

Preliminary agenda as of 02/26/2025; subject to change (all times are EST)

Thursday, June 5th

- 1:00-5:00 pm Pre-Conference Retreat (additional purchase required, seats limited)
The Call is Coming from Inside the House: Why Point of View is Everything, Sarah Combs
- 5:30 pm Welcome Reception (FREE, pre-registration open for First-Page Critique)
- 7:00 pm (In-person, recorded) Carnegie Center Author Academy Celebratory Reading

Friday, June 6th

- 8:00 am Breakfast & Registration
- 8:45 am Welcome by Jennifer Mattox, Executive Director
- 9:00-10:30 am Keynote by Meg Shaffer, followed by book signing
- 10:45 am-12:15 pm Breakout sessions 1:
- Brevity, Grant Faulkner
 - Experimental Essay Forms in Memoirs-in-Essays, Lucy Oquaye
 - On the Importance of Writing Groups, presented by Blah, Blah, Blah Writing Group, Liz Damrell, Janella Price-Lile, Shelley Roberts Bendall, moderated by Liz Carey
- 12:15-2:00 pm Writing Time & Lunch on Your Own
Optional downtown Literary Walk with Tom Eblen: 12:15–12:40 pm
- 2:00-3:30 pm (Virtual) First Page Critique, session 1 with Lynnette Novak, Roma Panganiban, & Kesia Lupo
- 3:45-5:15 pm Breakout sessions 2:
- Nonfiction Book Proposals, Andrew Shaffer
 - Characterization, Hosted by Bluegrass Writers Coalition, Ann Gabhart
 - Writing and Publishing While Black, presented by The Kentucky Black Writers Collaborative, Nita Clarke, Samar Jade, & Dorian Hairston, moderated by Claudia Love Mair
- 5:30-6:30 pm (In-Person) First Page Critique, session 2 with Meg Shaffer, Andrew Shaffer, & Grant Faulkner

Saturday, June 7th

- 8:00 am Breakfast
- 9:00-10:30 am Breakout sessions 3
- Punch it Up: Writing for Kids, Marcia Thornton Jones
 - Chasing the Fool, Samar Jade
 - Divine Details, Leatha Kendrick

10:45 am-12:15 pm	Breakout sessions 4 • What it Takes to Finish a Book, Grant Faulkner • Historical Fiction, Sheila Williams, Tracee de Hahn • Into the Woods: Forests, Trees, and Focus in Creating a Collection of Linked Stories, Kristen Gentry
12:15-12:30 pm	Closing Session & Giveaways
1:30-4:30 pm	<u>Post-Conference Retreat (additional purchase required, seats limited)</u> Post-Conference Retreat, Tracee de Hahn

Session Descriptions:

Pre-Conference Retreat:

The Call is Coming from Inside the House: Why Point of View is Everything with [Sarah Combs](#)

This generative cross-genre workshop will explore Point of View, perhaps the most powerful implement in any writer's toolbox. We'll examine various examples of unusual POV across poetry, fiction, and nonfiction; then we'll apply what we've gleaned in hands-on writing exercises designed to highlight this key element of craft.

The Art of Brevity with [Grant Faulkner](#)

In flash fiction, the whole is a part and the part is a whole. The form forces the writer to question each word and move a story forward by hints and implications. Flash stories are built through gaps as much as the connective tissue of words, so what's left out of a story is often more important than what's included.

In this workshop, Grant Faulkner, co-founder of 100 Word Story and the author of [The Art of Brevity](#), will discuss how a different type of creativity emerges within a hard compositional limit, exploring the many different forms that short fiction can take.

Be ready to write!

Experimental Essay Forms in Memoirs-In-Essays with [Lucy Oquaye](#)

We are fortunate to be in a renaissance of Creative Nonfiction. Book-length collections of linked essays centered on the author's experience are gaining popularity alongside traditional memoirs. A successful essay collection reveals the author's mind processing their experiences at different times and through different lenses. This class will explore experimental forms, such as hermit crab essays, deepening your arsenal of writing tools to speak to your experience in new ways. We will read contemporary experimental essays and reflect on forms that make sense for the stories we yearn to share in our book-length collection of essays.

On the Importance of Writing Groups, hosted by Blah, Blah, Blah Writing Group, with [Liz Damrell](#), [Janella Price-Lile](#), [Shelley Roberts Bendall](#), moderated by [Liz Carey](#)

Join us for a conversation about how to get the most out of your writing group experience! Blah, Blah, Blah is a writers' group located in Central Kentucky for writers of both fiction and non-fiction prose. Our goal is to be a place to support, educate, and inform writers while providing them with valuable feedback in a comfortable and slightly quirky environment.

Nonfiction Book Proposals with [Andrew Shaffer](#)

Got an idea for a nonfiction book or memoir? Before you invest months or years writing it, hold up! Nonfiction publishing isn't like the fiction market—you don't need to have a completed manuscript before querying agents or editors. *New York Times* bestseller Andrew Shaffer—author of two nonfiction titles for HarperCollins—will give you the tools to turn your idea into a ready-to-pitch book proposal.

Characterization, hosted by Bluegrass Writers Coalition with [Ann Gabhart](#)

Characters are at the heart of all fiction. Learn how to create and develop characters that can jump off the pages of your story and into your readers' hearts from an experienced writer, Ann H. Gabhart. With thirty-nine published books to her credit, she's brought a lot of characters to life to populate those stories. Discussions will cover what makes a good character, how to get under those characters' skins, and more.

Writing & Publishing While Black, hosted by KBWC

[Nita Clarke](#), [Samar Jade](#), & [Dorian Hairston](#) moderated by [Claudia Love Mair](#)

Black authors face special challenges in the publishing world, from blatant racism to microaggressions to dealing with the expectations of the publishing business, which is by and large centered in whiteness. Learn how you can succeed in writing and publishing while Black.

First Page Critique, session 1 with [Lynnette Novak](#), [Roma Panganiban](#), & [Kesia Lupo](#)

This session is important for anyone who is or will be seeking a literary agent. It's your chance to get inside the mind of three publishing professionals who have read many first pages. Submit your first page to our lottery to have your work read aloud by a reader, keeping everything anonymous. Panelists are instructed to raise their hand to indicate where they would stop reading. After the page is read in full, panelists will offer valuable feedback and opinions on why the piece did or did not work for them. Join us in the Jesse Stuart Ballroom for this rare opportunity with our three agents!

First Page Critique, session 2 with [Meg Shaffer](#), [Andrew Shaffer](#), and [Grant Faulkner](#)

Join us in the Jesse Stuart Ballroom to watch the second session of the First Page Critique. Even if you received feedback in the first session, this is still an invaluable session for anyone who is or will be seeking a literary agent. It's your chance to get insight into the minds of industry professionals and learn what does and does not work for them.

Punch it Up: Writing Kids Books with [Marcia Thornton Jones](#)

Punch it up! This interactive workshop provides strategies for punching up ho-hum writing into kid-friendly, page-turning scenes. Be prepared to write. Marcia Thornton Jones will lead you through exercises to bring your writing to life.

Chasing the Fool: Using Tarot and its Archetypes in the Writing Process with [Samar Jade](#)

While typically the Tarot is used in divination practices, this workshop is less about predicting your future and all about the exploration of these archetypes as a creative tool. In this workshop, you will delve into different ways of using card pulls to bypass writer's block, using it as character inspiration, and/or poetic writing prompts.

Divine Details with [Leatha Kendrick](#)

"Specific, concrete, particular details are the life of fiction," declared master teacher Janet Burroway. Why those adjectives? How do we know that we have selected the most effective "specific, concrete, particular" details? How much detail is too much? In *The Art of Fiction*, John Gardner speaks of details as "proofs"—proof that the story is authentic, that it is (indeed) happening. Do our details scatter the reader's attention or focus it? We will explore some texts to discover what works and why, then try to apply what we've learned to passages from our books in progress.

What It Takes to Finish a Book with [Grant Faulkner](#)

Writing a novel has been compared to months of pregnancy, running a marathon, climbing a mountain, or even going to war. And it can feel like all those things in one. This is why it's worth thinking about the novels you've abandoned and ask if you gave up because the novel wasn't good enough or because you lacked the stamina to see it through. Many a novelist has hit a wall and abandoned their creative dreams not because of a lack of talent, but because of their creative mindset. Your main task as a novelist is to train for endurance and develop the creative mindset necessary to be vulnerable, overcome imposter syndrome, release perfectionism, manage envy, develop grit, be accountable—and commit to finishing your novel!

Writing Historical Fiction, [Sheila Williams](#) in conversation with [Tracee de Hahn](#)

Historical fiction is the backbone of a multitude of genres and getting it right can make your book 'set back in time' truly sing. Join Authors Sheila Williams and Tracee de Hahn in conversation about writing Historical Fiction. Learn from their experiences what it takes to work in this genre, from choosing compelling characters to how much research of what kind, and more.

Into the Woods: Forests, Trees, and Focus in Creating a Collection of Linked Stories with [Kristen Gentry](#)

Creating a linked short story collection requires careful crafting of individual stories and a keen awareness of what each story contributes to the book as a whole. It can be hard to know where to start, and when to shift focus from the forest to the trees. Who tells the story? From what perspective? When and where does the story take place? These questions—and many others—that must be addressed in every story we write, can become overwhelming, impossible, when standing on bare ground, gazing up at a wide sky wondering how to peer into a canopy of trees not yet grown. Kristen will share insights gained while creating her linked collection, *Mama Said*, to help you navigate journeys through forests of your own making.

Post-Conference Writing Retreat with [Tracee de Hahn](#)

Don't wait to put what you learned during the conference into practice! This post-conference retreat will begin with a short group-share of conference highlights and goal-setting to help you continue the momentum inspired by your conference experience. Writing prompts will be offered at intervals to help you dig deeper into your project and apply what you've learned. Use this time to bring your project to the next level and connect with other writers. Tracee will be available for questions at the end of this energizing conference wrap-up.

[Presenter Bios:](#)

Liz Carey is an award-winning journalist who has covered every beat except sports in cities across Ohio, Kentucky, and South Carolina. Now a freelance writer contributing to nationwide news outlets, Carey also

serves as an instructor for the Carnegie Center for Literacy and Learning and is the co-founder of the Blah, Blah, Blah Writers' Group. As an author, Carey has ghostwritten several biographies, and penned several books of her own including a children's book titled *My Little Zombie*; a collection of historical stories about Anderson County, S.C. in *Hidden History of Anderson County*; and a look at tales we tell about the weird and unknown in *Rural Monsters, Myths, and Legends*. Her current projects include a book on the dark side of Kentucky's history called *Murder, Mining, Moonshine and Mayhem* and a follow-up to her *Rural Monsters* book, as well as a collaboration about how to self-publish your book with author Bill Carman. Originally from Versailles, Kentucky, Carey lives in Lexington with her dog and cat, just steps away from the University of Kentucky. You'll often find her on her porch, lounging in her swing, sipping an okay wine, and reading whatever good book she can get her hands on.

Sarah Combs is the author of the YA novels *Breakfast Served Anytime* and *The Light Fantastic*. She has led writing workshops at the Carnegie Center for more than two decades and is at work on her third novel.

Nita Clarke is originally from the bayous of Louisiana but has been living in Lexington for the past 27 years. She is a disabled American veteran having served in the United States Navy during the Vietnam era. She is also a former radio announcer in Louisiana and a former employee of Central Bank in Lexington. Nita is the mother of two children, 10 grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren. She is the author of *Mint Julep: The Reunion*, *The Residence of Alabaster Court*, and *Timothy and the Blanket Fairy*. At the moment, she is writing a sequel to the Mint Julep series and a textbook of the OCIA program she wrote and taught for 14 years at St. Peter Claver Catholic Church. She enjoys writing, reading, and Sunday dinners with her family.

Lizabeth Teed Damrell has been writing her whole life and is the author of children's picture books, novels, and short fiction. She lives in Lexington, Kentucky with her family.

Tracee de Hahn is coordinator of the Carnegie Center's Author Academy. A frequent speaker on topics related to writing, editing, and "getting published," she enjoys helping writers identify their unique path. Her mysteries set in Switzerland (*Swiss Vendetta*, *A Well-Timed Murder*) are published by Martin's Press/Minotaur Books while her non-fiction work is with Chelsea House. She is an active member of The Historical Novel Society and is currently president of Sisters in Crime, which was founded in 1986 to advocate for women crime writers and has expanded to include all seeking equity and inclusion in publishing.

Grant Faulkner is the co-founder of 100 Word Story, the co-host of the [Write-minded podcast](#), an executive producer on [America's Next Great Author](#), and the former Executive Director of National Novel Writing Month (NaNoWriMo). He has published three books on writing: *The Art of Brevity: Crafting the Very Short Story*; *Pep Talks for Writers: 52 Insights and Actions to Boost Your Creative Mojo*; and *Brave the Page*, a teen writing guide. He's also published *All the Comfort Sin Can Provide*, a collection of short stories; *Fissures*, a collection of 100-word stories; and *Nothing Short of 100: Selected Tales from 100 Word Story*. His "flash novel," *something out there in the distance*, a collaboration with the photographer Gail Butensky, is coming out in September 2025 with the University of New Mexico Press. His stories have appeared in dozens of literary magazines, including *Tin House*, *The Southwest Review*, and *The Gettysburg Review*, and he has been anthologized in collections such as Norton's *Flash Fiction America*; *New Micro: Exceptionally Short Fiction*; and in several editions of the annual *Best Small Fictions* and *Best Microfiction* anthologies. His essays on creativity have been published in *The New York Times*, *Poets & Writers*, *Lit Hub*, *Writer's Digest*, and *The Writer*. He serves on the [National Writing Project Writers Council](#), [Litquake's](#) board of directors, the [Aspen Institute's Aspen Words' Creative Council](#), and [Left Margin Lit's](#) Advisory Board. Find Grant online on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#). Listen to his podcast [Write-minded](#) and subscribe to his newsletter [Intimations: A Writer's Discourse](#).

Ann H. Gabhart has been called a storyteller, and with 39 published books, the title fits. Ann wraps her stories around Kentucky's historical times and settings. She's written about Shakers, explored Appalachian history for stories like *The Song of Sourwood Mountain*, and mined her family history for *Angel Sister*, *Scent of Lilacs*, and more. For her new release, *The Pursuit of Elena Bradford*, Ann stepped back to the 1840s for a historical

Kentucky setting of Graham Springs Hotel where people went to “take the waters” for various illnesses. Ann keeps her keyboard warm on her Kentucky farm where her dogs, Frankie and Marley, make sure she gets plenty of exercise. Learn more about Ann and her books at www.annhgabhart.com.

Kristen Gentry is the author of *Mama Said*, longlisted for the 2024 PEN/Robert W. Bingham Prize for Debut Short Story Collection. She received her M.F.A. from Indiana University. Her award-winning fiction has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and appeared in *Electric Literature*, *Crab Orchard Review*, and other journals. She is a VONA and Bread Loaf Writers’ Conference alumna, a member of the inaugural *Poets & Writers* publicity incubator for debut writers, and the opinion editor at the Courier-Journal. She lives and writes in her hometown of Louisville, Kentucky.

Marcia Thornton Jones is the author/co-author of 137 traditionally published books for children with sales totaling more than 45 million copies worldwide. Her books include the mid-grade novels *Woodford Brave* and *Champ*, picture books *The Tale of Jack Frost* and *Leprechaun on the Loose*, and seven chapter book series including the bestselling *The Adventures of the Bailey School Kids*. Marcia is the co-author of *Writing for Kids: The Ultimate Guide* and a former columnist for *Writer’s Digest Magazine*. Marcia’s latest books are the Graphix Chapter Books *Ghosts Don’t Eat Potato Chips*, *Vampires Don’t Wear Polka Dots*, *Frankenstein Doesn’t Plant Petunias*, and *Dragons Don’t Cook Pizza*.

Writer, teacher, and editor, **Leatha Kendrick** received the 2025 Judy Gaines Young Award, recognizing a body of work by an author from the Appalachian region. Recent poems are in the *Anthology of Appalachian Writers*; *Hood of Bone Review*; *Still: The Journal*; *Women Speak—An Anthology of the Women of Appalachia Project* (Volumes Eight, Nine, and Ten), as well as in several recent volumes of *Appalachian Journal*—where her research untangling the publications of poets Effie Smith Ely and Effie Waller Smith also appears (Volume 52 Numbers 1-2, Fall 2024/Winter 2025). Her essay, “Invisible, Essential” is found in *Troublesome Rising—A Thousand-Year Flood in Eastern Kentucky*.

Janella Price-Lile creates stories and paintings that strive to capture the heart of her characters and subjects. After living on farms in nearby counties, the native Lexingtonian once again resides in Lexington appreciating her husband’s encouragement and humor and enjoying her interactions with smiling dogs and purring cats in the neighborhood. Previously published works include human-interest articles in *CrossRoads*, a Diocesan paper, and other works of nonfiction in *Occupational Biographies*. Her first published piece of fiction work is included in the second *Blah, Blah, Blah Anthology—Mothers, Fathers, Sons & Daughters*. She is currently working on a historical novel.

Shelley Roberts Bendall is a writer, hiker, activist, and mother. She writes about politics, family, and the natural world, but mostly to discover more about herself. Her work has appeared in the Lexington Herald-Leader and the Chevy Chaser Magazine. When she isn’t writing, you can find her exploring the never-ending beauty of Kentucky’s mountains, streams, and wildlife. She lives in Lexington, KY, with her two lovely teenagers and two neurotic cats.

Andrew Shaffer is the *New York Times* bestselling author of the *Literary Cats Coloring Book* from Running Press/Hachette and over twenty other books in multiple genres including mystery, horror, and poetry. He has illustrated multiple children’s picture books, including *Mothman’s Merry Cryptid Christmas*. Shaffer is a five-time Goodreads Choice Award nominee and a two-time finalist in the Humor category. He lives in Louisville, Kentucky, with his wife, novelist Meg Shaffer.

Sheila Williams is the author of seven novels, including *Things Past Telling*, *The Secret Women*, and *Dancing on the Edge of the Roof*, which was adapted for the Netflix film *Juanita*. In addition to her published works, she is the librettist for *Fierce*, an opera commissioned by the Cincinnati Opera. Sheila lives in Northern Kentucky.