



# The Prairie Wind

Newsletter of the Illinois Chapter of the SCBWI

## Current Issue • Spring 2011 • from the editor

There have been a few changes at the Prairie Wind since the winter issue. Jeanne Becker and I have joined the editorial staff. Jeanne, who also has an article in this issue, is director of a family service center in Waukegan that provides early literacy programs for two- to five-year-olds. I am a freelance copyeditor living in Chicago. Jeanne and I want to thank Cheryl Bardoe, our terrific assistant editor, Heather Banks, our outstanding outgoing editor, and Sara Shacter, our amazing regional advisor, for their help and advice in easing the transition. Despite all the changes, we hope you won't notice any change at all in the wonderful Prairie Wind.

Susan Tarcov  
Editor

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## CHARTING YOUR COURSE—PART 2

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In our last issue, my partner Alice shared some of her memories of what it was like to be a fledgling writer, and how daunting it was to learn both the craft of writing for children, and also the business end of a writing career. Much like her, I found SCBWI to be amazingly helpful, right from the beginning—especially my local network meetings. But I often didn't fully take advantage of what SCBWI offers to members. Over my years of membership, one of my biggest "sins of omission" was in not exploring enough at our organization's "nerve center": <http://www.scbwi.org>. For sure, I would pore over the faculty listings when a conference was coming up. But rarely would I just "snoop around" to see what was new. And it dawns on me that maybe some of you are in the same boat...

If that sounds familiar, then do come along as I offer a sampling of the kinds of resources and ideas you might be missing. It'll be fun. Really. (But do dig up your member password—some places on the website require it.)

Let's say you are embracing your inner daydreamer as part of your writing process (or even blatantly procrastinating) and you catch yourself fantasizing about winning the Golden Kite Award. Then you slap yourself in the head and say, "Oy! I don't even have a finished book! I can't win the Golden Kite." Well, maybe not...but you COULD apply for a Work-In-Progress grant. Do you know about these? Have you ever applied for one? Well, I can tell you from experience that it is not hard to apply, and you can get clear instructions at the website—just click on the AWARDS AND GRANTS tab at the top of the home page.

And if you ARE published, you should note that SCBWI has a brand-spankin' new award this year for PAL members. The Book Launch Award offers a prize of \$2,000 to launch a new PAL book in the coming calendar year. There will be two winners of this award.

Okay, change of scene. Let's say you're an illustrator, and you are looking for more exposure for your work. Or maybe you need to decide if you are ready to start submitting. Have you studied the art in the Illustrator's Gallery at the SCBWI website? Well, I just took a speedy "tour" there and I was wowed! If I were an artist, I imagine it would be fantastic to peruse the wide variety of art styles represented there. I'd be asking myself questions like, "Where does my work fit? Is it similar to some pieces I see here? Can I get some clues about how to differentiate myself?" OK, I'm NOT an artist, but I THINK I'd be asking questions like that. And I think I'd be learning, too. So illustrators—if you're feeling confident, what are you waiting for? Upload, my friends!

On a different day, you might just be seeking inspiration. Wouldn't you love to read an interview with the likes of Ellen Hopkins, Rick Riordan, or Peter Sis? Well...did you know their words of wisdom were lurking at...you guessed it—[scbwi.org](http://scbwi.org)! Click on RESOURCE LIBRARY, and then INDUSTRY PROFILES.

Flash to a different situation—an editor just asked to see a full manuscript based on your query. Eeegads! What if they want to buy your book? You're not ready! You don't remember how royalties get calculated! Even hearing the term "subsidiary rights" makes

your head hurt. The critical thing is, don't panic. But DO begin your homework at the SCBWI resource library I just mentioned—click on PUBLICATION GUIDE ONLINE, then LEGAL QUESTIONS. You can even read a sample book contract!

So, if you're reading this issue online, are you feeling a sudden impulse to switch over to the "home office" website for a little while? I have to admit, that was my goal all along. But don't tell yourself you'll do it next week when you're less busy. You won't be. Less busy, I mean. The Prairie Wind will be here when you get back—but don't be gone too long now—ya hear?

Lisa Bierman  
Co-Regional Advisor  
SCBWI-Illinois

## The Clan of the Illustrators Network

By Terri Murphy

Who are the members of the SCBWI Chicago Area Illustrators Network? We are hunters, gatherers, and foragers. We gather once a month and forage through each other's creative efforts looking for hidden treasure. We sniff out newbies and examine their artistic strengths. We hunt for speakers who can illuminate us. But we are no Neanderthals—we know how to use a wheel, a paintbrush and a wacom stylus.

The current incarnation of this network started almost ten years ago when I searched for a local illustrators' group in SCBWI and found that formal meetings had fallen to the wayside. Intuiting that there may be others like me, hungry for knowledge and connection, I visited local SCBWI writers groups to see if illustrators attended. To my delight, each group had its resident illustrator or two. When I asked if we needed to form an illustrators' group with focused programming, the answer was a resounding "Yes!" I got an email list of illustrators from SCBWI and reached out to more.



Deborah Topolski presents her findings at our Publisher's day.



Patrick Girouard shows a spread from his book.

Since the first meeting of our resurrected Illustrators Network on May 2002, we've relied on the expertise of our own membership for much of our programming. Artists step up to the plate to lead programs such as "Favorite Illustrators," where we each speak about picture books that move us or obscure ones we've discovered. The program "Deconstructing a Picture Book" calls for a member to literally cut apart a book and spread it out like a giant picture book dummy while the speaker focuses on a specific theme. During "Visual Impressions" sessions we work with writers who read their picture book manuscripts to the group for visual-potential commentary. We've had create-a-thons, artist demos, portfolio

shows, and book presentations celebrating members' newly published books. We've hosted a studio tour and a mock Caldecott. We've partnered with the Lincoln Park Zoo with its N.O.A.H literacy program and sketched and painted at the zoo. We've taken field trips to the Art Institute, the Museum of Modern Art and the American Library Association Conference.

In 2007, we presented our first gallery show at the Chesterton Art Center in Indiana. In addition to participating artists showing their original illustrations and selling books, we held an auction for an illustrated alphabet letter that each artist created. It was such a treat to celebrate each other's talents in one place at one time, together with an enthusiastic public.



Our first gallery show at Chesterton Art Gallery.



Eric Rohmann's book won the Caldecott!

When there is a topic outside our level of expertise, we find speakers. Illustrator reps Christine Wilkinson of Wilkinson Studios and Nicole Tugeau of Tugeau 2 shared their knowledge of the publishing industry and critiqued portfolios. Art director Nick Tiemersma with Albert Whitman Books spoke of the journey of a picture book from words to print. Eric Rohmann presented the artistic method of his Caldecott award winning book, *My Friend Rabbit*. And recently, two guests from Sourcebooks and a member artist talked about the market for ebooks and apps.

I am proud of the generosity of our members, not only in sharing their knowledge with each other, but in sharing their hearts with those outside the group. In May of 2010, we organized another gallery showing, at Ridge Art in Oak Park, where each artist created an illustration to the theme of "Tree of Life" for public auction. All of the auction profits went to a Haitian children's organization in Jacmel, Haiti, providing much relief after the devastating earthquake.



Our gallery show and auction to benefit Haitian youth.

Throughout it all, the clan of the SCBWI Chicago Area Illustrators Network has grown, in numbers, in knowledge, in respect in each other's work, and in friendships. We are open to all illustrators, writers, and curious onlookers. We meet every second Saturday of the month from 9:30 a.m. until noon at the Des Plaines Library. For our schedule of topics, please visit the SCBWI website at <http://www.scbwi-illinois.org> under networks. Perhaps we'll see you there!

Photo credits: Pam Anzalotti and Terri Murphy

*Terri Murphy is the SCBWI-IL Illustrators Network Coordinator along with Janet McDonnell. She is a picture book illustrator, youth librarian, develops and facilitates traveling creativity classes for kids, could have been a border collie in a previous life, and recently became a certified dragonfly tracker. You can visit her website at <http://www.terrimurphyart.com>.*

## Unexpectedly, but Gratefully, An Author

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By Sherri Duskey Rinker

At age five, I want to be an artist. By fourth grade, a poet. My teacher takes an awkward little girl and encourages. She invites me to hear a poet read, gives me books, and enters my work in contests. She says I have promise, and this makes me feel good. Then I discover art in junior high, journalism in high school, and then art again. I decide on graphic design in college. Later, I make a successful business out of combining pictures and words. Copywriters provide most of the text, and my opportunities to write are relegated to occasional headlines, persuasive business presentations and sentiments on greeting cards.

More than 20 years later, my career feels like drudgery. So discouraging that I pray about it almost daily. Beams of inspiration have turned to faint, rare glimmers. How many logos, how many brochures, how many ads or sell sheets have I done? The clients, the requests; I've heard it all before; done it all a million times. "Make the logo bigger." "Could our phone number be more prominent?" "How would it look in blue?" I wish I could nap with my children and play at the park and have dinner on the table. But the economy is teetering on collapse and my husband's career has gone eerily silent, so I trudge on. Everything feels chaotic. The demands of work, motherhood, life: often, it all blurs together. I'm exhausted.

Our bedtime routine was easier with my oldest, who was happy to thank Him for everything and everyone and consider it covered. My little one needs to earnestly name EVERYTHING, afraid he'll miss something. So we cuddle up together and say thank-you prayers, naming bulldozers, crane trucks, dump trucks, excavators and cement mixers. I know all his favorites. We see the whole construction site in our minds, and now he is LESS tired, more wired. Every night, I fall asleep in his bed before he does and stumble into my own later, in the darkness.

The idea nags at me until I start to write. I can see and hear most of it already, clear as day. I work through the parts that aren't as clear, and the path straightens quickly. For the first time in forever, work—THIS work—feels good and hopeful. Energizing. I write and sketch layouts. My husband looks over my shoulder, and I sense that he thinks this is a slightly weird tangent. I work during vacation with my parents, and my father reads it. He pats my head, but says nothing. I read it to the boys, who look quizzically. I'm sure they all think I've quite lost my mind.

It's done. Is it good? Yes. No. Yes. No. I'm not sure. I decide that the worst that can happen is nothing, which is exactly what's happening now. I get brave and show it to a few people who seem honestly encouraging. So I take the plunge.

A friend-of-a-friend-of-a-friend knows an author in Chicago that might be willing to give me some direction. My phone call with the author lasts just long enough for him to recommend that I join SCBWI for information—which I do, five minutes later.

I pore through SCBWI materials, put together cover letters, and scour through lists of agents and publishers. I spend hours on websites—who will look at it, who won't? An agent seems like the long way around: I'll just pick a publisher and send it off. I list eleven, in order of my favorites. I figure that the wait time will average 3–6 months each, and I plan that I'll easily be doing this five years from now. Ok, no expectations. I package the manuscript, the layouts, and the cover letter. My friend Meg knows a bit about this industry, and I take her advice to indicate that I'm not particularly interested in illustrating the book, but just wanted to convey a sense of my vision for it. And, I send it off to Chronicle Books.

My iCal reminds me that it's time to send a note to withdraw my submission with a polite, "thank you." Their website says to wait three months before assuming "no interest," and that is tomorrow. I'm swamped with work, however, so I put this on my list of things to do next week.

Four days later, on my home voicemail: "Hi Sherri, I'm an editor in the children's division at Chronicle Books. I apologize it's taken me so long to get back to you. I've had your manuscript for a while, and I'm wondering if you are still interested in having us publish it? Please call me and let me know." I listen to the message four times, just to be sure I've heard it correctly.

I call my dad and my husband, both of whom are congratulatory, but conservative. I call Meg, who gives me a deafening squeal and assures me that editors would not make that call unless they were quite sure. Now THAT is the reaction I want.

I call Chronicle. I don't hear back for over a week, and I begin to wonder if I made up the whole thing. I listen to the voicemail message every day, just to make sure I'm sane.

"All it needs is some minor trimming" turns out to be the understatement of the century. I recall all of the times I've been harsh with illustrators and photographers: "I appreciate your passion, but the client is paying for this, and we have to deliver what they want." Karma kicks me in the face, and I suffer through the edits, whining like those artists I have complained about for years. Serves me right.

They have chosen the illustrator, and it isn't my vision AT ALL. But the idea grows on me, and the sketches win me over: a combination of touching and timeless, tough and sweet. And Tom Lichtenheld has unwittingly become my mentor, politely tolerating and kindly answering a constant barrage of questions about a process—and an industry—about which I know nothing. And I add him to my own thank-you prayers.

Through it all, my editor remains kind and encouraging. But, the industry strikes me as a strange parallel universe in which everything moves in slow motion. It becomes a bit like watching paint dry. Oil paint. The book's release is February. Then March. Then April 6. Then April 20. Then May. I try to be patient: not my strong suit.

Yesterday, almost three years after all of this began, I received advance copies of my book. I'm reminded of the feelings I have about motherhood: nothing like I imagined, more work than I ever could have foreseen, but even more wonderful than I could have predicted.

I am deeply grateful for the blessing of this book. It's reenergized me in every aspect of my life. It's given me a sense of clarity. It's rekindled my belief in miracles. In the midst of chaos and challenge, I believe that God put me on the path to this incredible journey—along with, maybe, the distant memory of an amazing fourth grade teacher, telling me that I have promise, reminding me who I once wanted to be.

*A visual communications graduate of Southern Illinois University, Sherri Duskey Rinker has returned to her passion of writing to indulge her own children's passions. A graphic designer, she lives in Chicago with her photographer husband, a cockapoo named Quincy, several fish, a few hermit crabs, an ever-changing array of insects in jars, and two energetic and inquisitive young boys: one fascinated by bugs and magic and another obsessed with trucks and trains. She's constantly inspired — and often exhausted. She created Goodnight, Goodnight, Construction Site in hopes of happier bedtimes and sweet dreams for all. Learn more at <http://www.SherriDuskeyRinker.com>.*

## **ANNOUNCING: The Illinois Chapter of The Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI) 2011 Spring Crop of NEW Books: "Home Grown in Illinois"**

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Compiled by Beverly Patt and Ruth Spiro

### **Picture Books**

Cheryl Bardoe, THE UGLY DUCKLING DINOSAUR (Abrams)  
Andrea Beaty, HIDE AND SHEEP (McElderry)  
Kathleen Long Bostrom, THE VIEW AT THE ZOO (Ideals Children's Books)  
Robert Burleigh, NIGHT FLIGHT (S&S/Wiseman)  
Esme Raji Codell, FAIRLY FAIRY TALES (S&S/Aladdin)  
Carolyn Crimi, DEAR TABBY (Harpercollins), ROCK 'N' ROLL MOLE (Dial)  
Julia Durango and Katie Belle Trupiano, DREAM AWAY (Simon and Schuster)  
Esther Hershenhorn, LITTLE ILLINOIS (Sleeping Bear)  
Tom Lichtenheld, CLOUDETTE (Henry Holt)  
Sherri Duskey Rinker and Tom Lichtenheld (illustrator),  
GOODNIGHT, GOODNIGHT, CONSTRUCTION SITE (Chronicle)  
Barb Rosenstock, THE LITTIEST MOUNTAIN (Kar-Ben)

### **Nonfiction**

Raymond Bial, RESCUING ROVER: SAVING AMERICA'S DOGS (Houghton Mifflin)  
Louann Mattes Brown, HOW TO CREATE SPECTACULAR HALLOWEEN COSTUMES (Capstone)  
Scotti Cohn, BIG CAT, LITTLE KITTY (Sylvan Dell)  
Mary Dunn, HEDGEHOGS (Capstone); also PORCUPINES and OPOSSUMS  
Candace Fleming, AMELIA LOST: THE LIFE AND DISAPPEARANCE OF AMELIA EARHART (Schwartz & Wade)  
Dennis and Judy Fradin, TORNADO (National Geographic Children's Books)  
Kimberly M. Hutmacher, DELTAS, Natural Wonders Series (Capstone); also ISLANDS  
Suzanne Slade, A DOLLAR BILL'S JOURNEY (Capstone); also A RAINDROP'S JOURNEY and A PLASTIC BOTTLE'S JOURNEY

### **Books for Older Readers**

Penny Blubaugh, BLOOD AND FLOWERS (HarperCollins)  
Ilene Cooper, ANGEL IN MY POCKET (Feiwel and Friends)  
Julia Durango, UNDER THE MAMBO MOON (Charlesbridge) Poetry  
Michele Weber Hurwitz, CALLI BE GOLD (Wendy Lamb Books/Random House)  
Daniel Kraus, ROTTERS (Delacorte)  
Christina Mandelski, THE SWEETEST THING (Egmont USA)  
Nnedi Okorafor, AKATA WITCH (Penguin)  
Allan Woodrow, THE ROTTEN ADVENTURES OF ZACHARY RUTHLESS (HarperCollins)

If you would like to arrange an Author or Illustrator Visit, please go to our Speaker's Directory at <http://www.scbwi-illinois.org/Speakers.html>

Beverly Patt is the author of Haven and Best Friends Forever: A WWII Scrapbook. Ruth Spiro is the author of Lester Fizz, Bubble-Gum Artist. If you wish to receive this list regularly, please send your email address to **beverlypatt@hotmail.com** or **rbspiro@gmail.com**. Email addresses will not be sold or shared.

## Spring/Summer 2011 Classes, Retreats, and Workshops

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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.

### \*\*\*CLASSES IN ILLINOIS\*\*\*

#### THE ART CENTER

1957 Sheridan Road, Highland Park, IL 60035

#### Spring/Summer Plein Air Landscape Painting at Heller Nature Center

Tuesdays, April 12 to June 7, 10:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Tuesdays, June 21 to August 9, 10:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

**Instructor:** Michelle Kogan

**Cost:** \$270 members/\$290 nonmembers

**To register,** tel. 847-432-1000 or go to

<http://www.theartcenterhp.org>

**More information:** <http://www.michellekogan.com>; <http://www.moreart4all.wordpress.com>; [mkogan@mdandmk.com](mailto:mkogan@mdandmk.com)

#### CHICAGO BOTANIC GARDEN

1000 Lake Cook Road, Glencoe, IL 60022

#### Plein Air Watercolor: In the Greenhouse and Garden

Thursdays, April 21 to June 9, 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Thursdays, June 16 to August 4, 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

**Instructor:** Michelle Kogan

**Cost:** \$299 members/\$374 nonmembers

**To register,** tel. 847-835-8261 or go to

[http://www.chicagobotanic.org/school/botanical\\_arts.php](http://www.chicagobotanic.org/school/botanical_arts.php)

**More information:** <http://www.michellekogan.com>;

<http://www.moreart4all.wordpress.com>; [mkogan@mdandmk.com](mailto:mkogan@mdandmk.com)

#### COLLEGE OF DU PAGE, GLEN ELLYN CAMPUS

425 Fawell Blvd., Glen Ellyn, IL 60137

#### Writing for Children and Young Adults: From Goodnight Moon to Harry Potter

Saturday, June 25, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

**Instructor:** Carmela Martino

**Cost:** \$59

This class is a one-day introduction to the children's writing field—from picture books and magazines to teen novels. Learn about the genres of children's literature, the current marketplace, and how to submit a manuscript. Please bring a sack lunch.

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

## **CORPUS CHRISTI PARISH CENTER**

Shiloh, IL

### **Annual Summer Critique-nic**

Saturday, July 23, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Fun, food, and critiquing will be featured.

**More information:** Sherry Randle at [sherry\\_randle@att.net](mailto:sherry_randle@att.net) or Anastasia Ely at: [anastasia.l.ely@gmail.com](mailto:anastasia.l.ely@gmail.com)

## **EMILY OAKS NATURE CENTER**

4650 Brummel Street, Skokie, IL 60076

### **Plein Air Watercolor Workshop**

Saturday, May 21, 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., rain date May 28

Saturdays, July 2 & 9, 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., rain date July 23

**Instructor:** Michelle Kogan

**Cost:** \$60 residents/\$75 nonresidents

**To register,** tel. 847-677-7001 or go to <http://www.skokieparkdistrict.org>

**More information:** <http://www.michellekogan.com>; <http://www.moreart4all.wordpress.com>; [mkogan@mdandmk.com](mailto:mkogan@mdandmk.com)

## **EVANSTON ART CENTER**

2603 Sheridan Road Evanston, IL 60201

### **1. Creating Dynamic Figures**

Tuesdays, March 29 to May 31, 7 to 10 p.m.

Tuesdays, June 14 to August 16, 7 to 10 p.m.

**Instructor:** Michelle Kogan **cost:** \$275 residents/\$295 nonresidents

### **2. Plein Air Watercolor: Lurie Gardens, Millennium Park**

Mondays, June 13 to August 15, 7 to 10 p.m.

**Instructor:** Michelle Kogan

**cost:** \$250 residents/\$270 nonresidents

### **3. Studio Drawing: Composition/Space/Value**

Wednesdays, March 30 to June 1, 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Wednesdays, June 15 to August 17, 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

**Instructor:** Michelle Kogan

### **4. Transparent Watercolor**

Fridays, April 1 to June 3, 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Fridays, June 17 to August 19, 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

**Instructor:** Michelle Kogan

**Cost:** \$250 residents/\$270 nonresidents

**To register,** tel. 847-475-5300 or go to <http://www.evanstonartcenter.org/catalog.aspx?did=5>

**More information:** <http://www.michellekogan.com>;

<http://www.moreart4all.wordpress.com>; [mkogan@mdandmk.com](mailto:mkogan@mdandmk.com)

## **HIGHLAND PARK**

### **Materials and Techniques in Children's Book Illustration**

**Teaching Artist:** Lisa Cinelli,

440 Oakland Drive, Highland Park, IL 60035

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 or gouache (an opaque watercolor), or mixed media.

**More information:** lisacinelli@gmail.com or tel. 847-433-4287

### **LAKE FOREST COLLEGE**

555 Sheridan Road, Lake Forest, IL

#### **Illustrating Children's Books**

Tuesdays and Thursdays, June 2 to July 21, 1 to 5 p.m.

**Instructor:** Lisa Cinelli

**To register,** contact B. J. White at bwhite@lakeforest.edu or tel. 847-735-5027. You do not have to be a degree-seeking student at Lake Forest College to register for this class.

### **MAYSLAKE PEABODY ESTATE**

1717 W. 31st Street, Oak Brook, IL 60523

#### **Craft & Critique: Writing Workshop for Children's/Young Adult Writers**

Tuesdays, May 3 to June 21, 7 to 9:30 p.m. (no class 5/31).

**Instructor:** Carmela Martino Cost: \$165 (\$155 for returning students) By student request, this class has been expanded to seven weeks. In this workshop, 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 to the first class—a picture book, short story, nonfiction piece, or novel excerpt. Also, if you are new to the class, you must email Carmela (carmela@carmelamartino.com) before enrolling.

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

### **NEWBERRY LIBRARY**

60 W. Walton St., Chicago, IL

#### **The Write Place: A Facilitated Children's Book Writers Group**

Wednesdays, June 8 through July 13, 5:45 to 7:45 p.m.

**Instructor:** Esther Hershenhorn Writers will have the opportunity to share stories in a supportive, focused, and enlightening environment. Facilitated discussion of participants' manuscripts will highlight the writing process, story components, elements of narrative, craft, revision, and a story's marketability within today's children's book publishing world. Writers of all levels will be offered a variety of writing exercises, suggested readings, and current marketing information. Esther Hershenhorn writes picture books and middle grade fiction, coaches children's book writers, and serves on the Board of Advisors of The Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators.

**More information:** <http://www.newberry.org>

### **NORTH SHORE ART LEAGUE**

620 Lincoln Avenue, Winnetka, IL

#### **Illustration**

Spring Session: Fridays, April 8 to June 10, 9:30 a.m. to noon

Summer Session: Fridays, June 24 to August 12, 9:30 a.m. to noon

**Instructor:** Lisa Cinelli To register, contact the North Shore Art League at nsal@sbcglobal.net or tel. 847-446-2870.

## **NORTH SHORE STORYSTUDIO**

723 Elm Street, Winnetka, IL

Writing For Children & Young Adults Workshop

Wednesdays, April 27–June 15, 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

**Instructor:** Molly Backes

If you need the support of an ongoing workshop to help keep your writing on track, consider the Craft of Writing for Children & Young Adults. The workshop's small size will allow for multiple opportunities to get feedback on your manuscript.

**More information:** [http://www.storystudiochicago.com/nscourses/writing\\_for\\_children\\_and\\_young\\_adults.php](http://www.storystudiochicago.com/nscourses/writing_for_children_and_young_adults.php) or [molly@storystudiochicago.com](mailto:molly@storystudiochicago.com)

## **RAGDALE FOUNDATION**

Lake Forest, IL

Ragdale offers classes and workshops for writers and illustrators.

**More information:** tel. 847-234-1063, <http://www.ragdale.org>

## **SCHOOL OF THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO**

37 South Wabash Ave., Chicago, IL 60603

### **1. Beginning Children's Book Illustration**

Mondays and Wednesdays, May 23 to June 27, 6 to 9 p.m.

Instructor: Lisa Cinelli

### **2. Beginning Children's Book Illustration**

Tuesdays and Thursdays, July 5 to August 10, 6 to 9 p.m.

**Instructor:** Laura Nyman Montenegro

<http://www.lauranymanmontenegro.com>

**To register,** contact Continuing Studies at [cs@saic.edu](mailto:cs@saic.edu) or tel. 312-899-7458 The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Department of Continuing Studies and Special Programs, now has a Certificate in Children's Book Illustration Program with Lisa Cinelli and Laura Nyman Montenegro as Instructors.

## **WRITERS CENTER AT ELGIN COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

Elgin, IL

Regular writing workshop plus weekend special-topic workshops.

**More information:** tel. 847-697-1000, ext 7578

## **\*\*\*SCBWI REGIONAL CONFERENCES\*\*\***

### **SCBWI ILLINOIS**

Words by the Lake: Reflections Retreat

Villa Maria Retreat Center

Springfield, IL

July 8–10, begins Friday at 5 p.m., ends Sunday at 3 p.m.

Contact: Sara Latta at [saralatta@sbcglobal.net](mailto:saralatta@sbcglobal.net)

### **SCBWI OHIO**

The Picture Book Uncovered

Holiday Inn Cleveland-South

6001 Rockside Road

Independence, OH 44131

May 20–22

Contact: Victoria Selvaggio, [vselvaggio@windstream.net](mailto:vselvaggio@windstream.net)

The Do's, Don'ts, and Dynamics of Writing the Perfect Query Letter

Holiday Inn Cleveland-South

6001 Rockside Road

Independence, OH 44131

June 18

Contact: Victoria Selvaggio, [vselvaggio@windstream.net](mailto:vselvaggio@windstream.net)

Critique Meeting—Calling All Manuscripts and Illustrations

Barnes and Noble

4015 Medina Road

Akron, OH 44333

July 16, 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Contact: Victoria Selvaggio, [vselvaggio@windstream.net](mailto:vselvaggio@windstream.net)

First Page Critique Session

Upper Arlington Library

August 17, 7 p.m.

Contact: Victoria Selvaggio, [vselvaggio@windstream.net](mailto:vselvaggio@windstream.net)

Schmooze—Open Forum

Barnes and Noble

4015 Medina Road

Akron, OH 44333

August 20, 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Contact: Victoria Selvaggio, [vselvaggio@windstream.net](mailto:vselvaggio@windstream.net)

WISCONSIN SCBWI

Fierce Revision

Muehl Public Library

436 N. Main Street

Seymour, WI

May 21, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Contact: Susan Manzke, [sunnybook@aol.com](mailto:sunnybook@aol.com)

Illustrator's Intensive Workshop

UW-Waukesha

June 25, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Contact: Deb Gross, [deb144@charter.net](mailto:deb144@charter.net)

SCBWI INTERNATIONAL

40th Annual Summer Conference

Los Angeles, CA

August 5–8

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

## **\*\*\*LEARNING OUTSIDE ILLINOIS\*\*\***

### **CHAUTAUQUA INSTITUTE**

Chautauqua, NY

#### **27th Annual Writers Workshop**

July 16–23

**More information:** [http://www.highlightsfoundation.org/pages/current/chautauqua\\_top.html](http://www.highlightsfoundation.org/pages/current/chautauqua_top.html)

### **HIGHLIGHTS FOUNDATION**

#### **Founders Workshops for Professional and Aspiring Writers and Illustrators**

Honesdale, PA

Conferences include seminars, small-group workshops, and one-on-one sessions with some of the most accomplished, prominent and supportive authors, illustrators, editors, critics, and publishers of the world of children's literature, all determined to help authors and illustrators meet their goals.

**More information:** tel. 877-512-8365 or email Jo Lloyd, [jalloyd@highlightsfoundation.org](mailto:jalloyd@highlightsfoundation.org)

#### **Writing Jewish-Themed Children's Books**

May 15–18

Workshop Leader: Barbara Krasner

#### **Time to Be Brief: Taking the Time to Write Concisely**

May 19–22

Workshop Leaders: Juanita Havill, Susan Pearson

#### **A Concentrated Course in Nonfiction**

May 22–25

Workshop Leader: Peter Jacobi

#### **Somebody Ought to Write a Poem**

June 2–5

Workshop Leader: David Harrison

#### **Whole Novel Workshop**

June 5–12

Workshop Leaders: Carolyn Coman, Jay Neaves

#### **Writing from the Heart**

June 12–19

Workshop Leader: Lori Ries

#### **Editing for Writers**

June 19–22

Workshop Leader: Stephan Roxburgh

**Room to Create: A Writer's Retreat**

July 9–16

Workshop Leaders: Sandy Asher, Linda Oatman High

**The Poetic Muse: A Retreat with Rebecca Kai Dotlich**

August 13–18

Workshop Leader: Rebecca Kai Dotlich

**Food and Fiction**

September 8–11

Workshop Leaders: Rich Wallace, Marcia Dunsmore

**HAMLIN UNIVERSITY LOW-RESIDENCY**

1536 Hewitt Avenue

Saint Paul, MN 55104

**Master of Fine Arts in Writing for Children and Young Adults**

Semesters begin in January and July

Program is 4 semesters, 5 residencies

**More information:** [http://www.hamline.edu/gls/academics/degree\\_programs/mfa\\_cl](http://www.hamline.edu/gls/academics/degree_programs/mfa_cl)

**LESLEY UNIVERSITY LOW-RESIDENCY**

Cambridge, MA

**Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing**

Semesters begin in January and June

Program is 4 semesters, 5 residencies

**More information:** [http://www.lesley.edu/gsass/creative\\_writing/program.html](http://www.lesley.edu/gsass/creative_writing/program.html)

**SPALDING UNIVERSITY LOW-RESIDENCY**

Louisville, KY

**Master of Fine Arts in Writing Program with a Concentration in Writing For Children**

Semesters begin in fall, spring, or summer

Program is 4 semesters, 5 residencies

**More information:** <http://www.spalding.edu/writing-for-children-and-young-adults>

**VERMONT COLLEGE LOW-RESIDENCY**

Montpelier, VT

**Master of Fine Arts in Writing for Children and Young Adults**

July, January

10-day intensive residencies in July and January on campus alternate with 5-month nonresident projects (4 semesters, 5 residencies).

**More information:** <http://www.vermontcollege.edu/low-residency-mfa/writing-children-young-adults>

## \*\*\*DISTANCE AND ONLINE LEARNING\*\*\*

### **The ABC's of Children's Poetry Correspondence Course**

**Instructor:** Heidi Bee Roemer

**Cost:** \$195 (includes shipping)

Author of three poetry books and over 400 magazine sales, Heidi 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 email. 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. Do you want professional feedback on your story-in-rhyme, poetry collection, picture book, or nonfiction? Heidi Bee Roemer, a children's author and instructor for the Institute of Children's Literature, offers detailed written critiques with an eye on publication—yours! More information: [HRoemer@hotmail.com](mailto:HRoemer@hotmail.com)

### **INSTITUTE OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE**

Correspondence courses and access to articles, tips, chat room discussions on writing.

**More information:** <http://www.institutechildrenslit.com>

### **WRITER'S DIGEST ONLINE WORKSHOPS**

Fundamentals of Writing for Children (12-week beginning course)

Focus Course in Writing for Children (14-week intermediate course)

**More information:** <http://www.writersonlineworkshops.com>

*June Sengpiehl lives in Oak Park with her husband, Paul. She writes poetry, articles, picture books, and chapter books. Her email is [jsseng629@yahoo.com](mailto:jsseng629@yahoo.com).*

## News Roundup Spring 2011

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Compiled by Michelle Sussman

### \*\*\*EVENTS\*\*\*

#### ANDERSON'S BOOKSHOP

Information subject to change; some events require (free) 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.

- May 16: Jennifer L. Holm and Matt Holm, authors of *Squish #1: Super Amoeba*, 7:00 p.m. at AB Naperville.
- May 17: Sarah Dessen, author of *What Happened to Goodbye*, 7:00 p.m. at AB Naperville.
- May 18: Jeanne Birdsall, author of *The Penderwicks at Point Mouette*, 7:00 p.m. at AB Naperville.
- May 18: Preschool Teachers' Open House, 6:30–7:30 p.m. at AB Downers Grove.
- May 19: Walter Dean Myers and Christopher Myers, authors of *We Are America*, 7:00 p.m. at AB Naperville.
- May 21: Super Saturday, celebrating Llama Llama, 11:00 a.m. at AB Downers Grove and 2:00 p.m. at AB Naperville.
- May 21: Rob Scotton, author of *Splat the Cat*, 2:00 p.m. at AB Naperville.
- May 26: Michael Scott, author of *The Warlock: The Secrets of the Immortal Nicholas Flamel*, 7:00 p.m. at AB Naperville.
- June 7: Dark Days of Summer Tour, five Young Adult authors. Details to come. 7:00 p.m. at AB Naperville.
- June 11: Super Saturday, celebrating Froggy, 11:00 a.m. at AB Naperville and 2:00 p.m. at AB Downers Grove.
- June 15: This Is Teen (Young Adult author event). Details to come. 7:00 p.m. at AB Naperville.
- June 25: Victoria Kann, author of *Silverlicious*, 2:00 p.m. at AB Naperville.
- July 16: Super Saturday, celebrating *Ladybug Girl*, 11:00 a.m. at AB Downers Grove and 2:00 p.m. at AB Naperville.
- July 19: Maggie Stiefvater, author of *Forever*, 7:00 p.m. at AB Naperville.
- July 23: Mother-Daughter Book Club, discussing *13 Little Blue Envelopes*, by Maureen Johnson, 2:00 p.m. at AB Downers Grove.
- August 27: Super Saturday, celebrating *Max and Ruby*, 11:00 a.m. at AB Downers Grove and 2:00 p.m. at AB Naperville.

## **BOOKEXPO AMERICA**

**When:** May 24–26

**Where:** Jacob K. Javits Center in New York, NY

**Details:** BookExpo America features an author conference and marketplace, author breakfasts, international forums, and meetings with booksellers. This year's headliners include Roger Ebert and Diane Keaton. For more information, visit <http://www.bookexpoamerica.com>.

## **40th Annual SCBWI Summer Conference**

**When:** August 5–8

**Where:** Century Hyatt in Los Angeles, CA

**Details:** Early registration begins in April. For more information and registration fees, visit <http://www.scbwi.org>.

## **\*\*\*AWARDS\*\*\***

### **JOHN NEWBERY MEDAL (ALA)**

#### **Winner**

- *Moon over Manifest*, by Clare Vanderpool

#### **Honor Books**

- *Turtle in Paradise*, by Jennifer L. Holm
- *Heart of a Samurai*, by Margi Preus
- *Dark Emperor and Other Poems of the Night*, by Joyce Sidman, illustrated by Rick Allen
- *One Crazy Summer*, by Rita Williams-Garcia

### **MICHAEL L. PRINTZ AWARD (ALA)**

#### **Winner**

- *Ship Breaker*, by Paolo Bacigalupi

#### **Honor Books**

- *Stolen*, by Lucy Christopher
- *Please Ignore Vera Dietz*, by A. S. King
- *Revolver*, by Marcus Sedgwick
- *Nothing*, by Janne Teller

### **RANDOLPH CALDECOTT MEDAL (ALA)**

#### **Winner**

- *A Sick Day for Amos McGee*, illustrated by Erin E. Stead, written by Philip C. Stead

#### **Honor Books**

- *Dave the Potter: Artist, Poet, Slave*, illustrated by Bryan Collier, written by Laban Carrick Hill
- *Interrupting Chicken*, written and illustrated by David Ezra Stein

Want more info on the American Library Association (ALA) awards? Visit <http://www.ala.org>.

### **GOLDEN KITE AWARDS (SCBWI)**

#### **Winners**

- Fiction: *Turtle in Paradise*, by Jennifer L. Holm
- Nonfiction: *The Good, the Bad, and the Barbie*, by Tanya Lee Stone

- Picture Book Text: *Big Red Lollipop*, by Rukhsana Khan
- Picture Book Illustration: *Pocketful of Posies*, by Salley Mavor

### **Honor Recipients**

- Fiction: *Mockingbird*, by Kathryn Erskine
- Nonfiction: *Fort Mose*, by Glennette Tilley Turner
- Picture Book Text: *Interrupting Chicken*, by David Ezra Stein
- Picture Book Illustration: *Bunny Days*, by Tao Nyeu

Want to know more? Visit <http://www.scbwi.org/Pages.aspx/2011-Golden-Kite-Awards>

### **REBECCA CAUDILL YOUNG READERS' BOOK AWARD**

In February, students from all over Illinois grades 4–8 voted for their favorite book from the 2011 Caudill list. This year's winner is *The Hunger Games*, by Suzanne Collins. Want to know more? Visit <http://www.rcyrba.org>.

### **MONARCH AWARD**

Children in grades K–3 vote for this award from the 2010 Monarch list. This year's winner is *Rhyming Dust Bunnies*, by Jan Thomas. Want to know more? Visit <http://www.islma.org/monarch.htm>.

## **\*\*\*GRANTS & CONTESTS\*\*\***

### **MARTHA WESTON GRANT**

**What:** This grant is available to any SCBWI writer or illustrator who has published in book form and desires to work in a new children's genre. The \$1,500 grant is expected to fund expenses for the SCBWI Annual Conference in Los Angeles. Entries must be postmarked between May 1 and June 10.

**More Information:** <http://www.scbwi.org/Pages.aspx/Martha-Weston-Grant>

### **KATHERINE PATERSON PRIZE FOR YOUNG ADULT AND CHILDREN'S WRITING**

**What:** *Hunger Mountain*, the arts journal for the Vermont College of Fine Arts, offers this writing contest where the winner will receive \$1,000 and publication. Three runners-up receive \$100 each. This year's guest judge is children's author Kimberly Willis Holt. Entries are limited to three categories: Young Adult, Middle Grade, and Picture Book or Writing for Young Children. Entry deadline is June 30.

**More Information:** <http://www.hungermtn.org/katherine-paterson-prize-for-young-adult-and-childrens-writing>

### **CHILDREN'S WRITER POETRY OR VERSE CONTEST**

**What:** For a single poem, collection of poems, or verse story for children of any age, up to 300 words. Entries must be received by October 31. Entry is free for Children's Writer subscribers, \$15 for all others (which includes 8-month subscription).

**More Information:** <http://www.thechildrenswriter.com/aj512/>

*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.*

## Creating a Personal Strategic Marketing Plan

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By Sallie Wolf

Food for Thought is occasional, member-generated programming to support published writers and illustrators in the business of publishing for children.

At our last FFT on January 15, a crowd of forty participants met at the Chicago Temple in the Loop to take a workshop on Creating a Personal Strategic Marketing Plan for Writers and Book Illustrators.

The workshop was led by Mary Longe, writer and strategic planner. In her day job at the American Hospital Association, managing the marketing of innovative products to hospitals, she edits the AHA Solutions' Patient Flow eNewsletter, writes the Patient Flow Challenges Assessment, produces 7-9 webinars each year, and manages the Linked-In group Hospital Patient Flow with several hundred members. Her experiences in writing, running a successful business, and marketing give her unique insight into thinking strategically about the business and art of creating books for children.

Beginning with creating a personal mission statement, examining personal goals, values, and ideas of success, the workshop went on to look at financial objectives and how to achieve them while fulfilling personal goals and values. That a business model can be useful for achieving success in a creative field was a new way of thinking for many of us.

A panel of published authors, Marlene Brill (<http://www.marlenetargbrill.com>), Carolyn Crimi (<http://www.carolyncrimi.com>), and James Kennedy (<http://www.jameskennedy.com>), and a professional publicist, Nancy Berman (NBBIB@aol.com), added their personal experiences of the challenge of publicizing one's work and creating a career in the field.

The workshop was power-packed and thought-provoking. Future Food For Thought programming will revisit some of the aspects of this workshop as well as touch on such topics as Skype presentations, alternative publishing venues, and apps for children's books.

If you have an idea for Food for Thought, please contact Sallie Wolf, [salwolf@comcast.net](mailto:salwolf@comcast.net).

*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, February 1, 2010), and she 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 writing, visit her website at <http://www.salliewolf.com>.*

## Words by the Lake: Reflections Retreat

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**When:** July 8–10, 2011, begins Friday at 5 p.m., ends Sunday at 3 p.m.

**Where:** Villa Maria Retreat Center, Springfield, IL

**Cost:** \$135 SCBWI members; \$150 non-SCBWI members

Join us for a relaxed writing retreat at the Lake of the Woods facility (Villa Maria) on Lake Springfield. Your price includes all meals from Friday dinner through Sunday lunch, a double room on Friday and Saturday nights (each double has its own bathroom), and the companionship of your fellow writers all weekend long.

There will be focused discussion groups planned if you'd like to participate, as well as manuscript critique groups if you'd like to get feedback on your latest masterpiece-in-the-making. We'll have evening bonfires and entertainment of our own making, and otherwise plenty of time to write, draw, and create. The facility has wonderful lounges where you can sit in an easy chair by yourself or relax with a group. There is a big porch area and benches by the lake.

Bring your own drinks, alcoholic or otherwise, to enjoy between meals. This is a laid-back, bare-bones retreat—there won't be any speakers, but there WILL be plenty of folks who love writing and illustrating for young people!

Retreat location website: <http://villa.dio.org/>

The registration form is available at <http://www.scbwi-illinois.org> (under Events)

For more information, contact Sara Latta at [saralatta@sbcglobal.net](mailto:saralatta@sbcglobal.net)

## You Can't Always Get What You Want (But You Might Just Get What You Need)

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By M. Molly Backes

Kurt Vonnegut famously said, “Every character should want something, even if it’s just a glass of water.”

So, I ask my students, what does your character want? Too often, they give me blank looks. Their stories have beautiful scenes, well-rendered settings, witty dialogue, memorable characters, and protagonists who stand in the center of the whirling drama, reacting to everything around them. Wanting nothing.

To be fair, it’s a big question. We all have wants, all the time, and they range from abstract, deeply rooted psychological yearnings—approval, acknowledgement, validation, revenge, love, power—to concrete goals and desires, both long-term and momentary—a blue ribbon at the State Fair, a new boyfriend, a good college, that glass of water. Often, when we can’t answer the question of what our protagonist wants, it’s because we’ve developed these gorgeously complex, deep characters with many deeply-rooted yearnings—but no particular goals.

Here’s the tricky part: your character should have both.

### **The Difference Between Wants and Needs**

For simplicity’s sake, let’s call those deeply rooted yearnings ‘needs,’ and the surface goals ‘wants.’ If your protagonist has strong wants but no particular needs, you’ll end up with what’s often called a “plot-driven” book—one of those page-turner pot-boilers with action on every page and cardboard cutouts for characters who move like paper dolls through the scenes. They may solve complex mysteries and break codes embedded in great works of art, but achieve no actual character growth or change over the course of the story. Speaking hypothetically, of course. Your reader is interested in the action, but even if the action is astonishingly well-written, it doesn’t pack an emotional punch. And a few days after she finishes the book, your reader can’t seem to remember much about the characters at all.

With needs but no wants, you end up with a “character-driven” novel, where there are beautiful descriptions of the silvery glint of a raindrop rolling down a windowpane and mournful geese flying overhead, but there’s almost no action, and your character spends most of the novel sitting in a chair feeling a lot of feelings. Maybe you have a lot of metaphors (the raindrop is a symbol of the mother’s tears!) and your reader appreciates your gorgeous sentences. But though you really captured your character’s deepest psychological struggles, your reader can’t help but be a little bored. Because, frankly, nothing happens.

But what if your protagonist has a clear want that drives the action and a deep need that

runs through the story like a subterranean river, subtly affecting every interaction? And if in the course of trying to get what she wants, your character also manages to get what she needs? Well, then you have what we call a “great” book, one that will keep the reader turning the pages and linger in her mind long after she finishes the final page.

### **Does Your Character Need a Want? (or Want a Need?)**

If you find that you’re stuck in the middle of a story and you don’t know where it’s going and everything you can think of seems forced and tedious or clichéd and trite, then it may be that your protagonist doesn’t have a strong enough want.

Your character’s want(s) must be measurable and easily identifiable, so we the readers will know when she’s achieved it. So “she wants to feel comfortable in her own skin” doesn’t work—it’s not measurable. How do we know when a character feels more comfortable in her own skin? How much more comfortable is enough? Better to give her a clear, measurable want: She wants a starring role in the school play. She wants to win the local dance contest and be crowned the Best Tap-dancer in Kalamazoo. She wants a date to the prom.

If your character knows exactly what he wants and goes after it, but you feel like you don’t have a good enough grasp on your character’s voice, then you may need to consider his need. What’s the real motivation behind his surface desire? What big questions is he grappling with? What’s the big, unspeakable sadness or fear or anger inside him? How will he grow over the course of the story?

As your character moves through the surface plot to achieve her immediate goal—her want—she grows and changes in ways that ultimately fulfill her need. In *A Wrinkle In Time*, for example, Meg Murray’s want is to rescue her father from IT, the evil brain that’s holding him prisoner on Camazotz. This want drives her to follow Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Who, and Mrs. Which, and eventually to face IT alone. Her need is to believe that she is worthy of loving and being loved, despite her physical and social awkwardness. As she pursues her want, first rescuing her father and later going back to rescue her baby brother, she also fulfills her need and learns that not only is she worthy of love, but that her ability to love and be loved is her greatest strength.

### **Underlying Childhood Needs**

In children’s literature, we already have one solid need at the foundation of all our stories—our characters’ need to grow up in some way, becoming more self-sufficient or self-actualized, learning some greater truth about themselves, navigating relationships with new maturity, becoming a man (or woman!). One could argue that every children’s and YA book, on some level, is a coming-of-age story, and if so, on some level every protagonist’s need is to grow up.

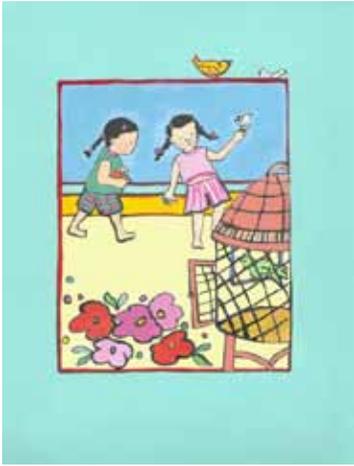
Of course, character wants and needs may change over the course of the story—after all, it’s human nature to constantly be looking toward the next challenge or desire (unless you’ve achieved enlightenment, but I’d argue that a truly enlightened protagonist is going to make for a pretty boring story!). Perhaps your character achieves her initial want and

realizes that she's actually wanted a different thing all along, or maybe in the course of getting this want she's managed to screw up a bunch of other things, and now she wants to fix them. Maybe she finally gets that glass of water she's wanted for the last hundred pages, finally drinks it, and in observing the empty glass she realizes the water was inside her all along. And now she needs to pee.

*M. Molly Backes is the assistant director of StoryStudio, Chicago's center for writing and the related arts. Her novel *The Princesses of Iowa* is forthcoming from Candlewick Press.*

## Make the Time

By Lisa Cinelli

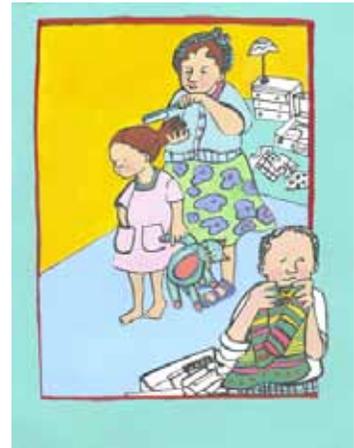


Words and pictures, telling a story—when a picture book works, it is seamless. A memorable and well-crafted children’s picture book flows effortlessly with perfectly chosen words, images, pacing, and pagination (the turning of the pages). The fiction picture book will tell a story and usually has a beginning, middle, and end. It can have an “aha” moment at the end. “Aha” can be a feeling of satisfaction after reading a wonderful book or it could be enjoying an unexpected but true to the character little twist at the end. A nonfiction picture book also has “aha” moments, but might not be telling a story.

Then why is it so difficult to attain that gem every time we sit down at the drawing board? Because crafting works of literary art takes time and effort. You have to make the time and practice. It is about making hundreds of drawings. It is about experimenting with materials and techniques. It is about giving stories room to breathe so that we don’t create dull, uninspired places and characters that drone on to the last page. The perfect words and pictures rarely flow out of someone’s pen or pencil the first time around. Often authors and illustrators lose the connecting thread to their picture book stories as life intervenes. Make the time to rethink the words and the pictures. Let yourself get into your imagination.

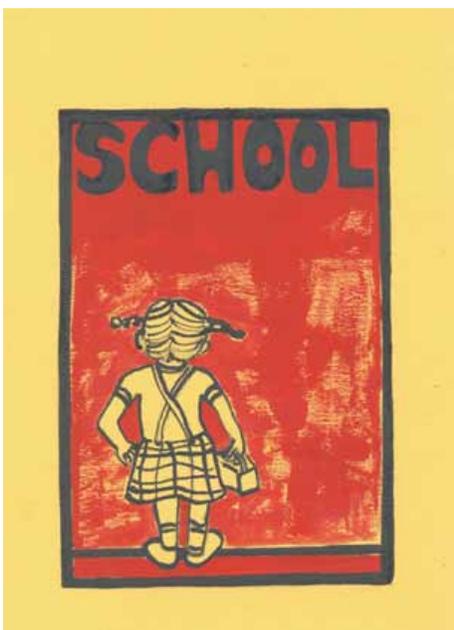
Make the time. Take a moment to write down or sketch a thought or an image that pops into your mind that you might be able to use later. Have a little sketchbook or paper and a writing tool with you at all times.

Make the time to read and reread the books you love. Discover new books. Read everything a favorite author has written. Reading is the key to making amazing books yourself. You cannot live in a vacuum and understand the world of children’s picture books. It is an art form unto itself. Check out books weekly from the library. Read them out loud. Prop favorite books next to your computer and type out the texts. When you put those favorite books away, could you write a summary in twenty-five words or less on what each book was about? This hones our skills for creating characters, scenes, and plots that readers will remember and want to return to and read again.



Make the time to map out those stories you love into picture book dummies. Eight sheets of paper folded in half will give you a thirty-two-page picture-book dummy. The number of pages in a traditional trade picture book is a multiple of eight, usually thirty-two pages. Traditionally, a picture book begins with the title page or a half title page, but many art directors include in the page count the endpapers, which are glued down onto the front

and back covers. Count the pages before you begin. The story might begin on different pages in different books. Don't forget the title page, copyright page, etc. It could be a forty-page picture book (which would be ten sheets of paper folded in half) counting the two pages glued down to the covers. Make little thumbnail sketches to map out the structure of the book before you fold your paper. Type out the text, print it out, and then carefully cut out the sentences and paragraphs. Use Scotch Magic Tape and tape the words into the blank picture book dummy following the flow of the text in the published picture books. Where are the words on the page? How do the words integrate with the illustrations?



Make the time to create picture book dummies of your stories with words and pictures. For illustrators, producing a picture book dummy to show art directors and editors is as important, if not more sometimes, than presenting a portfolio of finished pieces. It is the mechanics and understanding of how a book is put together that separates a children's book illustrator from someone who simply likes to make pictures. Writers also dummy up the words of a picture book text in blank picture book dummies. Many of my favorite editors and art directors said they dummy up a manuscript when they receive it to see how the rhythm of the words look on the blank page.

The more you read, the more you write or type out texts of books, and the more you draw, the more you will add to your ability to call upon words, language and images to fulfill on paper the visions you have for your books.

There is an unspoken connection when you are involved in a group such as SCBWI. You don't have to validate the time you take each day, week, month, or year to work on your books. In such solitary worlds, writing and illustrating, make sure you are connected to others who understand the commitment you have to your work.

Make the time. And make amazing books.

*Lisa Cinelli, painter, author/illustrator, and teaching artist, teaches privately and has taught Children's Book Illustration at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago since 1994. More info at her website <http://www.lisacinelli.com>.*

## Review of THE FIRE IN FICTION

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By Jeanne Becker

This issue's craft book review comes from *Prairie Wind's* new managing editor, Jeanne Becker. Becker's review of Donald Maass's book (*The Fire in Fiction*) is honest and insightful, so much so that I plan to add the book to my writer's bookshelf. Thanks, Jeanne, and welcome!—Kim Winters

Do you have a manuscript that has a good story line but still feels flat? Maybe you like your lead character but your critique group says that he doesn't come to life on the page? I was in this predicament a month ago. I had a draft (draft #11 would be more like it!) of a picture book story that takes place in Colorado in the 1930s. My writing coach, Esther Hershenhorn, liked the plot. However, she said I needed details that popped, I needed a character the reader cared about. My story was flat and I didn't know what to do about it.

That was, until I picked up *The Fire in Fiction* by Donald Maass (Writer's Digest Books, 2009) at the Deerfield Border's closing sale. Maass, literary agent and author, takes apart well-known novels as diverse as *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini and *Lake News* by Barbara Delinsky and describes why they work. Most of his examples come from adult novels, but I found his suggestions to be equally applicable to a picture book script. After all, developing a character that matters is essential to a good story whether the book is 32 pages or 500 pages.

Maass's core message is that all components of the story (time and place, secondary characters, back story, conflict, tension, even the weather) need to be developed from the perspective of the point-of-view character. For example, in his description of Setting as a Character, Maass points out that lots of movies, novels, and songs have the boardwalk at Coney Island in New York City as a setting. But, using Reed Farrel Coleman's novel *Soul Patch* (2007) as an example, Maass shows how an author can bring that place to life in a new, fresh way by seeing it from the perspective of the point-of-view character, in this case a man about to commit murder:

It was much cooler under the boardwalk, even at night. The sea air was different here somehow, smelling of pot smoke and urine. Ambient light leaking through the spaces between the planks imposed a shadowy grid upon the sand. The sand hid broken bottles, pop tops, used condoms, and horseshoe crab shells. Something snapped, and it wasn't the sound of someone stepping on a shell.

Clearly, these are not the words of a children's book. However, the concept of how to bring a setting to life is directly applicable. In my picture book manuscript, I started to see the small western town from the perspective of my 10-year-old lead character. Where did he play with his friends? Where did he drink root beer floats? Where did his mom buy peaches for the summer pies that he loved? Rather than describing the town as a whole, I reworked the text to include just a few descriptions of those places that were most important to my lead character. The setting came to life and so did the character.

Each one of the nine chapters of *The Fire in Fiction* ends with a list of "Practical Tools." Maass lists tasks and questions that help the writer begin to rewrite her own story. For example, at the end of the chapter about setting, Maass asks: What is your protagonist's personal connection to this place? Write it out. Make it specific. How was this place seminal in her personal history? What does she love about this place? Why is she afraid of this place? What stands out about this place? What makes it different from any other place like it?

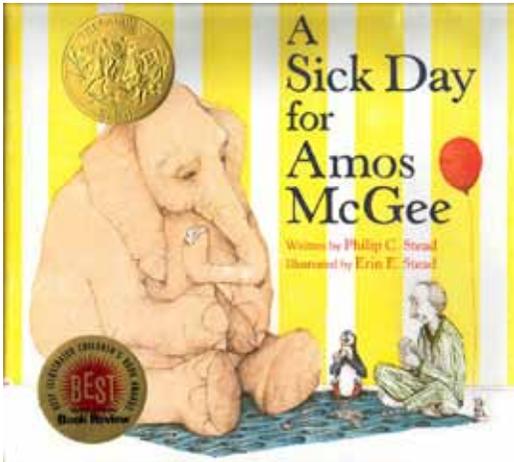
The writer who studies Maass's examples and who works through the tasks at the end of each chapter will find her story becoming three-dimensional. It will no longer lie flat on the page. Instead it will pop with details that illuminate a sense of time and place, foster a sense of moment-by-moment tension, and bring both the protagonist and the secondary characters to life.

*Jeanne Becker is director of a family service center in Waukegan, IL, that provides early literacy programs for two- to five-year-olds. She is an avid traveler and has published several articles about train trips in the U.S. and abroad. Jeanne is working on her first picture book, which combines these passions, about a young boy traveling by train in the southwestern U.S. In her free time, Jeanne helps her husband with their garden railroad in Deerfield, IL.*

## A Sick Day for Amos McGee: Exceptional Pacing Enhances Emotional Journey

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By Jodell Sadler



As children's writers and illustrators, we inspire a child's desire to read, explore, and learn more about their world in the picture book form. Although it's not the easiest genre to craft, many picture books boast pure fun with a capital, "YEAH!" This year's Caldecott Award-winning book, created by Philip C. Stead and Erin Stead, *A Sick Day for Amos McGee*, is no exception. It's just exceptional.

*A Sick Day for Amos McGee* is an example of a picture book that fills with heart as the story unfolds, but what is most fascinating is its pacing and the use of pacing tools; lists, repetition, setting, page turns, art, and unspoken characters, all work together to enhance the emotional journey for the reader.

When the art and words of a picture book are paced just right, its pages surprise the reader at every turn. For this reason, writers fill picture books with rhythm, sounds, language play, repetition, pacing, texture, art, line breaks, white space, colors, onomatopoeia—and so much more—to release, or reveal, the heart of a story. A great picture book is one that will leave children thrilling to read it again and again just to uncover its hidden magic.

A starred Kirkus Review provides a summary. "Amos McGee, an elderly zookeeper, enjoys a clockwork life (one teaspoonful of sugar for oatmeal, two for tea and the number five bus to work) until the sniffles force him to stay in bed and miss his daily visits with animal friends."\* That is...until the animals decide to visit him.

### Setting Adds Rhythmic Pace

In this journey story, the reader moves over the course of Amos's every day and learns his routine. The reader also travels every day to and from the zoo, back and forth, on the number five bus. As Amos moves, the reader moves, and these movements add rhythm that pace. The pace, how the writer slows or stops or pauses along the story arc, gives the reader more or less opportunity to consider what appears on the page. In this story, well-crafted moments in time bridge the reader from beginning to end. A familiar sense of place during the forward trajectory becomes challenged by a twist for the reader to consider in the end as Amos and the animals exchange roles and reveal the true meaning of friendship.

### Lists Reveal Character

When we think about the unfolding of a story, we really can do a lot with a list. *A Sick*

*Day for Amos McGee* shows how a list can be used to pace a story. A list may be used to control the speed of story: visually, verbally, or both. A list may cascade with care over a series of pages or appear as a list on a single page. A list may also reveal character slowly or with immediacy. Amos's character is shown to the reader over the course of five pages:

He would play chess with the elephant; (who thought and thought before making a move),

run with the tortoise (who never ever lost),

sit quietly with the penguin (who was very shy),

lend a handkerchief to the rhinoceros (who always had a runny nose),

and, at sunset, read stories to the owl (who was afraid of the dark). (pp. 8–12)

Meanwhile, Erin's art shares a list of activities any child would adore. An elephant plays chess. A tortoise crosses a finish line. A penguin sits still. A rhinoceros gets his nose wiped, and an owl listens by the lamplight—all in response to Amos. The reader learns a lot about Amos in these spreads; he plays nice with others, supports his friends, shows empathy, cares, and entertains.

Suddenly, the plot turns on a sneeze. "Ah-choo!" Amos wakes with the sniffles, sneezes, and chills. His routine—his every day—is upset by a cold that send him back to bed.

After a page turn, a new list shares what each animal does without Amos. This list stands in stark contrast to the first, as this list is just a list. It's immediate and presents on one page. The art shows more. The animals polish pawns and castles, limber limbs, sit patiently, worry, perch on a stack of stories, and ask, "Where is Amos?"

### **Art Carries Story**

Art is an equal player when it comes to pace. The many tools we can come up with to pace a manuscript can benefit writers on the illustration-side. It is always nice when the words of a picture book halt and the art carries the story. In this case, the animals don't wonder about Amos for long. Three words announce a big decision to visit Amos. Philip writes, "Later that day..."

The reader observes Erin's gentle renderings. Her careful choice of color blocks and the detailed wrinkles, brow bends, and gestures of her delicate and soft, black and white illustrations are worthy of her Caldecott. As the words stop, the art takes the animals, and reader, on a ride on the number five bus—just like Amos. They surprise Amos just like he surprises them, and this gives the reader a deep sense of their friendship.

### **Games Create Interactivity**

As writers and illustrators, we need to think of the picture book as a performance, a stage, or means to connect with our readers and bring them in. It's good to investigate

interaction as we craft a manuscript. In *A Sick Day for Amos McGee*, Erin surprises her reader by adding two tiny characters that are not mentioned in the text: Mouse and Bird.

The inclusion of these two characters adds a game of hide-and-seek to each page turn. The reader explores: Where is Mouse? Where is Bird? Thus creating an interactive game for the reader and reminds us how relational the picture book is.

Author Phyllis Root says, “Picture books connect Reader to Words, Listener to Words, Listener to Reader, Reader to Listener, and Page to Page.” Since a picture book is also told in the art, this relation might include the Reader to Art, Art to Reader, Reader to Viewer (Parent to Child) as well. This game and these new characters add to the readers’ adventure.

### **New Characters Create Curiosity**

Characters not mentioned in the text really are the illustrator’s genius. Mouse checks a pocket watch, waits at a mini bus stop, holds pompoms as tortoise crosses the finish line, wipes rhino’s eye, waits on the fence as the animals leave, rides tortoise’s shell, sits below the bed when Amos wakes with the sniffles, and looks on as the animals surprise him.

Bird appears, wearing a tie, carrying a briefcase. He holds a sign, sits below the branch to listen to a story, takes part in tea, listens to the story owl reads, and leaves the reader searching where he may show up next.

These two additional characters slow the text in a variety of places so the child explores the interplay of art and words at a higher level.

### **Repetition Relates Relevance**

Often times, we forget that the small changes we make as writers may make a big impact on the reader. In this story, repetition really relates relevance and finishes off the book’s journey and final trajectory: how Amos is a friend to his animals and how they return his friendship in kind.

Repetition, as a pacing tool, may be used to draw attention to a certain line of text, or slow the reader enough to allow time for the reader to consider more in the scene. Repetition also adds emotional depth to this story and, along with the list, works together—through both the art and words—to reveal heart. In *A Sick Day for Amos McGee*, the reader compares the opening list to the closing list. In doing so, the reader experiences the love that presents on and permeates every page. They view Amos and the animals bathed in friendship. In the end these friends completely reverse roles:

In the beginning Amos...

lends a handkerchief to the rhinoceros (who always had a runny nose) (p. 11)

...and, at sunset, [Amos] read stories to the owl (who was afraid of the dark). (p. 12)

At the ending, the animals...

“Ah-choo!” Amos awoke with a sneeze. The rhinoceros was ready with a handkerchief. (p. 28)

Amos says goodnight to each animal in another list:

And goodnight to the owl, who—knowing that Amos was afraid of the dark—read a story aloud before turning out the light. (p. 32)

What creates all this fun? Pace, and the careful use of the many pacing tools, provides a writer excellent ways to improve a picture book for his/her readers.

Having studied pacing for my MFA thesis, it became clear that pacing provided many ways to really control and enhance the words and art of a story. Words and art, both important and integral to the picture book, do intertwine, play, mingle, and leap frog over each other. As children’s writers and illustrators, when we want to inspire a child’s desire to read, explore, and learn more about their world in the picture book form, pace is a great craft item to explore. Although it’s not the easiest genre to write, picture books do boast pure fun with a capital, “YEAH!” when they are crafted with care, and this is certainly the gift readers come to realize in reading *A Sick Day for Amos McGee*.

\* Used with permission from Kirkus Reviews Online.

*Jodell Sadler, serves as an editor, illustrator. Additionally, she serves as an adjunct professor for **Rasmussen College Online**, where she teaches English, literature, and writing by day, and online Children’s Writing courses by night. Her new class on Pacing the Picture Book Form begins June 6, so please log into <http://www.sadler4kids.com/writing4kids.htm>.*

## Ebb and Flow

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By Carol Coven Grannick

In Dennis Palumbo's classic book on the emotional life of the writer, *Writing From the Inside Out*, the writer/psychologist suggests that the ebb and flow of positive and negative emotions in the writer's journey is normal. This is perhaps the most important "take-away" not only from Palumbo's work, but from any journey of self-exploration and personal growth. That is, without self-acceptance of the normal joy and pain of life, we continue to torture ourselves about feelings, rather than simply accept them as natural reactions.

That awareness goes a long way toward keeping feelings transient. The problem is that it's hard for us to really buy that because the downs feel rotten and we start wishing them away. But when we do, the feelings tend to tie themselves in knots and added layers of untrue self-deprecatory language and feelings pile on. So it's our fear and hate of "negative" emotions that gets us in trouble and stifles our brain's capacities—and writing.

I've been musing about this ebb and flow of the writing life, even as I ebb and flow. Internal and external experiences have intertwined this past year to make me ponder the cycle of life and feel perplexed about the field of publishing. Although I know that I can only control certain things, the uncertainty that accompanies the creative journey can shake me to the core. In addition, life losses and transitions have made my moods less buoyant, and my energy less social, than I'd like. Not all the time, but enough that it's noticeable. Yet I'm cautious about wishing these moods away. I think it's my attitude, not life, that needs tweaking. So I'm working harder at talking to myself and benefiting from my writing partners' and life partner's reminders and support. And I've been more productive with my writing than ever. I know I'm not alone. This year there were many voices, including beautiful posts by Francisco X. Stork (<http://www.franciscostork.com/blog/>) and Sara Zarr's powerful and comforting SCBWI final-day keynote (<http://scbwiconference.blogspot.com/2011/01/sara-zarr-keynote.html>) that spoke to so many of us who have worked for so long without the complete results we wish for.

Don't get me wrong—I love feeling upbeat and joyful. I'm feisty and eternally hopeful. But I have no need to feel wonderful every moment of my life. I want to allow, and even welcome, the ebb and flow of emotions along with the ebb and flow of events. I keep the basic attitude that life has great meaning, and that the broad and deep range of human emotion feeds my creative life in a way that nourishes my writing and my soul.

*Carol Coven Grannick is a writer and licensed clinical social worker in private practice, supporting writers through the vicissitudes of the creative journey. She writes picture books and middle grade fiction and can be reached at: [carolgrannick@att.net](mailto:carolgrannick@att.net).*

## Book Promotion Begins with a Great Premise

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By Kat Falls



When I was first asked to write an article for *Prairie Wind's* Promote that Book column, I said yes without hesitation. I figured it would be easy since I'd given a lot of thought to marketing my middle-grade novel *Dark Life* (Scholastic Press, May 2010). But then I realized I'd have to admit something that brings out my insecurities . . . that I don't approach writing like a book author. I have an MFA in screenwriting and old habits die hard. My writing process works for me, but suddenly I wasn't sure that I wanted to publicly admit that I think about marketing before I start writing the book.

I mean, come on, aren't novelists supposed to be inspired by more lofty concerns like theme and character? Only afterward, when the book is done, does a real author deal with the pedestrian realities of selling and promoting her work, right?

Luckily, when I decided to write *Dark Life*, I ignored my romantic notions of what real authors do and stuck to my belief that the most important marketing decisions for a book are made in the early stages of the writing process.

If you think about the elements that go into creating a successful marketing campaign for a novel, you realize that either most of those elements are there at the start or they aren't. Marketability doesn't just appear after the book is finished. So here are a few things that I consider before I commit to a story idea.

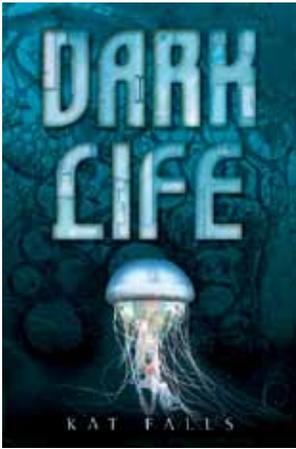
### **Start with a marketable premise.**

I know it sounds obvious to say that a book must start with an original and compelling idea, but really, how many writers, when excited by a new idea, spend time evaluating its marketability?

Then again, why wouldn't you? As a writer, you have more control over whether your book sells than the publisher because you have 100 percent control over one of the most important elements of the book's marketing campaign—the concept.

I know that once I start writing, I become obsessed with the "trees," studying every branch, twig, and leaf (aka: scenes, sentences, words). But the person who picks up my book in a bookstore is surveying the forest. This is why I don't start writing until I'm confident that my story premise will have immediate oh-wow, must-read-this impact on its target audience.

So what makes a story premise marketable? Again, thinking like a screenwriter, I look for the following elements:



**The idea is focused and specific—and can usually be told in a couple of sentences.**

Once I came up with the premise for *Dark Life*, I wrote it as a logline, which is a concise description of the story. I try to keep my loglines short because I want my finished book to be highly “tellable.” Not only to facilitate the word-of-mouth among readers, but because a catchy pitch makes it easier for booksellers to hand sell my book to customers.

Here’s the longest version of my logline:

*Dark Life* is set in the near future when global warming has caused the oceans to rise and reduced America to half its former size. Fifteen-year-old Ty and his family live on an ocean floor homestead. When outlaws attack the pioneer settlement, Ty teams up with a girl from the “Topside” who’s come subsea to search for her brother. Together they face dangerous sea creatures and venture into the frontier town’s rough underworld to discover the secret behind the outlaws’ eerie abilities.

Once I had a sense of my story’s scope, I challenged myself to make the logline even shorter. It’s shocking how few words it takes to pique a reader’s interest. After many attempts, I managed to pare *Dark Life’s* premise down to “A space western . . . underwater.”

The sequel, *Rip Tide*, which comes out August 1, 2011, can be summed up as “The Searchers on the ocean.”

Okay, I know that pitch isn’t going to work for middle-graders. How many of them have even heard of John Wayne? Forget a 1956 western. I’ll have to come up with a different logline for them. But in the meantime, their parents, teachers, and librarians seem to get it.

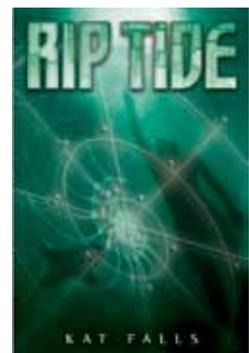
**The idea is fresh—something we haven’t seen before.**

Keep in mind that a logline should highlight what is unique and interesting about a story, which are almost always the most marketable elements. After honing my story’s logline, I evaluate it. Is it too familiar? A knockoff? Not thrilling? Read aloud, does it have oh-wow! impact?

**The idea is incredibly appealing to its target audience.**

In my case, I knew I wanted a logline that evoked “Awesome!” from a middle-grade reader. But not just because of one aspect of the story. For example, a cool subsea setting wasn’t enough. I wanted to make sure that every story element contained in the logline would be awesome to a middle-grader. So I tinkered with *Dark Life’s* logline until I felt it would fire up a kid’s imagination and have a visceral appeal.

For me, this process often means making bolder choices until I have a



story situation that feels original and unforgettable. In other words, a highly marketable concept. I don't start writing until I feel that I've achieved this because I'm convinced that to end up with a marketable book, you plan it from the very first step in the writing process.

*Kat Falls' debut novel, Dark Life (Scholastic Press, May 2010), has deals in 18 international markets and is in development at Disney with Image Movers and the Gotham Group producing, and Academy Award-winner Robert Zemeckis attached to direct. In July, Kat appeared on the Today Show when Dark Life was featured on Al Roker's Book Club for kids. The second book in the series, Rip Tide, is due in bookstores August 1, 2011. An adjunct professor at Northwestern University in radio/television/film, Kat lives with her husband and three children in Evanston, IL. She is currently working on a dystopian YA trilogy, The Fetch, acquired by Scholastic Press for publication beginning in fall 2012.*

## So You're on Facebook...Now What?

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By Hilary Wagner

Few writers are not online in some capacity these days. Most of us have blogs and websites, then we've got Twitter, Facebook, and various writers' forums and groups, including our own IL SCBWI Yahoo Group (highly recommended). Why do we do all this crazy social networking? Well, because we want to promote ourselves and our books. And in most cases, no one is going to do it for us these days.

Many writers feel chained to social networking. It becomes laborious—constantly tweeting and blogging and posting—when you just want to have a normal writer existence. You know, that one where you imagine yourself all cozy in a log cabin, atop a mountain in Colorado (or maybe Alaska), far, far away from the internet and all that it demands. As I'm sure you've noticed, it doesn't work that way anymore.

Recently, a fellow SCBWI member emailed me to ask how I have so many on-line connections. The whole social networking thing can be a pain in the neck sometimes, but there are ways to make it fruitful AND fun. Here are some easy tips (I'm all about tips) that have made my social networking life easier, which in turn, makes other parts of my life easier.

### **Blogging with Brevity**

1. If your blog feels overwhelming, commit yourself to only one post a week—just one.
2. Pick a day that gets a lot of traffic. I'd say Tuesday and Wednesday, because Mondays are just, well, Mondays and people usually have other stuff going on towards the end of the week.
3. You don't have to write a book for each post. Remember that! If it's helpful, keep your post to a short and sweet paragraph or two. You are more likely to get comments from short posts. Lots of blog-readers pass over lengthy posts because they don't have time to read them.
4. Engage your readers. Ask them questions about writing, the books they love, whatever is on your mind. Comments increase when readers feel included in the post. We all love to contribute and be part of something.
5. Last, but not least, schedule your posts! You can write a quick post on Sunday, but schedule it to appear on Wednesday. So if you have too much happening during the week, you won't forget or be too busy to post.

## Tips for Tweeting

1. Start following writers, authors, your friends. Most will follow you back and if they don't, no worries. Many people view Twitter as a popularity thing, but just make connections and the popularity will come!
2. To make things easy, limit your tweets to a certain number a day. For example, divide up twelve random tweets. Four for the morning, noon and night. Doing this still gives you a good twitter presence and you only have to write twelve sentences per day. Any writer can handle that!
3. Don't worry about your grammar (or lack thereof) on Twitter. You only have 140 characters to work with, so no one expects you to be perfect.
4. Have fun! Twitter is fast paced and entertaining. I love seeing the silly things people write. You don't need to be clever or witty. Just be you! That's why your friends like you, and soon, so will everyone else.
5. Avatar: Stick with the same picture. I can't stress this enough. People will quickly lose track of you if you're constantly changing that little picture. Find one decent picture of yourself or something else (like your pet or something silly) if you're shy and don't want to show the world your pretty face. I've had the same picture up for two years now and when I go to conferences, meet-ups, etc., people walk up to me and say, "Hey, we're connected on Twitter!"

## Frequenting Facebook

1. Not to beat a dead horse, but ... Pick one avatar and stick with it. Use it for everything. If someone is connected to you on Twitter, they'll immediately connect with you on Facebook and other sites, because they spotted that stunning little picture again. Brand yourself, baby!
2. Don't be afraid to request friendship from writers, agents, editors, etc. That's what Facebook is for—to network. If someone emails you and asks, "Why do you want to be friends? Do I know you?" Be honest and say that you're a writer trying to make connections with other people in the industry. You didn't join Facebook so you could read posts about your Aunt Martha's cat. So go, be fruitful and multiply your friends. If someone doesn't friend you back, no sweat. We still know you're cool!
3. Comment on posts. Leave a handful of quick comments on your friends' posts. It only takes a few minutes a day to do so and you'll still have a nice presence without being a Facebook junkie. Even if you're just hitting the like button, you're still connecting with people. And how hard is it to click "like"? Not very.
4. Raid your friends' friends! Yes, that's what I said. When I first started out on Facebook (2009), I had my teeny, tiny group of writer friends. So, I raided their friends. Anyone who was a writer or connected to the publishing biz, I requested their friendship. Most, if not all, accepted, and my network grew from there. In fact, I encourage you to go on

my Facebook page and steal all my friends! Just don't say bad things about me to them. I've kept the lie up this long! ;)

5. Please, please, please...don't constantly post about your book and your book alone. I can't stand it when all I see from a Facebook user is tweets about their book. Where to buy it. A promo that's going on. How you'll feel a lot better if you buy their book... please! Not to mention, the tons of Facebook emails about where to buy their book, etc. IT DRIVES ME CRAZY! Those are people I tend to block. I absolutely believe we should post things about our books, but don't go overboard. Facebook is more about selling YOU, as opposed to your book. My Facebook friends who bought my book bought it because they got to know me, the real me, not some blank face that is constantly being pushy about her book. No one likes that. I've never sent out a Facebook email blast about my book, because those emails tend to be ignored and I personally think they come off as spam, especially if you're sending them out to every single connection. Sending something like that to your close friends every once in a while is perfectly fine, but they're probably buying your book already!

Okay, there are my social-networking tips of the trade. It's easy to simplify your social-networking life and still have a solid presence. Please feel free to reach out to me anytime with questions. And for goodness sake, Friend me already! ;)

*Hilary Wagner is the author of Nightshade City, a middle-grade fantasy adventure featuring a memorable cast of rats—both heroic and villainous. Best-selling author Rick Riordan says, "Fans of Redwall and the Warriors series will love this heroic tale of good versus evil in a subterranean society of rats." The White Assassin, Book II of the Nightshade Chronicles will release this October. Hilary's latest undertaking, City of Goblins, an undersea adventure in modern-day Tokyo, is scheduled to hit the shelves in 2012. Find out more about Hilary and her first novel, a CBC Best Book, at <http://www.nightshadecity.com>.*

## SCBWI-Illinois Experiences a Spring Thaw with Arthur A. Levine

By Christine Wolf



On April 16, 2011, Arthur A. Levine, founder of Arthur A. Levine Books (an imprint of Scholastic Books) greeted SCBWI Illinois members with humor and humility. "I feel that we are part of the same community," he told a crowd of more than 125 at National-Louis University in Skokie. His motivating and highly entertaining talk came from an authentic place: Levine has edited such notable titles as *When She Was Good* (Norma Fox Mazer) and *Lost & Found: Three by Shaun Tan* (Shaun Tan); Mr. Levine is also the author of *Monday Is One Day* (illustrated by Julian Hector) as well as the forthcoming *Tooth Trooth*.

Speaking to the crowd as an editor, Levine acknowledged significant anxiety in the publishing industry, most notably among authors, agents, and publishers. He assured the gathered crowd, however, that "the industry's not going down the toilet: it's just changing."

One of the most motivating statements Levine shared in his speech might have been this: "If your goal is to be published, your chances are better than ever."

### Discussion 1: THE PUBLISHING INDUSTRY

Levine illustrated his sentiment by detailing challenges, neutral topics, and positive aspects of the publishing industry:

#### Challenging Trends

- The biggest supporters of quality books are under fire: schools and libraries. School librarians are being let go; public library branches are closing.
- Bookselling: independents are struggling. There's been a migration of customers to online purchases. Authors lose out when invaluable "handselling" (typically done by independent booksellers) is missing.
- Further, Borders Books is now bankrupt. Fewer national accounts like this means fewer chances of sales for authors.

#### Neutral/Positive Trends

- E-books are now helped by Google. Sales can connect through independents.
- E-books are a cheaper, greener production option than paper.
- It's easy to keep an e-book in print.
- E-books don't have shelf-space limitations.

#### Neutral/Negative Trends

- Publishers don't sell enough e-books yet to pay editors a salary.

- E-books are not as fun to read as physical books.
- Uncertainty exists about financing authors' payments, etc., though these issues are resolving...

## Positive Trends

- Internet marketing is an amazing thing: (1) A Facebook presence helps authors connect with previously untapped audiences. (2) It's easier to target an audience via internet marketing. Publishers now target bloggers who speak to specific communities. Authors can also tap into these communities themselves, subscribing to others' blogs and connecting/selling their books.
- There's been a reprieve for independents lately. The "shop local" movement is making a difference for book sales.
- Borders' bankruptcy means less competition; independent booksellers may pick up even more sales.
- Google books' online capacity is tremendous.
- Independent booksellers represent a diversity of opinion. Barnes & Noble represents one opinion of buyers, but independents represent a multitude of opinions and therefore, a multitude of chances to sell your book.
- The "giant book" is a thing of the past. Publishers are trending away from putting all their attention/money into just a few books—great news for "the rest of us." We may not become millionaires, but we'll have a more equal shot to do well.
- Publishing goes on. Book reviews in newspapers have declined, but specialized blogs have proliferated. Institutional reviews, like *School Library Journal*, *Kirkus*, *American Library Association*, and *The Horn Book* still exist. The transformation is ongoing, but the rate of change is slowing; we're getting back to a greater sense of normalcy.
- E-books are becoming a source of revenue for publishers, especially with adult titles. Kids' books should follow.
- There's a whole new realm of editorial freelancers because of all the layoffs. This is an opportunity for authors who want/need editorial assistance.
- Despite the layoffs and cutbacks, most houses have kept all of their imprints open, and "newbies" are still the lifeblood of their lists.
- There's an increasing diversity of publishers. Modest-sized publishers are becoming more standard. Namalos, Open Road, West Side Books—they're all interesting new kids' publishers. E-books and print-on-demand provide options to traditional publishing.

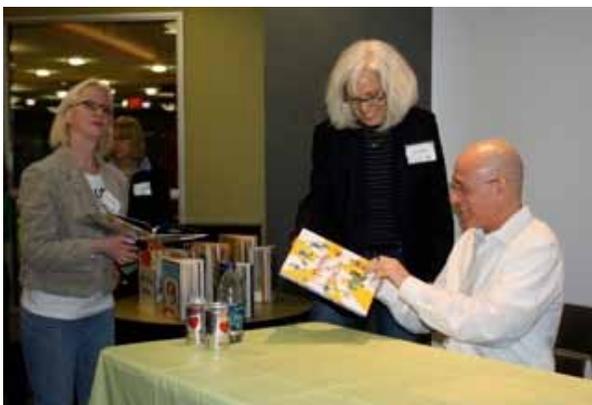
## Discussion 2: LAUNCHING A PB IN A TOUGH PB MARKET

Mr. Levine then switched hats and spoke to the crowd as a published picture book author, sharing some of the things he learned along the road to publication:

1. It takes a long time!
2. Long stretches of silence between contact with your editor doesn't mean things are happening. Check in, ask for estimated timelines. It's reasonable to ask business-related questions about your book. That's not being pushy: it's helping to move things ahead.

3. A fresh pair of eyes helps. The editorial process can be helpful, even when you don't think you don't need it.
4. If an editor suggests a change you don't necessarily agree with, think about what he/she is asking you to change. If you don't agree with his/her specific suggestions, consider the general idea and make the change using your own personal style.
5. Art: do not hold back when sharing your vision of what the art might look like. You can suggest your own artist.
6. Figure out what you can do for yourself online. Start a blog, create a Facebook account.
7. Form a coalition when launching a book. Send several different Evites, tailor-made for each of your groups (personal friends, family, professionals/peers, etc.). Within the invites, give people several reasons to come to your launch, such as donations to a library, supporting a local independent, etc. Use Facebook. Consider passive publicity, like signs up at a local bookseller or at the public library.
8. SCBWI can help. Did you know there's a new regional award: The Silver Kite?
9. Reach out! Promote yourself to your relatives and your kids' friends' parents. Don't be shy.

### Discussion 3: Q&A



**SCBWI:** How important is it to have an agent?

**AAL:** Whether you need one depends on your personality. Do you need help negotiating a contract? Researching? Making connections? Dealing with conflict? If you really want a particular editor who takes only agented manuscripts, you might want an agent. However, if you're able to do your research and read all that editor's books and write a convincing letter about why your manuscript

fits into her list, you might be able to skip the agent.

**SCBWI:** What do you think of picture book apps on electronic devices?

**AAL:** Physical books are a long way from being outmoded. The iPad is the only realistic platform for reading a PB right now. A lot of research shows kids prefer reading physical books and "unplugging" from all their electronic gadgets. Physical PBs are far superior to electronic.

**SCBWI:** What's your feeling on rhyming picture books? I've heard they're the kiss of death.

**AAL:** Talk to Jim Aylesworth about that. While most people do rhyming PBs very badly, it's

not the kiss of death if you can do it really well. Rhyme can't be what leads the story: the story itself must lead.

**SCBWI:** When you receive submissions, do you prefer physical or electronic art?

**AAL:** Even though electronic samples are easier to store, physical samples are preferred. It's nice to lay them all out on the floor and compare them next to one another.

**SCBWI:** How do you feel about Amazon providing Nielsen BookScan sales data to authors who sell on Amazon?

**AAL:** Keep in mind that BookScan doesn't tally sales of e-books. The numbers provided represent about 75% of total sales.

**SCBWI:** What's the relationship between good reviews and sales?

**AAL:** It's a direct relationship. Keep in mind: the stronger the institutional sales are, the better reviewed your book has been. Blogger/reviewer coverage has a positive effect on sales, too.

#### **Discussion 4: FIRST PAGES**

Mr. Levine provided insight regarding several authors' first pages. His advice included the following points:

1. When you write narration from the characters point of view, make sure to ask yourself: is this the way the character would actually think or talk? Consider this line: "Coach Logan doesn't know I'm quitting the basketball team." Wouldn't the character think, "Coach doesn't know I'm quitting the team"?
2. Avoid the "info dump" right at the start. Get right into the story.
3. Trust your reader and yourself. The author doesn't need to set the scene or explain the obvious ("Susan and I are best buddies" or "I have a fear of heights"). These things will reveal themselves.
4. Treat scene writing as acting. Write the background and direction somewhere if you must, then let the characters "perform" in the actual scene—and exclude all traces of direction.
5. It's risky to present a character mostly from inside his/her head—don't allow your characters to be too passive.
6. Avoid stepping back from your story to explain a situation; doing so interrupts the emotional flow. Pull your readers in and keep them in.
7. Illustrator notes are important to include when what you (as the author) imagine is crucial to the text.

Many thanks to Arthur Levine for his heartwarming advice and good humor. You can visit his website at <http://www.Arthuralevinebooks.com>—and be sure to friend him on Facebook!

Special thanks also go to Meg Fleming Lentz and Lori Degman for organizing such a cheerful and inspirational Spring Thaw.

*Christine Wolf is revising her first novel, a middle-grade chapter book titled My Life Afloat, and appreciates Mr. Levine's advice that she is unlikely to become a millionaire if it is published; accordingly, she just canceled her order for a 400-foot yacht. Christine also writes the About Town opinion column for Evanston's Patch.com and blogs (very irregularly) about life as a fledgling children's writer at <http://www.ChristineWolf.wordpress.com>.*