



The Prairie Wind

newsletter of the scbwi-illinois chapter

autumn 2010

Autumn 2010 • from the editor

Falling into Place

Hello, SCBWI-Illinois! The Prairie Wind has seen a summer of change, but things are now falling into place. On the editorial side, several columnists moved on and others were ushered in. And on the technological side, our webmistress Chris Vasilakis has revamped the Prairie Wind's outer appearance and behind-the-scenes capabilities. Among the changes you'll notice:

- We have a new address! Be sure to bookmark <http://www.scbwi-illinois.org/pub/PrairieWind> for easy access.
- Articles can now be found in three places: (1) by issue date in the right-hand sidebar, (2) by active column in the left-hand sidebar (along with current articles), and (3) by retired column in the right-hand sidebar.
- The "front page" has a slightly different format. Now, the (wider) center column will display the current From the Editor, Greeting, Illustrator in the Spotlight, and Tales from the Front articles.
- As has been my habit, I will continue to feature a table of contents in my From the Editor column. But now, you can also click each article's title to instantly access that article. This will hopefully help readers navigate the site and ensure that no one accidentally misses one word of any issue!

I will never adequately thank all the people involved in producing the *Prairie Wind*, yet I will keep trying. To all of the Prairie Wind's regular and guest contributors, Chris Vasilakis (webmistress), Cheryl Bardoe (assistant editor), Paula Nathan (PDF creator), Alice McGinty and Lisa Bierman (SCBWI-IL's fearless RAs), and Sara Shacter (ARA and my go-to guru): THANK YOU!

Heather Banks Editor

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~ Our Chapter ~

- **Illustrator in the Spotlight:** This interview may have taken place

in John Aardema's head, but his career hasn't—read all about his picture book success.

- **Tales from the Front**: Writing a book changed Jen Cullerton Johnson's life in more ways than one. Find out how her book could change your life, too.
- **Season's Crop**: Beverly Patt and Ruth Spiro have compiled a list of recently and soon-to-be published books by SCBWI-IL members—in time for book reports and holiday shopping!

~ Happenings ~

- **Classes**: Autumn is a great time to “spring” ahead and learn something new, and June Sengpiehl has compiled the many educational opportunities out there—local, distant, and online.
- **News Roundup**: Events, contests, awards, and more—Michelle Sussman puts it all in one place for you.
- **Food for Thought**: Sallie Wolf is planning a program to help us plan the promotion of our new books—find out more about it here!
- **Don't Miss #1**: Autumn—time to enroll in school and, more importantly, the Speakers Directory. Kimberly Breyer and Ozge Gunday supply all the necessary details.
- **Don't Miss #2**: Just when our outdoor gardens drift into dormancy, prepare to cultivate your creative garden at November's Prairie Writer's Day!

~ Craft ~

- **Writing Tips**: Jennifer Ward shows us how to create patterns in our stories—and explains why they're important.
- **Critique Group Tips**: Being in a critique group has taught Meg Fleming Lentz a lot, and now we can learn from her experience.
- **Illustrator Tips**: When it comes to illustrating picture books, new columnist Lisa Cinelli believes in learning by example—and she shows us how to do so.
- **Writer's Bookshelf**: Pack your bags (and your work-in-progress)—new columnist Kim Winters wants to send us on a revision quest.
- **Book Look**: Is your manuscript tone-deaf? New columnist Jodell Sadler helps us learn from a middle-grade novel that sings.

~ Career ~

- **The Irrepressible Writer**: Carol Coven Grannick explains that if we know how to get to Carnegie Hall, we also know how to become better writers and illustrators.
- **Promote That Book!** Deborah Ruddell and Robin Luebs prove that two heads can be better than one when it comes to promoting a book.
- **Kidlitosphere**: This interview by Margo L. Dill gives us a glimpse

into a popular science fiction and fantasy blog—and the woman behind it.

- **Booksellers' Perspective:** Once you've read Bob and Paula Morrow's profile of Books on First, you'll know why those who live near this bookstore are so lucky.
- **A Fly on the Wall:** All aboard! Join Kym Brunner as she returns to the Words in the Woods retreat that took place in June.
- **Someone You Should Know:** Jeremy Dunn, president of ISLMA, explains why this organization is so important to SCBWI-IL.

autumn 2010 • greeting

Growing Together-Part III

At the time of writing this, I am still in the “glow” of a wonderful experience at the SCBWI Summer Conference. The array of information shared on such a wide variety of topics was truly an embarrassment of riches. But just as valuable, and no surprise to me, was the pleasure of interacting with fellow members from Illinois. In almost any gathering of our membership, I come away grateful. For lively conversation. For an attitude of openness. For the many folks who are willing to pitch in and create or support our varied programs.

Now as much as I enjoyed the conference, it's deeply satisfying to know that you could stay right here in Illinois all year long and still have access to inspiration and valuable educational experiences. Let's just review a smattering of the professional enrichment opportunities we have had in past months.

- For those who are a little intimidated by technology, we had workshops on creating book trailers and using Facebook professionally.
- For those wondering about new business models in the publishing industry, we had the chance to hear Stephen Roxburgh explain how things work at his new company, *namelos*.
- For those wondering which new books will give them a good sense of the market and a point of comparison for judging their own work, we had Jan Dundon and Mary Harris Russell speak—FOR FREE!
- And every week or two, my e-mail has contained some announcement for a network program both relevant and full of promise, such as writing narrative nonfiction, polishing presentation skills, or how to survive a disastrous public appearance.

For years now, I have been impressed with our members' willingness to share what they know with colleagues. But before any smart person can get up to a podium to “wow” the rest of us, there has to be a topic and a plan. And where do those plans come from? If you ask me, it's from our chapter's secret “superpower.”

Our collective superpower is that we share what we don't know but wish we did. We share the daily struggles that hamper our creativity. And we wonder out loud about trends or concepts we keep hearing about but don't grasp yet. It's these moments of exploration that plant the seed for some of our best programs—whether they are Food for Thought sessions, network meetings, or breakout sessions at Prairie Writer's Day.

OK, here's where I get back to the "embarrassment of riches" concept. Our program ideas are generated by so many different members, it just puts a foolish grin on my face. So, I'd like to end with a heartfelt thanks to all of you who contribute to our common cause—the cause of GROWING TOGETHER! Whether you have been an idea-generator, a room-setter-upper, a schedule-maker, or any other "doer," you are our precious natural resource. And if you have been an attendee, an information-seeker, or a comment-maker, then you, too, have been our chapter's lifeblood. Cuz without an audience, what joy would there be in program planning? (And we ARE, by the way, hoping to see a great many of you in the audience at Prairie Writer's Day 2010...)

Now read on, soak up the offerings of your colleagues—there's a banquet in this issue of the Prairie Wind, and no ticket is needed. Enjoy.

Lisa Bierman Co-Regional Advisor

autumn 2010 • illustrator in the spotlight

Bountiful Reverie: An Interview with John Aardema

By Mister Proteus



His home is decorated in shades of oaken browns and charcoal greys, camel beiges and antiqued golds. An oversized clock here, a crumbling cherub there, and florid tables with ornately carved legs prowl the room. A thick light illuminates this tintype atmosphere, where I am to interview one John Aardema, an illustrator of picture books for children.

Initially, SCBWI-IL's Prairie Wind asked Mr. Aardema to write an article highlighting his journey to publication, but it was decided after a few false starts that an interview would yield greater results. It was agreed to by both parties that Mr. Aardema be interviewed by myself, Mister Proteus—a fictional character from the illustrator's very own imagination.

* * *

Mister Proteus: Good day to you, sir. I must ask, have you ever been interviewed by an imaginary character before?

John Aardema: Yes, yesterday. He's a giant lightning bug, but he's from a project still under wraps. I didn't want to unveil him prematurely. So the interview didn't really fly.

MP: Haha! Fly...firefly...that's a terrible pun, sir.

JA: Thank you. It's a gift.



MP: Now to the reason for the interview—the newest book you've illustrated, *The Blizzard Wizard* (Down East Books), by Lynn Plourde, will be available September 16, 2010. And another book, *Emma's Rainy Day* (BeachHouse Publishing), will also be available in

September. Two illustrated picture books! Is that impressive?

JA: I have no idea what others think. As for myself, I'm very impressed. It's a good feeling to finish an illustration and publish it on the Web for everyone to see. But it's a great feeling to hold a printed book in your hand, containing your own art that is on the market for everyone to enjoy.

MP: Are you a full-time illustrator?

JA: Yes, but only accidentally. I had been working as an art director/designer of magazines for ten years when publications started downsizing due to the growth of the Internet and changes in postal regulations. I decided to freelance until a full-time job became available, but none ever did.

MP: You make a living doing picture books?

JA: Not yet! I also draw storyboards for clients like Domino's Pizza, Chips Ahoy! JCPenney, and so on, but I could stand to get more of that work. And I've done some work for magazines like *Books & Culture* and *Click*.

MP: Do you have an agent?

JA: Um, I think so, but I haven't heard anything in about a year. Maybe I should check on her and see if she's still alive.

MP: Oh dear, who's feeding the cats?

JA: Hmm.

MP: When did you become interested in picture books?

JA: I've always been interested in picture books. My parents bought me a lot of picture books as a child, and my grandparents used to show up every Sunday with a new little book. We also went to the library often.

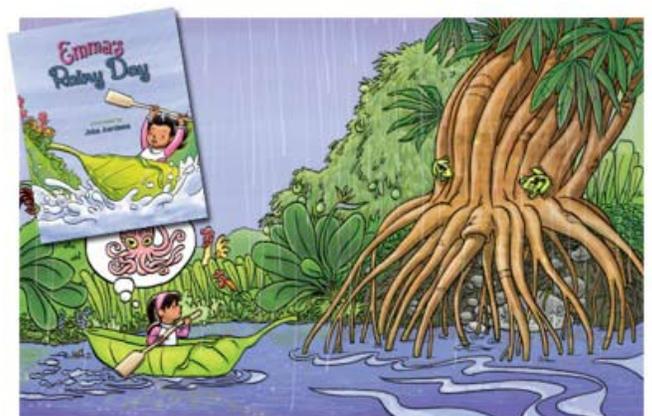
MP: Who were your influences? What sparked your imagination?

JA: Early on? Anyone in the Sunday funnies. I just adored that stuff. Charles Schulz, especially. Influences from picture books were Maurice Sendak, Quentin Blake, Richard Scarry, Edward Gorey, and Ed Emberley. I also loved television cartoons and the Rankin/Bass holiday specials.

MP: Tell me about the two newest picture books you've illustrated.

JA: The first book, *The Blizzard Wizard*, is about a wizard whose job is to make it snow every winter—except he's lost the spell. So he tries to fake it. All I can say is, expect hilarious results. *Emma's Rainy Day* is about a Hawaiian girl who ventures outside one rainy day and has a great adventure because she transforms the landscape through her imagination.

MP: What were some of the highlights or



challenges working on these books?

JA: *The Blizzard Wizard* is a wintertime story that takes place without any snow, so I had to draw a snowless yet convincingly cold winter. I got to play with the diffuse light of wintertime and some interesting skies. There's also an owl I added to the story, whose expressions serve to alert the reader to the reactions the children in the story would be having if they weren't so polite. *Emma's Rainy Day* allowed me to play with light as well, but I was further challenged as I had to learn the correct flora and fauna of the Hawaiian Islands. The copy is sparse, so there was a lot I drew to show Emma's blossoming imagination.

MP: Imagination figures heavily in your illustrations, does it not?

JA: Absolutely. When I began making illustrations for my online portfolio at <http://www.inkyboy.com>, I deliberately chose subjects that I enjoyed drawing, such as monsters, fairies, aliens, robots, etc. Some art directors pick illustrators because their art evokes a certain mood that reflects the story, but other art directors pick an illustrator because they see an element in the art sample that is mentioned in the story. Either way, when people see my work, they hire me to illustrate more imaginative tales. Heaven forbid someone hire me to illustrate a story about gingham-dressed settler girls in a barley field baking root pies with Grandma or whatever...

MP: Root pies?

JA: I dunno. Whatever they ate back then...

MP: Gingham-dressed settler girls sounds like something you could do. You enjoy drawing illustrations of characters wearing period clothing, don't you?

JA: Oh yes. I've drawn kids in medieval France, Victorian ghosts, Victorians embarking on a transatlantic steamship journey, character designs for a Russian folktale, and Greek mythological characters dressed in the Regency period. I'm currently working on an illustration of Beethoven for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. So I could illustrate a story about prairie girls if I had to. But there'd need to be aliens involved or something.

MP: You are a big fan of the Victorians, aren't you?

JA: I am. Yesterday's firefly was a Victorian.

MP: Indeed? You seem to be deft at creating unique characters and settings. What inspires you?

JA: Unique things, interesting things. Old stories, vintage clothing, strange plants, outrageous insects, sea life, prehistoric animals, museums, cryptozoology, ghosts, dreams, weird buildings, mythological beasts, odd

children, faerie lore, holiday origins, Jungian psychology, lost civilizations, grand opera, Dixieland jazz, night scenes—really anything can be an inspiration, but usually everything is. I look to everything as a potential source for creating the elements of the story at hand.

MP: After illustrating two picture books, what's next for you?



JA: Next, I'm going to assemble my manuscripts and start sending those out again. I've lost count of how many manuscripts and picture book ideas I actually have. I think I've written five or six fairly strong ones. Stories about goofy insects, a nighttime world of Japanese spirits, a boy who tells tall tales, a trip to the underworld, a mermaid girl, and others. I've received a number of rejection slips, but not as many as other people, I'm sure. At some point shortly I'm going to do a

marathon manuscript blitz.

MP: One last question—as the most recent character to come out of your psyche, could you give me a little insight into me?

JA: In Greek mythology, Proteus was one of the original sea gods. In stories about him, he is pursued by someone requesting a boon. In order for the boon to be granted, he must be captured and held fast. But Proteus can change his shape, and he will turn into many a terrible beast to cause the captor to loosen his grip. If the captor doesn't let go, the wish will be granted. I thought you were a good symbol not only of me wrestling with this article, but also of the bountiful reverie of the protean imagination.

MP: Ooh! That's deep. Am I in one of your manuscripts?

JA: Not yet. May I become a successful picture book author and illustrator?

MP: Gotta catch me first! Look, I'm a bee!

JA: No fair!

MP: Now I'm a skunk.

JA: Stop it...

MP: Look, I'm a duck!

JA: Get outta the toilet! ...

John Aardema is an illustrator with three picture books to his credit: The

Blizzard Wizard (Down East Books), by Lynn Plourde, available September 16, 2010; *Emma's Rainy Day* (BeachHouse Publishing), also available in September; and *There Was an Old Auntie* (BeachHouse Publishing). More illustrations can be found at <http://www.inkyboy.com>, or look up his inkyboy page on Facebook.

autumn 2010 • tales from the front

The Accidental Environmentalist

By Jen Cullerton Johnson

I live in an urban environment where skyscrapers hem in nature. Animals dwell in cages at the zoos. Gardens and greenery thrive in manicured parks. Buoys block off Lake Michigan. Even the stars disappear under the brightness of streetlights. The hours I spend inside my house on the computer surpass the time I spend outside.

When I began researching and writing *Seeds of Change*, a book about the life of Wangari Maathai, the first African woman and first environmentalist to win the Nobel Peace Prize, I wasn't a Greenie. In fact, my contributions to saving the planet rested on turning off lights, recycling, and an occasional Bike to Work Day. Nature, I felt, belonged to another world, a world separated from mine.

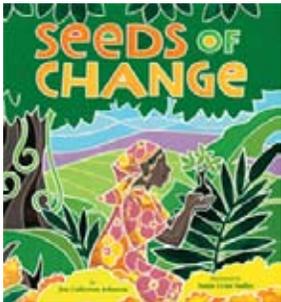
At first, what drew me to writing about Wangari Maathai's life for children was not the fact that she planted thirty million trees in Kenya but her persistence to find solutions for difficult problems. How do you conquer poverty without destroying the land? How do you preserve the land without disempowering the poor? Wangari took these two complicated issues, poverty and the environment, and found her own answer. Wangari taught poor women a very specific skill: how to plant a tree. By doing so, these women planted trees all over Kenya, creating what looked like green belts across the land. The powerful image of green growing again in Kenya gave birth to the name Green Belt Movement. A movement, I might add, that thrives today as an international organization for the environment and the rights of the disempowered.

When I started the research for *Seeds of Change*, there were only a few academic journal articles about Wangari Maathai and the Green Belt



Movement. I therefore drew heavily on Wangari's memoir, *Unbowed* (Knopf, 2006). Wangari spoke to many different kinds of people, from poor women to presidents, schoolchildren to ambassadors. Her words inspired all around her to action. You can sense the persistence and commitment in her speeches. Her words moved me from a passive watcher to an active doer. When she said *hajabee*, or "let's work together," I understood it didn't just mean turning off a light or recycling a water bottle but being aware of my actions and how my actions impact the world around me.

Community is essential for everyone, especially writers. In the early stages of *Seeds of Change*, I was fortunate to have Esther Hershenhorn critique my manuscript. Her astute insight was to ask me how my experiences related to Wangari's. I think her suggestion made all the difference to me as I searched for Wangari's voice and my own. I wanted readers to "hear" Wangari, so I decided I would take every opportunity to use Wangari's own words. When the book is read, it feels as if Wangari Maathai is the room since the words belong to her.



Wangari Maathai's life had many challenges. She was thrown in jail for planting trees. My editor, Jennifer Fox at Lee & Low, never hesitated, never doubted that telling the truth was important to telling Wangari's story. There is a line in *Seeds of Change* that says, "One day while she was out planting a tree, some wealthy businessmen paid corrupt police officers to arrest Wangari." This is a tricky line with big implications. But Lee & Low did not shy away from the truth; like Wangari Maathai herself, they stood firm. I will always be grateful to them for their deep respect for story and truth telling.

When *Seeds of Change* came out, I wanted to embrace Wangari's idea of putting ideas into practice. I understood now how I coexisted in nature. Our worlds were one, not separate. Whenever I go on a school visit, do a reading, or give a presentation, I make sure that after *Seeds of Change* is read, the audience has a chance to make a connection between themselves and nature. Sometimes we plant trees, other times seeds, but each time there is a connection between reading and doing. People need to dig in the dirt, roll a seed between their fingers, or touch the leaves of different plants so they know that Wangari's experience of embracing nature and caring for the environment can also be part of their own experience.

The urgency, the nowness, of environmental issues is upon us. There is no escape. Either we find solutions like Wangari did with the Green Belt Movement, or we cease to exist. One of our jobs as writers is to inspire readers with our words, but sometimes inspiration fades or is forgotten. Therefore, our words must also move readers to action, be it to plant seeds or be nicer to their neighbors.

I think environmental books for children are doing just that—inspiring readers and moving them to action. I am very grateful that *Seeds of Change* is part of this genre. I hope more writers push ahead and continue to explore how our natural world, and our human place in it, are both one of many, and many for the good of all.

Links:

Lee & Low Books: <http://www.leeandlow.com> Jen Cullerton Johnson's website: <http://www.jencullertonjohnson.com> Wangari Maathai and the Green Belt Movement: <http://www.greenbeltmovement.org>

Jen Cullerton Johnson lives and works in Chicago. Seeds of Change (Lee & Low Books, 2010) is her first picture book. Jen is passionate about green literacy and green books. She has spoken for the EPA and Green Festival (<http://www.greenfestivals.org>). Along with writers Michelle Duster and Trina Sotira, Jen formed MuseWrite (<http://www.MuseWrite.com>), a literary organization for community writing workshops. Their next workshop, "Collect. Recollect. Connect!" will be held in November at Columbia College.

autumn 2010 • season's crop

New SCBWI-IL Books to Get You Through Winter

Compiled by Beverly Patt and Ruth Spiro

PICTURE BOOKS

John Aardema (Illustrator)

THE BLIZZARD WIZARD

(Down East Books)

EMMA'S RAINY DAY

(BeachHouse Publishing)

Marlene Brill

ANNIE SHAPIRO AND THE CLOTHING WORKERS' STRIKE

(Lerner)

Esme Raji Codell

FAIRLY FAIRY TALES

(Simon & Schuster/Aladdin)

Kate Hannigan Issa (and Karen Duncan)

THE GOOD FUN! BOOK: 12 MONTHS OF PARTIES THAT CELEBRATE SERVICE

(Blue Marlin Publications)

Kimberly M. Hutmacher

THERAPY DOGS

SLED DOGS

TELEVISION AND MOVIE STAR DOGS
CAVES
MOUNTAINS
(Capstone Press)

Alice B. McGinty
ELIZA'S KINDERGARTEN PET
(Marshall Cavendish)

Barb Rosenstock
FEARLESS: THE STORY OF RACING LEGEND LOUISE SMITH
(Penguin/Dutton)

Jonathan Schkade
ICKY, STICKY, HAIRY SCARY BIBLE STORIES
(Concordia Publishing House)

Kathleen Spale (Illustrator)
SAMSON'S STORY
(Story Pie Press)

Suzanne Slade
CLIMBING LINCOLN'S STEPS: THE AFRICAN AMERICAN JOURNEY
(Albert Whitman & Company)

Pat Stemper Vojta
MR. GROUNDHOG WANTS THE DAY OFF
(Raven Tree Press)

OLDER FICTION

B. A. Binns
PULL
(WestSide Books)

Marlene Brill
THE ROUGH-RIDING ADVENTURE OF BRONCO CHARLIE, PONY EXPRESS RIDER
(Lerner/Graphic Universe)

Hilary Wagner
NIGHTSHADE CITY
(Holiday House)

*Bev's latest release, **Best Friends Forever: A World War II Scrapbook**, has earned two starred reviews and is listed on the ACPL Mock Newbery and Mock Sibert lists! Visit Bev at <http://www.beverlypatt.com>.*

*Ruth Spiro is the author of **Lester Fizz, Bubble-Gum Artist**, published by*

Dutton. Her articles and essays have appeared in national magazines, including The Writer and Disney's FamilyFun. A frequent speaker at schools and conferences, Ruth may be contacted through her website, <http://www.ruthspiro.com>.

autumn 2010 • classes

2010 Classes to Help You Get Ahead This Fall

Compiled by June Sengpiehl

Classes, conferences, and workshops provide opportunities for professional contacts, manuscript critiques, networking, and fellowship. Many an unpublished manuscript has been refocused, redefined, rewritten, and published after its author attended a class or workshop. Why not consider one of the learning opportunities below? Or visit <http://scbwi-illinois.org/Networks.html> for events offered by SCBWI-Illinois Networks throughout the state.

CLASSES IN ILLINOIS (roughly by starting date)

MAYSLAKE PEABODY ESTATE (Oak Brook, IL) **What:** [Craft & Critique: Writing Workshop for Children's/Young Adult Writers](#) **When:** Tuesdays, September 14–October 26, 7:00–9:30 p.m. (no class October 5) **Instructor:** Carmela Martino **Details:** In this newly expanded workshop, author Carmela Martino will help students hone their writing and revision skills via lectures and readings. Students will also receive a critique of their own work while learning how to critically study the work of other writers in a friendly, supportive environment. You must bring copies of your manuscript—picture book, short story, nonfiction piece, or novel excerpt—to the first class. Also, before enrolling, you must e-mail Carmela (carmela@carmelamartino.com) for word count limits and manuscript guidelines.

Note: Class is limited to ten students, so register early. Also, attendance on September 14 is mandatory.

Cost: \$135

Registration: Call Mayslake at 630- 206-9566.

More information: <http://www.carmelamartino.com/events.htm>

OFF CAMPUS WRITERS' WORKSHOP (OCWW) (Winnetka, IL) All sessions run Thursdays from 9:30 to noon, and the cost is \$10 per session. OCWW members (for \$30 per year) receive session discounts and may get manuscripts critiqued for \$15. Visit <http://www.ocww.bizland.com> for more information. The following programs are of particular interest to children's writers:

1) [Fundamental Plots](#)

When: Thursdays, September 16–October 7

Instructor: Fred Shafer

Details: Using examples from children's books, as well as adult literary fiction, Fred will share his insights into the fundamental plots that underlie all storytelling. Fred is a literary editor, writer, workshop leader, and lecturer in creative writing at Northwestern University. He will critique children's and adult fiction.

2) Getting Your Story Right: A Children's Book Writing Coach's Two-For-One Checklist

When: Thursday, October 14

Instructor: Esther Hershenhorn

Details: Esther will offer suggestions and shortcuts to help writers with both the children's story they're telling and the writer's story they're living. Esther teaches writing for children at the University of Chicago's Writer's Studio and at the Newberry Library. Her latest title is *S is for Story: A Writer's Alphabet*, an A-to-Z journey through a writer's life and process. In lieu of manuscripts, writers may submit questions that address issues of craft, the writer's life, or the world of children's books.

THE ART CENTER (Highland Park, IL)

What: **Fall Plein Air Landscape Painting at Heller Nature Center (#8223)**

When: Tuesdays, September 14–December 7, 10:00 a.m.–12:30 p.m.

Instructor: Michelle Kogan (<http://www.michellekogan.com>)

Cost: \$320 (\$300 for members)

Registration: Call (847) 432-1888 or visit

<http://www.theartcenterhp.org/classes.asp>.

EVANSTON ART CENTER (Evanston, IL) The following classes are taught by Michelle Kogan (<http://www.michellekogan.com>). To register, call (847) 475-5300 or visit <http://evanstonartcenter.org/catalog.aspx?did=5>.

1) Creating Dynamic Figures (0176)

When: Tuesdays, September 14–November 30, 7:00–10:00 p.m.

Cost: \$320 (\$300 for residents)

2) Studio Drawing: Composition/Space/Value (0282)

When: Wednesdays, September 15–December 8, 7:00–10:00 p.m.

Cost: \$300 (\$280 for residents)

3) Transparent Watercolor (0261)

When: Fridays, September 17–December 10, 9:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m.

Cost: \$300 (\$280 for residents)

CHICAGO BOTANIC GARDEN (Glencoe and Chicago, IL)

The following classes are taught by Michelle Kogan (<http://www.michellekogan.com>).

1) Plein Air Watercolor: In the Greenhouse and Garden (Glencoe, IL)

When: Thursdays, September 16–November 18, 9:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m.

Cost: \$290

Registration: E-mail Michelle at mkogan@mdandmk.com or call her at (312) 813-1176.

2) Plein Air Watercolor Workshop In Lurie Garden (Chicago, IL)

When: Mondays, September 20–October 25, 9:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m.

Cost: \$287 (\$229 for members)

Registration: Visit <http://www.chicagobotanic.org/school/index.php> and search “Kogan,” or call 847-835-8261.

EMILY OAKS NATURE CENTER (Skokie, IL)

What: [Plein Air Watercolor Workshop \(344451-01\)](#)

When: Saturday, September 25 and October 2, 9:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m. (rain date October 9)

Instructor: Michelle Kogan (<http://www.michellekogan.com>)

Cost: \$60/\$75

Registration: Call (847) 677-7001 or visit https://www.skokieparkdistrict.org/register_now.asp.

NEW TRIER WEST EXTENSION DIVISION (Northfield, IL)

What: [The Nuts, Bolts and ABC's of Writing for Kids](#)

Session #103-930: Mondays, September 20–November 29, 7:00–9:00 p.m. (no class October 11)

Session #103-931: Tuesdays, September 21–November 23, 1:00–3:00 p.m.

Instructor: Pamela Dell

Details: If you aspire to be a published children’s book author, this course will take you several steps further toward that goal. Weekly presentations will focus on the craft of writing and provide practical information on the publishing industry, such as the best markets, what editors are looking for, and how to attract an agent. In the workshop portions of the class, participants will improve their writing skills through exercises focusing on character, plot, dialogue, and other essential elements of the writer’s craft, and receive valuable professional feedback on their work. Expect to come away from this class with the increased confidence that leads to success.

Cost: \$200 (\$160 for seniors)

More information and registration: Call (847) 446-6600 or visit <http://www.newtrier.k12.il.us/page.aspx?id=6954>.

NORTH SHORE WRITERS STUDIO (Highland Park, IL)

What: [A Facilitated Critique Group For Children’s Book Writers](#)

When: Alternate Tuesdays—September 21; October 5, 19; November 2, 16, 30; 6:30—9:30 p.m. **Instructors:** Brenda Ferber and Jenny Meyerhoff

Details: Participants will submit five pages per week to all workshop members, including Brenda and Jenny, for critique. Participants will also receive pages from all other workshop members each week and will be expected to comment on the work of their peers. Open to all children’s literature genres. Class limited to six persons.

Cost: \$240

Registration: E-mail northshorewriters@gmail.com by September 7.

Note: Refunds vary depending on when you cancel.

More information: <http://www.northshorewriters.com>

THE NEWBERRY LIBRARY (Chicago, IL)

What: [Picture This: Writing Picture Books For Children](#)

When: Tuesdays, September 28–November 2, 5:45–7:45 p.m.

Instructor: Esther Hershenhorn

Details: This workshop focuses on how to create and write a successful children's picture book that connects with both young readers and today's ever-changing marketplace. Participants' manuscripts will be shared and discussed to highlight the variety of picture books and structures, craft, the writing process, and today's children's book publishing world. Writers of all levels will be offered a supportive, challenging, and encouraging environment.

More information: <http://www.newberry.org/programs/seminars.html>

SCHOOL OF THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO (Chicago, IL) For more information on the two classes below, visit the SAIC's Continuing Studies website at http://www.saic.edu/continuing_studies/ace/index.html. Also, as of this fall, the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Department of Continuing Studies and Special Programs, has a Certificate in Children's Book Illustration Program with Lisa Cinelli and Laura Nyman Montenegro as instructors.

1) [Multi-level Children's Book Illustration](#)

When: Thursdays, September 30–December 9, 6:00–9:00 p.m. (no class November 25)

Instructor: Lisa Cinelli

2) [Beginning Children's Book Illustration](#)

When: Tuesdays, October 5–December 7, 6:00–9:00 p.m.

Instructor: Laura Nyman Montenegro

EVANSTON, IL

What: [The Intuitive Suitcase](#)

When: Wednesdays, October 6–December 15, 6:00–9:00 p.m. (no class November 24)

Instructor: Laura Nyman Montenegro

Details: The picture book art form is a rich and inviting world for story making and expression. In this class, you will develop several picture book dummies using your own unique blend of story writing, illustration, and book design. Shaping the book dummy generates exciting moments in a book's creation. Far surpassing the singular arts necessary in picture books—illustration, story writing and book design—the book dummy invites the artist to combine all three. Using cut-paper collage, tempera, gouache, pen and ink, and other media, we will transform the written word into visual poetry and create story through image. This class will encourage development of artistic and writing skills as well as draw students to a deeper, more personal artistic expression. No art experience is necessary.

Cost: \$400

Registration: (847) 328-4175

HIGHLAND PARK, IL

What: [Materials and Techniques in Children's Book Illustration](#)

Teaching Artist: Lisa Cinelli

Details: Work one-on-one or in small classes exploring drawing, painting, and mixed media techniques used in children's book illustration. Fine-tune images in your picture book dummy and then experiment with materials to best tell the story visually. Classes can also be arranged to focus on particular drawing or painting techniques such as pen and ink, watercolor, gouache (an opaque watercolor), or mixed media.

For more information about classes or one-on-one lessons: Contact Lisa Cinelli at lisacinelli@gmail.com or (847) 433-4287.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO GRAHAM SCHOOL (Downtown Chicago, IL)

What: [Publishing Your Book for Children and Young Adults](#)

When: Thursday, December 2, 6:00–9:00 p.m. **Instructor:** Esther Hershenhorn

Details: If you are thinking about writing a children's book, either fiction or nonfiction, this seminar will ground you and point you in the right direction. Bring a proposal, an idea, a character description, a synopsis, or even a first chapter to help determine your story's format possibilities, audience, and marketability in today's diverse children's book world.

More information: <https://grahamschool.uchicago.edu/php/offering.php?oi=5505>

THE RAGDALE FOUNDATION (Lake Forest, IL)

- Visit <http://www.ragdale.org/calendar> to explore the programs at Ragdale this fall.
- Visit <http://www.ragdale.org/residency> to learn how to apply for a residency at Ragdale.

DISTANCE AND ONLINE LEARNING

WOW! WOMEN ON WRITING

What: [Writing for Children: Everything You Need to Know About Short Stories, Articles, and Fillers](#)

When: Starts Wednesday, September 8 (duration is 7 weeks)

Instructor: Margo L. Dill

Details: This class will teach the basics of writing for children's magazines, including crafting short stories, nonfiction articles, poetry, and fillers. The student will come away with a short story and cover letter, nonfiction query letter, and a filler or poem. She will also have a list of potential markets fitting her manuscripts. The instructor will also share an organizational tool for submissions and information on finding other children's writers and networking.

Cost: \$200, which includes access to a Google group, ability to upload work to a Google group for discussion with instructor and other class members,

a free story and filler critique from the instructor (\$50 value), a free query and cover letter critique from instructor (\$25 value), and private e-mail discussions with instructor as needed.

Please note: because this course is offered more than once throughout the year, former students have the option of staying in the Google group each time the class meets (once their session ends) and gathering any new information or networking with new classmates.

Registration: http://www.wow-womenonwriting.com/WOWclasses.html#MargoDill_WritingForChildren

WOW! WOMEN ON WRITING

What: [Blogging 101 and More: Start a Blog, Make it Unique, and Keep it Going](#)

When: Starts Monday, October 4 (duration is 5 weeks)

Instructor: Margo L. Dill

Details: Blogging is one of the best and cheapest ways to achieve an Internet presence. This class will help students start a blog. If you already have a blog, it will help you target the readers you want to reach. Students will also learn how to create a unique blog, build followers and/or drive traffic to their blogs, blog on a schedule, connect posts to social networking sites, and monetize their blogs. This course is for beginning and intermediate bloggers or for people who are looking to spice up their blogs.

Please note: You do not have to be technologically savvy to start a blog and keep up with it. **Cost:** \$125, which includes access to a private Google group and private e-mail discussions with instructor as needed. **Students can remain in the Google group after the class ends to access materials and discuss problems/solutions/ideas with classmates.

Registration: http://www.wow-womenonwriting.com/WOWclasses.html#MargoDill_Blogging101

ROCK VALLEY COLLEGE

The following courses are taught by Jodell Sadler. To register, call Rock Valley College at (815) 921-3900. For more information, please e-mail Jodell at sadler4kids@charter.net.

1) [Knuffle Bunny to Harry Potter](#)

When: September 6–October 4

Details: This class is an online introduction to the children's writing market for those who are new to the field. Writers may learn about the many genres of children's literature, the current marketplace, and how to submit a manuscript. Weekly critiques will be offered.

Cost: \$79

2) [Finding Voice to Creating Characters](#)

When: October 4–November 4

Details: When it comes to writing for children, voice, character creation, point of view, plot, and pace matter. Join us online for a look at the many aspects of writing for children. Weekly critiques will be offered.

Cost: \$79

3) Writing for Children: Illustrators Perspective

When: November 1–29

Details: Want to find out what it takes to illustrate children's books? Explore children's illustration. Work hands-on to create unique characters children will love. We will be creating a character and placing it in a series of poses and scenes. This is a great class to help build a portfolio as a children's illustrator. Bring pencils and sketchbooks to each class. Color pencils and/or watercolors are optional.

Cost: \$79

4) Writing for Children: Advanced Course

When: Starts first Monday of each month: September, October, November, December

Details: If you are looking for an online course that shares the information I learned in my master's program in Writing for Children & Young Adults, sign up for my five-week Writing for Kids Advanced Course hosted completely online today. This course will explore the various genres, creating characters, finding voice, pacing (verbal and visual tools to change up the pace of your story), and editing (how to critique and edit your own story). Writers will receive weekly critiques of their work through personalized feedback.

Cost: \$150 (per month)

5) Writing for Children—Advanced Picture Books

When: Starts first Monday of each month: September, October, November, December

Details: This course explores whether writing picture books is as easy as it looks. Lectures and workshops will focus on seeing the picture book as an art form, as well as what it means to integrate art and words on a 32-page, two-dimensional landscape for the reader.

Cost: \$150 (per month)

POETRY WRITING CORRESPONDENCE COURSE

What: [The ABC's of Children's Poetry Correspondence Course](#)

When and where: at your convenience, in your own home

Instructor: Heidi Bee Roemer

Details: Do you want professional feedback on your story-in-rhyme, poetry collection, picture book, or nonfiction? Heidi Bee Roemer—instructor for the Institute of Children's Literature, and author of three poetry books and more than 400 magazine sales—teaches students how to write poetry for children with an eye on publication. Learn how to write a variety of poetry forms, basic meters, rhyme schemes, devices of sound, and more. Poetry assignments are exchanged via e-mail. Detailed critiques offered. Includes instruction on how to find and target poetry publishers. Materials you receive: 60-page ABC workbook, Poetry Place booklet, five CDs, sample magazines, and market newsletters.

Cost: \$195 (includes shipping)

More Information: Please contact Heidi at HRoemer@hotmail.com.

E-MAIL POETRY COURSE

What: [Beyond Jack and Jill: A Study in Children's Poetry](#)

Instructor: Kim Hutmacher

Details: This four-week course covers rhyme, meter, and scansion. Students will read a variety of poetry and gain an understanding of poetry forms and the tools poets use in creating their works. Students will read at least two children's poetry collections per week. They will submit two of their own poems for critique each week. Instructor will share children's poetry market information with students. The class is designed for four weeks, but if more time is needed, it will be okay.

Cost: \$100

More information or to register: Please contact Kim Hutmacher at kiddos@warpnet.net.

INSTITUTE OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE (ICL)

- correspondence courses, articles, tips, and chat room discussions
- <http://www.institutechildrenslit.com>

WRITER'S DIGEST ONLINE WORKSHOPS Writer's Digest offers three courses for children's writers: [Fundamentals of Writing For Children](#), [Focus on Writing Fiction For Children](#), and [Focus on Writing Nonfiction for Children](#). For more information, visit <http://www.writersonlineworkshops.com>.

*****SCBWI REGIONAL CONFERENCES*****

SCBWI-MICHIGAN (Augusta, MI)

What: [Fall Conference](#)

When: October 8-10

Speakers: include authors Darcy Pattison and Cinda Chima, editor Susan Chang (Tor), and art director Patrick Collins (Henry Holt)

More information: <http://kidsbooklink.org/id30.html>

SCBWI-CENTRAL & SOUTHERN OHIO (Upper Arlington, OH)

What: [2nd Annual Scarlet & Gray Event](#)

When: October 9, 8:30 a.m. (half-day event)

Speakers: agent Mary Kole (Andrea Brown), author Lisa Klein, and author/PR expert Marcia James

More information: <http://coscbwi.org>

SCBWI-WISCONSIN (Racine, WI)

What: [Annual Fall Retreat](#)

When: October 15-17

More information: http://www.scbwi-wi.com/upcoming_events.html

*****LEARNING OUTSIDE ILLINOIS*****

2010–2011 HIGHLIGHTS FOUNDATION WORKSHOPS

Visit <http://highlightsfoundation.org> for information on all workshops.

1) The [27th Annual Writers Workshop at Chautauqua](#), NY, will be July 16–23, 2011.

2) The following 2010 Founders Workshops are held near Honesdale, PA. Visit the website for workshops beyond November 2010.

- October 7–10: [Writing Novels for Young Adults](#) (Leader: Rich Wallace)
- October 10–13: [Starting Your Novel](#) (Leader: Patricia Lee Gauch)
- October 15–17: [A Crash Course in the Business of Children's Publishing](#) (Leader: Clay Winters)
- October 17–20: [Editing for Writers](#) (Leader: Stephen Roxburgh)
- October 28–31: [Nonfiction—It's More Than Just the Facts!](#) (Leader: Carolyn P. Yoder)
- October 31–November 3: [Picture This: Writing and Illustrating Picture Books](#) (Leaders: Candace Fleming, Eric Rohmann)
- November 6–13: [Whole Novel Workshop](#) (Leaders: Carolyn Coman, Martine Leavitt)
- November 13–20: [Whole Novel Workshop for Historical Fiction](#) (Leaders: Liza Ketchum, Ellen Levine)

VERMONT COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS (Montpelier, VT)

- low-residency MFA in Writing for Children & Young Adults
- eleven-day residencies in January and July
- <http://www.vermontcollege.edu/mfawc>

SPALDING UNIVERSITY (Louisville, KY)

- low-residency MFA in Writing with a concentration in writing for children & young adults
- ten-day residencies in May and (usually) November
- <http://www.spalding.edu/content.aspx?id=1912&cid=2376>

LESLEY UNIVERSITY (Cambridge, MA)

- low-residency MFA in Creative Writing with a concentration in writing for young people
- ten-day residencies in January and June
- http://www.lesley.edu/gsass/creative_writing

HAMLIN UNIVERSITY (Saint Paul, MN)

- low-residency MFA in Writing for Children and Young Adults
- eleven-day residencies in January and July
- http://www.hamline.edu/gls/academics/degree_programs/mfa_cl

June Sengpiehl lives in Oak Park with her husband, Paul. She writes poetry, articles, picture books, and chapter books. Her e-mail is jsseng629@yahoo.com.

autumn 2010 • news roundup

Fall Events to Fill Up Your Calendar

Compiled by Michelle Sussman

EVENTS (roughly by date)

ANDERSON'S BOOKSHOP

Information is subject to change; some events require tickets. For more information on these and other upcoming events, visit <http://www.andersonsbookshop.com/events.php>, or call (630) 355-2665 for AB Naperville or (630) 963-2665 for AB Downers Grove.

- **September 2:** Cassandra Clare, author of *Clockwork Angel*, 7:00 p.m., AB Naperville
- **September 14:** Adam Epstein and Andrew Jacobson, authors of *The Familiars*, 7:00 p.m., AB Naperville
- **September 15:** Peter Brown, author/illustrator of *Children Make Terrible Pets*, 7:00 p.m., AB Naperville
- **September 15:** Eoin Colfer, author of *Artemis Fowl: The Atlantis Complex*, 6:30 p.m. at Pfeiffer Hall, 310 E. Benton, Naperville. Purchase tickets at AB Naperville
- **September 16:** Cornelia Funke, author of *Reckless*, 7:00 p.m., AB Naperville
- **September 17:** Jamie Lee Curtis, author of *My Mommy Hung the Moon*, 7:00 p.m., AB Naperville
- **September 21:** Blue Balliett, author of *The Danger Box*, 7:00 p.m., AB Naperville
- **September 22:** The Smart Chicks tour presents six great authors: Melissa Marr, Carrie Ryan, Kelley Armstrong, Alyson Noel, Jennifer Barnes, and Jackson Pearce. 7:00 p.m. at Wentz Concert Hall, 171 E. Chicago Ave., Naperville. For details and tickets contact AB Naperville
- **September 22:** Ellen Hopkins, author of *Fallout*, 7:00 p.m., AB Downers Grove
- **September 23:** Doreen Cronin, author of *Rescue Bunnies*, 7:00 p.m., AB Naperville
- **September 24:** Kenneth Oppel, author of *Half Brother*, 7:00 p.m., AB

Downers Grove

- **September 24:** Pam Muñoz Ryan, author of *The Dreamer*, 7:00 p.m., AB Naperville
- **September 26:** Claudia Gray, Sophie Jordan, and Kiersten White, popular young adult authors, 2:00 p.m., AB Naperville
- **September 27:** Justin Somper, author of *Vampirates #5: Empire of Night*, 7:00 p.m., AB Downers Grove
- **September 27:** Tony DiTerlizzi, author of *The Search for WondLa*, 7:00 p.m., AB Naperville
- **September 29:** Sara Pennypacker and Marla Frazee, author and illustrator of *Clementine, Friend of the Week*, 7:00 p.m., AB Naperville
- **September 30:** Michael Grant, author of *The Magnificent 12: The Call*, 7:00 p.m., AB Naperville
- **October 3:** Suzanne Collins, author of *Mockingjay*, 2:00 p.m., AB Naperville
- **October 4:** Tad Hills, author of *How Rocket Learned to Read*, 7:00 p.m., AB Naperville
- **October 11:** Cinda Williams Chima, author of *The Exiled Queen*, 7:00 p.m., AB Downers Grove
- **October 13:** Lauren Kate, author of *Torment*, 7:00 p.m., AB Naperville
- **October 16:** Hilary Duff, author of *Elixir*, at time and location to be determined. Please check back with AB Naperville.
- **October 18:** Jennifer Donnelly, author of *Revolution*, 7:00 p.m., AB Naperville
- **October 18:** Peter Yarrow, author of *Puff, the Magic Dragon Pop-Up Book*, at a time and location to be determined. Please check back with AB Naperville.
- **October 19:** Lincoln Peirce, author of *Big Nate Strikes Again*, 7:00 p.m., AB Naperville
- **October 21:** T. A. Barron, author of *Merlin's Dragon: Ultimate Magic*, 7:00 p.m., AB Naperville
- **October 27:** Scott Westerfeld, author of *Behemoth*, 7:00 p.m., AB Naperville
- **November 1:** Rachel Caine, author of *Ghost Town (Morganville Vampires #9)*, 7:00 p.m., AB Downers Grove
- **November 7:** Kathy Reichs, author of *Virals*, 2:00 p.m., AB Naperville
- **November 8:** Jane O'Connor, author of *Fancy Nancy and the Fabulous Fashion Boutique*, 7:00 p.m., AB Naperville
- **November 15:** Laurie Halse Anderson, author of *Forge*, 7:00 p.m., AB Naperville
- **November 16:** Becca Fitzpatrick, author of *Crescendo*, 7:00 p.m., AB Naperville
- **December 4:** Anna Dewdney, author of *Llama Llama Holiday Drama*,

11:00 a.m., AB Naperville

PRINCETON KIDLIT 2010 (Princeton, IL)

When: Saturday, September 25

What it is: This community-wide literary festival will feature two blocks of family-friendly games and activities on the street and sidewalks, in the storefronts, in the movie theater, in the little downtown park, and even in the county courthouse.

National Author Guest of Honor: Richard Peck will speak and sign copies of his books, including the Newberry Medal winner *A Year Down Yonder*. Mr. Peck's newest book, *Three Quarters Dead*, will be available at the festival in advance of its official publication date.

Local Author Guest of Honor: Fr. Dominic Garramone of St. Bede Academy in Peru, IL, will speak and sign copies of his new children's book, *Brother Jerome and the Angels in the Bakery*.

Also: A number of Illinois children's authors will present readings and signings throughout the day. A meet-and-greet luncheon with all the authors has limited seating, and reservations are required. Authors will be available for conversation and autographs at a wine and cheese gathering later in the day.

Tickets and directions: <http://www.princetonkidlit.org>

Note: Illinois children's authors may still sign up to come and read/sell/sign your books, but you need to respond quickly. The program will be going to press soon. Contact LuAnn Salz at lsalz@kidlitfoundation.org right away.

EVERYDAY ADVENTURES GROWING UP: ART FROM PICTURE BOOKS

When: April 30–November 28

Where: The Art Institute of Chicago, Ryan Education Center and Gallery 10

Cost: museum admission applies

Details: The works of Nancy Carlson, Timothy Basil Ering, and Peter McCarty, are featured in this exhibition.

More information: <http://www.artic.edu/aic/exhibitions/exhibition/everydayadventures>

ANDERSON'S BOOKSHOP 7th ANNUAL YA LITERATURE CONFERENCE

When: September 25, 7:30 a.m.–4:00 p.m.

Where: Hotel Arista in Naperville

Cost: \$99 (includes author sessions, continental breakfast, and lunch)

Details: Featured authors include Blue Balliett, Charles Benoit, Kenneth Oppel, Dana Reinhardt, and Pam Muñoz Ryan. Also meet authors Alexandra Adornetto, Andrea Cremer, Simone Elkeles, Claudia Grey, Stephanie Hemphill, Antony John, Sophie Jordan, Stacey Kade, Kody Keplinger, Jim Klise, Kirsten Miller, and Kiersten White. Attend breakout sessions on fascinating topics, enjoy a continental breakfast and full luncheon, and shop the conference bookstore. Book-signing opportunities and CPDU credits offered.

More information: Call (800) 728-0708 or visit <http://www.andersonsbookshop.com/youngadulthoodliteratureconference.php>.

ILA ANNUAL CONFERENCE

When: September 29-30

Where: Navy Pier, Chicago

Cost: \$225-275 for full conference, \$150-170 for single day, \$35-55 for Youth Services Author Breakfast; discounts available for early registration, ILA membership, etc.

Details: The Illinois Library Association (ILA) Annual Conference is attended by librarians, trustees, library assistants, educators, and others interested in libraries. Book illustrator David Catrow will speak at the Youth Services Author Breakfast.

More information: Call (312) 644-1896 or visit <http://www.ila.org/events/conference.htm>.

TEEN READ WEEK

When: October 17-23

Details: This year's theme is "Books with Beat @ your library." It encourages kids to read poetry, audiobooks, books about music, and more.

More information: <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/yalsa/teenreading/trw/trw2010/home.cfm>

CAROL'S BOOK TALKS AT ANDERSON'S BOOKSHOP

When: October 26, 10:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m.

Where: Anderson's Bookshop, Naperville

Details: A presentation of the latest and greatest books this season. Reservations required.

More information: Call Anderson's Bookshop, Naperville, at (630) 355-2655.

34th DAY OF READING CONFERENCE

When: November 5-6

Where: Holiday Inn Select Hotel and Convention Center, Tinley Park, IL

Cost: One-day admission: SRL member, \$110; IRC member, \$120; non-member, \$150. Admission for two days includes a free dinner on Friday night: SRL member, \$220; IRC member, \$140; non-member, \$300

Details: This conference, presented by the Secondary Reading League (SRL), focuses on literacy for grades 6-12. It is primarily for librarians and educators. Keynote speakers are Dr. Judith Irvin, Executive Director of the National Literacy Project, and YA author Neal Shusterman.

More information: <http://www.dayofreading.org>

SCBWI 2011 WINTER CONFERENCE

When: January 28-30, 2011

Where: Hyatt Grand Central, New York City

Details: This is one of SCBWI's national conferences. Schedule and

registration will go live in October.

More information: <http://www.scbwi.org>

IRC: LIGHTING THE WAY TO LITERACY

When: March 17–19, 2011

Where: Springfield, IL

Details: This is the Illinois Reading Council's Conference. Registration will be available by November 2010. Featured authors are M. T. Anderson, T. A. Barron, Jane Yolen, Sara Pennypacker, Marc Brown, and many more!

More information: <http://www.illinoisreadingcouncil.org/conference.html>

*****GRANTS & WRITING CONTESTS*****

GOLDEN KITE AWARDS

What: These awards for published books—available to all current SCBWI members who are renewed through at least April 1, 2011—is given to recognize excellence in children's literature for fiction, nonfiction, picture book text, and picture book illustration. Entries must be received by December 17, 2010.

More information: <http://www.scbwi.org/Pages.aspx/Submission-Guidelines-Individuals>

SCBWI MAGAZINE MERIT AWARDS

What: These awards are given to published, original magazine work for young people in the areas of fiction, nonfiction, illustration, and poetry. Entries must be submitted on or before December 15, 2010.

More information: <http://www.scbwi.org/Pages.aspx/2010-Magazine-Merit-Award-Rules—Procedures>

DELACORTE PRESS: FIRST YA NOVEL

When: Entries must be postmarked between October 1–December 31.

Cost: free

Prize: standard book contract, \$1,500 in cash, and \$7,500 advance against royalties

Details: The contest is open to U.S. and Canadian writers who have not previously published a young adult novel. Writers will be notified between January and April as submissions are evaluated by the editors. Final contest results will be announced on the website on or around April 30, 2011.

More information: <http://www.randomhouse.com/kids/writingcontests/#youngadult>

CHILDREN'S WRITER: HISTORICAL FICTION

When: Entries must be received by October 31.

Cost: free for Children's Writer subscribers, \$13 for non-subscribers (includes 8-month subscription)

Prizes: \$500 for first place, plus publication in Children's Writer; \$250 for

second place; \$100 for third, fourth, and fifth places

Details: Historical fiction for young teens, age 13, to 1,500 words. Balance originality with accuracy and provide strong sources. Create a voice and a story that is historical but relevant to contemporary readers. Include a bibliography of research sources. Publishability is the ultimate criterion. Winners will be announced in the March 2011 issue.

More information: <http://www.childrenswriter.com/contests.htm>

AWARDS

BOSTON GLOBE-HORN BOOK AWARDS

Winners:• Fiction and Poetry: When You Reach Me, by Rebecca Stead• Nonfiction: Marching for Freedom: Walk Together, Children, and Don't You Grow Weary, by Elizabeth Partridge• Picture Book: I Know Here, by Laurel Croza, illustrated by Matt James

Honors:• Fiction and Poetry: The Dreamer, by Pam Muñoz Ryan, illustrated by Peter Sís; A Conspiracy of Kings, by Megan Whalen Turner• Nonfiction: Anne Frank: Her Life in Words and Pictures, by Menno Metselaar and Ruud van der Rol; Smile, by Raina Telgemeier• Picture Book: It's a Secret! by John Burningham; The Lion & the Mouse, by Jerry Pinkney

More information: <http://www.hbook.com/bghb/current.asp>

2010 SCBWI PORTFOLIO AWARDThe Portfolio Award is given at the SCBWI Annual Summer Conference in Los Angeles to the best art portfolio on view in the Juried Art Portfolio Display.• Grand Prize Winner: Molly Idle• Honors: Debbie Ridpath Ohi, Ye Won Lee

More information: <http://www.scbwi.org/Pages.aspx/Portfolio-Award>

E.B. WHITE READ-ALoud AWARDS

Award for Picture Books:• The Curious Garden, by Peter Brown

Award Honors for Picture Books:• 14 Cows for America, by Carmen Agra Deedy, illustrated by Thomas Gonzales• Once Upon a Twice, by Denise Doyen, illustrated by Barry Moser• Princess Hyacinth (The Surprising Tale of a Girl Who Floated), by Florence Heide Parry, illustrated by Lane Smith

Award for Older Readers:• The Brilliant Fall of Gianna Z., by Kate Messner

Award Honors for Older Readers:• Leaving the Bellweathers, by Kristin Clark Venuti• Tumtum and Nutmeg: Adventures Beyond Nutmouse Hall, by Emily Bearn, illustrated by Nick Price• Where the Mountain Meets the Moon, by Grace Lin

More information: <http://theabfc.wordpress.com/the-eb-white-read-aloud-awards>

BLOGS AND WEBSITES OF INTEREST

<http://writeoncon.com>

<http://querytracker.blogspot.com>

<http://kortizzle.blogspot.com>

<http://yalitchat.org>

A freelance parenting writer since 2004, Michelle Sussman is also hard at work on a YA fantasy novel. She's a stay-at-home mom in the Chicago burbs and VP of two community organizations. She has no free time, never sleeps, and is fluent in two languages, English and Sarcasm. Knock on the front door to her world at <http://www.facebook.com/michellesussman> or at her website <http://www.michellesussman.com>.

autumn 2010 • food for thought

Creating a Strategic Marketing Plan: A Workshop for Children's Book Writers and Illustrators

By Sallie Wolf

What: [Creating My Personal Strategic Marketing Plan](#)

When: January 15, 2011, 9:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m.

Where: The “Parlor” at First United Methodist Church (downtown Chicago, at Clark & Washington, across from Daley Plaza)

This program is based on Carmela Martino's great suggestion:

...a presentation where someone (or a panel) would discuss a marketing plan listing things to do to publicize the release of a new book. I'd especially love if someone could prioritize and/or quantify the benefits of the different types of PR, since it would take a tremendous amount of time to do everything from press releases to book trailers to store signings to blog tours. I'd love to have a publicist present this, or at least be on the panel.

If you have a new book in the works, this is the program for you. Watch the listserv, SCBWI-IL website, and Prairie Wind for further details.

Food for Thought is occasional, member-generated programming for published and under-contract (not limited to P.A.L.-published) authors and illustrators who are members of SCBWI.

*Sallie Wolf is a full-time artist and writer living in Oak Park. She is an avid journal/sketchbook keeper, which led to the creation of *The Robin Makes A Laughing Sound: A Birder's Journal* (Charlesbridge, 2010). Sallie is the author of *Truck Stuck* (Charlesbridge, 2008) and *Peter's Trucks* (Albert Whitman, 1992). To learn more about her art, including the ongoing Moon Project, and her writing, visit her website at <http://www.salliewolf.com>.*

Speakers Directory 2010

Kimberly Breyer and Ozge Gunday are coordinating the SCBWI-IL Speakers Directory this year. Kimberly is the main contact for simplicity's sake. She and Ozge are working closely to keep things running smoothly throughout the enrollment process.

The 2010-2011 enrollment begins August 1 and will run through September 30.

Past participants, please begin thinking about any changes you'll need for the renewal cycle. If you were a member last year, here's the link to refresh your memory on what you have up there now: <http://www.scbwi-illinois.org/Speakers.html>.

Here is a checklist to help you get started:

1. Visit <http://www.scbwi.org> and make sure your membership is current.
2. List one publication that fulfills P.A.L.* requirements.
3. Complete the form located at <http://www.scbwi-illinois.org/Subscribe2010.html>.
4. Double-check the word count of your profile. If you're a returning author, please note your changes using boldface.
5. Pay via PayPal or send a check with your registration form by September 30.

Some additional information and answers to FAQs:

- Your profile will be limited to 350 words.
- You may include one JPEG photo.
- The fee is \$25 for new registrants and \$10 for renewing members, payable by a check made out to SCBWI-Illinois or by PayPal. Payment is due with your enrollment form prior to the September 30 deadline. See the enrollment form for complete instructions.
- **All speakers (new and renewing) must complete the enrollment form.**
- See the bottom of this e-mail to read more about the directory.
- You must be a current SCBWI member at the P.A.L.* level to be listed in the Speakers directory. Please verify these requirements prior to submitting your application.

** P.A.L. stands for "Published and Listed." This level of membership is open to those whose books, articles, poems, stories, illustrations, photographs, films, and television or electronic media for children have been commercially published by one of the organizations listed in the SCBWI Market Surveys. If you're not sure of your P.A.L. status, call the National office at (323) 782-1010 or e-mail Sara Shacter at sfshacter@*

gmail.com.

IMPORTANT NOTES

1. Be sure to check your word count PRIOR to submitting your profile.
2. It is unnecessary to include contact info in your profile since we display the same information below your profile.
3. We are standardizing contact information. You will be limited to **one e-mail address** and **two web addresses**, so make sure you provide current information. Check off the appropriate boxes for genre. Renewing members: Information you have listed in the past will be replaced by your selections on this year's enrollment form. Also, we do not recommend listing phone numbers on the Internet.
4. We are also standardizing the blurbs under each speaker's name in the index. This ensures easier searching for visitors. Renewing members: Revisit what you have. If you add more than the standard categories, please limit extras to twenty characters in the "OTHER" category (no abbreviations). Please keep "OTHER" related to children's writing.
5. Be sure payment (either check or PayPal) is included with your registration form.

If you do not wish to receive direct e-mails from us regarding the directory, let me know. Otherwise, more announcements will arrive via e-mail as enrollment time approaches. Thanks!

Kimberly Breyer and Ozge Gunday

scbwispeakersdir@gmail.com

Speakers Directory Coordinators

*** MORE ABOUT THE DIRECTORY ***

The Speakers Directory offers a cost-efficient way to reach people across Illinois. Listed here are SCBWI-Illinois authors and illustrators, as well as their genres and formats. Each participant has his or her own web page on the SCBWI-Illinois website which contains author, publication, and contact information.

SCBWI Members (at the P.A.L. level) benefit from the ongoing promotion of the Speakers Directory with Illinois librarians, educators, and booksellers. We are linked from many listservs and websites for school librarians, educators, and booksellers around Illinois. Once visitors connect to our website and click on our Speakers Directory button, they discover the talented professionals in our state who create for children.

The price is an affordable \$25 for the initial enrollment and setup, with a \$10 annual renewal charge (subject to change). Each web page will include a profile with contact information, one image (a photograph, book jacket or your own art), and a link to your own website. Changes may be made to your web page each year during the renewal period. If you're not yet a published children's author or illustrator, we hope you'll be ready to take advantage of this marketing tool in the next enrollment period!

autumn 2010 • don't miss

Prairie Writer's Day 2010

SCBWI-Illinois'
6th Annual Prairie Writer's Day

How Does Your Garden Grow?

Digging into the Details of Craft and Career

WHEN:

Saturday, November 13, 2010

9:00 a.m.—6:00 p.m.

(registration begins at 8:00)

WHERE:

Wojcik Conference Center

Harper College

1200 West Algonquin Rd.

Palatine, IL 60067

The prairie's rich soil alone doesn't ensure a successful garden. Just as gardeners need to plant, water, and weed their flower beds, writers need to revise, polish, and promote their work. This year's Prairie Writer's Day will help you prepare your soil, nurture your seedlings, and sharpen your shears with:

- more editors & agents

- more critiques
- fabulous breakouts with industry professionals
- the return of first pages commentary

However, the fee remains the same: \$150 for members

Our Master Gardeners

Keynote speeches and critiques by:

- **Marilyn Brigham**, Editor: Marshall Cavendish Children's Books *The Bonsai Tree*: How to master word choice and craft powerful sentences.
- **Katherine Jacobs**, Associate Editor: Roaring Brook Press *Jardin à la Française*: How to manipulate pacing via a manuscript's form/structure.
- **Tamra Tuller**, Editor: Philomel Books *Hothouse Gardening*: How to get a stuck writer unstuck.
- **Andrea Welch**, Editor: Beach Lane Books *The Rose Arbor*: Finding the emotion in one's manuscript.

Industry discussion and critiques by:

- **Jennifer Mattson**, Associate Agent: Andrea Brown Literary
- **Edward Necarsulmer**, Director of the Children's Department: McIntosh & Otis

Two Sets of Breakouts:

1. The Garden Gate: Does the first page of your story invite the reader in or act as a barrier? For this breakout, attendees will be placed in smaller groups to hear one of our keynote speakers (editor or agent) respond to first pages. All attendees have the opportunity to submit a first page, but not all pages will be read due to time constraints. The editor's/agent's comments will give you insight into what compels a publishing professional to turn the page.

2. From Backyards to Botanic Gardens: Industry professionals join us for the second set of breakouts, including:

- **Getting Started:** For those new to the industry, the ins and outs of publishing and its etiquette are not always obvious. No question is too basic or too difficult for award-winning author Alice McGinty.
- **Good vs. Great:** Janice Del Negro—author, professor and reviewer—will explore the subtleties that separate a good manuscript from a great manuscript.

- Promotion: Michelle Bayuk, Director of Marketing at Albert Whitman & Co., will talk about working with publishers to promote your books.
- Writing for Magazines: Meg Moss, Contributing Editor for ASK/Muse, and Jenny Gillespie, Associate Editor with the Cricket Magazine Group, will discuss writing nonfiction and fiction for magazines.

But Wait, There's More!

- Cross Pollination: A mix and mingle will follow the closing comments, and attendees are encouraged to bring business cards to exchange.
- Sowing Seeds: Book donations to the Benld Library will be collected at Prairie Writer's Day and are much appreciated.

*****The registration form can be found at**

<http://www.scbwi-illinois.org/pdf/PWDFinalRegistration2010.pdf>.***

autumn 2010 • writing tips

Pattern Perfect

By Jennifer Ward

Patterns are everywhere. People create them on buildings, in textiles, in homes—just look at the patterns that surround you as you read this. Patterns exist in nature as well—google the Fibonacci sequence; you'll never look at a flower, a pinecone, or a seashell the same way again! And now, we are enjoying the pattern of seasons as we fall into cooler weather, the perfect time for hunkering down with our writing process. So why all this prattle about patterns? As noted above, patterns are integral to our lives. And for authors, patterns are often prevalent in the words we place on paper, in the stories we write for young children.

Young readers find comfort in written patterns as they discover and become familiar with them. Not only do pattern-language books provide a sense of familiarity for readers, but the predictable, repetitive text found in pattern language is proven to build literacy skills for children learning to read. Children find it easier to follow books with pattern language. These books help them learn to correlate text with sounds, match text to picture clues, and even predict what comes next in a story.

There are many ways we, as writers, can implement patterns into our writing. Below are some picture book styles and titles to peruse.

Cumulative Text: The text builds and grows by adding a new word or

sentence to each page, followed by the text that already exists. This pattern format allows a character's action or scene in the story to repeat. Some cumulative text examples:

- "The House that Jack Built" (traditional)
- Arnold, Marsha Diane: *Roar of a Snore* (Penguin/Dial, 2006)
- Beaumont, Karen: *Move Over, Rover!* (Harcourt, 2006)
- Brett, Jan: *Gingerbread Friends* (Penguin/Putnam, 2008)
- Clarke, Jane: *Stuck in the Mud* (Walker Books, 2008)
- Edwards, David: *The Pen that Pa Built* (Tricycle Press, 2007)
- Ward, Jennifer: *There Was an Old Monkey Who Swallowed a Frog* (Marshall Cavendish, 2010)

Repetition of Phrase (Repetitive Phrase): A particular word or phrase is implemented throughout the story line. Sometimes it can be done in a subtle manner, as SCBWI-Illinois member Andrea Beaty so cleverly implemented in her picture book *Firefighter Ted* (Simon & Schuster/McElderry, 2009). Ted reminds those around him, "Remember, only you can prevent...." A tinge of the familiar, yet very effective. Other times, the repetition authors implement can be conveyed in a very black-and-white manner, as in Eric Carle's classic *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* More repetition-of-phrase examples:

- Brown, Margaret Wise: *Goodnight Moon* (Harper & Row, 1947)
- Dewdney, Anna: *Llama, Llama, Red Pajama* (Penguin/Viking, 2005)
- Fox, Mem: *Where Is the Green Sheep?* (Harcourt, 2004)
- Ward, Jennifer: *The Seed and the Giant Saguaro* (Rising Moon, 2003)
- Wood, Audrey: *Silly Sally* (Harcourt, 1992)

Here is one way you can create a pattern in your story's plot. First, take the text of your manuscript and place it into a grid, say, three columns across by four or five rows down.

- Pages 1-4—which contain your story's title page, copyright, opening, etc.—will not be part of the grid. Nor will pages 31-32, which wrap up your story. However, you can play with the remainder of your text and place in the grid as follows:
- The text for pages 5-6 goes in the first column, top row. Pages 7-8 go in second column, top row. Pages 9-10 go in third column, top row.
- Jump down to the second row. Pages 11-12 go in first column, second row; pages 13-14 in the second column, second row; pages 15-16 in the third column, second row.
- Jump down to your third row. Column one contains pages 17-18; column two contains pages 19-20; column three contains pages 21-22. And so on.

Now find your story's pattern. Each section of text in the first column should correlate in some way. It could be that a main character's actions occur on those pages, an exclamation is stated, or a phrase is repeated. Essentially, you are creating a pattern within your plot that is organic to the story, and a sequence that moves the story forward. Column two may also contain an element that ties that column together, via text, character action, or whatever you choose. As may column three.

This grid device is a format for revision, through which you tweak and tighten your text in each column to establish a pattern to your liking. You may also choose to create a different-sized grid for your text, such as one that is four columns across instead of three.

Play with patterns and have fun with the process!

Happy writing, and happy fall—once again—to one and all.

With warmest regards,
Jennifer Ward

*Jennifer Ward is the author of numerous acclaimed books for readers of all ages, including the popular *There Was a Coyote Who Swallowed a Flea and I Love Dirt! 52 Activities to Help You and Your Kids Discover the Wonders of Nature*, in addition to the forthcoming *There Was an Odd Princess Who Swallowed a Pea* (Marshall Cavendish, 2011), *It's a Jungle Out There! 52 Nature Activities for City Kids* (Trumpeter, 2011), *Hatch!* (Bloomsbury/Walker Books, 2012) and *Mama Built a Little Nest* (Simon & Schuster/Beach Lane Books). She is represented by Stefanie von Borstel of Full Circle Literary. Visit her on her web site: <http://www.jenniferwardbooks.com>.*

autumn 2010 • critique group tips

Lessons Learned from My Critique Group

By Meg Fleming Lentz

On deadlines...

“Goals are dreams with deadlines.”~ Diana Scharf Hunt

As much as I stress about deadlines, without them I would have nothing but ideas. Ever since I started meeting with my critique group, my productivity has more than doubled. I am no longer simply writing for myself; I am on a mission to meet a group deadline. It's quite exciting! Every other Friday, we submit our new work by midnight. I feel charged to forgo sleep and write on because I know that I am not writing alone.

While many successful writers set goals, meet deadlines, and forge their

dreams individually, I find it extremely helpful to have a group expecting my submission. When a critique partner asks, “So...where’s that query?” she adds strength to my dream.

On Friday nights at 6 p.m., the pre–deadline–perspiration begins, and thankfully, so do the fresh pages.

On trust...

“I think that we may safely trust a good deal more than we do.”~ Henry David Thoreau

Maybe it was luck, maybe it was fate...or maybe finding trusted companions along this road is much easier than we think. I do count myself lucky to have found a group of people that I completely trust with my manuscripts. We care about one another’s characters as much as we care about one another. This sort of trust makes it easy to be an honest writer.

On persistence...

“Energy and persistence conquer all things.”~ Benjamin Franklin

Good ol’ Ben! He makes it sound so easy. All we need are (a) energy and (b) persistence. Done!

Despite the fact that these two ingredients are hard to come by, I have watched the members of my group work tirelessly on their manuscripts in order to achieve their own personal seal of approval.

On collaboration...

“I think it is in collaboration that the nature of art is revealed.”~ Steve Lacy

I love it when we all show up to critique group with specific questions about our stories...questions we’ve been mulling over on our own but cannot answer. When we sit down together, the answers seem to reveal themselves through easy conversation.

Every time we open our manuscripts up to fresh ideas, we walk away with pages of hand–scribbled notes and the burning desire to revise.

On encouragement...

“There is nothing better than the encouragement of a good friend.”~ Katharine Butler Hathaway

Where would we be without encouragement?

Because we regularly face rejection, doubt can easily outrun our purpose.

But when a fellow critiquer says, “You can do it!” everything changes. Timely encouragement is like crumpling up a thousand rejections and stuffing it in the face of doubt.

It is an incredible gift...a cathartic call to action.

On heart...

“What comes from the heart, goes to the heart.”~ Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Be it serious or funny, the best writing opens my heart to a point where I feel I know the author on a personal level. In writing for children, I am on a continual quest for authenticity—for real people, real voices, real heart. The heart is the birthplace of emotion. It is where manuscripts learn to sing. My critique group reminds me to be bold and write with heart.

On perspective...

“A little perspective, like a little humor, goes a long way.”~ Allen Klein

Just the other night after a critique group session, one of the members said, “It is so great to crawl out of the box and get some new ideas.” Stepping away and looking at a story from another person’s point of view is fresh air for the manuscript.



Stepping into a new situation is always a little nerve-racking. When our critique group first formed, we had the classic “getting to know you” phase, followed by the comforting “this is gonna be cool” phase. And then we were struck by something unexpected, the “this ROCKS!” phase. What brought on such change?

It was a dose of perspective...followed by uproarious laughter, which almost got us kicked out of Barnes & Noble. Indeed, laughter is the glue that keeps people together.

For this, I am ever so grateful.

Looking for a critique group? I am positive that there are numerous talented writers and illustrators close by who would love to get together and grow with you. Don’t be shy! Check out the following link for more info: <http://www.scbwi-illinois.org/CritiqueGroups.html>.

Meg Fleming Lentz writes picture books, YA, and poetry. She is a freelance writer/singer, and she facilitates workshops on writing and creative

expression. Meg has three kids and one husband. She can be reached at megfleminglantz@gmail.com.

autumn 2010 • illustrator tips

Learning by Example: Deconstructing the Picture Book

By Lisa Cinelli



“Know yourself. Listen to a lot of music. Don’t whine. Maintain your sense of humor, indulge your sense of play. Persist, persist, persist.”

There’s a chance the above quote from author **Kathleen Krull** was originally intended for children’s book authors, but I believe it is applicable to picture book illustrators as well.

As with poetry that lunges for a misdirected rhyme and throws a reader off track, illustrators often misdirect the reader with unnecessary and wayward information in their artwork. The best picture

books and poetry are succinct and create an emotional, not sentimental, connection with readers.

I’ve heard several art directors suggest studying **Marla Frazee**’s work to aspiring picture book illustrators. Analyzing Literature for Children is a course I recently took for graduate credit through Portland State University. Marla Frazee was on the faculty for the week, and I had a chance to study her work more closely. Below is a section about Marla’s work from my paper “What makes a GREAT book?”

Marla Frazee’s picture book illustrations create believable worlds and endearing characters. Her cast of characters relates to each other in very particular settings and often humorous situations. Marla’s handling of her materials and techniques, usually pencil and watercolor or gouache, an opaque watercolor, offers the reader easy access into the books she has illustrated.

...Words and pictures have equal weight and importance in telling a picture book story. A true picture book cannot be read over the radio without many gaps in understanding because the pictures are not seen to complete the whole of the book. The pictures in a picture book are “read” and tell a parallel story to the text, but the completeness of the whole book is not known until the text is included. Even in a wordless picture book, the illustrations are based on a story. Marla weaves a story arc into the words and the pictures in her books. In a recent lecture she said she asks herself when

working on a book, “What’s at stake in this story?” Her answer to that question creates a foundation for stronger illustration details and more selective wording in her text.

For additional reading, **Leonard S. Marcus** wrote an in-depth article about Marla Frazee’s work in a special issue on awards in the July/August 2010 *Horn Book Magazine*. The article is “Something Old, Something New: Marla Frazee’s Picture Book Art,” pages 140–144.

Author **Marion Dane Bauer** said, “If a writer isn’t a reader, he’s in the wrong profession.” The same holds true for picture book illustrators. Illustrators are visual storytellers. It is vital for picture book illustrators to include reading as a daily exercise. When picture book illustrators make time to read, and when they read scores of picture books out loud, they are building resources to draw upon in their own work.

Editors, authors, and art directors over the years have suggested typing out a manuscript and dummied it up to better understand the rhythm and flow of a picture book. In deconstructing a picture book and creating a picture book dummy, an illustrator gains a better perspective in how to put a book together. Begin using a published book. Later, you can do the same exercise with your own manuscripts and illustrations. It is a blueprint, a guide.



- Type out the text of a favorite picture book. Print out two copies. You will cut up one copy and tape the words into your picture book dummy. (When you do submit your own dummy to an editor, you would include a printed-out version of the text.)
- For a 32-page picture book dummy, fold eight pieces of 11” x 17” paper in half. Page one is usually the title page or the half-title page, not the cover or the endpapers.
- Following the text placement of the original picture book, cut and tape the words you’ve typed out into your picture book dummy. You will begin to see the rhythm of the page breaks—where the story slows down, speeds up, and moves the story forward.
- Sketch into your dummy the rhythm of the artwork on each page. At this time I would recommend working in black and white to highlight values, light sources, etc.
- Once you’ve finished, set aside the dummy and the published book. Retell the story visually as if you were drawing the stills of a silent movie. Using thumbnail sketches and your own imagination, sketch out the story. What was this story about? Can you recapture

the energy and the flow of the illustrations moving throughout the book? Can someone read your illustrations and follow the story? You must concentrate to recall the beginning, middle, and end. When you are working on your own books, you need to see the story through the eyes of the characters in your illustrations.



In 1980, **Dilys Evans**, artists' representative and former art director of *Cricket* magazine, created the Original Art Show, showcasing the fine art of children's book illustration. It is now held each fall at The Society of Illustrators in New York City. Her book, *Show & Tell: Exploring the Fine Art of Children's Book Illustration* (Chronicle Books, 2008), delves into the drive, dedication, and processes of twelve diverse picture book illustrators. We all need inspiration, and then we all need to get back to the drawing board.

Lisa Cinelli: painter, author/illustrator, teaching artist. Lisa has taught children's book illustration at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago since 1994. Check out her work at <http://www.lisacinelli.com> and http://www.saic.edu/gallery/saic_gallery.php?type=Faculty&album=68.

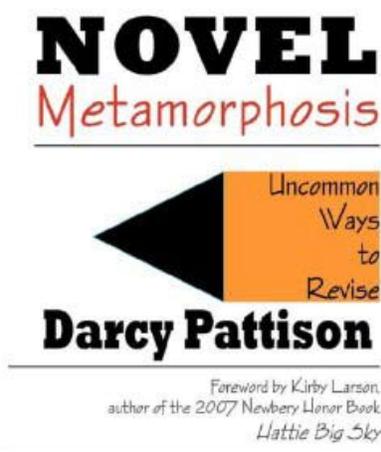
[Editor's Note: All of the art accompanying this article is by Lisa Cinelli.]

autumn 2010 • writer's bookshelf

Go on a Revision Quest with Darcy Pattison

By Kim Winters

If writing a novel is 10 percent writing and 90 percent revision, as so many wise and seasoned SCBWLers say, then Darcy Pattison's book *Novel Metamorphosis: Uncommon Ways to Revise* is your guide.



Pattison, whose popular Novel Revision Retreat sells out each time it comes to Illinois, created *Novel Metamorphosis* (Mims House, 2008) as a companion piece to her weekend workshop experience. The beauty of Pattison's book is that it's so hands-on, articulate, and interactive, you don't need to wait until her next visit to delve into it.

Rather than offering up a heady explanation of how revision should work, Pattison guides you through the process step by step. One of

the first tasks she gives you is to (gasp) mark up your book with the working title of your novel-in-progress, the date revisions started, etc.

Brilliant. It's as if Pattison believes what so many of us believe—that books are revered and mystical—and the moment you scrawl your intentions in that sacred space, you're no longer just along for the ride. You're invested. Your journey has begun and you're the one breaking trail.

First stop on your revision quest: a novel inventory, detailing the inner and outer conflicts of each chapter, using only one sentence to describe each entry. The object of this exercise, Pattison explains, is to reconcile the two manuscripts you wrote, “the one in your head and the one you put down on paper.”

All other exercises build on the initial inventory. Simple writing exercises, and tools such as the shrunken manuscript and spreadsheet plotting techniques, assist you in analyzing and re-visioning your plot, characterization, language, and other elements key to a successful novel. Space is provided for you to write your answers in the book, but in some places it's limited (intentionally, Pattison says) to encourage focused answers.

The wisdom of Pattison's approach reveals itself the deeper you go. As you progress through your re-visioning process, your confidence in your story grows. You identify your obligatory scene, analyze your narrative arc, determine whether or not your middle sags, review emotional arcs and epiphanies, and much more. Along the way, Pattison offers advice, resources, and a recommended reading list of craft books with opinionated annotations that's worth the price of the book alone.

The ultimate goal, thanks to Pattison's “uncommon ways to revise,” is to reach a place during your re-visioning process where you can listen to your novel with an editor's ear instead of a writer's heart.

Visit Darcy at <http://www.darcypattison.com> to learn more about Novel Metamorphosis and her newest book, The Book Trailer Manual.

Kim Winters is a graduate of Vermont College with an MFA in Writing for Children & Young Adults. Her short story, “Loving Elena,” was published in Special Gifts: Women Writers on the Heartache, the Happiness and the Hope of Raising a Special Needs Child (Wyatt-MacKenzie, 2007). Kim teaches teen writers' workshops and is a regular contributor to Family Time magazine. She is working on a book about service dogs with her daughter Elena, and re-visioning her YA novel with help from her fab SCBWI critique group and Pattison's book. Visit Kim at Kat's Eye Journal (<http://www.kimwinters.blogspot.com>).

When a Middle-Grade Novel Sings

By Jodell Sadler



Saint Training
By Elizabeth Fixmer
(Zondervan, 2010)

We are given so much advice as writers—mile high stacks, enough to fill a football field or carry on golden wings around the world—but the best advice comes one genre at a time. Middle-grade novels sit on the fifty-yard line in the genre selection zone, and we find that by glancing at one middle-grade—one book that sticks with us—we can discover some pretty nifty hints about craft that will help us grow as writers. *Saint Training*, by Elizabeth Fixmer, is a book that stuck with me. Here's why:

What we learn most from middle-grade novels is that every book should carry originality both on its spine and throughout, for this is what makes a book a keeper. As writers in pursuit of publication, we know our book must sing in order to be picked up by an editor or agent, but what does this mean? Peter Selgin, in *By Cunning & Craft* (Writer's Digest Books, 2007), claims it's "[t]he difference between the writer who tries to copy the world using words, and the writer who makes a world out of words" (p. 28).

In *Saint Training*, Elizabeth Fixmer is definitely a painter of words. This book screams originality. It radiates color, heart, and humor as its main character, Mary Clare, fights to help her family and discover her own peace-filled place in the universe.

Mary Clare O'Brian wants the job of Mother Superior. She claims it's perfect and sets out to get hired before she begins liking boys too much. She also

wants to help her mother keep her faith despite another pregnancy, wants to gain popularity, and wants to see her brother's application approved to become a conscientious objector to the Vietnam War. Becoming a saint, however, is her ultimate destination and secret mission. This would position her even closer to God, where her prayers—above all other prayers—might be answered. So, Mary Clare gets down to business and writes Mother Superior directly.

Dear Reverend Mother,

My name is Mary Clare O'Brian. I am in sixth grade and I am writing because I want to become a Good Shepard nun. I like the Good Shepard nuns best because you work with unwed mothers and their babies. I love little babies.

I have lot of experience with kids. God gives my family a new baby every year even though we have more than we can handle now....
(*Saint Training*, p. 5)

The novel's literary letters are funny and show character growth as we sense that even Mother Superior has been changed by her relationship with Mary Clare.

The characterization in this book rallies the reader and is crafted masterfully. We learn more and more about Mary Clare at the turn of every page. She's an alpha girl who takes on a lot of responsibility for her family. While retrieving underwear from the laundry for her little sister before the family leaves for church, we discover that Mary Clare's heart is in the right place. She does her best. With her mother depressed—in the muddle of a midlife crisis and a new feminist movement that challenges her faith—Mary Clare folds clothes, cleans stains out of shirts, and cares for her siblings long before her mother needs to be bothered. But becoming a saint is tougher than Mary Clare first thinks.

Humor remains at the heart of this story, but what is even more interesting is how Fixmer carries her reader through each scene. It becomes crystal that we are being placed exactly where the writer intends us to be—especially when she focuses on an unusual detail like the smell of a janitor's spill bucket. Here's a glimpse:

Mary Clare is called down the office to pick up a letter she is to deliver to her parents. Sister Agnes (aka Sister Agony) seals it and stamps FINAL NOTICE in bold red print on the outside. Sister tells Mary Clare the contents of the letter are none of her business, then immediately discloses that the letter threatens to have her little sister, Gabriella, “be the only one to walk down the aisle in her First Communion without a missal and rosary...” (*Saint Training*, p. 22). Mary Clare, who cannot understand how a school that

teaches students to be good Catholics can also be so harsh and cruel, holds her tongue.

Mary Clare stood. She turned on her heel and crammed the envelope into her uniform jacket. “Good night, Sister.” She knew her eyes were as cold as her voice in spite of her efforts to the contrary.

“Good night,” Sister said. Her voice held no mercy.

Mary Clare made her way through the long empty hall and down the two flights of stairs to the antiseptic smell of Mr. Gordon’s bucket. He was already mopping the entrance.

“Careful not to slip,” he said. “I don’t want to see you get hurt.”

Mary Clare only nodded, too angry to make polite conversation, even with Mr. Gordon. (*Saint Training*, p. 22)

When a writer pulls her readers through a scene by using voice and meaning to reveal the interior and exterior build of her characters, we know she has done something brilliant. Creating a successful scene isn’t about writing a long-winded passage that shares every detail. It’s about being painterly in choosing details that serve more than one purpose. Mr. Gordon’s bucket, its smell, and its potential to cause harm mirror the main character’s current interior hurt. The contrasting elements of clean and dirty, of antiseptic and filth, give the reader even more to chew on. In this short exchange of dialogue, as Mary Clare simply exits a building, we learn more than expected.

Middle-grade readers want girth and spunk; they want fun with a voice. With *Saint Training*, the reader gets a good dose of both. Mary Clare’s voice sings, and there is a lot for the reader to put his or her head around: girth. The writer shares an honest representation of the guts of a girl who dares to find her own way and stay true to herself. Mary Clare is Mary Clare. She couldn’t be anyone else. She’s authentic. We know her and join in her journey and plight because the author has allowed us to venture inside her thoughts, feelings, and actions. Using close third person, past tense, Fixmer writes clearly and simply. She simply writes. “Or as Joseph Conrad (author and scholar) described his task to his readers, ‘by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel—above all to make you see. That and no more’” (*By Cunning & Craft*, p. 16).

What is key here is economy, and every word of *Saint Training* counts. Fixmer writes to serve double duty (perhaps a higher duty) with her words, for her descriptions create a scene, reveal character and heart, and further her story. In this way, her story moves and the reader is also moved.

Fixmer transports her readers into Mary Clare’s world seamlessly, beyond all

doubt. So, how do we do this with our own writing? Selgin says it best:

Don't chisel perfect sentences into stone, or try to. That's no way to write a first draft. Don't even think that you're writing; think that you're dancing, or conducting a symphony, or chasing moonbeams, or soaping windows. Don't be a slave to grammar or syntax, or even to meaning....Be guided by rhythms, hues, textures, game theory, astrological charts, whim....Forget about readers; tickle yourself. (By *Cunning & Craft*, p. 4)

Not enough is said about letting go, playing, or having fun when it comes to writing for children. This advice should be cast in uppercase letters across the many stacks of writerly advice we receive. Since 90 percent of our writing is rewriting, it's imperative that we find humor and fun in our process. For this is what will transport our work to the top of the slush piles, across that one editor's desk where it finds union with the wings of our own dreams—and then finds its rightful place on a bookshelves, eventually leading to the hands of a child.

When it comes to writing middle-grades, we write the stories we must write—the ones only we can write. All advice set aside? Consider all the rules; consider none. There are no rules. Reveal heart. Create characters, carve great ideas, and cast words well—for it is by allowing our words to dance in our minds and out onto the page, brush stroke by brush stroke, dip by dab, that the manuscript we paint will sing.

Saint Training sings loud, sings strong, and carries its own symphony of sound. It's perfectly crafted by Elizabeth Fixmer and worthy of closer study. As Newbery award-winning author Gary D. Schmidt writes, "This is a novel that is painful, but true, honest, and hopeful; gusty, and funny—a compelling read for all readers aware of their own spiritual pilgrimages."

Taking over this column from a great Illinois author, Brenda Ferber, is no small feat. Her insights and sharing are things I can only hope to emulate. Thank you, Brenda! My next Book Look will explore YA, so e-mail me a 2010 book title if you would like it to be considered for the next issue (no promises): sadler4kids@charter.net.

Jodell Sadler is a recent graduate of Hamline University's MFA Writing for Children & Young Adults program in St. Paul, Minnesota. She is an adjunct by day and writer/illustrator by night. Her article, "Picture Book Pace: Verbal and Visual Tools for Writer," was published in the 2011 Children's Writer's & Illustrator's Market, and she teaches advanced courses in writing for children online (see Facebook Events for more information).

You Know How to Get to Carnegie Hall, Right?

By Carol Coven Grannick

My violin-playing son probably heard the old joke about how you get to Carnegie Hall hundreds of times from the time he was three and a half, yet he didn't even comprehend the reality of what the answer "Practice, practice, practice!" meant.

If the same is not true for everything in life, it is certainly true for the arts. Whatever is or isn't inborn, there is little genius without repetitive practice.

Although it's not uncommon for writers to pause in their work to self-diagnose ("well, this is certainly trash") and then keep on writing, there are those precious moments somewhere along the journey when a writer notices something profoundly different: "Wow, did I write that? That's good." The dream of writing the poem or story or book you've dreamed of writing sparkles in the dark somewhere.

The writer looks back, reflects on past work, the journey she's been on, and realizes it has all been practice for this moment. The writing is not just better; it is deeper, cleaner, and clearer, and the voice is *true, more connected*. The moment seems like a treasure.

A therapy client once told me at her final session, "Therapy is like taking a trip on a ship. You don't notice how far you've come—you sometimes even think you're hardly moving—until you look back, and the shore is so very far away."

Isn't that true about our writing journey, too?

It's not that you practice or work mindlessly, building skill and discovering talent by osmosis. But neither do you always (or perhaps even often) notice that the effort you make has direct and immediate impact.

I recently enjoyed walking slowly through the Art Institute of Chicago's Matisse exhibit, *Radical Invention*. Much of the commentary on the wall included interviews with Matisse on the creative process, particularly his thoughts on revision.

Use the following link to look at Matisse's process for *Bathers by a River*. Note the dates as well as the changes, and then come back to finish reading this column:

<http://www.artic.edu/aic/exhibitions/matisse/p0.html>

What Matisse had, or developed, was an intense trust in the artist's journey,

whatever time it took. Seeing that validated my own process. So what if it took me more than five years to write my first novel and revise and revise it until it was good enough...to put in a drawer and move on to my next project?

We can't know how long each of us must practice to find the magic moments, the writing we dream of that's deep inside us.

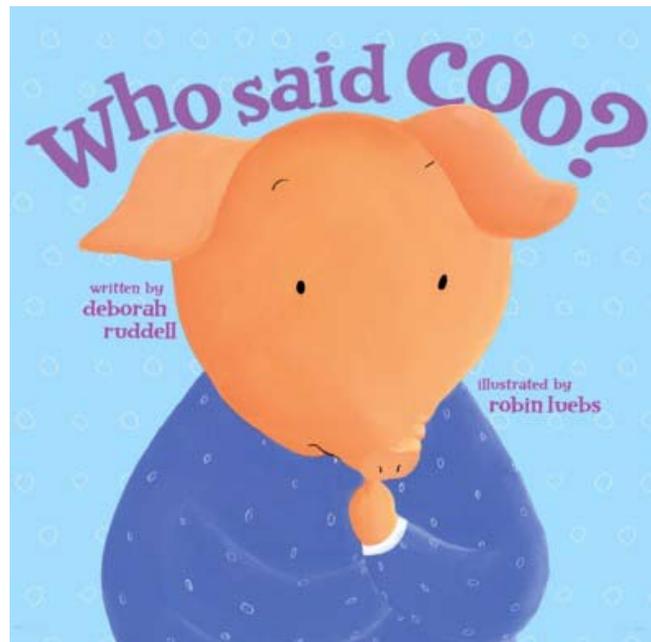
We just try to keep trusting and loving the journey. And we practice, practice, practice.

Carol Grannick is a writer of poetry, picture books, and middle-grade novels. Her short fiction has appeared in Cricket and Highlights. She is also a clinical social worker in private practice, working with writers and others individually and in small groups to handle the emotional aspects of the writer's journey, and to create and maintain resilience. You can reach her at carolgrannick@att.net to set up a consultation.

autumn 2010 • promote that book!

Promoting Our Picture Book Together

By Deborah Ruddell, with Robin Luebs



My twin sister, Robin Luebs, and I had each published two picture books when our dream of working together came true: Robin would illustrate *Who Said Coo?* my story about a perturbed pig and her friends.

I loved visiting Robin's Urbana studio as often as I could while she was working on the book, and getting a private, behind-the-scenes education on how a picture book gets made. But our collaboration didn't end with the book's publication.

Since we're sisters, it was natural that we promote our picture book together. And it's been a blast. But you don't need to be related to your collaborator to try the author-illustrator, tag-team approach to picture book promotion. It's a great way to share expenses, divide the responsibility, and have twice the fun.

In general, Robin did all the design work for our promotional materials, and I did the writing. We brainstormed ideas and planned our whirlwind tour of central Illinois together. We split the costs. And best of all, we did all our signings together—so much less lonely than going it alone!



Before the book came out, we printed miniature versions of our book jacket on cardstock. (Cardstock is a recurring theme in our promo campaign.) On the inside, we printed our contact information and publisher information. The mini-jackets were folded just like real book jackets and tied with jaunty orange yarn along the spine. Cute and memorable business cards/giveaways, if we do say so ourselves.

We linked our websites and coordinated the content, too. Robin used her black-and-white drawings from the book dummy to create printer-friendly coloring sheets that can be used to make a simple shoebox puppet theater and puppets. I designed a matching game with all the book's characters. Everything was posted on both websites.

We planned a modest, but concentrated, book tour—four signings in four Illinois cities over three consecutive weekends. We chose two independent bookstores, a national chain bookstore, and a gift store/café. We each took responsibility for two signings, from initial contact through nailing down all the details. We made personal visits to each store with a book. One of those visits led to a Kids' Indie Next selection for *Who Said Coo?*

We used one of our activity sheets as the basis of a puppet craft kit to be given away at our book signings. We printed it on cardstock (naturally!) and attached three craft sticks and a pink pipe cleaner for Lulu the pig's tail. The craft kit included instructions for making the puppets, as well as our website information. Even though putting the craft kits together took time, it was worth it. We loved having something fun to give to people who bought the book, and they seemed to like it, too. We gave away 275 of them over three weekends!



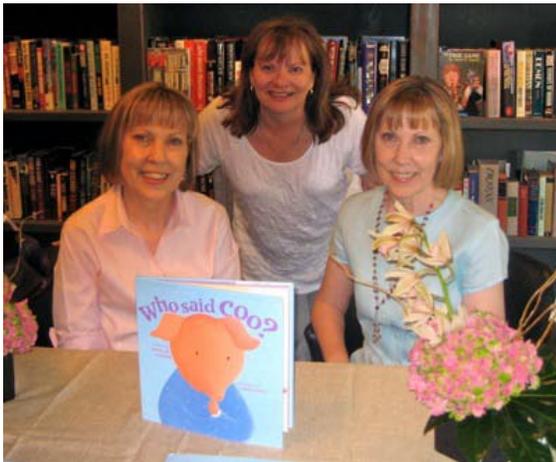
Robin designed the postcards for our book launch, which we had professionally printed (no cardstock this time). I developed the mailing list and addressed the postcards.

We each sent a few books out for review to bloggers and publications. We each donated books to our local libraries.

I wrote a general news release, which we tweaked for each area.

Both of us did interviews—mine with a local arts magazine, and Robin's with a mom blogger.

With Robin's encouragement (and artwork from the book), and the example of our fellow SCBWI-Illinois members, I made a *Who Said Coo?* book trailer (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YsQ5ZMw5Mhs>). We put it on our websites and our publisher's website, but we're still working out how to use the trailer effectively.



Just before the book was published, we made a last-minute decision to hire a publicist. Neither one of us had considered it with our earlier books, but sharing the cost made it possible. And the current book-selling climate made it necessary, we thought. The decision paid off almost immediately with a great interview in *PW Children's Bookshelf*, something we never could have pulled off on our own. The second part of the campaign is ongoing, but we have high hopes that it will draw

attention to our book.

Robin Luebs, of Urbana, illustrated *How Do You Say Good Night?* by Raina Moore (HarperCollins, 2008). She is the author/illustrator of *Please Pick Me Up, Mama!* (Simon & Schuster/Beach Lane Books, 2009). Deborah Ruddell, of Peoria, is the author of *Today at the Bluebird Café* (Simon & Schuster/McElderry, 2007) and *A Whiff of Pine, A Hint of Skunk* (Simon & Schuster/McElderry, 2009), both illustrated by Joan Rankin. *Who Said Coo?* (Simon & Schuster/Beach Lane Books, 2010) is their first collaboration. Please visit them at <http://www.robinluebs.com> and <http://www.deborahruddell.com>.

An Experienced Blogger Shares Her Stuff

By Margo L. Dill

Wands and Worlds (<http://blog1.wandsandworlds.com>), a blog by Sheila Ruth, is the focus of this issue's Kidlitosphere column. Sheila is an experienced blogger whom we can all learn from. Just read her answers below about the blog she's kept up for FIVE years, then think about your own blog (or the blog you want to start)! You will surely find yourself putting Sheila's words of wisdom into practice on your own blog.

Margo: Hi Sheila, thanks for joining us in the Prairie Wind! What is the focus and target audience of your blog?

Sheila: My blog Wands and Worlds covers middle-grade and young adult [YA] fantasy and science fiction [SFF]. Although it's a very targeted niche, it's amazing how much is published every year, just in this category. I write primarily for adults—teachers, librarians, and parents looking for recommendations for the kids they work with, as well as adults who read YA because they like it—but some teens read my blog as well.

Margo: What types of information do you provide on your blog?

Sheila: The majority of my posts are book reviews. I try to be thorough in my reviews and talk about the strengths and weaknesses of a book. It's too simplistic to say whether I like a book or not; no book is right for everyone, and a book I love may not work for someone else, and a book I hate may be perfect for another reader. So, I try to give enough information for people to make decisions about whether to try a book, and to help teachers, parents, and librarians find books to recommend to the children and teens.

I also occasionally post other types of things: links and news of interest, commentary about current topics in the kidlit or publishing world, or author interviews. I have done contests and blog tours on occasion, but I'm moving away from doing these because of concerns. I'm a little nervous about doing contests because of the legalities involved, and I've stopped doing blog tours because of a couple of bad experiences where I agreed to be part of a blog tour before reading the book and then later found that I couldn't recommend the book.

I have a small publishing company as well, and I occasionally post news about the books I publish. I try not to make the blog too promotional because most people don't want to read a blog that's self-promotional.

I also have a separate news blog where I post short announcements of forthcoming and recently released books in the genre, which I add from publisher catalogs. It's just a way of providing announcements for people

who are interested in keeping up with what's new. I decided to segregate those from the main blog so that they don't get confused with the reviews I post on the main blog. Many of them are books I haven't even read, and I don't want people to think that they're books I'm recommending. It's just a way to help people keep up to date.

Margo: WOW! I love how focused you are on your blog readers and the service that you are providing for teachers, librarians, and parents. You are one busy blogger! How is your blog helpful to children's or YA writers and readers?

Sheila: For readers, I hope that the blog helps to find books of interest. I'd like to think that children's and YA writers, especially those who write in the SFF genre (or want to), might be able to get some tips about good fantasy and science fiction by reading my reviews. I'm not a writer, but I'm a lifetime reader of fantasy and science fiction, took a college lit class in the genre, and have been reviewing SFF books for five years. So I've seen an awful lot of different types of fantasy and science fiction and have some pretty good ideas about what works and what doesn't.

Also, published writers can submit books to me for review considerations. I get a lot of submissions, and unfortunately, I can only review a small number of them, but writers are welcome to send me an e-mail to inquire. My review submission guidelines are posted on the Blog & Review Policy tab on my blog. I'm especially on the lookout for books with diverse or multicultural characters, good science fiction (which is rare compared to the number of fantasy titles being published), and well-written small press books.

Margo: Thanks for inviting authors to send in their books. That is a great service. I also completely agree with you that writers can learn from reading other books and reviews on what works and what doesn't! Why did you start the website and blog Wands and Worlds?

Sheila: I had multiple reasons for starting, and my reasons have evolved over time as well. In part, I started it as something to share with my son, whom I've homeschooled. We both love fantasy, and it was a fun thing for us to do together. Reading and reviewing the same books was a good way for us to connect and also for him to practice evaluating literature. (Book reviews are much more fun to write than book reports.) I also had recently started Imaginator Press and thought it would be a good way to build an audience for the books I was publishing.

As a busy teen, my son doesn't have as much time to be involved as he used to be. I continue in part because of my love of books and in part because of the online friends I've made. When I started blogging, I had no idea that I would become part of a community—one that loves children's and YA books

as much as I do. I've made some good friends online, some of whom I've had the opportunity to meet in person at various conferences.

Margo: What a cool idea to have your son review books with you. I love it! You had your fifth blogiversary this past summer. How are you able to keep up with consistent blogging for five years?

Sheila: I actually don't feel that I've been very consistent with the blogging. I think I'm more of an example of what not to do. I've been through phases where I post fairly frequently and phases where I'm lucky to get one or two posts a month. As much as I love reviewing, it's actually hard for me, and I can spend several hours on one review. I'm kind of a perfectionist, and I'm incapable of posting something without getting every word just right. It's hard to be a frequent blogger when you put so much time and effort into one post. It's a hard way to go, and I don't recommend it. It is important to blog regularly if you want to keep your audience, so in some ways it would be better if I could spend less time on each post, and post more often.

Margo: You are so modest, but thanks for the tips on posting more frequently. However, it's obvious to your readers that your reviews are very meaningful and well written to have stuck around for five years in the blogosphere. What types of posts do you find are the most popular with your readers and followers?

Sheila: Ironically, my most popular posts in terms of traditional measures (traffic, number of comments) have been throwaway posts. A short blurb I tossed off about feral cats and Erin Hunter turned into an impromptu Warriors discussion board and has several hundred comments. Another popular post was one that I made when the Golden Compass movie came out. There was an online daemon creator, and all the bloggers were posting their daemons. I created a wrap-up post linking to everyone's daemons, and that ended up being hugely popular.

But in general, I think that the reviews are the reason most people subscribe to my blog. I like to think that I've added to many people's "To Be Read" piles.

Margo: How do you advertise your blog? How do you drive more traffic to your blog?

Sheila: I've never actually advertised my blog, and I don't really make a big effort to drive traffic. The most basic thing is to read and comment on other blogs. When you comment, most of the blogging software will automatically link your name to your blog (assuming you enter the URL in the correct place), so you don't need to say, "Visit my blog!" Just add meaningful comments that contribute to the conversation, and people will get to know you and discover your blog. I did a lot of commenting for the first few years,

and not only did it bring people to my blog, but it helped me to become a part of the rich community of children's lit bloggers. I've been so busy that I haven't commented as much in recent years, but I'm trying to get back to doing that more.

Another thing is to participate in the community activities. The kidlit community has a variety of things that bloggers can participate in: Poetry Friday, Nonfiction Monday, etc. I actually haven't participated much in these things, but they are a great way to get your blog known. One thing that I have participated in extensively is the Cybils Awards—the annual awards given by the children's and YA blogging community. A lot of people have discovered my blog through my participation in the Cybils.

JacketFlap is another site that has brought me a lot of traffic. JacketFlap is a social network for children's book people. It has its own blog reader; once your blog is set up there, your posts will show up on the site, and a lot of people have discovered my blog from that.

More recently, I get a fair number of people reading my blog through Facebook. Through the NetworkedBlogs application, my blog posts automatically show up on my profile there. I sometimes get more comments on my posts on Facebook than on the blog itself.

Margo: Thanks for the great ideas for getting your blog noticed. Can you offer two or three tips for people out there who want to start a blog or who have just started one?

Sheila: First, it's important to think about what you want to blog about before you start. It doesn't have to be set in stone; you'll probably find that your blog evolves over time, but it helps to have a starting point. If you're a writer, you want to blog about more than just promoting your books. It's really a balancing act because you do need to promote your books, but no one is going to want to read a blog that's just about promoting your books. So, you have to find that middle ground. It helps to blog about things relating to your books. If you're doing background research, you could post about interesting things you've discovered. Post about conferences you've been to and interesting people you've met. Lessons you've learned that could help other writers. Review other people's books.

You also need to find a way to set your blog apart and make it stand out from all the other blogs out there. You could find a niche that's not heavily covered or blog in a unique voice or from a unique perspective. It helps to have some type of focus. The more narrow the focus, the smaller your audience, but the easier it will be to attract those people who are interested in that topic.

Finally, participate in the community as I discussed above. Blogging is not

really a broadcast medium; it's a conversation and a community. By taking full advantage of all that the community offers, you'll find your blogging to be not only more successful, but more rewarding as well.

Margo: Thank you so much for all your words of wisdom and practical advice! Okay, bloggers, now it's your turn...what can you do to get your blog focused and become part of the blogging community?

Check out Margo Dill's blog, [Read These Books and Use Them \(http://margodill.com/blog\)](http://margodill.com/blog), for ideas on how to use children's and YA books in the classroom and at home. This blog offers teaching ideas and discussion starters with each book for your children, teenagers, or students. You can also take Margo's [Blogging 101 and More online class from WOW! Women On Writing: http://www.wow-womenonwriting.com/WOWclasses.html#MargoDill_Blogging101](http://www.wow-womenonwriting.com/WOWclasses.html#MargoDill_Blogging101).

autumn 2010 • booksellers' perspective

Books on First: A First-Rate Bookstore

By Bob and Paula Morrow

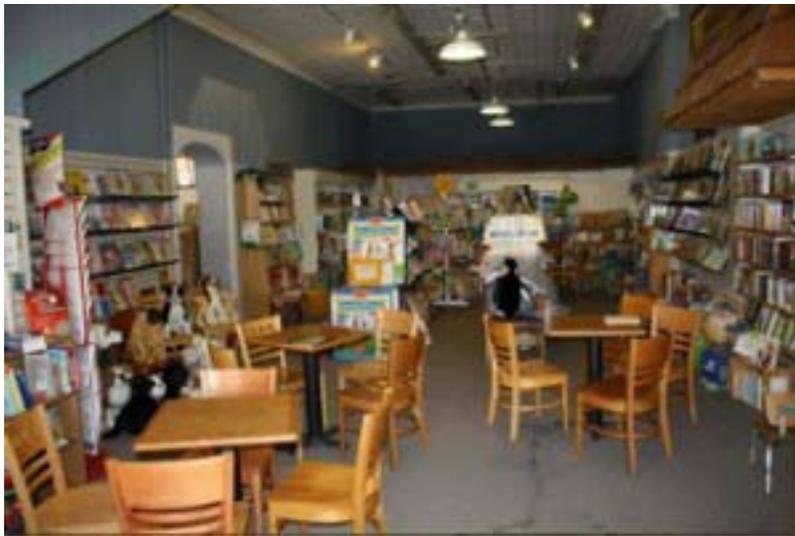


The original storefront on the corner of First and Hennepin.

After twelve years in the heart of downtown Dixon, Illinois, Books on First has become a landmark and a “let’s stop there” destination for locals as well as travelers from the Chicago suburbs. Owned and operated by husband-and-wife team Larry Dunphy and Carolyn Chin, this premier bookstore/coffeehouse is open seven days a week, offering a huge variety of titles, an enormous children’s department, and live music every Saturday. Neither Dunphy nor his wife had any bookselling background before opening Books on First, but, he says, “My wife always wanted to open a bookstore and I always wanted to open a restaurant. This is what we came up with.”

Books on First started out as a single storefront on the corner of First

and Hennepin. Three years ago, the store next door became available, and Dunphy and Chin decided to expand. They cut an archway in the wall between the two stores and created the “Kids’ New Learning Space.” Formerly, children’s books had been in a small room at the back of the shop; with the expansion, the area for children more than tripled. In the new space, Dunphy stocks not only books but other appropriate book-related puzzles, playthings, and plush. “We carry everything by Melissa and Doug,” he says, referring to the popular designers and manufacturers of educational toys and children’s products. The front part of the Kids’ New Learning Space is a bright, open area for free play or special events. In 2008, Books on First was one of five children’s bookstores nominated for the Lucile Micheels Pannell Award given annually by the Women’s National Book Association, “recognizing retail bookstores that excel at inspiring the interest of young people in books and reading.”



The Kids’ New Learning Space offers plenty of room for fun programs and free play.

Children’s special events are in the capable hands of employee Brenda Spratt, who has been with Books on First for ten years. She recently staged a “Tea with Royalty.” This year was the 46th Annual Dixon Petunia Festival, a major community celebration. The Petunia King and Queen and their court came in their festival finery to read stories and share regal refreshments with eager children at the bookstore. Another recent

event was a Pajama Party, which took place early on a Friday evening. A half-dozen local teachers, all of them bookstore regulars, selected read-aloud books from the store’s inventory. On party night, children came in their pajamas, with stuffed animals and blankets in tow, to hear the teachers read their selections.

The store has two part-time employees, Antoinette Brown and Bri Boyer. “Without their back-up in the front,” says Dunphy, “Brenda and I wouldn’t have the time to do a lot of what has been successful at Books on First.”

Dunphy can offer a large selection of titles because he carries only one copy of each. He credits Chin as a major help in book-buying and financial decisions. They order two or three times a week and can usually get next-day delivery, so they see no need to stock multiples. In addition, he comments, “We do a lot of special orders.”

Before the expansion, children's books were through the archway at back left. Now they occupy a room at back right.



The bookstore carries primarily paperbacks in stock. “Electronic publishing is killing hardcover books,” Dunphy says, and the trend to e-books has also taken a toll on bookstores. As he explains, “With a bookstore, like any other business, 20 percent of the customers provide 80 percent of the business. The people in that 20 percent are the big readers—they’re the ones who have a Kindle and buy e-books.” For prices, “nobody can match Amazon,” Dunphy observes. Still, “A few loyal customers will print a page from Amazon, bring it in, and say, ‘order this for me.’” He adds, “We know the names of 95 percent of the people who come in the door. That helps a lot.”

Asked how he chooses what books to stock, Dunphy smiled and replied, “Whatever sells.” In addition to reordering sold titles, he reads reviews to keep up with new books. Often a reviewer will compare a new book to older books on the same subject or in the same genre. “I go back and look up the references,” he says, “and that [the older book] may be the one we order.” He also stocks “a few” self-published books, especially those by local authors.



Larry Dunphy and Brenda Spratt welcome browsers, buyers, and book friends.

Promotions are an integral part of the bookstore business, and Dunphy offers both financial and esthetic enticements. Customers who buy five books get a 30 percent discount on the sixth book. The computer keeps track of sales so customers don’t have to remember punch cards or keep track of their purchases. Dunphy has observed that people often save up their credits, then buy five or six books at the 30 percent discount during the holiday shopping season.

Live music on Saturday is also a popular draw, and the bookstore coffeehouse features performers from outside the area as well as local talent. “We’ve got 25 to 30 different people who play throughout the year,” says Dunphy. “We don’t have to call anybody; they call us.”

Authors call, too, and ask to do signings. Dunphy is pleased to agree. “It’s not that they come just for this,” he says, “but if they’re coming this way they remember, ‘isn’t there a bookstore in Dixon?’ They let us know when they’re going to be here and we schedule a signing.” Each event is promoted through local media.

Spratt has seen trends come and go over the years and mentioned Fancy Nancy and Wimpy Kid as current examples. Knowing what's popular can help with cross-selling book-related extras, such as princess items for fans of Fancy Nancy. Books on First displays a large variety of toys and stuffed animals among the books throughout the children's area. "People will often pick out a book and a toy that goes with it, creating their own gift sets," says Spratt. "Children can always find something they love. We hear a lot of moms give in!"

Visit Books on First at <http://www.booksonfirst.com>, or read Chin's blog at <http://blog.booksonfirst.com>.

Bob and Paula Morrow have worked as a literary team for nearly thirty years. He is a retired journalist, she a professional librarian and former editor of children's magazines and books. Independently, they have authored hundreds of short stories and poems for children, as well as professional journal articles and nonfiction books. Together, they have produced numerous magazine articles and essays, and both have served as writing instructors for the Institute of Children's Literature. Members of SCBWI, the Morrrows offer critiques for aspiring and experienced authors at <http://rhmorrow.com> and <http://paulamorrow.com>.

a fly on the wall • autumn 2010

Words in the Woods: A Return to the Retreat

By Kym Brunner



Words in the Woods Retreat
Springfield, Illinois
June 18-20, 2010

You sign up for a super-cool writing retreat, wait around for months for the day to arrive, and then KABOOM! It's here and gone, quicker than a cool

breeze on a sweltering summer day. Though the event itself slips through your grasp, the lingering effects of the weekend are sweet, long in your memories, and buried in your heart, like a cherished love letter from an old flame (the one you keep hidden waaay in the bottom of your drawer so your spouse and kids don't find it).

I wish I could explain in detail exactly how glorious I felt after attending the Words in the Woods retreat, but describing an astounding event like this would be like trying to explain how frigid Illinois winters can be to a person who lives in Ecuador. With that said, I'll try my best to take you back there with my words.



Stephen Barbara gives a talk.

This lakeside event had three amazing headliners: Kristin Daly, the cheerful, sweet, and informative editor for Balzer & Bray, an imprint of HarperCollins; Stephen Barbara, aka super agent, currently #4 on Publishers Marketplace's list of top YA dealmakers; and Kathi Appelt, a warm and inviting award-winning author of the Newbery Honor book *The Underneath* (2008), as well as many other works.

These three headliners, along with the fabulous crew who put this whole event together, worked like a tag team throughout the course of the entire retreat. The Super Crew (Toni Leahy, Sara Latta, Alice McGinty, Louann Brown, and John Bowen) would introduce a topic with a clever song or skit, and then each of the headliners would give their unique perspective on that particular writing trait. The schedule followed a lakeside theme, including "Voyage along the Voice Vessel," "Dig the Dialogue Dunes," and "Riding the Waves of Linguistic Limbo." All I can say is that the schedule flowed better than the mighty Mississippi', alternating between large group events and small group critique sessions, and peppered with amazing meals in between.

Kristin Daly is at the podium.

Don't even get me started on the food. The food alone was worth the cost of the retreat—homemade meals that were plentiful, healthy, and incredibly delicious. Seriously good food like vegetarian quiches, freshly made salads and soups, meatloaf and mashed potatoes with gravy. Whoops, I got lost at sea there for a moment.

The thing that struck me as most unique about this retreat was that we were a small group of dedicated writers and illustrators who came from all over Illinois (only forty-two of us, according to the guest list), and who had ample opportunity to listen to and exchange ideas with Kathi, Kristin, and Stephen on a very personal level. Each group of five even had an opportunity to rotate among the speakers, with each group using their thirty minutes of time in a way they'd determined for themselves.



Each speaker was asked to present information on approximately five topics throughout the weekend—a lot of work, no doubt. Kristin Daly even remarked with a smile, “I don’t think I’ve ever spoken this much at a conference before.” But by hearing from each of the speakers five times, I felt that each of us had come away feeling we had really gotten to know each of the headliners in a more personal way—perhaps more than any of them would have wanted, but even if that were true, they certainly didn’t show it. All three graciously shared their heartfelt advice throughout the weekend.



Kathi Appelt works on her laptop.

Some of my favorite writing quotes from the retreat include Kathi Appelt’s advice: “If things are going too well for your character, then they’re not going well for your reader.” And her insistence that “when you’re doing your life’s work, your life works.” It certainly appears that Kathi is doing her life’s work, as her passion for reading and writing for children was evident in each of her talks.

Kristin Daly said that the key to having readers fall in love with your book is to make them “care about your characters” by making them “real and interesting.” Even better? “Put a very likeable character in peril,” and never end a scene without letting the reader know, through actions or words, the characters’ feelings about what is happening.

Stephen Barbara spoke about anti-heroes and how to make readers still like them. “Flawed characters need redemption,” he told us. “Discover what they didn’t know was true.” Stephen often read scenes from books he felt portrayed the writing trait we were discussing at the time to help illustrate his points.

On Saturday evening, the “Era of Your Ways” costume party was a hit, with all the attendees dressing up in either their favorite era or a character from their books. Karaoke time saw the strangest cast of hippies, rock stars, medieval lords and maidens, toga-laden gals, and those dressed in steampunk attire hitting the microphone, belting out songs that were way out of their costumes’ time-in-history range. (And maybe, for some, way out of their vocal range as well, but that’s a different article.)



The “Era of Your Ways” costume party was a hit!

I was sad when the retreat ended, but I went home from the Words in the Woods retreat thoroughly drenched with a renewed spirit and a boatload of information. The only letdown of the entire weekend was when I found out that this event only happens every other year. Sigh. I’ll have to wait a long time for this event to recur, but when it does, this voyager is definitely stepping aboard.

Kym is happily married, has three teen daughters, and writes teen and tween novels that will eventually become NYT bestsellers. That’s her plan, anyway. While she’s waiting for that to happen, however, she teaches fifth grade full-time in the northwest suburbs of Chicago. Look for her at <http://kymbrunner.livejournal.com>, as well as on Facebook and Twitter.

autumn 2010 • someone you should know

ISLMA + SCBWI = SUCCESS

By Jeremy Dunn

[Editor’s Note: Many individuals and organizations work hard to connect our books with readers. During the past few years, SCBWI-Illinois has developed a relationship with the Illinois School Library Media Association (ISLMA) to help foster connections between authors and school librarians. Jeremy Dunn, president of ISLMA, offers a description of his organization and its initiatives below.]

The Illinois School Library Media Association was formed on March 3, 1988, by a group of school library media professionals known as The Friends of School Libraries. Now in its twenty-second year, ISLMA strives to empower the school library media profession by fostering leadership, continuing education, and collaboration with other educators. Our membership is made up primarily of K-12 school library media specialists (also known as school librarians) but also includes academic, public, and special librarians.

As a central focus of its mission to support the professional development of school librarians, ISLMA convenes an annual conference each fall. This year's conference, scheduled for October 28–30 at Pheasant Run Resort in St. Charles, features the theme “Bridging the Gap: Linking Learners and Libraries.”

To provide equitable access to the conference for its statewide members, the conference location alternates between Chicagoland and central Illinois on an every–other–year schedule. The 2011 conference will be held at the Crowne Plaza in Springfield.

The annual conference includes three days of one–hour and half–day sessions presented by association members as well as guest authors, educators, librarians, and others who are experts in their areas. Special guests this year include award–winning author and library professor Michael Sullivan as well as best–selling Illinois authors Simone Elkeles and Mary Downing Hahn. Other returning favorites include the indefatigable reviewer Michael Cart and Illinois children's author favorite Sally Walker, to name a few.

Readers' Choice Awards are a highlight of the annual conference. The association administers three separate book awards: the Monarch Award (grades K–3), the Bluestem Award (grades 3–5), and the Abraham Lincoln Award (grades 9–12). ISLMA is also a cooperating organization for the Rebecca Caudill Young Readers' Book Award (grades 4–8). The association honors the winning books and their authors at each annual conference during an awards ceremony. To learn more about each award, visit <http://www.islma.org>.

As part of the association's commitment to support the best children's literature available and to provide our members with opportunities to meet and talk with authors, ISLMA has recently developed exciting ways to partner with SCBWI. In 2007, ISLMA invited SCBWI to host an autograph signing at the annual conference. The success of this activity led to an author breakfast at the 2009 annual conference that featured authors sitting and talking with our members over coffee and rolls. In 2010, an Author Showcase featuring thirty–five authors is planned for the conference at Pheasant Run in St. Charles. Our members truly value the opportunity to meet and talk with authors, and ISLMA looks forward to future opportunities to develop stronger relationships with Illinois authors through these types of events.

Jeremy Dunn is the president of ISLMA. Learn more about ISLMA at <http://www.islma.org>.