

Winter 2022

Highlighter

SCBWI Mid-Atlantic Journal

***New
ideas***



SCBWI Mid-Atlantic

Highlighter

Winter 2022 // New Ideas

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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://midatlantic.scbwi.org/>

Highlighter journal team

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To see the full list of regional volunteers, visit <https://midatlantic.scbwi.org/meet-our-volunteers/>

Submissions

Are you interested in contributing an article, illustration, or other content to *Highlighter*? Please send your ideas and/or portfolio link to Denise Taranov at MidAtlanticHighlighter@gmail.com

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Happy New Year!

Fall 2021 flew by. The second virtual Mid-Atlantic SCBWI Fall Conference in October made it into the books, and we couldn't be happier. Registration exceeded 175 people. More than 30 faculty members participated, including eight from the Mid-Atlantic region. Linda Sue Park gave the wonderful keynote address "Writing Outside Your Lane." Opportunities for interacting with faculty included Friday night trivia (a tradition we hope to continue when we return to in-person conferences) and a story time social with six PAL members who read from their newly released books. Attendees could attend write-ins and roundtables, and region member Terry Jennings hosted peer critiques.

The year is already off to a busy start. Registration is now open for the national [SCBWI Winter Conference](#) in February. We'll host a virtual pre-conference social (date to be announced).

Here in the Mid-Atlantic, we're pleased to welcome volunteers who are taking on new roles in the region this year. Thank you to the new *Highlighter* team: Denise Taranov (Editor, content); Lauren Loucas (Layout editor); and Korena Di Roma Howley (Copyeditor). Congratulations on your first edition! We're also excited to announce the formation of a volunteer-led equity and inclusion committee for the SCBWI Mid-Atlantic region to help ensure that our chapter meets the needs

of its members and welcomes all creators and translators of children's books in Virginia and DC. More information to come on this effort as we get underway, and a warm thank you to all who have volunteered so far for this opportunity.

Finally, planning for the 2022 Fall Conference is already in progress. Please save the dates of October 21-23, 2022. For the first time, we'll have the conference over the whole weekend, with a kickoff on Friday evening, the main conference on Saturday, and the optional intensives on Sunday. And, after two years of virtual conferences, we're excited to plan to be back in person at the Holiday Inn in Sterling, Virginia. Members of the new conference planning committee are Daphne Dador, Lee Gjertsen Malone, Katie Sivinski, and Kelly Pavelich.

We are excited for the opportunities the new year brings for SCBWI programming and initiatives, and we hope 2022 brings good health, peace, and creative success to each of you.

Warmest regards,

Handwritten signatures of Erin Teagan and Valerie Patterson.

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Joy Jones



Remembering What You Want

by Joy Jones

My favorite definition of discipline is “remembering what you want.” I’m so undisciplined about writing that I frequently forget what I want. SCBWI is my antidote to amnesia.

Ever since third grade I’ve known I wanted to be a writer. At that age, being a writer meant being a novelist. And although I made good on the aspiration of becoming a published author, I didn’t meet the goal of becoming a novelist until 2020.

My first novel is *JAYLA JUMPS IN*, an MG story about a girl who starts a double Dutch team. IRL, I’m the founder of a double Dutch team of adults—DC Retro Jumpers. We teach and do demonstrations all around the DMV. In fact, in 2018 we were hired as cultural ambassadors to teach double Dutch in Russia.

However, I didn’t intend to write about double Dutch. My agent suggested—more than once—that double Dutch would make a great children’s story. But after literally talking about double Dutch all over the world, I didn’t think I had anything more to say about it. But once I sat down in front of the page, it turned out I did have a story to tell. The very first editor to whom I pitched the story bought it. I met that editor at the local SCBWI conference held every October.

That conference is an artistic lifeline. A few years ago, I switched to working part-time to give more attention to my writing and to help with my aging parents. Although things were generally going according to plan, sometimes the finances were tricky. Being creative is harder to do when your emotional circuits are overloaded and your bank accounts are underfilled. I thought I might not go to the conference that year in order to save money. But then I heard about the Linda Wirkner Memorial Scholarship. I applied and got the scholarship that covered the cost of the conference. The Mid-Atlantic Conference was the perfect prescription to keep me motivated.

Even though SCBWI has come to my aid when I needed help in the present moment, I think it may also have a time-release effect.

joyjonesOnline.com

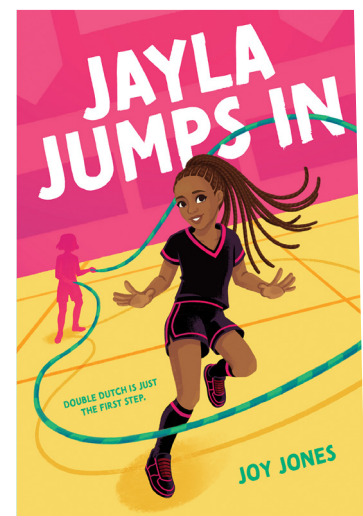
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Favorite books on writing

- *SAVE THE CAT* by Blake Snyder (<https://savethecat.com/books>)
- *IF YOU WANT TO WRITE* by Brenda Ueland (<https://www.graywolfpress.org/books/if-you-want-write>)
- *STEIN ON WRITING* by Sol Stein (<https://us.macmillan.com/books/9780312254216>)



Meet a Writer

(continued)

Back in 2012, I was sitting in the audience at the annual October SCBWI conference. My attention had begun to drift, and I found myself turning over a story idea about a boy who is forced to make a long walk home from school every day when he gets put off the school bus for misbehaving. He hates the walk at first but then grows to love it. I started an outline for the story while I was in my seat. I'd like to say I continued to work on that story when I got home, but I didn't. I promptly forgot all about it.

October 2013. I was back at the SCBWI conference. Once again, during a slow part of the program, I started thinking about a story idea. A boy is horsing around on the school bus and gets put off. Now he has to walk home from school every day. Wait a minute. This idea seemed awfully familiar. This time when I got home, I went through my old papers and found the conference materials from the previous year. Yep, there were my notes about that story. I'd like to say that I then got started on that novel—but I didn't.

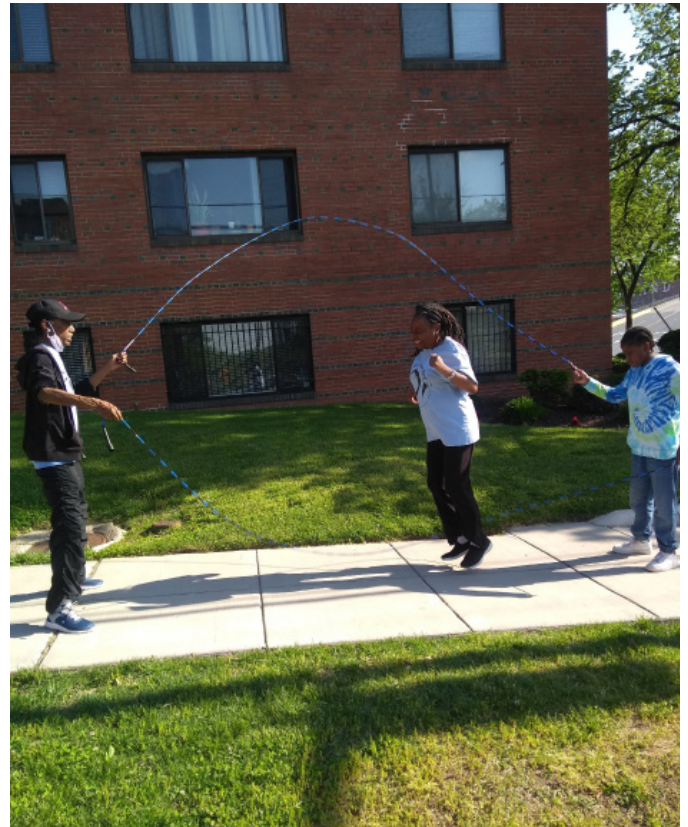
But once I had wrapped up work on *JAYLA JUMPS IN*, I started thinking again about the bad boy with the long walk. By then, five or six years had passed. Finally I started writing. Last summer, I saw an announcement about a writing contest sponsored by Pen America. For their competition you had to have someone write a reference. I got an SCBWI member to write a letter of recommendation. And you had to send in three or four chapters of a novel-in-progress. I wasn't focused on winning; having a deadline forced me to do some revision and shape up the scribble I had started. Without the external motivation of the contest, I may not have gotten around to doing a second draft in a timely manner. In other words, completing the application helped me remember what I wanted. So I was quite shocked that in September I became the winner of the PEN/Phyllis Naylor Grant for Children's and Young Adult Novelists.

That book, "Walking the Boomerang," is still not done yet. (Boy, am I a slow learner.) But because I have all of you at SCBWI to remind me, I'm confident that I'll keep remembering what I want.

Let SCBWI help you achieve what you want, too. //H//

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Joy Jones



Joy jumping double Dutch with DC Retro Jumpers

“My favorite definition of discipline is 'remembering what you want.'”

—Joy Jones

MEET AN ILLUSTRATOR

Lindsay
Heider Diamond



www.lindsayheiderdiamond-art.com/illustration

 @lindsayhdiamond.illustration

Self-portrait



Favorite tool

I love my Wacom Cintiq. I can create easily and change my mind often. Other than that, I still love gouache and also scratchboard, but I am constantly experimenting with new media.

What inspires me

Walks in the woods, hawks soaring in the wind, watching my dogs play, masterpieces of art, beauty, my kids, love from my husband, family and friends.

Design influences

Palettes from masterpieces of art or film are helpful to use. As for drawing and design, I am always looking at old masters (my self-portrait is a nod to Chagall, who worked as both a fine artist and an illustrator) and new artists. There is so much to learn from. I was a professional greeting card illustrator right out of college and learned to love to play with media and styles then.

Meet an Illustrator

(continued)

Lindsay Heider Diamond



A peek into the process

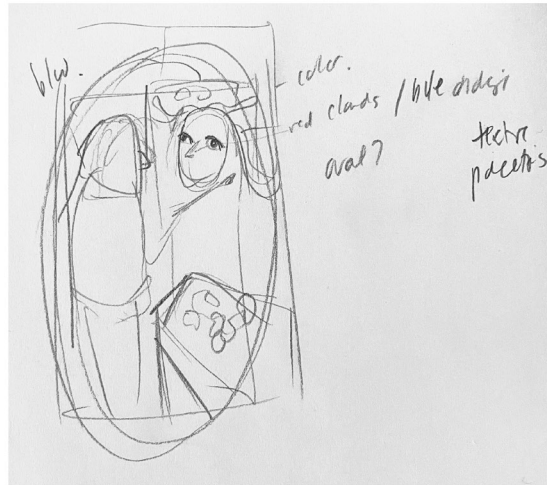


Favorite things to illustrate

Anything with some feeling or emotion to it. Any narratives. :)

What I'd like to explore in the coming year

Revisiting the children's books I wrote and am working on illustrating. Developing a larger portfolio of high caliber pieces that suit my ever-changing style. Playing more with texture and color palettes and risking more with the design and composition of my work. Balancing my fine art practice with illustration. //H//



Finding Inspiration for New Work

by Tamar Anolic

As writers, we're always on the hunt for ideas for our next story. My inspiration has come from all over, and sometimes my new ideas surprise me. Here are a few places I turn to for inspiration.

1. TV (and show websites)

Several of my ideas have come from television, whether that's network news or reality TV. The manuscript that I currently have out on submission, "Two Sisters of Fayetteville," is about the oldest daughters of a family that belongs to the Quiverfull movement—like the Duggar family in *19 Kids and Counting*. I have long been fascinated by that show, and the family dynamic with so many kids intrigues me. I also love reading the online comments that accompany news articles on the family. Many comments include plot points that viewers want to see on the show or speculate on questions such as which of the Duggar children might rebel. I thought these comments presented interesting what-ifs. After a while, I found myself internally constructing a narrative in which one of the older daughters realizes she doesn't fit in anymore. The next thing I knew, I was writing my manuscript.

By contrast my first published novel, *THE LAST BATTLE*, covered a more somber topic. The story is about a female veteran of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars and her transition home after being injured. This book started as a short story that I wrote when those wars were just beginning. The news was difficult to watch, and I found myself using my writing to make sense of what



was happening, especially as more veterans of these wars returned from the battlefield.

2. Things around me

My next set of books never would have happened if I hadn't written *THE LAST BATTLE*. As I wrote that manuscript, I found myself paying more attention to service members and their stories. That included noticing a woman in fatigues in Reagan National Airport while I was waiting for a flight. As it turned out, this woman was on the same flight. So was a young mother with a toddler who was wearing a Spiderman shirt and carrying Batman figurines. When our plane landed at our destination, the mother pointed to the woman in fatigues and said to her son, "See? This is a real-life superhero." That single sentence inspired *THE FLEDGLING'S INFERNO*, the first book of a trilogy about a female cadet at a military school who learns she has superpowers. This taught me something unexpected: Stories can come from the serendipity of an overheard conversation.



3. Connections to my own family history

On a different note, a number of my novels focus on the Romanovs. I'd grown up with stories of my great-grandparents coming to America to escape the Romanovs' pogroms and being drafted into their army. Then my mother bought me books on Rasputin and other details of the Romanov dynasty. I was hooked immediately, and after writing four novels about the Romanovs, I'm still going

Finding Inspiration for New Work

(continued)



Great-grandfather Wolf Anolic

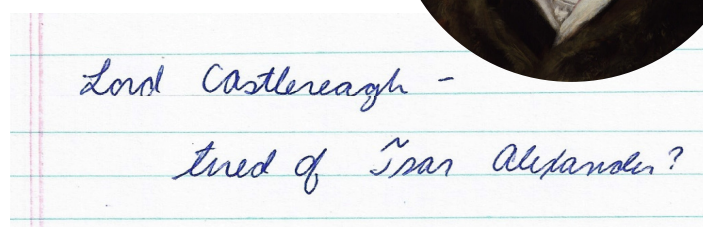
strong. Family history is a fabulous inspiration for new manuscripts, especially as agents and publishers look for more diverse stories. In addition, readers are often intrigued by an author's connection to her material.

make sure to collect my ideas more carefully as I wrote these stories, and I transitioned from my usual system of Post-it notes that I frequently lost to keeping a list in a Word document.

Inspiration for new stories can come from anywhere. So keep an eye out—or an ear open. You never know where your next story will come from. And most of all, happy writing! //H//

4. Interesting details

As my research on the Romanovs continued, more interesting narratives jumped out at me, begging to be written. My upcoming novel in short stories, "Tales of the Romanov Empire," allowed me to find places for those ideas. In previous research, I was struck by a photograph of Lord Castlereagh, the Irish diplomat who struggled to work with the often capricious Tsar Alexander. I kept that photograph on hand until I was ready to write about it. Another story, about two servants climbing the stairs to the attic of the Winter Palace, was inspired by a single footnote in a biography of Nicholas I. That footnote mentioned both the length of those staircases and the cows that Nicholas kept in the attic. As soon as I read it, I knew I had another story on my hands. Here as well, I was surprised by how much material I managed to conjure out of a couple of sentences! I had to



SS Grosser Kurfurst

“On the morning of August 3, Wolf was out on the ship's deck as dark clouds scuttled across the sky. Then, up ahead, he saw the most famous landmark in all the world—a tall green statue, wearing long robes, a crown adorning her head. The clouds parted, sending a ray of light onto Lady Liberty. The warm amber sunlight made her lit torch glow all the brighter—a beacon of hope against hatred and oppression!”

—Excerpt from "Tales of the Romanov Empire"
by Tamar Anolic

Play Your Way to New Ideas

by Ana Morales

With so much uncertainty during the COVID-19 pandemic, it has felt almost necessary to turn to my art as a place to safely and even joyfully explore the unknown. This is something I've actually done for years as a method of coping with type 1 diabetes, and I believe this kind of practice offers many benefits.

When I talk about exploring the unknown in art, I'm simply referring to playing or experimenting and remaining open to the possibilities. If you're feeling stuck creatively or if you'd like to approach illustration in new ways, play and experimentation are great means to reconnect with art.

Methods for exploring the unknown

The following are tips and ideas that I've gathered from mentors, professors, fellow artists, and favorite books over the past several years. There's no one way to go about this, so I encourage you to explore whatever sparks your interest and see where it takes you. As you begin implementing some of these techniques in your art practice, you may find that many of them can be applied in your daily life as well.

1. Paying attention

I've thought a lot about how much my attention shifted last year specifically. When I was suddenly very isolated and with few places to go, I found comfort in the nature around my house. Going on near-daily walks throughout the year, I noticed more than I ever had before, saw the complete life cycles of flowers I didn't even know existed. It wasn't just about giving a moment my attention, but paying attention over time, seeing things change and understanding the ways in which things are not static.

One of my favorite plants to observe was the southern magnolia tree. There are several of these massive, sturdy trees in my neighborhood; my favorite is probably upwards of 70 feet tall. From a distance, its deep green color combined with its size makes it look quite ominous. Up close, there is so much to see: tough, glossy leaves in a rich, dark green; the most beautiful, huge, milky white flowers; pods that emerge with a fuzzy, pale pink skin and then reveal surprisingly bright red seeds. The white blooms remind me of avocados—they seem to peak for a short amount of time before turning brown.



With any plant, you can observe its changing health, how it moves throughout the day, and how it's affected by the weather and nearby creatures. I find these observations helpful in thinking through the relationships among elements in my designs and how to get more out of an image. Take an observational drawing, for example—a key exercise in any art-making practice. Instead of simply drawing what you see, notice the smaller details of each object, as well as how one object affects another. How light travels through a glass jar. How the curve of a metal spoon warps the reflection of the adjacent object. How a tall, narrow object

Play Your Way to New Ideas

(continued)

complements a smaller, round one. The subtleties of each texture.

You can also choose one object and draw it multiple times—in different lighting, from different angles, with different materials. Maybe try drawing a plant in your house or yard throughout the day or week and observe the changes.

TRY IT!

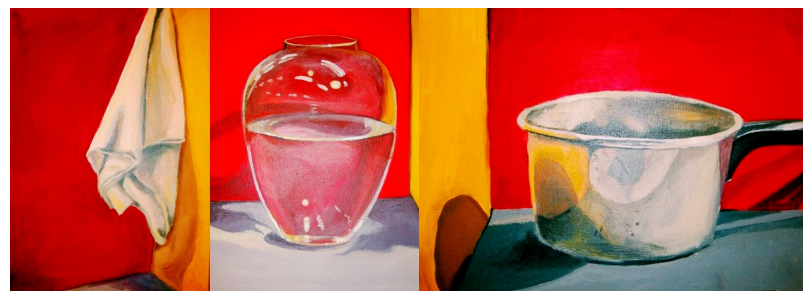
One of my favorite exercises is adapted from the book *HOW TO BE AN EXPLORER OF THE WORLD* by Keri Smith:

1. Choose a random object and draw it or write about it for five minutes.
2. When the five minutes are up, continue for another five minutes.
3. Continue for as long as you'd like after the first ten minutes; the point is to spend time with an object that may otherwise be viewed as ordinary or mundane and find something interesting about it. When we give something our attention, one could argue that everything is interesting. Try applying this thinking to a larger still life drawing with multiple objects.

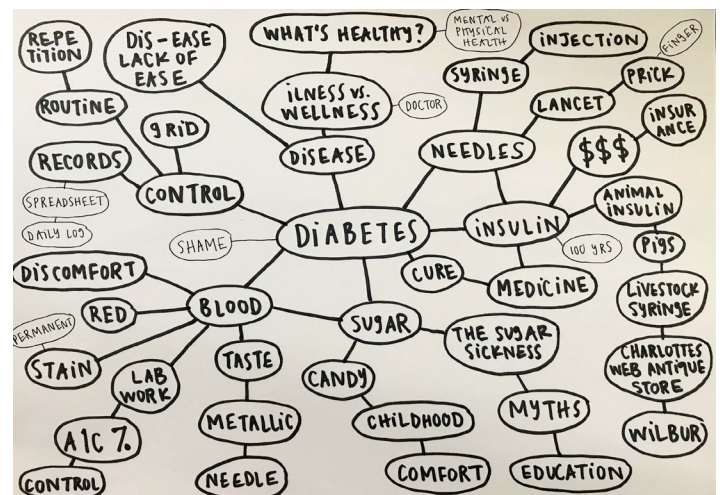


still life paintings. We were instructed to build the painting in three sections: the largest blocks of color, the mid-size blocks of color, and then the smallest details.

This same approach can be applied to the exploration of any subject. When something sparks your interest, take advantage of that curiosity and dive deep. Collect as much information as you can and take note of the way things are connected. Start with the obvious connections and search further



to discover the more nuanced ones. I've always been a notetaker, so I like to make lists and take lots of pictures, but you can also sketch, create texture rubbings, or record voice notes on your phone. Think of it as a word web, where one thought leads to another (as shown below). What new ideas are generated when you consider that everything is connected in some way?



2. Being mindful

When you practice being attentive, it can be overwhelming. After all, there is so much to see and explore in the world. In my experience, I often find myself bouncing between interests and not devoting quite enough time to any of them. This is where being mindful comes in. Mindfulness refines our attention so that we can connect more fully and directly with whatever we are looking at or thinking about.

I took an intro to painting class in college, and one of our first assignments was a series of observational

You can also practice mindfulness by setting some parameters when you start creating. For example, choose one tool and make as many different marks as possible with it. I love mark-making because it's

Play Your Way to New Ideas

(continued)

a great way to loosen up and also figure out what I can achieve with different tools. It's also a good way to be present and responsive to what's in front of me versus worrying about the end result.

TRY IT!

Draw anything that comes to mind or give yourself some prompts. Here are a few examples.

- General marks: thick, thin, short, long, wavy, curly, straight, etc.
- Make marks in response to music or environmental noise
- Use your nondominant hand
- Use both hands at once
- Hold the tool differently (between two fingers, holding at the far end, etc.)
- Close your eyes
- Vary the pressure
- Vary the speed
- Vary the density
- Assign emotions (how does an angry line look?)
- Repeat the same prompts with a different tool and compare the marks

Another way to practice mindfulness is through self-reflection. Set aside time to reflect on your practice and better understand what methods are most rewarding or fulfilling for you. You can even take a moment to set an intention before you begin working.

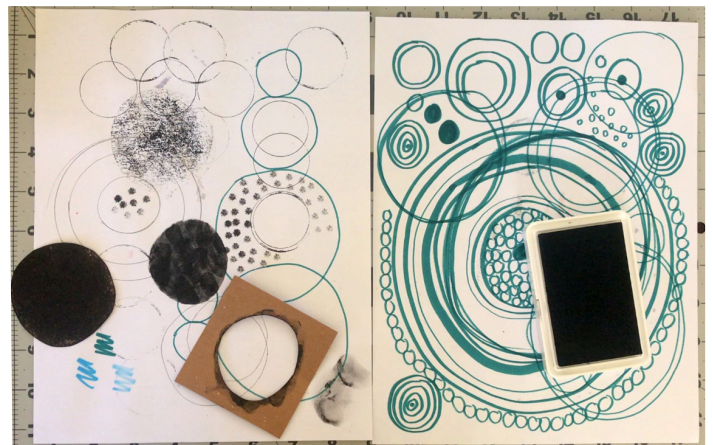
Don't be discouraged if you find being mindful difficult. I'm one of those people who will ask you your name and then immediately forget to pay attention when you tell me. It happens! When I start overthinking or find my mind wandering, I like to bring my awareness to my breath. This is something I've been practicing more diligently for the past year thanks to yoga, my dad, and the book *BREATH* by James Nestor. It's so simple, but a few mindful breaths in and out really does a lot for me!

3. Harvesting inspiration from play and experimentation

I want to emphasize that there's no right or wrong way to play and experiment and these examples

are just some of the techniques that have been valuable to my personal practice. No matter what kind of work you're making or material you're using, approach it mindfully and entertain all possibilities that emerge. Let one step inform the next. Try your best to relinquish control and embrace what happens. Reject the fear of failure and just create.

In this study, I created circles with different tools and materials. Repeating a shape or image is an easy way to try new things quickly, without getting distracted by too many different elements.



In the next study, I limited my palette to pink and red and experimented with application methods. Try broadening your idea of art-making tools. Go through your recycling and pull out things that can be cut into a stencil or used to apply media. In this example, I used a fork, knife, tulle, cut up gift cards, cotton balls, Q-tips, tape, toothpicks, and a small plastic cup to apply the paint. I also incorporated salt into some of the paint to create a gritty texture.



Play Your Way to New Ideas

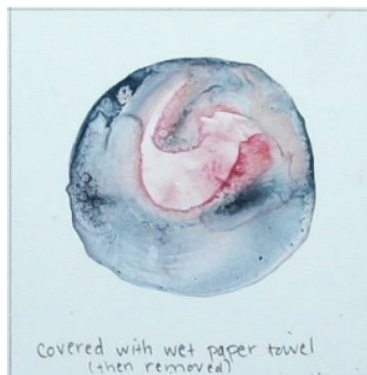
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In terms of experimenting with color, try using a restricted palette to explore the relationships between colors. Revisit the color wheel and observe your responses to different colors and color combinations. Try making a list of words that you associate with specific colors.

I made the following piece while I worked on my master's thesis, titled "Self as Subject: The 22-Year Decision to Paint My Chronic Illness."



One of the ideas I was exploring was the relationship that people with chronic or terminal illnesses have with death and how I felt I couldn't be honest with people about my thoughts regarding my mortality because it's a difficult subject to broach. My mentor shared the work of Ross Bleckner with me during this time, and I was blown away by the way he described his flower paintings.



(Detail)

I thought Bleckner's technique of painting then scraping away was such a beautiful and elegant way of portraying death, and I wanted to apply it to my own work somehow. I ended up making this piece where I experimented with methods of removal. I drew a grid on Yupo paper (a nonabsorbent surface), painted watercolor circles that symbolized cells, and removed or covered

each one in a different way. I went on to create an extensive series of cell paintings on Yupo paper that I presented in my thesis show.

"I've really internalized that sense of mortality...

I don't want my paintings to be alike. Even in this show, there are flowers, brains, and birds.

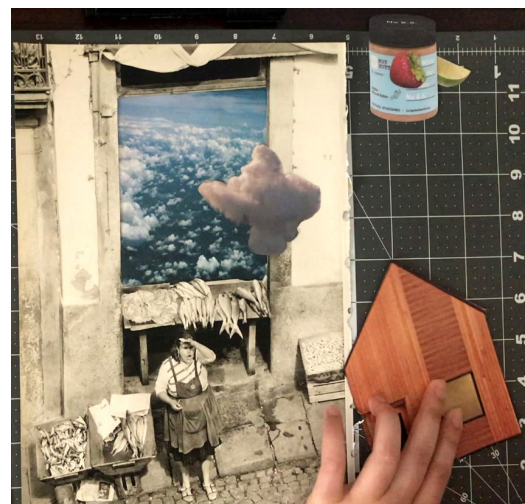
I begrudgingly call some of these my 'flower paintings' even though they're not really flower paintings. They were flower paintings. I first paint them really carefully, like a still life. Then I scrape off all that paint with a palette knife.

A flower has such a short life span; it blooms and it is so majestic at its height but then it just falls away. I find pleasure in painting them and then seeing what happens when they become just a trace of something left. I've always been amazed by what's not there anymore."

—Ross Bleckner,
interview by Frank Expósito for Art Forum

TRY IT!

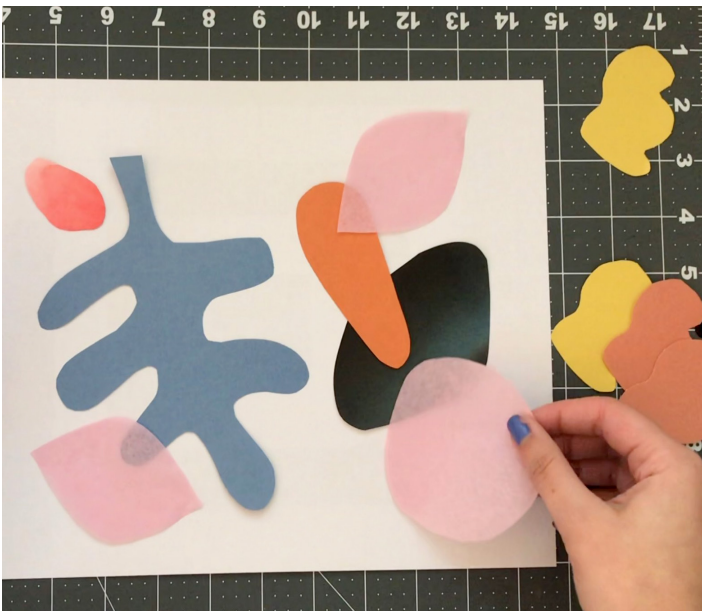
Another great way to experiment is by creating collages, maybe even several at once. You can use materials you have on hand and you can quickly and easily move elements around without committing to a mark (until you start gluing down). While I love painting, the accessibility of collage is really valuable, and you can even use found images to quickly create a narrative. I especially love the portal technique, where you find an image that has some kind of opening— whether it's a doorway, window, or mirror—and cut that out and replace it with another image (see the example below).



Play Your Way to New Ideas

(continued)

While creating collages, try focusing on just one thing: color, shape, pattern, etc. This is another great exercise in mindfulness—simply refining your attention. If you're focusing on shape, for example, try rotating or flipping each piece over. Glue two shapes together to create a new shape. Create a shape using negative space. Layer tissue paper shapes to create new shapes where they overlap.



Create a collage using found text, experimenting with using the text to create a new message or simply as a visual element that's not meant to be read. Try laying blocks of small text in the background and layering other elements on top or otherwise obscuring it. Dissect individual characters and reconstruct them to create abstract shapes. Keep in mind that when a viewer sees text, their inclination is to read it. Think about how you can manipulate the text to communicate your intention, whether it's to convey information, create a visual texture, or something else.

Making exploration a daily practice

Over the past several years, exploration has been a near-daily practice for me. I identify as a curious

person, a lifelong learner. I love going to antique stores just to look at objects and imagine who once owned them and how they were displayed. I like to learn about how the body and mind work and how I can best manage my illness. I love watching documentaries about musicians and bands, learning about their beginnings and their expectations for their careers. I love photographing the different phases of the southern magnolia trees in my neighborhood and observing the squirrels in the tree outside my window. I love exploring the world through the eyes of my two-year-old niece, whose joy and energy are unbridled.

When I approach my creative work with this mindset, I find that both the process and end result are more satisfying and aligned with my intentions. My go-to techniques usually involve drawing shapes and lines, repeating symbols, and playing with opacity. I like to work on multiple pieces at once so that if I feel stuck on one piece, I can move on to something else and revisit the other later.

Because I enjoy this approach so much, it has become less of an exercise and more of a primary art-making method that I practice regularly. I also like to play my favorite music when I create. In the past year, I listened to a lot of Lucius, Queen, Frank Ocean, and the Smiths.

I'm an advocate for play-based learning, and I highly recommend incorporating some of these techniques into your regular art practice. Once you get into a rhythm, the ideas will hopefully begin to flow easily, and you'll discover which methods best serve your goals.

Whatever approach you decide to take, don't forget to have fun (and maybe make a mess).

Happy creating! //H//

How Our Ideas Shape Communities, and Us

by Denise Taranov & Ramunda Young

A bookstore is full of ideas—things that started in the mind of a writer or illustrator, then grew. They took on a backstory and voice, or a Procreate brush texture, climbed through the publishing process, then put on a jacket and took a seat on a retail shelf to catch a ride to a new home.

We builders of stories turn to many different sources to learn how to create ideas and raise them right so they're strong enough to make it to the outside world. Among our partners in the book journey are booksellers, especially small business owners who are directly involved in determining what makes it onto the shelf, and who serve as customers' trusted guides. In stores closely tied to their community, booksellers become the seekers of stories and the witnesses to books' impact.

To gain insight on this perspective, I turned to Ramunda Young, co-owner of MahoganyBooks, a family-owned business with a mission centered on making works by African American authors and illustrators available to all readers. Ramunda and her husband, Derrick Young, founded MahoganyBooks 14 years ago, naming it after their daughter. They opened their DC store in 2017 in the Anacostia Arts Center and launched their National Harbor location in 2021, with a book-signing lineup that included *New York Times* best-selling authors Kwame Alexander and DC-born Jason Reynolds (who's also the current National Ambassador for Young People's Literature). Ramunda and Derrick say starting the business was driven by their love of culture, community, and connection and a desire to share books that empower readers. With book publishing relationships built over more than a decade, MahoganyBooks is kept in the loop on African American books being released and carries a wide inventory,

including many books not available through large bookstores.

Standing at the intersection of African American literature publishing and sales, their team has a direct view to how ideas affect people. At its core, that connection shows us that ideas can turn into books that help us better understand ourselves and each other.

Ideas feed the community, and the world

While the political and social movement Black Lives Matter first appeared on social media in 2013, an estimated 15 million to 26 million people participated in Black Lives Matter protests in 2020 following the murder of George Floyd. This surge in attention directly impacted the publishing world. Viewing this from the book supply chain, Ramunda has seen that people today are not shying away from Black Lives Matter issues and that the topics and content important for everyone has improved, especially over the past year. Looking at what readers buy, it's not just the newly published books. "[People are] craving authors that we've known for years, like people just discovering Tony Morrison or Octavia Butler. And [these authors] have been around 20 years or so. Octavia hit the *New York Times* Best Seller list last year—the first time in her career. She's been passed for many years, but there's a craving and desire to be aware of her work, to read her books."



MahoganyBooks now has a staff member dedicated to corporate and institutional sales, with companies realizing that they can buy these books from Black bookstores. "We've seen a

How Our Ideas Shape Communities, and Us

(continued)



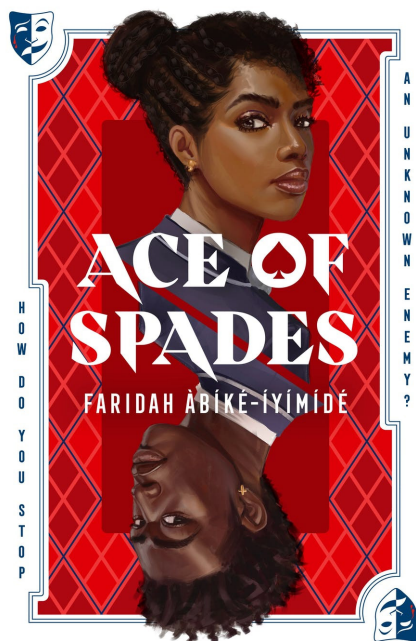
Co-owners Ramunda and Derrick Young

change in companies being intentional with their dollars and how they're doing that. We've always had a great rapport with them, but there are so many more [companies buying] now.

"We're starting to meet reader's needs. We need to continue to have diverse books. Don't be afraid to make Black children in the book."

When it comes to capturing African American stories and illustrating them, Ramunda supports Black authors and illustrators having first choice.

"There are so many writers and so many illustrators who could be doing this work!" When illustrators who are not African American have Black characters in



ACE OF SPADES by Faridah Àbíké-Íyímídé, Feiwel & Friends (June 1, 2021)

their designs, she recommends that they be "honest and intentional" with the characters, doing research just as with all art subjects. "Be authentic and realistic. Show the beautiful curve of a wider nose. Have hair that is in an afro, braids, all different styles. Show the wide gamut of how we look, all the skin tones. Don't just put another color on a character when the physical structure is clearly not Black." She points to ACE OF SPADES, which has a woman in braids on the cover, as an example of a book that sells itself through the illustration.

Over the last few years, Ramunda has also seen an increase in books with LGBTQIA+ characters for young people, which has helped children be aware of what inclusive terms describe and better understand themselves and others around them. Seeing the section in a MahoganyBooks store can serve as a reminder of the many dimensions to reader identities and interests, and how books can layer ideas to reach different aspects of ourselves and our characters.

Ramunda underscores that the community of readers for any African American book is as large as it is for any other book in the age category. "A lot of people come in and think, Oh, this store is just for Black people and I say, No, I've read about other people. People need to read about me, too. There's so much empathy that comes when you can read about others' journey and their culture and their community."

To support creators and readers, MahoganyBooks offers events—both limited in-store events (due to COVID-19) and remote sessions. For one recent virtual event, they partnered with book wholesaler Ingram on a multi-hour session that walked writers through how to get published, both traditionally and through self-publishing. They've also had award-winning poets provide workshops. "That, for us, is very important. It's one thing to sell a book, and it's another to help people to get their ideas on paper, and as a bookstore, to have that."

More books are needed

Ramunda says she would love to see more books about young Black boys, both because the

How Our Ideas Shape Communities, and Us (continued)



Picture book area in the National Harbor location

MahoganyBooks team often gets requests from parents and teachers who want to engage boys in reading, and to be able to hand them books that feature faces and characters like theirs. She says Black boys seeing themselves on the page is crucial. "CROWN by Derrick Barnes has really resonated, as has I AM EVERY GOOD THING. Those both feature young Black boys as the main characters, and they fly off our shelves, so we need to see more of that."

Along with the hard stories and historical stories, Ramunda says more books are needed to show everyday things, just reflecting being a young, Black person living today. "Normalcy. There isn't enough in the industry to cover the whole identity of what it means to be a kid. We have the big [historical] stories, and they have an important place. But then it's nice to just read about a kid who likes to skateboard, just do regular things."

She also sees stories as a way to break down stereotypes, like boys versus girls. "With greater breadth," she says, "kids gain balance." She also says more stories are needed about other countries and our DC, Maryland, and Virginia area, written through a kid's perspective so they know what's around them.

On the topic of entrepreneurship, Ramunda says there are a few local children's book authors talking about it, but there aren't many mainstream books. "Even if there is one or two, it can never be enough for us to see that there's more to this journey than working for someone else—having an idea, having it come to fruition, and creating your own business."

Ideas are born from experience, and connection

"Books give connection—you're reading a book with faces and your journey. Real experiences make kids feel seen." When they find their likeness in books, Ramunda says kids gain self-esteem and self-confidence. "It's empathy on one side so people can understand, and then self-esteem and confidence on the other—they go together."

In order to know what's relevant to the community, Ramunda advocates getting involved. "Take an active role in the community. Get involved, talk with parents and schools, not just look at social media. Get the education before you write the book. Get to know the community and really be there. Support them, and put your money there. It's not a way to just gain insight—be authentic."

With YA literature, Ramunda says reaching for new books can be a learning experience for parents. Some books have more challenging topics, like teen pregnancy, and stronger language. As booksellers, they serve as a resource for parents to get recommendations and coaching on how to talk with their teens as they hand the books to them.

The most successful books from their experience are "books that resonate. Books that show courage and give lessons for daily life, like sharing and using your voice to speak." //H//

Ways to learn and connect

Bookstore + Arts Center | The DC store is located inside the Anacostia Arts Center, home to other Black-owned businesses and an art exhibit in the front entrance (don't miss the spicy injera chips in the grocery store). *MahoganyBooks Anacostia, 1231 Good Hope Rd. SE, Washington, DC 20020*

Bookstore + coffee | The National Harbor location will be opening an in-store café in early 2022, giving readers a place to sit and sip while communing with books. *MahoganyBooks National Harbor, 121 American Way, Oxon Hill, MD 20745*

Events (in person and virtual) | The stores host events like book signings and book discussions, as well as workshops. <https://www.mahoganybooks.com/events/>

Book club | The MahoganyBooks + Very Smart Brothas book club meets monthly for fun, open, and "sometimes controversial" book-inspired conversations (participation is open to all readers with an interest in respectfully discussing and learning more about Black culture, race, relationships, history, pop culture, and other topics). President Obama made a virtual appearance at an event in 2021 to discuss his book, *A PROMISED LAND* (Crown Publishing Group New York, 2020), raising the book club bar high (it now just looks like a hyphen in the sky). <https://blackbooksmatter.com/announcing-the-mahoganybooks-very-smart-brothas-book-club/>

Book placement and author event requests | MahoganyBooks' website has an Author Relations page (<https://www.mahoganybooks.com/author-relations/>) with information on book placement consideration and author event appearances. The stores have featured local authors and artists and continue to grow in this area. Ramunda encourages local writers and illustrators to use the Author Relations forms to share information on their published and soon-to-be published titles.

RESOURCES

Generate 30 new ideas in 30 days (*free January event*)

Storystorm by Tara Lazar

"The Storystorm challenge is to create 30 story ideas in 30 days. You don't have to write a manuscript (but you can if the mood strikes)...The object is to heighten your idea-generating senses. Ideas may build upon other ideas. Your list of potential stories will grow stronger as the days pass. Eventually, you will have a list of ideas to flesh out into concepts, premises, and manuscripts in the coming year." <https://taralazar.com/2022/>

Commit to drafting 12 PBs in 12 months (*paid annual membership, registration in January*)

12x12 by Julie Hedlund

"12x12 is a yearlong writing challenge where members aim to write 12 complete picture book drafts, one per month, for each month of the year. A draft means a story with a beginning, middle, and end—NOT a submission-ready piece." <https://www.12x12challenge.com/membership/>

Learn techniques for exploring new ideas for poems (*free online video*)

Poets.org, "Poetry Breaks: Lucille Clifton on Where Ideas Come From"

"In this video, Lucille Clifton discusses the importance of patience and attention in the process of writing a poem."

<https://poets.org/text/poetry-breaks-lucille-clifton-where-ideas-come>

Come up with a chapter book idea, then turn it into a series (*free online article*)

Writer's Digest, "How to Turn an Idea into a Chapter Book Series" by Christine Evans

"From finding the idea to writing the manuscript and sending it off to agents, author Christine Evans maps out how to turn an idea into a chapter book series." <https://www.writersdigest.com/write-better-fiction/how-to-turn-an-idea-into-a-chapter-book-series>

Try out ways to generate new story ideas for your next novel (*free online article*)

MasterClass, "How to Find Story Ideas for Your Novel: 8 Story Idea Generators" by the MasterClass staff

"For some lucky people, novel ideas and short-story ideas flow like water from a fountain. For the rest of us, however, creative writing is a more deliberate process. If you're someone who could use some tips for seeking out the best novel ideas, here are some ideas to get you started on the book-writing process—from a thriller to a love story to a murder mystery to science fiction writing." <https://www.masterclass.com/articles/how-to-find-story-ideas-for-your-novel#8-ways-to-get-book-ideas>

Take a (global) stroll through children's book illustrations to spark ideas (*free online article*)

Really Good Designs, "32 Amazing Children's Book Illustrations for Mega Inspiration" by Ludmil Enchev

"To create magical illustrations for children's books, artists go through a unique kind of artistic process and let their limitless imagination take them to meet their inner child once again. Children's book illustrations are special and captivating. They perfectly communicate the action in a story to young readers and even to younger viewers who are still unable to read. This is why today I'll take you on an adventure way back to your childhood and hopefully make your inner child happy and inspired with 32 magical children's book illustrations." <https://reallygooddesigns.com/childrens-book-illustrations/>

Doodle with Mo to create a new idea together (*free online videos*)

Kennedy Center, "Lunch Doodles with Mo Willems" by Mo Willems

"It has been one year since people of all ages from around the world first joined Mo Willems in his studio for weekday LUNCH DOODLES. To mark this significant moment, Mo and the Kennedy Center are releasing Episode 00 as a new beginning. The original 15 episodes and their downloadable activities are archived below." <https://www.kennedy-center.org/education/mo-willems/lunch-doodles/>

Idea Prompts

1) Find a creature
2) Observe it
3) Imagine conflicts for it

Takes notes on what's **funny** (e.g., overheard phrase, something misspoken or misunderstood)

Pick a character → force them to get into a building in an unusual way—follow them

Go on a **smell safari**

Pick an interest (e.g., yodeling, steampunk) → write down **1** story idea per day for **10** days

Find an interesting image → imagine the plot that fits it

Think of a character and give them a conflict that's the **opposite** of what you'd expect

Observe kids interacting (target reader age)—notice their dialogue & gestures

Go to a place or area you've never been before → capture your feelings and observations

1) Brainstorm characters, environments & props, 2) randomly pick one of each, 3) build a story

Recall emotional **childhood memories** and funny moments

Brainstorm **10** new ideas in **10** minutes

Draw **10** shapes → create a character from each

Mash up **2** interests for a new concept (e.g., Manga + rock climbing, beekeeping + spoken word)

Taste flavors that trigger your emotions → channel them into a character

Pick a topic of interest → research it for 15 minutes → imagine **“what if”**

Peruse and touch **colors & textures**

Note what piques your interest → use it to seed an idea

Take an unusual sound, put it at the story climax & imagine what led up to it

1) Pick a number between 1-542, 2) find it on Tara Lazar's [500+ Things That Kids Like*](https://taralazar.com/2007/11/04/199-things-that-kids-like), 3) draft a new concept

Denise Taranov

* <https://taralazar.com/2007/11/04/199-things-that-kids-like>

GET CONNECTED

ONGOING

SCBWI regional events

Various dates (paid virtual events) | Events with children's literature industry professionals from all around the world. <https://www.scbwi.org/regional-virtual-events/>

Local bookstore events*

Various dates (in-person events, cost may vary)

List of independent bookstores in DC: <https://www.newpages.com/independent-bookstores/dc-bookstores>

Barnes and Noble store/event locator: <https://stores.barnesandnoble.com/>

* To find bookstores in your area, go to <https://www.google.com/maps> and search for "bookstores" or "independent bookstores"

Busboys and Poets poetry slams

Various dates (in-person events in DC, MD, and VA area locations) | Poetry and spoken word events with world-renowned poets and open mic sessions. <https://www.busboysandpoets.com/events-list/>

JANUARY

Show Way The Musical, Kennedy Center Family Theater

January 27-February 20, 2022 (paid in-person event) | Adapted from the 2005 picture book *SHOW WAY*, Education Artist-in-Residence Jacqueline Woodson's Newbery-winning book of history, love, and resilience. Based on Woodson's own family, the musical pays tribute to women whose strength and knowledge illuminate their daughters' lives, from enslavement to freedom, through segregation, freedom marches, and the fight for literacy. <https://www.kennedy-center.org/whats-on/explore-by-genre/young-audiences/2021-2022/show-way/>

FEBRUARY

SCBWI MD/DE/WV Region's All About Graphic Novels Day

February 5, 2022, 11 a.m.-3 p.m. (paid virtual event) | Various events (individually priced) for graphic novel writers and illustrators, including a panel, master class, and illustration roundtable. <https://mddewv.scbwi.org/events/webinar-all-about-graphic-novels-day-with-writer-and-illustrator-master-classes/>

SCBWI Winter Conference 2022

February 11-13, 2022 (paid virtual event) | The theme of the conference is "Creating and Selling Successful Children's Books in 2022." The schedule includes a Translators Social with Laura Watkinson. <https://www.scbwi.org/events/winter-conference-2022/>

MARCH

2022 MD/DE/WV Regional Conference: All Together Now!

March 11-13, 2022 (paid in-person event at the Maritime Conference Center in Linthicum Heights, MD, near BWI airport) | SCBWI regional conference with keynote addresses, panels, intensive workshops, manuscript critiques, and portfolio reviews, among other events. <https://mddewv.scbwi.org/events/2022-mddewv-regional-conference-all-together-now/>

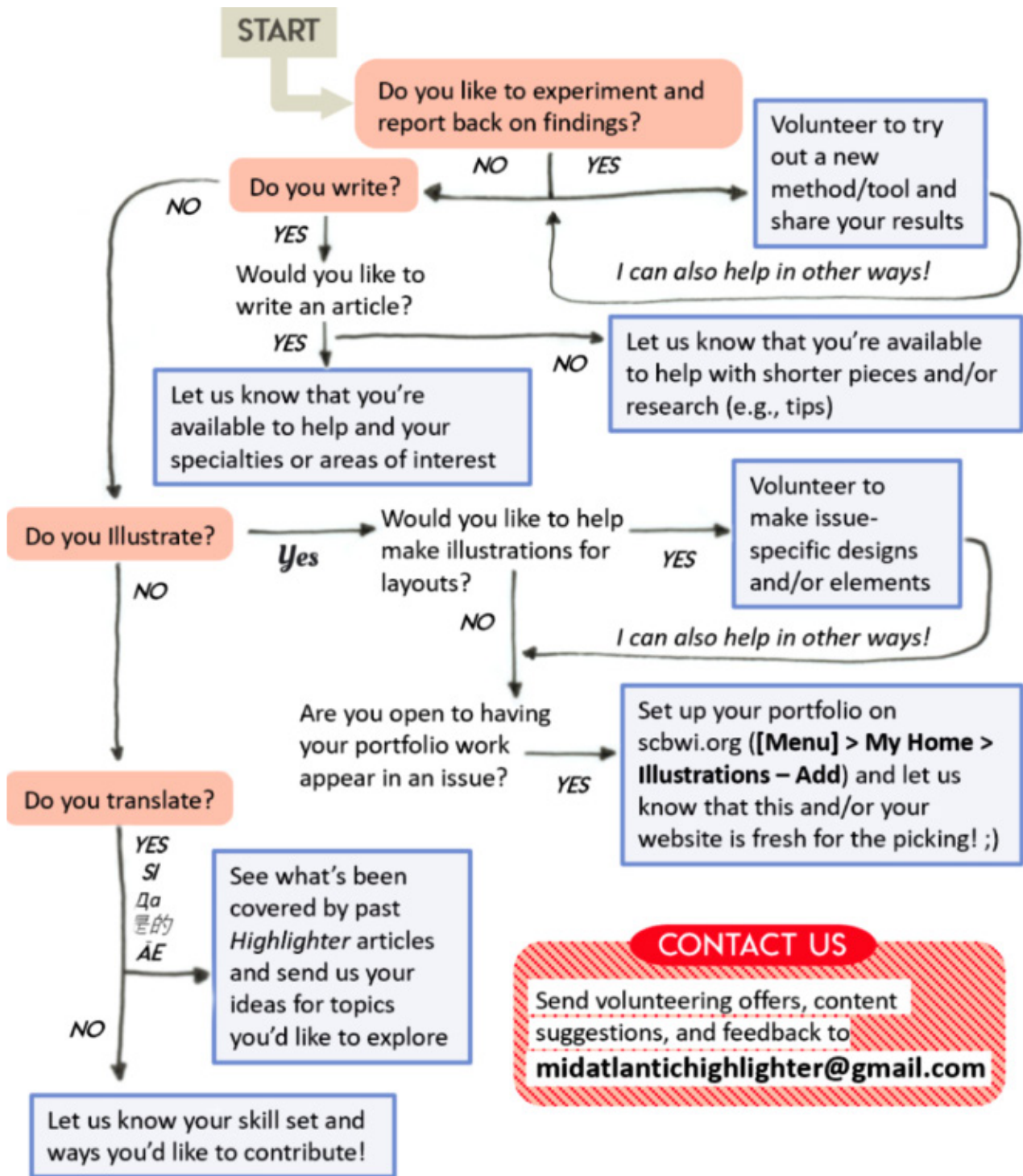
NoVa TEEN Book Festival: Homecoming

March 14-18, 2022 (free virtual event) | Weeklong celebration of YA books and authors with streaming of authors, games, panels, and discussions. <http://novateenbookfestival.com/>

Virginia Festival of the Book

March 16-20, 2022 (mostly free virtual and in-person events in Charlottesville and Albemarle County) | Event that brings together writers and readers to promote and celebrate books, reading, literacy, and literary culture. <https://www.vabook.org/2021/11/09/save-the-dates-for-the-first-hybrid-virginia-festival-of-the-book-in-march-2022/>

Highlighter Volunteering Flowchart



MOOD BOARD

2021

If you are reading this letter, you have found all my letters, all of my secrets.

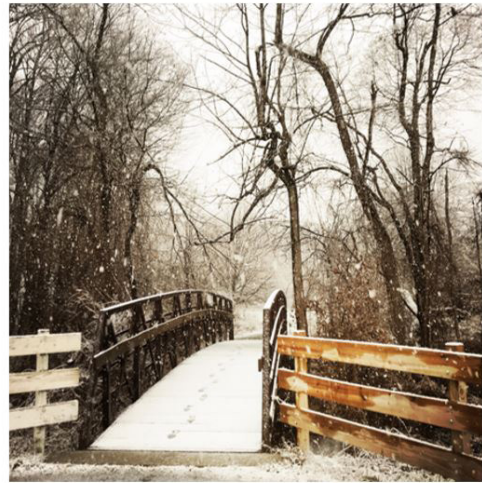
—Excerpt from THE LEGEND OF BUDDY BUSH by Shelia P. Moses, Margaret K. McElderry Books (2004)



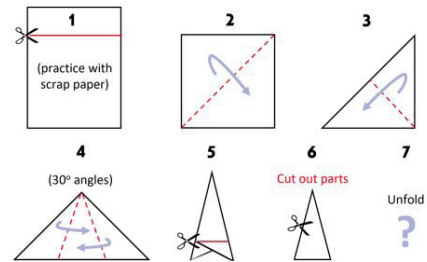
MIMI SIMON

“She hands me a small white box. I open it and look at the translucent pill every citizen takes to trigger their departure, the serum sloshing inside it.”

—Excerpt from DEPARTURES by E. J. Wenstrom, darkstroke (2021)



DENISE TARANOV



LINDSAY HEIDER DIAMOND, bus illustration