



The Prairie Wind

Newsletter of the Illinois Chapter of the SCBWI

Current Issue • Fall 2011 • from the editor

This time of year, summer's glory fades in such a way as to remind us how beautiful endings can be. Meanwhile, children in shiny new school clothes remind us of the promise and joy of new adventures ahead. Similarly, this issue of the Prairie Wind is full of writers sharing lessons learned from their past and excitement about writing projects to come.

This issue also represents four years for me as assistant editor of the Prairie Wind. And it's my last issue, because my family has just made a cross-country move. Happily, because our publication is online, I can still enjoy it from Connecticut. I have so enjoyed working with the SCBWI-IL writers and editors on the Prairie Wind and am proud that it offers a wealth of resources for us here in Illinois, as well as anyone creating children's literature nationwide.

As always, the Prairie Wind thanks its contributors, editors Jeanne Becker and Susan Tarcov, webmistress Chris Vasilakis, pdf-creator Paula Nathan, SCBWI-IL RAs Alice McGinty and Lisa Bierman, and ARA Sara Shacter.

Happy reading and happy writing!

Cheryl Bardoe
Assistant Editor

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Charting Your Course—Part 3

At the Golden Kite Awards Banquet during SCBWI's 40th Anniversary Conference in Los Angeles, Richard Peck began his keynote by saying, "We write by the light of every book we ever read."

As I think about how we chart our courses as writers and illustrators, it seems like Richard's got it right. From the time we were children, immersed in the worlds created by our favorite authors, we began to realize what was possible using words or pictures. At some point each of us asked ourselves, "Could I do that too?"

I came back from the Los Angeles conference like I come back from most conferences—inspired, exhausted, and with a stack of books and a reading list a mile long. These were books that I knew would help me to chart my course as a writer—picture books, middle grades, YA, adult, fiction and nonfiction. I added these titles to my already overflowing reading list, and then, as happens after every conference, I panicked. If I were to read full time, every day, for the rest of my life, I'd never get through them all. Help! I felt overwhelmed. Which books should I read? And what about the poor orphaned ones I didn't have time for?

I'm guessing we've all figured out different ways to deal with these issues or we'd be completely buried in books or guilt or both. I'm also guessing that there are a lot of you out there who manage this task MUCH better than I do (based on my levels of guilt), but I can share a few things that have helped me a bit in this dilemma (or would help if I actually did them all).

When researching my nonfiction projects, I set a reading goal for myself of 100–200 pages a day, though some is skimming. But when I read fiction, I read to enjoy. And that means I read slowly. Right now, I'm in the middle of Franny Billingsley's *Chime*. I've been reading it for several weeks, and am enjoying every slow, gorgeous word of it. I read as often as I can and listen to books on tape and CD (I haven't moved up to podcasts yet). Still, there are too many books and too little time.

- My suggestion: Reading is an essential part of your career. Make reading a priority and set goals for yourself. Writing this makes me wonder if I should give myself a page count goal for some of my fiction reading, too.
- Take a few titles on your reading list, ones you may not get to for a while, and read reviews or summaries instead of the full book. I figure that's better than nothing. You can read reviews on blogs, or go to websites like Goodreads or Library Thing, where lots of people post reviews. And skim through Shelf Awareness and Publisher's Weekly online to give you a feel for what's new out there and what's getting attention.

With the books you do read, especially those in the genres in which you're writing, here are a few ideas to help you use their light to chart your course.

- Give yourself an assignment. Read the book with an eye on how the author creates tension, or develops a character, or how the illustrator uses light. As Brenda Ferber suggests, read each book twice, once for pleasure and again to examine it for craft. Ask yourself what this author/illustrator did to help the book really stand out. I remember our member, Pat Wolff, saying that she writes a very short summary with notes about each book she reads.

Here's another suggestion: I've written a number of biographies about authors, such as Katherine Paterson and Jerry Spinelli. As part of my research, I'd read a lot of each author's books. This helps me to think of the books as extensions of the author. I can see how the author developed his or her craft over time and used life events to feed his or her books (you can read author interviews online to get insights).

On the last day of the Los Angeles conference, Leonard Marcus said that in Margaret Wise Brown's book *Goodnight Moon*, she created a world. In the first half of the book she introduced the world, and then she passed the baton to the child, saying in effect, "This is your world now."

We can use the books we read as batons. How? As you finish reading an amazing book, tears in your eyes, listen to it whisper, "This is what words and pictures can do. This is your world now." Take that baton and run with it. Let the books light your way.

Now...off to finish reading Franny's wonderful *Chime!*

With best of wishes to you all,

Alice McGinty
Co-Regional Adviser, SCBWI Illinois

Introducing the SCBWI-IL Downstate Illustration Network

By Louann Brown



The Downstate Illustration Network members pose for a photo at the Sugar Grove Nature Center in McLean, IL. Included in the photo are, front row (l to r) : Kelly Roos, Robin Luebs, Louise Audrieth; back row (l to r) Cinda Bauman, Rachel Hasenyager, Jerry Barret, Jill Wallace, Monty Mittleton, and Louann Brown.

The Downstate Illustration network members pose for a photo at the Sugar Grove Nature Center in McLean, IL. Included in the photo are, front row (l to r) : Kelly Roos, Robin Luebs, Louise Audrieth; back row (l to r) Cinda Bauman, Rachel Hasenyager, Jerry Barret, Jill Wallace, Monty Mittleton, and Louann Brown.

The SCBWI-IL Downstate Illustration Network is a wandering group of (mostly) unpublished children's illustrators honing their skills, amassing their portfolios, and tweaking their submissions. We come from diverse and interesting backgrounds: from working graphic artists to art teachers. (One of our members even works in a women's prison!) A few of us are also writers.

The Downstate Illustration Network was established a few years ago, when Robin Luebs, Monty Mittleton, and Louann Brown decided they needed an illustration group closer to home. Alice McGinty, one of our Co-Regional Advisors, encouraged us to give it a try. Admittedly, many of us still drive a few hours to our quarterly meetings, but despite the rising price of gas, it's worth the drive. We like to switch it up by meeting in different locations.

We rely on our members, who attend workshops and conferences, to bring back what they've learned. One of our most revealing presentations was given by our first published member, Robin Luebs, who brought in the dummy for her book complete with post-it notes from her art editor with suggested illustration changes. (Inspired, we tried using post-its to critique but it didn't work for us.)

Last year, we took a field trip to a popular children's illustrator's studio in St. Louis (think cherries!). We're planning a trip to New Salem in fall of 2012 to sketch staff members in period costumes and a trip to Cedarhurst Center for the Arts in Mt. Vernon, IL, in the spring of 2013 to see the work of Salley Mavern, SCBWI's 2011 Golden Kite Winner for Illustration.

We've started a small library of children's illustration books. Meeting in area libraries and bookstores gives us the opportunity to see what's new in the children's departments. One of our favorite topics is media and materials. However, the main focuses of our group are critiquing one another's work, offering encouragement and providing suggestions. Because of our great geographic range, members occasionally email the group an image for quick critique.

Once a year, the downstate group plans a sketch outing. We've been to the Scovill Zoo, the James Millikin Home in Decatur, a historic village near Champaign, and this year the Sugar Grove Nature Center, where Jill Wallace, one of our members, is on staff. Lunch is always on the agenda after our Saturday meetings ... we never get tired of lingering to "talk shop" with fellow illustrators.

A few of our members have agreed to share a little about themselves and have included a sample of their work:



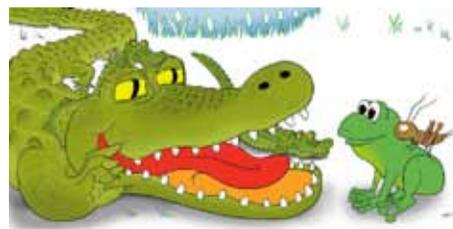
Louise Audrieth studied art and design at North Park College and painting and anatomy drawing with Tom Heflin from Rockford, IL. She has also worked with Don Lake, a celebrated watercolor artist in the Champaign area. Louise joined SCBWI to meet other artists and illustrators and to discover how to submit her work to children's publishers. Louise's current work includes all things aquatic. She sells paintings at local galleries and has participated in the Artists Against Aids benefit in Champaign for 8 years.

Cinda Bauman, of Mahomet, took every art class offered during her school years. "Like many people" she says, "I lacked the confidence to continue to study art in college." Instead, she checked out library books to study on her own and discovered children's illustration fit her really well. Now, she loves to write children's books and illustrates them with cut paper sculptures. She also paints in oil and is currently writing a middle-grade novel. She continues to work on her dream of becoming a published picture book author/illustrator.



Jane Eccles teaches high school art in a high-poverty, high-minority, urban school district. Prior to that she worked for many years as a graphic designer. People have always been a favorite subject of Jane's illustration, because as she says, "They are interesting to observe—especially children, who are so authentic." While Jane loves doing illustration, she also tries to convey her freelance experiences to her students. Jane's goal is to do more children's illustration, including e-book covers, as well as illustrating children's art activity books.

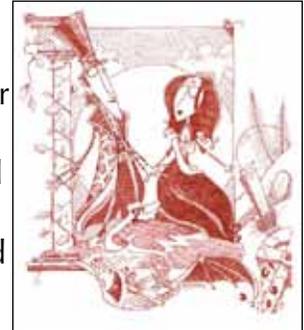
Jerry Barrett has been a member of SCBWI since 2009. He works out of his home studio in Urbana. Formerly a graphic designer for the University of Illinois, he now freelances on a wide variety of illustration and cartooning projects. Jerry's latest project includes illustrations for several Illinois Urban Extension websites for 8- to 12-year-olds, including: *Riding the Winds with Kalani: a Weather Adventure*; *Best of Friends: Kids and Dogs*; and *Where Your Food Comes From*. Links to these websites and other samples of Jerry's work can be seen by going to his website: <http://www.jerrybarrettdesigns.com/portfolio3.html>, or by visiting his portfolio on the SCBWI website. Jerry's current illustration project is a book, "Wide Mouth Frog Goes to the Zoo," co-authored with his wife, Nancy. Jerry's favorite author illustrators are Dr. Seuss (Theodor Geisel) and Maurice Sendak.





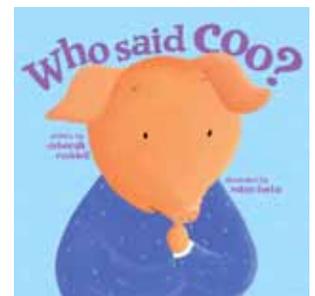
Few things are more exciting to **Kelly Roos** than seeking out and discovering ways to share her passion for art, whether through her work as a graphic designer, painting a watercolor for a show, or teaching drawing to teenagers through the Champaign Park District. “Seeing someone’s face light up due to some knowledge or a technique I suggest is the perfect reward,” she says. She is the co-author and illustrator of the cookbook *Anime Eats!* which contains over 50 recipes for popular Japanese dishes that appear in popular Japanese media (animation and comics). Kelly is working on two children’s book projects with two passionate authors and can’t wait to see these projects come to fruition.

Monty Mittleman has been drawing cartoons for as long as he can remember. Any blank canvas, from napkins to the back of placemats and the margins of schoolwork, were and continue to be fair game for his work. His biggest influence has been Sergio Aragones of *Mad Magazine* fame, but he also can’t get enough of Gris Grimley and Bill Watterson. Monty’s preferred mediums are pen/ink and watercolor, but he loves to experiment with pastels, colored pencils, acrylics, and crayons. Monty has created and put up murals, designs t-shirts, is the gag cartoonist and illustrator for the Carp Anglers Group, and has created personalized art for clients. You can find a selection of his work at <http://www.montysmonsters.com> and at the Scovill Zoo and Johns Hills Elementary School in Decatur. His latest mural is in the children’s visiting area at Decatur Correctional Center.



Jill Wallace earned a bachelor’s degree in Biological Illustration from Iowa State University. After working as a graphic designer and a freelance illustrator, she turned her attention to environmental education, leading to her position as Environmental Educator at Sugar Grove Nature Center in Funks Grove, IL. Jill enjoys the diversity of her job—teaching people of all ages about the natural world, taking care of the exhibit/education animals, and creating displays, the newsletter, and other promotional materials. Currently, she has several projects in progress for Sugar Grove. In addition, she is excited to be revisiting the world of illustration and hopes to one day have a published children’s book.

Robin Luebs, one of the SCBWI-IL Downstate Illustration Network Co-Representatives, is the author/illustrator of *Please Pick Me Up, Mama*, a picture book for preschoolers released by Beach Lane Books/Simon & Schuster in 2009. She also illustrated the HarperCollins bedtime picture book *How Do You Say Good Night?* written by Raina Moore and chosen as a Book of the Month Club Main Selection in 2008. Her latest picture book illustrations can be seen in the 2010 Beach Lane/Simon & Schuster release *Who Said Coo?* written by her twin sister, Deborah Ruddell. *Who Said Coo?* was chosen for the Summer 2010 Kids’ Indie Next List. It was also recently named to the Texas Library Association’s 2x2 Reading List for children age 2 through grade 2. Robin lives in Urbana. Visit her online at <http://www.robinluebs.com>





Louann Brown is the other SCBWI-IL Downstate Illustration Network Co-Representative. As a former elementary art teacher, Louann credits SCBWI-IL with her growth and development as a writer, poet, and illustrator. She is also a member of the Springfield Scribes and the Southern Illinois Book Ends. Louann's fine art has been shown in regional shows, galleries, and restaurants. Her illustration website is scheduled to launch in October 2011. Louann has sold writing projects to Highlights, Family Fun, Baby Bug, and Capstone Press. Her first book for children, *How to Create Spectacular Halloween Costumes*, was released in January 2011.

If you're an illustrator closer to Champaign than Chicago, we'd love to see you! Email: newlou2008@hotmail.com, or visit the SCBWI-Illinois website (<http://www.scbwi-illinois.org/Networks.html>) for an update on where we'll be meeting next.

A Seriously Procrastinated Dream Comes True

By Allan Woodrow

It's always inspiring to read someone's publication tale: that collection of rejection slips that reached such critical mass the author had to build an extension to his or her house to store them. Yet despite the murky clouds of self-doubt, he or she discovered the bright sunshiny skies of perseverance, and that manuscript which has been around so long it can actually be cut and its rings counted like a tree's is chosen from a slush pile by a snot-nosed intern (note: all interns are snot-nosed) and then carried to the agent on the wings of an angel.

Then you get annoying people who get one rejection slip and somehow get published. Jerks.

Well, I'm not a jerk. I think. Ask my kids. Well, don't ask my kids. They're being grounded right now and hate me.

In all fairness, I wanted to be an author since, well, third grade. I wrote a book, got praise from my teacher, and decided I wanted to be an author.

I still have that book. And reading it you would think only one thing: what was my teacher thinking? It's horrible. There isn't one sentence that is actually a sentence. It's barely legible. There is no plot. It's really just a random group of misspelled words and a construction paper cover with a drawing. I couldn't even draw.

Yet, that sealed it. I wanted to be an author, even if I had no obvious talent to be one.

So I kept on writing. More elementary school years brought more books, many featuring Godzilla and slightly better written. Which begot books in middle school, and stories in my high school literary magazine, etc., etc. After college I went into advertising as a copywriter for a giant ad agency, and I was going to write TV commercials until I wrote the great American novel on the side. I gave myself 3–5 years, tops.

And I was going to start that novel just as soon as the bar closed. Or the party ended. Or I ate dinner. Or I napped. Excuses were easy.

But I never forgot the dream. I'd start things. I'd get inspiration and write on the side for a few weeks. And I vowed to finish the book or screenplay as soon as I changed this diaper. Or as soon as the TV show was over. Or as soon as I finished folding the laundry. Excuses continued to be easy.

Through all these attempts I had another problem that I couldn't lick: what to write? Mysteries? Drama? Romance? Fantasy? Nothing seemed to fit. Nothing inspired me.

I would start something, say a horror book, and I'd get into it for a few days and think, I can do this. Maybe this is what I should be doing. Writing ... horror novels. So I'd write a

bit more and think: maybe that's not what I should be doing.

When my kids started reading picture books, I read them and thought, I can do this! Maybe this is what I should be doing. Writing ... picture books. So I wrote a bit and I thought: well, maybe that's not what I should be doing.

Then my kids graduated to chapter books and middle grade. And I read them and I thought, maybe I should be writing ... middle grade. So I wrote a bit and ... hey. Wait a second. This is exactly what I should be doing.

I made a New Year's resolution in 2009. Write a middle-grade chapter book and try to get it published. I had no book ideas. I had no contacts. I just had a resolution. And a few decades of pent-up passion.

The resolution itself was a big life changer for me. Try to get something published? Through my fits and starts I had hundreds of stories and started thingies on my computer. None of which I showed anyone. They were safe and nonthreatening on my hard drive, unprinted. (A piece of advice: print things. I lost about eight years of stories when my hard drive crashed in the mid-to-late 1990s.)

But I made that New Year's resolution on January 1, 2009, and I was going to keep it ... with some wiggle room. I would write for a year and not send anything out for publication. One year. I would learn how to write for that age group. Take classes. Join a critique group. Approach this like a job, with goals and patience, and more importantly, not get all depressed and jaded that my goal was absurd. After one year, I would take the plunge and give it my best shot. Maybe. (I think I still had some doubts whether I would actually send anything to anyone.)

I learned I should join SCBWI, so I did. I heard you should write every day, no exceptions. So I did. I read about how important critique groups were, so I tried to join one but couldn't find any that would have me (even an online group rejected me), so I co-started my own but it fizzled. But at least I was trying. I took a one-day class here and there. And I wrote and wrote, and after a few months I had a few things written and they weren't awful. Not great. But not embarrassing, maybe.

I went to my local SCBWI monthly meeting—I had become a regular—and heard an author, Jenny Meyerhoff, talk about her experiences. More importantly, she mentioned she was starting, along with author Brenda Ferber, a six-week writing workshop: bring in your manuscript and the group would critique it. Since my attempts at a critique group were floundering, I thought this was a perfect solution. I sent in my check. I was going to bring in a book that I thought showed real promise.

But then again. Maybe it wasn't that great. I had this other thing lying around, a manuscript called either "The Most Rotten 4th Grader in the World" or "The No Good Adventures of Zachary Ruthless." The titles pretty much tell you all you need to know about the plot. It was OK. Not great. But then I had an idea on how to make it better, maybe, and two weeks before the class started I rewrote the entire thing. Finished it the day before class started and renamed it, "The Rotten Adventures of Zachary Ruthless," sort

of combining the two titles.

The class loved it. Brenda and Jenny loved it. The class helped me fine-tune the rough edges. Then after the workshop ended, Brenda and Jenny suggested I send it out. To agents or editors. Gulp.

It had been eight months since my New Year's resolution. But I was supposed to wait a year! This was upsetting my master plan, or at least my wiggle room.

I plunged in anyway. After some noodling, I sent five manuscripts out to agents. Within a couple of days I had a request for a full, and two other requests followed shortly after that. A few weeks later I had an agent. My heart was pounding during the phone call. I'm not sure if words actually came out of my mouth, but I assume they did. She didn't revoke the offer, anyway.

I'll cut to the chase. Joanna (my agent) requested some small changes, and then the manuscript went out. Within a month we had a four-book offer from HarperCollins for the Rotten Adventures of Zachary Ruthless and three sequels. This was, all told, eleven months after I made my New Year's resolution to write something ... anything ... and a month before I had promised myself to send something out in the first place, maybe.

Book 1 came out this past spring, Book 2 comes out around Christmas, and books 3 and 4 hit the stores in 2012. You can learn more at evilbadguystuff.com.

And whatdoyaknow? I'm an author. A real, published one. And that book I wrote in third grade ... the one that started this whole thing ... really, it's even worse than you can imagine. Honestly. I have no idea what the teacher was thinking when she gave me a few kind words ... but I'm mighty glad she did.

*Growing up, Allan Woodrow was cursed with a boring, happy, and loving family, giving him nothing interesting to write about. He resented it for years. Allan eventually harnessed his feelings into his new children's series, *The Rotten Adventures of Zachary Ruthless* (HarperCollins, ages 7–12, launched Spring, 2011) about the world's most evil kid. Allan is also an advertising writer and Creative Director, has written for TV and the stage, and currently works for the Chicago Tribune. Learn more at <http://www.allanwoodrow.com>*

Announcing the SCBWI-IL Fall 2011 Crop of New Books

Compiled by Ruth Spiro

Picture Books

Scott Gustafson (author/illustrator), EDDIE: THE LOST YOUTH OF EDGAR ALLAN POE (Simon & Schuster)

Joan Holub (author), Tom Lichtenheld (illustrator), ZERO THE HERO (Christy Ottaviano Books / Henry Holt)

Tom Lichtenheld and Ezra Fields-Meyer (authors), Tom Lichtenheld (illustrator). E-MERGENCY (Chronicle)

Suzanne Slade, MULTIPLY ON THE FLY (Sylvan Dell)

Nancy Stewart, BELLA SAVES THE BEACH and SEA TURTLE SUMMER (Guardian Angel)

Middle Grade

Keir Graff, THE OTHER FELIX (Roaring Brook)

Carol Fisher Saller, EDDIE'S WAR (nanelos)

Sheila Kelly Welch, WAITING TO FORGET (nanelos)

Hilary Wagner, THE WHITE ASSASSIN, NIGHTSHADE CHRONICLES BOOK II (Holiday House)

Young Adult

Cherie Colyer, EMBRACE (Omnific)

Nonfiction

Mary R. Dunn, FIREFLIES and OWLS (Capstone)

Kimberly M. Hutmacher, YOUR SENSES AT THE BEACH, YOUR SENSES AT THE ZOO, YOUR SENSES AT THE DENTIST OFFICE, YOUR SENSES AT THE FIRE STATION, YOUR SENSES AT THE GROCERY STORE (Capstone)

Sally M. Walker, BLIZZARD OF GLASS (Henry Holt)

Ruth Spiro is the author of the award-winning picture book Lester Fizz, Bubble-Gum Artist (Dutton). Her articles and essays have appeared in Disney's FamilyFun, The Writer, Child, and Chicago Parent, as well as several popular anthologies. She often speaks at schools and conferences. Her website is <http://www.ruthspiro.com>.

Fall 2011 Classes, Retreats, and Workshops

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

CHICAGO BOTANIC GARDEN

1000 Lake Cook Road, Glencoe, IL 60022

Plein Air Watercolor: In the Greenhouse and Garden

Instructor: Michelle Kogan

Thursdays, Sept. 22 to Nov. 10, 9:30 am to 12:30 pm

Cost: \$299 member/\$374 nonmember

To register: <http://www.chicagobotanic.org/school> or tel, 847-835-8261

COLLEGE OF DU PAGE, GLEN ELLYN CAMPUS

425 Fawell Blvd., Glen Ellyn 60137

Introduction to Blogging

Saturday, Sept. 17, and Saturday, Sept. 24, 9 am to noon

Instructor: Carmela Martino

Learn how to plan, set up, and promote a blog, whether for business or personal use.

In the week between sessions you will design and begin creating a blog based on the information presented in class. The second week, you'll learn additional tips and have the opportunity to ask questions of the instructor and receive feedback from classmates regarding your blog's design.

Prerequisite: Basic computer experience

Cost: \$69

To register: <http://home.cod.edu/academics/ContEd/registration/>

ELGIN COMMUNITY COLLEGE, WRITERS CENTER

Elgin, IL

Regular writing workshop plus weekend special-topic workshops

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

EVANSTON ART CENTER

2603 Sheridan Road, Evanston, IL 60201

1. Figure & Composition

Tuesdays, Sept. 13 to Nov. 29, 7 to 10 pm

Instructor: Michelle Kogan

Cost: \$320 regular member rate/\$310 discounted resident rate

2. Studio Drawing: Composition/Space/Value

Wednesdays, Sept. 14 to Nov. 16, 9:30 am to 12:30 pm

Instructor: Michelle Kogan

Cost: \$300 regular member rate/\$290 discounted resident rate

3. Transparent Watercolor

Fridays, Sept. 16 to Dec. 2, 9:30 am to 12:30 pm

Instructor: Michelle Kogan

Cost: \$300 regular member rate/\$290 discounted resident rate

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

FRAASE FARM

782 S. Farmingdale Road, New Berlin, IL

Writing Poetry for Children

Instructor: Deborah Ruddell

Saturday, Sept. 24, 10 am to 2 pm

Cost: \$40 for SCBWI members, \$50 for nonmembers

Gourmet lunch included

Critique of a single poem (12 lines or less) for \$10

More information: books@gailwilkinson.net or tel. 217-556-2662

GLEACHER CENTER

450 N. Cityfront Plaza Drive, Chicago, IL 60611

University of Chicago Writer's Studio

Publishing Your Book For Children and Young Adults

Thursday, Dec. 1, 6 to 9 pm

Instructor: Esther Hershenhorn

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

More information: <http://www.grahamschool.uchicago.edu/> or tel. 773-702-1722

MAYSLAKE PEABODY ESTATE

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

Craft & Critique Workshop In Writing for Children and Teens

Tuesdays, Sept. 27 to Nov. 15, 7 pm to 9:30 pm (no class 10/18)

Instructor: Carmela Martino

This seven-week workshop is for adult students who are writing for children and teens. Students will hone their writing and revision skills via lectures, readings, and writing exercises. You will also receive a critique of your 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—a picture book, short story, nonfiction piece, or novel excerpt — to the first class. Also, if you are new to the class, you must email the Instructor (carmela@carmelamartino.com) before enrolling for additional instructions. Attendance the first night of class is mandatory.

Note: class is limited to 10 students, so register early.

Cost: \$170 (\$160 for returning students)

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

NEWBERRY LIBRARY

60 W. Walton St., Chicago

Picture This: Writing Picture Books for Children
Tuesdays, Sept. 27 to Nov. 1, 5:45 pm to 7:45 pm
Instructor: Esther Hershenhorn

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

More information: <http://www.newberry.org> or tel. 312-255-3700

NEW TRIER EXTENSION DIVISION, NORTHFIELD

The Nuts, Bolts & ABCs of Writing for Kids

1. Mondays, Sept. 19 to Nov. 28, 1 to 3 pm (no class Oct. 10)
2. Thursdays, Sept. 15 to Dec. 15, 7 to 9 pm (no class Sept. 29, Oct 6, Nov. 10, Nov. 24)

Instructor: Pamela Dell

Cost: \$200 (seniors \$160)

With a strong focus on the various elements of narrative craft—plot, characterization, dialog and other essentials—this course offers a combination of in-class presentations, on-the-spot writing exercises, and take-home assignments, as well as a chance for students to receive valuable feedback on their work. Every aspect of the course is designed to help writers sharpen their skills and to become clearly aware of the writing 'red flags' that editors and agents consider signs of an amateur at work. Participants will also learn the ins and outs of today's children's publishing industry, including information on writers' resources, what editors are looking for, and how to go about finding an agent.

More information: <http://www.ed2go.com/ntx/> or tel. 847-446-6600

NORTH SHORE ART LEAGUE

620 Lincoln Avenue, Winnetka, IL 60093

Illustration

Fridays, Sept. 16 to Dec. 16, 9:30 am to noon

(No classes on Oct. 21 or Nov. 25)

Instructor: Lisa Cinelli

To register: nsal@sbcglobal.net or tel. 847-446-2870

PEGGY NOTEBAERT NATURE MUSEUM

Plein Art Watercolor Class with artist Michelle Kogan

1. Tuesday, Sept. 27, & Tuesday, Oct. 4, with rain date Oct. 11, 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 pm

2. Tuesday, Oct. 18, and Tuesday, Oct. 25, with rain date Nov. 1, 9:30 am to 12:30 pm

Instructor: Michelle Kogan

Cost: \$150

To register: <http://www.naturemuseum.org> or tel. 773-755-5122

RAGDALE FOUNDATION

Lake Forest, IL

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

SCHOOL OF THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

36 South Wabash Avenue, Chicago, IL 60603

1. Multilevel Children's Book Illustration

Wednesdays, Oct. 5 to Dec. 7, 6 to 9 pm

Instructor: Lisa Cinelli

2. Illustration: Materials and Techniques

Thursdays, Sept. 29 to Dec. 8, 6 to 9 pm

Instructor: Lisa Cinelli

3. Beginning Children's Book Illustration

Tuesdays, Oct. 4 to Dec. 6, 2011, 6 to 9 pm

Instructor: Laura Nyman Montenegro

Fall 2011: SAIC 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.

To register: cs@saic.edu or tel. 312-899-7458

URBANA BAHAI CENTER

807 E. Green Street. Urbana

Facilitated Critique Group

Wednesdays, beginning in September, 6:30 to 8:30 pm (6 weeks)

Instructor: Alice McGinty

Cost: \$50

Each week we'll focus on a different element of craft as we critique participants' manuscripts.

More information: alice@mcgintyzone.com

WINNETKA COMMUNITY CENTER

620 Lincoln, Winnetka, IL

Off-Campus Writers' Workshop (OCWW)

Thursdays, 9:30 am to noon

1. The Climax or Breaking Point in Short Stories and Novels

Sept. 6, 13, 20, Oct. 3

Instructor: Fred Shafer

Because workshops about story and novel endings often deal with final sentences rather than the decisive scenes that precede them, Fred will focus instead on those big scenes in order to help writers find the most effective climaxes for their narratives. Fred will use examples drawn from adult literary fiction and genre novels as well as picture books, stories, and novels written for children and young adults. He will read and offer suggestions about manuscripts written for all of these audiences.

2. Publishing Today

Nov. 3

Instructor: Ruth Spiro

Ruth will discuss writing children's books, providing tools for generating material, examining your writing, and designing your ideal writing career. As a bonus, following the session, Ruth will take us on a field trip to the Book Stall where we will learn to browse a bookstore as a writer (bring a sack lunch). Ruth will critique manuscripts of up to 10 pages in any genre except poetry.

3. Nov. 17

Instructor: Keir Graff

Graff will share his writing process, the lessons learned on the road to publication, and the differences in his approach when writing for different audiences.

4. Dec. 1

Instructor: Wendy McClure

How does life experience become compelling nonfiction or fiction? Wendy will start by looking at the way Laura Ingalls Wilder turned her pioneer childhood into the well-known Little House series and then share her insights about her own writing process in her book *The Wilder Life*.

Cost: \$10 per session. Members at \$30 per year receive a session discount and may submit manuscripts in advance for critique for \$15.

More information: <http://www.ocww.bizland.com>

SCBWI REGIONALS

SCBWI ILLINOIS

Seventh Annual Prairie Writers Day
Wojcik Conference Center, Harper College
1200 West Algonquin Road, Palatine

Nov. 12

More information: Darcy Zoells, notmrdarcy@gmail.com

SCBWI MICHIGAN

Fall Conference
Mission Point Resort on Mackinac Island
Sept. 23 to 25

More information: Pat Trattles, trattles@yahoo.com

SCBWI OHIO

1. Discover Your Voice
Cleveland Airport Sheraton
Sept. 23 to 24
2. After Conference and Submission Meeting
Oct. 15

3. Publication Celebration

Nov. 12

More information: Victoria Selvaggio, vselvaggio@windstream.net

SCBWI WISCONSIN

20th Annual Fall Retreat
Olympic Resort, Oconomowoc, WI
Oct. 14 to 16

More information: Pam Beres, pjberes@centurytel.net

SCBWI INTERNATIONAL

13th Annual Winter Conference
Jan. 27 to 29, 2012
New York, NY

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

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

CHAUTAUQUA INSTITUTE

Chautauqua, NY

28th Annual Writers Workshop

July 2012

More information: http://www.highlightsfoundation.org/pages/current/chautauqua_top.html

HIGHLIGHTS FOUNDATION FOUNDERS WORKSHOPS

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

1. Whole Novel Workshop

Oct. 16 to 23

Workshop leaders: Carolyn Coman, Stephen Roxburgh

2. Mastering Setting

Oct. 13 to 16

Workshop leaders: K. L. Going, Kim T. Griswell

3. It's All About Character

Nov. 3 to 6

Workshop leaders: Lindsay Barrett George, Kim T. Griswell

4. Editing for Writing

Nov. 6 to 9

Workshop leader: Stephen Roxburgh

More information: jalloyd@highlightsfoundation.org or tel. 877-512-8365

*****RESIDENCY PROGRAMS*****

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/cwp/mfac/>

LESLEY UNIVERSITY LOW-RESIDENCY

Cambridge, MA

Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing with a Concentration in Writing for Young People

Semesters begin in January and June

Program is 4 semesters, 5 residencies

More information: http://www.lesley.edu/gsass/creative_writing/program.html

SPALDING UNIVERSITY BRIEF RESIDENCY

Louisville, KY

Master of Fine Arts in Writing with a Concentration in Writing for Children
Semesters begin in May or October
Program is 4 semesters, 5 residencies
More information: <http://www.spalding.edu/writing-for-children-and-young-adults>

VERMONT COLLEGE BRIEF RESIDENCY

Montpelier, VT
Master of Fine Arts in Writing for Children and Young Adults
July, January
11-day intensive residencies 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>

*****CORRESPONDENCE COURSES, ONLINE, AND INDIVIDUAL INSTRUCTION*****

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

INSTITUTE OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Correspondence courses and access to articles, tips, chatroom discussions on writing.
More information: <http://www.Institutechildrenslit.com>

MICHELLE KOGAN

Michelle works with students independently.
More information: <http://www.michellekogan.com>, mkogan@mdandmk.com

HEIDI BEE ROEMER

1. The ABC's of Children's Poetry Correspondence Course
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 e-mail. Detailed critiques offered. Includes instruction on how to find and target poetry publishers. Materials you receive: 60 page ABC workbook, POETRY PLACE booklet, five CDs, sample magazines, and market newsletters.
2. Do you want professional feedback on your story-in-rhyme, poetry collection, picture book or nonfiction? Heidi, 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

WRITER'S DIGEST ONLINE WORKSHOPS

1. Fundamentals of Writing for Children (12-week beginning course)
2. 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 address is **jsseng629@yahoo.com***

News Roundup Fall 2011

Compiled by Michelle Sussman

EVENTS (roughly by date)

ANDERSON'S BOOKSHOP

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

- **Sept. 15:** Harlan Coben, author of *Shelter*, 7 pm at AB Naperville
- **Sept. 17:** Adam Epstein and Andrew Jacobson, authors of *The Familiars #2: Secrets of the Crown*, 2 pm at AB Naperville
- **Sept. 17:** Mother-Daughter Book Club discussion of *Gone*, by Michael Grant, at 2 pm at AB Downers Grove. New members are welcome. Please call to make reservations.
- **Sept. 18:** Not For Kids Only Book Group discussion of *The Trouble with Chickens* by Doreen Cronin and *Dear George Clooney, Please Marry My Mom* by Susin Nielsen-Fernlund, 2 pm at Anderson's Two Doors East, 111 W. Jefferson Ave., Naperville. New members welcome.
- **Sept. 20:** Sourcebooks College Night #2: *Help! My Child Has Left for College and I Don't Know What to Do*, 7 pm at Anderson's Two Doors East, 111 W. Jefferson Ave., Naperville. Admission ticket admits two for \$5. Tickets available at AB Naperville or at the door.
- **Sept. 21:** Margaret Peterson Haddix, author of *Torn*, 7 pm at AB Naperville
- **Sept. 21:** Caroline Kennedy, author of *Jacqueline Kennedy: Historic Conversations on Life with John F. Kennedy*, 7 pm at an offsite location to be determined. Tickets will be required. Contact AB Naperville as the date nears.
- **Sept. 22:** Colin Meloy and Carson Ellis, authors of *Wildwood*, 7 pm at AB Naperville
- **Sept. 23:** Mike Lupica, author of *Underdogs*, 7 pm at AB Naperville
- **Sept. 24:** Theodore Boone and the *Thrill of Rights* bus tour, 2 pm at AB Naperville
- **Sept. 26:** Michael Grant, author of *The Magnificent 12: The Trap*, 7 pm at AB Naperville
- **Sept. 27:** Jack Gantos, author of *Dead End in Norvelt*, 7 pm at AB Naperville
- **Sept. 28:** Dave Barry and Ridley Pearson, authors of *Bridge to Neverland*, 7 pm at AB Naperville

- **Oct. 2:** Brian Selznick, author of *Wonderstruck*, 7 pm at the Tivoli Theatre, 5021 Highland Ave., Downers Grove. Tickets are required. Call for details.
- **Oct. 4:** Pen Fatale Tour, five authors of young adult fiction including Alexandra Adornetto (*Hades*), Jessica Brody (*My Life Undecided*), Alyson Noel (*Dreamland*), Mary Pearson (*The Fox Inheritance*), and Gabrielle Zevin (*All These Things I've Done*), 7 pm at AB Naperville
- **Oct. 13:** Sourcebooks College Night #3: *College Visits for Juniors*, 7 pm at Anderson's Two Doors East, 111 W. Jefferson Ave., Naperville. Admission ticket admits two for \$5. Tickets available at AB Naperville or at the door.
- **Oct. 14:** Becca Fitzpatrick, author of *Silence*, 7 pm at AB Naperville
- **Oct. 15:** Mother-Daughter Book Club discussion of *Number the Stars*, by Lois Lowry, at 2 pm, AB Downers Grove. New members are welcome. Please call to make reservations.
- **Oct. 16:** Not For Kids Only Book Group discussion of *Powerless*, by Matthew Cody, 2 pm at Anderson's Two Doors East, 111 W. Jefferson Ave., Naperville. New members welcome.
- **Oct. 16:** Dark Days of Fall Tour, four authors of young adult fiction including Jocelyn Davies (*A Beautiful Dark*), Amy Garvey (*Cold Kiss*), Kiersten White (*Supernaturally*), and Claudia Gray (*Fateful*), 2 pm at AB Naperville
- **Oct. 18:** Richard Peck, author of *Secrets at Sea*, 7 pm at AB Naperville
- **Oct. 24:** James Dashner, author of *The Death Cure* (#3 *Maze Runner Trilogy*), 7 pm at AB Naperville
- **Oct. 28–29:** *Halloween Trolley Story Rides*, 6:00-8:15 pm. Tickets required. Departing from and returning to AB Naperville.
- **Nov. 9:** Allyson Condie, author of *Crossed*, 7 pm at AB Naperville
- **Nov. 10:** Christopher Paolini, author of *Inheritance* (final book in Eragon series), 7 pm at a location to be announced. Please contact AB Naperville as the date nears.
- **Nov. 12:** Mother-Daughter Book Club discussion of *Somebody Everybody Listens To*, by Suzanne Supplee, 2 pm at AB Downers Grove. New members are welcome. Please call to make reservations.
- **Nov. 12:** Anderson's Presents A Swedish Christmas Extravaganza with Jan Brett, author of *Home for Christmas* and *The Night Before Christmas*, 4 pm at Naperville North High School, 899 Mill St. Tickets required and available at AB Naperville.

PRINCETON KIDLIT 2011 (Princeton, IL)

When: Canceled for 2011

ANDERSON'S BOOKSHOP 8th ANNUAL YA LITERATURE CONFERENCE

When: Sept. 24, 7:30 am–4:00 pm

Where: Hotel Arista in Naperville

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

Details: Keynote authors include Jacqueline Woodson, Paul Volponi, Torrey Maldonado, Paul Griffin, Coe Booth, Theodore Boone Bus Tour, Anna Perera, Lisa McMann, Mike Lupica, Sharon Draper, and Patrick Carman. Authors include Ilsa Blick, Franny Billingsley, Jeanine Cummins, Julie Halpern, Jeff Hirsch, Michelle Hodkin, James Kennedy, Sarah Darer Littman, Colin Meloy, Carson Ellis, Elizabeth Miles, Elizabeth Scott, Kristina Springer, and Bill Willingham.. Attend breakout sessions on fascinating topics, enjoy a continental breakfast and full luncheon, and shop the conference bookstore. Book-signing opportunities and CPDU credits offered.

More information: Tel. 800-728-0708 or <http://andersons2.indiebound.com/educator-events>

ILA ANNUAL CONFERENCE

When: Oct. 18–20

Where: Donald E. Stephens Convention Center, Rosemont

Cost: \$200–\$300 for full conference, \$125–\$225 for single day, \$35–\$55 for Youth Services Author Breakfast; discounts available for early registration, ILA membership, etc.

Details: The Illinois Library Association (ILA) Annual Conference is attended by librarians, trustees, library assistants, educators, and others interested in libraries.

More information: Tel. 312-644-1896 or <http://www.ila.org/conference-and-events/2011-annual-conference>

TEEN READ WEEK

When: Oct. 16–22

Details: This year's theme is "Picture It @ Your Library." It encourages kids to read poetry, audiobooks, books about music, and more.

More information: <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/yalsa/teenreading/trw/trw2011/home.cfm>

35th DAY OF READING CONFERENCE

When: Nov. 4–5

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

Cost: \$110 to \$280 based on membership status and which events are attended.

Details: This conference, presented by the Secondary Reading League (SRL), focuses on literacy for grades 6–12. It is primarily for librarians and educators. Keynote speakers are Todd Strasser and Dr. Jeffrey D. Wilhelm.

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

SCBWI 2011 WINTER CONFERENCE

When: Jan. 27–29, 2012

Where: New York City

Details: This is one of SCBWI's national conferences. Schedule and registration will go live in October.

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

GRANTS & WRITING CONTESTS

GOLDEN KITE AWARDS

What: These awards for published books—available to all current SCBWI members who are renewed through at least April 1, 2012—are given to recognize excellence in children's literature for fiction, nonfiction, picture book text, and picture book illustration. Entries must be received by Dec. 16, 2011.

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

SCBWI MAGAZINE MERIT AWARDS

What: These awards are given to published, original magazine work for young people in the areas of fiction, nonfiction, illustration, and poetry. Entries must be submitted on or before Dec. 15, 2011.

More information: [http://www.scbwi.org/Pages.aspx/2012-Magazine-Merit-Award-Rules—Procedures](http://www.scbwi.org/Pages.aspx/2012-Magazine-Merit-Award-Rules-Procedures)

CHILDREN'S WRITER: Poetry

When: Entries must be received by Oct. 31, 2011.

Cost: free for Children's Writer subscribers, \$15 for nonsubscribers (includes 8-month subscription)

Prizes: \$500 for first place, plus publication in Children's Writer; \$250 for second place; \$100 for third, fourth, and fifth places

Details: Single poem, collection of poems, or verse story for children of all ages, up to 300 words. Winners will be announced in the March 2012 issue.

More information: <http://www.thechildrenswriter.com/aj512/>

AWARDS

BOSTON GLOBE–HORN BOOK AWARDS

Winners:

- Fiction: *Blink & Caution*, by Tim Wynne-Jones (Candlewick)
- Nonfiction: *The Notorious Benedict Arnold: A True Story of Adventure, Heroism, and Treachery*, by Steve Sheinkin (Flash Point/Roaring Brook)
- Picture Book: *Pocketful of Posies: A Treasury of Nursery Rhymes*. by Salley Mavor (Houghton Mifflin)

Honors:

- Fiction: *Chime*, by Franny Billingsley (Dial); *Anna Hibiscus* by Atinuke (Kane Miller)
- Nonfiction: *Into the Unknown: How Great Explorers Found Their Way by Land, Sea, and Air*, by Stewart Ross, illustrated by Stephen Biesty (Candlewick); *Can We Save the Tiger?* by Martin Jenkins, illustrated by Vicky White (Candlewick)
- Picture Book: *Dark Emperor and Other Poems of the Night*, by Joyce Sidman, illustrated by Rick Allen (Houghton); *Pecan Pie Baby* by Jacqueline Woodson, illustrated by Sophie Blackall (Putnam)

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

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.

Food for Thought—Two Fall Programs

By Sallie Wolf

Food for Thought is member-generated programming that facilitates discussion, conversation, and exchange of ideas among our published SCBWI-IL members.

There are two programs being planned for the fall.

Skype Author Visits

When: October 15, 9:30a.m.-noon

Where: National Louis Center for Teaching Through Children's Books, Skokie, and the Champaign Public Library, Champaign-Urbana

Two groups will meet to experience what it takes to create a Skype Author Visit. On the northern end, Suzanne Slade will lead with a demo of how she sets up her equipment and then an abbreviated enactment of an author visit. Following Suzanne, someone in Champaign-Urbana will also demo briefly and then the floors will be opened for questions and exchange. Whether you have used Skype before or not, and whether you have given Author Presentations using Skype before or not, your presence will be valuable. Come with your questions and your ideas. RSVP to Sallie Wolf, salwolf@comcast.net or to Alice McGinty, alice@mcgintyzone.com.

Alternative Publishing Options

When: December 3, 9:30a.m.-noon

Where: a downtown Chicago location TBA

There has been a lot of lively discussion on the listserv and at various network meetings concerning the changing world of publishing today. From self-publishing, reissuing out-of-print books, print on demand, namelos, e-books, apps, and more, the world of children's book publishing is changing. Come join our diverse and eclectic panel of contributors to join the discussion. RSVP to Sallie Wolf, salwolf@comcast.net to reserve your space.

Further details will be posted on the listserv closer to the appropriate dates. Questions, suggestions, etc., can be emailed to Sallie Wolf.

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

SCBWI-IL Prairie Writers Day VII: Get Hooked!

WHEN:

Saturday, November 12, 2011
9:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.
(registration begins at 8:00 a.m.)

WHERE:

Wojcik Conference Center
Harper College
1200 W. Algonquin Rd., Palatine, IL

Member cost: \$140
Nonmembers: \$165

SPEAKERS:

Publishing Professionals:

Josh Adams, Co-Founder, Adams Literary
Stacey Barney, Editor, G.P. Putnam's Sons
Michele Burke, Editor, Alfred A. Knopf Books for Young Readers
Karen Kohn, Senior Art Director, Carus Publishing
Kathy Landwehr, Vice President & Associate Publisher, Peachtree Publishers
Daniel Nayeri, Editor, Clarion Books
Molly O'Neill, Editor, Katherine Tegen Books
Mary Rodgers, Editor-in-Chief, Lerner Publishing Group

Industry Professionals:

Bruce Hale, Author
Esther Hershenhorn, Author
Debra Kass Orenstein, Literary Attorney
Roxanne Owens, Chair of the Teacher Education Department, DePaul University

Take the bait and join us for SCBWI-Illinois's largest event of the year! With more speakers, more slots for manuscript critiques, and more breakout sessions than ever before, this year's Prairie Writer's Day is sure to be another sold-out phenomenon.

Prairie Writer's Day: Get Hooked will feature a brand new format, enabling you to customize your Prairie Writer's Day experience:

An opening panel will reel you in! You will get to know our agent and editors, their agency/houses, and the rapidly morphing children's book industry.

Four breakout sessions (see full event PDF linked below) will enable you to choose the speeches you want to hear. Regardless of which breakout sessions you attend, you'll receive copies of ALL handouts.

We'll all hear from the fabulous Bruce Hale, author of the Chet Gecko series and the comic/novel hybrid *Underwhere*, as well as numerous picture books. Known for his "seriously funny" writing, Mr. Hale will speak to us via Skype on how to "Hook Your Readers with Humor." Witness the interactive possibilities of Skype for virtual school visits!

The "Catch of the Day" panel will conclude the program. Speakers from breakout sessions 2 and 3 will share the highlights of their speeches, as well as their memorable moments from our grand fishing expedition. The day closes with our Mix 'n Mingle where you will have an opportunity to speak one-on-one with all of our publishing and industry professionals.

All attendees will be able to submit work to our speakers after the conference, even if a house is closed to unsolicited submissions.

AND, as if all of the above weren't enough, the cost to attend Prairie Writer's Day has been reduced for members (thanks to the support and encouragement of the national SCBWI office)!

Additional Opportunities for Illustrators:

Display and distribute samples of your work (see Registration pg. 3).

Be sure to sign up for the Session 4 breakout with Karen Kohn.

Additional Opportunities for Writers:

A limited number of manuscript critiques will be offered for an extra fee (see Registration pg. 3). Critiques are with editors/agent and are written only.

If you choose to attend a first pages session, you are encouraged to submit a first page for free (see Registration pg. 3).

And for those of you who prefer your instructions in verse...

Here's a list of DOs and DON'Ts,
to help with registration.
Within ten days of its receipt,
we'll send a confirmation.
Print out pages 1 and 2,
and fill them in completely.
Use page 3 when sending work . . .
and kindly scribble neatly!
You want to send first pages too?
Include two copies, please.
Follow the guidelines on page 3 . . .
cross your fingers and your "t's".
If a critique is what you want,
It's better not to wait.
The spaces fill up pretty fast,

So don't procrastinate.
Send your papers all at once,
and double-check the list.
Be sure to put your checks inside,
or you'll be sorely missed.
Standard mail is all you'll need,
be sure they stamp the date.
To prove just when you sent it out . . .
in case we get it late.
If something isn't making sense,
just ask us – don't be shy.
None of us know everything,
as hard as we may try.
If everything goes swimmingly,
we'd love to hear your cheers!
But if it doesn't, please be kind,
we're all just volunteers!
–Lori Degman

More Than a Pounding Heart: Capturing Emotional Experience

By M. Molly Backes

You've come to an emotionally intense moment in your story. Your character's heart pounds in her chest, her mouth goes dry, hair stands up on the back of her neck. Her fists clench, her teeth grind together, her face gets hot. Her frozen blood moves like ice through her veins.

The problem? This is the fifth time in your story that her heart has pounded, the third time her mouth has gone dry, and the seventh time she's clenched her fists. You find yourself making strange faces at your computer screen, as if you might suddenly discover other ways to describe your character's emotions by acting them out yourself. Your spouse wanders into the room and you ask, "How does your mouth feel when you're angry?" You do an internet search for "physical responses to stress."

So how do you show character emotion when you've exhausted your toolbox of physical descriptions?

Five Ways of Experiencing Emotion

In his book *From Where You Dream*, Robert Olen Butler describes five ways of experiencing emotion. The first two are physical changes in the body, internal and external—the aforementioned pounding heart, dry mouth, and clenched fists.

The third way people experience emotion, according to Butler, is through flashes of the past. Not flashbacks, exactly, not analytical or narrative in nature, but quick sensory pictures and memories, "little vivid bursts of waking dream." For instance, perhaps your character has just been told that her younger brother has been killed in a car crash. She responds physically of course, but she also has a sudden flash of memory in which she and her brother are industriously piling every single couch cushion on top of their babysitter, who lies patiently on the green shag carpet. Your character and her little brother climb onto the bare couch and vault onto the pillow pile, shrieking with laughter.

The fourth way people experience emotion is through little flashes of the future. Perhaps your character has lost her dog, and as she wanders the neighborhood screaming his name, growing increasingly panicky about finding him, she imagines the moment when she will have to tell her parents that he's lost. A brief movie plays in her mind: her parents look disappointed but not surprised, as if they've been expecting that she'd screw this up eventually. Anne Lamott talks about this in her book *Bird by Bird*: she describes running a red light and immediately having a mental conversation with the officer who might pull her over, explaining to him why she just ran the light.

The fifth way we experience emotion, according to Butler, is through sensual selectivity. "At any given moment we, and therefore our characters, are surrounded by hundreds and

hundreds of sensual cues. But in that moment only a very small number of those sensual cues will impinge on our consciousness. Now, what makes that selection for us? Well, our emotions do.”

In other words, everything your character notices is filtered through—and indicative of—her emotional state. The same bedroom can be cozy or stuffy, appealingly messy or disgustingly dirty. The outfit that looked young and fun when your character began her day looks stupid and babyish after the popular girls snub her at lunch.

Let Your Subconscious Guide You

Experiment with Butler’s five ways of showing character emotion in your own work. I like to challenge students to write a scene in which a character goes through all stages—not because it’s going to result in an amazing scene, but because in writing you might discover a moment, a detail, a “vivid burst of waking dream” that will help you to deepen your own understanding of your character and enrich the emotional moment.

As you write, I encourage you not to overthink. Let your subconscious mind drive the tiny flashbacks and flashforwards and the sensory details your character notices. It’s okay if they seem completely random and strange; after all, the human mind (and heart) is a weird, wild place. If we think too hard about it, we run the risk of jumping to the most obvious symbol and sounding like we’re trying too hard. Your character, in the moment she discovers her ex-boyfriend’s new girlfriend, could flash back to the first time she kissed him. (BO-ring!) Or she could find herself fixating on the weird freckle just below her elbow, and the freakish amount of dark hair on her arms. (Strange—and therefore interesting, and maybe even worth exploring. After all, the new girlfriend probably has perfectly smooth and hairless arms.)

Now go! Experiment! Unclench those fists, steady your pounding heart, and write!

*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.*

Redreaming

By Laura Nyman Montenegro

A dream is, by its very nature, new, inventive, unexpected, impulsive, unpredictable, unruly, and wild, with absolutely no calculation in its creation. It has no limits. It has complete freedom to take us anywhere, and away we go, night after night. It is spontaneous and has its own mind. We cannot decide on what we will dream, we must willingly acquiesce.

It is when we wake that our minds turn to calculation. We leave the dreaming mind behind, to be returned to tonight. The day is spent in deliberation, choice, decision, rulers, pencils, pens, and calculators.

But it is the nighttime mind that we seek when we create. We drag it with us into the daylight, hoping we might coax it to give us a little, tiny bit of its surprise. But it is a tricky guest and does not reveal itself easily.

“Just come for a little visit,” we say, patting the chair and showing it where it can sit down, but it is not easily coaxed. Instead, we must continue to search for it like the faint moon in the daytime sky.

And it is curious that we want to open ourselves to its uncertainty, that we would yearn for its unpredictability, seek its appearance, because so much of our creative work as writers and illustrators lives in editing and revising, reshaping and retooling our work step by step. Why would we want to enter into that messy, impulsive world?

Because it is exactly where we need to be.

Our intuition tells us that this is where the spirit of the story lives. This is where the power of our illustration lies. The integrity of our art which springs from this source we recognize immediately.

And so it is up to us as artists to discover how to “redream,” how to open the gate for our nighttime ponies to enter with their manes flicking and their heels kicking. How to coax forth the wild and unruly when we most need it, in the middle of our rational, daytime drawing, when we are most critical, least expressive, and most in need of self-abandon.

Recently, I had a student who came to the first day of class worrying that she had not done any art in six years. The final assignment of the class was to create a 32-page book dummy. In preparation for this, she made quick thumbnail sketches to storyboard her book. Short on time, she decided to enlarge these quick sketches on the xerox machine



and paste them up as her book dummy.

During our final presentations she showed and read her book to us. It was stunning.

Her thumbnail sketches, now large page-size images, were simple and direct, with subtleties of line and gesture and precise nuance of expression. Through these simple, sensitive drawings, her story spoke with eloquence.

She had simplified the text of her story as well, until it was only a few sentences. She said that she could see that some of her sentences had been unnecessary. These she had taken away and taken away until she had reduced her words to the bare essentials.

I could imagine her inner voice as she drew her thumbnail sketches, “Move on to the next one...move on...move on...do not labor...do not worry, it is only a sketch.” Through this act of abandonment, she opened the gates of the process to the impulse of the story, the nighttime dream world with its strange natural story arc and its clarity. She found the beautiful balance between the words and what they didn’t say and the pictures as they spoke through simple line and placement on the page.



She also included three pieces of finished art in her book. As she turned the pages and we watched, we saw these pictures too, scattered among her thumbnail sketch enlargements. But we noticed something very curious. Although these finished pieces of art were every bit as beautiful as her sketches, they had a different quality. While her sketches made from her original impulses were unlabored, the finished art was careful and measured. Her sketches were infused with energy, with a sense of abandon, and they seemed to communicate

more directly. Had she created two book dummies, one with the art of her sketches and the other with her finished art, we would have been looking at two very different books.

We long for the directness, the clarity, that this artist found. We wonder how we can create such vivid drawings that speak with such freshness. How do we connect with the unruly, the wild? How do we abandon ourselves so that the nighttime dream world can enter and allow our hand, as Paul Klee said, to “become the obedient instrument of a remote will”?

As artists, we devise ways to conjure this elusive nighttime spirit. We draw our character 500 times, as John Burningham did in creating the authoritarian character for his book *John Patrick Norman McHennessey—the boy who was always late*, so that when we draw him the 501st time, we hit the mark, just as Burningham’s character does as he leans over the desk with his slightly menacing countenance and towers over little Patrick.

We create games and explorations for ourselves, as Picasso so deftly did, limiting our palette, juxtaposing images through collage, restricting ourselves, throwing ourselves off

balance, so that we may, if we are lucky, allow the inner world to emerge.

We create a new portfolio, as Kevin Hawkes did, by hanging ten pieces of paper on the wall and drawing a line on each one, each to become a picture, giving ourselves just enough to begin, a simple line to open the imagination.

As artists, we invent these methods, hoping that this time the nighttime mind will be tempted. This time, we hope, it will not be able to resist our offer. We fluff its pillow, set tea and crumpets on the table before it, and wait. We hope that our reluctant nighttime guest will arrive willingly this time, generously spilling out its big wonderful bag full of crazy, mysterious surprises.



Here are some suggestions that you can use to invite the nighttime mind into your daytime work.

- Set down your pencil (better yet, put it away) and pick up your scissors. Tear your paper.
- Try collage. Arrange and rearrange pieces, creating an endless flow of possible composition.
- Save your scraps, Dig into your box of scraps of past bits and pieces of painted paper, cast-off bits of images. Rearrange these until your composition emerges.
- Use materials that invite play, simple materials that invoke childhood, like tempera paint, construction paper. Low cost means freedom from worry.
- Create 10 new images, the impetus for each one based on a single line.
- Limit your palette to two to three colors. Limitation opens the door to creativity.
- Try stencil for its exciting interplay between positive and negative. Work on black construction paper.

Most important, surprise yourself!

Laura Nyman Montenegro is a faculty member of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago where she teaches Children's Book Illustration. She is author/illustrator of A Poet's Bird Garden (Farrar, Straus & Giroux), A Bird About to Sing, Sweet Tooth, One Stuck Drawer (all Houghton Mifflin). Her books have won Parent's Choice Awards and A Bird About to Sing was featured on Reading Rainbow. She is a founding ensemble member, musician, and visual artist of Theatre Zarko, Puppet Symbolist Theatre. **<http://www.lauranymanmontenegro.com>, lauramontenegro@sbcglobal.net**

Exercise Your Writing with **THE 3 A.M. EPIPHANY**

By Cheryl Bardoe

A book of writing exercises is de rigueur for every writer's bookshelf, and Brian Kiteley's *The 3 A.M. Epiphany: Uncommon Writing Exercises that Transform Your Fiction* fits the bill quite well.

Kiteley opens with a concise, inspiring introduction that challenges writers to trust in the process of writing to beget more and more effective writing. He describes this craft book as "working backwards" because he inverts the common approach of exploring literary elements through expository essays, followed by a few writing prompts. Instead, Kiteley offers "instruction through the activity of writing." Each chapter offers a set of exercises, and each exercise is accompanied by a discussion of how it focuses the writer's attention on a particular technique or perspective in storytelling.

For example, exercise 30, titled "Absent," instructs writers: "Construct a character who is not present, who is offstage for the entire piece. You have many options here...Examine the ways we build characters in our minds and our social environments before and after we meet them."

Exercise 200, titled Q&A, advises: "Write a fragment about something in your story that bothers you like a bad tooth. Write this in the form of twenty questions and answers. Make the questions tough and probing, even unsettling, certainly unusual and unexpected. Write out the questions first, and spend a good deal of time making them lovely, strange, evocative, and part of the process of this story. Then write out the answers, carefully, over time, making every effort to answer the questions honestly and imaginatively. Don't simply answer the questions by reproducing them slyly in the answers. Finally, eliminate the questions from the final draft of this fragment of fiction. You will have twenty answers to hidden questions."

Kiteley's chapters cover basic literary elements featured in most general craft books—point of view, character, description, sentence style, etc. He also offers chapters on specialized topics that are relevant to many kinds stories—travel writing, biography, sports writing, humor. Although the book's title specifically promises "Exercises that Transform Your Fiction," I've also found the exercises to be easily adaptable for stimulating and synthesizing ideas for writing nonfiction. The variety, flexibility, and insightfulness of the 201 exercises are what make this book such a useful addition to my shelf.

The exercises can also be useful at varying points in a story's development. Kiteley recommends generating new story ideas by writing a set of ten or so exercises around a similar setting and group of characters, but holding off on defining the story itself, so as to see what bubbles up from the writer's subconscious. He also recommends techniques for using the exercises to further develop and refine a work in progress.

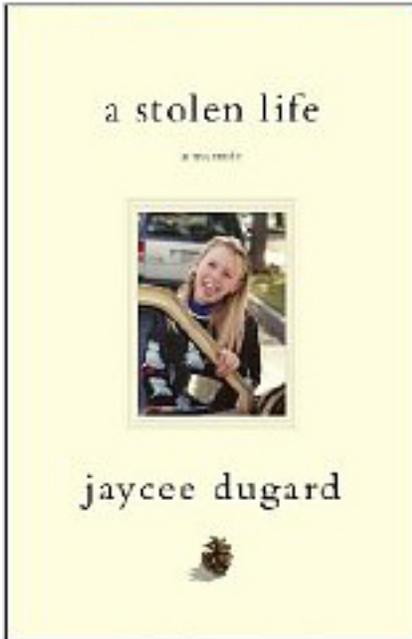
Throughout the book, Kiteley remains constant to the value that he set forth in his

introduction: "The best fiction reveals a writer who is learning something rather than trying to teach something." In doing so, he offers writers of every level and genre an opportunity to continuously challenge ourselves as we hone this lifelong craft.

*Cheryl Bardoe is the author of the award-winning nonfiction books *Mammoths and Mastodons: Titans of the Ice Age* and *Gregor Mendel: The Friar Who Grew Peas*. Her first fictional picture book, *The Ugly Duckling Dinosaur: A Prehistoric Tale*, was just released in 2011. She has an MFA in writing for children from Hamline University and enjoys school visits with young readers and leading hands-on writing workshops. Visit her online at <http://www.cherylbardoe.com>.*

A STOLEN LIFE: A MEMOIR, a Powerful Nonfiction Voice in YA

By Jodell Sadler



As children’s writers, we experiment with all the elements we use to craft our writing for an ever-changing market place of YA literature. Graphic, free verse, and illustrated novels challenge how we craft our novels. We explore both fiction and nonfiction, and integrate our nonfictional lives into our fiction. We select a point of view that weighs heavily on how intimately we relate our story to our readers. We make choices amidst a menagerie of options. When we look at books like Jaycee Dugard’s *A Stolen Life: A Memoir*, it becomes clear that when writing for the young adult market, an authentic voice matters, tension and believability run synonymously, and a strong pacing of plot is essential to crafting words that will become le crème de le crème of children’s writing.

An Authentic Voice Matters

Voice does drive the teen market. Place our attitude, tone, and opinions on overdrive, and we engage readers. Voice is a must, and it must be authentic, original, and memorable. Teens will not settle for less. Use forced dialogue, like forced poetry, and the YA reader will disengage.

When we our craft stories, we must create effective dialogue and monitor the mileage we get out of it. Often this means pulling back, or holding back, and remembering that what we share is equally as important as what we leave unsaid in order to reveal our main character’s emotional depth. Award-winning writer, Ray Bradbury in *Zen in the Art of Writing* (1994) says, “[The writer’s] greatest art will often be what he does not say, what he leaves out, his ability to state simply with clear emotion...the artist must work so hard, so long, that the brain develops and lives, all of itself, in his fingers” (p. 145).

When it comes to dialogue, there is power in being adversarial. Peter Selgin in *By Cunning and Craft* (2004) writes, “The essence of most strong dialogue can be distilled down to the following two-word exchange:

“Please—”

“No.”

Selgin then urges us to “spill our opinionated guts all over the page” (p. 113).

Jaycee Dugard does this when writing *A Stolen Life: A Memoir* (Simon & Schuster,

2011), and she has earned her writing fingers. She spills her guts about how she survived adversarial conditions. Her memoir is an account of her kidnapping at age eleven that spans the eighteen years she was held captive in a child predator's backyard.

Dugard was eleven. So young, so innocent, and yet she places herself through all of it, one more time, and shares her experience with readers. She shares how a taser gun, a blanket, and a car ride changes her life in an instant "one fateful day in June of 1991" (p. ix). In this memoir, she is younger than a normal YA character would be, yet the subject matter makes this book YA and an adult market crossover: rape, sexual abuse, abandonment, neglect. The reality Dugard shares is one that no one dare imagine. She faces and reveals it all to her readers. She enters her story in survival mode and adds in her personal reflections in alternating chapters. It is gripping and intense.

Dugard writes, "I decided to write this book for two reasons: One reason is that Phillip Garrido believes no one should find out what he did to an eleven-year-old girl...me. He also believes he is not responsible for his actions. I believe differently" (p. ix).

In our own undertakings as writers, we must explore many possibilities and write our stories the way they need to be written. We have to follow our literary guts as well as seek advice from those who have traversed the page. We often hear writers suggest that we write the story only we can write. When writing fiction, we are urged to tell the lies that reveal truth as this often turns our personal nonfiction lives into novels. We must do all these things, but we must also be certain that in our narratives, heart resonates just below the surface in the underpinnings of story.

Truth spills forth full-throttle in Dugard's book. She writes from the heart. She writes from that fragile place we must go to collect our stories. Her reflection reads, "Looking back on that day, feelings of dread come to mind. I was eleven years old, still very much a kid. I was very scared and alone. I didn't know what was going to happen and if someone had told me what I would be enduring for the next eighteen years, I would never have believed them" (p. 15). She pulls readers in, includes them, and this is the importance of voice and dialogue.

We've often heard that "dialogue is character," and this is one memoir that would prove this assertion. A novel must also have a healthy dose of tension and believability.

Tension and Believability Run Synonymously

Tension must be present in story and take place in a believable world. There are so many ways to write a story. So, how do we know where to start? Gertrude Stein might say that the story is the story is the story is the story, but where we start really depends on where the most pivotal part of the plot occurs. Dugard begins with her own introduction. "Let's get one thing straight! My name is Jaycee Lee Dugard" (p. ix).

Why begin here? For eighteen years Dugard was not allowed to use or say her own name, so much so that when she is finally faced with sharing the truth, she still cannot speak it.

I felt like I had just been waiting for the right question, and I said I was eleven and

that I was twenty-nine now. She [the officer] was shocked. She asked for my name again. I said I couldn't say it. I wasn't trying to be difficult. I told her I haven't said it in eighteen years. I told her I would write it down. And that's what I did. Writing shakily on that small paper, the letters of my name:

JAYCEELEEDUGARD

It was like breaking an evil spell. In that moment, I felt free but also exhausted and completely alive all at the same time. (p. 209)

As we write and explore teen lit, we experience an emotional intensity and tension we may not find in other genres. YA calls for tension, and it must be believable—even in fiction. As teens' lives pivot from a heart-centered place of exploration and expectation, we cannot disappoint in this area. Writers must deliver rich worlds that stand to lose something very dear to the heart of the main character. True, this is a part of every story, but in YA, it is as relevant as a teen's existence.

This is exactly what Jaycee lived moment after moment, day after day, moon after whole moon. She existed for simple pleasures: wearing the "pink flowered one-piece jumpsuit ... and a pair of undies" (p. 47); having access to sunshine, or viewing the moon that connected her to memories of the mother she loved; and when she was finally rescued, using a real toilet rather than a bucket in the corner of a shelter. She loved moments, and we must too as writers. All these rich details fill her story, fill and refill the well of her revealing scenes. She instantly shares her interior self. "No amount of preparation could have helped me understand why a human being would do what he did to another human being, a little girl, for that matter. I still don't get it" (p. 15). She doesn't hold back. As Selgin (2007) suggests, she spills her "opinionated guts all over the page" (p. 113), but in doing this, she doesn't lose sight of pacing or plot.

A Strong Pacing of Plot Is Essential

The pacing of plot is key. Vital. How we break up story, how we lay it out in chapters—both short and long—is as important to what is included in our stories. This step increases a reader's enjoyment and participation in our story.

Dugard presents chapters that alternate between her nightmare and reflections from a more adult perspective. In this non-linear progression, she fully engages in an intimate dialogue with her readers. Her reflections run from a paragraph to a few pages. She makes her scenes and chapters "long enough" to do justice to the story.

Dugard writes, "This book might be confusing to some. But keep in mind throughout my book that this was a very confusing world I lived in." She goes on to admit that the way to truly understand would be to live it, but she would "wish that on no one" (Author's Note).

The pace in which we unfold story is a tool that may be used in multiple ways. We may slow the pacing at moments of deep intensity, while we may speed time, or use pacing to break up our chapters into more interesting sections. Dugard's chapter titles themselves serve the pacing: "The Taking," "Alone in a Strange Place," "The Secret Back Yard." In that

back yard, “There is nowhere to run. There is nowhere to hide.” And there, “the strange man says that he wants me to take my clothes off. No, I say!” (p. 17).

We may use pace to slow the reader to notice story details, use descriptions to create a sense of place, create chapter endings that give pause for thoughts, or use short chapters to show relevance or importance. While lists may speed or slow the text, repetition, internal rhyme, dialogue, onomatopoeia, rhythm, and short sentences generally increase pacing—and this only names a few pacing tools. Imagine. Meanwhile, we must remain true to our story. We can’t worry about what the agent wants or what the marketplace expects. We must work to grow our writing “fingers” while adding the key elements of story that will embed our readers in our story so much so they will not want to put it down.

Bradbury suggests that a writer ask, “What do I really think of the world, what do I love, fear, hate?” and then “pour this on paper” (p. 147).

What is vital to our success as writers is to share our stories fully. We must love the stories we present to the world. Bradbury warns, “If you are writing without zest, without gusto, without love, without fun, you are only half a writer” (p. 4). This means that writers who focus on the expectations of others, on commercial markets, instead of their own expectations as writers, will miss their callings. Those who focus on story and the heart of the story are true writers.

How might we write our story?

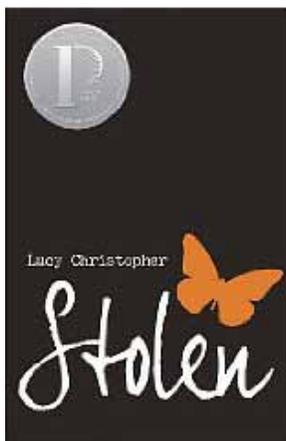
In our own unique and interesting way.

With love.

As a lover of words.

As a writer.

As a writer who uses an authentic voice to build tension scene-by-scene from that pivotal point in the plot forward. As the writer, who adds strong pacing in order to reveal a memorable main character, just as strong as Jaycee Dugard’s own in *A Stolen Life: A Memoir*. In doing this, we, as writers, may one day find our own work among le crème de le crème of children’s writing.



Create Your Own Book Look Workshop

If you wish to further this Book Look for the YA genre, consider comparing this memoir against a fictional book on the topic of kidnapping. Take these subtopics: voice, tension and scene building, and pacing of the plot. Examine how the novel *Stolen* by Lucy Christopher, which is a first- and second-person narrative written as a letter to a captor, compares and contrasts with Jaycee Dugard’s memoir.

- Jodell Sadler serves as an editor, illustrator. Additionally, she serves as an adjunct professor for Rasmussen College Online, where she teaches English and literature. She writes by day and provides manuscript editing services by night. Log into **<http://www.sadler4kids.com/editorialservices.htm>** for more information.

If I Only Had a Brain

By Carol Coven Grannick

When Dorothy asks Scarecrow in the movie version of *The Wizard of Oz* which direction to head in order to get to the Wizard, Scarecrow points in both directions. He doesn't know which way to turn because he doesn't have a brain.

That's how I sometimes feel with critique advice. I don't know who's right...or which way to go...but I begin to feel that I'm wrong and others must have the right answers.

The general writing advice, "You have to trust yourself and your story," hasn't held much water for me because often I convince myself for a variety of reasons, that I am not trustworthy when it comes to knowledge about writing.

So...Which Road to Follow?

That can be a challenge to even the hardest-working irrepresible wannabe. There's nothing like not knowing what direction to move in to discourage even the most energetic writer.

The dilemma is confusing enough with my challenging critique group full of amazing writers. External to my group, though, I had two polar-opposite critiques this year that struck at the heart of my confusion. Two well-respected readers—editors, writers, educators, and poets—had completely different responses to the format of my current work in progress. One suggested strongly that my free verse should become poetic prose segments. One year and a couple of revisions later, a critique by a favorite author, poet, and teacher began with, "Um...I'm just wondering why this isn't in verse...It seems as if it really should be."

My hair was too short to tear out.

I knew when I heard the second critique that I wanted the novel back in verse. But was wanting it enough? What about the people who encouraged the prose segments for a variety of middle grade-related and literary reasons? They aren't wrong...And what about...And then...And if...But...

You know the routine, right?

Clearing the Path

As it happened, I got the second critique at a retreat I'd almost decided not to attend. My husband and I were in the middle of packing up and moving out of our house of sixteen years on a short deadline, but he insisted that it would be good to go to the retreat, and to see one of my dearest friends who lives near enough the retreat site for a visit.

As I obsessed about whether to return the manuscript to verse and proceed with a revision

that way, or to keep it in poetic prose segments, one of the smart women in my retreat critique group asked, “Which writing do you enjoy doing more?” There was no question. The answer was free verse. It matches the rhythm in my head—the rhythm of the events and thoughts and feelings of the story.

It’s how I hear the story unfolding in my head and heart. Somehow the discussion removed a cloud of uncertainty from my vision of myself as a writer. Why and how I’m not certain, but there it was.

Click Your Heels...

Once I’d essentially realized that there was no place like free verse (“home” for me), I knew also that I have a brain, a heart, and the courage to make the decisions about which feedback makes sense for me and which doesn’t. That I can let the critique sift down and sort itself out. That I have actually learned a lot in the twelve years I’ve been practicing the work of writing for children, and that I know (even though I sometimes pretend that I don’t) what’s missing in my work that needs to be there, and also what simply might not feel right for the work—at least in the current draft.

And I also know that I am taking a risk that my middle grade novel in verse may never be published. But it’s a bigger risk to write in a way that keeps me distant from my heart—and therefore, I believe, distant from the heart of any reader.

Journey On...

Ultimately, the source of my irrepressibility as a writer—and yours, too, I’ll wager—is not so much the ability to be or become elastic with the level and number of disappointments we face. That’s important, and it matters. But for me the source of working at staying resilient is telling myself the truth about what keeps me whole, and alive in the way I need to feel alive. And that’s the everlasting need to create my place in the world through language, and to make sense of my inner world via the written word.

Refocusing on how I must write my story has restored my belief in my work, but also opened doors in the story that weren’t there before. Weren’t even known to me.

And who knows where they will lead?

Carol Grannick writes picture books, middle grade novels, poetry, and essays. She is also a clinical social worker in private practice, helping adults become more resilient with the vicissitudes of life and more comfortable with themselves. She can be reached at: carolgrannick@gmail.com

Checklist for Author Websites That Work

By Kate Gingold

While writing about history is my superhero job, my mild-mannered alter ego works for Sprocket Websites. So I'm happy to share a few pointers on creating a good author website.

First, a definition: A good website is the one that works for you. Ugly websites can generate incredible traffic and gorgeous websites often languish unvisited. When working on your own site, certainly mine the best ones out there for ideas, but don't demoralize yourself with comparisons. Focus on improving your web presence rather than competing with someone else's.

You'll need to measure to know if you're improving. Check if you already have an analytics tool on your website, but if not, Google Analytics is free to install and use and is a powerful measurement tool with extensive reports. Less tech-savvy folks may want to get someone to install it for them, but it shouldn't take much time at all. And don't be alarmed about wading through all the reports—you only really need to look at a couple.

Think Business Plan Rather Than Creative Outlet

If a good website is the one that works for you, then you need to clearly visualize what you want your site to do so you can measure how well it's working. Who do you want to visit your site? What do you want them to do while they are there? You may find you have more than one target audience—how do you deal with that? Clarifying your intentions guides the content and makes for a more positive visitor experience.

Here are a few things you might want a visitor to do on your site:

- Buy your book
- Read an excerpt
- See your public appearance schedule
- Download classroom activities
- Read about you
- Print a bio for introducing you at a public appearance
- Contact you for an interview
- Contact you for a public appearance
- Contact you to ask for your next manuscript

- Send you fan mail
- Play a game
- Post comments or photos
- Read your blog
- Check out your professional platform
- Watch your book trailer
- See what other things you've done
- Find your social media locations
- Learn more that didn't appear in the book

Your visitors might include:

- Book readers
- Book buyers
- Agents
- Publishers
- Teachers
- Children
- Adults
- News reporters
- Librarians
- Other authors

Think through what a positive experience might look like so that you can guide visitors to do what you want them to do on your site. Here are some points to consider:

- Unexpected sound may annoy your visitor. Let silence be the default setting for the sake of cubicle surfers and add a "sound on" option.
- Busy agents and news reporters often use iphones. If the information they're looking for isn't visible to them as text, they can't contact you.

- Sesame Workshop says nearly 50 percent of children at age 5 play computer games, but usually while on a parent's lap. Your site needs to appeal to both age groups.
- Creativity is admirable—but don't frustrate your visitor by sacrificing traditional navigation to whimsy. Help them get what they came to find.

Websites Are So 1999, Aren't They?

With the explosion of social media outlets, many people wonder if they need a website at all and the answer is still "yes." At the very least you should own the .com of your own name, or if that's already taken, then something very close to your name. Domain names usually cost about \$10 a year and you can buy it yourself. You can see if the URL you want is available at sites like the one we use for our clients.

Make that domain your "home base." You can link to Twitter, Facebook, LiveJournal, Blogger, YouTube, the page your publisher provided, and every other Internet outlet you use, but you'll be assured that this home base will always be under your complete control. Twitter can go out of business or Facebook can change their rules, but you'll stay in charge of your website.

Many authors use their book title as their URL because readers search for the title. The drawback is that the number of sites increases with the number of books you publish, which can get expensive and time-consuming to manage. One solution is to let your author site be home base and create "microsites" for each book title. Keep each microsite simple, focused on that specific book, and link to your author site for the event calendar, your bio, and other information. Facebook pages can be used as microsites, but keep the control issues in mind.

Investing the Time and Money

A website needs regular care to thrive. Stale content bores your visitors and makes them wonder if you still exist. In the old days, it got very expensive to hire a webmaster to keep your pages up-to-date, but today's Content Management Systems make it easy for nearly everyone to update their own websites. Not that you have to do it yourself! Consider hiring an administrative person to update the site for you so you can focus on writing.

Costs for a website can run from \$5 a month for a hosted do-it-yourself template to a couple thousand upfront for a custom design and another \$30 or more a month for hosting. Here are some points to consider when deciding which end of the spectrum to choose:

- The cheapest sites may require you to show advertisements.
- A good graphic designer can make your website something special.
- Good graphic designers aren't always good web programmers.
- Your nephew may be a good web programmer, but he may be unavailable for updates down the line.

- You could spend more than you save trying to do it yourself.
- Some old sites can't be moved and you'll have to start from scratch if it no longer meets your needs.
- Some newer platforms like DotNetNuke, Joomla and Drupal grow with you easily and have extensive support systems.

MySpace faded while Facebook soared and no crystal ball can tell us what's next on the Internet, but websites continue to be relevant workhorses. J.K. Rowling's "Pottermore" website will no doubt set new standards. Most of us don't have the financial resources to compete with Ms. Rowling, but we shouldn't focus on having as many visitors at our website as Pottermore has. Instead we should focus on getting more visitors this week to our sites than there were last week. We write our books to connect with readers and a good website can help us connect with more of them.

Kate Gingold writes every day, although mainly for clients' marketing purposes. She and her husband, Don, started their web development company in 1996 and launched Sprocket Websites with another couple in 2008. Kate's local business connections led her to write her first book of local history in 2006, Ruth by Lake and Prairie, which was later honored with an award from the Illinois State Historical Society. Since then, she has published two more books on local history and is currently working on a biography. Yes, the books all have their own websites, but like the cobbler's barefoot children, they don't get as much attention as the sites of business clients.

When Blogging Buddies Unite, aka Creating the Group Blog

By Hilary Wagner

Being writers and illustrators, whether you're published or not, it's always a good idea to get yourself out there, as in blogging, tweeting, or posting on Facebook. And should I thank Google+ for giving us yet another social networking outlet to waste our time on? Probably not, but maybe, since it is one more viable place to promote ourselves...and our blogs.

Another great way to get yourself out there is the group blog. This is a fantastic vehicle for writers and illustrators to establish an online presence and make themselves known entities to publishers and agents.



I know what you're thinking: "It's hard keeping up with my own blog, you numbskull!" I agree, many times, it's near impossible to come up with fresh and inspiring posts when you have the strings of real life pulling at you from all imaginable angles. But with a group blog, you actually take the pressure off yourself. You'll have several writers responsible for weekly posts and maintenance, and once you get your group up and running, you'll be lucky if you post more than once or twice a month. I should know...that's what happened to me!

Back in July of 2010, I founded a group blog affectionately known as PROJECT MAYHEM. There are few blogs that tackle anything and everything related to middle-grade writing, so I thought, "Wouldn't it be great to get a bunch of middle-grade writers together?" So I did. The minute I sent out invitations to fellow writers to join, (and they actually started accepting) I panicked something awful. I thought, "You raving lunatic! What were you thinking? No one is going to read your blog and all these writers are going to drop off like flies, because you wasted their precious time." Thank goodness I was wrong! Project Middle-Grade Mayhem, the Manic Minds of Middle-Grade Writers, now has over 500 combined followers/subscribers and gets visits from all over the world, including everyone from librarians and teachers, parents looking for great books for their kids, writers like you and me, and last but not least, publishers and agents. We have eleven wonderful middle-

grade writers who have exciting things to say about the crazy world of kids' writing. We have been mentioned in major writing publications and we get approached monthly by publishers, authors, and agents, asking us to review upcoming middle-grade books. And guess what, we love it!

Okay, so enough about Project Mayhem, because yes, I could go on forever and a day about it, when in reality I want to talk to you about starting your own group blog. Now that I've had my own journey starting a group blog, I can share my experience, so you don't make the same mistakes I did. Here are the most valuable tips I could come up with to get you going:

Find Writers!

This is clearly a no brainer tip. An advantage of a group blog is that you get a wealth of knowledge from a wealth of people. No one is going to feel exactly the same about a topic, so you'll have differing opinions, which is good. Readers like variety in that manner, but be sure your group shares a universal interest. For example, if the people you want to write all write in different genres, then pick the craft itself as the goal, as in tackling character development or creating a believable situation. Having one writer blog about his military thrillers one day, and then another writer blog about her picture books the next day generally won't work. People like variety on a blog, but typically in the same area, which brings us to our next tip...platform

What are you all squawking about?

Come up with a solid platform. Readers want wonderful, creative posts of differing opinions, but they also want cohesion. Make it clear what your platform is. If you're mystery writers, then you could be the Mavens of Mystery. Do you like a little horror? All right then, how about the Horror Henchmen? You get the drift. Readers want to be surprised, but at the same time they like to know what to expect when they click on your blog every day. Once you've established who you are as a group blog, the following will come.

Get your group some guidelines.

This may not sound important, but it is. There is nothing worse to see on a group blog than everyone doing whatever they want. That looks messy and disorganized, and trust me, readers will notice. Be very clear when people agree to be a part of your blog that they need to take it seriously. Remember, your group is doing this for free and no one is getting paid, so always be pleasant, but ask that your group stick to the guidelines as best they can. Mistakes WILL happen. Someone will forget their post date or accidentally post on someone else's day, etc, but if you're nice, but firm about your guidelines, generally people will adhere to them. It's all about mutual respect.

Ideas for group guidelines include:

- Length of posts: I say around 500–800 words give or take, but no more 1,000.
- Format: Make sure everyone posts in the same font and the same size font.

- Scheduling: Give your group a schedule in advance and distribute posts evenly.
- Pictures: Always include a picture with every post. They drive blog traffic.
- Administrator rights: Give every blog member rights to get to the blog, so they can login and post on their own. This takes the burden off you. Once your group knows all the guidelines, they'll have no trouble posting in the proper format and better yet, scheduling their posts ahead of time.

Last, be fearless!

Never be afraid to take the plunge. If I can do it, you surely can! Don't sweat the small stuff. Running a group blog can be a challenge sometimes, but it doesn't have to be. Once things are up and running, ask for help. You'll be amazed how supportive your group will become. It's like your own little online family. Be positive. Becoming a writer is a struggle. Show your readers you support that struggle and you're right there with them. Have fun! Once your group is up and running and the comments sail in, take a nice breath, and smile wide! You did it!

Hilary Wagner is the author of Nightshade City, a 2011 CBC Best Book. The second book in the Nightshade Chronicles series releases this October. She lives in the Chicago area with her husband and two kids. You can find out more about her at <http://www.nightshadecity.com> and <http://www.hilarywagner.blogspot.com>.

Words by the Lake

By Sarah Barthel

In mid-July, dozens of lucky SCBWI writers packed their bags and headed to Springfield for a weekend of nonstop inspiration at the Words by the Lake retreat. Writing mediums in hand, words swirling in our minds, we congregated at the Villa Maria Retreat Center determined to accomplish our weekend goals.

Retreat from the Everyday

For me, having three days of uninterrupted writing time was a dream come true. A seven-month-old daughter at home and two dogs commanding much of my attention mean that my writing time is often disjointed. A room with no TV, radio, or anything but me, my notes, and my computer was exactly what I needed to refocus my energy into my characters and make some real revision headway. I was not disappointed.

Words seemed to nearly float through the air as we all sat in different spots around the facility frantically typing before our narrations slipped away into nothingness. The stark silence of nature allowed our characters to speak to us without the buzz of technology filling our minds and influencing our pens. It was eye-opening to see what can come out of unplugging from life and letting your mind focus.

Naturally, not every attendee had the same reason for coming. There were the serious writers who had a very specific page goal and who locked themselves in their rooms, speaking to no one except at mealtimes. Other attendees came to simply rejuvenate their mind—they were found typing up stories, reading in the living room, and whispering in corners with fellow writers. And a few came to simply catch up on other kinds of work: school grading or dissertation drafts. Regardless of our goals, we all left satisfied with our progress.



Rejuvenation of Mind

There is no better place for such a retreat than Villa Maria. Located on Lake Springfield, it is surrounded by lush foliage and mere steps from the Lincoln Gardens. Forest paths

offer wonderful venues for mental meanderings, and the lake is a soothing place to sit and recollect your thoughts.

Several guests saw a deer as they took a morning stroll through the woods, and I think we all walked down to the lake multiple times just to breathe the peace that it radiated. In fact, every time I looked out my lakeside window there was a different person sitting on the bench, staring out into the blue waves. It was the perfect way to distance your mind from the business of cities.

The facility itself is well suited for writers as there are many places to plug in your laptop, lean back, and dig into the world you have created. Nearly every room had someone hunkered down, busily typing the words that were flowing through her mind. We didn't even need the Do Not Disturb signs provided to us as we all respected one another's solitude.

Communion of Writers

This is my favorite part of being an SCBWI member, the community of writers to which I belong. There is no other place I can think of with such warm and inviting people who genuinely want to see you succeed. Words by the Lake was no different.

I love how even in a retreat setting where there are no speakers, we still gathered together to help each other expand our knowledge and support each other's dreams. Even the meals, which were cooked for us by the staff at Villa Maria, turned into longer breaks as we all conversed on what we were working on and the progress we were making.

Although there weren't any assigned breakout sessions, there were still plenty of opportunities to further educate ourselves.

- About half of the attendees chose to participate in critique groups, which were divided up by reading level. At any point that weekend you could turn a corner and find a circle of heads pressed together discussing tone or rhyming pattern.
- Discussion groups were also set up for those of us who wanted to brainstorm certain aspects of the writing world. The main topic was whether or not to obtain an agent for your work—something every writer grapples with at one point or another.

Once the sun went down Alice McGinty and Louann Brown, who organized this wonderful weekend, lit a fire in the fire pit and called all willing voices down to the lakeside circle for an evening of folk tunes and merriment. Alice had her guitar and led us in many fun songs ranging from her own school performance to old folk songs.

As an added bonus, on the last day of the retreat two names were drawn for critiques with Kristen Daly, an editor at Balzer and Bray who was a speaker at last year's Words in the Woods Conference. Carmela Martino and I were the lucky writers. However, everyone was a winner as we left the Villa Maria Sunday afternoon rejuvenated, inspired, and reconnected.

When she isn't chasing after two dogs or playing with her baby daughter, Sarah Barthel can be found at the computer rapidly typing the stories that fill her mind. Inspired by images from the past, she primarily writes historical fiction, but she often tries her hand at contemporary as well. She credits SCBWI with introducing her to some of the greatest friends and cheerleaders she knows.

How to Adapt a Children's Book for the Stage, or: "How Hard Could It Be?"

By Juliet C. Bond

"How hard could it be?" may be the most overconfident, delusional phrase in the entire English language. I've used it frequently. It's an expression I should have ditched about two months into parenting my first child, a few weeks into the hours of colic-laden shrieking in my second child's life and about five minutes after the test came back blue with my third.

But it took a writing project to finally cement the lesson. Here's what happened. A few years back, I joined the board of a local children's theater searching for its next production. Someone brought in a copy of *This is Just to Say*, by Newbery Honor author, Joyce Sidman. If you don't know this book, then go out and get it. It's stunning. You will laugh and you will cry as you read it. It's what those of us who write for children only hope to achieve in the span of forty-eight pages. The layout is a series of poems of apology but within each poem is a world made small. In the second half, those apologized to, respond—also in verse. The result is the discovery of a mystery, the healing of a friendship and the saving of a life.

I thought it would make a great play. So I uttered the words that would set an avalanche of complications and conflicts in motion.

"I'll adapt it! How hard could it be?"

I began by contacting Joyce Sidman through her website, outlining my experience in writing for children and boldly asking if I could adapt her work. She wrote back right away:

"I'd be thrilled! I've always wanted to see those characters come to life! But, permission has to come from the publisher."

Joyce graciously contacted Houghton Mifflin and worked some magic. They whipped up a contract giving me author adaptation rights for free. (Thank you, Joyce!)

The Rights of the Playwright

Because the book was a series of poems with no real interactions between the characters, I envisioned action happening as the poems were read. I began writing the framework for these "scenes." But I hoped to work with the cast to generate ideas for interactions between the poems and additional poems to add to the mix. I wanted the kids to feel some ownership of the content.

On the day of auditions, I was excited to give my input about which children I thought would fill the various roles I was still writing. But, in a rather awkward conversation, I agreed to allow the director to cast the play without my input.

This was my first mistake.

Later, I asked more seasoned playwrights whether the writer should be involved in casting a play. They confirmed that with new work, writers assist in auditions and attend rehearsals because doing so gives them the opportunity to tailor and improve the content in real time. It's an incredible opportunity to perfect flaws in the storyline and dialogue—like when someone else reads your work aloud, but even better, because you aren't just hearing the characters and story, you see them too.

In fact, a first production is akin to a first pancake and most dramatic publishing houses won't even read the play until it's been staged and the knots have been worked out. So in a debut play, any revisions to the script absolutely have to be approved by the playwright. Later, when the play has been published and various theaters purchase the rights, directors might take some small liberties with content. Even then, many dramatic publishers insist that the author is contacted for permission first. For example, the webpage for Dramatic Publishing company says,

all of our plays and musicals are protected by international copyright law, which means that any alterations, deletions or substitutions are prohibited by law except with prior written consent of the copyright holder (usually the author).

So the basic storyline and dialogue are not in the director's domain. What does belong to the director is, well, everything else:

- The way the characters are directed to show emotions
- The staging and set design
- The costumes
- The lighting
- The timing between scenes
- The blocking (unless specifically included in the script)
- The rehearsal schedule
- The times and dates of the performances etc.

Unfortunately, though I'd sensed that I be involved in most aspects of the production, including casting, I backed off out of nicety and self-doubt. Way to go, me.

Other Mistakes to Avoid

Next, the director phoned with a plea to write a portion of the play and, even though my insides were shriveling up like paper on fire, I said, "Um...sure."

If you have some hope of learning from my experience, then let me stress that giving in to

this demand—which I totally did—was a boneheaded move. Later, when I tried to share my thoughts on character or actor motivations, it was like talking about sautéed okra to a room full of kindergarteners. What I had to say wasn't something the audience was excited to hear.

The director requested more and more control until eventually, we parted ways. A new director was hired and I thought everything would be fine because,

How hard could it be?"

Between directors, I attended a rehearsal to lead writing exercises with the kids. I needed stories about true apologies but the initial material they generated was exactly what kids felt comfortable sharing with a new adult—nothing too personal—stuff about farting in class or stealing their sister's designer jeans. I looked forward to returning and building more trust. But the new director insisted on time to bond with the cast so I waited for his permission to attend another rehearsal.

Waiting for Permission to Write, When You're the Writer

Maybe this lesson is obvious but since it clearly wasn't obvious to me, let me say that waiting for permission to do something you have every right to do puts you in an inherently weak position. Here's how my metaphor for that mistake goes: I am now dressed as a giant, gleaming candy bar in that room full of kindergartners. Their well-meaning teacher has had them skip lunch for this important lecture on sautéed green veggies as I cry out, "Kids, let's talk kohlrabi!"

So the director never "gave me permission" to return to work with the kids and I never had the opportunity to generate more material with them.

Dr. Phil says (I know, but still) there are "no victims, only volunteers" and yep, I'd allowed my power to be usurped by an overwhelming desire to get along with people. Research shows that this particular behavior is one women engage in more often than men. That's true—not because of anything biologically inherent—but because when women make demands, they are often viewed as strident or "difficult." As a result, we frequently sublimate our own desires, or worse, stay silent when a situation has gone off the rails.

I get this stuff. I teach women's studies and read bookshelves of research on it. Unfortunately, I have no idea what to do in actual situations. And for children's writers (of which, like 99.9% are women), it's a ridiculously big issue—not just in writer/director relationships but in negotiations with agents and publishers too.

At this point, I felt I'd lost my voice. If I'd turned around, I'm pretty sure I'd have seen Dr. Phil muttering, "Girlfriend, whad'ja think would happen when you slipped on that candy bar costume?"

Good and Not so Good Advice

I called a friend who directs a larger theater program and asked, "Why is this so hard?"

She said, "Oh this is so natural. There is ALWAYS some push and pull between writers and directors. Look at any Hollywood movie. Most writers will tell you that their work gets mauled in the hands of a director and everybody fights the whole way through."

"Bummer," I mumbled.

My friend had a point. In fact, I'd recently had coffee with an author whose novel was made into a film. I asked her, "What did you think of the movie?"

"I never saw it." She stared into her coffee cup. "After I read the screenplay I knew I couldn't." Then she smiled. "With my second novel, I'm producing my own screenplay."

But while full control was tempting, I'd hoped the play would be stronger with the children's and even the director's contributions. Still, this was getting really hard. Heartsick, I finished the adaptation alone and emailed the final script to the director.

Two days later, a board member called. "You're not going to like this."

"What?"

"The director changed some things."

I felt a bubble of fury rise in my belly. "What things? How much?"

"A lot."

She sent me a copy of his changes. Lines were rewritten; characters had gone from sweetly oblivious to outright bullies, scenes had been moved from one act to another and full poems were deleted. It was time to tell Joyce Sidman what was going on. I'd already given her my adaptation and she loved it. I wasn't sure how to explain the alterations to the script. Though I was under contract to write the play, I had allowed someone to warp the content.

My theater friend said, "Pull the play sweetie."

Pull the play?

"You could be sued for breach of contract. Get out, get out now."

But we were weeks from production. I couldn't pull the play from nineteen children who'd put their hearts into it. I'd damn the theater to a public humiliation. Parents would be outraged.

I stopped sleeping. I developed an odd and rather unattractive rash. But with Joyce's help, we took Dr. Phil's advice and stopped being volunteer/victims. Missing poems were finagled back in, and word choices argued until characters were molded back into something Joyce and I recognized. The struggle felt dreadful, and each agonizing alteration escalated everyone's stress level.

The Show Goes On

On opening night, there were scenes that worked and moments that sung. There were also gross imbalances between the acts, plot lines that fell flat and a host of confusing interactions. I watched it with a mixture of tears, pride, fury and resignation, wondering what happened and how I had contributed to it.

In the end, my name was credited to a show I felt unsteady about. But there was a measure of joy in what resulted too. I watched Joyce's poems and some of what I wrote, come to life. After viewing it, I knew exactly where to revise plot lines and dialogue. Joyce and I plan to submit the revised adaptation to dramatic publishing companies. She talked to a theater in Minneapolis who may be interested in producing it, and I met with a group here who may use it for a school anti-bullying project. There are some wonderful possibilities emerging out of the rubble left behind.

So what wisdom can I impart to an author who thinks, "I'll adapt a children's book into a play. How hard could it be?" Well, I can tell you this, if you are asking yourself this particular question, you may be inviting the universe to take advantage of your naiveté. Hold onto your role as the writer. Weigh compromises carefully. Remember not to volunteer to be a victim. Take it on if you have the fortitude, but go in knowing that when you shrug your clueless shoulders and utter the words, How hard could it be? The universe has an answer for you,

This hard

Juliet C. Bond is a professor, social worker and writer. She is the author of Sam's Sister, a picture book about open adoption, and has contributed to other collaborative works including the stage adaptation of This Is Just to Say. Juliet is forever inspired by the transformative power of a great story. Please visit her at julietcbond@tripod.com