From the Editor

Just when I think a Prairie Wind issue can’t be equaled, along comes the next one full of stories just as inspiring and articles just as insightful and illuminating.

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Greeting

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News Roundup

Diane Telgen’s News Roundup lists events at Anderson’s Bookshops, award-winning books including Newbery and Caldecott, and grants to apply for…

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Classes
Visit illinois.scbwi.org/area-classes-retreats-and-workshops/

Food for Thought
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Don’t Miss
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Writing Tips
Michelle Falkoff cleverly analyzes the different ways of starting a new writing project…

Illustrator Tips
Kathryn Ault Noble’s Illustrator Tip purports to be about the Face Aware Liquify Filter in Photoshop…

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In the words of its subtitle, the book gives “Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World.”…

Book Look
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A Fly on the Wall
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The Inside Story
Carol Coven Grannick’s column “The Inside Story” would alone be worth the price of admission…

Thank You
Dorothy Wiese writes a loving and poignant tribute to teacher and writer Laura Crawford…
From the Editor

Just when I think a *Prairie Wind* issue can’t be equaled, along comes the next one full of stories just as inspiring and articles just as insightful and illuminating.

**Deborah Topolski**’s lovely illustrated *Greeting* acknowledges the truth that “some make writing and illustrating for children a 9-to-5 job; others write and illustrate as a portion of their workday; still others are practicing in unrelated fields while cultivating the dream.” She offers suggestions and inspiration for writers in each category.

**Diane Telgen**’s News Roundup lists events at Anderson’s Bookshops, award-winning books including Newbery and Caldecott, and grants to apply for.

**Tales from the Front** is always a highlight, and this time **Peter Thompson** recounts how he became a children’s book writer by accident: “I soon found out I had written a middle-grade novel. I’d never heard of that category before.”

**Season’s Crop**, compiled by **Natalie Ziarnik**, lets us see what our fellow Illinois writers and illustrators are publishing. This time the list includes 7 new picture books, 2 middle-grades, and 1 young adult novel.

**Michelle Falkoff**’s Writing Tip cleverly analyzes the different ways of starting a new writing project. “Some people start with character…Others start with a sentence, whether it’s the first one or one that will be key to the narrative or even the ending…**Jim Crace** [starts] with a question, and the book serves as the answer.”

**Kathryn Ault Noble**’s Illustrator Tip purports to be about the Face Aware Liquify Filter in Photoshop. You might think this would be interesting (and comprehensible) only to illustrators. But her essay soon leads to considerations of racism and ethnic diversity: “Many of the how-to images…were almost exclusively based on the European face.”

On the **Writer’s Bookshelf** is *Deep Work*, by **Cal Newport**. In the words of its subtitle, the book gives “Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World.” Enjoy **Amy Alznauer**’s bemused evaluation.

**Elizabeth Brown**’s timely Book Look reviews two picture books that portray the refugee experience: *The Journey*, written and illustrated by **Francesca Sanna**, and *Lost and Found Cat: The Story of Kunkush’s Incredible Journey*, by **Doug Kuntz** and **Amy Shrodes** and illustrated by **Sue Cornelison**.

Our Fly on the Wall is **Beverly Patt**, who attended “Hello, My Tweet!” a Food For Thought event devoted to Twitter. She gives six “reasons Twitter is a valuable use of your time,” plus a whole bunch of detailed how-to’s, including “Aim for 80% of your quotes to be about someone or something OTHER than yourself.”

Our Illustrator in the Spotlight is **Jason Slater**, who fills us in on his preferred medium, his beginnings as an illustrator, and other interesting things.

**Carol Coven Grannick**’s column, “The Inside Story” would alone be worth the price of admission. Readers of her column know that a few years ago she gave up hope of publishing because it was inhibiting her writing. Now she has started submitting her work again. Here Carol considers the problem of how to “balance our dreams for our work, and the work itself.”

Finally, **Dorothy Wiese** writes a loving and poignant tribute to teacher and writer **Laura Crawford**.

**Susan Tarcov**, Editor
**Tara Haelle**, Managing Editor
**Sara Shacter**, Editorial Advisor
**Cedric Gliane**, Webmaster
Greeting

Listening for Resonance

Deep within a window recess high on the wall of my grandmother's basement sat a beautiful conch shell. Its rough spiraling architecture and smooth cavernous interior made me want to caress what was once safety and shelter for a beautiful being. After Grandma died, I had the grim task of clearing out her home; what was once safety and shelter for an entire family and her own beautiful being in particular. Tall enough to reach the shell now, I grasped its glassy spines and lifted it to my ear. Feeling particularly vulnerable, I'm not entirely sure what I thought I would hear. Her lilting greeting? A magical message meant only for me? The dependable surf of a constant and calming ocean? Suddenly, the shell's occlusion effect combined the stillness of the house with my own breathing and a lifetime of childhood memories…in a word, resonance.

Like the seashell, our manuscripts and dummies resound with the thoughts and images once housed within the safety and shelter of our minds. With careful listening, we can tap into our child selves and breathe life into these thoughts and images, crafting them into the words and pictures that will resonate with our readers.

A Shell of My Former Story

I think seashells hold a particular fascination for us Midwesterners—their myriad colors, shapes, and sizes never cease to amaze me. In contrast, the first shells I ever found as a kid were really tiny ones out of cold, clear summer lakes found on fishing trips where the only things biting were mosquitoes and the occasional wit. These shells were less flashy and fragile than their salty counterparts, yet still the empty husks of living things. My words and illustrations sometimes feel a bit like this too. What was once alive within my mind enters the real world as a shell of its former self. It's like when you're standing at the shore looking through the ripples at the shells. The colors are rich and robust within the waters of your mind. Once you lift that shell out of the water, although now sharper and better defined, it's lost some of its vibrant color in the beach glare of the bright white page. We must listen for opportunities to imbue our stories with the emotional context of childhood—the sights, sounds, smells and sensitivity of our child selves. When we simply harvest them without this emotional resonance, we force our readers to listen to empty shells of stories.

Getting Out of Your Shell

One of my first shells was a thick, white one from the lake, ribbed by the echo of waves and pierced with a tiny hole. Pale, resilient and flawed, this little shell is the perfect metaphor for a first draft. Created in the waters of my mind, my work has been striated with every pass and still there are holes in the storytelling. I really like this draft, it seems perfect to me in its possibilities—but I fear someone else might not see its potential.

Only when I get out of my shell and bring it to critique can this draft
become a treasure. There are many opportunities for critique within SCBWI-IL. Many Networks offer critique every month, some every other month, and still others, like the Chicago-Area Illustrators’ Network, combine programming and critique at every meeting. These are terrific opportunities to gather with like-minded creators in a professional setting to receive thoughtful feedback. For more information, visit the Illinois Networks webpage.

My critique group partners also help me to smooth away some of the roughness and fill in the gaps and holes with words and pictures. If you’re looking to create your own or add to your existing critique group, our Illinois Critique Groups webpage can help. Updated every six months, this list of groups and individuals is easily searchable for both in-person and online feedback. I know with wave after wave of revision and with careful listening to my critique group’s suggestions, I can craft a story that will begin to resonate with meaning for my readers—as well as for myself.

**A Shell Game**

For a single spread, you might create dozens of images before you find the right one. In the end, which one should you choose? Sometimes all of this writing, drawing, and revising seems like an endless shell game where the pearl of a prize is occluded by choices. Which shell should I choose? In what direction should I go? Should my protagonist make this decision or another? Will the draft be stronger if I follow that alternate plot line or add a secondary character? This creative sleight of hand can make choosing seem impossible. Pick the wrong shell and you could come up empty-handed.

Happily, we don’t have to get caught up in all this eeny-meeny-miny-moe to play this game! Listen to your instincts and make the choices that resonate with YOU. At first, like the proverbial grain of sand in the oyster, your choice might seem a bit irritating. But with each successive pass, layer upon layer of storytelling will build up a bright and lustrous pearl. Only by choosing the ideas that resonate within us can our stories be genuine and authentic.

**Shelling Out**

Oftentimes it seems like I’m shelling out a lot of energy and expense for my craft. After all, paint and paper and software and printer cartridges, conferences, classes, coaching and paid critiques require treasure. The girl may be selling seashells by the seashore, but she isn’t necessarily getting rich doing it. More importantly, how does she prevent herself from becoming emotionally and creatively bankrupt in the process?

The answers are as varied as the shells on a beach because everyone envisions a unique creative journey while listening to a different drum. Some make writing and illustrating for children a 9-to-5 job; others write and illustrate as a portion of their workday; still others are practicing in unrelated fields while cultivating the dream. Our physical and mental resources are not inexhaustible. Protect the pearls of your time and talent by making choices that align with your goals and ultimately resonate with your personal career plan.

Contests, mentorships, and online pitch parties are a valuable and cost-effective way to get your work in front of agents and editors. If budgets, work, or family responsibilities don’t allow you to attend conferences, low-cost webinars and free SCBWI Podcasts are a great alternative. You can usually watch or listen at your convenience. Local and online classes may be the best path to your current goals. When your project is ready for tailored feedback from an industry professional, be selective by researching those agents and editors who specifically publish your genre and...
format. Determine where they will be presenting and budget for these events as you would for other professional continuing education. Pick and choose specific conference opportunities like breakouts, first pages roundtables, one-on-one critiques or portfolio contests to move your project forward. Even if you don’t get a chance for a critique with a sought-after industry professional at a conference, you will usually get an opportunity to attend their session and submit work to them after the conference to ultimately determine if your work resonates with them.

Electron Shells and You
I kid you not—there’s something called an electron shell. An online dictionary describes it as a kind of shell created by electrons orbiting an atom’s nucleus. Just listen to the cool kids you know in atomic physics. Like these little electrons, it’s important to create a protective energy around your creativity to replenish the well.

Last fall while in Florida I was working every day on various projects and feeling more than a little spent on what was supposed to be, after all, a vacation. Finally, I listened to what my body was telling me and I took a beach day. I read and bathed and soaked in the rays. After a while, I decided to build a sand castle. It became more of a bas-relief in sand and shells of one of my picture book characters from a story set at the seashore. Later, I made the image into a holiday card which could be sent to friends and colleagues within the book industry. Most importantly, this play fueled my creativity by causing me to step outside the box and use a wildly different medium in an unconventional workspace. “Changing it up” prevents burnout on a long-running project and resonates within other aspects of our lives.

Listening with intent uncovers the emotional resonance within our stories, creates manuscripts and dummies that resonate with our audiences, and clarifies choices that resonate with our career goals. Ultimately it transforms our work into a day at the beach!

Deborah Topolski dedicates this article to her Grandma Virginia. Gram, you’ve inspired me by owning your own business during WWII, by the care you gave our family, by your eye for design, by your seemingly inexhaustible positivity and joie de vivre—and by one pretty special shell. These things resonate with me always.
News Roundup

**Spring 2017**
Compiled by Diane Telgen

**EVENTS**

ANDERSON’S BOOKSHOP
Information is subject to change; some events require tickets. For more information on these and other upcoming events, visit www.andersonsbookshop.com or call 630-355-2665 for AB Naperville (123 W. Jefferson Ave., Naperville) and ATDE (Anderson’s Two Doors East, 111 W. Jefferson Ave., Naperville), 630-963-2665 for AB Downers Grove (5112 Main St., Downers Grove), or 708-582-6353 for AB LaGrange (26 S. LaGrange Rd., LaGrange).

- **May 20** —Barbara Bottner, author of *Priscilla Gorilla* (PB), 11:00 a.m. at ABNaperville.

- **May 20** —GenYA Book Group. Discussion of *More Happy Than Not* by Adam Silvera. 2:00 p.m. at AB Downers Grove, (630) 963-2665.

- **May 21** —How to Raise a Global Citizen Group. Presentation of books to help parents open awareness about current events. May's topic is the refugee experience. 2:00 p.m. at AB Downers Grove.

- **May 30** —Chris Grabenstein, author of *Welcome to Wonderland 2* (MG). 7:00 p.m. at AB Naperville.

- **May 31** —Ryan Higa, author of *Ryan Higa's How to Write Good* (YA). 7:00 p.m. at AB Higa.

- **June 8** —Joelle Charbonneau (*Dividing Eden*), Kimberly McCreight (*The Scattering*), Julie Murphy (*Ramona Blue*), Evelyn Skye (*Crown's Fate*). 7:00 p.m. at AB Naperville.

- **June 11** —Joelle Charbonneau, author of *Dividing Eden* (YA). 2:00 p.m. at AB Naperville.

- **June 17** —GenYA Book Group, discussion of *Jane Steele* by Lyndsay Faye. 2:00 p.m. at AB Downers Grove.

- **June 25** —Cornelia Funke, author of *The Book No One Ever Read* (MG). 2:00 p.m. at AB Naperville.

- **June 27** —Young at Heart Book Group. Discussion of *Say No to the Bro* by Kat Hegelson. 6:30 p.m. at AB Downers Grove.

- **June 28** —Mackenzi Lee, author of *The Gentleman's Guide to Vice and Virtue* (YA). 7:00 p.m. at AB Naperville.

- **July 2** —Amy Young, author of *A New Friend for Sparkle* (YA). 2:00 p.m. at AB La Grange.

- **July 15** —GenYA Book Group. Discussion of *The Great American Whatever* by Tim Federle. 2:00 p.m. at AB Downers Grove.

- **July 16** —How to Raise a Global Citizen Group. Presentation of books to help parents open awareness about current events. July's topic is LGBTQ issues. 2:00 p.m. at AB Downers Grove.

- **July 24** —Becky Albertalli and Angie Thomas, authors of *Upside of Unrequited and Hate U Give* (YA). 7:00 p.m. at AB Naperville.

**ANNUAL SCBWI CONFERENCE**

**When:** July 7–10, 2017
**Where:** JW Marriott at LA Live, Los Angeles, CA

Details: For more information, visit www.scbwi.org/annual-conferences/

**AWARDS**

**JOHN NEWBERY MEDAL (ALA)**

**Winner**
- *The Girl Who Drank the Moon*, by Kelly Barnhill (Algonquin Young Readers)

**Honor Books**
- *Freedom Over Me: Eleven Slaves, Their Lives and Dreams Brought to Life*, by Ashley Bryan, illustrated by Ashley Bryan (Atheneum Books for Young Readers)
- *The Inquisitor’s Tale: Or, The Three Magical Children and Their Holy Dog*, by Adam Gidwitz, illustrated by Hatem Aly (Dutton Children's Books)
- *Wolf Hollow*, by Lauren Wolk (Dutton Children's Books)

**MICHAEL PRINTZ AWARD (ALA)**

**Winner**
- *March*: Book Three, by John Lewis, Andrew Aydin, and Nate Powell (Top Shelf Productions)

**Honor Books**
- * Asking for It*, by Louise O'Neill (Quercus)
- *The Passion of Dolssa*, by Julie Berry (Viking Books for Young Readers)
- *Scythe*, by Neal Shusterman (Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers)
- *The Sun Is Also a Star*, by Nicola Yoon (Delacorte Press)

**RANDOLPH CALDECOTT MEDAL (ALA)**

**Winner**
- *Radiant Child: The Story of Young Artist Jean-Michel Basquiat*, illustrated and written by Javaka Steptoe (Little, Brown)

**Honor Books**
- *Leave Me Alone!*, illustrated and written by Vera Brosgol (Roaring Brook Press)
- *Freedom in Congo Square*, illustrated by Carole Boston Weatherford (Little Bee Books)
- *Du Iz Tak?*, illustrated and written by Carson Ellis (Candlewick Press)
- *They All Saw a Cat*, illustrated and written by Brendan Wenzel (Chronicle Books)

REBECCA CAUDILL YOUNG READER’S BOOK AWARD
For readers 4th-8th grade:
• **First Place:** *The Crossover* by Kwame Alexander (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt)

More information at [www.rebeccacaudill.org](http://www.rebeccacaudill.org)

MONARCH AWARDS
For readers K-3rd grade:
• **First Place:** *Gaston*, by Kelly DiPucchio, illustrated by Christian Robinson (Atheneum)
• **Second Place:** *This Book Just Ate My Dog*, by Richard Byrne (Henry Holt)
• **Third Place:** *Princess in Black*, by Shannon and Dean Hale, illustrated by LeUyen Pham (Candlewick Press)

More information at [www.islma.org](http://www.islma.org)

BLUESTEM AWARDS
For readers 3rd-5th grade:
• **First Place:** *El Deafo*, by Cece Bell (Amulet Books)
• **Second Place:** *The War That Saved My Life*, by Kimberly Bradley Brubaker (Dial Books for Young Readers)
• **Third Place:** *Rain Reign*, by Ann M. Martin (Feiwel & Friends)

More information at [www.islma.org](http://www.islma.org)

ABRAHAM LINCOLN AWARDS
For readers 9th-12th grade:
• **First Place:** *Red Queen*, by Victoria Aveyard (HarperCollins)
• **Second Place:** *All the Bright Places*, by Jennifer Niven (Knopf)
• **Third Place:** *A Court of Roses and Thorns*, by Sarah J. Maas (Bloomsbury)

More information at [www.islma.org](http://www.islma.org)

GRANTS

SCBWI BOOK LAUNCH AWARD
What: Provides authors or illustrators with $2,000 in funds to help the promotion of their newly published work and take the marketing strategy into their own creative hands.

Deadline: July 1, 2017.


Diane Telgen is a Chicago-based freelance writer and author of reference books. She graduated in January 2017 with an MFA in Writing for Children and Young Adults from Vermont College of Fine Arts.

Don’t Miss

**Prairie Writer’s and Illustrator’s Day 2017: Opening Doors**

**Date:** Saturday, November 4

**Time:** 9:00 am – 6:00 pm (registration begins at 8:00 am)

**Location:** Wojcik Conference Center at Harper College
1200 W Algonquin Rd, Palatine, IL 60067

The goal of this year’s program is to open new doors for YOU, whether you’re pre-published, on the cusp of publication, or published. Join our faculty of editors, agents, career specialists, and book creators for panels and breakouts geared to YOUR level experience. Mix and mingle with speakers. Get your work seen and critiqued! See [www.illinois.scbwi.org](http://www.illinois.scbwi.org) for more information this summer! Registration will begin at the end of August.

Save the Date
Tales from the Front

A Sprint That Turned into a Marathon

By Peter Thompson

My path to publishing started out as a sprint, then turned into a marathon. I've always been a reader, but I first started writing in my thirties. I was golfing with my three brothers when my youngest brother, Dan, announced that he was going to write a kid's book, and he already had the title picked out. He was going to call it A Monkey for Cousin Larry. That sounded good, so we asked what it was going to be about. He hadn't gotten that far, he said, but he thought it would have something to do with a monkey being up in a tree and maybe throwing bananas, or something like that. A few months later, we were at a family get-together, and one of us asked him how his book was going. He hadn't started yet, but again, it was a great title, and he thought it was a real funny idea. After a few more times of hearing about this, my brother Greg and I decided we would "help" Dan (it's a guy thing), by coming up with our own versions of the book. So we started writing stories, each titled A Monkey for Cousin Larry, and sending them to Dan. We came up with a couple of dozen stories altogether. One was a children's story, but we also wrote mystery, horror, a poem, a romance and one that read pretty much like Google directions. Dan didn't really appreciate our help, and he never got around to writing the story. But we had a great time with this inside joke, and I realized that I really enjoyed writing, and people liked what I wrote.

After that I tried my hand at some other short stories, I wrote a few screenplays, and then I had an idea for an adult novel, a thriller. I joined a writer's group and started writing. At the time, I had a young family and my wife was ill. Writing became my stress reliever and escape. I would write early in the morning and stay up late writing after everyone else was in bed. I'd completely stopped watching TV, because getting this story out was so much more interesting. Every week I would go to my writer's group and learn about writing by reading others' work and having them read mine. I learned about run-on sentences and punctuation, about showing and not telling, and how to write fiction that flows. I knew I had something by the reaction I got from my readers each week. They were hooked on the story and wanted to hear more.

It took me about a year and a half to finish the novel, and then I started looking for an agent. I sent query letters out in batches and waited for the replies. Crickets. I tweaked my letter as the rejections piled up. After about six months of trying, I revised the letter one more time and changed the name of the novel to "Living Proof." Out of this batch, four of the twelve agents I queried requested the book. I ended up going with a New York agency that had some success with my type of novel. In my first conversation with my new agent, he told me who he saw playing the lead in the movie (Antonio Banderas) and said that this was going to be HUGE. At this point I started to fantasize about my new life as a best-selling author, but it didn't work out that way. My agent put the book up for auction, but nobody came. The book did eventually sell to an imprint of Penguin-Putnam, but it came out as a mass market paperback. It sold 40,000 copies, I got some good reviews and won an award at a mystery conference, but once the print run was gone, they had already moved on to the next title. I'm still waiting for the movie.

By now my life had changed in a big way and I was a single dad. Besides working a full-time job, I was also a cook, chauffeur, tutor and counselor to my three boys, aged 8, 10 and 14. I still dreamed of making it as an author, and I did continue to write, but it wasn't my focus. For the next several years, I started new books regularly and inevitably ended them after hitting a brick wall of one kind or another. I liked parts of each but couldn't make a novel where it all fit together as a satisfying whole. Life was busy, and I wrote less and less.

Then I had an idea for a new story, very different from what I had been writing. This story idea was about an alien, an extraterrestrial, who is forced to earth to fix his broken craft and lands on an out-of-the-way farm where he takes on human form and gets to know a young boy and his family. He tries to help them with their troubles by using his technology to create a money tree, which then causes a new set of problems for the family. The whole story came to me nearly at once, and I had a sense of the main characters...
right away – Grady, an 11-year-old boy who had recently lost his father, and Ralwil (Will), an alien engineer trying to get back home. I started writing and came up with most of the novel in about six months. I liked what I had. It was funny, and touching and the emotions seemed real. But like so many times before, I got stuck. I couldn’t figure out the ending. I put it away and didn’t look at it again for about a year. When I finally picked it back up, I knew where I was going and finished the book a few months later.

I wrote the novel in a nonstandard format. Each chapter was told from a specific character’s point of view, mostly Grady’s, and Will’s, but further in the book I also brought in a couple of others, a greedy banker and a bumbling detective. To make things more complicated, Grady’s voice was first person while everyone else was third person. I had written this because the story moved me and I felt compelled to write it. I didn’t really know who my audience would be, but I soon found out I had written a middle-grade novel. I’d never heard of that category before, but it turned out that I had been reading these novels for years, and some of my favorite books were considered MG. As the father of three boys, I read favorite books were considered MG. It was funny, and touching and the emotions seemed real. But like so many times before, I got stuck. I couldn’t figure out the ending. I put it away and didn’t look at it again for about a year. When I finally picked it back up, I knew where I was going and finished the book a few months later.

I put together a query letter and started sending it out to agents who worked with MG books. Crickets. As before, I sent the letters out in batches, tweaking a little as I went, and each time getting the standard rejections back. After a while I got a few nibbles. Several agents requested the first few chapters but then came back with vague rejections. I sent the full manuscript to one agency and the initial reader, a well-known children’s writer, loved the work and gave me great feedback on some ways to make it better. She recommended that the agency take me on as a client. The selling agent then read the book and liked the story, but didn’t think she could sell it. I had a couple of others that came close, but no results.

By now I was having major doubts. I decided to spend the money to get a professional opinion and sent the manuscript to a respected critique service. The feedback I got was all positive, and the best thing was that they referred me to an agent, Anna Olswanger. I sent Anna the full manuscript and a month or so later she came back with a response. She said she loved the novel, but it wasn’t ready. She gave me a list of suggestions, including expanding the story, changing the ending and making everything the same perspective. She said that she would be happy to look at it again when I was done. This meant a major rewrite, but everything she said made sense. I went back to work. It took me about eight months to complete, and the story was clearly better now. I sent the novel back, and Anna then took me on as a client.

At this point I thought my path to getting this published would be a downhill run. I was wrong. Anna sent the novel, now called “Summer on Earth,” out to everyone in the publishing world, and I learned how many ways you can hear the word no. Some editors loved the Grady parts, but not the alien POV. Others thought the exact opposite. We were told this was too literary, and too commercial. Some editors were buying only series and suggested the novel be rewritten as a series. Some editors said they personally liked the story, but it wasn’t quite right for their house. There was interest, but no takers. Anna kept the faith and continued sending the manuscript out.

To make a long story short, Anna eventually placed this with a small publisher, Persnickety Press, and Summer on Earth will be released this summer, 14 years after my first novel was published. As I said at the start, this has been a marathon. It is exciting to see this portion of the race come to a close. My publisher is fully behind this and thinks the book fits into a real need in the market as a book that young boys will want to read. Award-winning author Jane Yolen in her blurb said that “at its core it’s a sweet tale of first contact.”

This process has been long and rewarding in many ways, and I learned quite a bit along the way:

- Be willing to listen to criticism, and make changes if they make sense.
- All opinions are subjective. What works for one person is not what will work for another.
- If you believe in what you have, stay committed and be persistent.
- Find the people who support you, and let them help.

I am looking forward to what will happen on the next part of my journey, and I am hoping my next novel won’t take quite so long.

Peter Thompson grew up in Illinois and lives near Chicago. He remembers how excited he was when the first astronaut stepped on to the moon. He has had an appreciation of space and all its possibilities ever since. His love of children’s books developed while reading to his three sons. Summer on Earth will be released in August of this year.
Season’s Crop

Spring – Summer 2017

Compiled by Natalie Ziarnik

Creativity is blooming all across Illinois this spring! Enjoy these new releases by our members. To find out more about these titles, please subscribe to Book Bounty at http://illinois.scbwi.org/ at the bottom of the page.

Picture Books

• “Mama, LOOK!” by Patricia J. Murphy and David Diaz. Little Bee Books, February 2017.

Middle Grade


Young Adult


Natalie Ziarnik is the author of Madeleine’s Light and the forthcoming A Lullaby of Summer Things.
Writing Tips

Point of Entry

By Michelle Falkoff

One of the most important decisions when writing a novel is where to start. It sounds easy—start at the beginning, right? But it’s not always clear exactly where the beginning is, or whether that’s even the best way to open the book, so this column will discuss how to work through the process of figuring out the optimal way to invite readers into your narrative.

The first thing to think about is where to start, and by that I mean how one starts thinking about the book as a whole, as opposed to how one starts writing it. Some people start with character; they form an impression of someone they’d be interested in writing about, or they’re inspired by someone real, or someone pops into their head fully formed and demands that she take center stage in a book. Others start with a sentence, whether it’s the first one or one that will be key to the narrative or even the ending. (John Irving always says that he needs to know the last sentence of the book before he can begin.) I remember listening to Jim Crace speak about starting with a question, and the book serves as the answer. There’s no wrong way to begin, but everyone has to start somewhere, and identifying the seed of the idea that generated the concept of the book is helpful when thinking about how to move into the narrative.

The next thing to consider is where we start writing, and by that I mean the first words we put down on the page. Some people write in order; they start on the first page and move through the narrative until they reach the end. Others write the parts of the book that inspire them first, and then they think about how those pieces fit into the overall structure. (Scrivener is a great tool for people who write this way; it allows a lot of flexibility in constructing narrative and moving pieces around seamlessly.) If you’re someone who tends to write out of sequence, it often helps to be a good outliner, or at least someone who can use the fragmented scenes to construct an outline once it’s time to put the pieces of the book together.

Only after these two considerations does it really make sense to think about where the book should start. For books that are structured chronologically, it makes sense to start at the beginning, but that begs the question of what the beginning really is. In a biography we’d start with the beginning of a person’s life, but that’s not usually the optimal way to start a novel; rather, it’s better to think about the impetus for the narrative for our main character, and then start the story where it starts for her.

It doesn’t always make sense to start at the beginning, though, especially for novels that have complex plot structures. Many books start with teasers set at some distant point in the future, which provide a driving force for the narrative as readers work through the book to get to the events hinted at in the beginning. Some books have a frame narrative, where the narrative starts in one place and then moves back in time; others have both past and present storylines, moving back and forth, which raises the issue of whether to start in the present or the past.

If you’re debating where your book should begin, here are some common approaches:

1. The literal beginning, or as I often think of it, “This is the day everything changed.” In this type of opening, there’s usually an action scene of some kind very close to the opening. We sometimes start in the middle of that action, or very close to when it starts, and we move from this dramatic moment to some background that explains how we got there and how the event is significant. From there we move forward into examining the fallout of the inciting event.

2. A place a little before the events that prompt the narrative. This is often a largely chronological approach, where the narrator gives us enough background to understand the characters in stasis, so we can see how the inciting event affects the people who are important to the book.

3. At or near the end. Sometimes it can be fun to start with an opening that hints at or reveals information that lacks context, and the structure of the book is to provide that context so what we learned at the beginning makes
sense. Some books are even told backward—Martin Amis’s Time’s Arrow is a wonderful and literal example of this, in that it relates events in the reverse order in which they occurred, filtered through the point of view of a narrator who believes the events are occurring in the usual, forward-progressing sequence. It’s disorienting and fascinating and serves as a useful example of how many different approaches there can be.

4. In the middle. One of my favorite books, Donna Tartt’s The Secret History, opens right in the middle, with a scene depicting a murder. We know who died, and we even know who did it, but we have no idea why. The next section moves us back in time to everything leading up to the murder, and the final section deals with the fallout.

5. Anywhere you want. The great thing about novels is that as long as you teach readers how they work—what the rules are, what readers can expect from the story—you can structure them any way you like. E. Lockhart’s We Were Liars is a great example of this—the book moves all over the place in time, starting in the present but moving through different time periods, giving us events in whatever order the narrator feels appropriate, and her own ability to render events is severely affected by a brain injury and problems with memory, which complicates the story both for her and for us.

If you’re thinking about where to begin and you don’t know which option is best for you, a fun writing exercise is to try more than one. Write the scene that makes the most intuitive sense, given where your book is going, but then try a different approach and see what options that opens up in terms of enticing readers and teaching them what your book is about. I sometimes try writing opening scenes from the point of view of someone other than the main character, even though I know I won’t use them; it helps me see how others might view the relevant events, and it can give me information about what’s empirically important at the beginning of the book.

I hope some of these tips are helpful, and I’d love to hear other suggestions about the kinds of openings people find effective. Good luck beginning!

Michelle Falkoff is the author of Playlist for the Dead (2015), Pushing Perfect (2016), and Questions I Want to Ask You (forthcoming 2018). She lives in Chicago.

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Food For Thought

Programming for Published Members—Save the Date!

Our next Food For Thought will be October 28 and the topic will be Contracts. All published and under-contract members of SCBWI are invited to join an expert in the field in a discussion and q & a about publishing contracts. You do not need to have PAL status to attend FFT, but you should be published (traditional, self, magazine market, etc.) or under contract. Save the date and watch the List Serve and IL calendar for details as to time and place.

**PAL Member Pop-In**

Join other PAL Published members for an opportunity to network and catch up. You know you love to see old friends and meet the newest Pal members. Make time for this fun “artist’s date” to exchange ideas and find out what everyone is up to.

**Chicagoland PAL Member Pop-In**

May 13, from 10AM to 12 noon.
Email with full details to follow.

**Downstate PAL Member Pop-In**

May 18, email with full details to follow.

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What Could Go Wrong?

It started out innocently enough, happily agreeing to pop back for another guest article here on the windy prairie. Sitting in my DropBox were quite a few topics created as a follow-up to the Photoshop Webinar I presented recently with Dana Carey for SCBWI France.

After I had decided upon what I believed to be a fun subject, the Face Aware Liquify Filter in Photoshop, the first step was gathering together the sketches used as the main subject in the webinar, a young Indonesian girl. She had appeared last year on my page of random sketches of children drawn from my head. Over time she managed to captivate my curiosity. Who is she? What is her story?

Illustrator Tips

The Adobe Photoshop Face Aware Filter

By Kathryn Ault Noble

Original Sketch on Left with the Identical Image Flipped Over on Right. No matter how many times I look at this, the one on the left is mostly straight up, but the one on the right is leaning significantly. Obviously they are the same so it is important for me to always flip my images to actually be able to see any wobbliness.

Redrawn Face on Left. Her age appears to have gone up owing to a reduction in depth of the hair on top as well as a sharpening of the chin. I first thought it was the change in hairstyle, but my mistake was in assuming the alignment of facial components was enough to hold her age as I tightened the drawing, as demonstrated above.
The House of Mirrors

After I had done several passes to redraw her as a tighter sketch, it was clear each attempt to make her face and shoulders symmetrical stole her personality away completely, and her age fluctuated with each sketch. Instead of only flipping the image horizontally to better “see” the wobbliness, I also did a series of mirrored half-faces. And to help me understand her face better, I researched photo references of Indonesian girls of various ages.

The Shape Changer

Of course this ended up compounding the problem. Fortunately, Adobe included a new Face Aware Liquify Filter in the more recent versions of Photoshop CC 2015.5 – 2017.

Liquefying Faces

Does this bring back visions of melting faces in Raiders of the Lost Ark? Adobe has information on how to use the Filter on their help site, but this article, written by Steve Patterson, was the most thorough and accessible, in my opinion:

“There’s sliders for adjusting the size, angle and distance of the eyes. Other sliders for adjusting the height and width of the nose. Still more sliders for reshaping the mouth (including a person’s smile), and even more for things like raising or lowering the forehead and chin, expanding or contracting the jawline, and adjusting the width of the face.

The Liquify filter also gets a brand new Face Tool which allows us to control the sliders simply by clicking and dragging directly on the image itself. The Face Tool even lets us do things that we can’t do with the sliders, like adjust the cheeks, reposition the nose, and even move a person’s eyes in different directions!” — Steve Patterson

1. Open an image. Open an image in Photoshop, and select a layer that contains a photo of a face. Go to Filter > Liquify… to open the photo in the Liquify window.

2. Enlarge the eyes. In the Liquify window, click the triangle to the left of Face-Aware Liquify. Tip: If there is more than one face in a photo, go the Select Face menu in Liquify and choose the face to adjust. Click the triangle to the left of Eyes to reveal sliders that affect just the eyes. Drag those sliders to adjust the size, height, width, tilt, and/or distance of the eyes until you get a look you like.

3. Adjust the shape of the nose. Click the triangle to the left of Nose to view sliders you can use to change the shape of the nose. Drag the Nose Height slider to the left to elongate the nose. Drag the Nose Width slider to the left to narrow the nose.

4. Widen the smile. To access sliders for adjusting the mouth area, click the triangle to the left of Mouth.

Drag the Smile slider to the right to increase the man’s smile. Drag the Lower Lip slider to the left to make the lower lip thicker. Drag the Mouth Width slider to the right to expand the mouth horizontally. Drag the Mouth Height slider to the right to expand the mouth vertically.

5. Elongate the face. To change the shape of the man’s face, click the Face Shape triangle. Drag the Forehead Height slider to the right to make the forehead taller. Drag the Jawline slider to the right to expand the jaw. Drag the Face Width slider to the left to contract the width of the face.
Sliding Back in Time

With the Face Aware Liquify, we can move a character back in time to an earlier age and it won’t even involve a Flux Capacitor! But BEFORE grabbing the sliders and haphazardly reducing and enlarging facial components, a solid understanding of spatial ratios is recommended:

“The biggest differences between a child and an adult face are the scale ratios of the facial features. As you can see, in the adult face, the eyes are located close to halfway between the top of the head and the chin. In the infant, we can see that the area above the eyes is greater in length than the area below. Notice also that the distances between the other features — the nose, the lips and the chin — get shorter as well. However, while the distances shrink, the relative sizes of the features appear to stay the same. This gives them the appearance of features being larger on a child’s face than on an adult, when really, it’s only the distances between them getting smaller that creates the effect.
Other important attributes of a child’s face are the lack of a pronounced jawline and pointed chin, and the absence of prominent cheekbones. Notice also that the nose is more upturned. So too are the brow ridge and jaw. These angles are easier to see in profile.” — Paul Easton

Stay Out of the Shadows

As usual I ended up digging too deeply, hitting some areas in my research on drawing facial proportions which exposed so much racism I was sickened. I felt I was seeing a whole field of study on facial “aesthetics” in a way I could never unsee. I did not know whether to back slowly out and ignore what I had seen (which is not in my nature), or address it in a manner which would challenge myself and every educator/illustrator to consider how we might approach drawing and teaching the proportions of the human face differently.

The Monster Appears

As I researched the subject of drawing facial proportions, an internet image search left much to be desired in terms of ethnic diversity. Many of the how-to images, which came from books created in the early to mid 20th century, were almost exclusively based on the European face and focused on a particular “ideal beauty” handed down from the Greeks and Romans. For instance, I found an old Jack Hamm page being assigned to current 7th grade art students and felt a wave of angst. Listen to these words and decide if this is how you would want any young person to approach drawing:

“Many students are not able to construct a well-proportioned face because they violate the equilateral [sic] law of facial feature arrangement.”

VIOLATE? LAW? It’s art, not physics. If there actually were a law dictating facial feature arrangement, the majority of us would be in jail for breaking it. He goes on with his idea of this facial law:

“Common failings are: Eyes that are too close together, noses that are too long or short, mouths that are too far removed from the eyes, chins that are too big, etc. Simply the knowledge of this triangle safeguard will assist in placing features correctly.”

Failings? Too Short. Too Long. Too Big. Correctly? I am starting to understand why so many children grow up afraid of art, using the phrase “I can’t draw” as a protective device against exposing themselves to the fear that not only their drawings but they themselves may be deemed incorrect.

Children should not be exposed to this potentially demoralizing philosophy of mathematical perfection, based primarily on the Northern European face, but I repeatedly found them on a variety of how-to or educational sites.

Unfortunately, the search words Loomis and Racist brought up more results than could be easily ignored in internet searches. After reading comments on various art forums, I was disappointed to see most people were willing to say Loomis was a racist but merely a product of his time, and therefore the quality of his instructional materials should allow them to prevail. I do not agree.

“These are measurements I have personally accepted as ideal. Realizing the Standard proportions were based on Latin types, I have worked these out as ideal American.” — Loomis
You Might Want to Do a Comb Over

One of the most troubling areas I stumbled onto was the tentacles of Victorian phrenology tangled through early to mid 20th century “how to draw” books.

“This belief that the protuberances on the skull provided an accurate index of talents and abilities was particularly urged to be applied to education and criminal reform.”

Excuse Me, But You Have Math All Over Your Chin

The internet is paved with articles leading us to believe there is a perfect face, mathematically proportioned, which can become the model for definable perfection. The Mask, used to create the perfect face, brought to you by The Golden Ratio, scalpel and sutures.

Calipers were actually applied to defendants' heads in criminal court cases. And while phrenology did lead eventually to the current understanding of how the different regions of the brain operate, to call phrenology a pseudoscience is generous, in my opinion. Images dredged from library archives, which should never have seen the light of day again, now appear extensively throughout Pinterest.
Redeeming the Day

A positive outcome of my investigation into the resurgence of this disturbing information was that I connected with well-known forensic artist Carrie Stuart Parks. I felt compelled to thank her for the group of inclusive “how to draw” books she and Rick Parks have released in this new millennium. I communicated my distress at what I had seen while researching the topic of facial proportions and let her know the joy I experienced when seeing the covers of her books. When I asked how she approached facial proportions in her step by step instructions, she shared some of her written descriptions:

*The explanation of how to draw a feature is fun—for example: “the end of your nose is like a flying bird between two parenthesis. The more the bird flaps his wings, the more nostril you can see. As the bird comes in for a landing, the less nostril you can see.”* —Carrie Stuart Parks
Writer’s Bookshelf

A Review of Deep Work by Cal Newport

By Amy Alznauer

The other day, in a burst of Internet surfing and skimming, I came across a statement author David Foster Wallace made in a 2005 commencement address. True freedom, he said, “means being conscious and aware enough to choose what you pay attention to… because if you cannot exercise this kind of choice in adult life, you will be totally hosed.”

How often do I feel like that, totally hosed? Like so many in this community, I spend my days struggling to balance writing with the demands of raising children and working part-time, not to mention with the demands of an increasingly addictive smartphone and computer. I often worry my life will get swallowed up by busyness, and I’ll spend my time merely surfing and skimming and never get down to what really matters.

So when a front-page piece in the New York Times mentioned Cal Newport’s new book Deep Work: Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World, I immediately borrowed it from the library. He opens by telling a beautiful story of how Carl Jung once built a stone tower in rural Sweden to wall himself off from distraction. Deep Work is Newport’s call for us all to build, at least figuratively, our own stone towers. So if you can look past his occasionally frenzied tone – “I’m convinced I haven’t yet reached my full value-producing potential!” – his book offers not another manual on craft, but an excellent guide for creating a life in which craft can flourish.

A Case for Cultivating Deep Work

In Part One Newport makes a case for deep work. He begins by arguing that the Internet is creating “a universal bazaar” where everyone has immediate access to the very best, which in our case means the very best stories, the very best books. So it is harder than ever to stand out. But, at the same time, the Internet is wearing away our ability to concentrate and produce elite work. So Newport thinks that if you can harness the uncommon skill of working deeply, you will possess the 21st century’s greatest superpower.
offering a less demanding substitute for true productivity. When the outcome of our work is intangible (as daily drafting and revising so often is), “doing lots of stuff in a visible manner” gives us a proxy for accomplishment.

But here’s why we should really care. Distraction is problematic not just when it’s happening; it actually erodes our ability to concentrate, period. By exposing ourselves to perpetual interruption and redirection, we create the habit of a scattered mind.

And Newport backs this up with science. An interruption leaves what researchers call an “attention residue.” If you pause in your work to check email or Facebook or Slate, what you read leaves a film on your mind, an understanding of your working life whatever it is that is established in your mind as a dominant, wholly absorbing idea.”

Newport spends the rest of Part One detailing all the benefits of this kind of absorbed attention. Here are a few highlights.

If shallow concerns and practices fill up your time, “your mind will construct an understanding of your working life that is dominated by stress, irritation, frustration and triviality.” What you pay attention to, he says, will create the world you experience.

Furthermore it is not just what you pay attention to that matters, but the very practice of going deep. It is deep focus itself, psychologists say, that generates happiness and a sense that life is worth living.

And finally, drawing on philosophy, Newport says the purpose of any devoted craft is not to drum up new meanings, but rather to discover the meanings that are already present. So by working deeply at our craft we move from the narrow confines of extreme individualism out into the broader world, which is filled with “shining wondrous things.”

So now, after arguing that deep work will lead not only to great accomplishment but to a life well lived (are you intrigued yet?), Newport launches into Part Two, four rules for building that stone tower and so providing for a life of depth.

Rules for Practicing Deep Work

His first rule is right on point: “Work Deeply.” But it’s not so simple. You can’t just head out full of vigor and resolve and expect success. Humans are full of desire, Newport says. “People fight desire all day long.” And furthermore, he says, people have a fixed amount of willpower that diminishes with use. So to combat distraction Newport recommends adopting a formal “depth philosophy.” He lists four such philosophies.

The first is the most radical: monasticism. Taking this approach requires radically minimizing all obligations outside of a central deep task. He quotes the novelist Neal Stephenson. “If I organize my life in such a way that I get lots of long, consecutive, uninterrupted time-chunks, I can write novels,” he says. “But as those chunks get separated and fragmented my productivity as a novelist drops spectacularly.”

Although Newport doesn’t mention her, Annie Dillard has a similarly brazen declaration on her website: “I can no longer travel, can’t meet with strangers, can’t sign books, … can’t write by request, and can’t answer letters. I’ve got to read and concentrate.” This might seem extreme but Newport suggests that if you are someone “whose contribution to the world is discrete, clear, and individualized,” a category that definitely includes writers, then you should seriously consider this option. “It might be the deciding factor,” he warns, “between an average career and one that will be remembered.”

He goes on to detail three other approaches: the bimodal (alternating between being a hermit and something less radical), rhythmic (following a set, daily schedule), and journalistic (fitting work in where you can).

Next, Newport talks about the importance of ritual. Paraphrasing columnist David Brooks, he says, “Great creative minds think like artists but work like accountants.” So even before you begin to work, be deliberate. Designate a set place and time to work, a goal for how much you will complete (think: word count, number of pages), a support system for fueling your brain (food, coffee, circulatory system breaks), and a regular shutdown routine.

He also suggests departing from daily ritual and making grand gestures (which always seem to verge on the monastic). Mathematician Andrew Wiles worked in an attic in secret for seven years to produce the astonishing proof of Fermat’s Last Theorem. J. K. Rowling checked into a hotel to write Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows. An MIT physicist regularly holes up on an island with no Internet or even phone access.

But reading these stories, I couldn’t help remembering essayist Vivian Gornick tell of her own disastrous grand gesture. To finish her first memoir she packed herself off to Yaddo, the famous writer’s colony. But faced with all that
rared expectant time, she froze. “I wanted to kill myself,” she said in her deadpan Bronx accent. “What do you mean?” someone asked. “I mean,” she said, exasperated, “I wanted to die.” She went back to Manhattan and finished her book in the usual way, while living her life.

Fortunately, Newport's second rule, “Embrace Boredom,” returns us to the everyday. Our brains can no longer focus, he says, because they demand perpetual diversion. If we could learn to simply wait and be bored, we could rewire our brains to resist the need for distracting stimuli. This makes me think of comedian Louis C.K.'s skit on cell phones. “You need to build an ability to just be yourself and not be doing something,” he says. “That's what phones are taking away. The ability to just sit there. That's being a person.” Boredom calms our brains down, readies them for harder tasks.

And since boredom is just the flipside of focus, Newport then offers several exercises for focus training. He details the practice of brain interval training, in which you focus intensely for fixed periods, pushing yourself deeper and longer each time. He talks about his own practice of productive meditation, or learning to work out difficult problems on the fly. And he even gives a step-by-step method for memorizing a shuffled deck of cards.

It should be clear by this point that Newport believes the main source of distraction is the Internet, and social media and entertainment sites in particular. So his third rule is “Quit Social Media.” He doesn't mean this literally, at least not for everyone, but he doesn't hide his personal opinion that social media is “lightweight whimsy” and an “unimportant distraction.”

He worries about social media because by offering “personalized information arriving on an unpredictable intermittent schedule,” these sites are designed, calibrated to be highly addictive. He cautions against adopting what he calls the “any-benefit” mindset. Often we assume anything Internet is good, and even more that if an online platform offers some or any benefit, then it's worthwhile. He urges us to follow a two-step sorting process. First, identify a limited number of professional and personal priorities, and then ruthlessly reject any online tool that doesn't have a “substantially positive impact” on these priorities. To guard against the inevitable objection that twitter is essential to marketing, he even goes through a quick analysis of how many book sales an average twitter practice is likely to generate. His conclusion? Not very many.

His final rule is “Drain the Shallows,” and here I'll just touch on the one behavior he says is more important than all others: to develop a fixed schedule for every day. The idea isn't to set up an intransigent agenda, but to chart out daily how you hope to spend your time and then modify only when absolutely necessary. By forcing yourself into fixed blocks, you will adopt what he calls a scarcity mindset. It is a fact that we have limited time (we are mortal after all), but often we live and work as if time is infinite. The ultimate point, Newport thinks, is to “maintain, at all times, a thoughtful say in what you're doing with your time.”

He closes the book with hints for how to minimize the demands of email and a final pep talk for doing the hard work of forming a deep practice.

I might be particularly well primed to receive Newport's sometimes radical advice. Years ago, I loved essayist and farmer Wendell Berry's credo titled “Why I Am Not Going to Buy a Computer.” And I laughed a little too hard when the Onion ran a 2012 piece on the remaining four Facebook users who, when exposed to the site, weren’t “overpowered by a deep, nameless sadness” or didn't start immediately “calculating how much of their life they just let slip away.”

But truly, I don’t believe it is these grand gestures – locking oneself in a cell, forgoing Facebook or computers altogether – that really solve the problem. It is only the daily, intentional, personal work of setting up a life, building a tower, that will allow our minds to calm down, work deeply, and create a life that really matters. For “how we spend our days,” says Annie Dillard again, “is, of course, how we spend our lives.”

Amy Alznauer is the author of The Boy Who Dreamed of Infinity: The Life of Mathematical Genius Ramanujan (forthcoming from Candlewick Press). She lives and writes in Chicago, trying to build her own stone tower.
Book Look

Portraying the Refugee Experience in The Journey and Lost and Found Cat

By Elizabeth Brown

“They are migrating just like us. And their journey is very long too, but they don’t have to cross any borders. I hope, one day, like these birds, we will find a new home. A home where we can be safe and begin our story again.” – The Journey by Francesca Sanna

How does an author document the refugee experience in a picture book? How does an author portray the truth, not diminish the struggle, and avoid stereotypical portrayals of refugees as downtrodden, faceless victims? Two recent picture books, The Journey, written and illustrated by Francesca Sanna (Flying Eye Books, 2016), and Lost and Found Cat: The Story of Kunkush’s Incredible Journey, by Doug Kuntz and Amy Shrodes and illustrated by Sue Cornelison (Crown Books for Young Readers, 2017), focus on the experience of the refugee child and family. The authors have told their stories with aplomb, their emotionally palpable writing is heartfelt but not overwrought, and they offer accurate depictions of the refugee experience, especially suited for the child reader.

Both books offer hope and illuminate the resilience of the human spirit, especially meaningful in these times when the refugee crisis is at its most serious since World War II. The Journey is a tale of many migrant and refugee stories combined into one journey. The childlike voice of the narrator comforts the reader, describing the plight, struggles, and overall journey of this refugee family. Lost and Found Cat tells of the refugee experience through the tale of a refugee family’s loss of their cat, which in turn becomes a metaphor for their own journey to a new life. Both of these books do justice to the child refugee as a strong, three-dimensional character, with great appeal to the child reader as well as the adult (parent, teacher, librarian, or caretaker).

Lost and Found Cat: The Story of Kunkush’s Incredible Journey

The journey of Kunkush is a metaphor of the journey of the family. Picture book readers are able to understand the refugee experience through the loss of the pet and the joy of being reunited with it at the end:

Since they could only bring what they could carry, they had packed just one bag full of food and water. They would buy clothes later. But Sura had decided they could not leave without their beloved cat, Kunkush (KUN-koosh). Sura prayed that the cat, hidden in a small carrier, would stay quiet.

The portrayal of the refugee experience is told with emotion and knowledge of the experience, especially since the authors of this book lived and worked with the family and within the refugee camps (Amy was a volunteer and Doug was a photojournalist). This makes the account of this refugee story ring with authenticity. Furthermore, much of the conflict and fear can be seen and felt in the illustrations, aiding the young reader in understanding the experience of the refugee family. The authors give the reader the background to understand the refugee experience, and the reader can get a clear sense of the terror, fear, and hardships all refugees most likely encounter: fleeing war, hiding, fear of being caught, making it to safety, and starting a new life in a new country. The hardships all appear in the book but are told in a child-friendly way.

Even though the story is told from a third-person reportorial point of view, the authors do a solid job at relaying this uplifting story of loss, hope, and starting anew. Their voice and point-of-view choices make the story easier for the child to understand and allow this true story to affect the reader deeply.

The ending of the book not only brings the family to a satisfying ending but brings the reader full circle: “After four months and thousands of miles, Kunkush and his family were finally together in their new home. ‘We are all safe now.’” This is an emotionally satisfying tale of strength for all involved.

The Journey

The ingenious storytelling in The Journey weaves many refugee and
migrant tales into one. In the words of Francesca Sanna in her author’s note:

The Journey is actually a story about many journeys, and it began with the story of two girls I met in a refugee centre in Italy. After meeting them I realized that behind their journey lay something very powerful. So I began collecting more stories of migration and interviewing many people from different countries…I knew I wanted to create a book about these true stories…This book is a collage of the people within them.

Like Lost and Found Cat, The Journey has illustrations that are colorful to indicate hope and promise, and dark and foreboding on the page when war and possible death are introduced. Sanna’s illustrations do so much to describe the story and make the conflicts the refugees face very understandable for the child reader.

The portrayal of the journey clearly depicts the dangers and the various levels of risks while taking the reader on this journey with the family. Starting from a place of war and death, the travails across rugged lands, hiding in fear, and sailing across seas in crowded boats are all clearly spelled out for the reader, who is able to live through them with the child.

The depiction of the child refugee is similar to that in Lost and Found Cat in that the journey is seen and experienced as an “adventure” by the children: “We don’t want to leave but our mother tells us it will be a great adventure. We put everything we have in suitcases and say goodbye to everyone we know.”

Similarly, Sanna uses beautiful, lyrical prose to capture some of the magic of the journey, even though the reason for the journey is rooted in war, persecution, and other causes of fear and destruction: “The boat rocks and rocks as the waves grow bigger and bigger. It feels as if the sea will never end. We tell each other new stories. Stories about the land we are heading to, where the big green forests are filled with kind fairies that dance and give us magic spells to end the war.”

Sanna’s use of such poetic language aids the child reader in grappling with the hardships and conflicts the family face.

Both stories are journeys of a family unit, a mother and her children, seeking a better life. The reader experiences the journey through the child’s eyes more directly in The Journey because of the first-person point-of-view choice made by Sanna: “She shows us pictures of strange cities, strange forests and strange animals until she finally sighs, ‘We will go there and not be frightened anymore.’” Overall, both books clearly captivate the reader while explaining the refugee experience and struggle. They end with hope and promise, which makes their messages resonate deeply with the reader and the parent/teacher/caregiver.

The Journey and Lost and Found Cat are both strong books in the increasing number of social justice books published today to help children understand the worldwide refugee crisis. In the critical times in which we live, it is wonderful to have well-written stories offering knowledge, reassurance, and emphasizing resilience for children and adults.

Other Notable Children’s Books Depicting the Refugee Crisis

- Teacup, by Rebecca Young, illustrated by Matt Ottley, Dial Books, 2016.

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Time = a valuable commodity of which most of us wish we had more.

Twitter = an online news and social networking service requiring a certain investment of time.

Authors/Illustrators = creative sorts who require loads of time to work on and perfect their craft.

So why should said Author/Illustrators spend one second of Time on Twitter?

This is the question I wanted answered when I attended the Food For Thought event, “Hello, My Tweet!” in late February. And boy, did I get answers!

Reasons Twitter Is a Valuable Use of Your Time

• Twitter is where many of today’s agents and editors are ‘hanging out.’ By following them, you can see what they are saying/reading/wishing for! When you are ready to query, mentioning something they’ve said on Twitter will let them know you are an informed writer and that you have selected them for a reason and are not just blanket querying.

• Through following agents and editors on Twitter, you can learn their tastes and interests, as well as get in on special events like “Pitch Madness” (#PitchMad or #PitchMad) where you can pitch your WIP (work-in-progress) directly to a select group of agents and/or editors! It’s like getting a FastPass at Disney, you go straight to the front of the line/slush pile. One other example of connecting with these seemingly out-of-reach agents is by typing in #MSWL, which stands for Manuscript Wish List, where agents post what type of manuscript they would love to see in their inbox. Again, another FastPass! If Agent X says she is dying to see a dystopian YA novel featuring a breadbox as the main character, and that’s what you’ve just written, BOOM! You tweet back to Agent X and arrange to send it to her.

• You can bond with or just follow other writers or illustrators who write/illustrate in your genre, for example, #historicalfantasy or #picturebookclub. There are live chats to participate in, some scheduled, some impromptu. A few examples I scribbled down are: #MGLitChat, #KidLitChat, #SharpShu.

• If you follow people in the publishing/writing world, you will find interesting articles, facts, quotes, news and opportunities. You, in turn, can pass these on (“re-tweeting”) to your followers, who will appreciate your sharing with them. This is where Twitter differs from Facebook - it is a place where you present your Professional Self to those in your field. No pictures of your cat’s birthday party or badmouthing the guy who rear-ended your car and sped away. This is a Mix and Mingle with other writers, illustrators, editors, agents, publishers, librarians, booksellers.

• Once you are published (for the first time or again), Twitter is one more avenue in which you can (carefully, thoughtfully) promote your new book. HOWEVER, this is most effective if you have already had a presence on Twitter and have followers/friends. No one likes meeting a person and the first thing they do is try to sell them something. Which kind of leads in to the next point, which is…

• Interacting on Twitter gives you a potential to grow your audience. Think of it as networking at an enormous cocktail party, without going through the pain of high heels. Or of getting out of your yoga pants. Tons of booksellers, schools, and librarians are on Twitter. Follow them and they will probably follow you. Once your book comes out, they will already be familiar
OK, so once the lovely Sarah Hammond, Lisa Katzenberg and Natalie Rompella convinced us we needed to be on Twitter, they explained a few of the how-to’s.

- First, um, sign up. Twitter.com
- Next, you write a Profile. Be professional. Possible things to put on your profile: agent name, titles of book(s), one or two hobbies/interests.
- Handle - this is your username, preceded by the @ symbol. You can use your name @beverlypatt or something that identifies you, @tennisgal. From what I’ve read, it seems best to use something close to your own name.
- Hashtag - this symbol # is used before a key word associated with your tweet which makes it easy for others who are interested in the same topic to find. Example: #amwriting, #picturebooks, #TitleOfYourBook, #popcorn. You can also search for news about your topic by typing in #yourtopic.
- Follow - you follow people by clicking the blue ‘follow’ button. Good people to follow: other writers, experts in your field, publishers, editors, Publishers Weekly, School and Library Journal (SLJ), known fans/readers. It was highly recommended you follow someone named “Inkyelbows” as she has lots of great lists.
- Tweets and how to get them - Tweets are those who follow you. Usually if you find fellow authors in your genre (by putting key words like ‘YA’ or ‘MG’ or ‘writer’ etc into the search bar), and you follow them, they will follow you back. Follow authors you admire. Put your Twitter handle on your business card/website/email signature. Follow up on Twitter after meeting someone in person by following them and include a message. Follow up on Twitter after (and before!) a school, library, bookstore visit.
- What to tweet - craft knowledge, inspirational and motivational thoughts/quotes, art, humor, details about your WIP, news of upcoming events, links to interesting blog posts, questions, announcements, and good news regarding others’ successes. Aim for 80% of your quotes to be about someone or something OTHER than yourself. When you do speak of yourself/your books, one possibility is a “call to action” tweet by requesting your followers to “click here to order,” or “write a review on goodreads” or “please retweet!” (But don’t overdo, or you will lose followers.)
- Facebook link - Because your followers on Twitter will (hopefully) be somewhat different from your FB friends, our experts advised separating your Twitter from your FB - look in the ‘settings’ to do this.
- Other Important Things I Jotted Down But Omitted Details So You May Want to Google Them Yourself - Twitter Card, Tweet Deck, Tweet Chat and Tweet Roll (<.-don’t get excited, it’s nothing to eat. Darn!>), Raffle Copter, Twitter App, Share This (icon to put on your blog), Canva, HootSuite.com, udemy.com (social media courses).

As you can see, these ladies packed a TON of info into just a few hours and patiently answered all of our newbie questions, for which I and the other attendees could not thank them enough! And, lucky us, Lisa Katzenberger and Kym Brunner have agreed to be our brand-new Social Media Coordinators, graciously giving of their time to school us all on the ins and outs of the ever-changing online world. Woot!

A big shout-out to Sallie Wolf and Deborah Topolski as well, for setting up and running this great PAL event! Thank you all!

Bev shares her life with her high school sweetheart husband who still makes her laugh after mumblemumble years of marriage, four adult children who occasionally show up in need of a free meal or washing machine, and one golden retriever who has trained her to go on long walks and deal out dog treats with alarming regularity. Her last book, Best Friends Forever: A WWII Scrapbook, was an ALA finalist and 2010 Great Lake, Great Reads Pick. She is represented by Lorin Oberweger at Adams Literary and is hoping for a sale in the very near future. Bev has serious addictions to tennis, PBS television and Oberweis peppermint ice cream.

In closing, our incredible Twitter Team spoke to the importance of having an effective Twitter presence by giving VALUE (sharing important/interesting/amusing things), by using your own personal voice and by identifying your brand. Their recommendation? Aim for 5-10 tweets PER DAY (this is where we all gasped), not all at the same time (having the Twitter app on your phone is handy to tweet on the fly), and remember it’s about engaging with people 80% of the time and selling 20%.
Illustrator in the Spotlight

Jason Slater

Are you an illustrator or an author/illustrator?
Illustrator. I like being able to tell a story in pictures, it is a challenge and also universal.

What is your preferred medium to work in?
Digital, it is faster, more versatile and allows a ridiculous amount of experimentation with low risk. I sketch in traditional medium for fun and artistic exercise, but spend most of my time on the computer.

Tell us a little of your beginnings and journey as an illustrator.
I have always enjoyed comics and cartoons, and used to draw them all the time. After I went to college to get my BFA, I didn’t really pursue it aggressively. However, when my first daughter was born I was inspired and motivated to go into it full time.

Do you have favorite themes or characters you return to in your art?
Not really, I genuinely like depicting a whole range of stuff.

What does your workspace look like?
An incomprehensible mess; multiple monitors and sketch pads, covered by a plethora of water bottles and Mountain Dew, but hey, it gets the job done!

Please share an illustration and give us a brief “step-by-step” of your process.
As I said I work digitally mostly. I start with a quick sketch and quickly refine it in Photoshop. I send it to illustrator to digitally ink it. I then send it back to Photoshop as a smart object and add flat color. By keeping it as a smart vector object I can change any of the ink lines by quickly going back into that file in illustrator. Once I like the lines, and the color area, I start adding lights and darks, then a few strokes later I have my final image.

What three words best sum you up?

Which illustrators were your favorites when you were little?
Frank Miller, John Romita Jr., Richard Isanove, Chuck Jones/Tex Avery, Disney, Dr Seuss.
Which illustrators are your favorites now?
Right now I am digging Dan Santat’s work. It’s fresh, expressive and just fun. I also have a renewed appreciation for Norman Rockwell. He could exaggerate any expression or pose and still make it feel 100% real. Also Skottie Young, as his ink work is amazing.

Do you ever tuck little personal homages or details in your illustrations?
Not intentionally, but if an illustration is inspired by another work, it’ll show in the composition.

What’s one thing that may surprise people about you?
My awesomely awesome beard, and my bicycle, and my garden.

What inspires you creatively, spiritually, or emotionally?
My kids. I get to see how their imagination becomes real and they give me a nonstop source of ideas.

What gets in the way of your creativity?
My kids. Dude, seriously, if I only could get an uninterrupted block of time to do some work…

And, of course, please tell us: Where can we find you?
www.silenticonstudio.com
https://www.facebook.com/SilentIconStudio/
silenticonstudio@gmail.com
At this writing I find myself wandering through thoughts about whether or not my middle grade novel in verse will sell.

This is an unusual activity for me, since over five years ago, after twelve years of writing for children, I set aside the longing for book publication. I did it because it was shadowing my life and my writing, and I needed the light again. My emotional well-being and my work blossomed in the absence of wondering whether I'd ever have a book published.

I had to change my thoughts so that I could create a new, positive pathway with language that sounded something like, “I am a writer, whether or not I ever get a book contract. I will continue to write.”

The experience changed me as a person and a writer. Day after day, month after month, and then year after year as I practiced my craft, I became calmer, more positive about my work — but specifically, more trusting of myself and able to sort out critique better. I worked harder and better. My self-editing and revision skills sharpened and flourished, and I found myself essentially dispassionate about words, scenes, characters I previously wouldn’t have been able to disturb.

By the time I decided to begin submitting again, it was with a far more carefree, or casual, attitude — professional, to be sure, but no longer fearful of every word in a query.

I’m sure that there are writers who nailed this kind of thing down early in their careers. But it took me some time and effort — and was well worth it.

Then, a couple of years ago on a whim, I sent my then 90-page MG novel in verse to the Katherine Paterson Award at Hunger Mountain.

The manuscript, Reeni’s Turn, was named a Finalist and enjoyed the attention of Hunger Mountain’s editor, who brought it to the attention of an agent she was pretty sure might love it, too. Two years and six challenging revisions later, my completed, 268-page middle grade novel in verse is out on submission.

It is now the book I dreamed of writing but never thought I could. And I remind myself that I’d come to believe that that was the prize, the most important accomplishment.

I still believe it. I don’t dream about being famous, having a huge book deal, or winning some amazing award. As pretty as that picture could be, it would tilt me off balance.

But that doesn’t mean I’m devoid of writing dreams.

My dream is to hold my book in my hands, travel to schools, and discuss Reeni’s story with young girls, in particular. That’s all I’d love right now.

I am pretty certain that we all balance our dreams for our work, and the work itself, and that the balance changes throughout our creative and life journeys.

And as happy as I imagine I’ll be if my agent is able to sell my novel, I prefer the balance in which my work surrounds me and infuses my brain, heart, spirit. It’s an intense place of challenge, joy, longing, pain, and meaning.
That's where I feel best. Centered. Connected to myself and connected to the world.

That's where I feel at home. And as L. Frank Baum told us, there's no place like that.

Carol Coven Grannick loves and writes middle grade and picture books. Her MG novel in verse, Reeni’s Turn, was a Finalist for the 2014 Katherine Paterson Award and is currently on submission, as is her 2016 Katherine Paterson Award Finalist PB, Jakey’s Jazzy Rhythm. Her work has appeared in Cricket, Highlights, and Ladybug, and she is a regular guest columnist for Cynthia Leitich Smith’s Cynsations, as well as for The Prairie Wind.

Thank You, Laura!

By Dorothy Wiese

Special people influence others in life and in death. Laura Crawford was beyond special, which is why she tops my list.

I met Laura when she taught a workshop, “How to Write Children’s Books,” some years ago at Barnes and Noble, Spring Hill Mall, Dundee. Her thorough presentation and enthusiasm made me realize how important writing for children is to the joy of reading. Thank you, Laura, for turning my desire to write into a devoted writing adventure.

A beautiful young woman, inside and out, Laura was a reading specialist at Sleepy Hollow Elementary School. She loved teaching all ages of children, and she was a passionate author who led an SCBWI critique group at Barnes and Noble at Geneva Commons; she often attended the Spring Hill Mall critique group.

Laura encouraged adults to join her in writing for children. You could see the sparkle in her beautiful blue eyes and hear the uplifting laugh in her voice as she helped each of us grow in our craft and life. Her positive encouragement kept our spirits up during writing, editing, rejections, and moving on. She shared her experiences and set an example for us to “keep on keepin’ on.”

At the close of Laura’s presentation, I talked with her about my writing experience and my desire to write an adult book. However, I had long been a collector of beautiful picture books, and I loved reading to children. Laura invited me to attend two SCBWI local critique groups and decide if writing picture books would be a fit for me. She SCORED on that advice. Little did I know how difficult it is to write picture books, but Laura continued to steer me in the right directions. “Join SCBWI,” I did! “Attend local, state, regional, and national events including conferences, workshops, critique groups, and classes.” I did! “READ, READ, READ picture books and authors of books on writing, especially for children.” No problem here; I’ve always been a huge fan of reading. Through these activities, I have met wonderful, caring, sharing people. Thanks again, Laura.

My journey has led me to write several picture books. Although none has been published, I am happy with my progress and growth; I will keep on working toward the goal of publication. After joining SCBWI and attending two solid critique groups, I have attended events featuring authors’ presentations,
Prairie Writers' and Illustrators' Day, Spring Thaw, and Words in the Woods sponsored by SCBWI Illinois, and two SCBWI regional three-day conferences. Four classes in writing at Newberry Library, Chicago, and a class on voice at College of DuPage have enlightened me. Attending two Highlights workshops in Pennsylvania, and the Vermont Manuscript Workshop, Landgrove, VT, have enriched my writing. My manuscripts have received Honorable Mention from the 2015 and 2016 Writer's Digest writing competitions, and First Place from the Illinois 2015 Litchfield Student Educational Foundation Children's Book Writing Contest.

Thank you, Laura, for teaching me perseverance in writing for children. Your books, including In Arctic Waters, The American Revolution from A to Z, and the Post Card series, written in English and Spanish, are excellent. I know how hard you worked on Benjamin Franklin from A to Z in our critique group before it was published.

You were our cheerleader! Each of us in our critique groups felt special with your encouraging and positive comments. You would write bold comments such as “I love this,” “Good job,” “Good revising,” or “Good story—kids will like it” on our manuscripts. We learned a lot from you.

I've also learned from meeting other writers that everyone has ups and downs in their writing careers. With the encouragement and suggestions of other writers, I move on to the next revision or the next story. Even the best and most successful writers don’t see everything they write published, and they share my emotions. The act of writing, the encouragement of others (many of them strangers), the passion shared with others, and meeting interesting people are often my reward. I feel refreshed and motivated from these experiences; and I learn to observe, listen, improve my writing, and have fun in new ways.

No one “right” way exists. I can learn “rules” (better called suggestions), try new ways, and progress. “Failure” is not in my vocabulary. My mantra is “When I get published,” not “If.” If I accept my writing as is, I share it with special people in my life.

Thank you, Laura, for the love you shared. Your books and your teaching live on in all of us who knew you and those who only hear about you. We were all students from preschool through adulthood. We have grown in our craft and psyche because of you. You opened new worlds for us as you improved our writing, reading, patience, experiences, and worldview.

During your hospitalization, you continued your routine of submitting every Sunday, and you continued to critique manuscripts. You were taken too soon. As you approached death, you continued living through all of us by advising us on our writing. For this we are grateful.

Dorothy Wiese began writing children’s books and joined SCBWI in 2013. A devoted reader and writer, she taught secondary school and community college classes, including business education, for 32 years. She and her husband worked on their farm for many years while they worked off the farm and raised a daughter and son. She enjoys her six grandchildren and traveling. She received Honorable Mention from Writer’s Digest writing competitions in 2016 and 2015 and First Place from Litchfield Student Educational Foundation Children’s Book Writing Contest in 2015 for her manuscripts.