

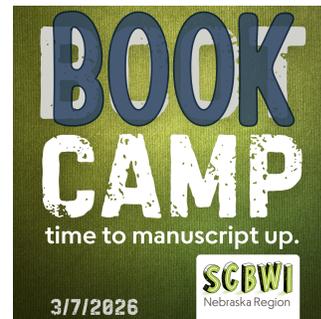


Prairie Song

SCBWI Nebraska Newsletter

Get Involved!

Get up. Get Going. Get Involved with SCBWI-Nebraska.



Our next [Story Spinners](#) is set for Feb. 20 @ 10am in Ashland, NE. Join us for some casual in-person writing and illustrating time! Registration is encouraged.

Join us online Feb. 25 @ 7pm where author, coach & podcaster Beth McMullen will explore the framework behind Middle Grade Adventures. [Click for details!](#)

Don't miss out on our in-person day-long event with Senior Editor Anna Parsons on Saturday, March 7th. Registration is required. Find out more [details online](#).



Heather Dawn Torres
SCBWI-Nebraska Co-Regional Advisor

A note from Heather...

February 2026 - As I write this note, I'm looking out of my window at a sunny day with temperatures in the upper 60's. My brain isn't quite sure if it is winter or spring. A quick look at the calendar however confirms that it is indeed STILL winter in Nebraska. But even though we may have a few more cold days ahead, change is on the way.

For me, the coming spring signals not only a change of seasons, but a change in routine. After much thought, I have decided to step down from my position as Co-Regional Advisor. Each interaction I have had as part of the SCBWI-Nebraska regional team has inspired me in some way. Every writer, illustrator, agent, and editor that I have met or interacted with over the last two years has been a blessing. And that's certainly a lot of inspiration--notebooks full, in fact! I am ready to take all of the notes, ideas, and sparks of creativity that I have been gathering and get to work. So, this spring, instead of starting my

mornings with checking my SCBWI Co-RA email, I will be grabbing a pen and paper and getting to work on some new creative projects.

It has been a privilege working with Jennie and all of our amazing regional volunteers. What an incredible team of people! If you have ever considered being a part of the regional team or volunteering in some way, I urge you to consider changing your routine and to reach out or apply. Not only will you be giving back to the SCBWI community, but serving others along their creative journeys will impact YOU as well. I want to thank everyone who has been a part of my SCBWI journey and I look forward to seeing you all at upcoming events very soon.

FEATURED MEMBER: Let's Meet Diane Newcomer



DIANE NEWCOMER traces her love of picture books all the way back to reading books from the *Sesame Street Book Club* with her mom, snuggled up before nap time. She later brought that love into the classroom, incorporating picture books while teaching adults English in Omaha and overseas. Now she reads picture books with her 3 young children while they homeschool.

While she dreamed of writing picture books for as long as she can remember, she wrote her first manuscript after experiencing a miscarriage and discovering how few picture books addressed the topic. Since then, she has developed two miscarriage manuscripts as well as a manuscript about refugees. She is drawn to tender topics that address the child with dignity while also adding a dash of humor and hope to go along with hard times. She loves creating—whether through words or by playing with illustrations—and is represented by Anjanette Barr at Dunham Literary.

You can find Diane at www.DianeNewcomer.com, where she writes mainly about infertility, miscarriage grief, and spiritual formation for adults or on Instagram at [@Diane.Newcomer](https://www.instagram.com/Diane.Newcomer). She can also be heard on **Imago Play**, a podcast for the whole family incorporating faith and play into everyday life.



Judith Snyder
Critique Group Coordinator

From Judith's View...

Hello all you writers and illustrators. I'm Judith Snyder, a member of SCBWI since 2003, first in Colorado and now in Nebraska where I am the Critique Group Coordinator. I am a former elementary teacher, librarian and oral storyteller, all of which led me to writing for children. Many people think writing/illustrating children's books sounds easy, but those of us in the trenches know that the writing process is a journey with exhilarating highs and rocky roads. But what helps us as we travel this path are the like-minded passionate people we meet along the way. Connecting with others in a professional way with critiques often leads to personal friendships and always leads to better writing.

Over the last 5 years, I have endeavored to create critique groups for our region. These groups have met in person and via Zoom. However, the only way I can form new groups is if you creators out there let me know you are looking for a group. Once I get two names, I can connect you as partners and add other members as more sign up. If your group has fizzled out but you are still interested in this commitment, I can send people your way. I'm also available to help your group get started with organizing and developing group expectations. If, on the other hand, you just want a critique exchange, I can help with that, too.

Send me a note at: scbwi.nebraska.critiques@gmail.com
Hope to see you at Story Spinners on Friday, February 20th @ 10:00am!

CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS: Be Part of the Regional Team



SCBWI-Nebraska has two regional team position openings: Assistant Regional Advisor (ARA) & Illustrator Coordinator (IC). If you've ever wondered what it's like to be a member of the regional team and thought "maybe I could do that" now is a great time to apply!

If you are interested in either of these positions or just want to find out more, you may request an application by emailing the person indicated below. Applications must be requested by Feb. 20th.

For the Assistant Regional Advisor applications, email:
Patricia Wiles, Director of Regional Team Management
patriciawiles@scbwi.org

For the Illustrator Coordinator applications, email:
Jerry Bennett, U.S. Illustrator Coordinator
us-ic@scbwi.org



Congrats to Our Nebraska Members!

JAYME SANDBERG - Congratulations to Jayme Sandberg, winner of the 2026 Indi-500 Writing Challenge for her entry "Morning Drop-Off is a Disaster." Jayme has won a 15-minute Zoom critique with Alvina Ling, VP & Publisher at Little, Brown Books for Young Readers. Way to go, Jayme!



KIMBERLY GLASS - Congratulations to Kimberly Glass, winner of the 2026 Indi-500 Illustrating Challenge. Kimberly has won a 15-minute Zoom portfolio review with Laurent Linn, Art Director at Simon and Schuster. Great work, Kimberly!



TIM HANTULA & JANE BURESH - Kudos to our Indi-500 Challenge runners-up, TIM HANTULA and JANE BURESH who have both won a registration for a SCBWI webinar of their choice! Nice job, Tim & Jane!



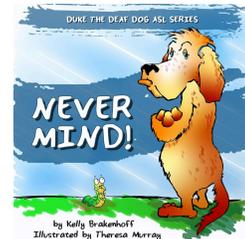
JODI ADAMS - Huge congrats to Jodi whose latest picture book, *One Little Squiggle*, recently won the SCBWI 2025 SPARK HONOR Award for excellence in independent publishing for children. The Spark Award is an annual SCBWI award that recognizes excellence in a children's book published through a non-traditional publishing route. We are thrilled for you, Jodi!



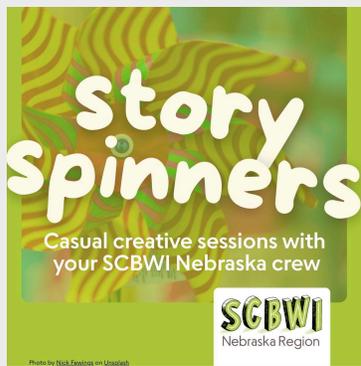
KATHLEEN GADEKEN - Kathleen Gadeken celebrates the release of *Inside My Maya Jungle: I Love Bats*, written by Blanca Manzanilla and Dr. Brock Fenton. This educational picture book introduces young readers to tropical bats—what they eat, where they live, and why they matter. This is the second collaboration between Manzanilla and Gadeken, continuing their growing series of nature-focused titles for children. Well done, Kathleen!



KELLY BRAKENHOF - Kelly is excited to announce the completion of the ASL Story Video for *Never Mind*, from her Duke the Deaf Dog ASL Series. All four Duke the Deaf Dog books now feature full ASL story videos performed by deaf signer Amy Willman, with illustrated book images visible throughout. This accomplishment fulfills Kelly's original vision for the series: accessible ASL storytelling for classrooms, families, libraries, and anyone interested in learning through visual language. The videos are free to watch on YouTube. Amazing work, Kelly!



**STORY SPINNERS:
Friday, February 20**



Our venue for the first Story Spinners of 2026 is Cheri O's Coffeehouse in Ashland, NE (upstairs room). This is conveniently located midway between Lincoln, Omaha & Fremont. We will meet on Friday, February 20th from 10:00a.m.-1:30p.m.

Most of our time will be spent working on individual projects with a few short breaks during the first 2 hours. Afterward, we will do some informal critiques or talk about our work. Stay for as long as you can or leave when you need to. Registration is not required, but we kindly ask that you register to help gauge interest.

We hope to see you there!

REGISTER TODAY!

CREATIVE CONNECTIONS: Wednesday, February 25

"THE MIDDLE GRADE ADVENTURE BLUEPRINT" - Join us as author, podcaster, and book coach, Beth McMullen explores a practical, writer-friendly framework built around 5 core pillars that help MG adventure, fantasy, and mystery stories gain momentum and emotional depth. Using simple questions and craft touchstones you can apply while drafting and revising, we'll look at why scenes stall, how kid-sized stakes and agency keep readers engaged, and how emotional change drives a story forward.



This webinar is offered as part of our SCBWI-Nebraska Creative Connections series and is free to Nebraska members. If you live outside of the Nebraska region, please click the link below to register.

MORE INFORMATION

SPRING BOOK CAMP w/ Editor Anna Parsons Saturday, March 7



On Saturday, March 7th put your boots on the trail, or more appropriately, pen to paper and join us for an all-day in-person Book Camp with Senior Editor Anna Parsons from Simon and Schuster.

Anna will discuss the elements it takes to go from pitch to offer and all registered participants will have the opportunity to submit a one-page pitch, query or the first 250 words of a project for live feedback during the workshop. Anna will also offer a behind-the-scenes look at what editors and publishers are thinking when evaluating submissions. This is one event you won't want to miss!

Registration is required for this event. Click below for more information or to register. Spots are limited to don't delay!

REGISTER TODAY!



Shop Talk: Creating Satisfying Endings

Satisfying kidlit endings and beginnings are equally difficult. They intricately depend upon each other. Endings need to circle back to the beginning in some way—as an “answer” to the story question posed, or the “bridge” that takes the story into the future. They often feature a safe landing where conflicts are resolved, or a circular ending that returns to the beginning for humor and closure.

Key elements of satisfying endings include:

- **Being Earned, Not Contrived:** The resolution must flow logically from the character's actions.
- **Being Character-Focused:** The main character takes center stage, having grown or changed.
- **Having Emotion & Surprise:** A mix of emotional satisfaction and unexpected, yet inevitable, turns.

Some types of endings could include:

- **The "Aww" Ending:** Emotionally touching, often used in picture books to leave the reader with a warm feeling.
- **The "Aha!" or Surprise/Twist Ending:** Provides an unexpected realization that feels inevitable upon reflection.
- **The Funny (Ha-ha) Ending:** A humorous payoff that encourages re-reading.
- **The Circular Ending:** Circles back to the beginning, often reinforcing the theme with a final laugh.
- **The "Safe Landing" (Resolved) Ending:** Common in younger fiction, where the main tension is fully resolved.
- **The Bittersweet Ending:** Common in older children's literature, mixing, for example, a sad loss with a sense of hope.

The endings can't be too abrupt—or drone on and on. They must be clear, but not sappy or didactic. They should elicit an emotional reaction, linger, and resonate. The take-away must be just that—something a child can carry in their mind or heart or funny-bone. Don't be afraid to try something bold. Challenge yourself to think about how the ending reflects the whole story and consider what you want your readers to feel. The goal is to leave your readers with a sense of wonder, satisfaction, or curiosity. So go ahead and write that ending that sticks.

Please join us at our next lunchtime Zoom on **March 26, 2026, from 12pm-1pm** as we focus on Satisfying Endings.

Until then, Happy Writing!

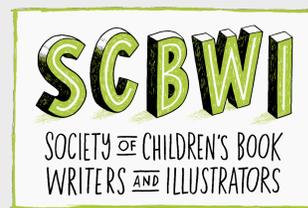
~ Mary Beth Rice & Ashley Karges, Shop Talk Co-Coordinators

SHOP TALK CALENDAR

DON FREEMAN ILLUSTRATOR GRANT:

Submissions Open March 1

Don Freeman was a renowned illustrator and an early supporter of SCBWI. He established this award to enable picture book illustrators to further their understanding, training, and work in the picture book genre. Two grants of \$1,000 each will be awarded annually. One grant to a published illustrator and one to a pre-published illustrator. The money may be used in any way to help you complete your project. Acceptable uses include: purchasing art supplies, enrollment in workshops or conferences, courses in advanced illustrating or writing techniques, travel for research or to expose work to publishers/art directors, or childcare. [CLICK HERE](#) for submission guidelines and eligibility requirements.



Upcoming Events in Other Regions:

[SCBWI KS/MO: An Illustrator's Tool](#)

FEB. 28 - "Stick to one style!" "Only show one style in your portfolio, otherwise art directors and editors won't know what they're going to get." Like many illustrators, you may have heard this advice ad verbatim. But is it really true? In this talk, which will take place in-person and on Zoom, children's book illustrator Charlie Mylie will dive deep into visual "style". Mylie will share a theory of how style is created, what it means, and what we can do with it as artists.

[SCBWI Austin: Educational & Non Fiction KidLit](#)

MAR. 7 - Join the Austin SCBWI chapter online for a day-long bootcamp about nonfiction and educational markets. 5 amazing speakers will discuss PB, novel, and illustration works and business topics, with additional opportunities such as pitches, critiques, and AMAs.

[SCBWI San Diego: Anatomy of a Query Letter](#)

MAR 14 - It's an exciting time when you've finished a publishing project and are ready to query! But if you're feeling a little lost on where to get started, we've got you covered. Literary agent and author, Sandra Proudman, will dive into the parts of a query letter + samples, her top ten tips for writing a standout query, the best ways to utilize and come up with comparative titles, and more in this 80-minute panel. There will be ample time for Q&A, so bring your questions and be ready to talk all about queries!

[SCBWI Kansas/Missouri: Recharge Your Writing Retreat](#)

APR. 17- 19 - Who's ready to take a step back from everyday life and focus on their writing for 2 solid days! Who wants to fill their creative soul with nature and children's book talk? If I'm describing you, take time for yourself to dive into a manuscript or two in the bucolic setting of Conception Abbey with Editor Ruqayyah Daud of Little Brown Books for Young Readers.

[MORE VIRTUAL EVENTS](#)

[MORE IN-PERSON EVENTS](#)

SCBWI

[Got questions? E-mail us by clicking here!](#)



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