

FAII-Winter Issue 2025 TABLE OF CONTENTS

 Fall Harvest Writer & Illustrators 	
Day Conference 2025	Page 3
• Fall Harvest Conference pictures	Page 6
 The Pitch 	Page 7
• Librarian Corner	Page 8
Grammar Nerd	Page 10
Killer Openings	Page 11
• 2025 Meet-ups	Page 12
Member Good News	Page 14
Announcements	Page 15
Newsletter Staff	Page 16





by Carlene Griffith

hildren's book creators, both newbies and seasoned members, gathered October 4th at Cal State Fullerton for the 2025 Fall Harvest Writers and Illustrators Day conference. Participants enjoyed opportunities to listen to industry professionals, participated in contests, portfolio reviews, manuscript critiques, and mingled with other like-minded creatives.

ALLI STRAUS said, "Since this was my first conference ever, I enjoyed the face-to-face connections with other writers. I've spent the last 5 years interacting with SCBWI members on Zoom only and was feeling pretty disconnected."

JUDY FAULKER said she benefited from "the many levels of engagement possible — everything from socializing with friends to meeting new people to doing intel on the market and industry professionals, and the ability to go for a deep dive with the crits and pitches. It made for a satisfyingly full day."



The event started with fun ice-breaker activities led by chapter volunteer KELLY POWERS. She prepared bingo cards and passed them out to allow attendees to get to know one another. Each square had an activity inside such as "ridden a horse" or "published a picture book." The objective was to go around and find people who had done that activity and then they would mark off the square. This activity could be done anytime during the conference. With a blacked-out card, attendees could then enter a prize raffle at the end of the conference.

As another quick get-to-know-you game, beach balls with meaningful questions written on them were given to small groups of attendees to initiate conversations and help them feel at ease. Attendee JANIE EMAUS said, "I found the bingo game to be a great way of meeting people. JANET BASTIEN commented, "Loved, loved, loved the ice-breaker ball toss!!!"

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Professional presentations included a range of informative and inspirational talks. BRETT DUQUETTE, Editorial Director at Little Bee Books, spoke on What's so Funny. How To Take the Mundane and Turn It On its Head!" REBECCA SHERMAN, Senior Literary Agent at Writers House, talked about The Art of Agenting: What Literary Representation Looks Like from Query to Book Acquisitions and Beyond. SALLY M. KIM, Literary Agent at Andrea Brown, provided an Insider's Look at Children's Book Marketing and Publicity. BRIAN LAROSSA, Executive Art Director, gave a talk on KidLit Illustration Do's and Don'ts.

When surveyed, most attendees were very happy with the presentations. MARY SHANNON said, "The presenters were absolutely A-list! All of them. I learned so much." Zoom attendee KRISTINE CARTER, when asked what part of the conference she benefited from, said, "Can't say just one. The lectures covered a wide array of what I needed to learn as a writer for my career and personal health. The honest reviews of first pages helped me see how I could improve my own. The line edits provided by agent Shelly Romero offered targeted insights on honing my manuscript. Her comps provided mentor texts for me to learn from. Thank you, thank you for making this workshop available virtually."

Local award-winning guest authors TINA ATHAIDE (Wings to Soar) and MARIE CHAN (Mamie Takes a Stand) also gave short inspirational presentations. Tina spoke on Why Visual Storytelling Matters, then while Marie discussed Care for Creatives When Writing Tough Topics. Our featured Illustrator, ROBIN PREISS GLASSER, then talked about My Journey to Fancy Nancy. It was a real pleasure to have Robin there, especially since it was her birthday. Attendees joined together in singing Happy Birthday to show her how much we appreciated her sharing her day with us. Later, everyone was given the opportunity to purchase presenters books and get autographs.

At registration, individuals who submitted manuscripts and illustration portfolios ahead of the conference could enter contests, get written critiques and have their first pages read live for oral critiques by the editors and agents. STARLA RAJAVUORI said, "The first pages panel was one of the most unfiltered panels I've seen in terms of industry pros, giving their truthful opinions. I was sometimes surprised by the reasons an agent or editor would either keep reading or not. It was super helpful, and I wrote down a number of juicy advice tidbits." JENNIFER BRENNISE said what benefited her the most was "the portfolio live review and the opportunity to display my full portfolio and promos. Getting real-time feedback from professionals was invaluable — it helped me better understand how my work is perceived and what resonates. The book dummy contest also gave me a tangible goal and deadline to work toward, which was really motivating."

The conclusion of the conference was probably the most anticipated moment, with announcement of the contest winners and the opportunity for individuals to pitch agents and editors directly one-on-one. MARY MALHOTRA said, "I appreciated the editors and agents fully participating in the conference alongside us authors and illustrators. It made it so much easier to talk with them (or pitch to them!) and was a good reminder: we are all human, all partners in this work of making books for kids."



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Contests winners:

*Picture book dummy: KAY FELLING (Where's Frankie?)

*Picture book manuscript: 1st Place--LORIAN STEIDER (Book Hunt Day)

Runner-up--SUSAN HUNNICUTT (Blanket for Roho)

*Middle Grade: 1st Place--CARRIE SCHNEIDER (Wary & Weave)

Runner-up--ANNELISE WILHELMSEN (Imaginary Friends)

*Young Adult: 1st Place--MARY SHANNON (Stupid Cupid)

Runner-up--BEV PLASS (Double Take)

*Portfolio Review: 1st Place--FARNAZ NADIM Runner-up--LAUREN GALLAGOS



Farnaz & Lauren



Bev



Lorian & Susan

FARNAZ NADIM was the winner of our banner contest. The illustrated banner was used in our promotional marketing for the conference prior to the event.

At the end of the day, committee member volunteers BEV PLASS, CARLENE GRIFFITH, JODI RIZZOTTO, SU MOON, CRYSTAL SCHRECK and HEATHER SOODACK felt good about the results of the event. 98% of attendees, both in person and online, rated the event as good or higher. Attendee FAY RYU KELLING said, "This was my first conference, and it was such a positive experience. I really appreciated the pacing of the day — everything felt just the right length — and it was wonderful meeting new people and feeling part of a creative community. The experience definitely boosted my motivation and gave me clear goals to keep." MARTIE MCFLY SMITH said, "I left the conference feeling encouraged to keep pushing! I felt inspired and loved reconnecting with my SCBWI friends."

We want to thank the committee members, volunteers, faculty and students who dedicate their time and talents to making SCBWI the best organization for children's book creators. We are so grateful for this organization and the opportunities it gives us, both individually and as a community.

Carlene Griffith is SoCal's co-Assistant Advisor and acting Newsletter Editor. She is the author of Amazon's bestselling book 10 MINUTE PLAYS FOR KIDS OF ALL AGES.





Carrie







Jodi Rizzoto, is SoCal 's co-Assistant Regional Advisor. Her writing genres include MG and YA contemporary fantasy. Adlut speculative short stories and is represented by Tia Mele of Tia Rose Mele Literary.

fter the Fall Conference was over, the pitch sessions started. Participants could sign up for tenminute paid pitch sessions with one of the agents or editors who presented that day. It was a great opportunity to get your work in front of a publishing professional without getting lost in a digital slush pile. Whether your story was ready to query or was still in idea form, it was great to get live feedback.

Participants waited inside the building until their time to go out to the patio area and meet with their pitch person. When it was my turn, I took a deep breath and brought my pitch cheat sheet with me.

Instead of sharing pages, I decided to share three pitches from two MG stories and one YA I'd been revising for years. The agent I spoke with was interested in both of my MG stories. She offered a few revision suggestions and told me to query her with them when I was ready.

When I walked back into the holding area, I noticed many smiling faces from participants who had already spoken to their pitch person. Those smiles encouraged the worried few who were still waiting to give their pitch.

Whether the agent or editor asked to see your work or had suggestions for further revisions, the pitch sessions offered a valuable opportunity to speak directly to them. With hundreds of queries in their inboxes each day, we jumped at the chance to make sure our submissions would catch thier attention.



How-To on Writing Pitches by Carlene Griffith

Pitching can be an intimidating experience. Especially when you've never done it before. Simply put, pitches answer the following questions: Who is your main character (protaganist)? What do they want (objective)? What or who is the problem? What are the stakes? What is the inciting incident in the story? Is there a shocking twist? And what setting or location does the story take place?

Here are two simple templates I use to write pitches. They are similar to writing loglines for movies.

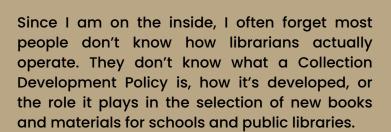
A: In a (setting) a (protagonist) has a (problem) (caused by an antagonist) and (faces conflict) as they try to (achieve a goal.)

B: When (inciting incident occurs) a (character type) must (objective) before (stakes.)

BANNED BOOK WEEK

A CONVERSATION

by Kelly Powers



Librarian's Corner

Therefore, I ask those parents on the other side to assume good intentions in me while I explain:

Basically, a Collection Development Policy is a document that states what a Librarian or Library Tech can and cannot order for their library. It can be basic or complex, but it is the code we stick to mainly because it makes our jobs easier, and it also serves as our shield wall against book challenges.

My policy is simple:

1.Any item ordered must be at or below grade level. On the District-Approved website where I order my books, it plainly states the grade range (a.k.a. maturity level) on the information page about the book. Since my school is 7th and 8th grade, that means I can only order books that are listed as being for 8th grade or below. If it's listed as "9th-12th grade, " for example, that book is out, no matter how badly the kids might want it. And you'd be surprised how often I have to break that news to the kids when they request something.

As Banned Book Week draws to a close, I'd like to take stock of the event and the conversations my displays stir up in my students. While it's easy for me, a school librarian with sixteen years under her belt, to see the dangerous trends in what books are being challenged or outright banned in schools across the nation, this year I decided to take a step off my soapbox and try to get to the heart behind the movement I'm so radically against.

"Always assume good intentions." That's the advice many therapists give struggling people during their sessions. We often get so caught up in our own anger and what we would do or say in a given situation, we automatically assume anyone working against us is intentionally trying to harm or undermine us. Most of the time, this is not the case, and it is something I need to remember. So if I turn that same advice toward the people on the book banning tirade, what do I find?

Parents.

Though they don't make up 100% of the movement, concerned parents are the vast majority, and it's obvious they have either been misinformed or flat-out lied to about the role librarians play in their children's lives.

- 2. The book must have a published review from a reputable reviewer. For me that's Booklist, School Library Journal, Horn Book Magazine, Kirkus Reviews, or Publishers Weekly. Unfortunately, this does remove a lot of self-published books from the selection, but it also ensures we only have high-quality (as in not Al garbage) books filling our limited space.
- 3. The item must fill a need. While the number one fear book banners have is the idea that librarians are forcing their own personal biases on children, nothing can be further from the truth. I look for new books the same way a parent searches for the perfect Christmas gift. I listen when the kids talk about what interests them. I see what characters are featured on the clothes they wear, and I take note when they ask for a book or series I do not have.

Those are the things that make kids excited to read – which is the whole point – and if I don't have those themes, topics, characters, or series already, then those are the gaps I need to fill. In the end, I know I've done right when the kids get excited and immediately start checking new items out. So, while I'd like to order a hundred books about dogs because I love them so much, that would severely unbalance the collection, and let's face it, wouldn't stir up as much joy as a hundred new Manga books.

That's my policy in a nutshell, and it was written with the motivation of curating a collection where every student can find something they want to read. A collection that feels like a treasure hunt kids want to explore.



Illustration by Farnaz Nadim www.farnaznadim.com

In keeping this conversation open and honest, I implore all those good-intentioned, concerned parents to take your own step back and realize your children are smart. If they don't want to read a book with violence, they won't check out a book about war. If they don't want to read a book with an LGBTQIA+ character in it, they won't. A librarian will never force a child to read anything. Our job is purely to foster the love of reading in whatever form or shape that takes.

And if you're worried a book might change your child's outlook on a certain topic, I invite you to step into that conversation and not avoid it. Because if Anne Frank, or Ruby Bridges, or Kelly Yang, or Jacqueline Woodson, or Jarrett Krosoczka, or Alex Gino were old enough to live through the experiences they wrote about, I believe your 7th and 8th graders are old enough to read about it.

But, again, only if they want to.









by Tim Burke



Shared/Joint Possessive: only one apostrophe.

- Brooks and Dunn's hit song (they co-wrote it)
- Abby and Jill's room (they both live in this room.)



Individual Possessive: one apostrophe for each.

- The Democrats' and Republicans' policies are summarized in this book.
- Los Angeles's and Boston's hockey teams are close to qualifying for this year's Stanley Cup.



General rule for singular possessive: add an apostrophe and an s, regardless of whether the singular noun ends in an s or not.

- The teacher's book
- The mouse's nest
- Pentax's warranty
- George Jones's guitar

- Jesus's teachings
- anyone's theory
- a year's loss of revenue



General rule for plural possessive: a) if the word ends in s, just add an apostrophe, b) doesn't end in s, add apostrophe and s.

Ends in s

- the three teachers' classrooms
- the girls' volleyball game
- the Smiths' Christmas card
- the triplets' photos

Doesn't end in s

- the children's hobbies
- the mice's nest
- the oxen's workload
- the geese's honks
- the loci's centers

Fim Burke is a past Regional Advisor, SCBWI SoCal chapter member volunteer, and author of the Grammar Nerd and Killer First Lines newsletter columns. Represented by Jennie Kendrick at Red Fox Literary, he writes MG and YA novels, though he has also sold stories to the national adult crime fiction magazines, Alfred HItchcock Mystery Magazine and Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine. His debut MG novel, Troll Tails, is out on submission (fingers crossed, y'all!). You can contact him at tim@timburketales.com and visit his website at www.timburketales.com.

KILLÉR compiled by Tim Burke

We went to the moon to have fun, but the moon turned out to completely suck. - Feed/M.T. Anderson

There's nothing more heart-stopping than the wheeze of an empty glue bottle the night before a big school project is due.

- Freddy V.S. the Family Curse/Tracy Badua

Somebody had shot a political officer. At least-I thought. My Russian wasn't anything to be proud of.

- The Silent Unseen/Amanda McCrina

Listen—I was alive once and then I wasn't. Simple as that. Now I'm alive again. The in-between part is still a little fuzzy but I can tell that, at some point, my head got chopped off and shoved into a freezer in Denver, Colorado.

- Noggin/John Corey Whaley

A guy's life can be basically summed up by two things: how much Silly Putty he's eaten and who made him eat it.

- Alan Cole is Not a Coward/Eric Bell

Confession

Look, nobody's ever accused me of being a good dog. I bark at empty air. I eat cat litter. I roll in garbage to enhance my aroma.

- The One and Only Bob/Katherine Applegate

It was as black in the closet as old blood. They had shoved me in and locked the door.

The Sweetness at the Bottom of the Pie/Alan Bradley

Judy Moody did not want to give up summer. She did not feet like brushing her hair every day. She did not feel like memorizing spelling words. And she did not want to sit next to Frank Pearl, who ate paste, in class.

Judy Moody was in a mood.

– Judy Moody/Megan McDonald



2025 Meet-ups Retrospective

by Beverly Plass

As I look back on 2025, I'm grateful that our region could afford to host speakers at our monthly meet-ups and offer them to our members for free. Thanks to Jodi Rizzotto for inviting all our presenters and coordinating the range of topics so there's something for every writer. Many of you have attended one or more of these meetings, and some of you were lucky enough to win a free book by the presenter!



We kicked off the year with **Henry Lien**, author and UCLA instructor, who discussed "Scenecraft: What It Is and How It'll Blow Your Writing Open." He shared movie techniques that can be applied to our writing, like how to show backstory without an info dump, how to use scene elements – set-up, character locations, rituals—to move our stories forward, and how to show a power structure between characters that can shift by the end of the scene.

In March, we chatted with **Paula Yoo**, award-winning author of RISING FROM THE ASHES: LOS ANGELES, 1992 and FROM A WHISPER TO A RALLYING CRY: THE KILLING OF VINCENT CHIN AND THE TRIAL THAT GALVANIZED THE ASIAN AMERICAN MOVEMENT. She answered all our questions about her experiences writing tough topics and publishing.



In April we met with **Debra Halverson**, the award-winning author of WRITING YOUNG ADULT FICTION FOR DUMMIES and WRITING NEW ADULT FICTION, as well as numerous teen novels, books in a series for struggling readers, and a picture book. She presented "Novels and Picture Books: 5 Ways to Translate 'No' to 'Yes'." She described the five most common reasons for rejection and how we can fix them.

In May, we hosted **Rex Ogle**, an award-winning author of over a hundred books, comics, graphic novels, and memoirs. He presented "World-Building 101: How to Make Your Fantasy Stories Realer Than Life?, including use of senses, developing characters (even if not human), addressing the geo-political/socio-econ of your setting, and creating a "world bible."

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In June, **Ariel Richardson** joined us. She's a Senior Editor in Children's at Chronicle Books in San Francisco. She addressed "Pep, Prod, and Pause: Managing the Emotional Roller Coaster of the Creative Process," giving us self-care tips in our loooong, slow writer's journey to ensure inspiration and creativity so we can finish our projects.

In August, **Kaitlyn Sanchez**, agent at Bradford Literary Agency, let us ask her anything. We heard about her successes, her typical journey with a writer, and how she makes decisions when receiving so many submissions.





In September, **Laura Stegman**, author of THE CHAMBERED NAUTILUS, a middle-grade trilogy, shared tips on how to write a successful author bio to use for query letters and promotional materials and making yourself shine. We even got to practice and she gave feedback.

In October, we met with **Lee Wardlaw**, an award-winning author of 31 books for young readers including 8 written in verse. She discussed the Curse of the Verse and shared ten reasons agents and editors shy away from rhyming text, and how to fix those errors. One lucky winner won her most recent picture book: MY BOOK OF FIRSTS: POEMS CELBRATING A BABY'S MILESTONES.



What a year! Jodi is busy recruiting speakers for 2026, so buckle up, everyone. Our goal is to make everyone's manuscript un-rejectable.

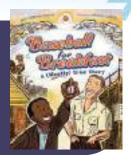


Bev Plass is SCBWI's SoCal Chapter Regional Advisor. As a writer and speech-language pathologist, she creates materials and stories that get kids talking!



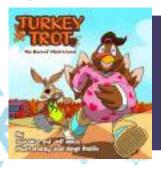
Compiled by Desi St. Amant

Judy Campbell-Smith's picture book, BASEBALL FOR BREAKFAST: A (MOSTLY) TRUE STORY, will be published on Feb 17, 2026. www.judycampbellsimith.com



Robert Joseph published ALI-POO AND BELLA-ROO GO TO THE ZOO in October 2025. www.outskirtspress.com





TROT: THE RACE OF THEIR LIVES, was just published, and it already made #1 on the Amazon Best Sellers page for Children's Thanksgiving books, #1 in animal books for children, and #4 on Kindle Children's Literature overall!

www.GibbysTurkeyTrot.com



Barbara Swisher Amundson has authored two internationally bestselling children's picture books, STANLEY'S STANDING OVATION! and ALFIE SAVES THE DAY! www.Authorbarbara.com

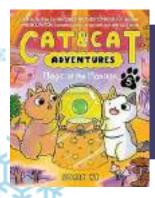
Lisa Caprelli's THE FLYING TACO is a joyful story inspired by school visits, kids' questions, and her Hispanic roots. With Unicorn Jazz™ friends, children discover cultures and foods of the world through a Flying Taco named Hope (Esperanza in Spanish.)

WWW.UNICORNJAZZ.COM/FLYINGTACOART



Laura Segal Stegman, author of the SUMMER OF L.U.C.K. middle grade trilogy, is July's guest poster on SCBWI's official blog www.laurastegman.com

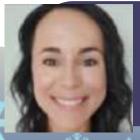




Susie Yi's fifth book in the CAT & CAT ADVENTURES series came out August 19, 2025! www.susieyi.com



Debra Green's four-book early chapter series, C.J. BAKER, MOVER AND SHAKER, was published by Capstone Press on July 31, 2025. www.DebraLGreen.com



Shaelyn Zeitzl has secured a two-book deal with Feiwel and Friends for her middle grade horror novels! Title pending, but the working title is THE DARK PLACE.

www.szeitzwrites.com

If you are a SoCal member who has good news to share - we'd like to celebrate you by announcing it on social media and our website. You must be a SCBWI SoCal member and you must "follow" our region on SCBWI.org. Check out our SCBWI SoCal regional page for more information. To share your good news: Visit https://socal.scbwi.org/member-goodnews/ and fill out the online form.

14

SCBWI SOCIETY OF CHILDREN'S BOOK WRITERS AND ILLUSTRATORS 2026 WINTER NEW YORK CONFERENCE

January 16-18, 2026 in New York City

VOLUNTEER NEEDED

Newsletter Art Designer - duties include collecting art and designing the Newsletter under Editor's direction. If you're interested contact: Carlene Griffith socal-ara@scbwi.org





Welcome! Welcome! Welcome

Gina Capaldi is Our New Upcoming Co-Illustrator Coordinator

As you may know, Su Moon has done a fantastic job as Co-Illustrator Coordinator for our SoCal Region of SCBWI. She's helped organize monthly meet-ups and events and supported illustrators with a smile. Sadly, she is stepping down at the end of Dec.

The good news is that Gina Capaldi is stepping up. Gina has been an SCBWI member for 25 years, and she was the former SoCal Illustrator Coordinator for 8 years. She organized meet-ups for 5 years back when they were called Schmoozes. Gina has both written and illustrated books and products for trade, historical non fiction, educational, and the toy industry. She often combines traditional painting techniques and mediums with collage and/or digital elements to add additional layer of visual story telling. You can see her artwork and book on her website: www.ginacapaldi.com

SAVE THE DATE

MARCH 14TH 2026 SCBWI SoCal **ART DAY 2026**

A Workshop for Children's Book **Illustrators and Authors**

Banner Contest SCHWI Socal ART DAY 2026

Theme: STORY BLOOM

- Must Include: SCBWI SoCal ART DAY 2026 "STORY BLOOM
- Size: 1600 x500 (72PPI or higher), Format: JPG or PNG
- Include 7 details to be used for buttons on the webpage. See examples: at www.scbwi.org/events/art-day-illustrators-and-writers-connect
- You must be a SCBWI member who lives in SoCal Region (Long Beach or Orange Counties, San Berandino, Riverside.)
- Submissions due: Dec 21st, 2025, winner announced Dec 28th, 2025
- The winner will get attributed on our website great for publicity PLUS will get free registration to our Art Day Event
- Submit to Bev Plass: SoCal-RA@scbwi.org, subject line: Banner Contest
- For more information see website: scbwi.org/regions/socal

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Carlene Griffith is a child at heart and loves all things writing, theater, and playing pretend. Email: socal-ara@scbwi.org Website: carlenegriffith.com.

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A two-time Author of the Month for her stories in Highlights magazine, Christine Henderson is currently working on a middlegrade novel. During the school year, Christine works as an instructional aide for the Corona-Norco school district.







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