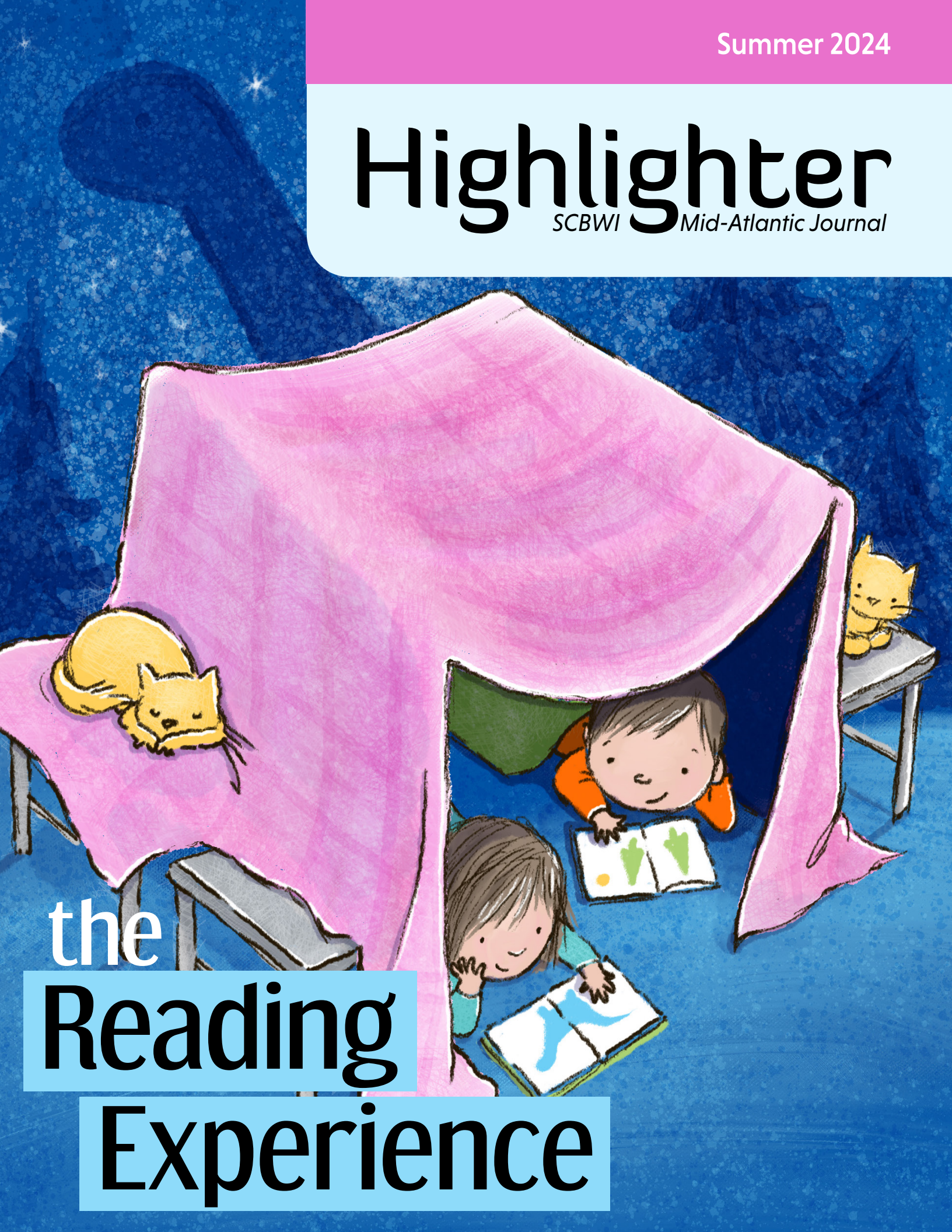


Summer 2024

Highlighter

SCBWI Mid-Atlantic Journal



the

Reading

Experience

SCBWI Mid-Atlantic

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Summer 2024 // The Reading Experience

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The *Highlighter* is a quarterly journal published by the Mid-Atlantic Region (DC/Virginia) of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI).

For more information on our region, see <https://www.scbwi.org/regions/midatlantic>

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Long Summer Days

We hope your summer is off to a great start.

Thanks to the stalwart volunteer *Highlighter* staff and contributors, we have yet another excellent issue. Articles include a profile of illustrator Lisa Connors and a look at murderous revision by author Dionna Mann, as well as teacher and librarian perspectives on thinking about and using books for young readers.

Summer already has been busy with June online socials for illustrators (hosted by Cynthia Cliff) and indie and self-published writers (hosted by Joyana Peters), as well as the monthly Central VA Write-In (hosted by Chris Bailey). (Shhh—you don't have to be in Central VA to join in!) We also were delighted to participate in the Hollins Biennial Children's Literature Symposium, where we held an in-person social for SCBWI Mid-Atlantic members in the Roanoke area and a separate virtual Write-in/Draw-in for symposium participants.

We have several events scheduled in the months ahead. Registration is open for the July 9 webinar "Transforming True Events into Picture Books" with

Nancy Churnin and the August 21 webinar "I've Got the Power: How to Use Character Agency to Make Your Story Satisfying" with freelance editor Rachael Stein. To find out more about these and other upcoming events, please visit our landing page: <https://www.scbwi.org/regions/midatlantic/events>

Please save the date for our fall workshops, still being planned. Two-hour-long in-person workshops will be held in Reston on October 26 and in Charlottesville on November 9. The workshops in Charlottesville also will be available virtually.

Here's to a summer of warm weather, memory-making vacations, and long days to write, illustrate, and translate. And fireflies.

Warmest regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Erin".

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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Val".

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Dionna L. Mann



Murder on the Rewrite Front

by Dionna L. Mann

Being a rewriter more than anything else, I'd become used to applying the advice to "kill your darlings." In fact, while writing *MAMA'S CHICKEN AND DUMPLINGS*, my debut novel for young readers, "delete," "cut," and "trash" had been my chairside friends for ten—count them—TEN years. My attempts to get this story right, one revised page atop another, could likely reach the Space Station! So as you can imagine, I was in no mood to murder any more darlings once Margaret Ferguson Books offered to acquire it. And yet, there I was, a contract before me with the caveat: Are you willing to revise?

Of course I'm willing to revise! I mean, only a delusional writer would believe her words were perfection on paper after ten years of writing, rewriting, and revising ... right? Honestly, though, I wanted to reply, "NO WAY am I killing any more darlings! This is an as-is manuscript!" Instead I replied, "OF COURSE I'm willing to revise!" After all, it was revise or let lie in my computer FOREVER.

And so the Revision Guillotine stood above my manuscript yet again. And the first beloved darling on the chopping block was the story's setting of 1941 on the South Side of Chicago (after my main character's move from Harlem).

I had chosen the South Side because it is where I was born and where my parents grew up, and my opening scene is based on a story my mother shared with me that occurred on the South Side. It was a lot of fun to research the South Side in its prime—a thriving African American community despite segregation in the city as a whole. There was 47th Street with its elegant shops, music scene, and the Regal Theater. Streetcars ran through it. Men sang on the corner. Train porters, businessmen and women, owners of insurance companies and banks, lawyers, doctors, dentists—all African Americans looking after those in their community—were hard at work, living their lives, and raising their families the best they could despite the times. By deleting the setting, I had to delete many of my favorite passages, ones I had fallen in love with.

dionnalmann.com

Favorite resources

- *DESCRIPTION* by Monica Wood, a masterful book that helps you use description to move your story forward
- *WOE IS I* by Patricia T. O'Connor because every writer needs a good laugh while reading a grammarphobe's guide to better English in plain English
- Kidlit411 for links to great articles online, giveaways, and more
- PW Children's Bookshelf, a weekly newsletter for keeping up with industry news, and so much more



Meet a Writer

(continued)

Dionna L. Mann



For example, the following comes from a scene that met its Darling Demise:

People are gathering on the street corner in front of Woolworth's, talking. People are going in and out of Mattie's Hat Shop, strutting. People are piling inside Palm Tavern, eating. People are sitting in Peacock's Beauty Shop, styling. People are walking in and out of South Center Department Store, shopping. All of 47th Street is jammed-up with people with skin as light as white to skin as dark as night. It's a people symphony of sound from the lowest to the highest C, three octaves wide.

Sniff sniff ... Rest in peace 1941 Chicago—see you in another manuscript.

Though murdering my setting caused me a great deal of mourning, I was able to keep its essence alive by replacing it with another thriving African American community, albeit a smaller, Southern one located within Charlottesville, Virginia, called Vinegar Hill. The year 1941 became 1935, but only because I wanted to keep a scene involving a kid “flipping” a streetcar (riding on the back by hanging onto the outside rails), and Charlottesville’s streetcar service stopped in 1935.

And you know what? Despite the labor pain of having to research this new cityscape of the past, I came to love my new setting even more than my old one! For one, I loved how quaint the setting allowed me to make the neighborhood. I loved the small-town Southern city feel, and felt it absolutely served the storyline of a ten-year-old on a quest to find her mama a husband with a Man-for-Mama plan in one hand and a jar of chicken and dumplings in the other. And by not

having my main character move from one city to another, her conflict with her NOT-friend Gwen could be moved up in the plotline.

True, there was a domino plot effect with my setting change. It required the reconstruction of nearly the entire novel! Truth be told, the work it took to get it done made me do a lot of pulling at my afro and yelling at my computer. But now that my rewrite of my rewrite of my rewrite times more rewrites has finally been written, I am glad I listened to the sage advice to kill my darlings. Because what remains, I hope, is a story rich with emotional depth, a plot that is logical, and a main character that kids will love.

Isn't that what being a writer, er, rewriter is all about? We murder our darlings for the sake of the story. //H//

writer and purchased a vocabulary charged with ornament, wherewith to attract the fair one as with a basket of jewels. Well, in this extraneous, professional, purchased ornamentation, you have something which Style *is not*: and if you here require a practical rule of me, I will present you with this: “Whenever you feel an impulse to perpetrate a piece of exceptionally fine writing, obey it—whole-heartedly—and delete it before sending your manuscript to press. *Murder your darlings.*”

But let me plead further that you have not been left altogether without clue to the secret of what Style *is*. That you must master the secret for

Digital Image: ON THE ART OF WRITING by Sir Arthur Thomas Quiller-Couch, p. 281. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1916, accessed May 5, 2024, Library of Congress.

[Return to Contents](#)

MEET AN ILLUSTRATOR

Lisa Connors



Self-portrait



lisaconnors.wordpress.com
connors.halcyon@gmail.com

Favorite tool

I work traditionally with watercolor. My favorite tools are good quality paper like Arches and Silver Black Velvet brushes.

What inspires me

The outdoors, ecology, children's curiosity, and travel

Design influences

Beatrix Potter, Arnold Lobel, Jerry Pinkney, Matt Patterson, Lita Judge

Favorite things to illustrate

Wildlife, especially insects and plants

What I'd like to explore in the coming year

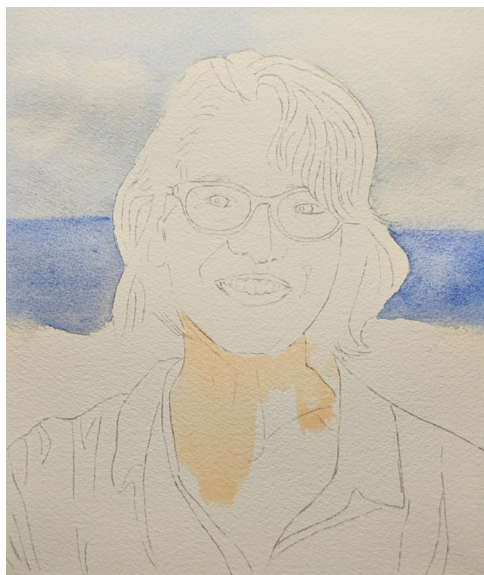
I want to get better at painting human characters and whole spread scenes. I'm also interested in learning how to use Procreate.
//H//

Meet an Illustrator (continued)



Lisa Connors

A peek into the process



Elementary Teachers' Reading Wish List

by Alicia Meyers

The [Manuscript Wish List](#)[®], also known as MSWL, is an online service that allows agents and editors to post what they wish they could read from writers in the querying process. You can find many agent and editor wish lists on social media with a simple search of the hashtag #MSWL.

But agents and editors aren't the only ones with curated wish lists. Elementary school teachers have their own look-fors and must-haves, which can take form as Amazon or Scholastic Book Fair wish lists, Donors Choose grant requests, or even a list of the books they'd spend a pretty penny on for their own personal collection. Teachers undeniably are a huge reason books are successful.

In the classroom, picture books can teach, reinforce, explain, model, and represent. They can help us connect and disconnect. Some books specialize in helping us teach standards, while others give the brain a break, bringing pure joy to the reader.

The elementary classroom bursts at the seams with picture books. Teachers grab them for whole-group and small-group read-aloud time, independent reading time, free time, partner reading, centers/workstations blocks, and even brain breaks.

If we want to teach our students how to do something—there's a picture book for that.

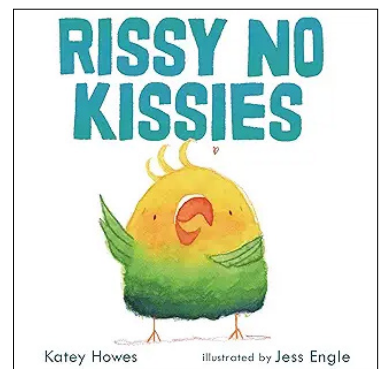
If we want to reinforce content—there's a picture book for that.

If we want to laugh, cry, remember, *feel*—there's a picture book for that.

In honor of the late author Katey Howes and the inspiration she was to so many, let's take a peek inside

of the picture book *RISSY NO KISSIES*, illustrated by Jess Engle (Carolrhoda Books, 2021). This book is jam-packed with teacher look-fors and read-aloud possibilities.

So what makes a picture book a must-have for the elementary classroom teacher?



RISSY NO KISSIES by Katey Howes (author) and Jess Engle (illustrator)

Here's a wish list of what we hope to find.

The Elementary Teacher Wish List

1. Context clues

Words and pictures that help readers find the meaning of new vocabulary words

In early readers and chapter books, words are less rigorous, but in picture books an adult is typically reading, and the words are more complex.

We'd love to see at least one interesting/new word on every spread to introduce as a vocabulary component. These words must be surrounded by text/illustrations that serve as clues and convey their meaning. A teacher may say, "Let's re-read this paragraph. What do you think the word ___ means?" or "What words/pictures helped you understand the meaning?"

For an example from *RISSY NO KISSIES*, many students may not know what "chirruped" means when they hear the following: "'NO KISSIES!' Rissy chirruped with a most emphatic squeak." But seeing "NO KISSIES!" in all capital letters, hearing the rest of the sentence

Elementary Teachers' Reading Wish List

(continued)

(" ... with a most emphatic squeak"), and seeing an illustration of Rissy's beak wide and wings flapping, a child can uncover that the word "chirruped" is a form of tweeting, squeaking, or making a high-pitched sound.

Do you have at least four new words with context clues spread throughout your book?

Things to try: Add antonyms, synonyms, examples, and details to describe these special words. Use bold lettering or different fonts if you want to highlight the words for readers. Create a glossary that explains the meaning of chosen words.

2. Doors to Discourse

Opportunities before, during, and after reading the story that can encourage discussion and student discourse (*defined [here](#)*)

Teaching has shifted over the years to include ample time for student discourse and student-led conversations.

We'd love to see pages/spreads that promote discussion between students. This includes natural stopping points to ask open-ended questions, illustrative moments that students can use to infer, and repetitive phrases that encourage participation.

In RISSY NO KISSIES, page after page provides discussion topics, such as "What struggle does Rissy have in this story?", "What would you do if you were Rissy?", or "How does this picture tell you how Rissy feels?"

Do you have natural stopping points and open-ended moments that can lead to thoughtful discussions?

Do you have moments that students will want to talk about?

Things to try: Pretend you are a teacher and mark up five natural stopping points or sentences in your story that can offer opportunities for discussion.

3. Mind-Bending Back Matter

Blurbs, fun facts, and activities that can be read or used to learn more after reading

Every student has unique interests, and after reading, many kids will want to know more! Enticing back matter and resources at the end of a book help teachers answer student questions and guide additional learning.

We'd love to see child-friendly, interesting back matter with visuals, fun facts, and frequently asked questions. This especially helps when the teacher has limited knowledge about a subject.

In RISSY NO KISSIES, in addition to child-friendly definitions and key practices, there's a section that provides specific sentences, as well as questions to ask others. This gives kids a practical way to begin sharing and stating their boundaries.

Do you have a resource, recipe, personal story, or extra information to use as back matter for your book?

Is it written in a way that the teacher can learn with the students?

Things to try: Add additional sections specifically for teachers. Downloadable resources, writing prompts, project ideas, and letters to send home to learn more can make our planning time significantly shorter!

Elementary Teachers' Reading Wish List

(continued)

4. Reader Representation

Diverse characters, themes, and conflicts that readers can identify with

Attention is captured the minute children can see themselves in a book, identify with a character, or notice a shared experience. Kids love to share something similar that happened to them during reading!

We'd love to see diverse characters, themes, conflicts, and personal stories that only you can tell!

In *RISSY NO KISSIES*, students with sensory processing disorder or any child with a special way they like to give and receive love will feel represented in this story.

Does your book give the opportunity for students to see themselves within the story?

Things to try: Make a list of things kids might want to share during your story, as well as characters that offer diverse representation, whether it be race, religion, location, or disability representation.

5. Support for Standards

Targeting learning goals and school standards

Teachers must stay close to curriculum-based learning, district- and school-mandated units, or common core standards. A lot of districts preselect books used during units of study, but teachers are always looking for supplemental resources to add to their instruction.

We'd love to see books that go with our units of study in a variety of subjects. For example, books that support a literacy unit on perseverance, advocacy, or community helpers and careers. Some units are easier to find great books for than others.

RISSY NO KISSIES could be used for a plethora of standards, such as teaching text features through the use of bold print and capital letters in the refrain "NO KISSIES!", how to read when you see quotation marks, making predictions/inferences, or a range of social-emotional learning topics, starting with boundaries and consent.

Read through a range of [Common Core State Standards](#). Does your book support at least two standards?

Things to try: Research typical units for kindergarten, first, and second grade classrooms. What are they learning about? How can you support teachers through your book? Where do you see gaps in the market?

6. Unconventional, Inventive, and Imaginative

Characters and settings that stretch our imagination and view of the world

Kids love to read books that expand the universe, break rules, and are unpredictably imaginative. We'd love to see books that stretch the imagination, exist "out of the box," and ignite the question, "But what if?"

In *RISSY NO KISSIES*, everyone thinks Rissy should love kisses because she is a lovebird. But this story is unconventional and flips the expectation.

Does your book offer opportunities for imagination to soar/children to wonder?

Things to try: Make a list of all the possibilities for your character and the plot. Can the story be flipped? Told from another point of view? The setting moved to somewhere unexpected?

Elementary Teachers' Reading Wish List

(continued)

7. Powerful Page-Turns

Pages that leave readers in suspense or evoke strong emotions

You know it's a 10/10 read-aloud when, as the teacher, you are constantly reminding students to raise their hands and not blurt out commentary.

We'd love to see the last line on a spread elicit a reaction where the child needs to know what comes next. This can be in the form of an unfinished sentence that finishes on the following page, a strong emotion or behavior, or a question that needs an answer.

In *RISSY NO KISSIES*, the refrain "NO KISSIES!" provides opportunities to join in. It also brings curiosity to the reader, who will want to know how the recipient reacts to the phrase once the page is turned. Every page turn can be paused to allow students to predict how the next character might react to Rissy's boundaries.

Do you have a page or spread where a reader will be tempted to blurt something out? A personal story, a prediction, or a reaction?

Things to try: Read your story aloud. At the end of each spread/page turn, could you stop and ask a natural question? Does the next page hold an answer or resolution of some sort for the reader?

8. Illustrative Easter Eggs

Clues in the illustration or art notes that readers can identify or hunt for

Young readers love to find something in a book that looks like a hidden clue, or something no one

else noticed. A great example of this is Mo Willems's pigeon character hiding in the end pages of the *ELEPHANT AND PIGGIE* books.

We'd love to see a character or object inserted within the pages or end pages that gets kids excited.

For example, in *RISSY NO KISSIES*, the illustration of hearts filling the page when Rissy is being shown love, or the lack of them when she is stating her boundaries to others, is a fun discovery for kids.

Is there a character or object you can insert that can clue readers in or grab their attention?

Things to try: Add Easter eggs only when necessary for your plot. Otherwise, leave room for the illustrator to use their creativity and come up with something!

Just like agents and editors, teachers seeking books for their classroom have their own wish lists in mind. Every year is different. Every group of children is different. As the world grows and changes and kids cycle in and out of our classrooms, so do our needs for picture books.

As writers, even incorporating a few of these look-fors, as is done in *RISSY NO KISSIES*, could support teachers in the classroom. At the end of the day, our stories and illustrations hold the power to help teachers teach and children to want to understand.

I'm happy to report that teachers are always open for submissions of books to add to their classroom library. We and our growing readers are excited to read your work! //H//

What Librarians Consider in Their Story Time Picks

by Tami Traylor

As creators of picture books, we are deeply interested in the experiences of our readers. We consider kids and their parents when crafting our books, but the perspective of librarians, particularly those specializing in early literacy, offers valuable insights into what works, especially for story times.

I am fortunate to work in a vibrant, midsize library system in central Virginia. Four of the exceptional Chesterfield Public Library Early Learning Circle librarians—**Beka Castagna**, **Barbara Gumulak**, **Cat Miserandino**, and **Joy Doukas**—graciously answered five questions about the books they choose for their story times, which serve a broad age range of children, from babies to early elementary.

What criteria do you use to choose books for story time?

Beka: The number one thing I look for is book length. Many amazing picture books are simply too long for story time. I often gravitate toward short, engaging stories with interactive elements, like animal sounds, musicality, or call and response. If I choose a book featuring people, I always try to pick one with diverse characters.

Joy: I choose books based on how well they read, whether they fit my theme for the week, and how much I personally enjoy them. If I'm having fun, the kids are too. I loosely theme my story times by the month. For instance, this month's Pre-K Story Time theme is

"I choose books based on how well they read ... If I'm having fun, the kids are too."

Joy Doukas,
Librarian

"creepy crawly things," featuring both factual and fun books about different bugs. I seek books with a great story and a strong payoff with as few words as possible.

Cat: While classics have their place, I prefer using more current picture books. I frequently check the New Arrivals list in our collection. I consider the language, illustrations (favoring bright colors and clarity), read-aloud quality, interaction potential, and diversity. I also like to create unique themes, like "icky vegetables," which allows me to choose from a broad range of source material.

"I also like to create unique themes, like 'icky vegetables,' which allows me to choose from a broad range of source material."

Cat Miserandino,
Librarian

Barbara: My book selection process varies by age group. For all ages, I seek books I enjoy reading, with diverse characters and lots of audience engagement—motion, clapping, singing, noises, rhyming, and humor. My main criteria include developmental appropriateness, good quality illustrations, and suitable themes. For Baby Story Time, I choose books with minimal text and bright colors, like *ITSY BITSY SPIDER* by Iza Trapani. For toddlers, I look for engaging texts with movement elements, such as *WIGGLE* by Doreen Cronin. For pre-K, I choose more detailed stories that allow for conversation, like *BARK GEORGE* by Jules Feiffer. Pajama and Adaptive Story Times require flexibility and books suitable for mixed-age groups and varied engagement levels.

What Librarians Consider in Their Story Time Picks

(continued)

How do picture book illustrations enhance the early childhood literacy story time experience?

Beka: I weigh illustrations and story equally. Bright, large illustrations are crucial so all children can see the story unfold. If I like the illustrations, I then assess the story for story time suitability.

Joy: Typically, pictures guide children through the book. Beautiful, focused illustrations hold their attention. While detailed illustrations work well one-on-one, simpler, clearer images are better for group story times. However, books without illustrations that rely on strong graphic elements, like BJ Novak's *THE BOOK WITH NO PICTURES*, can fit into a story time.

Cat: Illustrations are essential in picture books. I think a lot about the illustrations when I choose the books that I use, and I prefer clear, colorful images that convey movement.

Barbara: Big, clear illustrations are very helpful. Bright colors and clear illustrations enhance the story time experience. Larger format books would be beneficial, as some smaller board books, despite their being ideal in other ways, are difficult to use in story time settings.

"Bright colors and clear illustrations enhance the story time experience."

Barbara Gumulak,
Librarian

How do you balance classic books with new releases and incorporate seasonal or holiday themes?

Beka: I select books based on story length and content, not whether they are classics or new

releases. While I use some timeless classics, I also enjoy exploring new releases. Seasonal themes are fun to incorporate, like fall-themed books or spring story times focused on rain, gardening, bugs, and farm animals.

Joy: Everything is new to the kids we have in story time. Classics endure for a reason, so I use them if they fit my objectives. I also celebrate cultural days and talk about these with the kids, like our Diwali Story Time last fall, where children shared their celebrations.

Cat: For certain themes, I use some classics but strive to use newer materials that are more relevant to kids today, making interactions during reading easier and more engaging.

Barbara: I aim for relevance, incorporating seasonal and holiday themes and social-emotional learning components while considering the diversity of our population. For example, *IT'S OKAY TO BE DIFFERENT* and *THE KINDNESS BOOK*, both by Todd Parr, are great for social-emotional learning. I look for new titles and strive to balance them with core classics.

Can you describe a memorable story time where a particular book significantly engaged the children?

Beka: WARNING: DO NOT OPEN THIS BOOK! by Adam Lehrhaupt is a favorite. It's an interactive book where the reader unleashes mischievous monkeys and toucans by opening the book and then has to help with a plan to catch all the animals so they don't escape.

"Along the way are signs reading 'Danger!' but the children shout, 'Keep going!'"

Beka Castagna,
Librarian

What Librarians Consider in Their Story Time Picks

(continued)

Along the way are signs reading "Danger!" but the children shout, "Keep going!" They love the suspense and feel like they are part of the story, helping to get the animals back into the book at the end.

Joy: Books with fun rhythms and surprises are always hits. Sandra Boynton's books, with their wonderful rhythms, appeal to both very young and older kids. Elise Gravel's DISGUSTING CRITTERS series blends facts with cute, surprising dialogue, making them enjoyable reads.

What are your top five picture books right now? Do you have topics you'd like to see?

Beka: My top five are REPEAT AFTER ME: BIG THINGS TO SAY EVERY DAY by Jazmyn Simon and Dulé Hill, GATHER ROUND by David Covell, THIS LITTLE KITTY IN THE GARDEN by Karen Obuhanych, SNAKES ON A TRAIN by Kathryn Dennis, and THE MONSTER MAC AND CHEESE PARTY by Todd Parr. I would love more picture books for two- to three-year-olds that cover social-emotional skills like self-acceptance, emotions, and cooperation.

Joy: It's tough to choose, but right now my top five are THE COLOR MONSTER by Anna Llenas, THERE'S A GHOST IN THIS HOUSE by Oliver Jeffers, I LIVED INSIDE A WHALE by Xin Li, THE MUSEUM OF NOTHING by Stephen Guaraccia, and NANA IN THE CITY by Lauren Castillo. I appreciate books relevant to both adults and kids, covering themes like friendship, kindness, acceptance, emotions, and love.

Barbara: I'm always looking for new titles and prefer books with bright colors and clear illustrations. I wish for more story time–suitable picture books with diverse characters and abilities. Good examples include EATING THE ALPHABET by Lois Ehlert and THE SNOWY DAY by Ezra Jack Keats. High-quality, developmentally appropriate books help children develop early literacy skills and a love of reading.

"I wish for more story time–suitable picture books with diverse characters and abilities."

Barbara Gumulak,
Librarian

• • •

What fantastic insight these four librarians provided. It certainly gives me ideas about the direction I'd like my next picture book projects to go in. How about you?

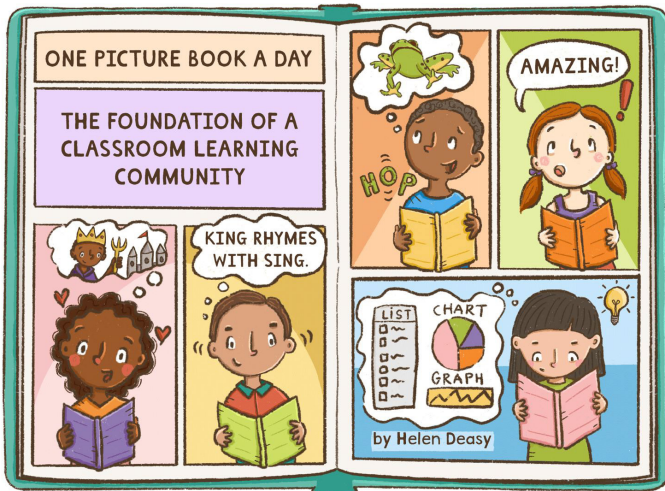
And for the board book authors out there, maybe there's a way to pitch a larger format board book that has all the right stuff: bright, colorful illustrations, minimal text that is engaging to read aloud, diverse characters, lots of movement, and most of all—fun!

We love our libraries and librarians. Our story time librarians are an essential part of early learning and literacy and are often a child's first introduction to reading in a group setting.

I hope this shared perspective from our amazing librarians provides insight into how important well-designed and thoughtfully written picture books are for story time listeners and helps you create books that both kids and librarians will love. //H//

Using Picture Books to Connect with Kids

Written and illustrated by Helen Deasy



For over twenty years, whether I was teaching pre-kindergarten or sixth grade, I read picture books aloud daily. Early on, I discovered that picture books were a powerful way to build connections and get students to interact with one another.

Reading with my class also met my goals as a teacher: (1) to build supportive communities and (2) to help individual students discover their strengths. If there were time for only one lesson each day, I'd choose to read a picture book to my class every time. I know my students felt the same way.

ONE BOOK A DAY

There are approximately 186 days in a school year. I read at least one book a day over my twenty-year career. That adds up to 3,720 picture books (a conservative number). The only people in the school who know books better than classroom teachers are school librarians. Before teaching any new subject, I visited the library. I always left with a big stack of picture books to base my lessons on and support student learning.

Reading picture books strategically can highlight an individual's strengths while allowing them to

contribute to a community. Day by day, children not only learn what they're good at and what they have to offer, but they also learn who to turn to when they need a different perspective. I've categorized some ways students interact with picture books and how their strengths contribute to the group's success.

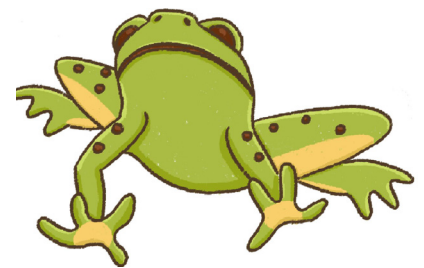
Pictures

Let's begin with readers who are captivated by the pictures in a book. They may initially be drawn in by a book's cover illustration, but it's the illustrations within that keep them hooked.

Their eyes rarely stray from the page because they don't want to miss a thing. They rely on the images to answer questions or retell the story. They'll flip through a book searching for the illustration that will defend their perspective or opinion.

These readers notice things in the pictures others may not and ask you to pause reading so they can linger on the details of the illustration. When given the opportunity, these readers share their unique insights with other students. They can influence others to look at the pictures more closely, to see things that will either change their perception of the story or cement it. Learning to see what's there is a skill that can be taught. And it's easiest to learn new skills when you are part of a safe and collaborative community.

Tips: These readers lose interest when book images aren't in harmony with the words. Unless irony is intended, readers who focus on pictures will notice when a character described by the author as moody is depicted as cheerful.



Using Picture Books to Connect with Kids

(continued)

These readers love finding hidden surprises in book illustrations. Just be sure the embellishments don't conflict with the words. Hand-drawn text is a good way to get these readers to pay attention to important words.

Words

Some readers focus on the author's every word. These readers are more likely to recall language and phrases from a picture book than details from the images. They're quick to recognize word patterns, rhymes, and repetition. They process their thoughts by talking about the story. They're often the first to call out answers to questions about story events that are not included in the pictures. They're tuned in to the story even when they don't seem to be looking at the pictures.



These readers enjoy listening to audiobook versions of a story while flipping through the physical book. They benefit from rereading parts of the book when they're confused. They'll raise their hand and ask you to go back if they missed or misheard something. Sometimes they repeat the language of the book or reword things to process information. When given the chance, they can help other students by filling in a timeline of events in the book. They can also be relied on to remember dialogue and narrative elements.

Tips: Like readers who focus on the pictures, readers who focus on the words notice if what they're hearing doesn't match what they're seeing. They trust in the words above the pictures. These readers are the reason it's important to accurately depict characters, settings, and events as described in the manuscript. If they aren't in harmony, they will notice. Alternatively, if the main character is an unreliable narrator of the story, these readers are excited to point out the discrepancies between the text and images.

Actions

Other readers pace, fidget, or doodle while listening because it helps them concentrate. They are always moving and will imitate actions or characters in a book. If a frog hops in the book, they hop around the room. They enjoy flipping through the book pages and acting out parts of the story, or drawing scenes from the story. They may trace an image before attempting to draw it on their own.

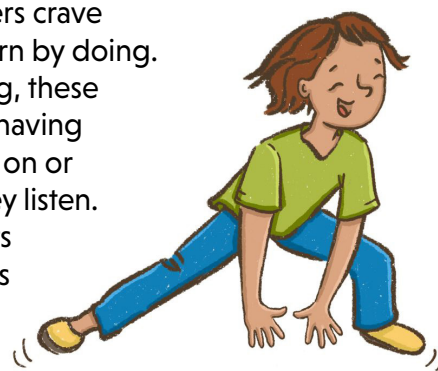
Because these readers crave experience, they learn by doing.

In a classroom setting, these students benefit by having something to sketch on or fiddle with while they listen.

They are the students who can show others what the characters did. Emotions,

actions, and key

story events are the story elements they pay the most attention to. They are the first to volunteer to perform parts of the story, and their enthusiasm encourages even the shyest students to participate.



Tips: Drawing expressive characters in motion and illustrating actions that match the story will capture these readers' interest. Graphic novels or digital books with audio are good options for readers who crave stimulation and interaction.

Analyzing

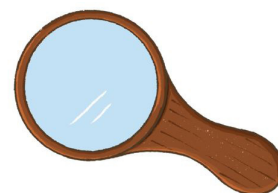
Many readers need time to think about the story.

They process the story by rereading it on their own.

They might make lists, take notes, or search dictionaries

and thesauri to learn new vocabulary from the book.

They often process and communicate their ideas through writing.



Using Picture Books to Connect with Kids

(continued)

These readers can't wait to get the picture book in their hands so they can study it independently. Given time, they will pick up on themes and information they'd miss otherwise. They benefit when reading is paused, especially after big story events or turning points. They enjoy working on group projects and writing their responses to books. They'll also show other students how to organize and categorize story information. They are adept at making comparisons to other stories the class has read.

Tips: These readers analyze illustrations, looking for details they can use in their writing and thinking. They love nonfiction books because they have text features like charts, diagrams, captions, glossaries, and other details. Illustrators can experiment with ways to incorporate text features in fiction illustrations. Including handwritten lettering or symbols is another way artists can capture these learners' interest.

Sharing

Finally, some readers can't wait to share what they're thinking. They make comments throughout the story. Readers who need immediate answers or validation can feel stuck. The teacher may have gotten to the end of the book, but these readers are still waiting to ask about the question they had on page four.



Pausing for questions and allowing students to turn and talk to one another every few pages is a strategy that works well. It's good to stop at crucial parts of the story to give students time to ask questions and chat about what might happen, what they'd do, and what the character's motivations are.

Sharing this way is also helpful to students who don't have the words to express themselves or aren't confident enough to say what they think. When this is done daily, students learn to trust the process and themselves. These readers are great at keeping other students invested in the book. Their exclamatory remarks—"No way!", "Uh-oh," and "Amazing!"—are cues for other students to pay attention. When given the opportunity, they can teach others how to share

their opinions and participate in healthy debate. These readers enjoy participating in book clubs.

Tips: These readers want to feel invested in the story. Use illustrations to fill in gaps that the text leaves unanswered. A sense of place and time is important to these readers because it grounds them in the story.

TWENTY YEARS OF BOOKS

Picture books helped me turn the job of teaching into the pursuit of knowledge and learning with others. The foundation was built on one picture book a day. How do you capture a young reader's attention? That's the challenge authors and illustrators face when they sit down to create a children's book. From a compelling cover to a clear conclusion, the list below is what over twenty years of teaching with picture books taught me about captivating a young audience. //H//

PICTURE BOOK DOS FOR AUTHORS AND ILLUSTRATORS

- Compelling cover/title
- Established time and place
- Relatable characters
- Inclusive characters
- Character consistency
- Characters in action
- Clear emotions
- Creative use of color and language
- Word and image harmony
- Balanced text and image layout
- Images that move the narrative forward
- Historical accuracy
- Hand-drawn lettering and symbols
- Text features like diagrams, charts, and graphs
- Table of contents, indices, and glossaries
- Images with captions
- Hidden images
- Illustrated how-tos
- Illustrated maps and guides
- Satisfying conclusion

Check a book's lexile reading level

["Look Up a Book's Lexile Measure"](#) by MetaMetrics, creators of the Lexile Framework for Reading

"If you want to know whether a specific book is within a student's Lexile range, you can use our Quick Search feature located on our Lexile® Find a Book tool. All you need is a book's author, title or ISBN number to find the Lexile text measure of that book. You can also use Find a Book to search for books based on text features. You can search for books based on Lexile codes, which provide information on the book's intended usage, or find books that are easy to decode or have a lot of patterning to help beginning readers."

Research kids' favorite books (and search for comp titles)

["Goodreads Choice Awards: The Best Books 2023"](#) and book search tools by Goodreads

"Tell us what titles or genres you've enjoyed in the past, and we'll give you surprisingly insightful recommendations."

Be inspired by reader favorites by age level

["Welcome To Story Hour: 100 Favorite Books For Young Readers"](#) by NPR

"As with all our summer polls, this one isn't a straight-up popularity contest ... Rather, it's a curated list built from your recommendations and picks from our expert panel of judges—a fantastic group of authors, librarians, publishers and all-around book nerds. And instead of a ranked list, it's grouped into categories that we hope will help you find just the right books for the kids in your life."

Uncover MG books recommendations for today's middle grade readers

["60 Refreshing and Relatable Books To Teach in Middle School"](#) by We Are Teachers

"Middle school students faced plenty of issues before the social, political, and economic upheavals of the past few years. At the same time, challenges to what students are allowed to read in school have made some of their experiences even more marginalized than they had been. With that in mind, we revised our middle school book recommendations to be even more inclusive, with an eye toward middle school books you may not already have in your library."

Learn about what teens like across genres

["Best Books for Teens"](#) by Read This Twice

"Discover the books that resonate with young adults today; this list captures the best novels and non-fiction for teens, reflecting contemporary issues, diverse experiences, and timeless coming-of-age stories, as praised by teen literature authorities."

Check out romance novel recommendations for teens

["50 Best Teen Romance Books to Read When You're Crushing"](#) by *Seventeen* magazine

"Love and crushes can be wonderful, complicated, and exhilarating all at the same time. Of course, there are so many questions that pop up when you're crushing hard or falling for someone new ... While asking your mom, sister, and besties is a tried and true go-to for answers, sometimes, it's nice to gain perspective on your love life from an unbiased source: enter, the best teen romance books of all time."

ONGOING

SCBWI regional events

Various dates (*virtual*)

Find events with children's literature industry professionals from all around the world: <https://www.scbwi.org/regional-virtual-events/>

AUGUST

SCBWI Virtual Summer Conference

August 1-4 (*paid, virtual event*)

A children's book writing conference spectacular! Join in a vibrant digital environment that will uplift, inspire, and support you in writing and illustrating impactful children's books. Pitch your book to acquiring agents and editors. Get your art in front of industry pros. Explore all aspects of children's book creation: writing, illustrating, translating, and marketing. Immerse yourself in sessions specifically for illustrators, traditionally published & self-published authors, nonfiction writers, graphic novel creators, picture book writers and more! Every attendee has access to the content of all 50 sessions for up to one month after the conference concludes. (For more info: <https://www.scbwi.org/events/virtual-summer-conference-2024>)

SCBWI Mid-Atlantic: "I've Got the Power: How to Use Character Agency to Make Your Story Satisfying"

August 21, 7-8:15 p.m. (*paid virtual event*)

Conflict is a vital component of any good children's book, from picture books to young adult novels. But which characters actually make the decisions and take action to resolve that conflict? In this workshop, we'll discuss character agency, why it's important for your main character to have control over their story, and how a character's actions and decisions make the story especially satisfying for readers. This event will be recorded, and a replay will be available for 30 days after the live event. (For more info: <https://www.scbwi.org/events/i-ve-got-the-power-how-to-use-character-agency-to-make-your-story-satisfying>)

SCBWI Pennsylvania East: "How to Make Young Readers Laugh"

August 27, 7-8 p.m. (*paid virtual event*)

Learn techniques and tips to create funny children's books, from picture books through young adult novels. Discover which types of humor work best for various age groups. Tap into your inner child with lively examples, fun exercises and practical advice that will inspire you to write side-splitting humor for the younger set. (For more info: <https://www.scbwi.org/events/webinar-everything-you-need-to-know-about-how-to-make-young-readers-laugh-with-donna-gephart>)

Highlights Foundation: "Successful School Visits" Three-Part Online Course

August 28-October 25, various times (*paid, virtual event*)

Connecting with your readers is an important part of a storyteller's life. Join George Jreije and guests Aram Kim, Andrea Loney, and Carmen Oliver to develop your virtual school visit and put your plan into action with a scheduled school visit! You'll blend who you are as a storyteller with resonant content and materials to create genuine connections with kids or teens, educators, administrators, and librarians. The course includes presentations, generative peer-to-peer discussions, 20-minute school visits with students, and post-course 1:1 consultations. (For more info: <https://www.highlightsfoundation.org/workshop/successful-school-visits-a-three-part-online-course/>)

SEPTEMBER

SCBWI Nebraska: "Writing from the Inside Out" Novel Workshop

September 7, 2024-April 5, 2025 (*paid, virtual event*) (Registration closes September 6)

This Collaborative Novel Workshop series consists of an eight-month virtual workshop that meets twice a month from September 2024 to April 2025 (once a month in December and April). Using Zoom, author George Jreije will guide collaborative groups through the process of planning, researching, and writing novels for kids and teens. George is a published author who will help you understand how to approach writing novel manuscripts from the writer's perspective. Classes will be 12-1:30 p.m. ET. (For more info: <https://www.scbwi.org/events/writing-from-the-inside-out-novel-workshop>)

OCTOBER

SCBWI Mid-Atlantic: "How to Master Multiple POVs"

October 8, 7-8:15 p.m. (*paid virtual event*)

Writing a novel from multiple points of view can be an excellent way to develop a strong, memorable cast of characters and open readers' eyes to different ways of looking at the same events. But how do you make sure each POV character's voice is compelling and distinct? And how many POVs is too many POVs? Professional editor Sophia Jimenez breaks down how to choose which of your characters should be narrators, and how to know which character is the best one to tell a particular part of the story. (For more info: <https://www.scbwi.org/events/how-to-master-multiple-povs>)

SCBWI British Isles: "Financial Wellness for Creatives"

October 10 and 17, 2-3:30 p.m. ET (*paid virtual event*) (Registration closes October 6)

Session 1: October 10, 7-8:30 p.m. BST / 2-3:30 p.m. ET "From Passion to Prosperity: The Art of Creatorpreneurship"

Session 2: October 17, 7-8:30 p.m. BST / 2-3:30 p.m. ET "Financial Resilience for Creators: Navigating the Challenges and Safeguarding Your Future"

Embark on a transformative journey from creative passion to financial prosperity! This is an exclusive course tailored for SCBWI members by expert Anna Orenstein-Cardona, author, NFEC-certified financial educator and founder of Wear Your Money Crown®. (For more info: <https://www.scbwi.org/events/financial-wellness-for-creatives>)



SALMA ALI

**"It's about how the lake got its name.
Kind of creepy."**

Evie dangles her legs over the edge

"I know that story," Crystal says

"Go on, Evie."

wish a hundred horse flies

would pick Crystal up and carry her off

- Excerpt from **GHOST WRITERS: THE HAUNTING OF LAKE LUCY** by Sandy Deutscher Green, Monarch Educational Services, L.L.C. (2024)

The teacher called, **RECESS!**

The class jumped in line.

They raced out the door
and they left me **BEHIND.**

I popped off the pan, yelling,
PLEASE take me too!

I want to be part of the class
just like **YOU**

- Excerpt from **THE GINGERBREAD MAN LOOSE IN THE SCHOOL** by Laura Murray (author), G.P. Putnam's Sons Books for Young Readers (2011)



ABIGAIL ANKLAM

