

Workshops

* *Popular favorites*

Poetry

*Environmental Storytelling and the Power of the Natural Object

Environmental Storytelling is a term used in the gaming community to describe how objects and details in an environment can give narrative information without impeding gameplay momentum. This concept also applies to the poet, who uses objects—including “the natural object”—to create an intended effect and lead a reader through the poem. In this workshop we’ll discuss how to mine the natural objects of a poem to highlight themes, focus our reader’s attention, and come to surprising realizations. We will look at example poems and take part in writing exercises to explore these principles in our own work.

Revising with Purpose: Playing with Poetic Form

Poetic form isn’t just meter and rhyme—it encompasses a diverse range of tools that shape a poem. Whether we’re aware of it or not, we all use elements of form when we write. Poetic form has a range of devices at our disposal for establishing and disrupting patterns for our readers. When we can masterfully employ patterns, we can focus our reader’s attention, clarify our intent and create powerful emotional moments in our work. In this time, we’ll discuss the tools of form at our disposal, such as rhythm, line breaks, the stanza, “the rules of the poem” and more. We’ll walk through my process and how I approached form in my collection *Drowning in the Floating World*, and will have time for exercises practicing form through anaphora and the haiku.

Poetry Craft in the Details

(For a multi-week course): Let’s build off the foundations of poetry. In this course, we’ll focus on how the ideas in our poems can be reinforced or detracted from based on our use of details. We’ll discuss how critical mindfulness is for a poet, and take time practicing attention on elements such as rhythm, line breaks, stanzas, and sensory details. We will also discuss the editing process, and work on editing work from the course.

(For a one-day session): In our busy age, it’s easy to overlook the details and move from one thing to the next in the name of productivity. But as poets, we must slow down to select precise language and details to create the intended experience for our readers. In this

workshop, we'll explore mindfulness for the poet, taking time to practice attention to language, details and form on the page. We'll play with how to reinforce our intended ideas, and try exercises to unpack the significance in the details around us. As we read and write, we'll practice attention on elements such as sensory details, line breaks, and patterns on the page.

Creating from Wounds: A Generative Workshop

In these difficult times, it can be so easy for us to drown in the relentless awful in our news cycle and world. How do we find the glimmers of beauty in so much pain? The power of poems is that they allow us to create from disaster, making something out of the brokenness to process and cope. In this workshop, Meg Eden will share tools that she has used in writing her latest poetry collection, exploring the beauty and magic that the natural object, form and personification can lend to our poems, and in turn, our spirits. Participants will have time during the workshop with interactive prompts, and will also receive resources to continue writing on their own.

Poetry Chapbook Workshop

works best asynchronously

The chapbook is becoming a popular form with both poets and publishers, and is a great way for poets to get their work out before a first book. In this hands-on workshop, we'll discuss what a chapbook is, look at several examples, and explore how to choose and order poems to create a strong body of work, as well as how to select the right chapbook publisher for your work.

Foundations of Poetry

works best asynchronously

Over the course of six weeks, we'll discuss four key elements of poems: image, sound, form and realization. Students will produce a variety of poems and learn tips for maintaining the practice of writing. Students will have the opportunity to workshop four poems and will receive personalized feedback on their work.

Poetic Forms

works best asynchronously

In this workshop, we'll explore why form is relevant for contemporary poets, and how we can take advantage of form to strengthen both traditional and free-verse poems. Poetic form isn't just meter and rhyme--it encompasses a diverse range of vessels that poems can inhabit. Form can help focus our poems, and reinforce a tone beyond our written words. When we have writer's block, form can give us direction on how to keep writing. Over the six weeks of this

workshop, we'll write in several forms (including the haiku, sestina, pantoum, and sonnet), and explore what content works well with different types of forms.

Open Every Door: Writing Beyond Abstractions

Emily Dickinson's poems are known for surprising pairings of the abstract with the concrete, making Hope "the thing with feathers," fame a "fickle food" and Death a carriage driver. By giving the abstract concrete properties, Dickinson breathes life to these ideas, and makes us as readers think about them in a new way. How can we do the same in our own work? Join us for a workshop where we'll dig into the sensory details behind our abstract feelings and thoughts. In the process, we'll make discoveries that take off the top of our heads.

Fiction

Revising with Focus: the Thesis of the Novel

Once you've written a draft, it can be difficult to figure out where to go next. A range of people will provide feedback, but who is right? How do you go about discerning what to edit and what to keep the same? To effectively edit, it's critical to identify a novel's underlying argument—it's heart. In this workshop, we'll discuss the "thesis statement" approach to editing, looking at examples of novels' "thesis statements," as well as providing exercises to help you identify and hone in on your novel's thesis.

*Hooking Your Reader: Writing A Killer First Line

Most editors of both magazines and presses will say that they read the first, last and middle page of a story before deciding if they want to read more. Potential readers are even less forgiving. When I pick up a new book, if the first line doesn't hook me, I probably won't continue reading. So how do we snag our readers and make them want to read more? In this workshop, we'll look at examples of powerful first lines and discuss strategies for selecting a powerful first line. Feel free to bring the first line of your story or novel for a mini first-line "workshop."

Bones and Narrative Energy: The Synopsis As A Creative Road Map

When an agent or editor requests a synopsis, the process of honing our novel down into such a small space can be dread-inducing. However, writing a synopsis can help us reflect on the larger themes and values of our work, helping us focus and tighten our narrative structure--or even lay out a road map for a future project. In this workshop, we'll use the synopsis as a frame for discussing the bones and beats of plot, as well as using it as a guiding light through the

drafting and editing process. In our time together, we'll practice getting to the heart of our projects through writing a one-line pitch, and using that pitch to outline our synopses.

Fiction Revision Workshop

works best asynchronously

In this workshop, we'll focus on creating one strong story. We'll dive into exercises to develop a story idea, discuss elements of craft, and develop our ideas through feedback and revision each step of the way. This course can be used to create a completed short story or work through excerpts of a novel.

A New Angle: Playing with Point of View

Have you started a writing project with excitement, but quickly lost interest and felt stuck? Sometimes changing the point of view in the story can reinvigorate a project, and give direction on how to move forward. In this workshop, we'll explore stories that use unique perspectives, and take part in a writing exercise to get ideas on what perspectives could transform our own stories.

Writing Outside the Box: Playing with the Page

Writers are discovering that nothing is off limits on the page. Novels are coming out that emulate video games, choose-your-own-adventures, text messages, tweets, emails, and more. What can we learn from the text mediums in our daily lives, and how can we apply the strengths of these mediums to our writing? Come to this workshop to take part in a lively discussion on the possibilities for the page, as well as practice writing in unconventional mediums through a writing exercise.

Publication

*Getting Your Foot in the Door: Publishing in Literary Magazines

Want to submit your work to magazines but don't know how? In this workshop, we'll talk about what literary magazines are, what editors are looking for in submissions, have a "translation" exercise, tips on how to get the most out of a lit mag, tips for approaching writing a cover letter and contributor bio, as well as how to handle rejections. The skills you learn in this session can easily apply to other publication realms, including writing to agents and editors of small book presses. All participants will receive a complimentary magazine of their choice.

Kidlit Market 101

Join us for an overview of the children's publishing world. We'll cover age categories, genres, and best practices for submission, in addition to breaking down the differences between large and small publishers, educational markets, and book packagers. Learn how to focus your craft to fit your publishing goals, when you do and don't need an agent, and the resources you need to know to get your kidlit career going.

I'm Getting Published...Now What? The Book Promo Strategies No One Tells You About

Writing a book and getting it published is hard enough--however the work doesn't end there. Both traditionally and self-published authors are expected to do their own promotion, and there are so many options for promotion, it can be hard to know which ones are most effective, let alone which ones are out there before publication. In this workshop, we will address lessons learned from both the author and publicity and marketing sides of the debut novel experience. Author and Assistant Director of Publicity and Marketing at California Coldblood Books Meg Eden will share what she has learned from promoting her own books, as well as the resources to get connected with larger networks of authors writing in your genre. This workshop is best for authors with a forthcoming book (ideally 6 months to a year out), but is also helpful for those with a completed book on submission, or an author who has already published work.

What They Don't Tell You About Publishing: Submitting to Agents and Editors

This workshop will equip you with everything you need to jump into the publishing industry. We'll discuss the roles of agents and editors, what they're looking for in work, and how you can make your work stand out through strong query letters, pitches, and bios. As someone who has worked on both the author and publicity sides of the fence, I can describe my experience with how to most effectively approach marketing and submitting books from both angles. We'll also discuss some key tips for how to get to know agents and editors better. No project required for this workshop; however, students who have a manuscript in mind will have opportunities to create and practice a mini pitch for the class.

Kidlit (YA and MG)

Professional Kid-ness: The Joy of Middle Grade Writing

Author Gennifer Choldenko describes being a middle grade writer as being “a professional twelve-year old.” To write middle grade, we can’t merely remember childhood, we have to re-learn how to be kids and write with a 12 year old’s worldview. But how do we do that? After all, middle grade is the great between: it’s not quite edgy enough to be young adult, but it’s got more heft than a chapter book. It’s right in the middle, just like the age of its readers: not quite a teen, but not exactly into the same kid things they were when they read Dr. Seuss. What exactly are the criteria for middle grade, and how do we write compellingly for this market? How do we get in a space to write the elusive but critical middle grade voice? Join us for this interactive discussion and workshop to ask all your middle grade questions, and take part in exercises to explore your own middle grade voice and find joy in the process.

The Craft of Young Adult Fiction

works best asynchronously

Young adult fiction (YA) is a genre of rising popularity in the writing industry. Its definition is growing to expand a wide range of engaging, complex writing for teens and beyond. But what does writing YA actually look like, and how can you make your YA stand out in front of an agent or editor? In this course, we’ll explore some of the key components that set this genre apart and make for good craft in YA writing. We’ll partake in exercises to strengthen our own craft, while also reading and dissecting specific YA books for what they do well (and in some cases, perhaps not as well). We’ll discuss the revision process as well as touch on the business of pitching and finding the right agent for your work. If you have a work-in-progress, you will have multiple opportunities to get feedback on excerpts of your manuscript.

*The Essentials of Kidlit Craft

In this eight week course, we’ll explore some of the key components that make for good writing in kidlit craft. We’ll partake in exercises to strengthen our own craft, while also reading and dissecting specific examples from contemporary kidlit for what they do well (and in some cases, perhaps not as well). We’ll discuss topics including:

- The Hook (openings)
- Plot, energy and “The Bones” (narrative structure)
- Voice and Personality
- Point of View
- Form and Objects

- Revision
- Business Informing Craft
- Reviewing Books You Love (and Hate!)

In each session, we'll spend about 30 minutes in discussion, and 30 minutes in a prompt and sharing time. Our examples will largely come from middle grade and young adult novels, but principles will still apply to other genres including nonfiction and picture books.

Advanced Kidlit Workshop

works best asynchronously

In this workshop, you'll have the opportunity to submit portions of your work each week for feedback from your peers and instructor. This is a great workshop for creating structure and motivation to finish a draft, or get feedback for revision. There will be opportunities for group discussions and writing exercises, but the focus will be on your draft and personal writing goals.

Novel in Verse 101: An Overview

Thinking about writing a novel in verse? The novel-in-verse is a unique form that merges elements of poetry and fiction, and is gaining popularity in the kidlit community as a powerful storytelling form. In this workshop, we'll discuss the craft and thematic elements that make for a strong novel-in-verse, explore some examples of effective novels in verse, and engage in exercises to start investigating this form for our own narratives.

Writing the Novel in Verse for Poets

Novels in Verse Workshop

6 week zoom lessons and workshop

Poetic Tools for Novels in Verse

Not a poet? No problem! Novels-in-verse are a great medium for telling a story, and have so many unique tools at their disposal to take advantage of. In this workshop, learn about tools to carry in your novel-in-verse toolbox including sound, repetition, line breaks, the stanza, "the rules of the poem" and more. Learn how to establish and disrupt patterns of form as well as integrate motifs to make your novel really shine. We'll walk through the process of how I've approached form in my adult poetry, as well as my novel-in-verse *Good Different*, and will have

time for exercises playing with form. If you'd like, feel free to bring some poems from your novel-in-verse that you'd like to play with.

Neurodivergent Rep in YA and MG: Writing as Neurodivergent

What does it mean to be a neurodivergent writer? While publishers say they're looking for work from lived neurodivergent experiences, do they really mean it? While I personally have received so much positive support already for my forthcoming novel in verse *Good Different*, and have found such joy in writing about my lived experience, I've also had some reactions to my neurodivergent protagonists along the way that have surprised me. Come for an honest conversation about the current state of neurodivergent representation in kidlit, as well as the experiences of a neurodivergent writer in the publishing landscape. Bring questions and topics you'd like to talk about!

Writing Workshops for Kids (best for ages 8-16)

Celebrate Autism Acceptance

Meet guest author, Meg Eden Kuyatt, author of *Good Different*, an extraordinary novel-in-verse about a neurodivergent girl who comes to understand and celebrate her difference.

Hear about Ms. Kuyatt's inspiration for writing this novel, her journey discovering she is autistic, and join the Q&A to get your questions answered. This author event is empowering for neurodivergent students and a great opportunity for all students to better understand their peers. A writing exercise inspired by *Good Different* is also able to be included if of interest.

Good Different is the winner of several honors, including, the 2024 ALA Schneider Family Book Award Honor for a book that embodies the disability experience, and one of School Library Journal's Best Middle Grade Books of 2023.

Where I'm From & Writing About Home

What do we mean when we call a place "home"? In this workshop, we'll explore Renee Watson's poem "Where I'm From" and write our own pieces about home, incorporating specific sensory details of the places we love.

Great for implementing instructional standards on SEL: empathy and emotional awareness, interpreting poetry, writing poetry, memoir/journaling about self, and identifying and creating sensory details.

Writing Spooky Stories

In this workshop, we'll discuss the elements of narrative through spooky stories. By exploring spooky book covers, we'll brainstorm what makes a story spooky and take time to write our own spooky stories. Great particularly for spooky season!

Great for implementing instructional standards on SEL: empathy and emotional awareness, identifying key narrative structure vocabulary, and writing a short fiction piece implementing these key narrative elements.

Figurative Language & What's Inside Me

Using poems from my novels in verse, as well as those from student writers, we'll look at ways to use figurative language to explore the feelings inside us. Are your feelings a fire-breathing dragon? An icy, angry ghost? Or something else entirely?

Great for implementing instructional standards on SEL: empathy and emotional awareness, poetry writing, poetry interpretation, and figurative language.

What's in a Name?

In this writing workshop, we'll talk about how important selecting a name can be for your character. We'll look at examples from my books, as well as slam poets, on the different ways we can feel about a name, and break into an exercise to write about our names.

Great for implementing instructional standards on SEL/empathy, poetry writing, and poetry interpretation.

Good Different Poetry Workshop

Let's play with poetry! Using examples from Good Different, we'll talk about two critical writing tools in our toolbox: sensory details and repetition. There will be time for writing prompts and optional sharing. Particularly great for National Poetry Month!

Great for implementing instructional standards on SEL/empathy, poetry writing, poetic form, and poetry interpretation.

How I Learned to Write through Playing Video Games

Writing workshop best for teens and gaming events

The popular saying goes: “A picture’s worth a thousand words.” With the rapid developments in technology, our storytelling is changing to not just be on the page, but through movies, television, and video games—highly visual mediums. Through the power of images, we can convey a whole narrative in a short space. Games like *Deus Ex: Mankind Divided* and *Gone Home* use environmental storytelling to give us pieces of characters’ lives. In this workshop, we’ll discuss examples of games that tell stories through objects, and go into our own writing exercises inspired by video games.

Great for implementing instructional standards on critical thinking, literary interpretation, fiction writing, and poetry interpretation.

Personified Points of View

Let’s look at the world from a new angle! Here, we’ll talk about how poems can allow us to see perspectives outside our own, both human and not! We’ll take some time to explore how different objects in the room might feel, and write a poem or story from an object’s perspective.

Great for implementing instructional standards on SEL/empathy, poetry writing, fiction writing, and poetry interpretation.

Odes Workshop & Writing What You Love

Did you know you have a story only YOU can tell? The details of our lived experiences make our writing shine—but how do we find our story? Using examples from my own books, I’ll talk about ways I’ve channeled my own experiences and interests into my characters and stories, and give writing prompts and exercises, including writing your own odes, to help you discover the things that you find exciting and interesting, and the unique story you have to tell.

The Language of the Experience: Unlocking Your Voice In Writing

Some writers feel a pressure that to be “a good writer” they need to use elevated, poetic or flowery language. However, the language of our experiences can be the most powerful tool in our writing. In this workshop, we’ll read examples from *Good Different* that uses “the language of the experience,” and explore what worlds we know and love in our own writing exercise.

General Writing Craft and Business

*The Language of the Experience: Unlocking Your Voice In Writing

Some writers feel a pressure that to be “a good writer” they need to use elevated, poetic or flowery language. However, the language of our experiences can be the most powerful tool in our writing. In this workshop, we’ll read examples of writing that uses “the language of the experience,” as well as take part in a “translation” exercise to explore finding our unique voice.

The Power of Specificity: Mining your Lived Experiences

Sometimes our experience seems too “boring” to write about, or that we need to add fictional sparks to make it more “interesting”--but in fact, the little details of our lived experiences can be our most valuable assets as writers. We hear the truism “write what you know” because our expertise is our strength, and the difference between a compelling, believable story and pulling our readers out of the suspension of disbelief. But what *do* we know? In this workshop, we’ll take part in exercises that dig deep into the specific intersections of our identity, as well as the language of our unique experiences. The goal for this workshop is for everyone to walk away feeling empowered about the unique expertise they bring to their writing, and to be reminded that we all have a place at the table with stories that need to get out into the world!

Getting Started with Creative Writing

works best asynchronously

Test the waters in both poetry and fiction, and learn the essential tools for writing creative work. Each unit will focus on an element of craft, including writing exercises, workshops and reading discussions. This is a great way to dip into creative writing and gain confidence on the page!

Scrivener for Writers & Poets

Learn about the basics of using the program Scrivener to best organize your ideas, as well as outline and draft efficiently. We'll cover the basic features of the program, as well as ideas and strategies for best using this tool as a poet or fiction writer.

Tech for Authors

Being an author means more than just writing--these days, publishers of all sizes expect writers to promote their work and have an online presence. In this course, we'll discuss some tech fundamentals all authors can consider, and how to best implement them:

- Author website
- Blog
- Social media
- Square online store
- Canvas online classrooms
- Zoom features (for author events)

Build an Author Website

Available for Squarespace and Wordpress

In this workshop, we will discuss the importance and function of having an author website, and will walk through the process of getting a custom domain, as well as actually building the website through Squarespace. Students will be able to get real-time feedback on their website design. During the 3 hour block, all participants will be able to walk away with some of their website done--maybe all of it! We may also discuss social media and other elements of having an online presence.

Environmental Storytelling: Place As Narrative

Prose workshop

Every place has a story, but to find it, we often have to use the power of natural objects. As writers, we can plant clues and seeds for our reader through objects, which can give us story more efficiently and powerfully than exposition. In this workshop, we'll talk about place, the natural object, and go into a writing exercise that allows us to explore and invent stories through the details of a landscape.

Putting Yourself Out There: The Public Life of the Writer

It's hard enough to get words on the page—but then you have to get your work in front of agents, editors and readers. Whether you're an introvert or an extrovert, the process can be daunting, and the etiquette expectations opaque and confusing. In this session, we'll discuss what makes the public writer life feel daunting at times, and talk about some of the critical principles of being a bold, respectful writer in the public sphere, both in-person and online. We'll cover tips on how and when to pitch—and practice fearlessly getting yourself out there as a writer! We invite and encourage you to bring questions and concerns about the public writing life.

Let's Do NaNoWriMo! Kickoff Event and Exercises

Get inspired to draft this November with this National Novel Writing Month! Connect with fellow writers, learn strategies and exercises to prepare your project, and play with hands-on prompts to keep your word count rising and get to know your characters. Hear strategies to stay pumped all month long from a 14+ year veteran of NaNoWriMo.

Poetry and Prose as Witness: A Generative Workshop

While the term “witness” can be used in the context of faith, it can also be applied more broadly to experiences we want to recreate for our readers. As writers, how do we bear witness to what believe, experience and see in the world around us? What do we want our writing to bear witness to, and how do we do this while avoiding preaching to our audiences? In this workshop, we'll explore the possibilities of writing as bearing witness in our own work. Participants will have the opportunity to submit portions of their work for feedback, and participate in optional individual conferences. Participants will also have ample time to write and explore optional writing exercises. This creative writing workshop is best for poets and fiction writers who explore spiritual themes in their work.

I also offer workshops for National Novel Writing Month (Nanowrimo), as well as workshops and conversations on topics including: working with a small press, MFA programs, writing influenced by faith, “bearing witness” in writing, epistolary modes in fiction, revision, writing in second person and more!

Panels

Kidlit

Bridging the Middle: How Tween Literature Can Spur Intergenerational Conversations for Healing and Change

While middle grade books focus predominantly on characters that are close to their target readers' ages, there is space for these characters to connect to their parents and grandparents, addressing intergenerational patterns and finding their own, healthy path—and, when possible, healing and reconciliation. Librarians and other educators are actively seeking literature to facilitate these discussions as middle grade books are a great gateway into difficult conversations across generations for readers as well, and can reach readers beyond the target audience.

In this panel, authors will explore ways middle grade books can open up intergenerational conversations, and how librarians can use these books as a tool for readers of all ages to address family conversations, patterns and tough topics—with the hope of finding empowerment and healing. Librarians and educators will leave the session with suggested book lists, model display and book club ideas, as well as activities readers can do on their own or in community.

Writing the Mind: Mental Health in Kidlit

Mental health is becoming an increasingly prominent and urgent topic in our current day and age--however, the topic continues to carry stigma, as well as misconceptions, in many circles. These panelists will discuss their own experiences and approaches with writing about mental health, as well as how they find children's fiction and young adult novels to be particularly powerful tools for discussing this vital topic.

Verse Novels: The Power of Poetic Narrative

The novel-in-verse is a unique form, merging elements of poetry and fiction. While individual poems can communicate a narrative, verse novels allow an author to play with both prosaic and poetic craft elements as they tell an extended story. In this panel, middle grade verse novelists will discuss the power and possibilities of novels-in-verse, including the literary elements that make for an effective book, how to sustain a poetic voice through a novel-length story, and examples from their own work.

Using Innovative Forms to Encourage Reluctant Readers

Difficulties with reading can stem from a variety of sources, ranging from struggling to engage with the content to reading comprehension and decoding letters. Contemporary kidlit uses a range of innovative forms that can help engage reluctant readers through visual formatting, images and sound, and engaging points of view. In this panel, we'll discuss kidlit books that use innovative forms and how these forms can be used to help engage reluctant readers.

Working the Writing Muscles: Writing Poetry and Prose in Kidlit

The boundary between poetry and prose has grown thinner as mediums including *novels-in-verse* become increasingly popular. While the thought of switching genres may seem daunting to some writers, many have fed the creative well through alternating mediums. In this panel, picture book, middle grade, and YA authors will describe how they transition between writing verse and prose, as well as the craft lessons that can be gleaned through the experience.

Using Kidlit Books to Spark Conversations about Consent and Autonomy

In this panel, we'll discuss why introducing and normalizing concepts of autonomy, boundaries and consent is important at every age, as well as introducing books that provide information, ignite discussion, and model consent culture in age-appropriate ways. We will expand our definition of consent beyond the context of sex, but seeing how consent applies in context of neurodivergence and culture. For educators, we can also discuss challenges to these topics in the classroom, and how to address those challenges.

Neurodiverse Representation in Kidlit: Writing as Neurodivergent

In this panel, we'll explore what it means to be a neurodivergent kidlit writer, how neurodivergence informs our writing, and what the landscape for representation currently looks like in the kidlit world. We'll provide information for educators on how to best support ND students, and discuss some titles that have strong ND representation and information.

Broadening Horizons through Novels in Verse: Across Content & Continents

The novel-in-verse is a unique form, merging elements of poetry and fiction. Because of the emotion and intimacy of the form, readers get a unique insight into new perspectives, which supports empathy-building and SEL. As the form bends and plays with the traditional novel

form, dancing between poetry and narrative, it asks the reader to also stretch themselves and broaden their horizons. In this panel, we'll explore the ways novels in verse create awareness of people and places beyond majority narratives, including diverse geographic, cultural, neurological, racial, social and familial structures. Panelists will also discuss how educators can implement novels in verse in their classroom to meet curricula objectives as well as engaging their students.

Authentic Neurodiversity Representation: What Does That Look Like?

Join four autistic kidlit writers as they discuss authentic neurodivergent representation in kid lit books. We'll discuss things to look for as you read, write, share or teach books with neurodivergent characters, and will share from our books and experiences as neurodivergent writers. There will be time for Q&A so please bring your questions!

Gap in the Shelf: the Joys and Tough Topics in Upper Middle Grade

While middle grade typically centers protagonists ages 8-12, YA mostly has protagonists ages 15 and up, leaving a gap on the shelves for young readers aged 13-14. Current middle grade trends leave them little opportunity to see themselves represented on the page. There is a critical need in the middle grade space for those readers aged 13-14, but publishers are still reluctant to expand this category. Librarians, teachers, and young readers are searching for stories that address "tough" topics at an age-appropriate level. Where are the 13 year old protagonists, and how do we change the publication landscape? Hear from four authors who are tackling this challenge, covering themes from environmental and social justice to neurodivergence and human trafficking. Join us for this roundtable conversation on the middle grade market and how authors are filling the upper middle grade gap—tackling important and serious topics in a way that is accessible to the middle grade reader.

Autism Acceptance and Authentic Representation Author Panel

Join four autistic kid lit writers during Autism Acceptance month as they celebrate their new book releases and discuss authentic neurodivergent representation in kid lit books. They'll discuss things to look for as you read, write, share or teach books with neurodivergent characters, and they will share from their books and experiences as neurodivergent writers. There will be time for Q&A so please bring your questions!

The Disappearing Bookshelf: Why You Should Write KidLit in the Era of Book Challenges

According to PEN America, nearly 900 different books were banned in the first part of the 2022-2023 school year. Libraries are also facing book challenges, with children's literature being a common target. With so much contention about what kids read, why should authors consider writing for teens and young readers? Join children's authors Heather Murphy Capps and Meg Kuyatt Eden for a frank discussion of the current state of kidlit, the unique joys and challenges of writing for readers in this age category, and why children still need books about a wide variety of characters, topics, and life experiences.

Big Issues for Young Readers: Writing & Publishing Debut Middle-Grade Authors

Meet upper middle grade authors who treat big themes for tween readers. They will share practical tips for aspiring writers on writing books about contemporary themes that appeal to readers from middle school and up, plus talk about what it's like to work on these stories with agents and editors. Bring any writing or publication questions you have!

Online Pitch Contests and Mentorship Programs

Online programs like Pitch Wars, #DVPit and Author Mentor Match are becoming an increasingly common way for authors to find agents and enter the publishing market. But what exactly are these online programs, how do they work, how do participants benefit from them, and what are the best ways to make your submission stand out? This team of writers, contest participants and mentors will discuss their experiences and answer questions about online pitch contests, mentorship programs, and more.

Getting Your Writing Out: a Debut Author Panel

Meet debut picture book, middle grade and young adult authors and illustrators as they share their publication and writing journeys, what they've learned along the way, and practical tips for

aspiring writers on working with agents and editors. Bring any writing or publication questions you have!

The Language of Life in Middle Grade Kidlit

Using today's nomenclature of windows and mirrors, our panel delves into 2023's middle-grade debut-authors's stories, reflecting and offering a window into lives of our diverse world. We explore how the intentional incorporation of different languages and language patterns create connections to worlds as varied and colorful as our own backgrounds.

Safe-Scary: How Middle Grade Horror Provides Kids with a Safe Environment to Face Their Fears

Let's face it, there are a lot of scary things going on in the world today that leave our kids feeling anxious and afraid. If you are eager to find creative ways to better support these young readers, come to this session and learn how spooky books can help! Horror gives kids an opportunity to read about young protagonists just like themselves who face their fears, learn from their mistakes, and dig deep to find the skills needed to triumph over evil. Librarians are in the perfect position to put these spooky stories into the hands that need them most, and by attending this lively discussion they will gain the confidence needed to do just that. A scaled list of middle grade horror titles will be provided, which will further help librarians recommend the best reads for the right kid.

Lessons in Hope and Healing: Using Upper Middle Grade Texts for Social Emotional Learning

Join award-winning authors for a panel on middle grade texts for social-emotional learning. Using books that range from magical realism to humor, learn strategies to help readers connect literature to real-life experiences, build relationship skills, and discuss tough issues. Develop cross-curricular applications to spark empathy, conflict resolution, and responsible decision-making

Fiction and Poetry

The Rabbit Hole: Research Based Poetry Writing with Tara Elliott & Meg Eden

Join award-winning poets Meg Eden and Tara A. Elliott as they take you on a journey highlighting resources and methods to assist you in research to develop great poems.

The Radioactive Muse: Nuclear Disaster and Poetry.

From Chernobyl, Fukushima, the Marshall Islands, and Three Mile Island to the hidden sites buried unknowingly in our communities, nuclear disaster continues to haunt our world with generations of lingering effects. While some effects are made known through news reports, there are many other, more subtle dangers that lack awareness. Five poets marked by our nuclear world read from their work and discuss the convergence of research, fairy tale, pop culture, and personal history in the making of their poems to not only spread awareness but to unearth a path forward. Relying on form to call upon ethos, logos, and pathos with tools such as persona and found text, this reading will feature works that offer protest and healing from our radioactive pasts. This reading will be followed by a ten-minute period for audience participation in this important conversation.

Chronicling the Anthropocene

Our world is changing, and we are a huge reason for that change--most of the carbon dioxide we've pumped into the atmosphere is from the last 30 years. Seas are rising, temperatures are warming, and storms are more intense and frequent. Climate change is affecting the poor and marginalized first and hardest; and our children and grandchildren will live in a world vastly different from the one we know.

In this workshop, writers--sci-fi and cli-fi writers, nature poets, environmental scribes--come together to share modes of engaging the Anthropocene and its implications. Together, panelists and participants will examine the challenges facing us, breaking down global problems into slightly more manageable pieces. Panelists will lead writing exercises based on topics such as energy, plant/tree communication, and nuclear power, in which participants can develop their own reflections on these larger-than-life topics. Together we will try to wrap our arms around the challenges our earth faces, exploring how we are impacted by--and can perhaps ourselves impact--our changing climate. We speak for the trees, and hope you will join us.

Pop Goes the Poem: Writers and Editors on the Pop-cultural Impulse

Pop culture, which surrounds our daily lives, can haunt our inspiration and writing--it can also be a way to engage audiences who might not otherwise read literature. What is it about pop culture that is so fascinating, and how does writing allow us to interact with pop culture in a unique way? Join this panel of writers and editors as they describe their influences from television, video games, music and other forms of media.

Reimagining the Fairy Tale

Who doesn't love a fairy tale retelling? Part of the universal appeal of fairy tales is that they were never a static form, at least not as an oral tradition. Re-tellers have used these archetypes and modes to spin new variations ever since these stories first came to the page. Angela Carter once said that "Ours is a highly individualized culture, with a great faith in the work of art as a unique one-off.... But fairy tales are not like that, and nor are their makers." We can find fresh insight into our own lives and connections through these age old tales. This panel will focus on a variety of approaches in reconstructing fairy tales with a modern bent, both in their favorite respins and in their own work.

Cleaning up the Mess: The Depths of Revision

For many writers the first draft is an opportunity to finish, but the end result tends to be a mess in need of much revision. To revise, writers must do more than polish that first draft. They must re-envision the book as the whole, moving around scenes, cutting or adding characters, strengthening story threads, ensuring all aspects serve the central focus. Effective revision strategies can mean the difference between sitting in the slush pile indefinitely or scoring the agent you've been following on Twitter for years. These panelists will share their best revision ideas, tips, and exercises that have been tested in their own writing experiences and also through the revision-focused, ever-popular contest, Pitch Wars, of which they are all connected.

The Geography of Writing: Writing Where We Know

As writers, we find pieces of our lives come into our poems, novels, and essays. These can be our experiences or elements of people we know, but also our sense of place. For some of us, this is an active choice, but for others, a place can be a subtle haunting. Why and how are we inspired by our personal landscapes, including those we have left behind? Does setting our writing in specific locations engage or hinder readers? What does it mean to be a writer in

Maryland, D.C., or Virginia, and how do the specific topographies of our experiences (rural/suburban/urban) come out in our writing? What communities are available for MD/D.C./VA writers? This panel of novelists, poets, essayists, and editors will discuss how the landscapes around us have fueled their writing, and why these landscapes continue to excite and inspire them.

Write, Revise, Repeat: The Deep, Dark Depths of Revision

For most writers the first draft is only the beginning—every draft usually needs some level of revision. To revise, writers must re-envision their book and make sure all aspects are working as strongly as possible to make the story and message clear and compelling. Effective revision strategies can mean the difference between sitting in the slush pile or scoring the agent of your dreams. These published writers will share their best revision ideas, tips, and exercises from their own writing experiences to help you make your manuscript as strong as it can be before you submit.

Author Website: Squarespace or Wordpress? A conversation with Meg Eden Kuyatt and Kathy MacMillan

A website is a critical platform for a writer or illustrator at any stage of their career to have. But where do you start? And which platform should you use? In this webinar, two authors will discuss the platforms they use for their author websites, and the pros and cons of Squarespace and Wordpress. We will discuss the importance and function of having an author website, the critical information it should contain, and how authors can decide which platform is the best fit for them.

SFF/Genre Fiction

From Fanfiction To Novel

A panel of writers will discuss how writing fanfictions inspired their own original works, what they learned from writing fanfictions, and some of their favorite fanfic reads.

Worldbuilding in Science Fiction and Fantasy Novels

For science fiction and fantasy writers, good worldbuilding is critical—if readers feel estranged from the world of the story, they will likely lose interest and pick up another book. Come hear

panel of writers discuss their favorite sci fi/fantasy worlds, how these worlds mirror our own reality, and how successful writers entice their readers into new and exciting worlds.

Writers as Fans: How Fandoms Influence Our Writing

A panel of writers will discuss their favorite fandoms and how their passions have inspired and influenced their writing.

Gaming

Narrative Storytelling in Game Design

It's one thing to tell a story on the page, but another thing entirely to design a narrative that a player has to navigate. How can traditional narrative storytelling tools inform game design, and where do the tools diverge? In this panel, we'll discuss games with effective narrative storytelling for traditional and interactive fiction, and why these stories are so effective. We'll also discuss practical tips for writers who are trying to tell their own stories through games.

Mental Health Representation in Games

Mental health representation takes many forms in games, and can be helpful or harmful. Games like *Hellblade* explicitly address psychosis through the use of sound and mechanics, and are highly praised for the care in which they implemented and portrayed this perspective. However, other games may be less careful in their depictions--and reinforce harmful stereotypes. How do tropes such as asylum horror settings, or villains who are labeled "crazy," implicitly reflect and reinforce harmful ideas about mental health and illness? How can we thoughtfully--and accurately--portray mental health in games, allowing players to empathize and better understand diverse neurodivergent perspectives? In this panel, we will discuss these questions and more, delving into our favorite examples of mental health representation in games, as well as tropes and ideas to avoid.

Gaming Writers: Translating Gaming Culture Onto the Page

In this panel, writers will describe how games and gaming culture have inspired their original projects, how they break and subvert stereotypes about gaming culture, and why they turned to writing as a medium for translating their gaming experiences.

The Pen and the Controller: Writing About Video Games

To celebrate the [MAGES Library blog](#), writers will discuss their experiences writing for the blog, what draws them to write about games, as well as how interested writers can find opportunities to share their work in the gaming community.

What Makes Good Writing in Video Games

Writers often hear the truism of “show don’t tell”--similarly, gamers don’t want to be told why they want to go on an adventure; they want to experience the thrill of adventure for themselves. Poet Ezra Pound is quoted for saying that “the natural object is always the adequate symbol”--in video games, the “natural object” can be anything from the text, visuals, even the mechanics of a game to entice the player into a story.

In this panel, a group of writers, gamers, and developers will discuss the similarities and differences between writing on the page and the screen. We’ll delve into what makes games like *Gone Home*, *Life is Strange*, *Papers Please* and *Undertale* haunt us even after we’ve stopped playing.

Cross-Genre Storytelling: from Novel to Text Adventure

A game developer and novelist will discuss the rewards and challenges of translating stories between mediums, particularly examining the strengths and weakness of the text adventure and novel mediums, and how their individual projects have both exploited and subverted these forms. They will discuss Post-High School Reality Quest, a novel that takes on text adventure elements, including the process of writing a “text adventure novel” as well as translating that novel into an interactive text adventure game.

The Retro Aesthetic and the Power of Abstraction

Despite the gains in graphical capabilities, games continue to turn to the faux 8 and 16 bit aesthetics. Why is this, and how does this form impact our playing experience? Why is it that games like Five Nights at Freddy’s intentionally switch between 8-bit and 3D rendering for specific moments, and what effects does this create in the player? How would games like Lone Survivor, Undertale and Beat Cop function differently with a different aesthetic. What can we learn about using the retro aesthetic to create a powerful response in our players? Come listen to a panel discuss our favorite examples of retro game design, and why we continue to love this aesthetic.