another couple of years and many, many revisions to refine the story and get the telling, the language, and the pacing just right.

So, that’s how *A Story for Small Bear* was born. Now, let’s talk about what helped it click.

MAKE THEM FEEL

Why do some books fare better than others in the marketplace? That’s what I asked myself. Why are *Goodnight Moon* and *Love You Forever* bestsellers? Why did my book *Thank You, World* sell over half a million copies, while *Ten Little Lambs* barely earned back its advance? The answer I came to is that the books that seem to do best are those that hook into strong emotions. They connect with readers and make them *feel*.

How can we as writers create books that hook powerfully into our readers’ emotions? We need to tap into the emotional core of what we’re creating, and after we find that gem, polish it to make it shine.



Finding the Heart of a Picture Book

Here are some ways to do that:

First is the key question: *How does the book make you feel?* And how do you want your readers to feel? Where is the emotional essence of your story?

With *A Story for Small Bear*, as I began writing, I let the world I was creating take me to an emotional place of safety, warmth, and security—the snugness of the den, the warmth and love of storytime—and the joy of play and exploration. I knew it needed to feel that way. Every time I worked on the story, from the beginning to the umpteenth revision, I put myself in that emotional place, like an actor. (This was lovely, because I was revising at the beginning of the pandemic and it felt so good to go to that safe, secure world.)

When [BookPage](#) wrote in a review, *A Story for Small Bear* “cradles a tale of playful curiosity and exploration in the warm, sheltering arms of home,” I felt grateful that they’d gotten it.

Suggestions:

- Think of times you’ve felt as you want your readers to feel. What was it like? Where were you? Every time you work on your story, head to that emotional place before you write and revise.
- Reread what you’ve written from the start each time you write. It’ll put you in the right emotional place.
- Think of words to describe the feeling you’re going for and write them at the top of your manuscript, ready to guide you.

STRUCTURE

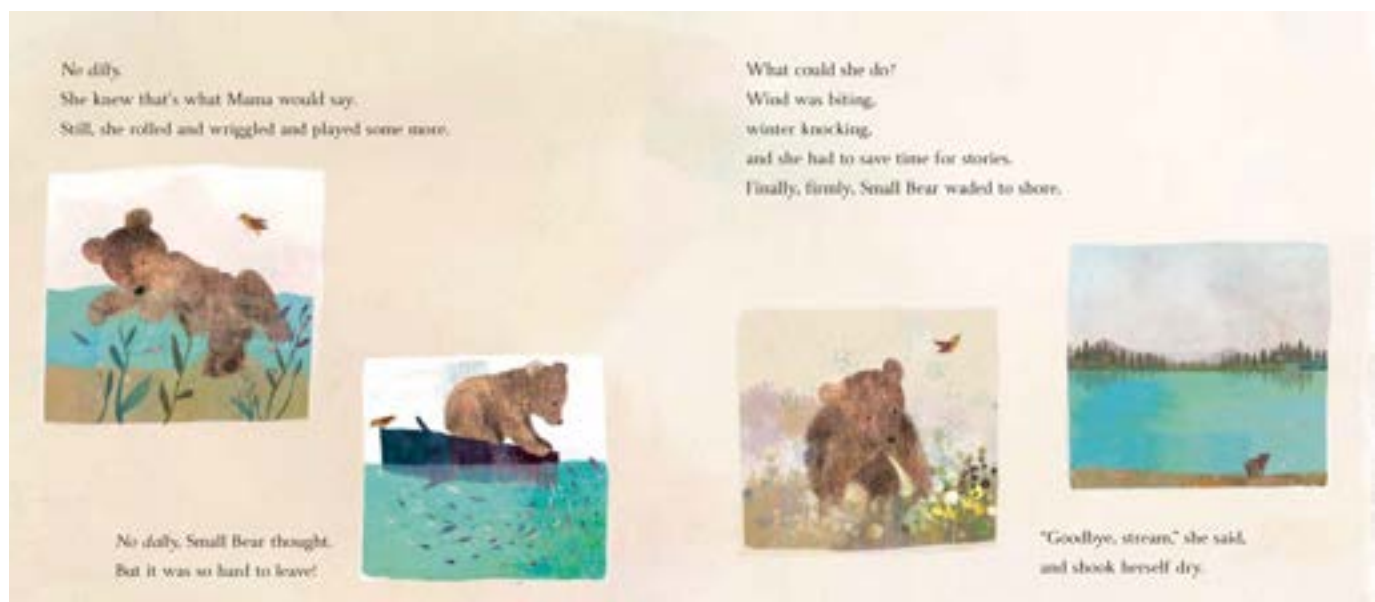
No matter whether I’m writing fiction or nonfiction, it’s all about finding the arc of the story—the story in a life through biography, the story in a parenting principle. I guess I love stories as much as Small Bear!

In the case of *A Story for Small Bear*, to achieve its emotional goal of safety and security, I knew the arc needed to feel slow and rounded, with no “sharp edges.” For the same reason, I knew the story needed to follow the predictable and soothing “rule of three.” That meant cutting a lot out (never easy!) to achieve the simplicity and structure, with an easy-to-follow arc, gentle building of tension, and satisfying conclusion.

The Rule of Three

If you haven’t examined picture books for these predictable sets of threes, take a look! Look for three attempts to solve a problem or attain a goal (think *The Three Little Pigs*) and often three characters, such as...the three little pigs. Many times, important story elements, such as refrains, are repeated three times as well, often marking the beginning, middle, and end of a story.

Think about how the plot or structure of your story works to support the emotional core and help the readers feel the way you want them to feel. The story structure sets up a scaffolding for the emotional content of the story. Does the pacing support the emotion you’re going for?



Finding the Heart of a Picture Book

Suggestions:

- Write an emotional logline showing the emotional arc you're going for.
- Skeletonize your manuscript. Ask yourself what is essential to support the emotion. Cut the rest. Then put back only what's necessary.

CHARACTER

In *A Story for Small Bear*, Small Bear has simple but strong wants and needs. She wants to play and explore. She also wants stories. When the two conflict, it creates tension.

Speaking of needs, in the story Small Bear also has a need to stay warm in the cold of winter setting in.

"She did not like cold. Not at all."

Warmth is a primal need, basic and necessary. Primal needs especially hook into readers' emotions because they are strong and we connect.

Relationships are also a key part of character—and Small Bear's relationship with Mama needed to resonate with the warmth and safety I was working to create.

Speaking of resonating, use *showing* details to bring the emotionality of your character to life. Your character should resonate with the way you want your reader to feel at each moment. Find just the right details to show this—because showing leads to connection, which leads to feeling.

*"Up, up, up she climbed,
one branch to another,
and ate acorn
after acorn. Mmm!
She looked out
from the branches. Ahh!
She could climb forever."
(from *A Story for Small Bear*)*

I was going for the joy of play and exploration here!

LANGUAGE, RHYTHM, AND REPETITION

The language you use has the responsibility—and the opportunity—of setting a strong emotional tone. Here are a few pointers:

- **Dialogue:** It's not only *what* the character says but how they say it, which can bring the core emotion to life. Give them a strong, unique voice!
- **Beginnings and Endings:** Establish the tone and feeling strongly at the beginning. Do it again at the end of your story, so the reader is left with a powerful feeling.
- **Repetition:** Here's one repeating phrase I use in the book:

*"Wind was biting,
winter knocking,
and she had to save time for stories."*
- **Rhythm:** Do you hear how the rhythm builds in the repeating phrase above? I used short phrases to show the tension of winter's bite until the last line, which has a different rhythm. Read your work aloud and make your language sing to the tune of the emotion you're going for.

The words you use to tell your story are the *key* element in achieving your emotional goal. Examine each word to make readers feel your key emotion more intensely, in more places. Get rid of the words that don't add. Bring in more of those that do. Recognize when something feels right. And when it doesn't.

So I hope you've found some nuggets here to help you with your writing. And thanks for sticking with this to the end! Whether it's a bedtime story with bears or something very different, in the end it's about writing from that deep emotional place and letting it flow from there to get to the heart of your story! 🌟

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Worldbuilding for the Real World

by Ronni Davis

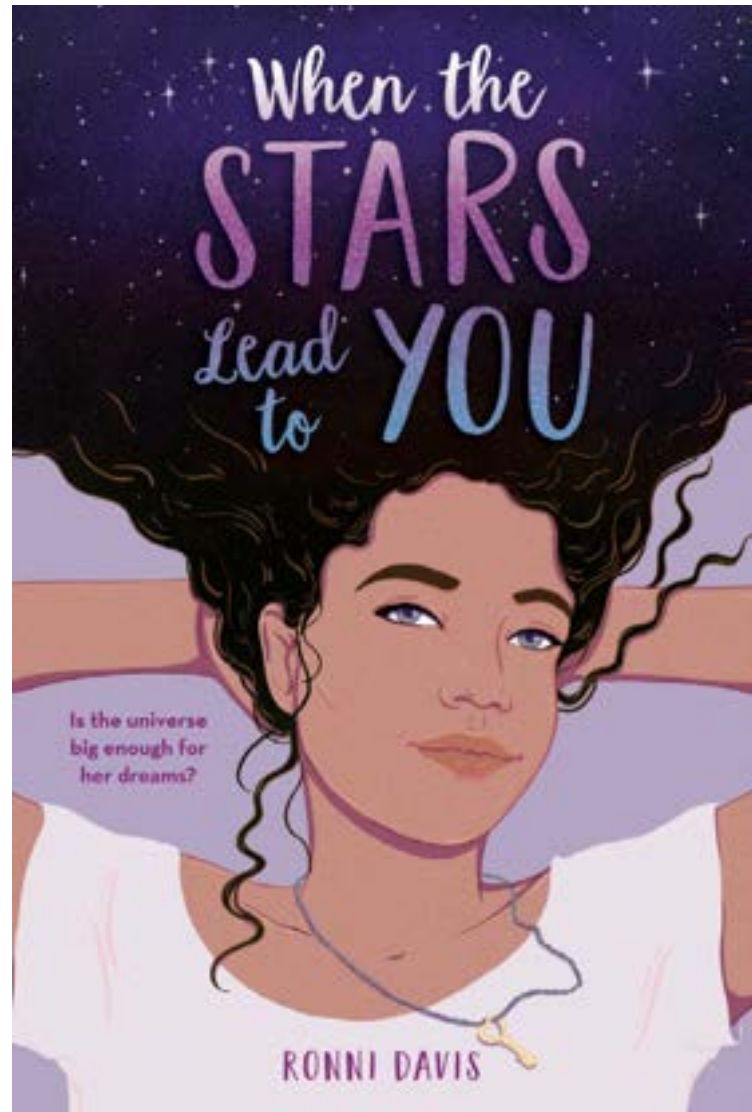
For a long time, whenever I thought about worldbuilding, it was in relation to epic fantasy novels, movies, or shows. When writers talked about building their worlds, they discussed everything from the weather to the type of money their characters used. Most of these worlds had a magic system, or maybe a particular kind of food not found in “our” world. I’m not a fantasy writer by any means, so the concept of worldbuilding *really* intimidated me. It wasn’t until I was deep into writing [When The Stars Lead to You](#) that I realized worldbuilding happens in all kinds of stories.

But first: What even is worldbuilding? And what makes it different from setting?

To me, world-building means creating a plausible world for your story—whether that story is incorporated into a book, a video game, a movie, or even a song. Whereas a setting is a particular space in a world, the world you’ve created is the space that encompasses all your settings.

Think of some of your favorite “real world” media. The one that comes prominently to mind for me is *Gilmore Girls*. To me, Stars Hollow—the town where they live—is just as much a character as Lorelai or Rory, the two main characters of the show. And not just the town, but Luke’s Diner, the grocery store where Dean worked, the inn where Lorelai worked, the gazebo where all the wacky events took place—even Chilton Prep School with its rules and clubs and competitive classmates. All of it was vibrant and bustling with distinctive personality.

But your world doesn’t always have to be made up. When I think of shows such as *Gossip Girl* or movies like *To All the Boys*—stories set in real places—there is still an element of worldbuilding, because you have to create *the world of your character*.



Where Does One Begin?

When I start building my stories, sometimes the world comes to me first—the park where my characters hang out or the hallway in the school they attend. But most of the time, I start with my main character and her point of view. I always write in first person past tense, so I ask myself a lot of questions in relation to her.



Worldbuilding for the Real World

For example...

What does her room look like? Which books are on her shelf? Why does she like those books, and how much do they affect the way she sees her day-to-day life? Is that a yoga mat rolled up in the corner? How is yoga woven into her life? Does she go to a studio, or is there a class at her school? What sort of school does she go to? Is it public and basic, or is it private and ritzy? How do the kids at her school dress? How do they treat the teachers and other authority figures?

How does she get home from school? Does she drive? Walk? Ride a bike or a skateboard? What kind of neighborhood does she live in, and what is her home like? Where does she hang out with her friends when her homework's done? What sort of things do they do at these places? What do they eat? Do they have or need a curfew? Is there graffiti on bus stops, or do people drive around in Range Rovers and Jeeps?

Other Inspirations

In addition, I draw on real-world settings to help populate my book world. When building the world for *When the Stars Lead to You*, I knew right away that I wanted my main character to live in a ranch house in a suburb. I looked up houses like that to get a sense of the exterior I wanted her to live in, and I also looked up floorplans so I could understand where her room would be in relation to the rest of the house. Then I went to town on Pinterest, gathering room decorations and such, so I could help build her room in my mind. That way, I was able to clearly picture the scenes that happened there.

I also knew I wanted her to attend a private school, so I looked at Philips Exeter Academy (in Exeter, New Hampshire) for course titles and campus settings. Then I made up the rest of the details, using those real-world examples as a base.

Sometimes these settings and the fictional world itself come to me right away. Some things I don't know until I'm writing the story, but starting to put these puzzles together gives me a good foundation. Not only do I get to know my character better, but I can also envision the world she moves through—the world I built.

It turns out that worldbuilding is one of my favorite things to do. Creating a space for my characters' stories to unfold and imagining all the things I can do to make that space unique to their experience is something I relish during the storytelling process. ✨



RONNI DAVIS lives in Chicago with her husband Adam and her son Aidan. By day she copyedits everything from TV commercials to billboards, and by night she writes contemporary teen novels about brown girls falling in love. Her debut novel, *When The Stars Lead to You*, is available now from Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, and the anthology *You Too?*, for which she contributed, is also available now from Inkyard Press. You can find her on Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok @lilrongal, and at her website at ronnidavis.com.

Voices of Change

DID YOU RUN THE LIGHT...OR DID YOU TAKE IT?

by Alina Celeste Hevia

I didn't leave Miami for any significant amount of time until I was 24. That year, I moved to a rural Pennsylvania town and into a dorm filled to the brim with other twenty-something actors as part of a theater company. I learned a lot that year, but one of the lessons that shook me to the core was that, according to nearly every new person I met, I spoke with an accent.

Almost immediately, my new friends and coworkers began to comment on my language. My English, that is. The language I've spoken from birth, the language I studied in college. The language in which I voraciously read two books a week. I was flabbergasted by constant questions about my "first" language and where I was from. It was world-bending to go from being ashamed of my less-than-perfect Spanish in a Latin-American-dominant culture to being singled out for my apparently bizarre and accented use of English.

Growing up in Miami, multi-lingual and multi-cultural households are the norm. The grocery store is bilingual. The coffee shop is multicultural. Your third grade teacher spoke English with an accent, or Spanish with an accent. Your next door neighbor spoke Creole or Spanish or English, or all three. Most adults had some kind of accent. My friends and I had lots of playful pronunciations, mostly used to make fun of our elders. We'd say "shockolat ships" for "chocolate chips" or "Meri Kreemah" for "Merry Christmas." We'd tease older family members and sometimes each other about our non-standard English, comfortable in the knowledge that this was a celebration of our multicultural heritage and not a reflection of our own native-English-speaking abilities. Most of us had been born in the United States, after all, or at least had come here at a very early age.

While we'd always treated English playfully, I knew, for example, that someone outside of Miami wouldn't call their flip-flops "chanx." I knew they wouldn't understand if I said "Pero, like" or that I was craving a *pastelito de guayaba*. What I didn't know was that the blend of Spanish, Creole, and other Caribbean, Central, and South American languages and dialects that permeated the daily life of Miami had so profoundly embedded themselves into American English that we had created a new dialect. We used different vowel sounds and accented different syllables, and we didn't just

sound different; I used phrases every day that left many of my new "American" friends scratching their heads.

"Could you put the light?" I would ask as a friend left a room or passed a light switch. "Put it where?" they would respond.

"I got down from the bed," I would say. "Was it up high?" they would ask, bewildered. I'd stop for a minute, reviewing my statement, and then correct myself. "I mean, I got out of bed." "Oh!" They might laugh or say, "Say something else weird!"

I still remember when I reported my discomfiting realizations to my best friend back home.

"We talk weird!" I told her, aghast. She had no idea what I meant. I explained that people from Miami said things that were not standard English expressions. That the people I was meeting in Pennsylvania had no idea what I meant when I said, "I was going pretty fast so I took the light." She froze, the gears in her head almost audible. "But, how else would you say it?" she asked.

I TOOK THE LIGHT

Some of the phrases I used then, nearly twenty years ago, have become more commonplace. I asked a few friends



Illustration by Brooke O'Neill

Voices of Change

recently, all native English speakers and living in different parts of the country, what “took the light” meant, and they all knew. Spanish has already infiltrated speech in this country to the point where once-odd turns of phrase are now commonplace.

This is where the magic of linguistic diversity comes in. The beauty of “foreign” influences on English is that descriptions and words can take on new meanings or connotations. The language evolves to incorporate new ideas, new images, and new realities, new windows with which to look upon the world.

Ironically, I learned about my “weird” English around the time that books by Indian authors like Arundhati Roy were making a huge splash in the world of American literature. Think pieces on the creative, nonstandard uses of English in her novel—and what that could mean for the written word—were everywhere. A Google search reveals that in the years since, there have been entire doctoral theses devoted to this topic. The use of nonstandard English was, and still is, more complicated than that, of course. It originates in long histories of colonization, education, caste systems, and racism. It is one more way to identify others as different, a euphemism for “less than.”

In 2018, Roy herself delivered a profound and thoughtful address at the British Library titled [“What is the Morally Appropriate Language in Which to Think and Write?”](#) In that talk Roy directly addressed her use of language and its presence in her writing, saying she intended to discuss “Translation as a Writing Strategy in a Community Without Passports.”

Writing from an intersection of cultures is indeed an act of translation, of world defining. When I first encountered the fact that my culture was reflected in the very words I used to communicate, I was ashamed of my nonstandard English. I know now I shouldn’t have been, that my presence in the wider world was a sign of growth, enrichment, and new windows created by the children of new immigrants and the culture of the United States, a country shaped by immigrants.

WE CHANGE LANGUAGE, JUST AS LANGUAGE CHANGES US

For example, a phrase I used often became very popular among my new friends. If someone made a grumpy or nasty face at me, say after they’d tried some new food I had

prepared, or perhaps during a playful argument where they’d make a show of displeasure with an exaggerated grimace, I’d say, “Don’t put that face!” In standard English, if someone made a face at you, you’d say, “Don’t *make* that face [at me].” Because in standard English, we *make* faces, but in Miamian English, we “put” our faces—we place expressions onto our faces, as if they existed somewhere outside of ourselves and could be used when needed and put away later. There are distinctly different, if subtle, connotations between “putting” a face and “making” one.

Since that time, I have become fascinated with the idea that language shapes the world we live in, even down to our perceptions of reality. (See [“Language as a Social Construction of Reality.”](#)) The evolution of phrases like “sexual preference” vs. “sexual orientation” is a powerful testament to the evolving attitudes toward the LGBTQIA+ community and how language helps to shift the way members of that community move through the world. This is also true of the term “undocumented,” now being used in place of “illegal.” The existence of a human being should never be illegal. The words we use, the ways we string them together, and the mental images we create have a physical, world-shaping effect.

By this reasoning, the more varied the linguistic backgrounds of our writers, the more diverse the reality we collectively construct. With each new wave of immigrants who speak a foreign language, English expands to include more sounds, more descriptive phrases, and more versions of reality. Another window opens, and another world is revealed. 🌟

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 pre-sents workshops for educators, librarians, and children living all over the world. Find them at [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.

Shop Around the Corner

ANDERSON'S BOOKSHOP by Michelle Schaub

The *Prairie Wind's* inaugural “Shop Around the Corner” column, which appeared in the winter 2019 issue, featured Anderson's Bookshop, a mainstay of the western suburbs with two locations, one in Naperville and the other in Downers Grove. We're circling back to check in with Anderson's after a year of the pandemic, this time with a focus on the Downers Grove location.

I chatted with Kathleen March, Children's Manager of the Downers Grove store. Kathleen has been with Anderson's Bookshop for twenty years and is a long-time resident of Downers Grove. My own three children grew up delighting over books recommended by Kathleen. When she isn't finding the perfect book to put in the hands of readers, Kathleen enjoys knitting and worshipping at the altar of baseball.



Kathleen, what makes Anderson DG's children section special?

Honestly, I think it's part and parcel of what makes Anderson's as whole special—we read what we sell. Our passion for the books that we recommend to you shines through; if we're excited about a book, it will rub off on you. That doesn't change because of the age of the reader. We also make sure that our displays represent our community so that every child, every parent walking in will see themselves represented in the books we feature.

What do you enjoy most about your role as children's bookseller in the community?

I also live in Downers Grove, a block from the bookstore, so I see our customers outside of work and really have the opportunity to get to know them as friends. I love watching my youngest friends grow up. Some of the readers that I connected to books when they were young are now back shopping with their kids. It's so rewarding (but also a stark reminder of how old I am).

2020 marked the 40th anniversary of Anderson's Downers Grove, and your 20th year as a bookseller. Congratulations! How were you able to celebrate despite the pandemic? What's the secret of the store's long-term success?

We really couldn't celebrate, which was one of the many heartbreaks of 2020. Pre-Covid we would have thrown open the doors and celebrated with our community. Hopefully, soon we'll be able to have a delayed celebration. I did buy myself a bottle of champagne on December 31 to celebrate the close of my 20th year with the company. I think the secret to surviving 40 years is to just do what we do best – serve our community; be a pillar in the community. Through our work with local schools, author events, and programming like “How to Raise a Resilient Child” we become a resource for the community, not just a store, and that's what sets Indie bookstores apart.



Shop Around the Corner

In what ways has Anderson's had to adapt during this challenging year? What kinds of ongoing changes do you think will be in place after things return to normal?

There are the obvious changes—the protections put in place for both staff and customers; moving all author events to virtual events; cancelling any other in-person events, etc. The more subtle change, I think, is our gratefulness. We've always been grateful for our customers' support. But the way everyone rallied around us during lockdown, the way everyone supported us during the holiday season, blew us away. Every day that we unlock the front door, turn on the lights, and invite customers in is another opportunity for us to say thank you to the community for its support. While I know that we are *all* looking forward to in-person events again, I have a feeling there will always be a mix of virtual and in-person events.

Speaking of events, Anderson's has always been a gracious host for local authors' book launches. With in-person launches on hold, how is Anderson's helping authors connect with readers?

Early on into lockdown we started doing Facebook Lives twice a week with book talks about what we were reading and loving. We started it because so many of us were missing the opportunity to connect readers with the new releases, but what we quickly realized was how healing it was for us as well. When you're a bookseller all of a sudden unable to see your customers or connect readers with authors, well, it takes a toll. We stopped the FB Lives when we were able to reopen to the public but we continue to use social media posts and our website as a way to make recommendations—through curated lists, new-release Tuesdays, featured preorders, etc. Of course, hosting as many virtual author events as possible has also been a great way to connect readers with authors and books.

In the past, Anderson's had an amazing authors-in-schools program. How has the pandemic affected that program?

While we haven't had the number of school/author events we've had in the past, we still connect authors and schools through virtual events. In some ways I think this is easier for the schools and the authors.

What suggestions do you have for indie-published authors who'd like to forge a relationship with Anderson's?

Being indie anything can be by trying for sure. I think the key to success for any indie is that connection. Get to know us; help us get to know you. The other piece of advice is to think like a publicist. Be prepared with a marketing plan for your book. Know who your audience is and how they connect with Anderson's. 🌟



MICHELLE SCHAUB is the author of *Kindness is a Kite String* (Cardinal Rule Press 2021); *Dream Big, Little Scientists* (Charlesbridge 2020); *Finding Treasure: A Collection of Collections* (Charlesbridge 2019); and *Fresh-Picked Poetry: A Day at the Farmers' Market* (Charlesbridge 2017).

Inside Story

“MOTIVATION”: WHAT IS IT? AND IS IT MORE AVAILABLE THAN WE THINK? by Carol Coven Grannick

Since the pandemic began, I have become aware of online comments from writers and illustrators about the “lack of motivation” they’ve felt.

And for those who’ve been talking about it, this lack seemed to disrupt their ability to work.

The reason for this seems to be that “motivation” is associated with a *feeling*, essentially an *energetic interest* in doing a certain activity. And then, when the “motivated” feeling is not present, the impetus to do the work becomes harder or even impossible.

But I’m going to question that connection, and whether “motivation” can even be called a feeling. I’d like to offer a different interpretation, one that not only changes the concept, but also may help change the way you think about motivation’s connection with your creative work.

IF MOTIVATION IS A FEELING, CAN YOU DO YOUR WORK WITHOUT IT?

As Chicagoland weather devolved into frigid temps and iced sidewalks, my regular morning outdoor walks transitioned into riding a small, inexpensive, stationary bike or following the moves on a cardio, low-impact, and high-intensity workout from an Australian couple who offered

some laughter along with their great workout. What I particularly respected was their attitude: Work as hard as you can *today*, follow the movements but find your own pace and rhythm, and do what you can do *right now*. The cool-down tagline was “Don’t wait for motivation. Just show up and do what you can.”



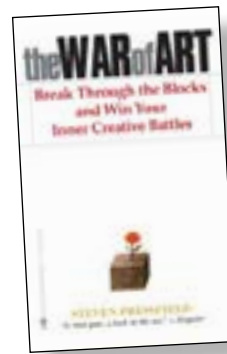
TeamBodyProject.com



Inside Story

Their words resonated with my own beliefs. I don't believe in waiting for what I might call "motivation-the-feeling" to do my work (i.e., writing) any more than I wait for motivation-the-feeling to brush my teeth, keep myself clean, find some way to be physically active during the day, share in the purchase and preparation of food, or anything else I see as essential.

While I enjoy writing more deeply than any of the above-mentioned tasks, it's still a job. A number of years ago, I spent a deliberate period of time not submitting manuscripts. Instead, I wrote a daily post for myself in the form of a public blog, because I needed to feel accountable. I called the blog *Today I Am a Writer*. It kept me writing, whether minimally or extensively, each day for nearly two years. Steven Pressfield's *The War of Art* and helped to solidify my commitment.



For me, if motivation exists as an energizing feeling, that energy comes to life only after I do the work. I don't particularly enjoy moving, for example, but I do it because the benefits—seen and unseen, felt and unfelt, daily and long-term—keep me coming back.

So if motivation is a feeling you wish you had, or believe you need, in order to do your creative work, read on. Because that could be a disappointing choice.

MOTIVATION = FEELING...OR NOT?

Actually, motivation is not a feeling. By definition it means a reason for various behaviors, which does not necessitate *feeling* anything in particular.



Inside Story

Motivation simply requires a reason. For me, that reason is my commitment to doing the work I need to do to be the writer I want to be, and am. That often looks (and feels) different each day. Whether I'm loving my work while a dozen new poems fly through my brain or feeling blank, lost, or empty of poetry, that does not change what writing is to me. It's *me*. It's part of who I am. That's really the reason or, according to its definition, the "motivation" that moves me to do the work.

CAUTIONARY NOTES

This does not mean I believe:

1. that life events, whether psychological/emotional or external, do not at times distract or prevent us from doing our work;
2. that only those who create every single day are writers or artists; or
3. that "lack of motivation" is equivalent to creative "block"

ONCE UPON A TIME

There was a time when I believed that insight, particularly into the unconscious, had to precede meaningful change. That feelings had to change before one's actions or behavior could change.

I switched perspectives in 1980-81. During that time I gradually moved toward the most powerful change in my life—one that opened doors to everything I wanted to become—by changing my mind about something. I changed *how I thought* and that changed *the behavior that accompanied those new thoughts*.

As a result, I took on a more cognitive approach in my own continuing growth and in the way I provided therapy. This approach has been part of my everyday life for decades now, and I treasure the power of my brain to control how I feel and act, rather than the other way around.

That's what got me thinking about the definition of "motivation." The concept of motivation being a reason instead of an emotion makes so much more sense to me.

If writing or illustrating is part of who you are as a person, if doing that work helps to create the *wholeness* of you, the tapestry of who you are, that's your motivation. You do the things that hold that "self" together. Whether it's every day or every week or once in a while. Whether it's a day of six words or a chapter, a scribble or a massive revision.

Whatever your commitment to your work is, it does not matter whether you *feel like* doing it. It only matters that you show up in a way that works for you.

And when you show up and your work-in-progress won't come, work on something else. Anything. Nudge your brain and your hand(s) to do something that keeps the brain-to-hand connection lubricated. Maybe that "something else" will be a bridge to something new, a discovery you may never have made without the detour. Often my detours seem to circle back home.

So don't wait to *feel* motivated. Motivation doesn't come and go if you've committed to a creative journey. It's there with you. It's your reason. It's who you are, not how you feel. Just take one step forward. ☀



CAROL COVEN GRANNICK is an author and poet whose MG novel in verse, *Reeni's Turn*, debuted in 2020 from Fitzroy Books. Her children's poetry and fiction appears/is forthcoming in *Highlights*, *Hello*, *Cricket*, *Ladybug*, and *Babybug*, and her poetry chapbook for adults, *Call Me Bob*, is under contract with Oprelle Publications. She's happy to receive your questions and comments through her website: www.carolcovengrannick.com

Illustrator's Tips



WORKING WITH SELF-PUBLISHING AUTHORS

by Gabriella Vagnoli

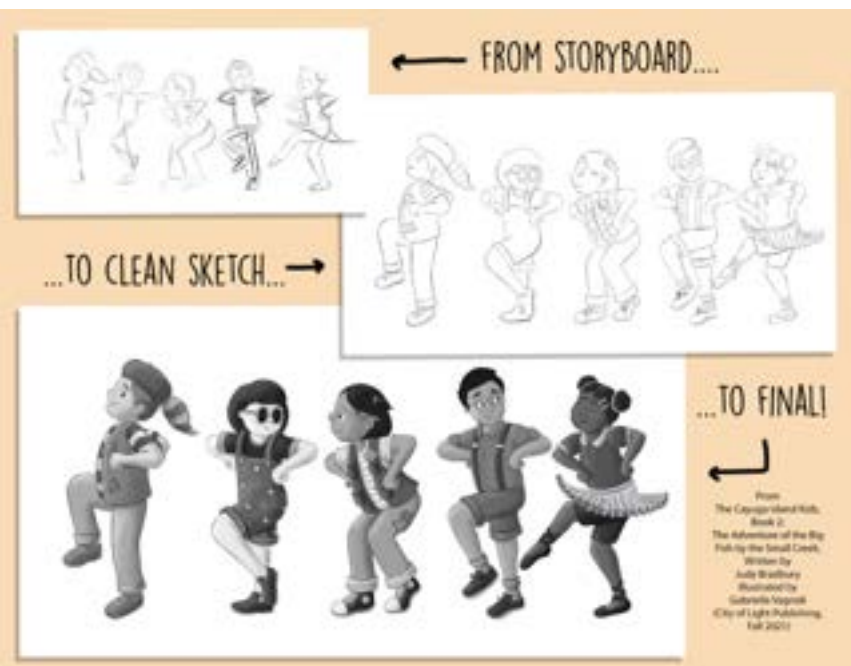
Working as an illustrator on a book that will be self-published is, for me, akin to what working in a small independent movie is for an actor: It might not land you an Academy Award, but it will allow you to gain experience and pay some bills. Here are some things I have learned (sometimes the hard way) through my personal experience in this field.

FINDING WORK: SORTING THE WHEAT FROM THE CHAFF

It should go without saying, but never work for free or for “exposure.” Even if you have absolutely zero experience in illustration, your work is always worth being paid for. You might charge a lower fee for your first job than what you will charge for your second or third, but never ever agree to work for nothing. That not only cheapens your work (and everybody else’s), but an author who expects you to work for free is one who does not value your work, and I can *guarantee* you will have a nightmare of a time working with this person and not get much in terms of exposure. This includes doing an initial sketch to “see if you are a good fit.” Instead, direct the author to your portfolio website, which should be enough to give them an idea of your style. If they insist on a sketch beforehand you can treat it as commission work and negotiate a fee accordingly.

While finding authors is relatively easy (I found work through social media, freelance websites, word of mouth, and more), it is important to quickly weed out the less “serious” offers as well as the scammers. Here are some tips:

- Be prepared to give a ballpark estimate right away. Many authors like to “shop around” and contact multiple illustrators to see which one fits their budget. Save yourself time, and be ready to at least offer a range of prices, in order to discourage people who think they can get a full-page illustration for less than the price of a coffee.
- Prepare a document that outlines your process step by step to send to authors who have inquired about your work. Assume that the person who contacted you doesn’t know anything about how a book is illustrated, which is often the case. You can also include this information in an FAQ page on your website, so people can understand how you work without having to contact you. This is a great way to set expectations and to show that you know what you are talking about.
- Have your own contract template ready for the client to review. I started with a template I found online and tweaked it based on contracts I received from publishers later. (Below I’ve outlined what I think should be included in a contract, but also keep in mind I am not a lawyer!)
- Once the author has accepted the estimate, learned about your process, and reviewed the contract you’re offering, ask to see the manuscript. (Some authors will have you sign a nondisclosure agreement, or NDA, before sharing the book, and that’s okay). Reading the manuscript before signing a contract is important to make sure that the book is something you would want to work on and that it doesn’t contain anything you would be uncomfortable portraying. It is also a way to make sure the manuscript is actually finished enough to start working on (and trust me, this is coming from experience).
- As a final stage before accepting an offer, I suggest meeting via Zoom to discuss the project. Remember that in a self-publishing project you will be working directly and, most likely, solely with the author. You don’t have to be best friends, but you don’t want to work with someone who makes you feel uncomfortable



Illustrator's Tips

for any reason, and “face to face” is a good way to ensure you have the right “chemistry.” Virtual meetings also give you the chance to answer any questions your potential client might still have.

CONTRACT TIPS

Once again, I am no lawyer, but here is what I have included in my contract:

- The overall scope of the project, including the number of pages, their size, the format of delivery of the illustrations.
- The payment. I personally prefer to charge a flat fee to be paid in installments at specific milestones. While some self-published books might sell pretty well, it is a gamble that I let the author take. Tracking them down for royalties is not part of what I want to do, and it isn't exactly easy either, so I do my math and try to charge a fee that represents the time I expect to invest in the project.
- A clear outline of milestones. What is included (this is similar to your “step-by-step process document” discussed earlier), milestone due dates, and the payment for each. I also include a time limit on feedback and change requests, as well as how many major changes are included for each stage.
- An outline of cancellation fees. As a rule of thumb, any completed work should be paid for. You should also include a penalty fee to cover the time your client has “reserved” in case they decide not to go ahead with the project, and this fee should depend on how early they cancel.
- A liability clause. This portion of the contract makes clear that both the author and I guarantee that our work is our own and also that each of us relieves the other of liability in case someone sues either of us for copyright infringement.
- A copyright clause. Personally, I license the use of my illustrations exclusively for the publication and promotion of the book but reserve the right to create a separate contract for any other commercial use. Basically, the author can give away free bookmarks or make a book trailer with my art, but they cannot profit from the sale of other products that display my work, like t-shirts or mugs.

All in all, I have found working directly with authors very rewarding. The authors I have worked with have always been truly passionate about their books, which means they were all very committed to the work in terms of focus and

time, and that alone makes work a breeze. Moreover, it is a pleasure to be there to help someone make their dream book come to life, often a dream that had been years in the making, and learning what it meant for them.

Finally, I have been lucky enough to find people who were on the whole incredibly supportive of my work, which has allowed me to experiment and improve my skills, increase my experience, create some good portfolio pieces, and pay the bills all great things while I wait to be cast in my Academy Award-winning movie...errr...hired for my Newbery Medal-winning book. ☀



Besides several self-published books, GABRIELLA VAGNOLI has worked on the first three chapter books in the series *The Cayuga Island Kids* (written by Judy Bradbury, published by City of Light). The first book in the series, *The Mystery of the Barking Branches and The Sunken Ship* was released in April 2021. Gabriella is currently working with Blue Manatee Press on the upcoming book *Billie the Brain* by Dr. John Hutton and Dr. Ryan A. Moore. Please visit her portfolio website at www.GabriellaVagnoli.com. She is currently seeking representation.

Writer's Tips

WRITERS IN COLLABORATION by Patricia Hruby Powell

Making books for children and young adults is a team sport. You've got the writer, and oftentimes the illustrator, agent, editor, publisher, book designer, copyeditor. We all work together to create, then polish, the gem—the book. There's all that collaboration. Then there's the collaboration the book has with the reader—how the reader experiences his/her own story through the writer's words and the illustrator's pictures.

Here I'll address collaboration between writers, thinking that some of us might be interested in such a venture. Speaking from experience, collaboration is common amongst dancer/choreographers and composers; choreographers and dancers; or choreographers and techno-wizards, sculptors, and other kinds of artists. I can't say that any of these joint ventures is easy, but they can be gratifying, can expand your horizons as an artist, be a source of personal growth, and promote lifelong friendships.

"OWN VOICE" COLLABORATION

Some of the examples below are collaborations between a white woman and a person of color, each writing or speaking from their "own voice" and culture.

I'll start with my own story—a white woman's story. My agent had been attempting to sell a nonfiction manuscript I was calling *Not Your Average Joe*, about a white teen in 1941 who serves a bus full of African Americans in a sundown town. He knows his boss and the townspeople will object, but he does the "right thing." He serves the people, and, as it turns out, those people are Ella Fitzgerald and her band headed south from Chicago on tour. It's based on a real incident I'd read about in the Champaign-Urbana *News Gazette*. I tracked down Joe Ernst, the white teen who was by then 88 years old, in his hometown of Arcola, Illinois. We began a warm friendship and he gladly told me all the details he could remember. That's another sort of collaboration right there.

Lots of editors liked *Not Your Average Joe*—somewhat. One suggested I write the story from Ella Fitzgerald's point of view rather than from Joe Ernst's POV. My agent and I agreed it would be better to ask an African American writer to write Ella's voice while I would write Joe's, maybe in a call and response format. I considered various writers but ultimately decided to ask the acclaimed Lesa Cline-Ransome, who wrote *Finding Langston* (Holiday House 2018). We'd sat on a panel together at a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) conference in Atlanta in 2016 and she loves Ella Fitzgerald. She agreed.

Lesa: What was a little unconventional about our collaboration is that we began essentially as strangers. Beyond knowing each other through the books we'd published and a panel we'd shared, we knew very little about each other, which is what I think made the start of the project more challenging for me initially...Adding to this dynamic was the additional layer of navigating the treacherous waters of writing a manuscript addressing issues of culture, religion, and race in [what ended up being called] *Sunday Before Sundown*.



Mural painted by Walldogs in Arcola, IL



Writer's Tips

Patricia: I gave Lesa my original story and my research. Lesa did further research and wrote passages for Ella, I rewrote Joe and wove the two voices together. We were respectful of each other's space, honoring each other's voice. We gave our piece to our respective agents, who made a contract between us two authors and after a few tweaks and suggestions began to submit it.

Lesa: When we sent out the manuscript for submission, and the two of us had to unite as a team to entertain offers and discuss advances and editors, a friendship began to grow and, for me, then, the ability to begin discussing our work more openly and honestly came easier.

As we currently continue to work through revisions, I still am not comfortable editing Patricia's words. We have both put in years of hard work building our craft and have our own distinct voices. So, as I am writing my character, I try to focus my portion on aligning with the character she has drawn and crafting the text in a way that best complements hers. I like to believe Patricia is doing the same and in both of our efforts, we can create the best story possible.

Patricia: I totally agree with Lesa. As you read through the examples in the rest of this article, note that my collaboration with Lesa is one of only two collaborative projects between two already established children's writers. We were fortunate to have the piece acquired by the enthusiastic Cindy Loh, former vice president of Bloomsbury, under the name *Sunday Before Sundown* (Bloomsbury 2023).

OWN VOICE COLLABORATOR AS SUBJECT

Debbie Levy, the white author of *I Dissent: Ruth Bader Ginsburg Makes Her Mark* (Simon & Schuster 2016), was approached by her agent, who had seen a Facebook post from a friend honoring the courage of that friend's mother-in-law, JoAnn Allen Boyce. JoAnn was one of twelve African American teenagers who desegregated Clinton High School in eastern Tennessee in 1956. With permission from her FB friend, the agent contacted JoAnn to ask if she was interested in developing a book about her experience. JoAnn *was* interested. She had done school visits in southern California describing her teenage experience and

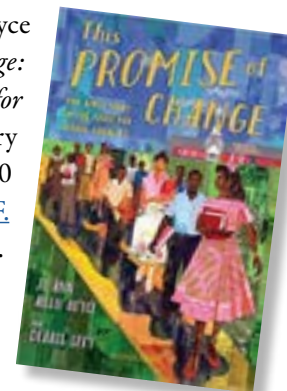
was a popular spokesperson for the twelve Black students, but she was not comfortable writing the book on her own. The agent approached four of her clients who she thought would be interested in a collaborative venture, then sent each of these authors' books to JoAnn. JoAnn chose Debbie Levy because she particularly liked her picture book *We Shall Overcome* (Disney 2013).



Debbie Levy and JoAnn spoke by phone, had an immediate rapport, and started working via email and phone—from Washington, D.C., to southern California. JoAnn mailed loads of high school memorabilia to Debbie. Even back then Jo Ann was a ground-breaking activist, but she also wanted to be a normal teenager, go to dances, date—and that's all part of the story.

Eventually the two met in Clinton, Tennessee, where they researched at the Clinton Library archives, studying in particular the *Clinton News Courier*. The authors interviewed JoAnn's classmates Gayle and Theresa, who still lived in the Clinton area. They also researched at the [Green McAdoo Cultural Center](#), whose building was once the segregated Black K-7 grade school the twelve Black students attended before high school. Now the Cultural Center is a museum dedicated to documenting the Clinton Twelve and their history.

This insightful story became Boyce and Levy's *This Promise of Change: One Girl's Story in the Fight for School Equality* (Bloomsbury 2019), which was named a 2020 Honor book in the [Robert F. Sibert Informational Book awards](#). Debby Levy remains close friends with JoAnn and has now embarked on another author collaboration, with her own son.



Author/illustrator of graphic novels Victoria Jamieson works in New York City with refugees who have



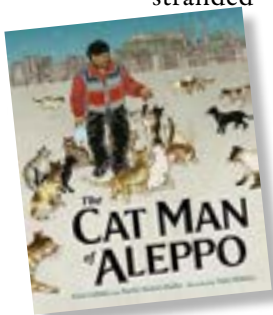
Writer's Tips



immigrated to the U.S. In her presentation at February's SCBWI National Conference this year she said she wanted to show the plight, hardship, and courage of people living in refugee camps. She searched for a collaborator at the refugee center and found Omar Mohamed, a Somali refugee. Victoria felt she could create the book because Omar invited her into his story. She ruefully says that whenever she speculated about Omar's life in, say, seventh grade in the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya, she'd consult Omar and discover she was wrong. She listened and learned. Omar is now a social worker in the U.S. helping refugees still in Africa; he was there each step of the way as Victoria developed their book, to help give authenticity to *When Stars are Scattered* (Dial 2020), a [National Book Award](#) finalist in the Young People's Literature category.

OWN VOICE COLLABORATION – SUBJECT MATTER

Irene Latham, another acclaimed white writer/poet, collaborated with Syrian-born writer/poet Karim Shamsi-Basha (also a U.S. immigrant) to write *The Cat Man of Aleppo* (Putnam/Penguin 2020), about the Syrian ambulance driver Mohammad Alaa Aljaleel. Rather than emigrating, Alaa had remained in Aleppo to help his fellow Syrians as well as the stranded cats, and eventually all homeless animals. Irene had discovered the remarkable story on Twitter.



Irene and Karim became acquainted at literary events in Birmingham, Alabama, where they both live. Irene asked Karim, who came alone to the U.S. years ago at the age of 18 (and whose father had been the poet laureate of Syria), if he was interested in collaborating. Yes! Karim messaged then phoned Alaa in Syria. The two corresponded (in Arabic), Alaa blessed the project, and offered some details. Irene wrote the skeleton of the story; Karim filled in the sensual details such as colors and smells of Aleppo. This lovely picture book, illustrated by Yuko Shimizu, is Karim's children's book debut and a 2021 Caldecott Honor winner. The two writers say the book took a couple weeks to write and it sold to its publisher in 24 hours. Wow!

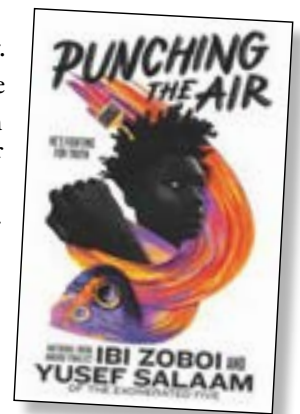
So writing from outside one's culture and wanting to work with a creator who is deeply informed by their culture, an "own voice" creator, is one reason you might want to consider a collaboration.

LIKE-MINDED WRITERS

Sometimes you just spark with someone and want to develop an idea. I think that's what happened with two white women authors, Julia Durango and Tracie Vaughn Zimmer. They wrote together under the pseudonym J.D. Vaughn, creating a novel series that includes *The Second Guard* (Little, Brown Books for Young Readers 2015) and *The Shadow Guard* (Little, Brown Books for Young Readers 2016).

POETS COLLABORATING – ONE AN "EXPERT"

Ibi Zoboi met Yusef Salaam in Dr. Marimba Ani's African literature course at Hunter College in 1999. Yusef Salaam was one of the five Black teenage boys who were wrongfully convicted of murder in Central Park a decade earlier—a story documented in Ken Burns' *The Central Park Five*. While serving a sentence for a crime he hadn't committed, Yusef had "freed his mind" by writing poetry in prison.



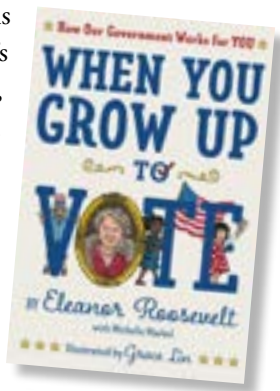
After their first meeting, Haitian-American Ibi Zoboi became the acclaimed author of *American Street, Pride*, and other books. A few years ago, she asked Yusef if he'd collaborate on a book with her. That book became the co-authored *Punching the Air* (Balzer & Bray 2020), a much-decorated bestselling novel-in-verse that included some of the poetry Yusef had written while in prison as well as the words of master poet Zoboi. So here is an instance of writers united by race and culture with a will to "speak truth to power," one of them having lived much of the life experience the book's main character, Amal, does.



Writer's Tips

"COLLABORATING" WITH DECEASED AUTHORS

Michelle Markel's agent owns the rights to Eleanor Roosevelt's literary estate and asked Michelle, another award-winner, if she'd like to update Ms. Roosevelt's *When You Grow Up to Vote: How Our Government Works for You*, originally published in 1932. Michelle updated the information, emulating Ms. Roosevelt's cheerful child-accessible voice. She kept the same structure, starting with local government, moved on to state, then federal government. She also kept the structure of the original text, but revised some sections to make them shorter, snappier, less abstract, and more visual.



To reflect Eleanor's concern for voting rights and participatory democracy, Michelle added information about gerrymandering, lobbying, protest movements, and activism. The Eleanor Roosevelt estate approved the additional material, and the book was published by Roaring Brook in 2018. Michelle says she learned loads and, reading her book, so did I.

A FEW FINAL THOUGHTS

The Cat Man of Aleppo co-author Irene Latham notes that there are pros and cons to collaborating. It's wonderful, she points out, to celebrate the victories with your co-author and to commiserate about the downs. Yes, it is! However, the process of selling the book can be unwieldy—you're dealing with multiple agents dealing with multiple authors and with multiple editors. Agreed.

And as Irene's collaborator Karim Shamsi-Basha has said—but echoed by all of us collaborators—you have to give up ego, you default to the other writer; you cannot take sole control. It's a balancing act. But the spiritual growth is remarkable. Irene said it made her a better person, and I can agree with that. Collaborating is enriching. And it teaches humility. To paraphrase well-known children's book author Jane Yolen on the matter—it's twice the work for half the pay.

So this article is an alert to writers at all levels and from all cultures, and to agents. Keep your eyes on social media for ideas. (I wish I was better at following this advice.) Expand your writing or jump-start your writing by considering a collaboration!

Finally, and most important to me, I hope I've made a lifelong friend in my collaborator Lesa Cline-Ransome. I know Debbie Levy can say the same of JoAnn Allen Boyce. I think it's true of all these collaborators. ☀

PATRICIA HRUBY POWELL teaches Write Your Story (via Zoom) at Parkland College in Champaign. A former dancer/choreographer, storyteller, and librarian, she now writes children's books, including *Lift as You Climb: The Story of Ella Baker*; *Struttin' With Some Barbecue*; *Loving vs. Virginia*; and *Josephine: The Dazzling Life of Josephine Baker*. Visit her at <https://talesforallages.com>

Writer's Bookshelf

DREYER'S ENGLISH: AN UTTERLY CORRECT GUIDE TO CLARITY AND STYLE by Benjamin Dreyer

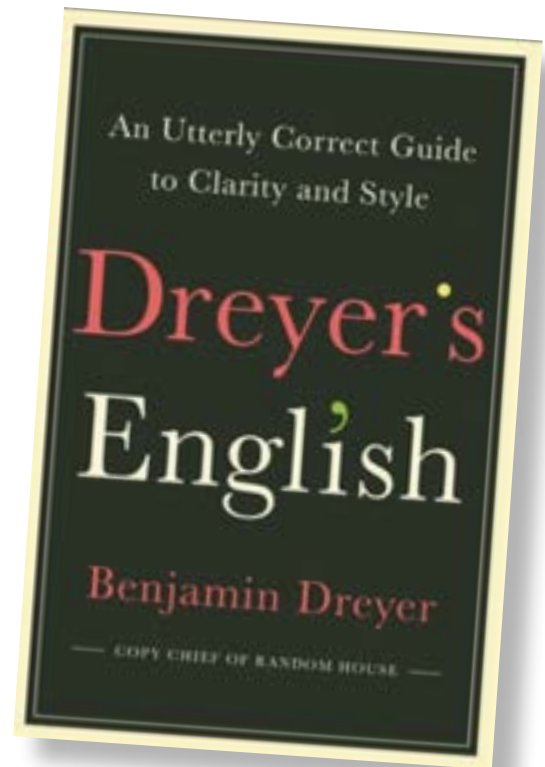
Reviewed by Karla Clark

Fellow writers, I have a question for you! What frightens you most—writer's block, imposter syndrome, or errors in your published book? I conducted an informal, unscientific study asking this question of writers/authors in several Facebook writers' groups, and the results did not surprise me. Sixty-eight percent of respondents chose "errors" as their worst fear.

I fall into that group myself. I've never really suffered from writer's block as I've found ways to deal with it—either by working on a couple of stories at once (say a novel and a children's story) or by turning to art to get my creative juices flowing again (I am a collage artist/wannabe illustrator). As for imposter syndrome, all artists contend with demons. I think I overcame my own feelings of inadequacy when, after years of self-publishing, I finally landed a New York literary agent who sold five of my children's books. Nothing like the validation of being accepted into the big, elusive world of traditional publishing!

But errors, those nasty things, besiege us all, whether we are first-time self-published authors or seasoned authors with professional eyes on our manuscripts. It kills me to say this but only my children's picture books are error-free. I'll never forget the near heart attack I had when, after I published my first novel, *Between Courses: A Culinary Love Story* (1stBooksLibrary 2003), my sister asked me, "What's up with the floating *h* on page 270?" What floating *h*? Sure enough, right below the chapter titled "On With the Dough," sits an italicized, lowercase letter *h*. Apropos of nothing, positively stupid and amateurish-looking, that *h* screamed out to me: *Loser!*

The floating *h* really got to me. I obsessed about it, trying to come up with a way to mitigate the damage. Maybe a contest where the first five readers to find the floating *h* would receive a free copy of the novel! I even thought about adding a floating *h* to every book I wrote, as a tribute to humility, not unlike the Amish women who often included a mistake in their quilts—a humility block—to show that only God



can create perfection. (This may be a myth, but still...) *My humility h...* just one of many "Uh-oh, typo!" moments in my writing career.

Which brings me to the book I would like to highlight: *Dreyer's English: An Utterly Correct Guide to Clarity and Style* (Random House 2019) by Benjamin Dreyer, copy chief at Random House. Once while driving I heard Mr. Dreyer interviewed on NPR and headed to the bookstore that very day to purchase his book. Praise for the book was effusive: "A mind-blower," "Brilliant, pithy, incandescently intelligent," "Smart and funny." I knew the book couldn't help me with my floating *h* problem, but unfortunately, the floating *h* wasn't my only problem! I sure wish I'd had Mr. Dreyer's book in hand back in 2003 when I published my first novel. I might have avoided an error with the words "sensual" and "sensuous" or, in one instance, not referred to something as "very unique."



Writer's Bookself

Diving into the book was like spending time with a man in love. Dreyer loves the English language with a passion I admire. The book is not only instructive but offers some liberating advice on prose rules and breaking those rules that made my heart hum. Go ahead, he says, begin a sentence with “And” or “But.” Great writers do it all the time! Don’t worry about ending a sentence in a preposition if it helps avoid tying a sentence into an unreadable knot...such as “This is the kind of arrant pedantry up with which I will not put.” (A line Dreyer says was mistakenly attributed to Winston Churchill.) Writers are given permission to split an infinitive from time to time. Think of the line from Star Trek: “To boldly go where no man has gone before.” (“To go boldly...” or “Boldly to go...” just wouldn’t work.) He even lauds the use of the passive voice (*What?*) if one wishes to place the emphasis in a sentence on the point of interest, e.g., The floors were swept and the beds were made.

In Chapter Three, Dreyer gives us “67 Assorted Things to Do (and Not to Do) with Punctuation.” A line I love: *If words are the flesh, muscle, and bone of prose, punctuation is the breath.* Dreyer is a man after my own heart in his love of the Oxford comma. He says, “Use it...only godless savages eschew the series comma.” You tell ’em, Ben! He exhorts the necessity of the “only” comma. Only commas are used to set off nouns that are the only one of their kind, e.g., Lincoln’s eldest son, Robert, was born on August 1, 1843. And he admits confusion (So, to blazes with it!) with regard to preceding a sentence-ending “too” with a comma. Is it “Will you go to London, too?” or “Will you go to London too?”

His advice: If you can hear a pause before the “too,” feel free to apply a comma. If you can’t, feel free not to. Never will you so enjoy delving into the intricacies of apostrophes, brackets, colons/semicolons, quotation marks, hyphens, and dashes. Pure bliss for you wordsmiths out there, whether your response is “I knew that” or you experience an “Aha!” moment.

Chapter Thirteen, “The Miscellany,” is my favorite chapter because it made me snicker. Here you will find gems about the difference between: “jumping into a lake” and “jumping in a lake”; the difference between “turning in to a driveway” and “turning into a driveway” (Poof! You’re a driveway!); that “stupider” and “stupidest” are words; and the word “namesake” works in both directions. (If you were named

after your grandmother, you are her namesake and she is yours.) And it’s *ad nauseam*, not *ad nauseum*...but my autocorrect just missed the error as I typed it! Fun stuff!

I’ll admit, I got a little cocky while reading Chapter Eight, “Notes on, Amid a List of, Frequently and/or Easily Misspelled Words.” I am a pretty good speller, thanks to the Catholic school nuns and their endless spelling bees. I know my “ibles” and “ables,” my “i before e” rules, but I do still have to look up “hors d’oeuvres,” “poinsettia,” and “vinaigrette” each time I use them.

I recommend this book for any writer, whether you are penning a children’s picture book or a young adult novel. You will learn something new! (I didn’t know that Bubble Wrap is a brand name for bubble pack.) But beware! You may also discover you made a mistake in your writing years ago that’s now well beyond repair. And if you do...welcome to the floating h club! Your membership is good for one year! ☀



KARLA CLARK writes fiction for adults and children, but the kiddos are her passion. Dubbed “Aunty Fun” by her nieces and nephews, Clark looks for joy in the world that only children can provide. She has published three novels, a collection of short stories, and two children’s picture books, with three more forthcoming. When she is not writing, you can find her in her art studio creating decoupage collages. She lives in Rockford, Illinois, with her husband and adult son, who has autism. Visit her website at www.karlaclarkauthor.com.

Mentor Texts

MATH PICTURE BOOKS – AS BEAUTIFUL, POWERFUL, AND ELEGANT AS MATHEMATICS ITSELF

by Songju Ma Daemicke

With a software engineering background, I love to read and write math story books, an important part of STEM. Math is one of the most useful skills we use everyday, but it can be complicated and abstract for many children. Great math picture books are a fun and powerful way to help children connect to math and instill in them a love and a confidence about math. I always turn to mentor texts for inspiration and guidance when I write my own books. Here are nine excellent children's math picture books I love and return to again and again.

THE VERY HUNGRY CATERPILLAR

by Eric Carle



Eric Carle is a living picture book legend. *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, a modern classic, uses several sequences of counting. The book uses the numbers one through five for the weekdays, corresponding to the caterpillar

eating a similar number of different fruits daily, ending with ten assorted snacks that finally fill it up. This great read-aloud book also has little holes throughout the pages showing the food journey. I remember that I made a caterpillar out of yarn for my daughters to put through the holes when we read the book. I love everything about this book: It's colorful, educational, fun, and it has a beautiful surprise at the end. A perfect book for little ones.



ONE GRAIN OF RICE: A MATHEMATICAL FOLKTALE

by Demi

All of Demi's books are treasures of children's literature. This wonderfully crafted Indian folktale is about a clever young girl who uses her knowledge of math to outsmart a greedy Raja. Readers will be amazed to see the power of doubling. Demi uses simple wording and exquisitely detailed Indian art to illustrate this wise and satisfying mathematical tale.



NOTHING STOPPED SOPHIE: THE STORY OF UNSHAKABLE MATHEMATICIAN SOPHIE GERMAIN

by Cheryl Bardoe, illustrated by Barbara McClintock

An inspiring story about amazing woman mathematician Sophie Germain's journey to solve an extremely difficult problem that had long intimidated her brilliant male peers. The story shows the importance of perseverance and determination. A great mentor text that uses a "purposeful repetition" technique. The author uses the title "Nothing Stopped Sophie" as a golden thread to beautifully tie together its theme of "never give up."

GRACE HOPPER: QUEEN OF COMPUTER CODE

by Laurie Wallmark, illustrated by Katy Wu

A beautiful tribute to the female computer coding pioneer Grace Hopper. Her passion and determination radiate from every page. I love the way the author plays with the heroine's name to describe her personality. Amazing Grace was truly an awesome mathematician.



TWO OF EVERYTHING: A CHINESE FOLKTALE

by Lily Toy Hong

This is one of the few available #ownvoices math picture books out there. This talented author-illustrator retells a delightful Chinese folktale with simple yet lively language. Children learn the



Mentor Texts

concepts of doubling and pairs in a very funny and clever way. The mix of fortune and misfortune also give the book a wonderful flavor of ancient Chinese philosophy. A great read-aloud book too.



A COMPUTER CALLED KATHERINE: HOW KATHERINE JOHNSON HELPED PUT AMERICA ON THE MOON

by Suzanne Slade, illustrated by Veronica Miller Jamison

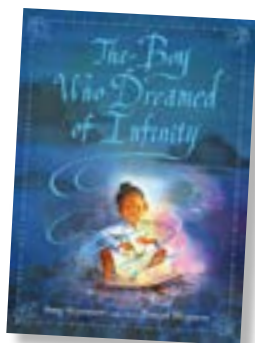
This powerful biography, written by an SCBWI-IL author, showcases

Katherine Johnson, an extraordinary African-American female mathematician, and how she helped NASA put a man on the moon. An important STEM book that offers a great role model for children, especially underrepresented girls. I love how the book cleverly uses “wrong math equations” to explain racism and sexism, emphasizing a math theme and tying it all together in a fun way.

THE BOY WHO DREAMED OF INFINITY: A TALE OF THE GENIUS RAMANUJAN

by Amy Alznauer, illustrated by Daniel Miyares

Also by an SCBWI-IL author (who heads up this very publication), this picture book is an elegant tale of Srinivasa Ramanujan, an Indian math genius who lived at the turn of the 20th century. The lyrical text and rich colorful illustrations bring Ramanujan’s passion for math to life. I love how Amy uses simple examples to explain complex math concepts like infinity and partition. One example: Cutting a single mango into an infinite number of pieces still leaves only one mango when put back together. Sure to spark interest in young mathematicians.



SWIRL BY SWIRL: SPIRALS IN NATURE

by Joyce Sideman, illustrated by Beth Krommes

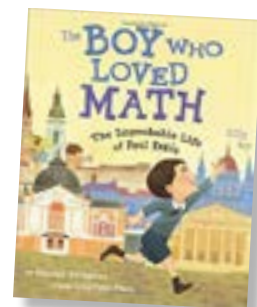
An exquisitely simple, elegant, and fascinating tale that references Fibonacci numbers.

This gorgeous book celebrates the beauty and value of spirals and reveals the handsomeness, power, and perfection of nature and mathematics. An eye-opener for young curious minds.

THE BOY WHO LOVED MATH: THE IMPROBABLE LIFE OF PAUL ERDOS

by Deborah Heiligman, illustrated by LeUyen Pham

This beautiful book is about the fascinating world of numbers as seen through the life of charming and eccentric Hungarian mathematician Paul Erdos. I particularly love how this book uses numbers and math words as adjectives to strengthen and carry along the theme. Examples: “Mama loved Paul to infinity. Paul loved Mama to ∞ , too!...He liked school a 1,000,000 times better now.” The book makes math fun! 🌟



SONGJU MA DAEMICKE, a former software engineer, grew up in China and is an award-winning children’s book author. Her picture book, *Cao Chong Weighs an Elephant*, was named a Best STEM book, was a Mathematical Sciences Research Institute Mathical Honor Book, and the winner of the 2018 Chinese American Library Association (CALA) Best Book award. She loves gardening, photography, and playing bridge.

Songju lives in the Chicago suburbs with her husband and their daughters. She invites you to visit her online at www.songjumadaemicke.com



Chicago Southside Network

by Kate Hannigan and Natasha Tarpley

A LITTLE BIT ABOUT THE NETWORK'S BEGINNINGS

Kate Hannigan: Initially, as a member of SCBWI-IL, I was frustrated that all sorts of wonderful programming was happening in other parts of the city and suburbs, but I couldn't get to any of it. I was missing out on hearing from writers and artists I admired. Then in 2009, while talking to a bookseller at my local indie, I expressed my frustration.

"Kate," she told me without hiding her exasperation, "you do know you could hold events *here*, right? We are a bookstore?" It was a revelation! I'd not connected the dots that a bookstore, in this case [57th Street Books](#) in Hyde Park on Chicago's South Side, might be delighted to host a gathering of children's writers and illustrators! In a word, duh! I could stop complaining.

Which neighborhoods do you serve and what are the main features of your network?

Kate: By some act of celestial alignment and dumb luck, our first event featured author Rebecca Stead, who was touring to talk about her book [When You Reach Me](#). By a further act of celestial generosity, Rebecca had won the [Newbery Medal](#) just days before our event was to take place.

"Is it all right with you if her editor, Wendy Lamb, comes too?" asked my benevolent bookseller. *The Wendy Lamb?* The legendary editor who also cultivated Christopher Paul Curtis's career? "Ah, yes. I think that will be all right," I told her. I was dense. But I wasn't a complete moron.



Rebecca Stead at our first gathering, February 2010

So in early 2010, our network—the SCBWI-Illinois Hyde Park/South Side Chicago Network—staked out a tiny outpost in the children's book world and raised a flag. Since then we've hosted panel discussions spotlighting homegrown picture book authors and illustrators (Suzanne Slade, Claudia Guadalupe Martinez, Jacqueline Alcántara, beloved northern neighbor Pat Zeitlow Miller), middle-grade novelists (Liesl Shurtliff, Keir Graff, Amy Timberlake, Lisa Jenn Bigelow), YA authors (Gloria Chao, James Klise, Samira Ahmed, Michele Falkoff, Christa Desir), and influential agents (Jennifer Mattson, Marcy Posner, Lori Kilkelly), bloggers (Betsy Bird), and even a publisher (Stephen Roxburgh).

And to our great surprise, we started drawing attendees from all over the city and suburbs. We even had folks coming up from Indiana. Maybe they were coming for the brownies that are a staple of every meeting, but I hope they were finding the panel discussions and featured speakers to be the real draw. While we do not feature manuscript critiques, what we do hope to provide is community. I think people find ways to connect with each other after meeting through our events. In the pre-Covid era, we shot for two to three events a year, balancing genres and topics so all interests are served.

What do you see in the network's future?

Kate: Looking ahead, and thanks to the brilliant Natasha Tarpley coming onboard, we'd like to mix up the programming a little bit. We've rebranded our network from the clunky original name to the more sleek "Southside Network," which includes not only Hyde Park but ideally the greater South Side of the city, including Pullman, Beverly, and beyond. Anyone interested in seeing what we're up to can find us on Instagram and Twitter at [@SCBWIsouthside](#) and on [Facebook at SCBWI-Illinois Hyde Park/South Side Network](#).

Natasha Tarpley: In addition to incorporating the greater South Side region of the city, we also hope to increase opportunities for South Side authors and illustrators, as well as providing greater visibility for communities too often overlooked, by hosting more literary events and workshops in these neighborhoods and by establishing partnerships with organizations and institutions working in these communities.



Chicago Southside Network

For those of our members who may not be familiar with Bernie's Book Bank, could you tell us a little about their mission and outreach in Chicago?

Natasha: This past December, SCBWI-Illinois Southside partnered with [Bernie's Book Bank](#), an Illinois-based organization that has distributed over a million free books to kids and communities in need. We've also partnered with [Semicolon Bookstore](#), a Black-owned bookstore in Chicago, to organize a holiday book donation drive. That initiative highlighted Illinois authors of color, as well as raising visibility for Semicolon.

How did the Southside Network first connect with Bernie's Book Bank?

Kate: This was a wonderful example of Twitter at its best. One of the Bernie's folks and I "liked" a tweet, and both were curious about the other. So the collaboration grew from there.

What is the nature of your collaboration, i.e., do you mostly connect Bernie's Book Bank with local books and book creators? Do you also provide volunteer hours? Are you involved in forging collaborations with local bookstores or any other partners?

Kate: Natasha and I see so much potential in collaborating with organizations on the ground that are putting children's books into the hands of kids who need them most. So we're hoping to team up not only with Bernie's but also with other businesses and organizations in the city that are doing amazing work, like [My Block My Hood My City](#) and others. The good will of SCBWI-Illinois members and the children's book world is tremendous. So we'd love to help plug authors into classrooms that don't typically get author visits, help sponsor book donation drives of members' books as well as kidlit in general, work with these organizations to provide authors for their events, and so much more. Stay tuned!

KATE HANNIGAN writes fiction and nonfiction. Her historical mystery *The Detective's Assistant* won SCBWI's 2016 [Golden Kite Award](#). *Cape, Mask, and Boots*, which make up her historical fantasy series *The League of Secret Heroes* (Simon & Schuster/Aladdin) wraps up in August 2021 with the publication of Book 3. Book 1, *Cape*, was recently optioned for film. Visit Kate online at KateHannigan.com



Agent Lori Kilkelly talks to a full house in 2016

Is there anything else you'd like the wider SCBWI-IL membership to know about your network or about forthcoming events?

Natasha: As Kate and I both mentioned above, we hope to increase opportunities for creators of color as well as stretch the literary "boundaries" by hosting more readings, panel discussions, and workshops in more neighborhoods on the South Side of Chicago. We hope that this will also encourage writers and illustrators from all over Chicago to explore these communities.

Kate: We're always open to ideas, so if anyone wants to see specific programming, let us know! 🌟

NATASHA TARPLEY is a bestselling children's book author with over 20 years' publishing experience. Her classic picture book, *I Love My Hair!*, an ode to Black childhood and natural beauty, is a favorite among readers around the world. Her forthcoming picture book, *The Me I Choose To Be* (Oct 2021), affirms the power of Black kids to choose who and what they want to be. Natasha is also the writer and co-creator of the award-winning children's narrative podcast *Opal Watson: Private Eye*. Her work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *Essence* among other publications. Visit Natasha online at NatashaTarpleyWrites.com

East Central Illinois Network

by Elaine Bearden



A LITTLE BIT ABOUT THE NETWORK

The East Central Illinois SCBWI network was started by Alice McGinty over twenty years ago and is located in Urbana-Champaign, though individuals from all compass points have attended our programs over the years—Decatur, Danville, St. Joseph, Monticello, Watseka, and even Peoria, to name a few. The network has grown through the time and talents of many hands and hearts.

How large is your membership?

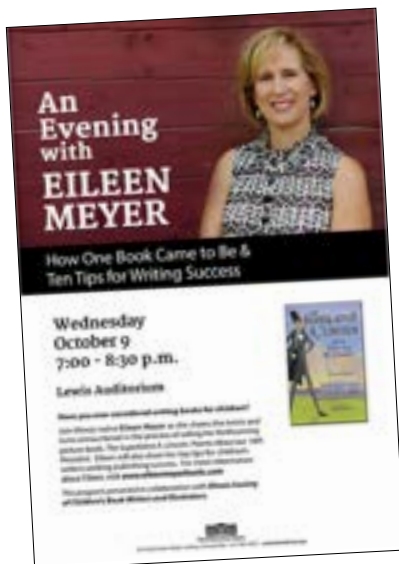
Membership is an interesting thing. If you consider the distribution list, it includes over 150 people. If you consider individual events, it can vary from 3 to 50, depending on factors like topic, timing, ease of access to the content, and random factors like the weather and pandemics. The number ten strikes me as a good way to characterize the network's attendance—sometimes less and sometimes more.

What are the main activities of your network?

Programming is the main network activity. Over the years, programming has included Sunday afternoon open-microphone-style gatherings, outdoor gatherings in the woods and sailing at a lake, presentations by authors/agents/editors, and gatherings based on pre-selected discussion topics. For a number of years Alice and her team brought in authors such as Richard Peck and Candace Fleming for intensive craft weekends. Besides outdoor venues, we have tried restaurants (tasty but difficult), bars (same), members' homes, and the local public libraries. Recently, we have partnered with The Urbana Free Library to offer programs and hosted gatherings in personal homes or outdoor venues with pre-selected discussion topics or workshops. During the pandemic, we have been meeting mainly as critique groups and taking advantage of the amazing state and national SCBWI online content available. Two notable exceptions were a Zoom gathering where we shared our current favorite books, and an amazing Zoom session with the editors of the [*Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*](#), accessible statewide.



East Central Illinois Network



How does your connection with The Urbana Free Library play into your role as a network representative?

Since one of my jobs as an Adult & Youth Services Librarian at The Urbana Free Library is public programming, I thought it would be interesting to try a partnership between the library and SCBWI to present a program. After getting a “green light” from my library supervisor, the partnership began. The library provides the

space (physical or virtual), publicity through the library’s normal promotions (print and electronic), and a staff member to be present. In turn, SCBWI provides the funding, coordinates with the presenter, and provides the library with a description of the program to be promoted. It is a win-win combination, with the library having the opportunity to add another dimension to its programming (i.e., building a community of writers) and the local SCBWI network having the opportunity to increase its reach.

What have you learned from your network offerings, either in content or what matters to your members?

- Collaborative programs with the library are a great way to connect with new people and grow the network.
- A diversity of program types and venues (formal program, discussion, outdoor setting, restaurant, personal home, Zoom) is important because such programs can pull in different people.
- Events where we have a pre-selected discussion topic with plenty of space for conversation (and homemade treats!) are surprisingly strong.
- Play is essential in creating and sustaining community.
- The outdoors, personal relationships, excellent speakers, opportunity for discussion, and a sense of curiosity drive the interests of this community, with each of these being more important to some than to others.

What has been your personal favorite event hosted by your network?

Oh, my goodness, it is so hard to choose. So I won’t. Plus, that way you’ll get a broader idea of the kinds of things we have done. Here are some of my favorites:

- We cohosted a Zoom event with the library featuring Deborah Stevenson and Kate Quealy-Gainer from *The Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books*. Deborah and Kate shared interesting content and, because of Zoom, we were able to connect with a much wider audience, since otherwise many wouldn’t have been able to attend.
- We met at a member’s farmstead and, over homemade treats, discussed the business end of children’s book writing. We asked a few members who have a lot of experience with this to be present so several different levels of expertise could be shared, but there was no presenter.
- We co-hosted an in-person event with the library featuring children’s book author Eileen Meyer. Eileen shared about her publishing journey and how essential SCBWI was to her success. Eileen was so energizing and community-building. The topic brought in many new faces.
- One of my all-time favorites was a day retreat at Alice’s cabin, where we hiked through a creek, did writing exercises under the trees, made s’mores, and enjoyed songs around the campfire. ☀



ELAINE BEARDEN is a children’s book writer and youth services librarian. After graduating from Ohio Wesleyan University, Elaine was lured to Illinois by the Center for Children’s books at the iSchool. Working in public libraries combines her interest in writing for youth and encouraging their love of reading. She has taught college courses in youth services and children’s literature, reviewed for *The Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books*, and has led teacher workshops and a children’s writing club. Elaine’s poetry collection *Grow* won the 2018 Laura Crawford Memorial Mentorship, giving her the opportunity to work with author and mentor Julia Durango. Elaine’s favorite activities are connecting kids and books and giving kids the time, space, and tools to become writers themselves. When she is not writing, she can be found gardening, hiking, or playing music. You can reach her at elaine.bearden@gmail.com.

News Roundup



Compiled by Kelly Darke

Events

SPRING THAW PITCH N' STITCH

When: May 14-15, 2021

Where: Held virtually

Cost: SCBWI Member Registration fee \$85;
Nonmember fee \$140

Details: PITCH your work-in-progress to all-star industry professionals N' STITCH together feedback into post-event critiques and submissions. For maximum feedback opportunities this event is limited to 50 AUTHORS & AUTHOR-ILLUSTRATORS.

More information at

illinois.scbwi.org/events/scbwi-il-pitch-n-stitch

SCBWI ILLINOIS INTERACTIVE SERIES

When: Fall 2021 (tentative dates 10/9, 10/23, 11/6)

Where: Held virtually

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

More information coming soon at illinois.scbwi.org/events

ANDERSON'S BOOKSHOP

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

- AB Naperville (630) 355-2665
123 W. Jefferson Ave., Naperville
- AB Downers Grove (630) 963-2665
5112 Main St., Downers Grove

SHOP AROUND THE CORNER: ANDERSON'S BOOK SHOP IN DOWNERS GROVE

Anderson's Bookshops is a fifth generation family-owned business with the mission to share their passion and knowledge of books and build community through great reads, good company, and engaging conversations for all ages. Anderson's Bookshops opened their Downers Grove store in 1980. Contact-free in-store pickup is available during all open business hours (Mon - Sat 10am - 6pm; Sunday 11am - 5pm). Call (630) 963-2665 to place an order.

SCBWI ANNUAL SUMMER CONFERENCE

When: July 30-August 1, 2021 (with additional programming July 29 and August 2)

Where: Held virtually

Cost: TBA

Details: The SCBWI Summer Conference turns 50 this year! In honor of this historic event, the summer conference will feature 50 speakers presenting 50 different topics, ranging from 15 minutes to half-hour presentations. Registration will open mid-May.

More information coming soon at

www.scbwi.org/annual-events-new/

*Illustration by
Rich Lo*



News Roundup

Awards

JOHN NEWBERY MEDAL (ALA)

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

WINNER

When You Trap a Tiger by **Tae Keller** (Random House Children's Books, a division of Penguin Random House)

HONOR BOOKS

- *All Thirteen: The Incredible Cave Rescue of the Thai Boys' Soccer Team* by **Christina Soontornvat** (Candlewick Press)
- *BOX: Henry Brown Mails Himself to Freedom* by **Carole Boston Weatherford**, illustrated by **Michele Wood** (Candlewick Press)
- *Fighting Words* by **Kimberly Brubaker Bradley** (Dial Books for Young Readers, an imprint of Penguin Random House)
- *We Dream of Space* by **Erin Entrada Kelly** and **Celia Krampien** (Greenwillow Books, an imprint of HarperCollins)
- *A Wish in the Dark* by **Christina Soontornvat** (Candlewick Press)

MICHAEL PRINTZ AWARD (ALA)

WINNER

Everything Sad Is Untrue (a true story) by **Daniel Nayeri** (Arthur A. Levine, an imprint of Levine Querido)

HONOR BOOKS

- *Apple (Skin to the Core)* by **Eric Gansworth** (Arthur A. Levine, an imprint of Levine Querido)
- *Dragon Hoops* by **Gene Luen Yang**, color by **Lark Pien** (First Second Books, an imprint of Macmillan Children's Publishing Group)
- *Every Body Looking* by **Candice Iloh** (Dutton Books for Young Readers, an imprint of Penguin Young Readers)
- *We Are Not Free* by **Traci Chee** (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt)

RANDOLPH CALDECOTT MEDAL (ALA)

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

WINNER

We Are Water Protectors illustrated by **Michaela Goade**, written by **Carole Lindstrom** (Roaring Brook Press, a division of Holtzbrinck Publishing Holdings)

HONOR BOOKS

- *A Place Inside of Me: A Poem to Heal the Heart* illustrated by **Noa Denmon**, written by **Zetta Elliott** (Farrar Straus Giroux Books for Young Readers, an imprint of Macmillan Publishing Group)
- *The Cat Man of Aleppo* illustrated by **Yuko Shimizu**, written by **Irene Latham** and **Karim Shamsi-Basha** (G.P. Putnam's Sons, an imprint of Penguin Random House)
- *Me & Mama* illustrated and written by **Cozbi A. Cabrera** (Denene Millner Books/Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers)
- *Outside In* illustrated by **Cindy Derby**, written by **Deborah Underwood** (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt)



Illustration by
Rich Lo

News Roundup

Awards continued...

CORETTA SCOTT KING BOOK AWARDS

Awarded to African American authors and illustrators of outstanding books for children and young adults.

WINNER (AUTHOR)

Before the Ever After by **Jacqueline Woodson** (Nancy Paulsen Books, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC)

HONOR BOOKS

- *All the Days Past, All the Days to Come* by **Mildred D. Taylor** (Viking, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC)
- *King and the Dragonflies* by **Kacen Callender** (Scholastic Press, an imprint of Scholastic Inc.)
- *Lifting as We Climb: Black Women's Battle for the Ballot Box* by **Evette Dionne** (Viking, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC.)

WINNER (ILLUSTRATOR)

R-E-S-P-E-C-T: Aretha Franklin, the Queen of Soul illustrated by **Frank Morrison**, written by **Carole Boston Weatherford** (Atheneum Books for Young Readers, an imprint of Simon and Schuster Children's Publishing Division)

HONOR BOOKS

- *Magnificent Homespun Brown: A Celebration* illustrated by **Kaylani Juanita**, written by **Samara Cole Doyon** (Tilbury House Publishers)
- *Exquisite: The Poetry and Life of Gwendolyn Brooks* illustrated by **Cozbi A. Cabrera**, written by **Suzanne Slade** (Abrams Books for Young Readers, an imprint of ABRAMS)
- *Me & Mama* illustrated and written by **Cozbi A. Cabrera** (Denene Millner Books/Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers)

ROBERT F. SIBERT INFORMATIONAL BOOK AWARD

Awarded for most distinguished informational book for children.

WINNER (AUTHOR)

Honeybee: The Busy Life of Apis Mellifera by **Candace Fleming**, illustrated by **Eric Rohmann** (Neal Porter Books/Holiday House)

HONOR BOOKS

- *How We Got to the Moon: The People, Technology, and Daring Feats of Science Behind Humanity's Greatest Adventure* written and illustrated by **John Rocco** (Crown Books for Young Readers, an imprint of Random House Children's Books, a division of Penguin Random House)
- *Exquisite: The Poetry and Life of Gwendolyn Brooks* by **Suzanne Slade**, illustrated by **Cozbi A. Cabrera** (Abrams Books for Young Readers, an imprint of ABRAMS)
- *All Thirteen: The Incredible Cave Rescue of the Thai Boys' Soccer Team* by **Christina Soontornvat** (Candlewick Press)

REBECCA CAUDILL YOUNG READERS' BOOK AWARD

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

2021 Winner: *Front Desk* by **Kelly Yang** (Arthur A. Levine Books, Scholastic, Inc.)

More information at www.rebeccacaudill.org

MONARCH AWARDS

Illinois' Grades K-3 Readers' Choice Award

First Place: *Can I Be Your Dog?* by **Troy Cummings** (Penguin Random House)

Second Place: *The Good Egg* by **Jory John**, illustrated by **Pete Oswald** (HarperCollins)

Third Place: *Douglas, You're a Genius!* by **Ged Adamson** (Schwartz & Wade)

More information at www.aisled.org/monarch.htm



Illustration by
Rich Lo



News Roundup

Awards continued...

BLUESTEM AWARDS

Illinois' Grades 3-5 Readers' Choice Award

First Place: *Wedgie & Gizmo* by Suzanne Selfors, illustrated by **Barbara Fisinger** (Katherine Tegen Books)

Second Place: *Sergeant Reckless: The True Story of the Little Horse Who Became a Hero* by **Patricia McCormick**, illustrated by **Iacopo Bruno** (Balzer & Bray, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers)

Third Place: *Curiosity: The Story of the Mars Rover* by **Markus Motum** (Candlewick Press)

More information at www.aisled.org/bluestem.htm

ABRAHAM LINCOLN AWARDS

Illinois' Teen Readers' Choice Award

First Place: *Truly Devious* by **Maureen Johnson** (Katherine Tegen Books)

Second Place: *Dry* by **Neal Shusterman** and **Jarrod Shusterman** (Simon & Schuster)

Third Place: *Devils Within* by **S.F. Henson** (Sky Pony)

More information at www.aisled.org/lincoln.htm

*Illustration by
Rich Lo*

Grants and Contests

2021 SCBWI MEMBER AWARDS

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](#).

GOLDEN KITE AWARD

What: Instituted in 1973, the Golden Kite Awards are the only children's literary award judged by a jury of peers. The Golden Kite Awards recognize excellence in children's literatures in seven categories: Young Reader and Middle Grade Fiction, Young Adult Fiction, Nonfiction Text for Younger Readers, Nonfiction Text for Older Readers, Picture Book Text, Picture Book Illustration, and Illustration for Older Readers. The winner in each category will receive \$2,500 plus an additional \$1,000 to donate to a nonprofit organization of their choice. Each honor winner will receive \$500 plus an additional \$250 to donate.

Deadline: July 15, 2021

(For PAL books published between January-June 2021);
December 15, 2021 (For PAL books published between July-December 2021)

For more information, visit [SCBWI's awards webpage](#). ☀

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

Season's Crop

CLICK TO BE ADDED
TO FUTURE
SEASON'S CROP

by Jenny Wagh

Picture Books

FICTION

Count on Me 123

by J.B. Frank
Illus. Ela Smietanka
Familius, Apr. 2021
ISBN: 9781641704380

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

by Lisa Katzenberger
Illus. Jaclyn Sinquett
Sourcebooks Explore, Feb. 2021
ISBN: 9781728222554

Jump at the Sun: The True Life Tale of Unstoppable Storycatcher Zora Neale Hurston

by Alicia D. William
Illus. Jacqueline Alcántara
Atheneum Books, Jan. 2021
ISBN 9781534419131

Maxine and the Greatest Garden Ever

by Ruth Spiro
Illus. Holly Hatam
Dial, Feb. 2021
ISBN: 9780399

Original Cat, Copy Cat

by Sarah Kurpiel
Illus. Sarah Kurpiel
Greenwillow, Aug. 2021
ISBN: 9780062943835

Saturday at the Food Pantry

by Diane O'Neill
Illus. Brizida Magro
Albert Whitman & Co, Sept. 2021
ISBN: 9780807572368

Somewhere in the City

by J.B. Frank
Illus. Yu Leng
Familius, Apr. 2021
ISBN: 9781641702607

Three Ways to Be Brave:

A Trio of Stories

by Karla Clark
Illus. Jeff Ostberg
Rise X Penguin Workshop, Aug. 2021
ISBN: 9780593222423

You Be Daddy

by Karla Clark
Illus. Steph Lew
Feiwel & Friends, Apr. 2021
ISBN: 1250225396

You Be Mommy (Board Book)

by Karla Clark
Illus. Zoe Perico
Feiwel & Friends, Mar. 2021
ISBN: 1250791359

Your Mama

by NoNieqa Ramos
Illus. Jacqueline Alcántara
Versify (HMH), Apr. 2021
ISBN: 9781328631886

NONFICTION

Baby Loves Political Science: Congress!

by Ruth Spiro
Illus. Greg Paprocki
Charlesbridge, Apr. 2021
ISBN: 97816235423

Baby Loves Political Science: The Presidency!

by Ruth Spiro
Illus. Greg Paprocki
Charlesbridge, Apr. 2021
ISBN: 9781623542351

Fearless World Traveler: Adventures of Marianne North, Botanical Artist

by Laurie Lawlor
Illus. Becca Stadlander
Holiday House, May 2021
ISBN: 9780823439591

June Almeida, Virus Detective! The Woman Who Discovered the First Human Coronavirus

by Suzanne Slade
Illus. Elisa Paganelli
Sleeping Bear Press, Mar. 2021
ISBN: 9781534111325

Mars Is: Stark Slopes, Silvery Snow, and Startling Surprises

by Suzanne Slade
Peachtree Publishing Co., Apr. 2021
ISBN: 9781682631881

The Universe and You

by Suzanne Slade
Illus. Stephanie Fizer Coleman
Sleeping Bear Press, Aug. 2021
ISBN: 9781534111080



Season's Crop

CLICK TO BE ADDED
TO FUTURE
SEASON'S CROP

Middle Grade

FICTION

*Cat & Cat Adventures:
The Quest for Snacks*
by Susie Yi
Illus. Susie Yi
HarperAlley, Sept. 2021
ISBN: 9780063083813

Jack vs. the Tornado
by Amanda Cleary Eastep
Illus. Aedan Peterson
Moody Publishers, Apr. 2021
ISBN: 9780802421029

*The Adventures of Cleaver and
Whizjam on the Isle of Oogle*
by Mary Bonnett
Illus. Emily Thomsen
Independent, Mar. 2021
ISBN: 9798713632915

The Battle of the Werpenguins
by Allan Woodrow
Illus. Scott Brown
Viking, Aug. 2021
ISBN: 9780593114261

*The Losers at the Center of the Galaxy
by Mary Winn Heider*
Little, Brown Books for Young
Readers, Mar. 2021
ISBN: 9780759555426

The Hunt for Fang
by Amanda Cleary Eastep
Illus. Aedan Peterson
Moody Publishers, Apr 2021
ISBN: 9780802421036

Only My Horses Know
by Cinda Bauman
Editor 911 Books, Jan. 2021
ISBN: 9781735318677

Egg Marks the Spot: Skunk and Badger
by Amy Timberlake
Illus. Jon Klassen
Algonquin Young Readers,
Sept. 2021
ISBN: 1643750062

Spirit Untamed: The Movie Novel
by Claudia Guadalupe Martinez
Little, Brown Books for Young Readers,
Apr. 2021
ISBN: 9780316627436

Young Adult

FICTION

The F Words
by Barbara Gregorich
City of Light Publishing, Sept 2021
ISBN: 9781952536267

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or [@jennymariewagh](https://www.instagram.com/jennymariewagh)



Illustration by
Brooke O'Neill