

Fall 2021

Highlighter

The SCBWI Mid-Atlantic Region's Newsletter



Fall 2021

Highlighter

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Our Cover Illustrator:

LUCINDA ROWE is an artist living in a small house surrounded by catbirds, daffodils, and bamboo. She has an MFA in Children's Book Writing & Illustrating from Hollins University and some of her clients include Natural Bridge State Park, Grayson Highlands State Park, and Starr Hill Brewery. She is highly influenced by nature and hopes that her illustrations will inspire others to explore the world around them. When she's not painting in her studio, she is often birding up and down the Blue Ridge Mountains, transforming her yard into a wild garden, and dreaming up stories.
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The **Highlighter** is a quarterly newsletter published by the Mid-Atlantic Region of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI).

Information contained in it does not constitute an endorsement by SCBWI or the Mid-Atlantic SCBWI.

For information about Mid-Atlantic SCBWI, go to midatlantic.scbwi.org. For information about SCBWI, go to scbwi.org or SCBWI, 6363 Wilshire Blvd. Suite 425, Los Angeles, CA 90048.

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Are you interested in contributing an article, illustration, or other content to the *Highlighter*? Please send your ideas and/or portfolio link to Denise Taranov at MidAtlanticHighlighter@gmail.com.

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Find and follow Mid-Atlantic SCBWI on...





from Erin Teagan and Valerie Patterson, Mid-Atlantic SCBWI Regional Co-Advisors

Autumn! It's time for cool nights, pumpkin spice lattes, and the annual Mid-Atlantic SCBWI Conference ([HERE](#))! We're excited for the coming expanded virtual conference, which starts with pre-conference intensives—one a night—from Monday, October 18, 2021, through Thursday, October 21, 2021, including one with Newbery Medal winner **Linda Sue Park**, our conference keynote speaker. On Friday evening, October 22, we'll have roundtables for attendees on different topics, including one for PAL members, illustrators, new members, for those interested in nonfiction and indie publishing, and more. We're also pleased that Mid-Atlantic member **Jess Stork** will host the second annual Kidlit Trivia Night with faculty and conference attendees—a real hit last year. The main conference will feature speakers and panels on Saturday and Sunday, October 23 and 24, 2021, with sessions designed to meet a variety of interests. Several Mid-Atlantic members are on the faculty: **Terry Jennings**, **Debbie Levy**, **Mary Quattlebaum**, **Candice Ransom**, **Madelyn Rosenberg**, **Wendy Shang**, **Ginger Park**, and **Joan Waites**.

We had a busy summer, starting with a new member welcome in mid-July as well as a pre-fiftieth SCBWI International Conference social. Terry Jennings led the Summer Critique Fest in July. Virtual socials included one on mentoring for PAL members, regional write-ins for Arlington/Alexandria and Central Virginia, and indie publishing sessions, Self-Publishing 101, and POD. Also in September, **Carol Beth Anderson** conducted a helpful webinar, "Early Readers Catch the Worms: How Alpha, Beta, and ARC Readers Can Help You Publish and Market Your Books." Additionally, Mid-Atlantic member **Pam Harris** and **Emma Kress** gave an engaging interactive webinar, "From Outrage to Outlet: Writing a Better Future for Children and Adolescents."

As we look ahead, we are seeking volunteers to help the region in several capacities. First, we're looking for co-chairs to work on planning the 2022 fall conference, which will be back at the Holiday Inn in Sterling, Virginia...in person! We're also looking for a volunteer to serve as the *Highlighter* copyeditor. We have several other volunteer openings as well. Please learn more about these positions and apply [HERE](#).

Speaking of volunteers, this is the last *Highlighter* issue before we welcome our new newsletter team. We are so grateful for the work **Dionna Mann** (content), **Susan VanHecke** (proofing), and **Tami Traylor** (design) have done over the past five years to produce such a beautiful and informative newsletter for our region every quarter. It is truly a work of art, designed by Tami, our illustrator coordinator, for fifteen years. We are so thankful for all of the hours they donated to our region and wish them the best of luck as they pursue their creative endeavors. Going forward, **Denise Taranov** will be our content editor and **Larry Issa** will work on design and layout. Please help us welcome this new team!

The fall season with its back-to-school feel is a perfect time to renew our focus on what's important about our writing, illustrating, or translating. We can recommit to our craft and set new goals. We hope you're off to a great start!

Truly,

Valerie and Erin

Illustration: HELEN DEASY, helendeasy.com

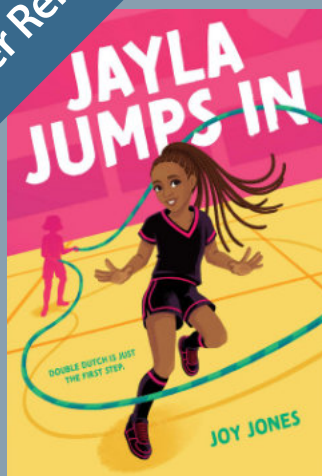


Did You Know?

You can use *THE BOOK*, an SCBWI resource free to members, to personalize and target your queries. It contains an up-to-date market survey of publishers of books for young readers, with what types of books those publishers and imprints acquire. If they accept unsolicited manuscripts, links to submission guidelines are included. There's also an Edited By listing.



October Releases



Joy Jones, author
Albert Whitman, October 2021

The paperback edition of JAYLA JUMPS IN about eleven-year-old Jayla who discovers double Dutch, which transforms her life and that of her family.



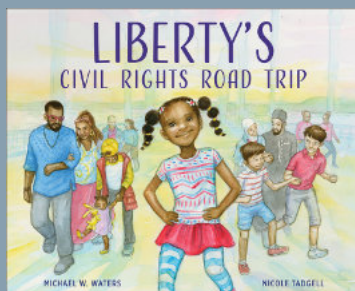
Candice Ransom, author
Nan Lawson, illustrator
Eerdmans, October 2021

This lyrically written biography shares how an independent, fun-loving woman became a trailblazing pioneer of modern picture books.



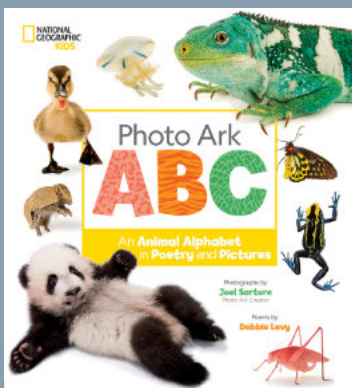
Debra Kempf Shumaker, author
Tristan Yuvenco, illustrator
Albert Whitman, October 2021

In good times and bad, for problems big and small, TELL SOMEONE's gentle verses encourage kids to open up, communicate, and—tell someone.



Nicole Tadgell, illustrator
Michael W. Waters, author
Flyaway, October 2021

In this autobiographical story, readers tag along with a young Black girl on an interfaith family road trip to visit important landmarks of the civil rights movement.



Debbie Levy, author
Joel Sartore, photographer
National Geographic Kids, October 2021

From armadillo to zebra, this picture book pairs playful poems that celebrate the diversity of the animal world with the stunning photography of a renowned NatGeo Explorer.



continued on page 5

Ready for Takeoff

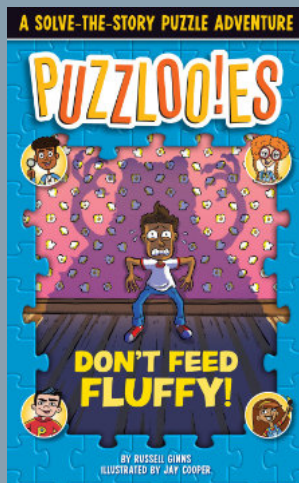
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November Releases



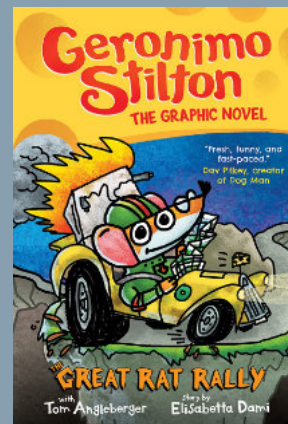
Terry Catasús Jennings, author
Fátima Anaya, illustrator
Aladdin, November 2021

In a hilarious visit to the country, Dom, Steph, and Pancho (on the phone) use Sherlock Holmes's practices to find a runaway goat.




Russell Ginns, author
Jay Cooper, illustrator
Penguin Random House,
November 2021

What on Earth will happen if Leo doesn't follow the Grunderblunken's pet-keeper's rules: "Don't feed Fluffy," "Don't feed Fluffy," "Don't feed Fluffy"?



Tom Angleberger, illustrator
Geronimo Stilton, author
Graphix, November 2021

In this latest edition of the popular graphic-novel series, Geronimo Stilton and his friend Trap enter the Rat Rally, a high-speed car race. 

#WeHeartOurIndies

Books and Crannies, owned by DeShanta Hairston, is a quaint general interest bookstore located in picturesque Martinsville, Virginia. Since its opening in 2016, its shelves feature a wide range of fiction and nonfiction titles, as well as a selection of YA novels and children's books. A used-book section featuring two-dollar paperbacks and five-dollar hardbacks is a customer favorite. Tune in to this public radio segment about the store [HERE](#). Find Books and Crannies online [HERE](#).

Books and Crannies owner DeShanta Hairston (photo courtesy Books and Crannies)



Publisher Alert!

Kokila celebrates stories from the margins, publishing books for children and young adults across all formats and genres. They LOVE stories that reflect the richness of our world, and that add nuance and depth to the way children and young adults see their place in it. From September through December, Kokila opens a submissions window, in which they accept unagented submissions that fit their mission. Kokila submission guidelines are detailed in SCBWI's 2021 THE BOOK, p. 122. Find Kokila's catalog [HERE](#) and a short video about submissions [HERE](#).

Meg Medina's award-winning YA novel **YAQUI DELGADO WANTS TO KICK YOUR ASS** will be interpreted as a graphic novel by Mel Valentine Vargas. Publication is planned to coincide with the book's tenth anniversary in 2024.

Nicole Taddell will be illustrating a math picture book designed to build children's understanding of measurement entitled **LEAVES TO MY KNEES**, written by Ellen Mayer, and published with Star Bright Books. (APD: Fall 2022)



Pamela Ehrenberg and her coauthor **Tracy López** sold **DETOUR AHEAD**, a dual-POV contemporary middle-grade, to PJ Publishing. With alternating chapters of prose and verse, this book takes readers along for the ride as Gilah, a neurodiverse Jewish girl, and Guillermo, a Salvadoran American boy, navigate life's detours while riding the bus together each day. (APD: Winter 2022)



Tracey Kyle's latest picture book, **LUCKY GRAPES**, has been acquired by Skyhorse. To be illustrated by Marina Astudillo, this delicious tale celebrates the Spanish New Year's tradition of eating twelve grapes at the stroke of midnight. (APD: Fall 2022) **H**



Must Read

Jena Benton's delightful and enlightening interview with **Joanie Stone**, illustrator of her latest picture book, **SECRETS OF THE SEA: THE TRUE STORY OF JEANNE POWER, REVOLUTIONARY MARINE SCIENTIST**, along with the book's author, Evan Griffith, can be found [HERE](#).

Learning Opportunity

Every couple of weeks, **Meg Medina** will be sharing her writing expertise in a FREE mini-video series on IGTV called **Meg's One-Minute Writing Tips**. She says: "No, it's not an MFA, but this might be just what you need when you're in a pinch. I hope you'll find the nuggets useful for your own writing or for sharing with students." Find episode one on characters [HERE](#).

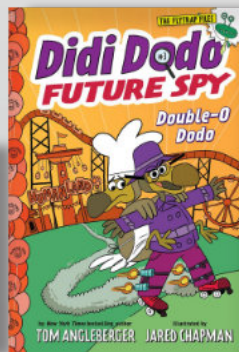




On the Shelf

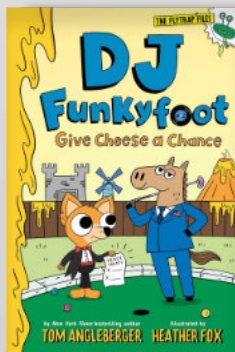
Tom Angleberger, author
Jared Chapman, illustrator
Amulet, March 2021

When the Queen is ducknapped, Didi Dodo has a plan: go undercover at the Humanland amusement park, find the Queen, and save the day.



Tom Angleberger, author
Heather Fox, illustrator
Amulet, September 2021

DJ Funkyfoot, a chihuahua butler, must save the day by getting President Horse through his mini-golf game, that treaty signed, and the war finally stopped.

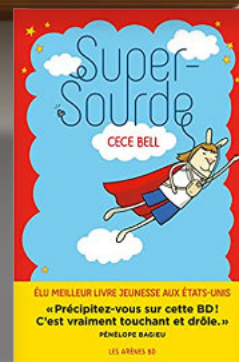


Tom Angleberger, illustrator
Geronimo Stilton, author
Scholastic, September 2021

In this French edition of SLIME FOR DINNER, Geronimo Stilton, an adventure-loving mouse, must solve the conundrum behind a package and its invitation to a mystery dinner.

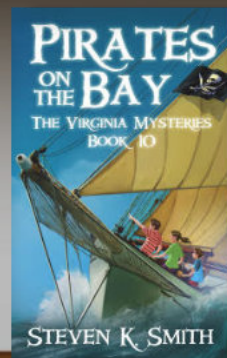
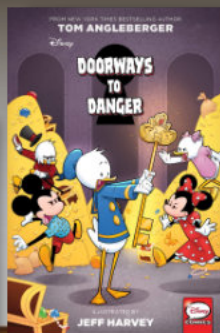
Cece Bell, author/illustrator
Hélène Dauniol-Remaud, translator
Les Arènes, June 2021

SUPER-SOURDE is the French edition of the award-winning EL DEAFO, a humorous and touching graphic memoir about finding friendship and growing up deaf.



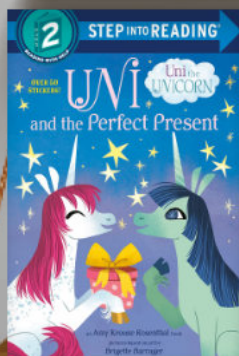
Tom Angleberger, author
Jeff Harvey, illustrator
IDW, July 2021

Mickey, Minnie, and their friends, as contestants on a reality game show, must scramble to collect the magical keys that lead them to their prizes.



Steven K. Smith, author
MB3, August 2021

Three friends meet a mysterious stranger while vacationing at Virginia Beach. He tells the legend of Blackbeard's treasure. Could it still be out there, waiting to be discovered?

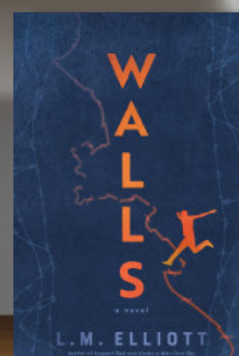


Candice Ransom, author
Lissy Marlin, illustrator
Random House, September 2021

Generous Uni loses the perfect present on the way to a friend's birthday party. What will Uni give instead?

L. M. Elliott, author
Algonquin Young Readers, July 2021

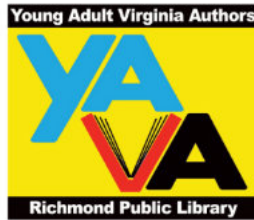
*Berlin 1961: Drew, an American army teen, and his East German cousin grapple with Cold War suspicions. Will they be able to scale the ideological walls between them as the political situation worsens? *Starred Kirkus and PW reviews*



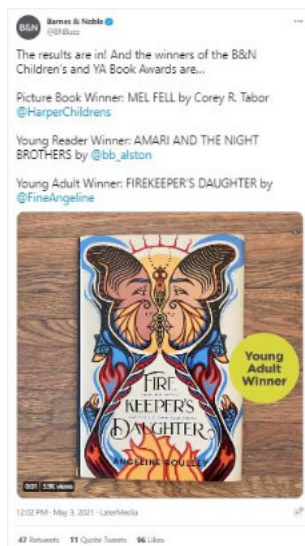


Member News

MS. GLORIA STEINEM: A LIFE, written by **Winifred Conkling**, was nominated by the Richmond Public Library for the 2022 YAVA Award. The winner will be selected by a panel of teen judges and announced during the annual YAVA Celebration held in the spring of 2022.



In May, **Angeline Boulley**'s debut, *FIREKEEPER'S DAUGHTER*, was crowned the winner of the 2021 Barnes and Noble Book Award in the young-adult category! The award, in its inaugural year, was created to spotlight and celebrate outstanding new and emerging talent in children's publishing, chosen for excellence and appeal to readers in the PB, MG, and YA categories. Read Angeline's B&N interview [HERE](#).

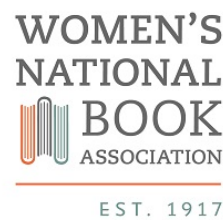


In June, *Parents* magazine named *EVELYN DEL REY IS MOVING AWAY*, written by **Meg Medina**, *STELLA DÍAZ DREAMS BIG*, written by **Angela Dominguez**, and *YOUR MAMA*, written by **NoNieqa Ramos**, among the best Latina books of 2020 for children. Complete list [HERE](#).

In July, **L. M. Elliot** was interviewed by *PW* Bookshelf. She spoke about her latest novel, *WALLS*, that covers the twelve months leading to the building of the Berlin Wall, and about including photo essays within the novel to help immerse readers within the historical world of fiction. Read it [HERE](#).

Time magazine included four books by Mid-Atlantic members among the "100 Best YA Books of All Time": *THE CROSSOVER* by **Kwame Alexander**, *THE POET X* and *WITH THE FIRE ON HIGH* by **Elizabeth Acevedo**, and *FIREKEEPER'S DAUGHTER* by **Angeline Boulley**. Complete list [HERE](#).

The Women's National Book Association (WNBA) named Hannah Oliver Depp, owner of **Loyalty Bookstores** in DC and MD, the 2021 WNBA Award winner. WNBA Award chair N. C. Weil said: "What distinguishes Oliver Depp is her meritorious work in amplifying the efforts of social justice movements, particularly Black Lives Matter, while using her bookstores to create community spaces." Hannah was honored during the Women's National Book Association's Award Ceremony, held virtually via Crowdcast on June 6. Find Loyalty Bookstores online [HERE](#).



Hannah Oliver Depp Wins 2021 WNBA Award



Denise Wilcox won the Virginia Outdoor Writers Association First Place Feature Story and the Appalachian Headwaters Conservation Award for her article "Grow a Butterfly Garden" that appeared in the May/June 2021 issue of *FunForKidz* magazine.

Nicole Tadgell's picture book, *LIBERTY'S CIVIL RIGHTS ROAD TRIP*, written by Michael W. Waters, received a fine review from *Kirkus*, which said, in part: "Tadgell's delicate illustrations capture warm relationships and diverse identities and personalities, juxtaposing light color in the present with black-and-white images of the past."

On July 26, 2021, **Jen Malia**'s op-ed about ableism against neurodivergent authors in the book publishing industry was included in the print issue of *Publishers Weekly*. The piece drew upon her personal experience of getting what she felt was an ableist rejection for her chapter book series proposal. Her tweet about the *PW* article garnered 162,000 impressions. Read it [HERE](#).

THE COAUTHOR: Wendy Shang

Do tell! How did you first meet and who came up with the idea that you'd be able to write a book together?



I met Madelyn at the Mid-Atlantic SCBWI conference, back when it was at a church in Arlington and you had to help put away chairs at the end! My first image of Madelyn was her holding an enormous bag of recycling to take home, which, if you know Madelyn, is perfectly fitting. Her books, like *TAKE CARE* and *ONE SMALL HOP*, have really strong environmental themes.

As it turned out, I ended up joining a writing group that Madelyn belonged to, and then, as another coincidence, Madelyn and I ended up with the same agent. It

seemed like we were destined to be friends. We were starting our writing journeys at the same time, our kids were around

the same age, and we both were terrible at playing tennis, so we could play together without anyone feeling bad.

I started campaigning to write together after I found out that Madelyn had written a book with another friend. I remember thinking, "Huh, you can do that? You can get paid to hang out and write? How do we get in on that?!"

After coauthoring *THIS IS JUST A TEST* with Madelyn, why were you excited about working together on your second book, *NOT YOUR ALL-AMERICAN GIRL*?

When you're starting a story, you have to make so many decisions, it's kind of exhausting, right? You have to figure out your character, where they live, what's going to happen, who their family is, etc. One of the nice things about going back to the same world is that you've already gotten a lot of that figured out, so you can focus more on what's going to happen next. I loved *THIS IS JUST A TEST*, the way it came together and the way the prose just bounced, so I was excited to return to that world of defined characters (and it's in the '80s, so there's an unmistakable vibe).

continued on page 10

THE COAUTHOR: Madelyn Rosenberg

Two authors writing a story with one voice and from one character's POV sounds hard! Did you and Wendy have to spend loads of time outlining each stage of the plot?

You know that age-old question: Are you a plotter or a pantsner? For this one, Wendy and I were both "pantsners" so there wasn't so much outlining. Or, you know, any. We did do some brainstorming. Lots and lots of brainstorming. We took turns writing chapters, but as we wrote, the other person would edit the previous chapter and then move the story forward. Then the next person would come in and edit the edits. Honestly, by the time the book was finished, I feel like we both touched every sentence. Each of us added layers. With each edit, we went deeper into our character and the story. It worked that way with humor, too. With each edit, the other person made it funnier. It was story building in the truest sense.

After coauthoring *THIS IS JUST A TEST* with Wendy, why were you excited about working together on your second book, *NOT YOUR ALL-AMERICAN GIRL*?

I was excited to get back into that world, of course, and I was also excited to get more time hanging out with Wendy. When we wrote together, we worked on a lot more than just our writing; we worked on our lives. We figured out what to eat for

dinner (chicken and dumplings, carnitas), how best to help our kids, how to deal with certain situations without losing it. We need to work on something else because I miss having her voice in my ear every day.

How would you compare the coauthoring experience to writing solo? What part of it do you like better?

They say you should write books only you can write; as coauthors, we wrote books we could only write together. As a solo writer, it can be a pretty lonely experience, so it was lovely to be able to share my brain. Writing with a partner, it was easier to break through writer's block because there was someone who had ideas when I was out. We could also talk through things to move our character ahead. There was just less being stuck. And of course, the copy was cleaner because we had both been over it so many times. Also, it's much easier to promote a book if you're promoting the work of a friend. I was less self-conscious about saying, "Please read this!" And I'm also so chicken when it comes to reviews. I made Wendy read them first.

*Madelyn is the author of a dozen books for children, including *ONE SMALL HOP*, a Junior Library Guild selection, and *CYCLOPS OF CENTRAL PARK*, a picture book about seeing the world that came out just when the pandemic began and we couldn't. She also wrote *THIS IS JUST A TEST* and *NOT YOUR ALL-AMERICAN GIRL* with her friend Wendy Shang.*



Partnership Profile

continued from page 10

I'll also tell you that when we write together, my goal is to make Madelyn laugh. Not that she's a hard sell, but Madelyn has really good taste, so if she laughs out loud, I know it's a keeper.

What did you enjoy about doing events together, both in-person and virtual ones?


After working together for so many years, we've really developed a comfortable patter together where we can kind of sense when to jump in or throttle back. We didn't have a joint book come out this year, but we each had a book come out on the same day (again! coincidence!) so we had an online event with One More Page. This was one of my favorite events to date because we talked about each other's books (a distinct improvement over talking about your own book), and then Madelyn had this brilliant idea that we should prepare trivia questions based on the topics in each other's books, sort of like *Wait, Wait, Don't Tell Me*. The audience really loved it. It was kind of a quirky detour from the usual book event, and more than that, you could see we were cracking each other up with these oddball questions.

It's *not important* who got more questions correct. The point is everyone had fun. Okay, fine, it was Madelyn. There will be a rematch.



Wendy is the author of several books for children, including *THE GREAT WALL OF LUCY WU*, which won the Asian Pacific American Librarian Association Award for Children's Literature, *THE RICE IN THE POT GOES ROUND AND ROUND, THIS IS JUST A TEST*, and *NOT YOUR ALL-AMERICAN GIRL*, cowritten with Madelyn Rosenberg.

THE BOOK: NOT YOUR ALL-AMERICAN GIRL

Nowadays, Lauren, who is Jewish and Chinese, is used to being the side dish alongside Tara, her best friend. But after Lauren's audition for her school's "All-American" musical goes extraordinarily well, Lauren wonders if it's her turn to be the star. Lauren's hopes are dashed when the director tells her she doesn't look the part to play the lead. And who is cast instead? It's blonde-haired, blue-eyed Tara! Lauren tries to support her friend, but after a while she can't bring herself to sing anymore, jeopardizing her smaller role in the musical and her friendship with Tara. But with the help of a button-making business, the music of Patsy Cline, and her two bickering grandmothers, Lauren just might find her voice again. Madelyn Rosenberg and Wendy Shang return to the 1980s world of Sydney Taylor Honor Book *THIS IS JUST A TEST* in *NOT YOUR ALL-AMERICAN GIRL*, a multicultural story full of heart and hilarity about what it means to be all-American. Named a Best Jewish Children's Book of 2020 by *Tablet* magazine; read reviews [HERE](#), [HERE](#), and [HERE](#). 

LAUNCHED!

On June 1, 2021, friends and sometimes coauthors **Wendy Shang** and **Madelyn Rosenberg** joined forces to launch each other's new picture books, *THE RICE IN THE POT GOES ROUND AND ROUND* and *ONE SMALL HOP*, during a fun trivia challenge hosted by One More Page Books. Watch the YouTube event [HERE](#).



Getting to Know Tom Angleberger

Tom Angleberger (NOT Anglebooger!!!!!!) is an author illustrator with more than thirty books to his name. His *Origami Yoda* series is so deliciously packed full of fun that kids have gobbled them up by the millions. (Thankfully, the books don't reciprocate.) His pen of choice is the Pilot G2 gel roller, 1.0 for everyday doodling, .7 for illustrating *Origami Yoda*.

His previous occupations have included being a newspaper reporter, juggler, weed boy, lawn-mower-part assembler, and biology research assistant (as in, bug larvae and plant diseases). His current occupations (and loves) include being an author, illustrator, keeper of origamiyoda.com (with webmaster Sam), and husband of the amazing kidlit creator Cece Bell.

Tom confesses that he creates books like a puzzle-putter-together-er. He takes little pieces of Yoda, middle school problems, and Cheetos, fusses with them until, voilà, they fit together to create a perfect picture of that which makes kids laugh.

Tom gets inspiration from *Star Wars*, Fumiaki Kawahata, Daniel Pinkwater, and his own personal social disasters. Tom's superpowers? Having Asperger's and making a room full of preteens roar with laughter during school visits.

Highlighter is delighted to welcome Tom as he shares how he has fun when doing school visits.

Thanks for sharing your secret sauce behind your countless school visits! Do you actually like them or do you do them as an obligation of being an author?

I absolutely love them! It's far from an obligation, it's an unmatched opportunity to get energized by kids!

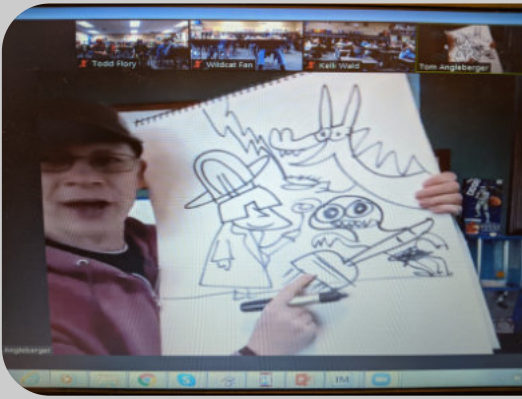
I recommend it even for authors who are just getting started. Look for a chance to visit a school and just talk to kids about books, writer's block, and whatever else they want to talk about. If you're not ready for a whole gym-full, try talking to a single class or even a small book club.

continued on page 12



(From top) Tom Angleberger, courtesy Blue Willow Bookshop; Tom Angleberger, courtesy Washington Times; Tom Angleberger, courtesy Tom Angleberger; Tom Angleberger, drawn by graphic novelist Jonathan Todd using the trackpad on his laptop in a lo-res drawing program, courtesy Tom Angleberger.





Getting to Know Tom Angleberger

continued from page 11

What message do you try to get across to the kids?

I think some authors may make the mistake of trying to educate the kids—and I can see how that could feel like an obligation. But I don't think educating is my purpose at all. My job is to energize everybody—to read, to write, to draw.

They don't need to remember anything I said as long as they remember that I have a great time making stories and they can, too

You certainly know a thing or two about energizing a room! Do you miss doing actual school visits? How have virtual visits worked out for you?

I do miss the in-school visits, but I don't miss the travel and hassles that can go with it. It can be absolutely exhausting, especially at schools with bad microphones. I do not miss the bad microphones! But I totally miss the direct connection with the kids.

Virtual visits have their technology problems, too. But now that EVERYBODY knows how to use Zoom, it's a lot different than the days when I might be the first Skype visit a school had ever had. Also, I can do so many more visits in one day! I think my record is twelve in one day! But six is a much better number. Meanwhile, four in-person visits in one day are too many.


Twelve Zoom visits in a single day? That's incredible! For you, what works for an in-school visit? And what doesn't?

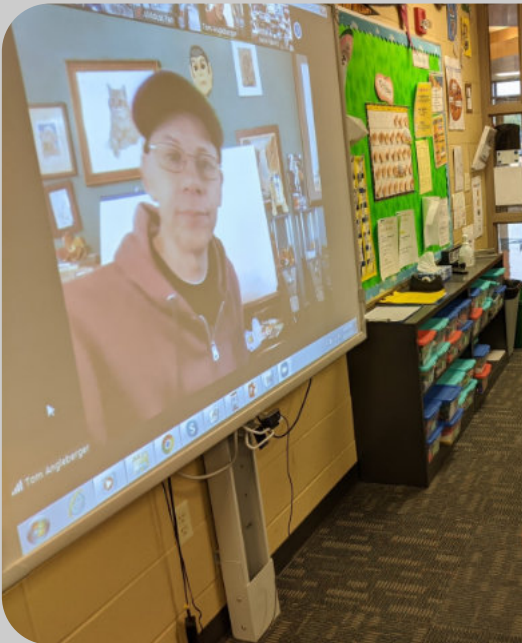
I don't think the hard sell works. Don't try to be a commercial for your book. Instead, be a champion of reading in general!

Something that works great is this: "I love to write books, but I also love to READ books. I'm looking for a new one to read, can anybody tell me about their favorite book?"

Using a whiteboard, you can either make a list or make a mash-up drawing with characters from each book. I tell kids I'm going to take the list to the library so I know what to check out. They are SO excited to tell me what to read next. (And, of course, it's a lot of fun to pretend I've never heard of the books or that I've misunderstood the title.)

Tom, it's been so fun having you here! Thank you so much for sharing, and please, do tell CeCe we said hi!

It's been my pleasure! And will do. 



(From top) Tom Angleberger, courtesy Todd Flora; Tom Angleberger, courtesy Todd Flora; Tom Angleberger, courtesy Lake Washington School District.

Chopped

by Dionna L. Mann

I love watching *Chopped*, a reality Food Network show that invites four chefs to prepare an appetizer, entrée, and dessert, each within a limited amount of time and by using a basket with mystery ingredients. A panel of judges rates each dish based on creativity, taste, and presentation. At the end of each round, the chef with the weakest palatal delight is placed on the proverbial chopping block, leaving a *Chopped* champion by dessert's end.

Now, I know what you're thinking. You're thinking—Dionna, why are you wasting your writing time watching the veg-tube? My reply? This is writing research, not time wasted! I've gleaned a lot about the writing process by watching *Chopped*. Really.

For example:

Don't forget the salt

We all know how important it is to add the right amount of salt to a dish, right? But I've seen many an episode when a classically trained chef forgets the essential dash, leaving the food, while beautiful, full of blah. Writing lesson learned? Don't forget to add sensory delight to every scene by engaging all five senses, including taste!

Transform the ingredients

Chefs on *Chopped* are often given the strangest of mystery ingredients. Sometimes, I'm like, really? Artificial spray cheese? But a skilled chef can do it! He can turn that gloopy yellow goo into yum. How? Creativity combined with freshness. (FYI: artificial spray cheese makes delicious creamed kale.) My takeaway? Writers can spin bland plot lines into something fresh by being creative.

Add some fat

I've seen quite a few chefs rise to the challenge when the basket is inherently lean, like say there are Rocky Mountain oysters in there. (Can you believe people actually eat bull testicles? Ewww!) A chef will slice them thin and deep fry them in sizzling oil. Readers like the taste of "fat," too. They want stories full of emotion. Fat is where it's at in a good way, at least when it comes to writing.

Sauce it together

I've seen chefs on the show rise to the top by using the unique flavor profile of an ingredient, like preserved rice juice, to create a delicious sauce that ties their dessert together. Writing lesson? We can tie our scenes together with a "sauce," a theme, a setting, a mood.

Use the pantry wisely

Besides the basket ingredients, chefs on the show are encouraged to use fresh ingredients from the *Chopped* pantry in their dish. But if they add too many—say, a whole lot of chocolate to mask the taste of durian—the judges will ding them. They actually want to be able to taste the ingredients found in the basket, even if it's a foul-smelling Asian fruit. Lesson: as writers, we should remind ourselves not to overwhelm a scene or dialogue with unnecessary details or description. Less is more basket.

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Illustration: CYNTHIA CLIFF, cynthiaciff.com



Chopped

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Be true to yourself

Chopped champions are often those who stay true to their own style of cooking, like the one who borrowed his babcia's chrusciki recipe, or the one who created her naani's curry blend. The recipe for success as writers? Take a lesson from Granny. Mine from your culture, your homeplace, your language, your ancestry to create stories uniquely your own.

Tantalize the taste buds

I love it when chefs on *Chopped* create something so yummy, so scrumptious, that it leaves the judges saying, "I can't stop eating this." As writers, shouldn't we try to do the same—leave our readers not just satisfied by the story's end, but wishing for a sequel?

Remember all the ingredients

To avoid leaving a mystery ingredient off the plate, I've seen many a chef on *Chopped* count their ingredients before Ted, the host, says, "Please, step back." (I can't tell you how many times I've been left holding my breath, hoping that a chef won't forget those caramelized hot dogs hiding beneath their

station!) As writers, we should enumerate, too. Have we included all that makes a story a story? Do we have a main character wanting something and doing something to get it; does he have an obstacle in his way and something at stake if he doesn't obtain it?

Count.

Taste your food

Tasting as you go along is a secret to success in any kitchen. Writers should also "taste" their words as they go along by reading them out loud.

There are many more writing lessons from *Chopped* begging to be shared. Writers cookbook, anyone? **H**



Dionna is a children's book writer and longtime SCBWI member who recently discovered the joy of binge-watching *The Great British Baking Show*. On your mark, get set, research! Find her blogging all things kidlit at dionnalmann.com

Illustration: PAIGE BILLIN-FRYE, paigebillinfrye.com



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From Page to Stage and Screen

by Gabriella Aldeman

Scroll through Netflix, Disney+, or even cable TV, and you are likely to find a number of book adaptations. While browsing through the viewing options for kids and teens, you may even come across characters created by your favorite SCBWI authors, some from our region.

Book adaptations take time and a whole community of creators who share a purpose and a vision—to bring to life what's on the page. For the authors of these books, it can be thrilling, challenging, and filled with long periods of waiting and uncertainty—much like creating the book itself.

We have asked four Mid-Atlantic SCBWI members—**Angeline Bouley**, **Anne Marie Pace**, **Kathryn Erskine**, and **Leah Henderson**—about the joys and challenges of having their literary works transformed into TV series, movies, and plays. Here are their insightful replies.

In having your book adapted, what brought you the most joy?

There were so many lovely moments over the years, but my favorite was seeing a video of a teenager with mobility issues and developmental delays whose caregivers used a video of the show to encourage her to do her physical therapy.—**Anne Marie Pace**, *VAMPIRINA BALLERINA*

Seeing *Mockingbird* performed onstage was a thrill. It was so beautifully adapted by Julie Jensen. I'm in awe of how she pulled out the salient scenes and put the story together in a play lasting just one hour. Beyond that, there were specific sensory-friendly performances for those on the spectrum, enabling attendance for those who experience the world more like Caitlin. And, on a personal note, having my family there, including our daughter who inspired the book, as well as friends who flew in from afar, and my sister and her whole fourth-grade class—it was pure bliss.—**Kathryn Erskine**, *MOCKINGBIRD*

I love hearing readers' casting suggestions! While I was writing the story, my favorite activity was pinning ideas on Pinterest about who I thought would be great in each role. But since it took ten years to finish my manuscript, all of my picks have aged out of the roles! (Full disclosure: I have no casting authority.)—**Angeline Bouley**, *FIREKEEPER'S DAUGHTER*

I think anytime anyone is excited to share your work and help it reach a wider audience, whether that's one person or ten, it's an amazing blessing. So what has brought me the most joy is other people believing in the story that I created and the characters that I've shared.—**Leah Henderson**, *THE MAGIC IN CHANGING YOUR STARS*

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(left) Rebecca Keeshin and Eric D. Pasto-Crosby in Nashville Children's Theatre's production of *Mockingbird*, based on Kathryn Erskine's book of the same name. Photo: Michael Scott Evans. (Above) Kathy Erskine with friends and family at the Kennedy Center about to watch *Mockingbird* being performed onstage. Photo: Bill Erskine

From Page to Stage and Screen

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What has been the biggest challenge?

The biggest challenge was learning to accept my part in the show. Hundreds of people have worked on this property, from the script writing to the acting to the music to the animation to designing and creating the merchandise. For a long time, when people congratulated me for something I didn't feel I should take credit for, I felt awkward and uncomfortable. Writers are so used to working alone, you know? But I finally came to terms with it, using the analogy of a plant. I planted the seed, and all those hundreds of people watered it, pruned it, gave it Miracle-Gro, made sure it grew and thrived. That put my contribution in perspective for me.
—**Anne Marie Pace**, *VAMPIRINA BALLERINA*

Actually, there was no challenge because Julie Jensen took care of everything. In fact, I told her I need her assistance in writing my books because she could help me cut unnecessary scenes!—**Kathryn Erskine**, *MOCKINGBIRD*

Biggest challenge? Time! I thought the publishing process was a long one, but it turns out that adapting books for a movie or series takes even longer!—**Angeline Boulley**, *FIREKEEPER'S DAUGHTER*

The uncertainty of it all is the biggest challenge, and the long periods of silence, but honestly, that goes back to the first challenge.—**Leah Henderson**, *THE MAGIC IN CHANGING YOUR STARS* **H**



Gabriella is an English-to-Spanish translator for education nonprofits and children's book publishers and authors. She is also an aspiring picture-book author. You can find her online at writebetween.com and follow her on [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/writebetween) where she plays with words and obsesses over coffee.



Illustration: SYLVIA LIU, enjoyingplanetearth.com

Here are some Mid-Atlantic members with books that have been or will be adapted for the stage or screen:

Angeline Boulley's *FIREKEEPER'S DAUGHTER* was optioned by Barack and Michelle Obama's production company, Higher Ground Productions, as a Netflix original series. *Firekeeper's Daughter* is early in development, with a scheduled air date yet to be determined.

Anne Marie Pace's picture-book character appeared in *Vampirina*, a Disney Junior animated preschool series for three seasons, airing from October 2017 to June 2021. The Emmy-winning and BAFTA Award-nominated show was led by executive producer Chris Nee and coexecutive producer Norton Virgien. Nicky Phelan and Brown Bag Films directed.

Elizabeth Acevedo's young-adult novel, *CLAP WHEN YOU LAND*, is being adapted for a television series. Those producing it include the Emmy-winning Bruna Papandrea, Made Up Stories' Steve Hutensky, Casey Haver, and Janice Park. In development is another of Elizabeth's young-adult novels, *WITH THE FIRE ON HIGH*, optioned by PictureStart for a film adaptation. Elizabeth is writing both screenplays.

Kathryn Erskine's National Book Award-winning middle-grade novel, *MOCKINGBIRD*, was adapted by Julie Jensen for the stage. The play, performed both at the Kennedy Center in 2015 and the Nashville Children's Theatre in 2018, was the winner of the David Mark Cohen National Playwriting Award (2015) and received two Helen Hayes Award nominations (2016), one for Outstanding Original Play or Musical Adaptation and Outstanding Production, and one for Theatre for Young Audiences.

Kwame Alexander's middle-grade novel *CROSSOVER* is being made into a Disney+ TV series. It is being written by Kwame and Damani Johnson (*All Rise*), with Dee Johnson (*The Good Wife*) supervising. It will be directed by George Tillman Jr. (*The Hate U Give*). Additionally, Kwame's picture-book character Acoustic Rooster has earned a place in his very own musical entitled *Acoustic Rooster's Barnyard Boogie: Starring Indigo Blume*. It is set to premiere at the Kennedy Center. It is being written by Kwame and Mary Rand Hess, and directed by Lili-Anne Brown. The music will be composed by Randy Preston with musical direction by Mark G. Meadows.

Leah Henderson's middle-grade novel *THE MAGIC IN CHANGING YOUR STARS* has been optioned as a musical for both film and the stage. Joining forces on the project are Tony and Emmy nominee Brandon Victor Dixon (*Jesus Christ Superstar Live in Concert*), Victoria Lang, Ryan Bogner, and Broadway & Beyond Theatricals.

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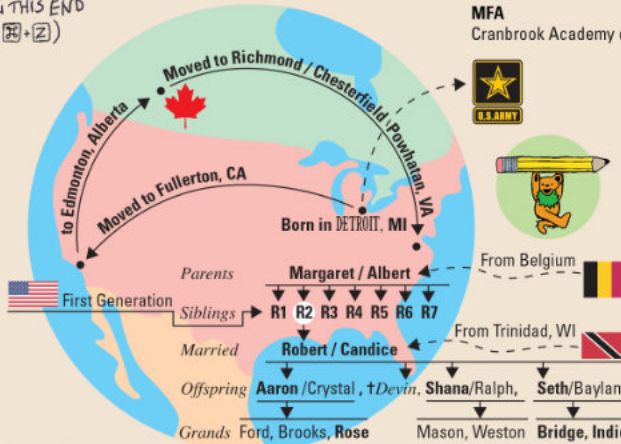
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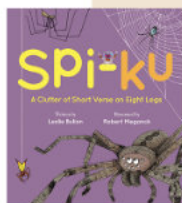
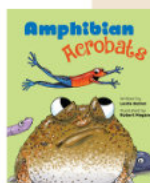
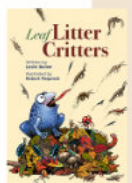
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Books Authored/Illustrated



Books Illustrated



Introducing Award-Winning Middle-Grade Author Kathryn Erskine

How do your passions, motivations, frustrations inform your work?

All my stories seem to come from a place of emotion—I think that’s true for most of us—whether it’s joy or frustration or fear or sadness. For example, with *MOCKINGBIRD*, I wanted to help people understand kids like my daughter who are on the autism spectrum, and in *THE ABSOLUTE VALUE OF MIKE*, I wanted kids with learning issues, like my son, to appreciate their real-world skills and contributions, even though school might not be their forte.

SEEING RED and *MAMA AFRICA* address the racism I struggled (and still struggle) to understand growing up in South Africa and the United States—racism that I thought people would get over by the time I was a grown-up. Yet here we are, which is why we need more books from authors of color to help dismantle the endemic of racism in our society, and in our world. I’m heartened and grateful that the publishing world is working toward valuing a wide variety of voices.

After winning the National Book Award for Young People’s Literature, the Dolly Gray Children’s Literature Award, and the SCBWI Golden Kite Award for *MOCKINGBIRD*, have you since felt emotional pressure or nervousness when writing your next project?

I really don’t think about it. Every project is a new adventure. Also, I feel that there are so many books every year that are award-worthy. I just happened to be lucky. And really, we write for young readers, even if it’s just one kid who gets some hope and comfort from your book. I know it’s corny, but that’s the real reward.

Tell us about your latest publications and why you wrote them.

In *LILY’S PROMISE*, Lily is a shy girl who was homeschooled by her father until he passed away. Now she has to attend public school and, as she promised her dad, learn to speak out and stand up for herself. She discovers that it’s imperative to speak out when you’re dealing with bullies and want to help your friends, an important discovery for those of us who are shy. The other part of the story, which was so fun to write, is Libro, the book itself, a metafiction character who comments on the story, the characters, and the author.

Libro’s humor lightens the story and appeals to reluctant readers, as well as underlines a major theme of the story, which is that we all have control over our thoughts, actions, and lives, even a kid (and unlike poor Libro, who’s stuck between the covers). Also, it allowed me to talk about the elements of writing and crafting a story, and my process—something that young readers are often curious about. I hope it’ll help teachers with analyzing the book in a fun way.

ALL OF US is a picture book about inclusion and acceptance, gloriously illustrated by Alexandra Boiger (seriously, it’s stunning!). I wrote it as an antidote to the vitriol we’ve had to deal with over the past several years. I’m hoping we’ll continue to transition to kindness and reason. It was such a gift to have Alexandra illustrate *ALL OF US*, and my fingers are crossed that we can do another book together.

What are you working on now?

A dystopian middle grade?!

I never thought I’d be working on anything like it, but my philosophy is that there’s a reason a story comes into my head, so I should just go ahead and write it down. I also have some picture book manuscripts I’m tinkering with, as well as several adult novels. I love having variety and challenges! **H**

*Kathy is a licensed lawyer and pharmacy technician, but much prefers writing for kids. She is the author of seven novels and two picture books. Her third picture book, *MY DAD’S A DJ*, with coauthor and illustrator Keith Henry Brown, will publish with Farrar, Straus and Giroux next year. kathyerskine.com Photo: Jen Fariello*

A Note from Your *Highlighter* Team:

Your *Highlighter* team wishes to bid farewell with this fall 2021 issue. It's been a blast, one that has lasted fifteen years for Tami and five for Dionna and Susan. We want to thank all of you most amazing members for writing for us, contributing your art, allowing us to shine the spotlight on you and your work, and for sharing your kidlit expertise and good news with SCBWI. It's been a delight getting to know you all, and learning from you.

Wishing you and your writing projects well in the years to come!

Dionna L. Mann, Susan VanHecke, & Tami Traylor
Highlighter Team since 2017

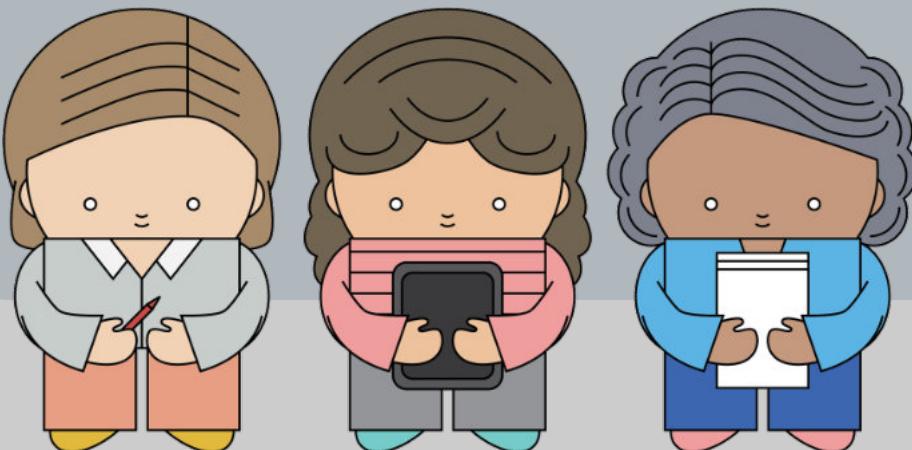


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