



“Writing, like life itself,
is a voyage of
discovery.”

- Henry Miller

Candid Conversations: Post-Publishing Marketing 101

By Sandra Nichols

This is the second in a series of *Creative Tap* discussions exploring the business side of book creation. Back in fall 2022, SCBWI-WI members Amanda Zieba ([WordNerdpolis](#)) and Jessica Kopecky ([Jessica Kopecky Design](#)) shared thoughts on the value of pre-marketing and creating a social media presence prior to traditional or self publishing.

Joining us today for a look at post-publication marketing are Pat Zietlow Miller and Valerie Biel. Pat is a New York Times

bestselling picture book author whose titles include *Sophie’s Squash* (2013) and *Be Kind* (2018). Valerie is the author of the award-winning *Circle of Nine* fantasy series.

Hi Pat and Val. Thank-you for giving your time and thoughts to this important topic of discussion for SCBWI-WI members. Pat, your books are traditionally published while, Val, you are an independently published author. I look forward to hearing how your experiences and thoughts on post-



Pat Zietlow
Miller



Valerie Biel

From the Editor

I found out the hard way that creativity has a mind of its own. It comes and goes when it wants. And no amount of wishing or coaxing or negotiating will lure it out of whatever elusive place it’s gone to.

When creativity left me, the color drained from my world. Snow crystals lost their magic. The scent of lilac blossoms drifted on a breeze I couldn’t feel. And the stories locked themselves away, hidden from my sight.

Writers like to call creativity’s absence writer’s block. But this implies there’s something the writer just needs to move. An impediment is in the way.

But creativity comes when it wants. You can’t pressure it.

publishing marketing might differ.

Let's dive in.

Pat, your books have been published through well known publishers such as Candlewick Press, Random House Children's Books, and Roaring Brook Press (an imprint of Macmillan Publishers). **I've always thought the big publishing houses put together a marketing campaign for any book they put out, so why should a traditionally published author bother with post-publication marketing?**

"There are so many books coming out into the world at any one time, that it takes a lot for any book to find an audience, stand out and sell. And for that to have even a chance of happening, the more people working to help the book succeed, the better.

"And, the marketing staff at traditional publishers are working on a lot of authors' books, not just yours, and different books get different levels of promotion based on the success of the author's previous books, the author's general level of acclaim, and how excited or optimistic the publisher is about a particular book.

"So even though my books are traditionally published and have a publicist assigned to them, I always do extra promotion on my own. I have a background in corporate public relations, and I focus on ways I might know my book better than a publicist using methods I enjoy and feel comfortable with."

Val, do you think marketing is needed for traditionally published books as well as independently published books?

"Marketing is an essential component of any business. So whether you are traditionally or independently published this key component of success (attaining sales through marketing efforts!) shouldn't be ignored by the creator of the work.

"There are very few traditionally published authors that have full, long-term marketing support. Often, any marketing push that exists is focused only on the short time immediately before and after the book is released, so it's important not to assume this role is being fulfilled properly by

After months of trying to force it, I realized I needed to be patient—with creativity and with myself. I needed to carve a place in my upside-down world where I uprooted myself and moved, then moved again. Where I lost focus of where I was going and what I wanted. I needed to carve a little place that creativity would find inviting.

It took time. But I did it. And finally I was ready to get this newsletter together.

So sorry for the lateness. We tried to pack it with ideas and inspiration.

Wishing all of you a little place where creativity likes to dwell.

Sandi



your publisher. Make sure you know what they're planning to do and see where the gaps are so you can determine where your own marketing efforts can supplement.

"I break down marketing efforts into two main categories—publicity (which is making sure your book is visible to potential readers) and advertising (where you're paying to reach particular audiences.) Book advertising is mostly placed on digital platforms like Facebook (meta), BookBub (for ads or a Featured Deal, if you're lucky enough to get one), and—of course—Amazon. Once in a while, I'll have an author client placing ads in publications (both digital and print) if their book is particularly well-suited to an online magazine audience.

"The difficulty for traditionally

I think writers are generally not inclined to promote themselves — it can feel intimidating or perhaps a little braggy or boastful. (Or is that just Midwesterners??)

published authors is that their royalty rate is often too low for a positive return on investment (ROI) for digital advertising. In that case, we have to get creative with marketing endeavors, often relying on less costly publicity efforts to gain new readers."

You sound as though you have experience in marketing, Val.

"My background is in public relations and marketing, so when I switched to writing professionally, I had a lot of general experience in that area. BUT, I still had to get my head around marketing my own work.

"I think writers are generally not inclined to promote

themselves—it can feel intimidating or perhaps a little braggy or boastful. (Or is that just Midwesterners??) I needed to remind myself that it is okay to put my books out there with publicity and advertising. I still need to do that some days."

Back in the fall 2022 issue of *Creative Tap*, Amanda Zeiba had mentioned the importance of targeting pre-published marketing efforts to a specific audience. **Do you see this applying to post-published marketing efforts as well?**

Val, I can tell you have some thoughts on this.

"It's essential to know who your audience is

long BEFORE your book is published. You might do this research even before you start writing by taking your initial inspiration and seeing where it fits in the market. At a minimum, this must be done before the querying stage, so you can convey to agents/editors (if you're going traditional) both how your book fits in your genre, but also how it is different to show why it will be new and interesting.

"Through every phase of publication (pre-launch/launch/post-launch), you will be severely handicapped if you can't identify your ideal reader(s). One of the key components for all types of advertising and publicity is your best target audience. For children's books, the gatekeepers are often buying books for young readers, so you'll be focusing on audiences like

Don't miss out on this FREE source for writing and publishing advice!

SCBWI-WI's very own Valerie Biel is an award-winning author and publicity professional who shares her writing, publishing, and book promotion know-how through articles, free guides, and courses.



To find out more:

Go to [Lost Lake Press - Author Pro](#) now!

Sign up for Valerie's popular monthly Writers' Forum filled with craft tips and marketing advice.

Enroll in a class to help your writing business grow, or download free writing craft, tech tools, book industry, and self-editing guides.

librarians, teachers, and parents for those too young to make their own purchasing decisions.”

So what you're saying is, yes, identifying your audience is important. **But, besides thinking of kids and teens, I find it difficult at times to nail down who else the audience might be. Pat, do you have any tips on this?**

“I break my books' audiences into two categories:

1. **People who know me and seem to like me and, therefore, might be interested in any book I write.** This includes family, friends, and teachers, librarians and booksellers and is a standing list I maintain and update.
2. **People who may not otherwise know me or like me but might be interested in the topic of this particular book.** This includes people with jobs or personal interests related to the book's topic, like women working in construction and maker space leaders for my book A GIRL CAN BUILD ANYTHING. They'd only get marketing for this book, not all my books.

“I reach these audiences mostly through social media

posts using related hashtags, postcard mailings and sending complimentary copies to possible influencers.”

I love this idea of gatekeepers, those who buy the books for our young readers and those who provide the books. Also, thinking of categories such as those adults whose interests match my book's focus is very helpful.

Both of you have years of experience in marketing your books and bring so much knowledge to the discussion. **However, I have a hunch you've made a marketing mistake or two along your path to publishing success. Val, care to share?**

“I wish I would have tackled learning Amazon advertising far earlier than I did. I allowed myself to be intimidated by that process, when—just like anything—you can take it step-by-step. And, yes, you'll make mistakes but the biggest mistake is not trying because something looks too hard.

“Although, I do have a funny story about a flub I made with a Facebook ad.

“So I once forgot to set an end date for an ad. Unfortunately, this particular ad was at a little higher spend rate than I usually use—something like \$8/day. I thought

the ad had ended, so I wasn't paying ANY attention to my Facebook ad manager UNTIL I got the bill at the end of the month. Gulp!!

"You can imagine how fast I flew over to my KDP dashboard to see my sales report and find out how badly I was in the negative for the month. But to my relief, the spend had paid off and I actually had made a sizable profit that month.

"So it ended well, but it also taught me that perhaps I needed to be less cautious with my budgets on Facebook."

I'm glad it all turned out well in the end, and that is a good lesson for all of us: be willing to take a chance on social media advertising as long as you're comfortable with the platform.

Pat, do you have a marketing lesson or two you picked up along the way?

"This may sound a bit depressing, but my biggest learning is that there are no guarantees. You can put equal amounts of effort into marketing two separate books and have one take off and another stay stagnant. And, even when a book does well, you won't necessarily be able to prove it's because of your marketing. But that doesn't mean you shouldn't market!

"I look at all the marketing I do as a long-term investment in my brand. Someone might not buy one particular book, but they might remember my name and end up getting another title of mine. To me, that's the value of my marketing strategy—it helps raise awareness of me as an author and build my personal brand.

"This isn't really a mistake, but I had to get comfortable being on live TV. I had never done it before, and the first time I was on a couch, live, facing a camera, I was more nervous than I might ever have been before in my life. I've learned to look at the host, answer concisely, and NOT LOOK AT MYSELF ON THE MONITOR."

It seems marketing our books requires planning, effort, and stepping out of our comfort zones!

Thank-you both so much for sharing your marketing expertise.

For those of you looking for more promotion and marketing tips for before, during, and after a book launch, please check out Val's blog post [13 Book Marketing Tips for During and After Your Book Launch](#) and Pat's blog post about promo and marketing books [My Thoughts about Two Confusing Words: Marketing and Promotion](#).

Market Facts

This year will be the seventh consecutive year the children's book market recorded revenue growth.

What percentage of global children's book revenue does the US children's book market hold?

*14.5%

*22.8%

* 36.7%

See answer at the end of this newsletter.

For Illustrators Who Want to Know about Children's Book Publishing

By Eliza Wheeler

I get frequently asked for information on children's book illustration and publishing, so I've compiled all the beginning info that I have to share with folks here, for anyone who's looking for it. This information is based on my personal experience, and it's important to say that there's no one right way to get into illustration or book publishing; each writer or illustrator's journey is going to be totally unique. I'm hoping this info and the links to much MORE information below will help guide people who are starting out!

Note The following information relates to **traditional publishing**. Self-publishing is a different topic; one of which I haven't any expertise on, but you can get some intro information for that here for free at: <https://underdown.org/self-publishing.htm>. For those ready to dive in further, I highly recommend a guide by the Society of Children's Books Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI) for members pursuing self-publishing: <https://www.scbwi.org/the-essential-guide-to-self-publishing-a-childrens-book/>.

HOW DO ILLUSTRATORS AND WRITERS WORK WITH PUBLISHERS?

The two most common **wrong** assumptions

people make about book-making:

1. **Writers and illustrators work together**—they don't! Writers write manuscripts and sell these to the publisher. Illustrators promote their illustration work to publishers, who hire them on a contract basis to illustrate the manuscripts they acquire. As always in publishing, there are exceptions to these rules (sometimes you see friends, spouses, siblings team up), but this is most traditionally how it works. There are a lot of reasons for this which I won't go into here, but mainly the publisher wants to choose text and art to pair together that they believe will have the most successful outcome in finished form. Very well-known authors or illustrators are paid more (in the form of a book advance) for the project, so to balance their budget they might pair that well-known author with a newer illustrator (or vice versa). If you *really* want to try to work with a partner on your book idea, my advice would be for the author to write the manuscript, the illustrator create a book dummy for it (as explained in 2.) and submit that book dummy as a team to a publisher. Be prepared for the publisher to like the book idea but want to hire their

The Problem with "Show, Don't Tell"



By TD Storm

The Value and Purpose of Showing

Let me quickly explain what's good and right about showing, as I see it. Readers enjoy inferring subtext and motivation and mood and significance.

When you *tell* them that stuff, it robs them of the chance to do something they love doing. If you want the reader's attention and devotion, you need to provide something that allows her to read between the lines.

In other words, you want to simulate actual experience. Which means you don't tell us that Angie was angry. You show us what we would see if we were in the room with Angie (Or if we *were* Angie).

Even if stories are speculative and fantastical, we pretty much want them to simulate aspects of authentic, real life. That is, we want to consume an alternate reality in the same way we consume the reality we inhabit—by experiencing it.

own chosen illustrator for the book. It's your choice to say yes or no to this arrangement.

- 2. Writers and illustrators sell their book idea to a publisher by making it first**—I remember thinking that in order to sell a book idea, I had to create a polished, finished version first. Not true! In fact, doing this could really hurt the sale-ability of the idea. Editors who work at publishing companies are the ones who acquire stories, and they have a lot of great feedback and opinions that will make your idea better. They will ask for revisions—sometimes huge ones! This is a normal part of the bookmaking process. Writers should submit their stories in the form of a Word Doc (no need to format and paginate it like a finished book), and illustrators who have their own story idea to pitch should create a **book dummy**. This is essentially a loosely pencil-sketched version of the book in PDF form. This gets your idea across and shows your skill with pacing, layouts, page turns, etc. A book dummy should be accompanied with 1-3 pieces of sample finished art, so the art director can get a sense of what the final book would look like.

WHO'S WHO?

The main people you'll be working with at the publishing company are Editors and Art

Directors. Writers work with the editor on the story and text, and illustrators work with art directors. If an illustrator is working on their own story, they'll work with both the editor and art director as a team. Some art directors also have a separate designer working on the book who's in charge of the book layout. Of course, there are *many* other people working in various roles at the publisher, but these are the first two to understand.

HOW DOES A BOOK PROJECT WORK?

After an illustrator is hired to make art for a book (more on that below), the illustrator creates sketches for the book to turn in and discuss with the art director and/or editor. They'll give revision notes and you'll go back to the drawing board to make a new draft. This might happen a few times, sometimes for the whole book, other times it's certain pages that need more revising than others. Once you get approval on sketches, you'll create the final artwork for the book. You'll do this in your chosen medium, be that painting, drawing, or digital art. If you're working traditionally (painting on paper), most commonly you'll mail the art to the publisher for scanning (but you'll discuss this with the art director if you prefer to scan on your own).

WHAT'S A SCHEDULE LIKE?

This varies so much from illustrator to illustrator, project to

Some writers understand showing to mean that the job of writers is to do his best to put the reader in the world of the story, to see it all as clearly as the writer does.

But that's not the writer's job.

No, **the writer's job is to get readers to identify with the experience of a character** (or characters). And if we're to mimic real-life experience in our stories, we need to be sure not to convey everything. After all, we don't perceive everything around us in the real world; the characters in our stories shouldn't perceive everything either.

Hyperdetailing

I certainly see lots of writing that fails to show enough concrete, physical detail. But I also see lots of manuscripts that err on the side of excessive showing. I call it "hyperdetailing," and it occurs when writers "show" the wrong things.

What do I mean by wrong?

I mean irrelevant detail. I mean descriptions that

project, publisher to publisher. Deadlines for picture books can be short, like 3-6 months, or longer, like 1-2 years. As an illustrator, you need to learn how fast or slow you work and ask for time accordingly. It can also take weeks to months to get sketch feedback, depending on your publishing team. I won't take on a picture book project schedule that's less than a year, because I work slowly. The art director is not in charge of time managing your work! This surprised me when I first started out, I thought things would be much more structured out for me. Artists need to do their own time management and communicate clearly to the art director when/if they need more time. Some book deadlines are flexible, others are not. You will want to ask about this when you start the project.

HOW DOES MONEY WORK?

Being an author and/or illustrator for books in traditional publishing is contract by contract work (also known as freelance). The project that you pitch to the publisher will be acquired, or bought, as a book contract. If your book does well enough, your publisher will likely want to publish more work with you! The publisher is your client, not your employer. (Though, there might be cases of in-house jobs for certain types of publishers as an employed illustrator). You have to take your own taxes out of the book payments. You'll get paid in split payments, which vary from publisher to publisher,

but common payments are on signing the contract, on sketch approval, on approval of final artwork. Sometimes a payment is left for "on publication". Having a trustworthy literary agent helps to make sure you're getting the best terms in the contract that you can.

Sad news: One book contract (unless you're a well-known author with a great sales track record) will not cover your yearly salary needs. Advances for beginners will not even pay half your salary. Maybe a quarter. This was a bit of rude awakening for me when I first started—I realized I needed to be working on multiple books at once just to cover my basic expenses. A lot of authors joke "Don't quit your day job"—a joke I sort of hate. But, this is why. And it's true to a certain point. Although it's not common, you can get enough work and books can do well enough that eventually you *might* be able to live off this work alone. I do. I know many illustrators who do. And less, but a few, authors who do.

HOW TO GET READY TO DO THIS WORK?

Guess what? It doesn't matter what your previous employment was or what your grades were in school. I LOVE this about illustration! You don't even have to have traditional art school training (though years of practice helps). You just need a quality body of work that you love to make that people also happen to like. That body of

are not significant and are thus boring for the reader.

Consider the various ways in which you might narrate a trip to the grocery store. You may begin with a simple, "I went to the store."

Or you could specify a little: "I drove to the grocery store yesterday."

Or you could really try to "show":

"I opened the door to my ailing, late-90s Toyota Sienna, noting the chipped burgundy paint on the fenders just above the wheel wells. I sat on the crusty leather seats, burning from the day's heat, which weighed heavy in the humid air already at 10:00 am. Turning the key in the ignition, I listened to the old beast cough to life. The fan belt screeched for a full minute as I backed the van out of my driveway and headed south on Park Street toward the Pick N Save next to the old labor temple."

If this is to be a story about what happened at the grocery store, how many details do we need about the car and route that got you there?

work is called your **portfolio**. This is a collection of your best work that you've built and curated over the years. You can put this work on your blog, website, instagram, flickr (do people still use that?). Wherever. Make it shareable and easy for people to navigate and quickly scroll through. You also may need to make a printed version if you plan on attending conferences (which I recommend, more on that below).

How do you build a body of work?

It's all about study and practice. Study illustrators working today and throughout history. Study books that are being made NOW. What are publishers releasing? This will help you see what they're looking for. What styles are you most drawn to? Pull from several influences so your work isn't too derivative of one well-known artist. Mix and match, experiment, play. Also, work in a style you enjoy—this will sustain you for the long run. Even if you're good at it, if you hate your medium or technique it will just be like any other day job you hate. Seriously, I've been there. Illustration is an awesome job, but it's also a TON of work. Like, a ton. Loving the actual making of the work will make or break your ability to stick with it. Luckily, you can learn and change as you go.

Keep practicing, studying, and growing. Create a creative

practice—your own time and space to study, practice, and make illustration work.

Be clear with your work. It's important to build a clear illustration voice, and your portfolio for book work needs to be specific to book work ONLY. Don't put other work you've done in there—like fine art projects, technical illustration, advertising, design work, etc. Book illustration needs to have a narrative quality to it—it's all about the storytelling. Show backgrounds, characters interacting, the same character in different scenes. You can have separate portfolios for different styles (as long as each style is cohesive and high quality), such as a colorful picture books portfolio, and one for black and white illustrations for middle grade novels. Have a sketch gallery if you want. Art directors don't hire you on your potential to do good work, they hire you based on the actual good work you've made.

If you'd like to see an evolution of my early portfolio, before I was getting professional book work, check out this post: <http://wheelerstudio.com/2011/08/22/portfolio-comparison-what-made-an-scbwi-winner/>

More tips are here: <http://kidlitartists.blogspot.com/2011/06/portfolio-tips-what-to-include-by-eliza.html>

Here's another good one about portfolios on

Kinds of Hyperdetailing

I've come to recognize four kinds of hyperdetailing, but I don't often label them when I comment on manuscripts. It's just that **knowing the potential places you might find yourself hyperdetailing may get you looking in the right neighborhoods for this problem.**

(And I want to be clear, by the way, that this problem is mostly one I see in very competent writing. Showing is a skill that comes with experience. And it's probably the most oft-complimented craft accomplishment I see writers give one another when I run workshops and critique groups.

That is, writers get a lot of positive reinforcement for their ability to show. And that may be part of the problem.)

Characterization

I land solidly in the camp of minimal character description. Readers will form ideas in their heads about characters, mostly based on character behavior. If you do describe characters, chances are readers will entirely miss those descriptions anyway.

KidLitArtists.com: <http://kidlitartists.blogspot.com/2013/07/a-few-thoughts-on-editing-your-portfolio.html>

HOW TO GET WORK

Once you have a professional quality body of work to promote to publishers, start the process of sharing it. A few different ways to do this:

Post it online: This is probably the easiest, free-est way to get your work out there. Put this work on your blog, website, Instagram, wherever. Make sure it's easy to scroll through. Keep adding more content to it, you never know if an art director is following you and keeping you in mind for when a good fit comes in. *And* make sure to have a clear way for them to contact you.

Promos: Artists create promotional material in a format that's meant to be sent to art directors at publishers. Before the 2020 pandemic, these would be mailed in the form of promo postcards or tear-sheets (8.5"×11" sheet of five or so sample art pieces) to art directors and editors you want to work with. These days, you might have to do a bit more work to track down the art director's info online to share your work with them, which requires a bit of research and knowing who works where.

Start paying attention to publishing companies and compiling a contact list with social media handles, emails,

addresses so that you can send low resolution tear-sheets or sample images attached to an email. You can promote to them a few times a year with new work. There are also hashtags such as #kidlitartpostcard that you can use on Instagram to promote new images.

Note Promoting your work to art directors is not a "submission." A submission refers to a specific project idea that you're pitching to the publisher. A submission includes a query letter and is usually sent to just one editor at a time.

Illustrator promotions are just about promoting the type of work you do in the hopes you'll get hired by the publisher—you can send these to as many publishers, editors, art directors as you wish (though make sure they publish the kind of work you do, e.g., don't send graphic novel samples to a publisher of baby board books).

Smaller jobs: Keep an eye on publications or websites that can use your work and promote yourself to smaller educational publishing companies—experience is good to have and can lead you to more work.

Educational publishing pay can be somewhat decent, though it's usually in the form of work-for-hire pay, meaning you don't get royalties. They also usually own the rights to the work you do, so you should negotiate to be allowed to display the work in your portfolio.

Remember all those people who missed that Rue from *Hunger Games* was dark skinned? And did you know that Jordan Baker from *The Great Gatsby* was a blonde?

Now, there are certain genres in which physical appearance is pretty important, most notably romance. But in such cases, physical descriptions are appropriate because they have so much to do with character desire, which drives the whole story.

Other stories use physical description to great effect—like *Children of Blood and Bone*, in which physical appearance often has to do with conflict; white-haired diviners are discriminated against and seen as a threat to the kingdom.

It's the gratuitous, paragraph-long descriptions of characters that rankle me.

Make description relevant to desire or conflict and you're in business. Otherwise, you might be hyperdetailing.

Info Dumps

I get it; we writers really like our imagined or

Community and

Conferences: The Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI), The Society of Illustrators, and the ICON conference hold regional and national conferences, workshops, and events where you can learn more about the craft and business of publishing.

They often have portfolio critiques and displays you can pay and sign up for, and there are often many publishing pros who attend these conferences. They're always looking for new illustrators, so bring your promo cards to share. Connecting with this community is a great thing. Even if you're not getting work yet, you can make friends and form critique groups who will support your growth.

Agent: If your work is ready, you might be able to get a literary agent to work with. They'll help promote your work and submit projects to all the big (and small) publishers and assist you in negotiating fair terms on contracts. You'll still need to promote yourself, but it helps to have someone advocating for you along the way. (Literary agents take 15% of your commissions. Art Agencies—not limited to the publishing industry—can take up to 30%.)

MORE INFO

The info in this post scratches the surface of all the

possibilities of publishing! To explore a ton more info for free, here are some good links:

Free info: Start by reading the entirety of this info-packed site: <http://www.underdown.org/>

Starting here: <https://www.underdown.org/basic-articles.htm>
and here: <http://www.underdown.org/picture-books-illustrations.htm>

Another similarly deep info site is: <http://www.kidlit411.com/>
And <https://www.debbieohi.com/debbie-faq/>

Articles: Pat Z Miller's description of all the steps involved to get her first book published: <https://emusdebuts.wordpress.com/2013/05/05/it-takes-a-village-to-write-a-book>

Read Debbie Ohi's steps on how she got published as an author/illustrator: <http://inkygirl.com/inkygirl-main/2012/5/15/writing-illustrating-a-picture-book-for-simon-schuster-books.html>

"I've Always Wanted to Write A Children's Book: <https://emusdebuts.wordpress.com/2015/03/30/ive-always-wanted-to-write-a-picture-book-getting-started/>

Paid info: If you're feeling ready to make the first steps into professional bookmaking, I

remembered worlds. And we also like doing research about those worlds. So it's really tempting to compose eloquent passages about salt-water exotic fish aquariums or the civil-war era paper mill your protagonist worked at as a teenager.

And you know what? Go ahead and write all about that stuff.

Just be sure to cut as much of it as you can in your final draft.

(For more on incorporating information, see [this article](#).)

Setting

Descriptions of place and "set" do a lot for the mood of the scene and can definitely help create a world that readers enjoy visiting. Setting is a key for vicarious experience. So I'm not saying that you should eradicate descriptions of place by any means. (Nor am I saying that all information and characterization are unnecessary.)

But if you're using a full page to describe the British countryside in your historical novel or if you're cataloguing booths at the marketplace in your high fantasy novel, chances

can't recommend more becoming a member of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators. This is truly where my career began and grew.

SCBWI: www.SCBWI.org

<http://www.scbwi.org/online-resources/frequently-asked-questions/>

Download their members-only guide to publishing called **The Essential Guide to Publishing for Children**. It has expanded info plus way more for writers, as well as a yearly updated contact info guide for publishers. That resource is worth the price of the yearly membership. <https://www.scbwi.org/online-resources/the-book>

I'm sending the best of luck out to you!

Eliza Wheeler is the illustrator-author of *Home in the Woods* (2019) and the New York Times bestselling picture book *Miss*



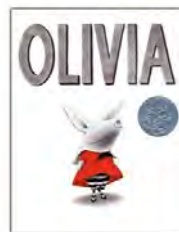
Maple's Seeds (2017). She was a recipient of the Sendak Fellowship Award, and has illustrated numerous books for children, including Newbery Honor book *Doll Bones* (2015) by Holly Black, *When I'm With You* (2022) and *Wherever You Go* (2019) by Pat Zietlow Miller, and *John Ronald's Dragons: Story of J.R.R. Tolkien* (2017) by Caroline McAlister. She lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Connect with Eliza online @Wheelerstudio on Substack and Instagram, visit her work at WheelerStudio.com, and subscribe to her online newsletter, Creativi-Tea Time, a two-minute, twice a month digital break for artists, writers, & makers to chew on a piece of creative process.

"This is Olivia. She is good at lots of things."
—Opening line from *Olivia* by Ian Falconer

Ian Falconer, creator of Olivia, the young pig with a vivid imagination, passed away at the age of 63 this past March.

The spry and precocious character brought Falconer international recognition as a children's book illustrator and author. *Olivia* (2000) was the first of eleven Olivia books written and illustrated by Falconer. *Olivia* was named a Caldecott Honor Book and spent 107 weeks on the New York Times children's book best-seller list.



are good I'd flag those passages in my edit of your work and ask if they're important to the current scene.

And yes, they need to be important to the current scene, not to some scene 50 pages from now. Later importance does not justify the inclusion of a long descriptive passage.

Clumsy Interiority

How can interiority be shown? The most common method you'll see promoted is through physical signifiers. Don't tell us someone is sad; show us how they hang their head, cry, mope, etc.

It's well-meaning advice, but it leads right into cliché land. Because how many external signifiers are there for emotions anyway? Writers tend to fall back on the same old stuff in first drafts at least: hearts racing, palms sweating, knees wobbling, jaws hanging open, brows furrowed, etc. That kind of showing is going to get you in trouble because it will feel like a poorly acted film.

So what should you do? Well, if you want to go with physical signifiers, try to make them relatively idiosyncratic.

Ready! Set! Write!

Tom and Kyle's Great Escape

By Pat Severin

"The photo prompt ignited the idea of two older boys, age 17, running away from an intolerable foster home where the homeowner has done unmentionable things to them both and, since they're going to age-out of the foster system, decide to make a run for it."

"This is crazy, Tom! We're gonna get caught and then what? We should never have taken off like this!"

"Kyle, man, you're always such a downer. Let's get real. That foster 'home,' and I use the term loosely, was the worst one yet! Are you forgetting the beatings . . . unless the pervert wanted something else? And meals? Or the lack of them? Listen, we're going to age out of the system in another year, and I don't believe there isn't something out there for us that's better than that horrible place! You and I have been stuck for a long time, and the system is a joke! We've never been anywhere where the people were taking in kids out of the goodness of their heart. We're their meal ticket! You know I'm right!"

"I do, Tom, but I'm scared. When the person whose boat we stole checks out the marina and sees his boat is gone—"



"Listen, Kyle, that's why we took a boat at night. By the time the guy realizes his boat is gone, we'll be twenty-five miles away! Besides we'll have gotten to Kramer's Landing by then. Don't worry, I've got it all figured out. "

"How did you do all that?"

"Every time the pervert was sleeping, I'd grab his phone and text my uncle. He *actually* believed me and said if I could get to Kramer's Landing and go to his work, he'd help us. It's only twenty-five miles from Farrow's. All we have to do is make it there before the weekend and he'll help us. Since he works in the boat yard near the Kramer's Landing marina, he said as soon as we get there, he'll see us right away. He'll help us moor the

But there are other methods:

Sometimes you can show interiority via a flashback or via speculation about the future. Flashes to the past and future can remain vivid (showing) as they relay a character's state of mind.

But sometimes interiority just needs to be explained. It's okay to tell it, especially when it's complex.

Still, I do see people go overboard with all of these more advanced methods of conveying interiority: excessive flashbacks, overly-long imaginative riffs, and, ironically, too much telling the reader about a character's internal processes.

(For more on interiority, by the way, check out these two articles: [Lessons from "Cat Person"](#) & [Juggle External Action and Interiority.](#))

The Bottom Line

Showing is an incredibly important skill for a writer to cultivate. In fact, "show, don't tell" is probably the most important part of "good writing." But if you're telling a story, the

boat and then cover it up with one of the marina's tarps. Don't worry."

"But what about money, Tom? Mr. Farrow never gave us any money."

"He had to give us a couple of bucks when he sent us to the store. I just bought cheap and only gave him part of the change. It's taken me a long time, but I've got some money—not enough for a vacation in Bermuda, but I've got enough. Trust me, Kyle. You've got to trust me. "

"I've got a little, too, Tom. I wasn't going to say anything, but I've got a little. I stole some change here and there when I knew Mr. F wouldn't miss it."

"Good, Kyle. Good for you! We're gonna be OK. I know it!

Not as Planned By Dan Roth

"The photo reminded me of early spring sailing, always a shake-out cruise. Given the demeanor of the two in the picture, things didn't look like they were going all that well."

Jack and Ann sat motionless at the stern of the boat, looking more like strangers at a bus stop than friends. As Jack's twenty-six foot sailboat glided quietly past the leeward side of Gallou Island, a brisk wind snapped him out of his worried trance.

Now how about you take over the boat. I want to go over the plan."

Pat has been an SCBWI member since 2018 and is a frequent contributor to *Creative Tap*. Pat says her writing journey has taken her exactly where she's wanted to go, which is having her Christian poems published. She is featured regularly in [*Agape Review*](#), [*the Clay Jar Review*](#), [*Pure Heart Stories*](#), and [*the Southern Arizona Press*](#). Check out Pat's work in [*Chicken Soup for the Soul: Lessons Learned from My Dog*](#) (2023) by Amy Newmark and [*I Chose You: Imperfectly Perfect Rescue Dogs and Their Humans*](#) (2022) by Carmen Leal.

"Concentrate, concentrate," Jack mumbled to himself under his breath. "Get Ann to the hospital; go back for Max."

"What are you mumbling? I can't feel my fingers," Ann said.

"I can't believe we left Max on the island." Jack paused, "I guess we didn't have any choice."

"It wasn't my fault!"

"You're right. It was my fault. I shouldn't have listened to you in the first place. I told you it

imperatives of storytelling trump the imperatives of good writing every time.

Or, put another way, writing must serve the storytelling, and the problem with "show, don't tell" is that it sometimes rips readers away from the story.

So take a look at your writing to see whether it may succumb to any of these hyperdetailing pitfalls. If it does, you've got a pretty good problem on your hands. All you need to do is cut.

Tim Storm is an author, editor, and writing coach residing in Madison, Wisconsin. Tim runs on-line critique groups and offers one-on-one coaching, on-line classes, or craft writing opportunities. He believes writers learn by examining exemplary writing, Tim guides writers through an examination of story and how the aspects of storytelling affect an audience emotionally and keep them engaged. If looking for sound, hard-hitting MFA-level craft advice and full engagement with your writing, check out Tim's site: [Storm Writing School](#).

was stupid to go out this early in the season.”

Ann whimpered as her eyes teared up: “Jack, stop!”

The wind suddenly increased, becoming a broad reach, causing the boat to heel significantly. “Ann, I need you to sit on the high side. That was a terrible fall you had. It happened so fast. I’m sorry.”

Ann sat with her head down. A dirty T-shirt covered her broken wrist as blood continued to ooze onto her parka. Tears poured from her eyes: “It’s throbbing so bad.”

“Hang on. With this wind, we’ll make good time. Poor Max, I should’ve brought a leash. He’s never run away before—I need to get binoculars from the cabin. Keep the boat on its present course. I’ll be right back.”

“What do I do? I never have —”

“Just stay on 030 heading. You will be fine.”

Ann reluctantly took the wheel as Jack pointed out a land mass in the distance. Going below, he looked around the cluttered cabin. Cardboard boxes used for winter storage littered the cabin floor. He shook his head and muttered to himself. “I should never have gone out like this. What was I thinking?”

He spotted his binoculars on the front berth, and as he reached for them, a strong gust of wind slammed the boat, causing it to round up uncontrollably into the wind.

“Help! Come up here. What do I do?” yelled Ann.

Jack turned quickly and darted toward the cabin door. The last thing he saw was Ann’s terror-filled eyes as he tripped and fell headfirst onto the navigation table, slashing his head and falling unconscious to the cabin floor.

Ann screamed: “Jack! Jack!” The severe heel of the boat tossed her into the winch,

wrist first. She fell to the deck, frozen in pain, surrounded by the roar of the howling wind ripping the sails apart as the boat heaved helplessly in the waves.

Max stood on the shore staring at the boat in the distance, oblivious to the sounds of wolves howling in the woods.

Dan has been writing stories for his five grandchildren for as long as he has been reading to them. The stories were Christmas presents, and each child was the main character in their book. Now that the youngest is beyond a children’s picture book age, Dan has found much joy in attempting to write to a broader audience. Armed with an art background and love of storytelling, Dan’s goal is to become a published children’s book writer/illustrator. In addition to fine art oil painting, Dan loves backyard art welding.

Ready! Set! Write! Fall Challenge

Looking for a quick, creative challenge to flex that writing muscle? Ready! Set! Write! Challenge is your answer. The goal: create a scene up to 500 words based on the visual prompt.

And to help you avoid a scene that goes nowhere, grab some advice from author and writing coach Lisa Cron.

Lisa Cron in her best-selling book *Story Genius* says any neutral “What If” prompt can be turned into a compelling story. How? When an idea strikes, ask yourself, “What’s the point?”

By only focusing on the external “what if” situation, you miss the protagonist’s internal conflict. And we all know the protagonist’s internal conflict is what it’s all about—it’s the heart of the story.

Ask yourself “What’s the point?” which helps identify the protagonist’s internal conflict in the situation.

How to express the point of the story?
Express the point of the story in a full sentence:

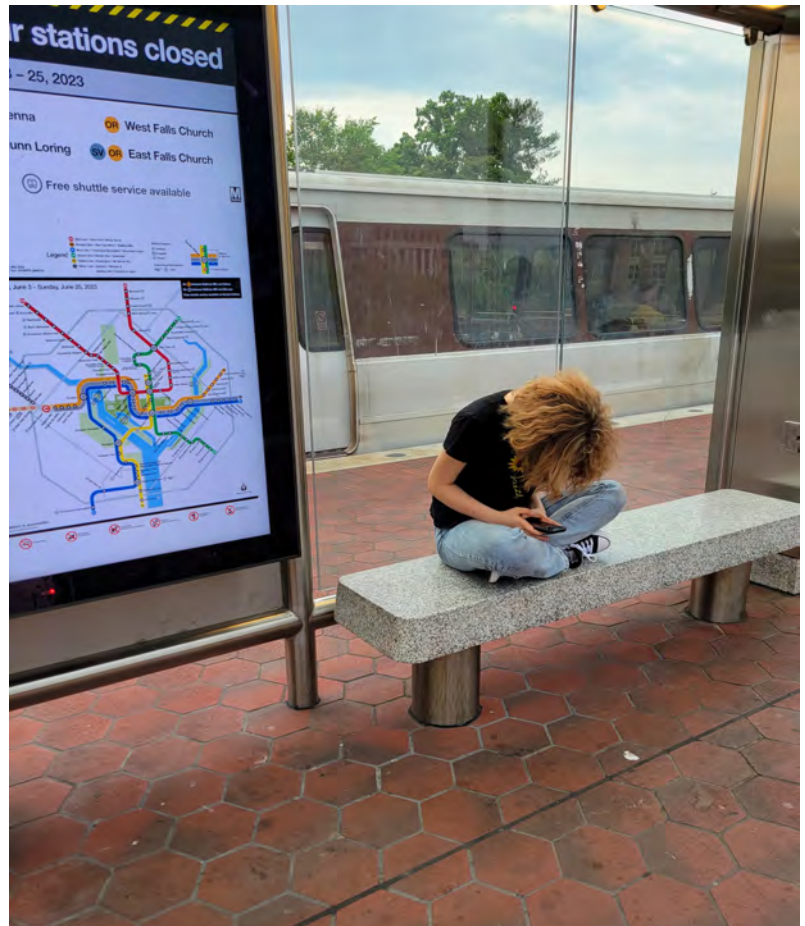
- **Stand up for what is right even when the world is against you.** (Think *Harry Potter & the Order of the Phoenix* by J.K. Rowling. Harry’s internal conflict? Continue fighting against Voldemort and risk alienation and imprisonment or stay silent?)
- **Our lives are enriched by accepting others’ differences.** (Think *Wonder* by R.J. Palacio. August’s internal conflict? To try to fit in at school and overcome his sense of being an outsider or remain a recluse and depend solely on his family for support and friendship.)

Once you have your protagonist, identify their internal conflict, and answer the question “What’s the point?”, it’s time to Ready! Set! Write!

Ready to start?

Look at the character in the photo prompt. Ask yourself “What’s the situation my protagonist is in? What is the internal struggle? What point do I want my story to make?” And remember, a scene is a combination of internal and external challenges and your character reacting to the challenges.

- Send scene submission to Sandra Nichols at nichols.five@hotmail.com
- Type “Ready! Set! Write!” in the subject line



- Include submission as Microsoft Word attachment
- Submission text must be between 250-500 words plus the title
- Include your name and a three-sentence bio describing your writing journey, writing accomplishments, and goals (this is in addition to submission text)
- Write one sentence describing how the photo prompt inspired the scene
- Submit by Sunday, October 1, 2023

NOTE: Authors retain all rights to their writing
All submissions will appear in the fall newsletter coming out around mid-April.

Illustrators' Gallery

What's missing from this page?

YOUR creativity!

Let's pepper the winter Creative Tap newsletter with your inspirations and show-off our SCBWI-WI talent.

How to do this? Have fun, play around with new ideas and mediums, let your imagination lead you.

Then let Creative Tap provide the outlet for sharing with fellow members.

Think of this as your creative incubator.

All you need to do is submit any doodles, creative designs, illustrations following submission guidelines.

Psst! If you need some inspiration for doodling, consider the upcoming newsletter's winter theme:

Simplify, slow down, be kind. And don't forget to have art in your life – music, paintings, theater, dance, and sunsets.
—Eric Carle

Submission Guidelines:

- Send a JPEG of your artwork to Sandra Nichols at nichols.five@hotmail.com
- Type "Illustrators' Gallery" in the subject line.
- Include your name, description of your artwork (including medium).
- Include a one- to three-sentence bio describing your artist journey, accomplishments, or goals.
- Provide your illustrator website if you have one.
- Submit by Sunday, October 1, 2023

NOTE: Artists retain all rights to their artwork. All submissions are included in the newsletter.

"I think Steve King said 'read, read, read and write, write, write.' I would also add 'keep your butt in that chair.'"

—Karen Marie Moning, author of *Feversong*

Publications Promotions

Spring Releases

Books released between January 1 and June 30



Fall Releases

Books released between July 1 to December 31



Joyce Uglow

jpuglow@gmail.com

Nicole Salter Braun

salterbraun@gmail.com

The Publications Promotions team promotes SCBWI Wisconsin's members' releases for Published and Listed (PAL) and independently-published books with ISBN.

Watch for seasonal flyers, virtual meetings held on Zoom, and scheduled in-person events.

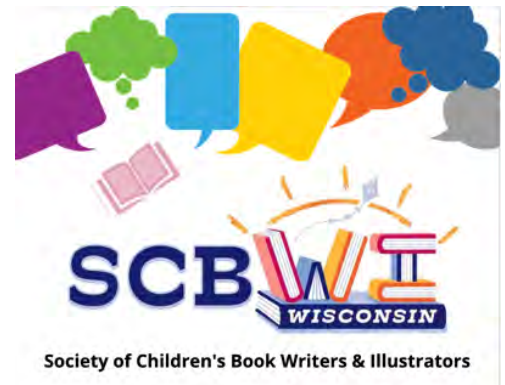
Fall 2023 Book Release Celebrations on Zoom!

Save the Dates:

August 29, September 26, October 24, and November 28

Join in these virtual celebrations, the perfect way to meet & mingle with fellow creatives and hear about members' new books. Meetings typically occur on the last Tuesday of most months from 6:30 to 8:00 p.m. (CST). **Watch the Listserv for the Zoom registration links. All are welcome!**

Want your book displayed? SCBWI Wisconsin will have a booth at the Green & Healthy Schools Conference on August 2 at the Milwaukee County Zoo where we will display members' published books while spreading the word about SCBWI. Also, we will likely host a booth at the Wisconsin Library Association's 2023 WLA Conference in October. If you'd like your book(s) displayed, please contact Joyce Uglow at jpuglow@gmail.com for the mailing address.



Call for Spring 2024 Book Release Flyer

Do you have a PAL and/or independently published children’s book scheduled for release between January 1 and June 30 of 2024? We’d love to get the word out!

Please send an email to Joyce and Nicole with the following information before October 10, 2023.

- Title
- Author
- Illustrator (if appropriate)
- Target/format (picture book, chapter/early book, MG, or YA)
- Publisher
- Release date
- ISBN (a single ISBN—provide the format ISBN number you prefer)
- One- or two-sentence catalog description (please keep it brief—think pitch lines)
- jpeg file of your book cover



Joyce Uglow

Happy writing and illustrating from the SCBWI Wisconsin Publications Promotions co-chairs, Joyce Uglow jpuglow@gmail.com and Nicole Salter Braun salterbraun@gmail.com

Upcoming Events, Retreats and Workshops

Picture Book Dummy Building: How to Balance Notions Around Art and Text

What makes a picture book sing? Think pacing and movement created through the artful relationship of visual and text. One way to improve your picture books is by creating a picture book dummy.

Sara Sargent—Senior Executive Editor at Random House Books for Young Readers—will lead a program exploring how to create a picture book dummy.



Sara Sargent

When: Saturday Sept 16

Where: Pewaukee Public Library; 210 Main Street

Registration info coming soon!

“Recharge Your Creative Battery 2023 with James Mihaley” a Write On, Door County Writing Retreat

When: July 31, 2023 9:00 a.m.—August 01, 2023 4:00 p.m.

Where: Write On, Door County 4210 Juddville Rd. Fish Creek, WI 54212

Cost \$275.00

Categories Adult Classes & Workshops

Topics All-Genre Writing

Ready to pursue your writing dreams? Or is it time to recharge the creative juices? Join James Mihaley —author of the Middle Grade novel *You Can't Have My Planet But Take My Brother, Please* (2012) for two fun-filled days of indulging your desire to put words on paper. Participants will be given dynamic writing prompts from the teaching artist to stimulate your imagination. By the end of the retreat, you'll be astounded by what you've produced! All impediments will be removed.

Sessions will take place throughout Write On's 59-acre property. Participants will find inspiration in the meadow classroom, along the hiking trails, in the old orchards and hardwood forests, and in Norbert Blei's Coop. Regardless of what writing genre you're drawn to, there's a place for you in this retreat.

Class meets in person Monday, July 31, and Tuesday, August 1, 9 am – 4 pm.

Class size: Minimum 6. Maximum 14.

Registration link:
[Recharge Your Creative](#)

[Battery 2023 with James Mihaley - Write On Door County](#)

Washington Island Literary Festival 2023: Space for the Unexpected

When: September 21, 2023 12:00 p.m.—September 23, 2023 5:30 p.m.
Location

Where: Trueblood Performing Arts Center
870 Main Rd Washington Island, WI 54246

Categories Adult Classes & Workshops for all writing genres

Join award-winning and acclaimed writers to explore the unexpected. Participants are invited to take part in all three days or may choose to attend just one or two days.

Author's presenting at this year's festival include:

Amy Quan Barry, fiction, *When I'm Gone, Look for Me in the East* (2022)

Brenda Cárdenas, poetry, *Trace* (2023)

Lan Samantha Chang, fiction, *The Family Chao* (2023)

Meghan O'Gieblyn, nonfiction, *God, Human, Animal, Machine: Technology, Metaphor, and*

the Search for Meaning (2022)
Shelby van Pelt, fiction, *Remarkably Bright Creatures* (2022)

Thursday, September 21:
Free community creative lab

Friday, September 22:
Writing workshops for writers

Saturday, September 23:
Author talks for readers & writers

Registration link:
[Washington Island Literary Festival](#)

Wisconsin Book Festival

When: October 19–22, 2023

Where: Madison area

A fall celebration of writers and books.

The Wisconsin Book Festival, presented by Madison Public Library in partnership with Madison Public Library Foundation, which hosts free, public author events throughout the Madison area throughout the year, celebrates writers and books in a four day festival.

The festival is committed to presenting a mix of in-person and virtual events

that are free and open to the public.

Keep an eye on their website for schedule/Festival updates.

Information link: [Wisconsin Book Festival](https://www.wisconsinbookfestival.org/)

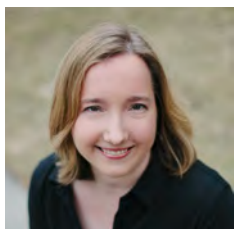
Looking Ahead

Keep an eye on your SCBWI notices for news of the **2024 SCBWI Winter Conference**. The conference happens in early February each year. This gives you time to plan!

Market Facts Trivia Answer

The US accounts for 22.8% of the total global children's book revenue.

Illustration from *WHEN I'M WITH YOU* (Little, Brown BFYR) by Pat Zietlow Miller and Eliza Wheeler



Newsletter Designer Erica Dimka has been a writer for as long as she can remember, from short stories for her dad to news articles as a former journalist and copy editor. Now, in addition to teaching English, Erica loves writing YA fantasy and science fiction, as well as traveling and hiking. A member of SCBWI since 2017, she enjoys connecting with other authors.