

# 2025 Midsouth Conference Schedule

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## FRIDAY, September 12th

### 5:30–6:30 p.m. | Informal Happy Hour Regional Meet-and-Greet

Meet other attendees (and perhaps make dinner plans) at this meet-and-greet during the DoubleTree Suites happy hour in the hotel lobby and patio.

2424 Atrium Way, Nashville, TN 37214

**\*\*Please keep in mind that the hotel happy hour is generally for those staying at the hotel, but the cash bar is open to the public! If you join us, please be mindful of hotel guests.**

## SATURDAY, September 13th

**NOTE: Paid Face-to-Face Manuscript and Portfolio Critiques are scheduled throughout the day. Please refer to your individual schedule for your specific assigned time.**

**7:30–8:00 a.m. | Registration**

**8:00–8:20 a.m. | Welcome**

**8:20–8:30 a.m. | Break**

**8:30–9:25 a.m. | Session I** (See the Breakouts page on the conference website for more details!)

- **A. Nicole Tugeau – Branding 101: What's Your Scene?**

- **B. Deeba Zargarpur** – Publishing Behind the Curtain
- **C. Mikaela Luke** – Show Don't Tell: How to Infuse Voice into Character Expressions and Movement

**9:25–9:40 a.m. | Break**

**9:40–10:35 a.m. | Session II** (See the Breakouts page on the conference website for more details!)

- **A. Deeba Zargarpur** – Revise Like an Editor - Getting into the Weeds
- **B. Mikaela Luke** – Contemporary Realism with a Little Bit of Magic
- **C. Maryn Arreguín** – From Manuscript to Illustration-Translating Text into Visual Storytelling

**10:35-10:50 | Break**

**10:50–11:45 p.m. | Pitch Critique Sessions: Pay to Pitch or Watch and Learn! (Paid Pitch, \$30. Observation, FREE!)** (See the Pitches page on the conference website for more details!)

Have your pitch critiqued by an agent or editor or observe and take notes! It's exciting to share your idea with an industry pro. This session is designed to help you improve and strengthen your pitch, whether you're meeting industry professionals, querying, or writing a proposal! Each paid pitch slot is 5 minutes, including Faculty feedback time.

- **A. Picture Books – Nicole Tugeau**
- **B. Picture Books/Middle Grade – Stephanie Fretwell Hill**
- **C. Middle Grade/Young Adult – Deeba Zargarpur**
- **D. Middle Grade/Young Adult – Lauren MacLeod**

**11:45 a.m.-12:00 p.m. | Portfolio Drop-off at Registration Table**

**11:45 a.m.–1:15 p.m. | Lunch** – Plan to either:

- **A.** Bring your own lunch (to eat in the atrium or elsewhere), OR

- **B. Purchase lunch** at a nearby restaurant, either by going out or utilizing Uber eats, etc. (See the Stay, Eat & Explore page on the conference website for more information.)

**Be aware that you only have 90 minutes for lunch! You do not want to be late for First Pages!**

**1:15–2:00 p.m. | First Pages** (See the First Pages page on the conference website for more details!)

First Pages sessions offer conference attendees the unique opportunity to witness an agent's first impression when reading a new manuscript. Anonymous first pages will be chosen at random and read aloud to the group. Then faculty will discuss the ever-important question: Would I read more? They will offer specific suggestions on how to improve the appeal of a story's opening. (First page submission is not required to attend this session, and not all first pages/materials will be read. Attendees may pre-register for one session only.)

- **A. Picture Books**— Nicole Tugeau and Mary Uhles
- **B. Middle Grade**— Stephanie Fretwell-Hill and Kristin Tubb
- **C. Young Adult**— Mikaela Luke and Erica Rodgers

**To submit a first page**, please email your page to [midsouthfirstpages@gmail.com](mailto:midsouthfirstpages@gmail.com) by August 23, 2025, following the guidelines listed on the First Pages page of the conference website.

**2:00–2:15 p.m. | Break**

**2:15-3:10 p.m. | Session III** (See the Breakouts page on the conference website for more details!)

- **A. Stephanie Fretwell-Hill** – Just the Right Fit: How Finding an Agent is Like Finding Romance
- **B. Lauren MacLeod** - AI Unpacked: What Every Kidlit Creator Ought to Know

- **C. Maryn Arreguín and Scott Soeder** - Art Director & Illustrator: A Creative Partnership

**3:10–3:20 p.m. | Break**

**3:20–4:10 p.m. | Art Director/Agent/Editor Panel—Maryn Arreguín, Lauren MacLeod, Deeba Zargarpur**

**4:10-4:20 p.m. | Closing Announcements**

**4:30–6:00 p.m. | Midsouth Autograph Party with Portfolio Showcase and Cocktail Hour**

Come mingle with us before the Create a Scene Bash and Dinner! Check out illustrator portfolios and purchase that special book you want to have signed by a faculty member or an SCBWI author.

- See the For PALs page on the conference website for PAL opportunities for this party!
- See the For Illustrators page on the conference website for Illustrator opportunities for this party!

**7:00–9:00 p.m. | Create a Scene Bash and Dinner (\$50)**

Saturday concludes with our Create a Scene Bash for conference attendees and faculty. Wouldn't it be lovely if you joined us? Come From Away or come from Nashville, but come dressed as your favorite Broadway character\* and join us at the always-delightful SCBWI Midsouth Bash! There will be dinner! Drinks! Kid-lit trivia! A centerpiece design contest where you can **WIN A FREE CRITIQUE AT OUR NEXT CONFERENCE!** And of course, the annual Midsouth Award Ceremony! Don't throw away your shot! It will be some enchanted evening, and you'll be Les Misérables if you miss it!

\*Costumes not required but it'd sure be Wicked if you had our Six!

(See the Evening Festivities and Contests pages on the conference website for more details.)

## SUNDAY, September 14th

### POST-CONFERENCE INTENSIVES AND PAL MEETUP

Post-conference intensives are available on Sunday for an additional fee. Registration is limited. To register for intensives, please check the appropriate box when registering for the conference online. Intensive registrations are non-transferable, and there will be no refunds. (See the Intensives page on the conference website for more details!)

**8:00 a.m. | Doors Open**

**8:30–10:30 a.m.**

- **INTENSIVE 1 (Full participation \$60 / Observe Only \$30) –** Maryn Arreguín: Designing Standout Covers: A Hands-On Workshop
- **INTENSIVE 2 (\$60) –** Sharon Cameron and Ruta Sepetys: The Neglected Art of Critique

**10:45 a.m.–12:45 p.m.**

- **INTENSIVE 3 (\$60) –** Stephanie Fretwell-Hill: How to Read a Picture Book
- **INTENSIVE 4 (\$60) –** Jennifer Lynn Alvarez: Whodunnit? Secrets to Plotting a Mystery/Thriller

**1:00–3:00 p.m**

- **INTENSIVE 5 (\$60) –** Nicole Tugeau: Embracing Empathy & The Natural World in Picture Books
- **PAL Roundtable (FREE!)** Join us for a PAL (published and listed) meeting to discuss marketing strategies, school visits, contract questions, AI challenges, the state of publishing...wherever our discussion takes us. We'll have a loose agenda, but are mainly

hoping to build and support our amazingly talented PAL authors!  
Please plan on joining us and sharing your best practices and  
strategies!

See the FOR PALs page on the conference website for more information  
about PAL opportunities at the conference!