

"In a growth mindset, challenges are exciting rather than threatening. So rather than thinking, oh, I'm going to reveal my weaknesses, you say, wow, here's a chance to grow."

-Carol S. Dweck
Author of *Mindset: Changing the Way You Think to Fulfill Your Potential*



Critique Buddies: Your Rock

By Deb Buschman, Assistant Regional Advisor

It was 2011. I walked confidently with my 2000-word picture book manuscript into an SCBWI fall group critique breakout session. Yes, I know, not even close to 500 words. I can hear you laughing.

The accomplished author who was our group mediator kindly listed everything wrong with my manuscript. I looked across the table and saw pity in the eyes of the group, but then they added words of encouragement. Those words led me to join my first critique group.

Over time, that patient group helped me to grow my craft and become a better writer. By the way, I'm down to 500 words. My critique buddies through the years have changed and evolved with new people joining and some leaving, but there has always been the constant support, trust and friendship.

I rely on those buddies for everything writing and sometimes non-writing related, which means we share life's successes and difficult times. We have always met online but get to see each other at conferences and local meet-ups. As buddies we share industry information and critique not only our manuscripts but also our query letters and pitches.

If you meet me for the first time and are new to SCBWI, you can bet I'll ask, "Are you in a critique group?" because I want you to have that rock of support and friendship to help you reach your goals. If you're not ready yet to commit to a group, then join us at a **Meet and Critique** in your area to feel the positive atmosphere and receive the input we all need to be the best writers we can be.

Critique buddies rock! ■

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SCBWI-Wisconsin Newsletter

Edited by Sandra Nichols
Designed by Leah DiPasquale

Fun Fact:

According to Adam Rowe, contributing writer for Forbes, of the 100 bestsellers in the U.K. for 2018, nearly 31% were children's books.

From the Trenches

SCBWI-WI Member Focus



Illustration © Essi Mathews



8 Tips to Guide Your Writing Success *By Valerie Biel*

I've been writing fiction professionally now for just over a decade. Prior to that, I spent my time writing a lot of business-y communications like newsletters, fundraising appeals, and nonprofit annual reports. I remember clearly my decision to radically change my professional world.

My sister had been diagnosed with terminal cancer—the same cancer that took my oldest sister a few years prior. Between hospice care, coping with my own grief, and somehow juggling work and family commitments, I reevaluated my priorities. We have no guarantee of time on this earth. I needed to start using my time in a more fulfilling way.

Having always wanted to write the stories germinating in my mind, I stepped back from many of my other responsibilities to create my first full-length story—a novel. Daunting! But I did it and went on to write two more in that same YA series, eventually independently publishing them. Three other manuscripts followed (middle-grade this time) plus a nonfiction book proposal—these are all now in the hands of my agent. (Fingers crossed!)

I truly cannot count the many lessons learned, mistakes made, skills acquired, and friendships built. It's been an incredible decade! Here are the most important things I've learned.

Find your people

Writing is a lonely venture, but it needn't be. In fact, I think all writers benefit from having other writers in their lives—people we can hang out with around the digital water cooler and with whom we can commiserate, complain, and (potentially) collaborate.

As this is a members' only communication, you've already taken a big step in finding those people!

With extreme nervousness I went to my first writing conference, the University of Wisconsin Continuing Studies' Writers Institute, in March of 2009. I had not yet reached the point where I felt comfortable saying, "I'm a writer." I knew nothing. I took nonstop notes. Pages and pages of notes. Things like "1-inch margins and 12-point font, preferably Times New Roman or Courier." But the best part was making friends with other writers. I had found my people. Seriously, there was a moment at this conference where I nearly started crying with relief that I had found people who understood how much I needed to tell stories.

When the woman in the next seat at one of the sessions kindly asked what I wrote, I explained in what I'm sure was a haltingly bizarre description my work in progress. She said, "Oh, *Young Adult*. You need to join SCBWI." I wrote SCBWI in my notes and joined the next week. Our Wisconsin SCBWI Fall Conference and regional events provided exactly the opportunities I needed to expand my writing skill and knowledge in a supportive environment.

You can also connect with other writers in online groups and on social media platforms and even in your local community where you might get to see (GASP!) people in person. >>

Protect your writing time

It took me a while to get into the groove of scheduling my writing time just like an appointment on the calendar. Once I'd mastered this and acknowledged the protected status that time now received because it was ON THE CALENDAR, I had to learn the phrase, "No, I'm busy then." That was much, much harder. While I took my writing seriously, when you work from home—particularly doing something like writing—others have a hard time seeing it as 'real' work. Eventually, I quit explaining why I was busy, and you know what? No one asked what I was doing. They just respected my statement that I was busy.

Find some trusty cooks and let your work marinate

Like there is such a thing as too many cooks in your kitchen, the same goes for too many opinions on your writing. However, you absolutely must have a few trusted cooks helping you perfect your work. We all need feedback and editing, and whether that comes from hiring professional editors or utilizing a skilled critique group, we need both the encouragement and feedback to make our writing better.

At first, letting others read (and comment on) your work is hard. It gets easier, and truly if your goal is to publish, you'd better become accustomed to the idea of A LOT of people reading your work (and having opinions about it.) At that Writers Institute back in 2009, with more than a little trepidation, I submitted the first three chapters of my very first book *Circle of Nine: Beltany* ahead of time for critique. I spent the entire opening session ignoring my impulse to slip the pages from the manila envelope and read the notes from writing instructor Christine DeSmet. She praised my work, and corrected some awkward phrasing/grammar, AND pinpointed that I'd buried the start of my story in chapter three. It was just the kind of help I needed.

If you can, join a critique group! I am so grateful for the group I was matched with through my membership in SCBWI. While the number of members has varied, our core group has stayed the same. I don't

know where I'd be without their invaluable advice and editing skills. Surely, my stories would not be as cohesive without them.

Additionally, once you've finished a manuscript, set it aside for a few weeks or even a few months. This is what I mean by marinating. You'll come back to it with fresh eyes and be ready to dig into editing.

Learn about the publishing industry

Long before you're ready to seek an agent or editor, you should be learning about the publishing industry. What's happening with traditional publishers? What's new over on Amazon? Are there shifts taking place? What are the current controversies? Which books are winning awards? What are people talking about on author/writing forums? There are so many good sources for writing and publishing information from blogs and websites to newsletters and magazines (both print and digital). I particularly appreciate articles from Jane Friedman, Nathan Bransford, Mary Kole, Joanna Penn, and Dan Blank. >>



Illustrator
Spotlight

Essi
Mathews

See more of Essi's work at
www.deviantart.com/littlerunningmouse/gallery/

Be generous with others

I hardly need to put this here because all the writers I know are incredibly generous people! But, as you progress on your writing journey, take the time to be helpful to other writers who are just starting out. I will never forget the many people who provided kind mentorship to me in those early writing days. Sometimes it only takes a few minutes to make the world less stressful for another writer! Plus, collaboration is fun, and it might lead you on a new, creative adventure.

Nurture the writer - right now

Our creative brains need to be fed with time away from the keyboard or the writing page. It's okay to take breaks to try new creative endeavors or seek out different activities that stimulate the senses. I have found more writing success after I've taken on a crafty sort of project or artistic work like painting (badly). Traveling, when possible, is an incredible way to find new inspiration. Even taking the time to get close to nature on a hike will give you a boost.

Believe in yourself

Be careful to avoid comparing your writing journey with that of other writers. Once you begin submitting your work to agents and editors, it is easy to feel defeated and wonder what you're doing wrong when success proves to be elusive. If you're lucky enough to get feedback with any rejections you receive, take it, make sure your work is the best it can be, and submit your next round of queries. There are astounding stories of rejection from famous authors like Stephen King and JK Rowling. Perseverance and persistence are your friends. We are incredibly lucky to be writing in a time when there are so many paths to publication.

Keep writing

And whatever you do, keep writing. The world needs to hear what you have to say! ■

*Valerie Biel is an award-winning author, publicity professional, and a highly-rated educator on writing, publishing, and book promotion topics. Books in her Celtic mythology inspired **Circle of Nine Series** have been finalists for the Kindle Book Award, Gotham Writers' YA Discovery Award, the Readers' Favorite Book Award, and shortlisted for the Eric Hoffer Book Award Grand Prize as well as being B.R.A.G. Medallion Honorees. She is represented by Tina Schwartz of the Purcell Agency. Valerie provides a variety of promotional, editorial services, and online courses to authors through her company Lost Lake Press. Her blog "The Three Rs: Reading, wRiting, and Roaming" was named one of the top 50 writing blogs of 2018 by the UK Writers Hub. You can follow her writing adventures at the links below: (warning: there may be sharing of grammar puns)*

Blog: www.ValerieBiel.com/blog

Facebook: @ValerieBielBooks

Instagram: @ValerieBielAuthor

Twitter: @ValerieBiel

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Fun Fact:

Besides being well known children's book authors, what do C.S. Lewis, Madeliene L'Engle, and Louisa May Alcott have in common? They each were born on November 29.

The Write Way

Writer Tips



Make Your Manuscript “Sing”

By Janet Halfmann

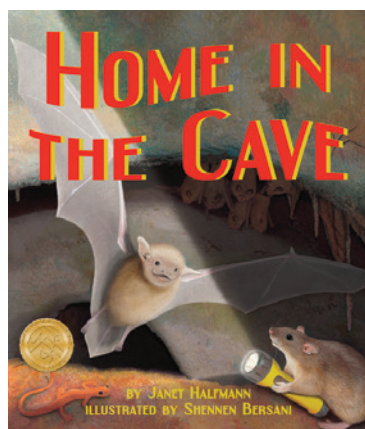
Children’s author Janet Halfmann has been writing for nearly 40 years, and most of that time, she has been writing for children. To say that Janet has perfected her writing along the way is understatement. Her books have received numerous awards over the years including 2014 Platinum & Gold Best Book Awards: Oppenheim Toy Portfolio; the Preferred Choice Award from Creative Child Magazine; New York Public Library Best Books of 2018; Teachers’ Choices 2019 Reading List: International Literacy Association; and most recently the 2019 Carter G. Woodson Honor Award from the National Council for the Social Studies for her book, **Midnight Teacher**. So how does Janet consistently create award-winning books? Reading through her book reviews provides a clue to her success: “Poetic verse,” states Publishers Weekly; “...textual pacing...,” acclaims Kirkus; “Lively text,” says Midwest Book Review; “You can almost hear the movement of the sea,” The Book Connection.

Join Janet as she shares some tips for creating your own award-winning children’s prose.

The best advice I ever heard at an SCBWI-WI writing conference was that every word in a manuscript must sing. Ever since, I’ve made that my mantra. However, knowing a manuscript should sing is easier than composing one that does. Over time, I’ve developed techniques to reach that perfect harmony. Hopefully my tips will inspire new ideas for you.

Discover the Unique

First, no matter what topic I’m writing about, I do tons of research, lots more than I will ever use. If the book is about an animal, I’m looking for that attribute or behavior that will bring the book to life for the reader. If I’m writing a biography, I’m looking for that thing that sets this person apart in a unique way.

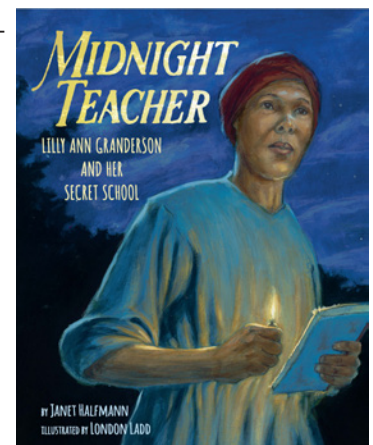


For example, in **Home in the Cave**, the unique thing I learned was that guano (bat poop) feeds all the other animals in a cave where bats make their home. That fact gave me the motivation for why Baby Bat would decide to leave the cave that he loved so much. Once Baby Bat knows how important guano

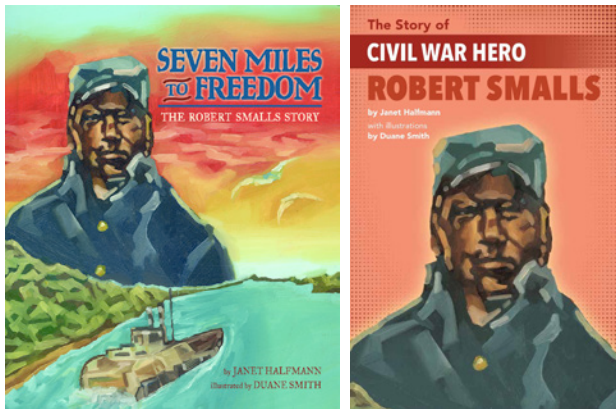
is, he is willing to overcome his fear and leave the cave to hunt insects and make food for the other cave dwellers.

When I was looking to spotlight an enslaved teacher who secretly taught her people to read when it was against the law, the fact that Lilly Ann Granderson held her school from midnight until two in the morning captivated me. She was even known as the “midnight teacher”—which gave me the perfect title: **Midnight Teacher: Lilly Ann Granderson and her Secret School**.

In my picture book **Seven Miles to Freedom** about the enslaved wheelman Robert Smalls, once I learned about his risky escape >>



to freedom by stealing a Confederate boat, I knew others would be just as spellbound as I was by his danger-at-every-turn journey. I'm so excited to announce that this story, with lots of new added material, will soon get an additional life as a chapter book biography, titled *The Story of Civil War Hero Robert Smalls*, for older readers—coming in late February from Lee & Low Books.



Create Feeling

In telling a story, I strive to use the most vivid verbs possible that convey the action and emotion I'm looking for, such as this line from my bedtime book *Good Night, Little Sea Otter*: "Good night, Little Sea Otter, all the fish bubbled and burbled." I find the *Children's Writer's Word Book 2nd edition* (2006) by Alijandra Mogilner an



invaluable tool in finding just the right alternate words.

I also strive to make the words I use have a rhythm that works with the story, such as the soft "s" sounds near the end of the

otter book to lull little listeners to sleep: "Little Sea Otter's eyes slowly closed."

I try to create phrases that will make a reader or listener see a picture in their mind. One of my favorite sentences from my Robert Smalls book is, "The boat surged forward, its paddle wheels whisking the water white." In *Little Skink's Tail*, this is a favorite, "Wiggle, wagggle, wiggle, went the tail, wriggling wildly through the fallen leaves."

'Listen' to the Story

I find it immensely valuable to read my manuscripts out loud. I write primarily picture books, and I usually read them aloud about 50 times. In reading aloud, one can really hear the rhythm and any stumbling blocks. If something trips up my reading in the slightest or if I find a phrase boring or confusing, I don't rest until I improve it.

I also find it valuable to print the story out a few times. It's amazing how differently you see a story that's on paper compared to when it's on a computer screen.

I hope these tips help you in making your manuscripts sing, and inspire other ways of your own. ■

You can find out more about me, my books, and my writing life at <http://www.janethalfmannauthor.com>. I am on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/janethalfmann> and on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/JanetHalfmann>

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Fun Fact:

Who says children's books aren't valued? The most expensive modern manuscript sold was J.K. Rowling's *Beetle the Bard*, first mentioned in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. Only seven of these books were created, each hand written and illustrated by Rowling and bound in leather with silver and moon stone embellishments. Six of the books were given as gifts; the seventh sold at auction for 3.6 million Euros.

Drawing up Inspiration

Illustrator Tips



Illustrations in Motion

By Mauro Magellan

From a very young age, I knew I wanted to be an artist. My parents, however had other plans. Art was not a good use of time or materials, so I became a drummer. Art became my fall-back profession, just in case the drumming thing didn't work out.

As luck would have it, the drumming thing did work out. I have gold and platinum records on my wall, as well as many other music related awards and accomplishments. But as most of us in the arts know, dependability is not always guaranteed. Fortunately, I had illustrating to fall back on.

I travel between the US and Europe playing in a Rock N' Roll band about 6 to 7 months out of the year. I keep up with my illustrating and graphic design work while traveling. Earlier in my Music/Art career I used to carry a full set of watercolors (no easel), a set of Koh-i-noor pens (high maintenance), a set of pencils, and watercolor paper.



I don't do that anymore. My illustrating style is pencil with color added later in Photoshop. Employing this process allows me to color while on the highway. **Louie & That Dog** and many other books were done using this convenient method. Well, convenient for me.

I don't keep all my original drafts as they get sold to fans around the world. I also put my originals up for sale on my web site. Otherwise I end up with so many pictures around the house the art turns to clutter.

The Illustration Process

1. I work out the drawing on any paper I can find.

I ask for paper from my current hotel reception desk or use hotel stationary if available. This keeps my materials to a minimum.



2. I re-draw the illustration on acid-free drawing paper. I scan it and save the drawing then save it in Photoshop.
3. With my lasso tool I clean up the edges and any thumb prints or eraser marks (lots of eraser marks). Select, copy, and save it in Photoshop.



© Mauro Magellan

4. Then, I colorize it in a sepia tone. With my magic wand I select all, copy and paste it. I turn the copied drawing into a transparent picture.



© Mauro Magellan

5. Now I'm ready to isolate each part and color it. I can also add a background if required. Sounds technical but it's not. ■



© Mauro Magellan

Sketches and illustrations from *Louie & That Dog*, music, story and pictures by Mauro Magellan, and *The Nutty Little Vulture*, story by Marta Magellan and pictures by Mauro Magellan. This article was written and edited while traveling in the UK.

For permission to reprint this article, contact Mauro Magellan at <https://magellanartdesign.com/>

Mark Your Calendars!

Upcoming Events

SCBWI Events

November 16, 2019 | 10:00 am–12:00 pm

Meet, Critique, and Pitch

Sun Prairie Public Library
1350 Linnerud Drive, Sun Prairie, Wisconsin 53590

Bring 5 copies of your entire picture book manuscript or the first 700 words of your chapter book, middle grade, or young adult novel.

Also, to prepare for Twitter's *PitMad* event on December 5, bring a pitch that goes with your story. It should be fewer than 280 characters (50 words). Even if you don't participate in *PitMad*, this pitch will be helpful for query letters.

We will be critiquing both.

Please RSVP to Deb Buschman- mbuschman@wi.rr.com. Our room at the library can accommodate many. So even if you decide to attend the day of, we would love to have you.

November 17, 2019 | 2:00 pm–4:00 pm

SCBWI-WI NE Area, Munch and Mingle!

Copper Rock Coffee Co
210 W College Avenue, Appleton, WI 54911

Enjoy spending time with other SCBWI-WI NE members to check in before the holidays start in full swing!

February 8 & 9, 2020

21st Annual SCBWI Winter Conference in New York – NY20

Grand Hyatt New York'109 East 42nd Street, New York, NY

Workshops, panel discussion, and deep-dive break out sessions run by top editors, agents, master writers, and illustrators. Dynamic keynotes by acclaimed authors and illustrators: Derrick Barnes, Coretta Scott King Award recipient; Kate Messner, Golden Kite Award winner; and Jerry Pinkney, Caldecott Medal for US picture book illustration.

Register at <https://www.scbwi.org/events/21st-annual-scbwi-winter-conference-in-new-york-ny20/>

Other Opportunities Around the State

January 18, 2020 | 1:00–3:00 pm

Essentials of Writing: Resolve to Write

Neighborhood House Community Center
29 South Mills Street, Madison, Wisconsin

Are you inspired to write, but unsure how to begin? Are you a seasoned writer who's feeling stuck? It's a new year—fulfill your resolution to write with a one-day class filled with fun and original writing prompts, in-class writing exercises, and helpful tips and techniques to help you jump-start your next writing project! Guaranteed to help you gain a sense of playfulness and confidence in your creative potential. This workshop is offered through UW Continuing Studies.

March 26-29, 2020

UW-Madison's 31st Annual Writer's Institute

Madison, Wisconsin

Get the creative juices flowing and hone your writing skills at this four day conference. Workshops on writing craft and navigating the publishing world are led by top writing coaches and instructors from UW-Madison's Continuing Studies program.

April 24-26, 2020

Untitled Town Book and Author Festival

Green Bay, WI

An annual weekend festival with workshops, panel discussions, readings, and events held at various locations throughout the Green Bay downtown area. The majority of events and workshops are free.

May 17-23, 2020

Novel-In-Progress Book Camp and Writing Retreat

Cedar Valley Retreat Center
West Bend, Wisconsin

Spend six days focused on nothing but your own writing? Yes! Chapter book writers of all genres both fiction and non-fiction will find the intensive workshops, coaching, and group critiques may be just what it needed to move that novel in progress to a completed draft. Located within 100 acres of nature and inspiration, the Novel-In-Progress Book Camp is sponsored in part by the Chicago Writers Association, Off Campus Writers' Workshop (OCWW), and The Wisconsin Writers Association. Geared towards writers who have a work in progress.

Author Events

Friday, November 15 | 4:00 pm

Michelle Schaub, author of *Finding Treasure: A Collection of Collections*

Boswell Books
2559 N Downer Ave, Milwaukee, WI 53211
Phone: (414) 332-1181

Poet and author Michelle Schaub presents her new book described as a treasure trove of clever poems which tell the story of one inquisitive child's quest to start just the right collection to share at school.

This special event will feature a mini-tour, led by Boswell proprietor Daniel Goldin, of some of his own collections. Great for adults and kids 4 and up.

Michelle Schaub is the author of *Fresh-Picked Poetry: A Day at the Farmers' Market*, and her poems have appeared in *And the Crowd Goes Wild*, *A Global Gathering of Sports Poems*, and *The Poetry Anthology for Celebrations*. She has contributed poems to *Highlights High Five*, *Ladybug* magazine, and the SCBWI national bulletin. She is the author of *This and That Sports and Vehicles of WWI*.

Wednesday, November 20, 2019 | 6:00 pm

Landis Blair, Illustrator & Author of *The Envious Siblings*

A Room of One's Own: New and Used Books
315 W. Gorham Street, Madison, WI 53703-2218

The Envious Siblings is a wicked collection of nursery rhymes that will terrify and delight children and parents alike. In Blair's surreal universe, a lost child watches as bewhiskered monsters gobble her fellow passengers on a train; a band of school kids merrily play a gut-churning game with playground toys; and two sisters, grinning madly, dismember each other joint by joint until their mother kills them both to keep them quiet. Witty verse reminiscent of Shel Silverstein and others accompany Blair's charmingly perverse illustrations, all done in his distinctive cross hatched style. This delightfully twisted and darkly funny debut heralds a brilliant new cartooning talent and will captivate readers who have thrilled to the lurid fantasies of Roald Dahl, Quentin Blake, Heinrich Hoffman, Alicia Vannoy Call, Charles Addams, and Tim Burton.

Thursday, November 21 | 7:00 pm

Holly Black, author of *The Queen of Nothing*

Boswell Books
2559 N Downer Ave, Milwaukee, WI 53211
Phone: (414) 332-1181

#1 New York Times bestselling author Holly Black makes her first Milwaukee appearance in six years with her highly anticipated, jaw-dropping finale to *The Folk of the Air* trilogy. Registration is free for this event at hollyblackmke.bpt.me, but you must upgrade to a copy of *The Queen of Nothing* to get in the signing line.

Holly Black is the bestselling author of contemporary fantasy novels for teens and children, including *The Folk of the Air* trilogy, *Tithe: A Modern Faerie Tale*, and the *Spiderwick* series. She has been a finalist for the Eisner Award and the recipient of the Andre Norton Award and Mythopoeic Award.

Call for Submissions

Authors & Illustrators: if you would like to be an article contributor for an upcoming issue, contact Sandra at nicholssandra5@gmail.com for more details.

Illustrators: if you would like to share your artwork in an upcoming issue, contact Leah at danzillustrator@gmail.com for more details.

Share your Events!

Send info on upcoming winter author/illustrator events taking place between May 2019 and October 2020. Contact Sandra at nicholssandra5@gmail.com.