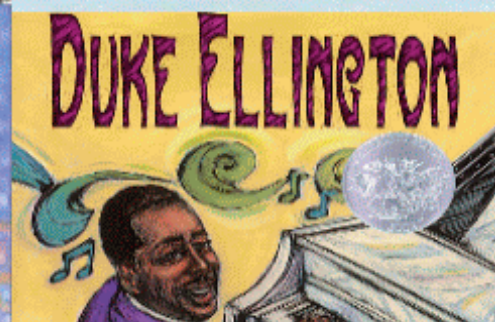
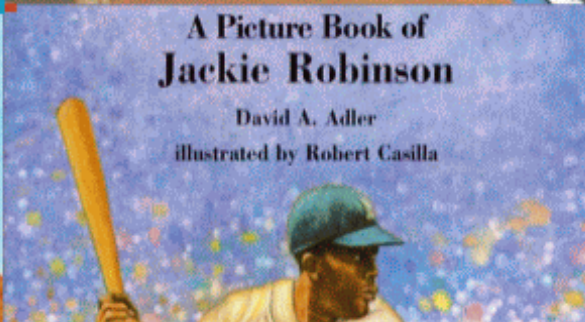
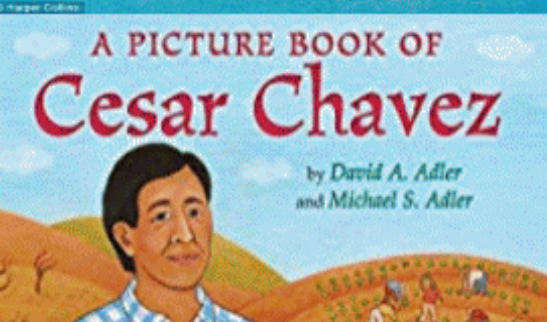
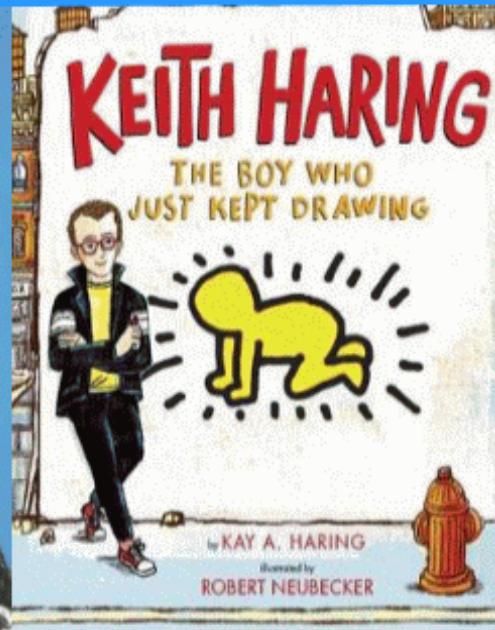
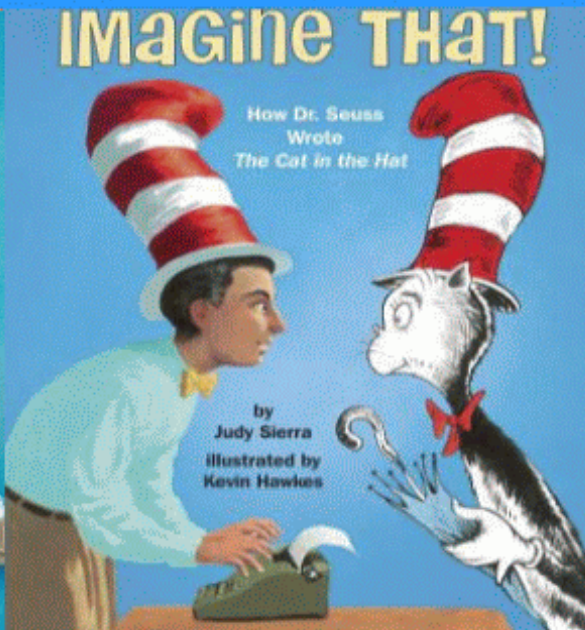
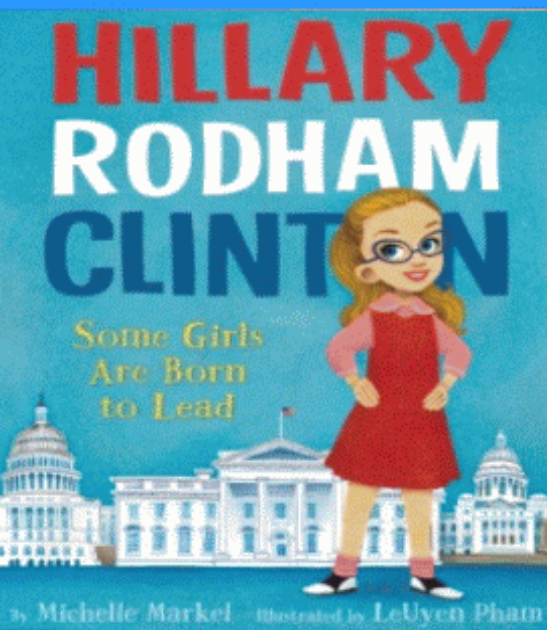
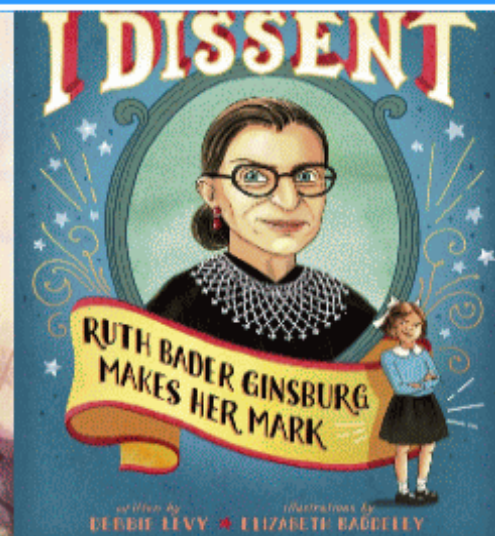
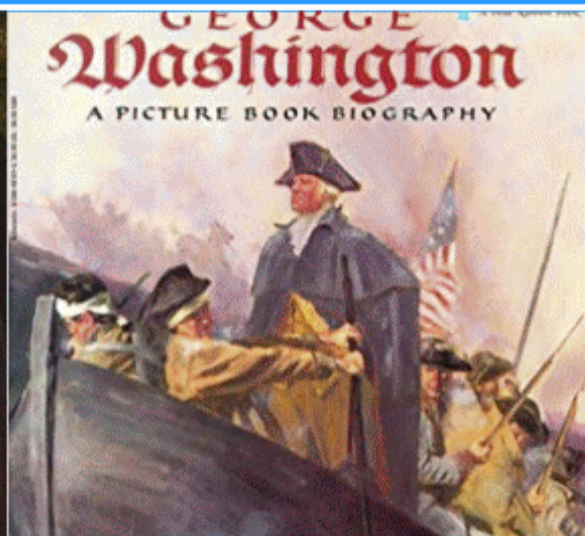
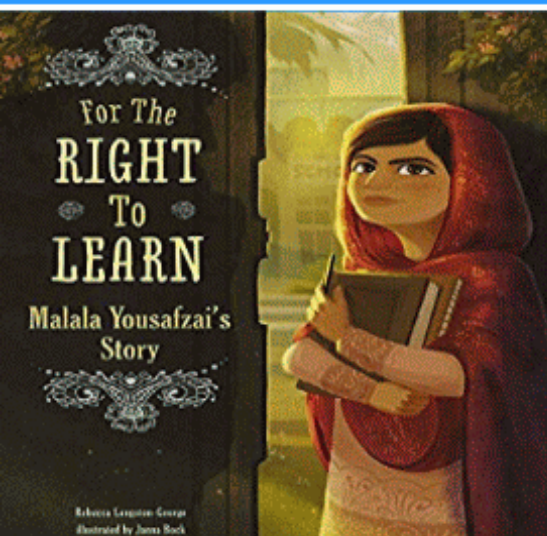


Children's Book Insider

July 2018



PICTURE BOOK BIOGRAPHIES COME OF AGE



PLUS Above the Slushpile Submission Code: Bloomsbury Publishing

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At Presstime:

Sydney Taylor Manuscript Competition for Unpublished Middle Grade Authors

The Association of Jewish Libraries sponsors the annual Sydney Taylor Manuscript Competition. A cash award of \$1,000 will be given for the best fiction manuscript appropriate for readers ages 8-13, written by an unpublished author. Unpublished is defined as not having published any works of fiction (commercially or self-published) for young readers. The book must be a work of fiction in English with universal appeal of Jewish content for readers aged 8-13 years, both Jewish and non-Jewish. It should reveal positive aspects of Jewish life.

Each entrant may submit one manuscript (64-200 pages) not currently under consideration by a publisher or another competition. Material should be a literary work of fiction in English. The story should serve to deepen the understanding of Judaism for all children. Short stories, plays, poetry, or collections of short stories are not eligible. Manuscripts should be submitted in PDF format by uploading through the AJL website, or on a CD mailed to the Competition's coordinator. Hard copies of the manuscript will not be accepted.

To assure impartiality, the manuscript **MUST NOT** include the author's NAME on it anywhere. **DO** include the TITLE at the top of every page of the manuscript. Each entrant will submit a cover letter and a curriculum vitae. The cover letter should include a short personal statement and a summary of the manuscript. Combine your cover letter and curriculum vitae into a single document and upload via the AJL website. **The deadline for submission of manuscripts is September 30.** Do not submit elsewhere until January 31, by which date the winner will be determined and all competitors notified.

For full rules and an application, go to http://jewishlibraries.org/content.php?page=STMA_Rules
(The link to for the application where you upload your manuscript is at the bottom of the page.)

Publisher Accepting Fiction, Nonfiction for All Ages

Holiday House is a publisher of quality hardcover children's books, from picture books to young adult, both fiction and nonfiction. The books tend to have a timeless quality but are accessible and appealing to readers. The publisher does not do mass-market books, including pop-ups, activity books, sticker books, coloring books, or licensed books. Holiday House's books fall into a broad range of themes. To review the publisher's current titles that fit the same theme as your manuscript, go to <http://holidayhouse.com/books-by-theme/>. This will help you determine if your book complements something on the publisher's list without duplicating an existing work.

Send the entire manuscript, whether submitting a picture book or novel. All submissions should be directed to the Editorial Department, Holiday House, 425 Madison Ave., New York, NY 10017. Send your manuscript via U.S. Mail. (Do not use certified or registered mail.) You do not have to include a self-addressed, stamped envelope, but do include your full contact information. Does not accept submissions by email.

Due to the volume of manuscripts received, Holiday House will only respond to submissions they are interested in publishing. All other manuscripts will be recycled. If interested in your manuscript, you will get a response within four months of receiving it.

Young Adult Imprint Accepting Submissions

Swoon Reads is a young adult imprint of Macmillan. The editors rely on reader input to choose future titles, and are dedicated to discovering new talent. Authors post their manuscripts on the Swoon Reads website (<https://www.swoonreads.com/>), and readers who are members of the site rate, comment, and give feedback on the work. There is no cost to upload a manuscript or become a Swoon Reads reader.

Interested authors should first visit the Swoon Reads site and become familiar with the concept of reader feedback. Also, review the submission tips (<https://www.swoonreads.com/submission-tips/>) for formatting and uploading instructions. Swoon Reads is accepting young adult and new adult manuscripts of any fiction genre with protagonists 14-23 years old. Finished manuscripts should be 50,000-70,000 words. To upload a manuscript, go to <https://www.swoonreads.com/submit-a-manuscript/>. The submission process is ongoing (no deadline) and books chosen for publication will receive a standard publishing contract from Macmillan Publishing.

Christian Magazine Seeks Content for Girls in Grades 1-3

Sparkle is a print, subscription-based magazine published six times a year by GEMA Girls' Clubs—an international, club-based ministry for girls. The mission of GEMS is to help bring girls into a living, dynamic relationship with Jesus Christ. *Sparkle* designed for girls in grades 1-3. It strives to give girls the building blocks to create a living and dynamic faith in Jesus Christ. The tagline is 'Sparkling Jesus' light into the world'. Submissions should avoid Pollyanna endings and predictable stories. Looking for pieces that are about real girls and are real topics girls can relate to.

Looking for fiction (adventure, fantasy, mystery, and stories about animals or situations readers can relate to in their daily interaction with family and friends. Stories should be realistic and need not always have a happily-ever-after ending. Does not publish stories with religious clichés). Length: 200-500 words. Nonfiction articles about topics that interest readers including: animals, activities, games, sports, music, famous people, interaction with family/friends/siblings, cross-cultural experiences, exciting service projects, and dealing with school work. Length: 100-400 words. Poetry, preferably rhyming, of 5-15 lines.

Sparkle does have a theme list for each issue, though submissions do not have to adhere to themes. For a current theme list and deadlines, go to <https://gemsgc.org/writers-guideline-sparkle-magazine/>

Place your manuscript within the body of an email, address to Kelli Gilmore, Managing Editor, and send to sparkle@gemsgc.org. Pays upon publication. Fiction and nonfiction writers receive 3-5¢ per word up to \$35.00 depending on length, quality, and rights. Poetry receives \$5.00 to \$15.00 depending on length, quality, and rights. Games and puzzles are paid from \$5.00 to \$15.00. All published writers receive two copies of the issue in which their piece is published.

Agent Seeks MG, YA, and Picture Book Author/Illustrators

Samantha Wekstein is a literary agent with Writers House (<http://www.writershouse.com/>). Her passion in publishing is YA fiction. She loves creative and epic fantasies in the vein of Sarah J. Maas or Leigh Bardugo. But she is also drawn to contemporary YA with multi-dimensional female characters like those of Rainbow Rowell, Julie Murphy and Melina Marchetta. She also loves middle grade of any kind, but especially books that deal with themes of friendship, adventure, or encountering tragedy for the first time. Her favorites are Sharon Creech and Gail Carson Levine.

She does not want to receive text-only picture book submissions. She will only review author/illustrator combinations, or standalone illustration work. Please do not send her literary fiction, stories featuring angels/demons, and works with themes of suicide or drug addiction.

Submissions should be emailed to swekstein@writershouse.com. Please submit a query letter in the body of your email with the first chapter as an attachment. Include the word "Query" in the subject line.

WRITING

ON THE GO!

by Robin Phillips

The sun is out and the sunscreen on. Summer is a time of vacations, weekend getaways, and fun outings, but that doesn't mean you have to take time off your writing. Get the most out of your travels by following three simple strategies: be prepared, be observant, be intentional.

Be prepared. In other words, be ready for the unexpected comment, an unlooked-for informational tidbit that fascinates, or the sight, taste, or feel of something that causes an emotional reaction. Precisely because we are on vacation, we experience our surroundings in a fresh way. We observe more closely. We listen more intently. We are often more relaxed because we are less rushed and have fewer distractions.

So be prepared to discover. New ideas can come in places you are not anticipating. Once, while traveling to a different destination, I visited a museum dedicated to the Packard family who built the automobile of that name. For some change, I bought a laminated timeline of the engineering and manufacturing improvements contributed by the Packard company in the last 100 years. While purchasing, I made the acquaintance of the very friendly and helpful volunteers who work at the museum. The whole visit became a treasure trove of contacts and facts about an engineering topic relatable to kids.

Next, be observant. Each of our senses evokes an emotion or a feel for a place. What do you hear when you wake up and when you go to sleep? Songbirds or delivery trucks? Crickets or traffic? Are the sounds annoying, soothing, or enchanting?

Listen also to people and their speech patterns. Notice not just accents, but the rate of talking, greetings and farewells, how much laughter occurs, and the decibel level.

Are the colors in the area different? Sunlight can change

in intensity or quality, for instance, from a warm, golden glow to a sharp, white glare.

Don't forget smells. The salty stench of sea lions on a beach is quite different from the musty odor of an antique shop or (my favorite) the hot butter smell of a fudge shop.

Notice local foods and their taste. Most places have a specialty or favorite. Although we have rhubarb festivals where I live, you are hard-pressed to find people in other states who recognize these red stalks. Also, what shows up on restaurant tables that you don't notice on your own? Vinegar in place of ketchup is one example.

Traveling with kids? Be thankful. What are their impressions of what you see and do? What do they notice? Any odd ways of looking at things you had not thought of yourself? What are they bothered about? How do you know if they are enjoying themselves? Notice what they notice. Ask them questions. All of this is fodder for rounding out your own characters or finding a nonfiction topic that might intrigue other kids as well.

If you can, check out online any place you'll be visiting before you go. I would include those you think you are very familiar with unless you have done this step before. It is not unheard of to live in a place for years, yet not be familiar with the special stories attached to it. A quick search may reveal personalities or historical facts that can be used in children's magazine articles or books. Finally, be intentional. Hold impromptu interviews (if necessary, get an email address to receive their permission to use quotes), collect information, take pictures, and, above all, take notes on all your observations.

There are many ways to take notes these days. The problem becomes finding them again and understanding them so that they are useful. If you have a favorite note-taking system, use that. If you do not, pick two and

Writing on the Go! continued

take both with you. For instance, although I always carry notebooks and pens, I once thought recording would work well and bought a small handheld recorder. I never used it for that purpose but found it invaluable for taping what other people said (with their permission, of course). Many people now use apps on their phones for notetaking, but sometimes I like something more discreet and faster, like a napkin and pen.

You need not be self-consciousness, however, about dictating or writing notes. So many people have devices in their hands now, it is no longer conspicuous to jot down ideas and impressions immediately. If you wait too long, you may either forget the idea, what it was connected to, and even why you thought it was worth writing down.

However, there are obvious times when immediate notetaking is not appropriate or possible, such as during white-water rafting. Therefore, another tactic for remembering is to take a few minutes each day to make or extend the notes about what you saw or heard or experienced. Include impressions, descriptions of other people and places, humorous incidences, or occasions where you felt intense interest or emotion. Fill out your notes with as many details as necessary. Many times, I have returned home only to read an impression and wonder what I meant since I could not remember the circumstances. Fortunately, the rafting trip touched on enough senses that I can still recall the warmth of the wetsuit, the hard spray of water, the screaming of our guide, and the sheer terror of riding a swollen, fast-moving river on a small piece of rubber.

Finally, take advantage of all the tourist information available in a vacation spot to intentionally prepare for future writing projects. Collect brochures from your hotel about area events or interesting places to visit. Collect business cards from local businesses and artists or postcards of area geographical features. Even if you do not visit each place on this trip, they are useful for browsing through later for plots, settings, characters, and historical background. Also, by having all this handy, you have a way to reach people who can answer questions you may have later on. You never know when you might want some local information to add verisimilitude to a story or nonfiction piece.

If you find yourself getting overwhelmed, remember you are a children's writer. Be as selective in your notetaking as you will be when you write for kids. A few vivid details are better than long descriptive passages. Dialogue and action make for more interesting reading in both fiction and nonfiction. And anything that makes you say "I didn't know that!" puts a spark in your writing. It is better to come home with a list of possible ideas to explore than pages of notes you dread deciphering. Take the pressure off your-

self, relax, and play. But also have a way to capture the thoughts that pop into your head, because they will.

So, whether your travels take you far from home or not, be prepared to write, be observant of the details surrounding you, and be intentional about capturing it all for later use. Instead of the frustration of time away from writing, you'll have the satisfaction of writing even when on the go.

TELLING LIVES:

PICTURE BOOK BIOGRAPHIES COME OF AGE

by William B. McIlvaine

What are the current trends in children’s biographies and how do those books get made and out into the market? Those subjects were addressed by a symposium in April hosted by New York University’s Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development and its Constantine Georgiou Library and Resource Center for Children and Literature. The subject was picture book biographies – stories of notable people in history or the present aimed at younger readers. The event was open to the public, and several dozen people attended, mostly educators, writers, and students.

Leonard S. Marcus, an NYU professor and authority on children’s literature, led off with a 20-minute talk about the history of children’s biographies. He noted that the subjects of picture-book biographies had broadened considerably in the past couple of decades. “Figures like George Washington and Harriet Tubman were about it,” he said of the offerings before then.

Marcus’ overview covered the books by notable picture-book authors and illustrators Jean Fritz, Alice and Martin Provenson, and Chris Raschka. Fritz, who died in 2017 at 101, wrote books with historical slants, unusual facts, and titles like *And Then What Happened, Paul Revere?*, *Why Don’t You Get a Horse, Sam Adams?*, *Where Was Patrick Henry on the 29th of May?*, *Will You Sign Here, John Hancock?*, *Can’t You Make Them Behave, King George?*, and *Shh! We’re Writing the Constitution*. Written in the 1970s and 1980s, these books paved the way for modern biographies because they humanized historical figures and invited young readers to interpret them for themselves.

“There was a mild impertinence to these titles, implying that the Founding Fathers were still heroes but that they didn’t require active veneration,” Marcus said.

In 1992, author/illustrator Chris Raschka (who won a Caldecott medal in 1994 for his picture book *Yo! Yes?*) published a picture book biography of jazz musician Charlie Parker, *Charlie Parker Played Be Bop*. Parker was almost as famous for his drug addiction as for his music, and Marcus called the way the author handled this “almost a magic trick.”

This led to the subject of the controversial *A Birthday Cake for George Washington*, published by Scholastic in 2016 and pulled just two weeks later after drawing heavy criticism over the depiction of smiling slaves. Though it was unlikely the book had been written and produced with a racial bias, Marcus suggested that this project had “not been thought through.”

“Picture books are perhaps not as straightforward as we thought,” he said.

A panel presentation followed focusing on the production of the picture-book biography of Jackson Pollock, *Action Jackson*, published by Roaring Brook Press in 2002. The participants were the authors, Sandra Jordan and Jan Greenberg; illustrator Robert A. Parker; the book’s designer, Jennifer Browne; and the editor, Neil Porter. They discussed how the book came to be and how they worked together.

An obvious question: Why Jackson Pollock? How many kids would know enough about him, or understand him and his abstract art? They described it as a book about “process” – the creation of one work, “Lavender Mist”, painted in 1950. Jordan and Greenberg had collaborated on two books before that, one an art book. “We were both fascinated by process,” Jordan said.

“Sandra and I saw ‘Number One’ [also titled ‘Lavender

Mist'] at a Pollock retrospective at Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2000," said Greenberg. "We were trying to feel the painting, imagining what it must have been like to paint that. We had so much fun talking about it, we wanted to let young people join the conversation."

It was a challenging project. "We wanted to revisit those questions about how something like this comes about; we wanted them to enjoy it and make it clear. This was not just a bio, but about the process of creating one picture."

"I originally saw it as a photographic book," said Porter, the book's editor. As it is, *Action Jackson* does contain a full-page reproduction of "Lavender Mist" because there was no sensible way to depict a complicated piece of abstract art in an illustration.

All parties agreed that Parker was the perfect illustrator for the project. Parker had briefly met Pollock twice, once at a party and again at an exhibition. "An ideal picture book is about matching the artist to the job," Porter said. Parker's watercolors in *Action Jackson* are colorful and expressionistic, and illustrate the stages of Jackson's process in creating the painting, from getting ready to paint (depicting his materials and the famous barn), his deliberate process, taking a break, revisiting the work, thinking about it until he decides the painting is done. Then he is ready to start again.

"The text has a wonderful rhythm to it, like the jazz he listened to," Porter said.

"We wanted to get all the details right," Greenberg said. Pollock was famous for doing paintings in a barn behind his house. "We called the Pollock-Krasner House in

Springs and they told us that painting wasn't painted in the barn, it was painted in the living room because it was raining that day."

"We actually checked with the Weather Bureau for those days in 1950 to make sure," Jordan said.

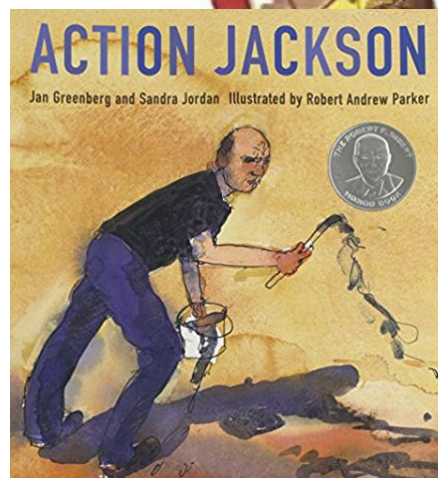
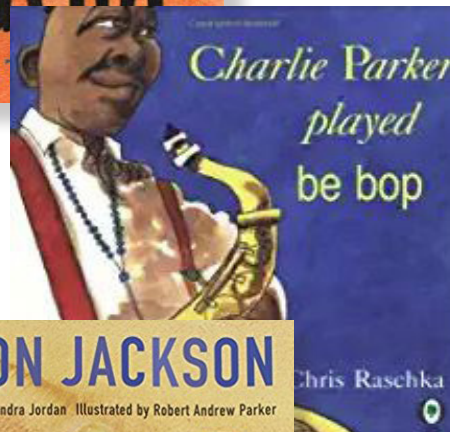
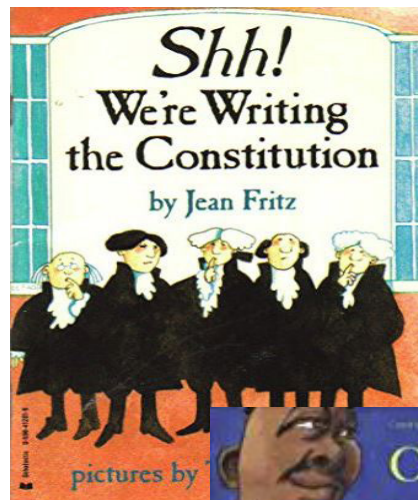
Other small details cropped up during the book's progress. One scene depicts Pollock in the kitchen making spaghetti sauce because they found out he had done that. Another of Parker's illustrations showed Pollock at a cocktail party holding a cigarette. At some point it was asked, Does Pollock need to be smoking in the picture? The cigarette was removed digitally. One drawing, however, was not used: a picture of Pollock's car, crashed into a tree.

Another unusual feature of the book is the use of footnotes, "which was a way of extending the text without stopping the narrative," explained Jordan. The backmatter was particularly important, she said, because the book required so much research.

"This is nonfiction; you don't put words in people's mouths, you have to back it up with research," said Greenberg. "A lot had to be explained. Even if kids don't read them, the teachers do." The book was a design challenge to get into 32 pages, she added. The footnotes and backmatter helped keep the book from being weighed down with text.

A second panel discussed general topics about how writers, artists, and editors conceive picture books and address trends in the sociology of publishing picture-book biographies. Moderated by Fabienne Doucet, an NYU associate professor of early childhood and urban education, the discussion focused on diversity and social consciousness.

Her starting question: How do we choose these stories, and who gets to tell them? "We have to balance and get accurate, honor the subject, and present realities," Dou-



Telling Lives continued

cet said.

“It is completely possible to present complex personalities and histories without omitting salient details,” said Luann Toth, managing editor of reviews for *School Library Journal*. “Even with mental health issues, there’s a way to do it. I don’t think you’re going to shock many people today.”

“People are complicated,” stated illustrator John Parra. “There can be several books about one person, all focusing on a different aspect of their life.” Parra has illustrated picture books on painter Frida Kahlo and other subjects that touch on his Latino heritage. “I get feedback, ‘Why didn’t you touch on this thing or that thing?’”

Parra noted that he had seen an “opening up” in the picture-book industry in favor of more ethnic subjects, including Latinos. His artistic style is rooted in South American folk art, and he illustrated *Waiting for the Biblioburro* by Monica Brown, an author of Peruvian descent. The book describes an actual Colombian librarian who brought books by burro to poor peasants in the mountains. Parra added that the book took the step of mixing fact with fiction. “Instead of a straight biography of this person, we told the story through the eyes of one little girl,” he explained.

While subjects of cultural diversity are one thing, outright controversy is another. One of the most explosive controversies of its day was the interracial marriage of Charles and Mildred Loving, a marriage that was illegal in the 1960s in Virginia, where they lived. They fought their case all the way to the Supreme Court, and won. This subject was tackled straightforwardly by husband-and-wife author/illustrators Sean Qualls and Selina Alko (themselves an interracial couple) in their picture book *A Case for Loving: The Fight for Interracial Marriage*, published in 2015.

“These were people who risked jail, and that’s really scary for kids,” said Alko. “You’re not going to do that story justice by whitewashing it.” Added Qualls, “Those people weren’t celebrities, but when it came time to stand up, they did. If you dumb that down, it’s lost.

“As a student, I thought history was boring without nuances,” Qualls continued. “I felt it was all the same story.” Picture biographies, he said, show “what you can be through what other people have done.” His own picture book about jazz musician Dizzy Gillespie, *Dizzy*, is

about how music is an outlet for emotions. “That’s a gift to a child,” he said.

Christy Ottaviano said she has seen definite change in what is considered acceptable subject matter during the 10 years she has been publisher at Henry Holt and Co., an imprint of Macmillan Children’s Group. “I love finding those misfits and outcasts that can inspire kids to not feel left out,” she said. “It all comes down to the story,” a sentiment echoed by all panel.

Doucet, speaking as an academic, expressed the importance of all stories in the cultural spectrum, citing “emerging awareness of cultural legitimacies” and “schools as a stage for society.” She and Toth considered picture books in terms of their utility in classrooms and social education. “Picture-book bios have many teachable moments,” Doucet said.

It’s clear that we live in an era when uncritical hero worship no longer works, and many different voices contribute to the pageant of American life. Near the end of the conference the issue was raised of cultural appropriation. Both in and out of the industry, some have questioned whether writers – usually white – can legitimately write about people of color or about cultures other than their own. The lengthy, and lively, discussion boiled down to the belief that there is no inherent reason that there should be such cultural restrictions on what publishers, editors, or writers choose to do, but they should evaluate the project on its merits and “get it right.”

The consensus of the conference was that whatever changes are taking place in the industry – diversity, “intersectionality” (i.e., color and disability or bilingual/cultural issues), questions of cultural appropriation – they are happening fast and not slowing down. There are different viewpoints and specialties involved in producing just one book – authors, illustrators, publishers, teachers, librarians, and the public. It’s a far cry from the days of simple picture books of Davy Crockett and Florence Nightingale.

Marcus’ words, which had opened the conference, seemed to sum it up best. “The stories we tell of others’ lives are ours, too.”

CLAIRE STETZER

ASSISTANT EDITOR BLOOMSBURY PUBLISHING

interview by Lynne Marie

We are happy to feature Claire Stetzer, who was recently promoted from Editorial Assistant to Assistant Editor at Bloomsbury.

Claire has worked in children's book publishing for several years, most recently as an editorial assistant at Bloomsbury from May 2015 to March 2018, and prior to that as an editorial assistant at Sterling Publishing.

Lynne Marie: Congratulations on your new position! Please share a little bit about your duties as an Assistant Editor and any details about the department in which you work.

Claire Stetzer: Thanks so much, Lynne! As an Assistant Editor, I assist two senior members of the children's editorial team. That includes providing editorial feedback on manuscripts, writing jacket copy, tweaking that copy for paperbacks and other reprints, conducting market research, organizing titles in our computer system, and countless other tasks. With this new position, I'm now also starting to build my own list, which I am extremely excited about.

LM: Please tell us a little bit about Bloomsbury and its origins, and how it's British-ness plays into the American arm of the company. How would you describe Bloomsbury as a house? If Bloomsbury were a Harry Potter house, which one would it be, and why?

CS: As you know, we're a UK-based company, and our US children's group just celebrated its 15th anniversary last fall. We have a really great relationship with our UK office. We have bi-monthly phone calls with the editorial team across the pond and are constantly sharing projects with each other. The markets are slightly different so not everything overlaps, but it's fascinating to see this additional perspective on the industry.



Bloomsbury as a house, at least from my experience in children's, is very focused on our authors. We don't have a huge list, so we're very strategic about what we acquire, and thus are very invested in our authors' careers. We publish everything from picture books through YA, so there's great variety as well. [As for which Harry Potter house we'd be,] it's a really collaborative and friendly environment, so I would go with Hufflepuff—although as a Hufflepuff myself, I might be a little biased!

LM: Prior to your job on the editorial side of publishing, you spent time working as a Bookseller. What are some things you have learned from selling books that you utilize in making editorial decisions today? What are some of your favorite books that you remember from those days?

CS: My first job ever was at the Penguin Bookshop about thirty minutes outside of Pittsburgh, and I worked there from junior or senior year of high school throughout college. And I loved it! (Shout out to all the amazing Indies out there!) It provided me with a fantastic baseline knowledge of the industry and children's market that has been incredibly useful. In my current position, my bookseller experience reminds me how passionate readers are about the books that they love. When I'm considering a submission, I look for that passion in myself, because I know a book needs that quality for readers to really connect with it.

connect with it.

One of my favorite books from those days is *Eleanor & Park*, and it remains one of my all-time favorites to this day. I very distinctly remember writing a shelf-talker when it first came out, and I would talk to everyone who walked into the store about it.

LM: Please share with us the titles of some projects you have worked on in the past.

CS: I'm very lucky to have two bosses who both have ex-

Claire Stetzer continued

traordinary lists. I've worked on picture books from Carole Boston Weatherford and Sarah Jane Wright, middle grade from Kate Messner and Kamilla Benko, and YA from Emery Lord and Renée Watson—including *Piecing Me Together*, which received a Newbery Honor and the Coretta Scott King Award this year.

LM: Have you made your first acquisitions in your new position? If so, what are they?

CS: I've co-acquired a wonderfully sweet, classically-inspired picture book called *Welcome to Morningtown*, about animal families in waking up and greeting the day.

Besides that, I'm reading a lot to find that perfect project—something that really sings and for which I have passion and vision.

LM: We are pleased that you will be accepting submissions from our members. Exactly what type of submissions are you looking for at this time?

CS: I'm looking for all age categories, primarily fiction. For picture books, I really like either quirky/humorous or heartfelt (but not too saccharine) stories, and I love ones that have clever use of illustrations. For middle grade, I'm looking for strong and memorable voices and stories with a clever hook (and maybe a touch of magic). For YA, I'm more of a contemporary reader but wouldn't shy away from a reality-based fantasy or magical realism. I'm a huge fan of *This Is Us*, so I would love to find a YA with a similar layers of heart, emotion, and humor told in a very thoughtful way.

LM: When considering an author/book to take on, do you usually look at one or multiple projects from that author? Do you tend to check out their social media platforms? What reasoning do you have behind these answers?

CS: We typically don't accept unsolicited manuscripts, and agents almost always send one project at a time from a certain author. However, if the writing is strong but the particular story isn't the right fit for us, I'll ask the agent what else the author is working on.

Social media is always something we look at, but it's not necessarily a make or break. But especially for a debut author, it's great to see him/her connecting to the kidlit community and being a part of the conversation.

LM: Name three things that make a manuscript stand out for you. Why are these things most important to you?

CS: The first thing is definitely the hook, because that

is what is going to draw readers in. With the number of submissions that I see, an interesting hook—something that is different and intriguing but also concise—gets me excited right away. The next is the voice—is it engaging, memorable, authentic? I think voice is especially important in children's books, and our whole team is very committed to **#ownvoices** as well. And the last thing I look for is that indefinable spark—that quality that makes readers passionate about this story. Manuscripts always need work—nothing comes in absolutely perfect—but I need to be excited about doing the work to get it there. And that only comes with passion.

LM: When reading a query/cover letter, what process do you have? Do you read the cover letter first, or the manuscript? How much of the manuscript will you generally read before you decide if you're interested or not?

CS: I do read the query letter first so I know what I'm getting into—the age group, tone, hook, etc. I like reading the short (spoiler-free) description as well because that's how a reader would come to the book, too. I usually read about 50 pages, sometimes all at the beginning or I'll skim through to see how it progresses.

LM: Do you have any tips for writers to keep an editor reading on to the second page?

CS: I've read a lot of first chapters that are so bogged down in details and backstory that the voice gets lost. Readers are perceptive—they can pick up on personality without an onslaught of facts. The sooner the reader knows and cares about who this narrator is, the more they'll be invested in the narrator's story—and that goes for editors, too.

Above the Slushpile

Claire Stetzer is offering an **Above the Slush** submission opportunity for CBI readers. You may submit a picture book or up to the first 50 pages of a middle grade or young adult novel with the code: **CBI - CS Bloomsbury Exclusive Submission** in the Subject line.

Email your submission (entire picture book or up to first 50 pages of a novel) to claire.stetzer@bloomsbury.com, along with a query letter. Paste your manuscript into the body of the email. Bloomsbury requires exclusive submissions because it is not open to unsolicited manuscripts except through the special CBI Above the Slush code.

**Please note that this opportunity expires on:
September 15, 2018**

THE ENEMIES OF GOOD PACING

by Jane McBride

We all know the importance of pacing in a manuscript. We've read articles about it; we've taken workshops on it. And some of us have written articles about it, as I am now.

We know how to vary the pacing, how to slow it, how to speed it up. But do we recognize the enemies of good pacing and how to get rid of them?

BACKSTORY

After writing 36 novels and hundreds of short stories, I should know to leave backstory out. If elements of a character's backstory have to be introduced, it should be done in a sparing manner, not an information dump. Yet in having my last manuscript reviewed by a friend, I received this note: "Too much backstory." She was right. All that information that was so important for me to understand my characters had found its way into the first chapter of the manuscript. Fortunately, the mistake was easily remedied and I yanked the offending passages from the chapter, broke them into pieces, and wove them through the story.

INTROSPECTION

Do your characters tend to reflect on what's happening to them? Do they spend an inordinate amount of time reviewing what led them to this point in their lives? Mine do, at least they do in my first drafts. They reflect; they ponder; they ruminate. In the end, they don't do much except indulge in useless introspection, so nothing happens in the story.

TELLING, NOT SHOWING

Telling is a writerly deadly sin on many counts. Not only does it make for a boring story, it slows the pacing down to a crawl. Who wants to read a litany of events written from a detached point-of-view? No one, especially not today's young people who are accustomed to instant gratification and non-stop action. Show your characters over-

coming their obstacles, whatever those obstacles might be. Show your characters dealing with grief. Saying "She was grieving the loss of her sister" isn't nearly as effective as "Pain ricocheted through her like a ping-pong ball on steroids."

SOLVING THE CONFLICT TOO SOON

What happens when the main conflict is solved in a book? The story ends. Sure, the author may drag it on, but the character's purpose, his goal, have been met and the reason for the story is over. Keep the reader guessing until the end. This is especially true for mystery and suspense books. If you want to write a page-turning book, you have to give the reader a reason to keep turning those pages.

RESOLVING PROBLEMS TOO EASILY

Related to the above, resolving problems too easily stalls the story. If the main character solves every problem with minimum effort and time, the reader is left to wonder what was the point of the story. What if your MC needs to complete a series of tasks in order to save his little brother from a horrible death? It isn't enough to list the tasks and then have the character whip through them. He must struggle, grapple, and fight his way through them. Make the tasks/problems ones that challenge his value system, his belief in himself. Make them call upon every bit of courage he possesses.

REPETITION

Do you find yourself wanting to hammer home a point to readers and rehash, reiterate, and repeat the point? In one book, I wanted to emphasize the hero's grief over the loss of his only brother. It turns out that I replayed his grief in scene after scene. Fortunately, my editor called me on it and I left in only a couple of references to the character's overwhelming grief. Another form of repetition is using different words to say the same thing, such

The Enemies of Good Pacing continued

as in the question at the beginning of this paragraph. Did you notice the words rehash, reiterate, and repeat? All say the same thing.

PURPLE PROSE DESCRIPTION

Authors of earlier centuries waxed poetic about ... well, just about everything. Such descriptions were accepted by reading audiences of bygone eras. Not so today. Readers want action. They want something happening. To say that the mountains are majestic and beautiful isn't enough. Show how the mountains affect the character and his goals. Does the sixteen-year-old Boy Scout have to scale an impossible cliff to reach the other side and find help for his buddy who has broken his leg at the base of the mountain?

Information exchange. Have you ever read a dialogue passage where two characters are telling each other things they already know? Picture the following:

"You know that Bob broke up with Delia last year," Cynthia said to her best friend Elle.

Elle nodded. "It was a horrible break-up."

Sounds fine at first glance, but what if Elle is Delia's sister? It would be completely unnecessary for Cynthia to tell her that Bob broke up with her sister. The dialogue is obviously put there to give the reader information. Find another way to reveal this.

Too many characters and/or subplots. Make sure each of the characters who populate your book are necessary. If they are there only to give the main character someone to talk to, cut them. The same goes for subplots. A subplot should complement the primary plot. If it doesn't do this, it doesn't belong in the book.

In the following Mini Blueprint, I've combined the above points into four main categories:

STEP 1: Look for what can be left out and then cut it.

ACTION: Take out all backstory and re-introduce it in small chunks (if it is needed at all). Cut introspection to the bone. You can leave a few thoughts, but make them count. Then search for and destroy passages that tell rather than show. If you are questioning whether you are telling rather than showing, look for words such as thought, felt, seemed, etc. These and similar words usually denote the author's point-of-view instead of the character's POV. A writer friend uses her software's search function

to highlight such words. These alert her to when she has slipped into telling mode.

STEP 2: Fine-tune your conflict.

ACTION: Solve the conflict near the end of the story. Make certain your black moment comes at the right time. Let main character struggle to reach his goal. If a problem can be solved easily, delete it and replace it with something that demands courage and effort on the character's part.

STEP 3: Look for repetition.

ACTION: Be ruthless in cutting words, scenes, even chapters that only repeat what has already happened. Look for long passages of narrative. Do they add to the conflict or do they only showcase your beautiful but otherwise useless descriptors? Ax information exchanges.


STEP 4: Decide on how many characters and subplots are needed to tell the story.

ACTION: Take a hard look at each character in your story. Does he or she serve a real purpose? If not, consider deleting them or combining them. If a character has a best friend and a sister in whom she confides everything, try combining them into one character.

Review your manuscript for subplots. Determine which subplots enhance the main story and what, if any, detract from it.

WRAPPING UP

Writing effective pacing comes with practice. Use the above tips that work for you, and, just as in good pacing, throw out the ones that don't.



writing blueprints

Each month, we will be incorporating Mini Blueprints into CBI, which are based on the step-by-step way of learning in our full Writing Blueprints. If you're not familiar with our longer Writing Blueprints that take you through the process of writing, marketing, or self-publishing your book, go to www.writingblueprints.com

#OwnVoices Writer Celebrates Her Diversity

interview by PJ McIlvaine

Lyn Miller-Lachmann, a writer who was diagnosed with Asperger's later in life, is a true Jill of All Trades: world traveler, teacher, radio host, sensitivity reader, children's book translator (*The World in a Second; Lines Squiggles, Letters, Words; The Queen of the Frogs; Three Balls of Wool*), and acclaimed young adult author. Her lauded debut coming of age novel *Gringolandia* (Curbstone Books, 2009), drew heavily on her experiences living in Latin America and was followed by a companion book *Surviving Santiago* (Running Press, 2015). Her third novel, *Rogue* (Nancy Paulsen Books, 2013), a 2014 Junior Guild Library selection, focused on a troubled autistic teen. A Lego-maniac on Instagram, Lachmann and her husband live in New York City and Lisbon. Find out more about Lyn at <http://www.lynmillerlachmann.com>

PJ McIlvaine: Where do you draw your inspiration from as a writer? Your characters span quite a spectrum.

Lyn Miller-Lachmann: In general, I'm drawn to the stories of people I meet or the places where I've lived. And that's a wide range. My debut YA novel, *Gringolandia*, came from my years in Madison, Wisconsin, working with refugees and political exiles from Central and South America in the 1980s. I became part of a community of exiles from the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile and became friends with musicians and other activists who'd put their lives on the line to bring democracy to their country.

In the case of *Rogue*, I drew from my own experiences growing up on the autism spectrum, but not yet diagnosed. I never knew why I had so much trouble making friends and being included in social groups, and in *Rogue*

tried to capture that sense of confusion as well as my own longing for a friend that led me to do almost anything to keep someone around who'd shown interest in spending time with me.

PM: From first draft to publication, how long does it usually take? How many drafts do you go through before you feel it it's ready?

LML: It varies. *Gringolandia* took 22 years from when I first started writing the story of Daniel, a refugee from Chile struggling to rekindle their relationship when his activist father is released from prison and expelled from the country. I lost a contract with a major publisher in 1989, two years after I started writing, and put the book aside for 17 years. When I picked it up again, I changed the story from contemporary to historical fiction, switched the point of view from third to alternating first person, and gave it a new ending. The rewrite took a year, and the book sold right away to the progressive small press that published my debut adult novel. *Rogue* took about a year to write, another six months to revise, and sold within a couple of months to a Big 5 publisher. *Gringolandia's* companion, *Surviving Santiago*, took six years to sell because my original publisher closed down, and it's hard to change publishers for a companion or sequel. I was lucky to have that book come out at all.

As far as number of drafts before a book is ready, it varies according to the book. *Gringolandia* took about five; *Rogue* three before it sold and another two afterward; and *Surviving Santiago*, four before it sold.



PM: What is your writing routine?

LML: I start slowly. Usually I work on other things, like translations or sensitivity reading, in the morning, and get started on my fiction in late afternoon and evening. I like to write late at night, when everyone else has gone to sleep.

PM: You've found a niche in translating books. How did that come to be? Do you look for books that aren't initially published in English or do publishers seek you out? Do you need a particular skill set in order to successfully translate?

LML: I became a translator by accident. I was at a meeting of the PEN Children's Committee, and Claudia Bedrick of Enchanted Lion Books, the guest speaker, mentioned that she needed a translator for a picture book in Portuguese. I'd just returned from Portugal, so I raised my hand. That's how I became the translator of *The World in a Second*, and I've translated two other picture books that Enchanted Lion has published.

Usually, publishers seek me out to translate. I've brought books in both Portuguese and Spanish to various publishers I've worked with, but so far I haven't been able to drum up interest for any of them.

As far as a skill set, one needs a solid reading knowledge of the language one wishes to translate from, but the most important thing is absolute fluency in the language one is translating into.

PM: You've traveled extensively, and set several of your books in foreign locales. A great job if you can get it. Do you feel that the travel gives you more authenticity in your writing?

LML: Yes, I've found both inspiration and information from my travels. Being in another location for a long period of time offers a mental image and flavor of the place (including, of course, its cuisine), an understanding of the rhythms of daily life, and for historical fiction, access to people who lived through the events (for stories set

in more recent times), and museums, archives, historic sites, and other places essential to historical research.

PM: Is there a book that you would love to translate?

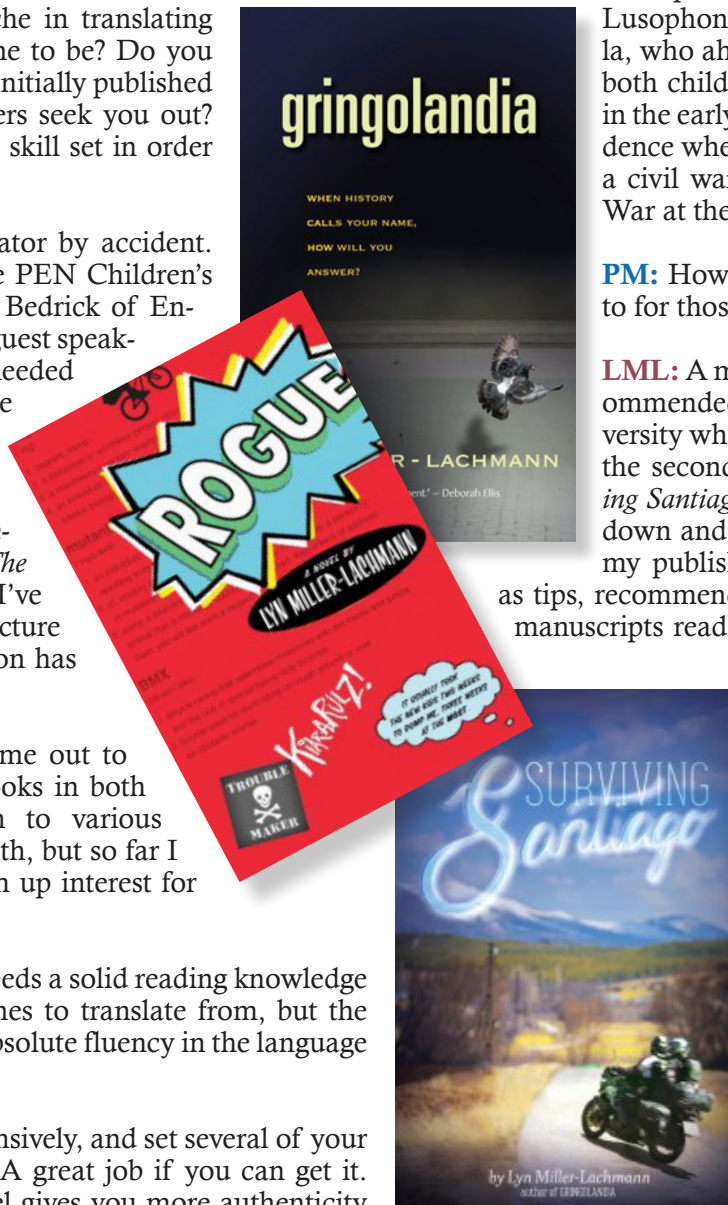
LML: We definitely need more books in English from the Portuguese-speaking countries of Africa – Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, Cabo Verde, São Tomé & Príncipe. One of my favorite authors from Lusophone Africa is Ondjaki, from Angola, who has written a number of books for both children and adults set in the 1980s, in the early days of that country's independence when Angola was also embroiled in a civil war that was a proxy of the Cold War at the time.

PM: How did you get an agent? Any tips to for those in the query trenches?

LML: A member of my critique group recommended me to an old friend from university who had become an agent. She was the second agent I'd queried with *Surviving Santiago* after my first publisher closed down and I realized I'd need an agent for my publishing career to continue. As far as tips, recommendations do help get queries and manuscripts read in a timelier manner, and they can get a manuscript read by an agent who's otherwise closed to submissions. The best way to gain access in this way is to participate in the growing number of excellent mentoring programs that are available, such as #PitchWars.

PM: As an #ownvoices writer who was diagnosed later in life, how much do you draw on your own experiences? Have you found that difficult to do?

LML: I draw a lot on my own experiences, even in cases where I've changed major details of the autistic characters so that they are not me. For instance, even though the protagonist of the YA novel I'm working on now is a teenage boy, he has a very similar relationship with his father to what I had with mine. It's no coincidence that I started this novel shortly after my father passed away, even though he likely would not have recognized himself



in the protagonist's father because of other details that I changed as well, like the setting of the novel.

This is the first novel with an autistic protagonist that I've written since *Rogue*. It's difficult for me to face the person I was in middle and high school, relentlessly bullied and excluded from clubs, activities, and social events, always on the outside looking in. And the publishing industry is not an easy place for an autistic author to succeed because of the way so many industry professionals communicate and the emphasis on authors promoting their own books, instead of the publisher taking care of most promotion. This new policy rewards those with excellent social skills and ultimately excludes those who lack them.

PM: You also offer sensitivity reads. Can you explain the difference between that and an editorial critique?

LML: Sometimes people call sensitivity reads "targeted beta reads" because they're designed to evaluate the representation of characters with specific marginalizations. In that way, they're different from an editorial critique, which evaluates general craft issues such as character development, setting, voice, and pacing or examines the text on the scene or paragraph level. Sensitivity reads are also different from, say, evaluating a historical novel for accuracy and authenticity because the focus is on characters with identities that have historically been stereotyped, expropriated, excluded, and/or targeted for violence and abuse.

PM: What are you currently working on?

LML: I'm revising a YA historical novel featuring an autistic protagonist and translating a middle grade novel from Brazil. I'm about to embark on my first indie publishing project as well. When I return from Portugal this summer, I plan to publish an e-book travel guide to Portugal, titled *Europe's Gateway: The RogueWriter Guide to Portugal and Beyond*, drawing from my most popular and useful blog posts. I've seen people walking around Lisbon with printouts of my husband's restaurant guide, and I think having something they can consult on a smartphone or e-reader without having to go online would be helpful.

PM: Where do you see yourself five years from now, creatively?

LML: I'm expanding my travel writing to include advice for individual and family travel for people on the autism spectrum. I appreciate being able to explore the world while autistic, and I've also found that my ability

to focus on specific interests has enriched my own travel experience and allowed me to become a unique and trustworthy source for others. I'd like to continue writing for young people – I've always felt that YA is my natural voice – and I hope that the industry continues to diversify and become more inclusive of disabled writers and others on the margins. Through my blog, my advocacy through organizations like We Need Diverse Books, my sensitivity reading, and my writing, I'm doing my part to change the way publishing approaches neurodiversity so that autistic and other neuroatypical writers have more opportunities to tell their own stories, develop their craft, and build their careers.



Want to Increase Creativity? Sleep On It!

by Regina Montana

Could the answer to your deepest publishing desires lie hidden in your unconscious? Paul McCartney was inspired to write “*Yesterday*” while asleep and Einstein’s theory of relativity came to him in a dream. So why can’t we writers and authors follow in their footsteps?

The simple answer is that, of course, we can. Thomas Edison was a big advocate of sleep-storming, although the term came much later. Edison said, “Never go to sleep without a request to your subconscious.”

In an article in the *Harvard Health Blog* of January 12, 2016, Dr. Michael Craig Miller writes that the term “subconscious” was used by Sigmund Freud interchangeably with “unconscious” at the outset. Eventually Freud stuck with the latter term to avoid confusion. Generally, Dr. Miller writes professional literature where mental functioning is concerned, and states that word unconscious rather than subconscious is used more often.

Peter Freedman, spokesman for *Calm*, Apple’s meditation app introduced in 2012, says, “Sometimes the state halfway between sleeping and waking up is a very rich source of ideas.” According to Freedman, dreams are not subject to logical thinking processes; they are free to roam and wander and take us places we have never been to. They are untapped sources of hidden treasure.

So why not put this process to work in your writing? How does a sleep-storming novice do that? Here are some suggestions from Mr. Freedman:

1. Keep a notebook and pencil by your bed. Write down any ideas, good or bad when you wake up.

Don’t edit.

2. Ask yourself a question that needs answering before sleep. Then relax and forget about it.
3. Wake yourself up mid-sleep and see if any answers arise.
4. Learn to have “lucid dreams” in which you are aware you are dreaming. Start by repeating a mantra: “*I want to dream. I want to be aware I am dreaming. I want to remember my dream when I wake up.*”

Wouldn’t this be a nice alternative to that writer’s group that just doesn’t seem to be working? Maybe fellow writers are pecking away at your manuscript until you don’t recognize it as your own anymore. Now you can tap into your unconscious for the magic you need to finish that picture book, middle grade or young adult novel. And you can begin tonight. Who could have imagined that golden nuggets of wisdom lie buried in this treasure trove of the mind, ripe for the picking for those willing to take the necessary steps to gather the fruit of their dreams. It may take more than a few nights, however, to perfect your sleeping habits. And you may have to wake yourself up mid-stream (of consciousness) to gather the treasure that lies hidden.

This writer plans to get to work starting tonight, tweaking my slumber habits after reading Freedman’s article. I will not put pressure on my mind’s inner workings, however, and overtax my unconscious. The stakes are high, but I won’t tell my dreams that; I’ll let them take me wherever they will. Maybe they will come up with the perfect title and ending my story needs. It will be

Want to Increase Creativity? continued

worth it to wake myself up at 3:00 AM in the morning to harness the long sought-after title and/or ending that I've been stressing out over.

If the early morning wake-up call is not your cup of tea, you might want to try writing “morning pages” as recommended in the must-read book published in 1992 for artists of every genre, *The Artist's Way* by Julia Cameron. This consists of writing three pages longhand of whatever crosses your mind first thing in the morning. The author calls it a form of meditation that provides fresh insights into ourselves and empowers us to make changes. “We are more honest with ourselves, more centered and more spiritually at ease,” says the author. There is no need to edit anything or show it to anyone. It is a kind of stream of consciousness capturing of whatever thoughts pass through with no judgment calls about what you have written. It's very possible that the creative journey can have a real beginning in morning pages when writers tap into source energy and live in the present moment. Then it's up to each individual writer to do the most difficult task of all: stay the course and not give up.

So the next time someone asks you where you get your ideas from, you might answer, “When I go to bed at night I put in a request to my unconscious.” Why not give this part of your psyche (or brain?) some work to do? Who knows, maybe the next award-winning children's book or song lyrics are waiting for you in your dreams tonight. Imagine.

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