

Children's Book Insider

The Children's Writing Monthly  August 2021

FAILURE IS AN OPTION.



HOW STRUGGLES CREATE STRONGER CHARACTERS

ABOVE THE SLUSHPILE
SUBMISSION CODE:

LIZA ROYCE
AGENCY

Table of contents

At Presstime: New Market Listings, Conferences and Contests.....	2
Writing Workshop: Writing with Authority by Hilari Bell.....	4
Agent Spotlight: Liza Fleissig - Agent/Owner, Liza Royce Agency interview by Lynne Marie.....	7
Writing Workshop: Making Failure Work for Your Story by Jane McBride.....	9
Featured Interview: A Chat with the Creative Duo Behind <i>Balloons for Papa</i> : Author Elizabeth Gilbert Bedia & Illustrator Erika Meza, interview by PJ McIlvaine.....	11
Mini Blueprint: Show Your Characters to Your Readers by Jane McBride.....	16
Bonus Market: Learning for Justice Magazine interview by Sharon O. Blumberg.....	18

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Children's Book Insider makes every effort to verify the legitimacy of small and new presses and literary agents before printing information in "At Presstime." However, authors and illustrators should always proceed with caution when approaching publishers or agents with whom they are unfamiliar, and read contracts carefully. All "At Presstime" listings are current at the time of initial publication. Members are urged to verify listings past the month of publication.

At Presstime:

Walter Grant for Diverse Authors and Illustrators Now Accepting Applications

The Walter Dean Myers Grant program was established in 2015 by We Need Diverse Books to provide grants of \$2,000 each to promising diverse writers and illustrators who are currently unpublished. **Applications for the 2021 Walter Grant will be accepted between 12:01 AM EST on August 1, 2021 until 11:59 PM EST on August 31.** All applicants must identify as diverse, [as per WNDB's definition of diversity](#). Applicants must be unpublished as illustrators and/or authors. This includes both trade publishing and self-publishing. If the applicant has a book deal for an as yet unpublished book, the applicant is considered published for purposes of this grant. Essays, short stories, and articles do not render an applicant ineligible. Applicants must be working toward a career as a children's author and/or illustrator. This includes but is not limited to: Picture Books, Early Reader Books, Chapter Books, Middle Grade Books, Young Adult, Graphic Novels, Nonfiction, Poet. Applicants must be a U.S. resident or a refugee living in the States.

To apply for the grant, submit a cover letter (up to 200 words) including: your full name and contact info; how you identify as diverse; the genre of the manuscript for which you're seeking grant support; one sentence stating your name and that you have never been published as an author or illustrator; a brief statement explaining how you intend to use the grant money to further your writing career. Also include up to 200 words summarizing the work for which you're seeking grant assistance. Finally, write an essay up to 500 words discussing how diversity impacts your writing and illustrating career, and attach up to 2500 words from your work in progress, or 4-6 illustrations.

All applications must be made online through the form on the WNDB website, at diversebooks.org/programs/walter-grant/#application-form

Scouting Magazine Accepting Submissions

Scout Life (formerly *Boys' Life*) is a general-interest, four-color magazine that prints 10 times yearly, with a circulation of 1 million, published by the Boy Scouts of America since 1911. They buy all rights for original, unpublished material. All articles for *Scout Life* must interest and entertain boys and girls ages 5 to 17. Write for a child you know who is 12. Looking for crisp, punchy writing in relatively short, straightforward sentences, and well-reported articles that demonstrate high standards of journalism.

Seeking **nonfiction** (500 to 1,200 words; payment is \$500 to \$1,200) on a broad list of subjects. Study the Boy Scouts of America current list of over 100 merit badge pamphlets to get article ideas, as well as studying back issues (found in many libraries). Query Managing Editor Paula Murphey with article ideas.

Five different **Departments** (up to 600 words; payment is \$100 to \$600) appear in each issue, and include science, nature, health, sports, space and aviation, cars, computers, entertainment, pets, history, music. Also have regular back-of-the-book how-to features. Query Associate Editor Sheniece Chappell.

Fiction is purchased on assignment only—please do not query or send manuscripts for short stories. Query by mail only, including a self-addressed, stamped envelope for a reply, to the appropriate editor listed above. Mail all queries to *Scout Life*, 1325 West Walnut Hill Lane, P.O. Box 152079, Irving, TX 75015-2079

New Publisher Seeking Illustrators

New children's book hybrid publishing house, BiblioKid Publishing (bibliokidpublishing.com/), is now accepting illustrator submissions for upcoming children's book projects. Work with a Caldecott award-winning book designer and get publishing experience to add to your portfolio. Book projects include anything from complete picture book stories to chapter book art and cover images, all of which are contracted for a flat-fee on a work-for-hire basis. To be considered for an upcoming project, please send 2 or 3 JPEG samples of your work, along with your query and link to your portfolio to submissions@bibliokidpublishing.com

Publisher Seeks Picture Books, Middle Grade and YA Fiction and Nonfiction

Pelican Publishing Company, is an independent company with a backlist of over 2,500 titles and 30 new titles produced yearly. Children's and young adult fiction often have a regional or historical focus—in particular, relating to the South. Currently seeking **YA fiction and nonfiction** (adventure, regional history, biography) for ages 12 and up with a minimum of 25,000 words; **middle grade fiction and nonfiction** (adventure, regional history, biography, cooking) for ages 8-12 with a maximum of 25,000 words; and **picture book fiction and nonfiction** (adventure, holiday, regional history, biography,) for ages 5-8 with a maximum word count of 1100 plus an Author's Note to children.

For middle grade and young adult submissions, send an email to editorial@pelicanpub.com with the subject line “TITLE—Submission for Publication”, containing a query letter (for details, see below); author publication credits (ISBN/link to Amazon) if applicable; sales history (life to date and first 12 months), and translation/subsidiary rights sales if any; author platform, including social media links; research references if nonfiction; synopsis (max 250 words); table of contents, if applicable; first chapter. Pelican requires exclusive submissions for up to one month. After that period, Pelican will continue their evaluation on a nonexclusive basis.

For picture book submissions, send an email to editorial@pelicanpub.com with the subject line “TITLE—Submission for Publication”, containing a query letter (for details, see below); author publication credits (ISBN/link to Amazon) and sales history (life to date and first 12 months) if applicable; author platform, including social media links; full manuscript. Accompanying artwork may be attached to email. Pelican requires exclusive picture book submissions for up to three months. If that period expires, they will continue the evaluation on a nonexclusive basis. Please note that these books are 32 illustrated pages when published, with a maximum Flesch-Kincaid reading level of second grade (2.0).

Query letter tips: The query letter should discuss the book's content (general description as well as subjects covered); anticipated length (in double-spaced pages or in words) and number of black and white and/or color images if any; intended audience; ideal publication date or season (spring or fall); three competing titles, with links to Amazon, and how your title differs from the competition; any promotional ideas and contacts you may have.

To review current Pelican titles, go to <https://pelicanpub.com/>

Deadline Extended for Lee & Low Awards

The deadline for Lee & Low's 22nd annual [New Voices Award](#) and 9th annual [New Visions Award](#) have been extended. **The new deadline to submit your manuscript for either award is August 15, 2021.**

The New Voices Award (for unpublished diverse picture book authors) and the New Visions Award (for unpublished diverse middle grade/YA authors) encourage writers of color and Indigenous/Native writers to submit their work to Lee & Low Books. Winners of each award receive a \$2,000 cash prize and a first time publishing contract with Lee & Low Books. For information on submitting to both awards, go to <https://www.leeandlow.com/writers-illustrators>

Agent Open to Submissions from Middle Grade Writers and Picture Book Author/Illustrators

Samantha Wekstein, an agent with Thompson Literary Agency (<https://thompsonliterary.com/>) is now open to submissions. She loves creative and epic fantasies as well as realistic stories with multi-dimensional female characters. She is always interested in elevating diverse voices, particularly through feminist narratives. She's currently seeking middle grade of all types, but especially stories that deal with themes of friendship, adventure, or encountering tragedy for the first time. She is also on the lookout for whimsical, meaningful, and funny picture books by author/illustrators. Anything with a unique world or setting, an ambitious structure, or a creative fairy tale retelling is of interest. She regularly updates her Twitter page with new submission info and query tips: <https://twitter.com/SWekstein> Submissions should be emailed to <https://QueryManager.com/SamanthaWekstein>. The Query Manager form will ask for a query letter and the first 10 pages of the manuscript as an attachment. If you're submitting a picture book manuscript, also include illustrations.

WRITING WITH AUTHORITY

by Hilari Bell

Have you ever come across the phrase, writing with “authority?” I heard a couple of editors use it when I first started writing, and I had no clue what they meant by it. Authority?

Finally, someone explained to me that authority in writing isn’t a matter of correct grammar, it’s prose that displays enough skill, professionalism and polish that it convinces the reader that the author knows what he’s doing. The reader (subconsciously) takes in the easy grace of the sentences and says, “This person can tell me a story! I’ll trust him enough to suspend my disbelief and give him a chance.”

It’s actually easier to spot writing that lacks authority than writing that has it. When you find yourself thinking, “Who is this turkey? I could do better than this!” that’s lack of authority.

OK, so how do you add authority to your writing? I think it’s mostly a matter of training your writing “ear.” Written English is a different dialect than spoken English—it has different rhythms, and turns of phrase. You can write a sentence that is perfectly correct, but it still reads awkwardly. For instance, try rewriting a couple of pages where you consistently put the adverb in front of the verb it modifies. There’s no grammatical rule against it—it’s the unwritten rule of the “ear” that’s being violated. It just “sounds” wrong. But how much does that matter?

It was a brick wall that made me realize that when it comes to art, the difference between the talented amateur and the professional lies in the way they handle details. I was at a Worldcon art show, comparing two paintings that hung on adjoining panels. The first painting was clearly the work of a professional, and the second, though very good, was

equally clearly an amateur work. An artist could probably have given me technical reasons why the first painting was superior but I’m not an artist. I knew which was better, but I couldn’t tell why. The figures were almost equally well drawn. Both scenes were active and colorful. Then I noticed that each painting had a brick wall in the background. In the amateur painting, the artist had created a red backdrop, painted a grid across it, and added a few stipples for texture. In the professional painting, every single brick had received individual attention no two in the entire wall were alike. Once I started looking closely, the professional piece had a wealth of finely crafted detail and it was this attention to the smallest detail that gave that painting its authority.

I sometimes hear beginning writers say things like, “I’m a big picture person, I just write for the story” or “I’m an artist I don’t want to constrain my creativity with a bunch of rules” or worst of all, “I don’t worry about the details—that’s the copy editor’s job.” I’ve never heard a published author say any of those things.

When I reviewed the copy edit on the first book of my *Farsala* trilogy, it was both the best, and the worst job of copy editing I’ve ever seen. The worst because it entailed the most work for me. Largely because the copy editor made the (grammatically correct) decision to italicize all the Persian-based words and in my Persian-based *Farsala*, there are a lot of them. Imagine a medieval fantasy where the words king, lord, lady, knight, and kingdom are all in italics and you pretty much have the picture. Needless to say, changing all this back took a lot of work. And there were places where I felt she was too heavy-handed in explaining things, and places where I wanted to say ‘who’ instead of ‘whom’

and...and...and...

But there were also places where she clarified attributions I had left too vague, places where the explanation she requested was necessary, and places where her grammatical corrections added authority to my prose. By the time both of us were finished, she had raised my work to a level of clarity and polish that I hadn't been able to achieve on my own. And (especially since we'll get that little italicizing issue cleared up) I was absolutely sincere when I asked my editor if I could get the same person to

work on my next two books.

Yes, story is what we all write, and read, for. Yes, you don't want to let the rules constrain your creativity. But writing is not only an art, it's a craft—and the essence of good craftsmanship is meticulous attention to detail. In writing, it's good craftsmanship that's the difference between the professional and the amateur. And possibly the difference between published and not.

RESOURCES FOR LEARNING TO WRITE WITH AUTHORITY

BOOKS:

[*Grammar for Fiction Writers*](#) by Chris Saylor and Marcy Kennedy

[*Grammar for Writers*](#) by C Beth Burch

[*Say What? Second Edition: The Fiction Writer's Handy Guide to Grammar, Punctuation, and Word Usage*](#) by C. S. Lakin

[*How to Write Clearly: The Meaning Approach*](#), Illustrated Edition by Ruth Beechick

ONLINE TOOLS FROM WritingBlueprints.com:

[Manuscript Magic Editing Power Bundle](#)

[10 Mistakes That Get Kidlit Manuscripts Rejected and How to Avoid Them](#)

[Mastering “Show, Don't Tell”](#)

[Dialogue Made Easy: The Essential Workshop](#)

LRA

LIZA FLEISSIG

Agent/Owner, Liza Royce Agency

by Lynne Marie

Formerly a partner in a New York City law firm, Liza opened the Liza Royce Agency, a boutique literary agency, with her partner Ginger Harris-Dontzin in 2011. LRA represents clients in all stages of their career and provides cross-platform development, representation and career management. In addition to over 40 years legal/negotiating experience between the partners, the company draws upon experience in movies and television.

LYNNE MARIE: As we are all hoping to finally start to get out from under this pandemic-y world, how is the publishing world looking from where you sit in NYC where much of the action happens? Are publishers still working from home, moving slowly and still being cautious, or are things beginning to get back to normal?

LIZA FLEISSIG: lot to unpack here. Back to normal? No. Still moving? Absolutely. The fact is, even pre-pandemic, publishing was going through major overhauls and those changes were further impacted by Covid. That said, a good book is a good book, and editors will always need a frontlist. Many publishers are still working from home, but as the world figured out, industries can survive that way (I feel badly for commercial real estate agents these days). As for being cautious, the bottom line is that even as early as 2011, publishing was finding new footing – ebooks had not necessarily been accounted for in contracts years past, social media was changing the marketing game – a couple of years later large bookstore chains and mainstay local bookstores started closing, and marginalized voices were (finally) starting to be highlighted in ways never seen before. All of this impacts how an editor looks to the future and makes them cautious in general about how they can best support new works go-



ing forward in an ever-changing landscape.

LM: As an agent, would you say that this is a good time to submit, or a time to focus on craft and work on getting a body of one's best work available for when things start to pick-up? Or is it still the status quo – one can submit, but as always, should be submitting the best work for the best possible result?

LF: Submit your best and polished work. Full stop. You have ONE SHOT to turn someone's head, make it a good one. As for timing, you might have to be more patient and give longer lead time, but so long as an agent/editor is open to new submissions, it's always game on.

LM: How many manuscripts would you say a writer should have ready before querying (depending on genre, of course)? How many do you ask to see prior to making a decision?

LF: It varies for agents. For us, we work one project at a time. While we always hope for more than a "one-hit wonder," the fact is even getting one book out there is a huge accomplishment, so we move forward on the strength of the project we are considering. If we wind up being able to go back to that same well, even sweeter. If an author, for whatever reason, is one and done, that's ok too.

Everybody's journey is different and we are just happy putting one foot in front of the other, especially these days.

LM: Notably, you have such a wonderful, select list of talented and up-and-coming authors and illustrators, many which several of us already love and will recognize (www.lizaroyce.com/lra-kids/). I was wondering

Liza Fleissig...continued

if you might share what these creatives had in common. How did they stand apart from the rest? How would you say you came upon the majority of your clients?

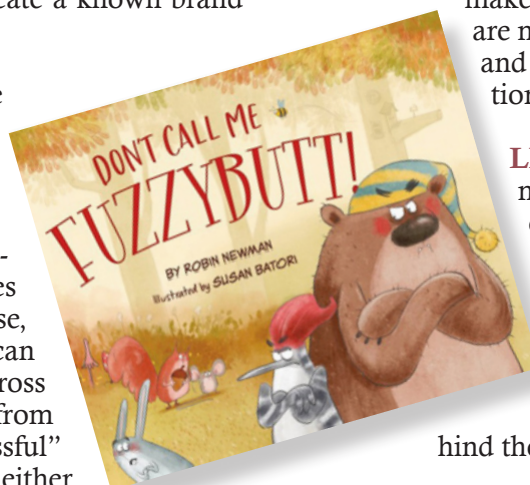
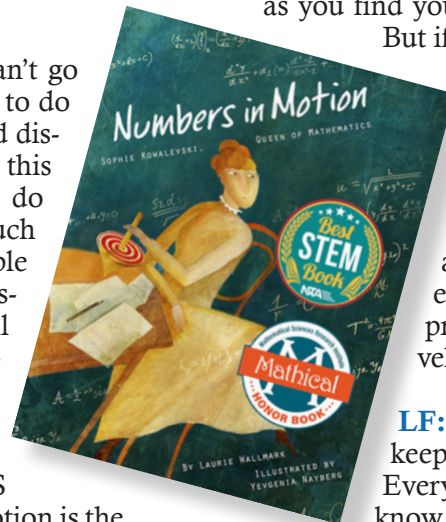
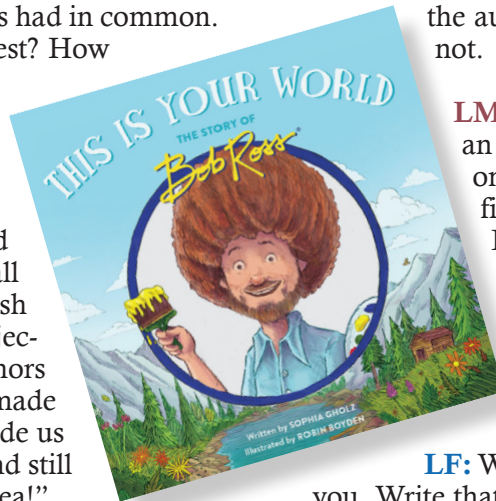
LF: Most of our clients come from author and editor referrals, but others come from conferences and just cold submissions. Creatively, they were all super strong and polished, with fresh storytelling. But really, it's a super subjective business, so the fact is, these authors just resonated with us in a way that made us want to work with them. Some made us laugh out loud, others made us cry, and still others made us go, "Wow, I had no idea!"

LM: How important is it to have a marketing plan for your project at the inception? After the completion? What are your thoughts on this?

LF: Critical at all stages. An author can't go into this business expecting a publisher to do it for them. Yes, they will edit, print and distribute it – but authors should approach this process otherwise with a "what can I do for me" from start to finish. And as much as social media is a drain for most people (I still have a blackberry!) it is a necessary vehicle in today's industry. Overall engagement is key, pounding the pavement, meeting at least your local librarians and booksellers... are there outliers, sure, but do you really want to bet your career on that? And ALWAYS lift up your fellow authors. Cross-promotion is the easiest way to get the word out and it's free!

LM: As someone who specializes in career management, what are your thoughts about branding as an author? Do you think it's important to be able to write across subjects and genres, or to create a known brand that you can be associated with?

LF: Sigh. I get this a lot and at the risk of repeating myself, it's just not a one size fits all. For us, we do not generally encourage writing across genres as a general proposition. That said, some writers are prolific, writing across different genres and even age groups. And of course, if one has a huge platform, they can more easily get away with writing across the board. Others definitely benefit from having a brand – but what is "successful" isn't the "brand", it's the author. So either



the author is finding his or her audience, or not.

LM: If someone has not yet obtained an agent in their corner, would you recommend that they try different things to find what works, or stick in one lane? I say this because I started out writing only punny farm animal stories and ended up publishing school/values stories, folktales and a travel story. So I'm wondering what the best advice is for our readers.

LF: Write what you love. Write what inspires you. Write that story you are passionate about. Writing to a trend or to satisfy a niche is a waste of energy since by the time you finish, that wave has probably already left the shore. If this means trying different things as you find your voice, then of course shake things up. But if there is a lane you are most comfortable in, ride that one all the way home.

LM: Your enthusiasm in encouraging debut authors is admirable! Could that be read that you are a career agent, rather than a one-book agent? And what are your thoughts about taking on more established, unagented authors? Are there pros/cons to that with regard to career development?

LF: We love our established talent and they keep the lights on. But we also love debuts. Everyone had to start somewhere, right? But know the industry. Learn your craft. Show engagement and that you are savvy about your journey. When I receive an unprofessional query – it's deleted. Even if that work is the next best thing, I will never know, because there's not enough time in a day to devote energy to someone who can't be bothered to make efforts on their own. And YES, we are most definitely in this for the long haul and are career focused. Though, as I mentioned, we still start one book at a time.

LM: Also concerning career development, what are some ways that writers can position themselves to be prime candidates for this endeavor? Do you recommend already having a social media following prior to publication, or concentrating on getting an agent or book deal, and then working on that? What's the rationale behind the answer?

Liza Fleissig...continued

LF: I can't stress this enough. It is never too early to start working on social media connections. The floodgates are opened and there is no turning back. It's just too ingrained in the industry at this point. But I would not rush out and spend money to get a website built, *that* can come later (unless you like to blog). But social media, YES YES YES ... and YES. You have 100 followers, get me 1000. You have 1000 followers, get me 5000. But make sure you remain kind and compassionate. This is about building support for you, not about taking someone else down.

LM: Please tell us about *Someone Else's Summer*, a Running Press Kids young adult book optioned for film to star Bailee Madison. (Now I want to read that book!) Are there any updates on that film release? Please tell us a little bit about the premise and what drew you to it. What was the process involved in your acquisition of this project? Did you originally see it as a film?

LF: That book – wow – I just fell in love. Heart-pounding, goosebumps love. In her dedication, my author wrote that she thinks I loved the book more than she did. LOL. And while I can't share too many details, I can say the film project is still very much alive, has been renewed, and screenwriters are working on it.

As for seeing it as a film, every book should unfold like a movie in your head. That's what makes a reader turn the page! But alas, there are hundreds of thousands of books published every year, and the film industry, like all others, is a business, with specific goals and trends that can often elude the rest of us. So write with passion that makes us love your book, and that's a win.

LM: Expanding from that book, what, in general, do you look for in a potential project?

LF: Like all readers, I love a good story. Whether you make me laugh, cry, or push my detective skills, I want to be so engrossed that I can't turn the pages fast enough. I want to really get to know the characters so that by the end of the book I can almost anticipate dialogue, thinking, "That's SO what she would say." What don't I like? Well, I don't care about trends, and really don't enjoy gratuitous sex, cursing, or characters/language that exist for the sake of checking boxes. These days you have so many people scrambling trying to give an agent what the "market" tells them, instead of writing a story that comes from the heart that they are compelled to tell. THAT is the story I want – not someone else's.

LM: Where do you fall on "writing outside your immediate experience"? Please share any qualifiers that you may have.

LF: Sigh. The lawyer in me says the First Amendment means anyone can write about anything. The agent in

me says all voices need to be lifted up and writing within your immediate experience makes the work much more authentic and stronger by definition. Is there a gray area? I still think so. People can be very passionate about different subjects, and spend their lives dedicated to things that might not necessarily be associated with their own "voice" but that doesn't mean they can't tell a story with much authenticity and grace.

Liza Fleissig is offering an **Above the Slushpile** submission opportunity for CBI subscribers. Send a query letter that provides a short synopsis of the project, a short author bio and any social media or marketing platform info you'd like to share. Do not send attachments. Submit by email to submissions@lizaroyce.com with the subject line "Ezine LRA [Title] by [Author]." **This code expires August 31, 2021.**

Liza says, "With this code I will respond to all queries, even if just to let you know that, unfortunately, it is not a good fit for our current list. For those projects we want to explore further, we will waive our exclusivity requirement for this post, but please note it might take us a little while to get back since we have to pepper them within exclusives. All I ask is that anyone we are considering extends us the courtesy of giving us time to respond before accepting any other offers of representation."

You can follow Liza and engage with her on social media on Twitter and Instagram at [@lizaroyceagency](https://twitter.com/lizaroyceagency), or at Liza Royce Agency on Facebook.

---Please Read Before You Proceed---

Before you submit your manuscript please run through the following checklist. This will ensure that editors will continue to offer us Above the Slushpile codes:

- You've studied the submission guidelines and verified that your manuscript falls within those guidelines.
- You've confirmed your work matches the interests of the editor by reading their CBI interview, and studying recent books on their list.
- Your manuscript falls within standard word counts of the particular age group for which you're writing. (If you don't know standard word counts, get our free Ultimate Children's Writing Cheat Sheet at: writeforkids.org/ultimate-cheatsheet)
- Your work has been critiqued by a beta reader, critique partner/group, or a freelance editor.
- You have thoroughly revised and polished your manuscript.

Making **FAILURE**

Work for Your Story

by Jane McBride

We talk a lot about the importance of having the protagonist work toward a goal and eventually achieving it. Much less do we talk about what happens if the main character doesn't achieve his goal. What happens when the MC, experiencing defeat over and over, is ready to give up? Does the story end unhappily? Who else suffers if the MC fails? The stakes grow higher and higher with every defeat. When the MC does finally achieve his goal, the rewards are all the sweeter. If this sweetness comes with a laugh, all the better.

Let's break this up into age groups.

Picture books and early readers. What kind of setback might a character in a picture book experience? Let's make up a story with a five-year-old protagonist, Andy. Andy has pleaded with his parents for a dog for the last year. Finally his parents agree. They take Andy to an animal shelter where he picks out a dog with imploring eyes who seems to be begging Andy to take him home. The dog is older, unlikely to be adopted. Andy's parents explain to him that the dog may not live for many years, but Andy has fallen in love with him. Andy promises to feed and clean up after the dog, whom he names Ralph. Ralph, however, proves to be a handful. The first "defeat" occurs when Ralph digs holes in the backyard and buries things there, including Andy's father's wallet. Andy and Ralph both receive a scolding. The story continues with more of Ralph's misdeeds. Andy knows he isn't keeping his promise to keep Ralph out of trouble. He decides if he can teach his old dog some new tricks, his parents will see how special Ralph really is. Andy works on fetch (Ralph doesn't like to run), roll over (Ralph gets stuck halfway through), and dance (not hap-

pening). Andy overhears his parents talking about returning Ralph to the shelter, and is convinced he's failed. But when Andy's father hurts his back planting his huge vegetable garden, Andy finds a way to channel Ralph's digging instinct and put it to good use.

If you're looking for a chuckle for you and your preschooler or early grade reader, pick up *A Funny Thing Happened at the Museum* by David Cali and Benjamin Chaud and *My Grandpa is NOT Grumpy* by Kally Mayer.

Chapter books (ages 7-10). How would a third grade girl, Mirabelle, solve the problem of always sneezing whenever she reads aloud? Mirabelle loves to read but she hates to sneeze. It's gotten so bad that the other kids in her class are making fun of her when she reads/sneezes. Mirabelle makes a goal to stop sneezing when she reads. What kind of failures might she experience in working to achieve his goal? Maybe she tries putting a clothespin on her nose. That doesn't work as her sneezes blow the clothespin right off her nose. Then she tries holding her nose when she reads. That doesn't work either. Mirabelle continues with her unsuccessful solutions, each more ridiculous than the last. She is ready to give up when ... Well, Mirabelle and I haven't figured that out yet. With each succeeding failure, Mirabelle's frustration grows, as do the laughs and the conflict. Treat yourself to some laughs with *I Funny: School of Laughs* by James Patterson (yes, this is the same James Patterson of best-selling suspense novels) and *Funny Girl: Funniest. Stories. Ever.* by Betsy Bird

Middle grade books. Because this age group, nor-

Making Failure Work...continued

mally considered between 8 and 12 years old, overlaps grade school and teens, the books vary in tone and subject matter. What kind of book for ‘twens might have ever-growing failures? Mysteries, of course, can contain setbacks as young sleuths seek to discover the truth behind odd happenings. The journey takes the kids on a series of challenges, each more harrowing than the last. The failures mount up, and, though the results aren’t life and death, they do have consequences. Mysteries can incorporate humor into the suspense, which lightens the tone and make it appropriate for the 8 – 12 age group. Check out *The Dork Diaries* by Rachel Renee Russell and Middle School, *The Worst Years of My Life* by James Patterson for good examples of ‘tween humor.

Young adult books (ages 12 and up). Things can grow more serious in books for teenagers. What kind of story can we make up about Lizzie Randle, who is trying to tell her mother that her stepfather is abusing her? All of Lizzie’s attempts to tell her mother fail because her mother doesn’t want to hear what Lizzie has to tell her. The stakes escalate with each failure because she is growing more and more desperate and is considering taking her life. Finally Lizzie works up the courage to tell a teacher—this is her ultimate triumph. The teacher gets Lizzie help. This doesn’t mean all books for teens need to be serious. On the contrary, teens enjoy humor just as do younger readers. For a good belly laugh, try *Winger* by Andrew Smith, and, for a change of pace, pick up *It’s Not Supposed to Be This Way* by Lysa TerKeurst.

Older young adult books (ages 14 and up). With older characters (generally junior or senior high school students), more complex issues can be addressed. Let’s pretend we’re writing a story about nineteen-year-old Rick who discovers that his mother and father aren’t really his biological parents. For weeks he’s been asking his mother and father for his birth certificate in order to complete a college application, but they keep putting him off. He decides to look for it on his own. When he finds it in the bottom drawer of his father’s desk, he is stunned to find that the names of the parents given on it are not his own. He will always think of his mother and father as his “real” parents, but he wants to learn about his biological parents. He tells his parents

that he has found the certificate, causing tears on his mother’s part, but his mother and father seem ultimately relieved to have the truth out. However, he doesn’t tell them that he wants to find his biological parents—he loves them too much and knows that it will hurt them. He determines to find out the true circumstances of his birth on his own and goes on a quest to do just that. Everywhere he turns, he is met with failure. The more he looks for the truth, the greater the nature of the setbacks he suffers. For examples of fine YA novels, pick up *Sacrifice: (The Emergence Trilogy)* by K. A. Riley, *The Amnesia Experiment* by Caroline Wei, and *The Rising Storm* by Ceri A. Lowe,

Or, throw some failure in the way of your YA characters with humor. To tickle your funny bone, try *Wild Nerd Yonder* by Julie Halpern and *Abundance of Katherines* by John Green and *To All the Boys I’ve Loved Before* by Jenny Han.

WRAPPING UP

Having characters experience defeats or setbacks over the course of a book heightens the conflict and brings realism to the story. Whether the story is humorous or serious, let your characters encounter the frustration, sorrow, and occasional tears in failing to achieve a goal.

A Chat With the Creative Duo Behind

BALLOONS FOR PAPA

Author Elizabeth Gilbert Bedia and Illustrator Erika Meza

interview by PJ McIlvaine

As a child, Elizabeth Gilbert Bedia was a keen observer of nature, and books expanded her knowledge of the world. But being a writer wasn't on her radar until years later, when she rediscovered her love of creative writing after starting a family. After wearing several career hats, Bedia found her footing in kidlit with her debut picture book *Bess the Barn Stands Strong* (Page Street Kids, September 2020, illustrations by Katie Hickey) and her newest, *Balloons for Papa* (HarperCollins, April 2021, illustrations by Erica Menza) which Kirkus Reviews hailed as “a skillful reminder that kids can be the bright spots amid their caregivers’ serious worries.” An outstanding cookie eater, Bedia lives in central Iowa with her husband, two kids, and big dogs Finn (a rescue mix) and Luigi, a Spinone Italiano. Learn more at elizabethgilbertbedia.com.



PJ McILVAINE: As a child, what were your reading influences?

ELIZABETH GILBERT BEDIA: My dad was always reading, I observed this from a very young age, so watching him influenced me to become a reader.

PM: Were you a voracious reader?

EGB: I wouldn't say I was a voracious reader. I loved to read, but I was (and still am) a very slow reader. That being said, I tend to be picky. A book had to capture my full attention in the first few pages for me to be all in and continue reading.

PM: Could you imagine yourself being a writer even then?

EGB: The simple answer is no. I gravitated toward science and never thought I was good at writing.

PM: Do you think writers are born—or can it be taught?

EGB: I honestly think writers can be either. I have friends who knew they wanted to write from the time they were in elementary school and they pursued a career related to writing. Then, there are those like me that loved to write creatively and quietly learned the craft for years, while working in an unrelated field.

PM: When did you realize that you wanted to continue creative writing in a professional way?

EGB: It was when my children were born. While reading to them, I fell in love with picture

books and creative writing again. Of course, it took many years of learning the craft of picture book writing, joining critique groups, attending conferences, and just plain sitting my bum in the chair and writing—to have manuscripts worthy to send out to editors and agents.

PM: What do you think is the most important thing a writer needs to do when plotting out a picture book?

EGB: To have patience and the willingness to not hold back. Those both may sound obvious, but both can be difficult. I am a pantser and a plotter when it comes to plotting out a picture book. Initially, I let my ideas flow

Balloons for Papa...continued

out onto the page until I have a working story, then I become more of a plotter—honing in on specific plot points and finessing them.

PM: What are three things that a successful picture book must have, in terms of character and story?

EGB: A character that is relatable and attainable to all. Spot-on pacing that drives the story forward. And, that re-readability factor that keeps the readers/listeners coming back again and again.

PM: Do you think the more obstacles/flaws the better?

EGB: That's a tough question. I think it depends on the story, but I do know too many flaws can muddle and bog down the story. Just as with the economy of words—make every word count—I think that applies to obstacles as well. They must be meaningful, build, and drive the story forward.

PM: Can a picture book have more than one main character?

EGB: Absolutely! I am actually drafting out a story with two main characters right now. Thus far, the most difficult thing is maintaining balance between their character arcs while not bogging the plot down with too many details.

PM: Your second picture book was initially released in 2020 by one publisher and is now being re-released in 2021 under a different imprint. As that's somewhat unusual, can you elaborate on how that came about?

EGB: Yes. *Balloons for Papa* was originally acquired by Trigger Publishing and released as *Arthur Wants a Balloon* in the UK in 2020. Last summer, I received word from my UK editor that one of the big five publishers was interested in acquiring the North American rights for *Arthur* and a few months later HarperCollins acquired it. I was thrilled for the opportunity and for Arthur's story to reach even more families.

PM: Was anything changed in the book for the second release?

EGB: Aside from Americanizing some of the words,

Luana Horry, my editor at HarperCollins, did ask for a few thoughtful text revisions. She wanted to make sure the reader knew clearly that Mama is in the hospital from the start and that Arthur knew his dad's sadness wasn't his fault. Both very important points for young readers to understand and I think the changes work brilliantly in the US version. The team at Harper also asked to expand the backmatter.

PM: Were you consulted about the illustrations?

EGB: Yes, but I also trusted my UK editor, Alli Brydon, because she shared my vision for the story from the very start. The first time I saw Erika's illustrations, I cried. They were exactly as I had envisioned but sooo much better!

PM: Was there anything you would've done differently?

EGB: Looking back, not at all. *Balloons for Papa* was championed from the start by both my UK editor, Alli Brydon, and my US editor, Luana Horry, so I knew it was in great hands.

PM: What aspect of the publishing process surprised you the most?

EGB: How much work goes on behind the scenes to make

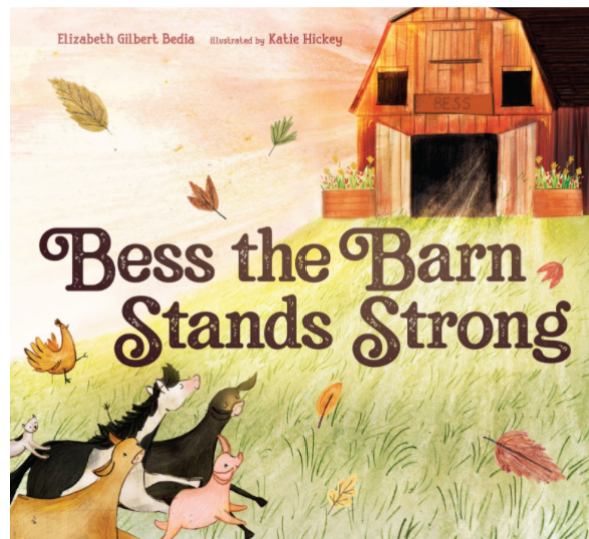
a picture book the best it can be and what a true team effort it is. I have complete and utter respect for the editors, art directors, designers, and marketing and publicity teams I have been fortunate to work with. They are all amazing!!

PM: What do you like best about writing?

EGB: The A-HA moments. Those moments when I have a breakthrough on a story and I say, "Yessss! That's it!" It could be at the beginning as I am just fleshing the story out or it could be in those final revisions before it heads off to an editor's desk. Those moments are what keep me searching, learning, and writing.

PM: Do you write every day?

EGB: I try to write every day. Even if it is just jotting ideas down on a post-it note to come back to later. Though, I have found over this past year, it's good for my creativity to take a break away from writing. I try to



Balloons for Papa...continued

do this on the weekends, if I am able to and there are no pressing deadlines.

PM: Where do you get your ideas from (and specifically, for your published books)?

EGB: Anywhere really. But for *Bess the Barn Stands Strong*, it came from my rural upbringing and my love of barns. As for *Balloons for Papa*, the basic idea came from an amazing Story Storm post by Tammi Sauer years ago, but the inspiration came from memories of my children's empathy toward me during tough times in my life.

PM: Are you a member of any writing groups or professional associations?

EGB: I am. I belong to SCBWI—the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators. I highly recommended it. It is a wonderful organization where children's writers and illustrators are able to network, attend local and national conferences, and have the opportunity to get their work in front of editors and agents. In addition, I belong to two critique groups of picture book authors and illustrators.

PM: When you hit a proverbial writing pothole, what do you do to get out of it?

EGB: Great question! I think we all deal with writer's block or writing potholes differently. I usually have lots of projects in the works at once, so I tend to switch gears and move over to another project. Nine times out of ten, I work out the problem I was having with one story while I am working on another one.

PM: I understand your current agent was a former editor for the publisher of your debut book. How did that partnership come about?

EGB: Yes! Charlotte Wenger was one of the first to read *Bess the Barn Stands Strong* when I submitted it to Page Street Kids. Though she wasn't my editor for *Bess*, I loved the picture books she had acquired while at PSK. When she moved over to agenting, I queried her, and we just seemed to connect on several levels. Most importantly, she "got" my writing and believed in it.

PM: Has the present pandemic affected your writing?

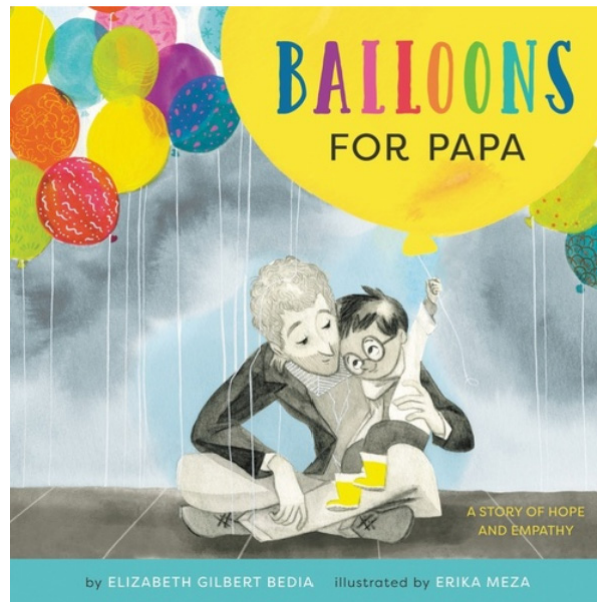
EGB: It did at the beginning. Our daily life was suddenly turned upside down, as was true for so many. I was used to working in solitude during the day, and now both my high schooler and my college student were home and working right next to me at the table.

PM: Since writing is such a solitary affair anyway, has it made it easier or harder?

EGB: It was definitely harder for me. My focus changed; I knew it had to with both of the kids at home. Plus, for the first time in a long time—my motivation wasn't there—there were weightier topics that occupied my mind. I didn't start back writing routinely until November of 2020. It was such a release and a feeling of sheer joy to get back in the chair again!!

PM: When do you know a project is ready for the world?

EGB: Aside from putting it through both of my critique groups, letting it sit, then coming back to it and honing it. It may sound silly, but it is the "goose-bump" test for me. When I am in the final stages of a project, I voice record it and play it back. If it gives me goose-bumps then I feel like it is ready to send to Charlotte for



a final check.

PM: What book do you wish you had written?

EGB: Oh my! There are SOOO many brilliant picture books out there right now, but if I had to pick one it would be *A House that Once Was* by Julie Fogliano, illustrated by Lane Smith. Just Lovely!!

PM: What is a Spinone Italiano and how did you come to own one?

EGB: They're a breed from northern Italy—originally used as hunting dogs. But in the US, because of their loyal, calm, and gentle demeanors, they are used more and more as service dogs. Our Luigi is a big goofy pup, lovable to a fault. When our rescue cat, Bluey, passed away, our older pup, Finn, was completely lost without her and became depressed. Luigi joined our family and

Ballons for Papa...continued

made all the difference for Finn and for all of us. He is either with Finn or by one of our sides—and always with a wet scruff, a trademark of Spins.

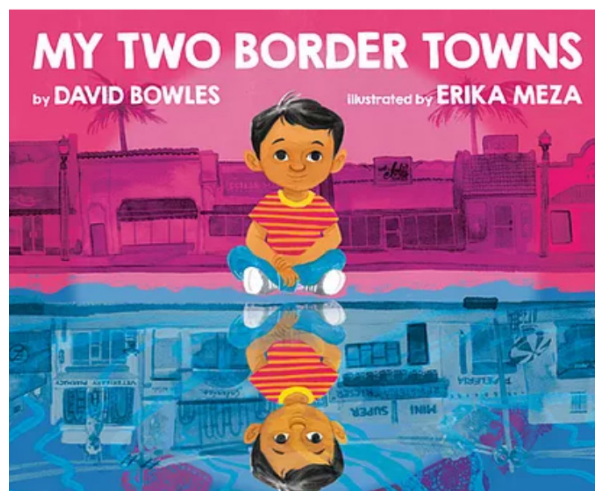
PM: How would you describe your writing as compared to a sweet treat?

EGB: Hahaha! This question made me chuckle, then it definitely made me think—What sweet treat IS my writing like? I would have to say a layered fruit salad. I see my writing as layered, vibrant, and consists of a variety of flavors—where each flavor is unique but melds together with the other flavors into a (hopefully) delicious treat.

Children’s book illustrator/Mexican Migrant/Eclair Expert/Taco Connoisseur Erika Meza once lived in a Parisian dungeon with a princess to study art (I smell a book). Meza’s art is as colorful as the artist; she takes great pride and diligence in tailoring her art to match words in unexpected ways, such as the striking black and white illustrations for *Balloons for Papa*. Now living in the UK with her cat, Meza continues to expand her repertoire as an author/illustrator. You can see more of her delightful illustrations at erikameza.com.

PJ McILVAINE: At what age did you realize that you wanted to be an artist? What were your artistic influences growing up? Is there a particular artwork or form that inspires you?

ERIKA MEZA: Gosh, I think the desire was always there. I remember watching a behind the scenes clip of the ink & paint girls in the Disney animation studios in the 1950’s, and thinking that seemed absolutely magical—and then proceeding to draw the characters again and again trying to figure them out, and get them *just* right. Animation was definitely THE big influence growing up—to this day, cinema and the way images are codified to tell a story through it (and I talk about all mediums, not just the animated one now) is a big influence on how I think about my work. Obviously, picture books being a static medium, they have different limitations in what I can do—but that’s where the creative stimulus kicks in. I quite like a challenge!



PM: Since you’re also an author-illustrator, in addition to illustrating other writer’s books, what comes first for you, the text or the art? Is one harder than the other? What skill sets do you need to successfully mesh the two? What is your writing process like vs the artistic one?

EM: It depends on the book (isn’t that annoying?). For some, the artwork pops up and the characters are conjured first, and they’re the ones to suggest a story: their clothes, their dynamic, their attitudes, their relationship in that one image will let me imagine their world. And the story may suffer extensive research and experimentation and copy and paste, version after version after version.

In others, it is the text first; I then have to do extensive research and sketching (and sometimes collage!) to figure out exactly what anything that I’ve written down looks like. I think both have their challenges and their joys; personally, I very much enjoy the latter because it means I can have a bit of play-time, where I create simply for the sake of exploring and making—and this sometimes pushes my style further, which is a welcome plus. I think for both,

the main skill I needed to develop was being able to extract the essence of what I wanted to say: whatever it is, it needs to be simple enough to guide every decision that follows, both in the art and the text. In *Balloons*, for example, that essence was the emotional state of the characters. Both processes are a bit chaotic, and very playful, but always go hand in hand in service of that message.

PM: Since I can’t draw for beans, I’m fascinated by the actual work involved in making an illustration to pair with text. Do you draw by hand and then transfer it to a computer program? What is the process like? How long does it take you to illustrate a book? How do you decide on the art style (your portfolio displays a beautiful array of artwork)? Have you ever started illustrating something and then realized it wasn’t working, for whatever reason?

EM: Oh, the process is (I dare say) one that probably drives my art directors a bit mad. I will sketch, and try and find the characters and the way I will portray them, and think and think of the message I want to convey with the illustration (even if I didn’t write the text, I find

Balloons for Papa...continued

it works better for me if I have a personal angle and an ‘essence’ for the art; it helps my decision making!).

So, I write a lot, brainstorming and searching for the visual language I will use in the book; the style is still very much my own, but the elements I will build with will support the text. For example, in *Balloons* everything angular signifies sadness, and hurt, and despair, and everything organic or round will stand for joy and hope. Arthur’s clothes, and that of his dad’s, are using angular and curve lines to signify the way their mood changes throughout the book: Arthur’s goes back and forth, and dad’s becomes more acute (until the twist at the end!). I first sketch everything very loosely, very simply—to the point where the characters and backgrounds look nothing like the finished product. I keep all my energy pent up until I am good to go so that it is all poured in inks and gouaches on the final art, which is all drawn by hand on paper. And sometimes if I need to speed things up or play with colour further, I will paint it all black and white and use the flexibility the computer gives me (at the end, it is just another tool!). But it is very much a collaborative effort with the art directors, who essentially let me run wild while nudging along to ensure I don’t deviate. They essentially will approve the colors, and the character designs, and the overall style I intend to use... and then cross their fingers I don’t go too out there.

PM: Is your work process different when you’re illustrating your own book vs another writer’s? How would you characterize your style? More realistic? Lifelike?

EM: Oh, my style is very much non-realistic. If I must define it, off the top of my head I’d say it is a very “real emotional” style, if that makes any sense: I find that, like in animation, being able to make the reader *feel* something for characters that are drawn on paper is the most magical piece of alchemy I can possibly conjure up. But yes, the process is definitely more complex when it is my own book, since I need to make sure the message I’m trying to communicate with it is loud and clear—whereas in someone else’s text, the loud message is *on* the text. All I have to do is support it.

PM: How did you decide on the style for *Papa*? The use of black and white vs color is striking. Since the subject matter deals with parental depression, was that intentional on your part?

EM: Oh; thank you so much for saying that! It was intentional, yes. In fact, I think it was a magical coincidence: I had already developed the style for a different book written by me (it was only a proposal), that dealt with *my* own mental health issues. That one was about the

importance of physical touch, and the black and white vs color was essentially there *just* as it is with *Balloons for Papa*, as if my proposal had been a dress rehearsal. At the same time, Ali and Liz were discussing that exact same idea as the way to bring this world to life. My sample with the black and white vs color arrived in Ali’s inbox, and the rest is history.

PM: You have an art agent to represent you. What was that process like? How do you decide on which project to take on?

EM: Yes! Claire is my guardian, my compass and my warrior. She and I have had chemistry from the time we met, and from that day I’ve known that she would be brutally honest with me, both in my art and my writing—which is what I wanted. And so far, I haven’t been disappointed—we’ve worked together for five years now, she has helped me grow so much and become more confident—and I just know she’s got my back. She will write to me with the enquiries people have, and the manuscript, and she leaves it entirely to me to accept or reject the project; this means I’m free to take the ones I know I can actually inject my personality into.

PM: If you weren’t an artist, what would you be? Do you aspire to illustrate in other genres?

EM: Oh, I wanted to be a marine biologist. I also flirted with the idea of working in the radio, and getting a talk show (maybe one day I can start my own podcast?). I also hoped to work in animation—to this day, I wouldn’t say no if Cartoon Saloon came knocking (AHEM AHEM, hint hint). But what I am doing right now, in the genre I’m doing it, this is my absolute dream. I’m incredibly lucky.

PM: And you know I had to ask—what’s your favorite taco and why? What’s the worst taco you’ve ever eaten? (Mine was fish tacos. Yecch.)

EM: Hahaha—fish tacos are iconic of where I come from!! But don’t worry, I won’t tell anyone. For me, the birria taco is the Mozart of tacos. Tijuana has perfected the recipe, and just writing this is enough to make me drool thinking of it—it is simply addictive, and luscious, and oh so wonderful when it has its broth on the side and is freshly served.

Worst one, on the other hand, an eye taco. (**PJ here:** trust me, you don’t want to know). We found them on a cart in a corner on New Year’s, a friend and I, and we had taken the resolution of “trying anything at least once”... once was enough!!

SHOW YOUR CHARACTERS TO YOUR READERS

by Jane McBride

Writers know that a large part of creating a strong book is crafting compelling characters. You may have tried character charts, interviewing your characters, comparing characters to an onion and peeling back the layers, and any number of other character revealing exercises. But once you've collected all that great character information, you have to convey it to your readers by using plot elements to show who your characters are. Here are some techniques to try:

STEP 1: Use subtext. To use subtext, we first need to know just what it is. Subtext is the implied meaning of a text, the understood but unspoken meaning that provides greater depth than what is overtly stated. Subtext lends drama, emotion, and relevance to characters.

ACTION: *Go deeper with your writing by hinting at what your character is truly feeling and thinking without saying so explicitly.* Suppose you are writing a story about a boy, Adam, whose parents divorced when he was only a baby. He hasn't seen his father in 15 years. Now his father wants to see his son. Our young protagonist is vehemently opposed to that; his father has ignored him for 15 years, why should he let him into his life now? Still, he is curious. He agrees to a single meeting. When his father arrives, Adam sees a man flashily dressed. The man's gestures are big and expansive. Adam is immediately put off, but then he looks more closely. His father's clothes look expensive, yes, but they are too flashy, too loud, the material shiny and, if he looked closely, cheap. His gestures are expansive, yes, but they have a desperate quality to them, as does his laughter. It is like the clothes and gestures—too flashy, too loud, too everything. He shows off with a big vocabulary, but he uses the words improperly. Adam, who has spent much of his life with adults—his mother and her friends—sees beneath the surface. When he challenges his father why he

has visited him after 15 years of ignoring him, his father confesses that he's sick. He can get better, he says eagerly, if he finds a blood marrow match. He asks Adam if he'll be tested to see if he's a match, excusing it by saying that he has no other family and that a blood relative is more likely to be a match than a stranger. Ah, there is the answer to the question that prompted Adam to agree to seeing his father. Adam and the readers finally understand. Adam now has a choice to make. The subtext of this piece makes what Adam learned about his father more poignant as Adam decides to take the test but refuses to have a relationship with his father. The cheap, shiny clothes, over-the-top gestures, and loud laughter are the explicit elements of Adam's father; they mask the implicit elements, his selfish reason for visiting Adam and his blatant relief that Adam doesn't want any more of a relationship.

STEP 2: Profile your character.

ACTION: *Ask her questions.* We are not talking the questions you might find on a characterization form, like "What is your place in the family?" or "What is your favorite subject at school?" We're talking the deep questions, questions that many people don't like answering. Why are you acting this way? Why do you feel this way? What secrets are you holding in your heart? What don't you want others to know? Let's make up another character, Ariel, who is the most popular girl in her senior class. She is beautiful, smart, funny, and genuinely nice. But Ariel has a big secret. She cuts herself. Every day she makes tiny, precise cuts on the insides of her thighs where the cuts won't show. Being perfect is taking a tremendous toll on her. It requires always being the best, for her parents, for her friends, for herself. She stays up past midnight every night, studying so that she can maintain her

Show Your Characters...continued

4.0 GPA. She is starving herself to maintain her size 2 figure. Her life is spiraling out of control. She cuts herself because that is one thing over which she has perfect control. Asking these questions early in the writing process will open up plot possibilities for you, as well as ways to reveal a character's motivations.

STEP 3: Put your character in hot water.

ACTION: *Ask one more question of your character. What is he most afraid of?* What if almost-18-year-old Adam is afraid of speaking in public? Okay, this is understandable. A number of us fear speaking in public. In fact, a survey revealed that people fear speaking in public more than they do death. But Adam's fear has been ramped up exponentially: he has earned the spot of valedictorian in his graduating class. This sparks huge anxiety within him. While he is thrilled to be valedictorian, he doesn't think he can speak in front of the hundreds of students plus their parents who will attend the graduation ceremony. Do you see how Adam's fear has ratcheted up with this honor? If his fear is stronger than his desire to be valedictorian, you have plot options, including Adam deliberately doing poorly on a final exam to drop his grade and miss out on giving the speech.

STEP 4: Take a moral inventory.

ACTION: *Find your character's high ground, what she will not do no matter the cost.* Then push her closer and closer to having to do that very thing. What if 17-year-old Hailey, who has a history of lying, vowed to herself in elementary school that she would never cheat on a test? She has managed to keep that resolution until she finds herself competing for a very prestigious city-wide scholarship. The scholarship is for \$10000.00 and would go a long way to pay for her first year of college. She knows the competition will be stiff. The other competitors are all top students from all over the city. Hailey has the opportunity to get a copy of the test questions; she has only to come up with the money. She can use the money her grandmother gave her as a pre-graduation present. Hailey is tempted, sorely tempted, to buy a copy of the questions. The idea fills her with revulsion, but she can't deny that she is thinking about breaking her self-made promise. Will she follow through and

cheat or will she hold fast to her resolve? Hailey's dilemma makes for good conflict as well as adding complexity and layers to her character.

WRAPPING UP

Creating nuances to your characters is an important writing skill. Showing those nuances to readers is advanced characterization. When you reach that level in your writing, celebrate. You've arrived!



Frequently 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, editing, submitting, marketing, or self-publishing your book, check out free trial editions here:

<https://writingblueprints.com/p/free-trial-editions-of-our-top-blueprints>



LEARNING FOR JUSTICE MAGAZINE

interview by Sharon O. Blumberg

This month, we're excited to chat with Monita K. Bell, Managing Editor of *Learning for Justice* magazine. The magazine was formerly called Teaching Tolerance.

SHARON BLUMBERG: Could you please tell us a little bit about yourself and how you came to be Managing Editor of *Learning for Justice* magazine?

MONITA BELL: As An Alabama native, I earned a B.A. and an M.A. in English from Alabama State University and Auburn University, respectively—all with the intention of teaching English literature at the college level. And I did that for five years: world literature, American literature, short fiction, composition, creative writing, and grammar. I loved being in the classroom with my students, but my love of writing and editing took over. I wanted to engage more with issues I was “sliding into” my courses.

When I learned about an open writer/associate editor position at the Southern Poverty Law Center's Teaching Tolerance project (now Learning for Justice), I saw it as an opportunity to merge my skills with my personal interests around justice and education, particularly in the South. I joined in 2013, was promoted to senior editor in 2016, and took on the managing editor role in 2019.

SB: How do readers find your magazine? Is it subscription, newsstand, or online?

MB: The print version of our magazine is available via free subscription for educators, but the online

version is available to anyone on our website at learningforjustice.org. There, readers will find our magazine archive and a link to explore the latest issue, as well as options for sharing stories and pulling stories into custom learning plans. Each issue is also available as a downloadable PDF.

SB: Who is the audience for your magazine?

MB: A broad range of K-12 educators read our magazine, from librarians and media specialists to classroom teachers and school counselors. We also know that professors of education use our magazine, as well as people who work in a variety of community-based organizations serving youth. Our magazine is a space where people can find commentary on the latest issues in social justice education, as well as practical considerations for making their schools and

classrooms safer, more equitable, and inclusive places for all students.

SB: What kind of background do your future writers need to have?

MB: In the past, we were primarily dependent on freelance writers. However, in recent years, we've been able to bring on exceptionally talented full-time writers who have both journalistic and education experience. Because our magazine delves into pressing issues in education, it helps if writers either have experience writing about education or have experience as educators themselves.

On our blog in particular, our freelancers are prac-



Learning for Justice Magazine...continued

ting educators who are speaking directly from their experience and offering usable information to fellow educators.

However, most relevant to your readers would be a section of our magazine, Story Corner, that is just for children and teachers or other adults who might be reading to or with them. Geared toward elementary students, each 600-word story is meant to expose children to aspects of identity, diversity, justice or action, and has accompanying reading questions to deepen discussion.

SB: What is the best way for writers to submit your magazine?

MB: Because Story Corner would be most relevant to your readers, that would be the best thing for me to speak to. Writers can submit by email via lfjsubmissions@splcenter.org. We also take queries. Anyone who is interested can learn more about writing for us at learningforjustice.org/about/writing-for-learning-for-justice, which also has details about submitting other types of material for the magazine.

SB: How do you respond to writers' submissions, and how long does it generally take for you to respond back?

MB: How and when we respond depends on several things, including the volume of submissions, the other projects we're working on, whether or not the submission was solicited, and more. And because we rely on our staff writers more than freelance writers, we don't use as many freelance submissions. We're also not like other magazines. For the past two years, we have produced only two issues per year—it was three issues per year previously—so we may hold pitches or submissions for up to a year or more. We respond immediately with more information about our pro-



cesses, but we contact writers only if we would like to use a submission.

SB: What kinds of rights do you buy from writers?

MB: The rights we buy vary by the type of writing, but generally speaking, work done for us is considered a work for hire. So we buy the copyright and all rights to the work. Authors have the right to publish similar work based on the same material elsewhere and may publish the exact work elsewhere with our written permission.

We pay different rates for different types of writing. For magazine features and Story Corner pieces, we pay \$1 per word. For the 600-word Story Corner, then, that would be \$600.

For blogs, however, we pay a flat rate of \$150 per published piece. We encourage everyone to visit our “Writing for Us” page to learn more about the different types of writing we use in our work.

SB: Is there anything else that I have not asked you, that you would like to add regarding yourself or the magazine, *Learning for Justice*?

MB: At *Learning for Justice*, our editorial work is a larger extension of the work of the program itself: We are working to ensure that every child feels safe and welcome at school, and has what they need—from accuracy and representation in what they read and learn, to equitable discipline and lunch practices, and everything in between. We do this by supporting educators and education leaders, as well as caregivers and community members, in creating and sustaining such spaces. So we write for them so that children and youth will reap the benefits. I personally do this work so that my child—and all children—will.

