

AUGUST 2025

Spotlight



Featured Member
SUE RAY-SMOLIK
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Upcoming Events

Fall Mingle - location TBD. Stay tuned!
Sept 12, 5:00pm-7:00pm CST

WFTIO Chapter Book Online Workshop Begins
Sept. 13, 12:00pm CST

Shop Talk-Let's Talk First Pages
Sept. 18, 12:00pm-1:00pm CST

Creative Connections with Adam Blackman (Zoom)
Sept. 29, 7:00-8:00pm CST

Explore All Regional Virtual Events

Select Your SCBWI Home Region!

Make your SCBWI experience more local by selecting a home region on your SCBWI profile. This is a brand-new feature on the SCBWI portal where members can now set a "home region" to get updates on local events and connect with regional volunteers, as well as the larger SCBWI community.

Be sure to select Nebraska as your home region so that you can stay up to date about all of the exciting events we have planned in 2025-2026! [Click here](#) for more info!

A Word From Our Regional Team



Heather Dawn Torres
SCBWI-Nebraska Co-Regional Advisor

Upon sitting down at my computer to write this note, I was immediately distracted by dust on my desk, a text from a friend, my grocery list, the dog, hungry kids, and a stray sock on the floor. I knew that that sock would distract me until I picked it up. So, I got up from my desk and picked up the sock--and since I was already up, I fed the dog, fed the kids, ordered groceries, responded to my friend, dusted off my desk, and then sat back down to write only to realize that I was hungry! (And who can possibly write on an empty stomach?) Thus, after making myself a snack, washing dishes, helping with homework, and tossing that stray sock into the washing machine, I finally returned to my computer to give writing another try. But, after all of that, I found that I was simply too tired to be creative. So, I told myself I would try again tomorrow.

But, when I stop and think about it, will tomorrow really be any better? Probably not. Tomorrow will most certainly bring more chores, more distractions, more hungry kids, and more socks on the floor. I absolutely do want to write and not only that, but I also want to find time for other writerly things as well; things like watching a webinar, reading a book on craft, visiting my local library to look for mentor texts, connecting with other authors over coffee, or attending an SCBWI event. But, the days always seem too short, and my to-do lists seem way too long. So, this season I have challenged myself to leave those dirty socks on the floor and put my writing first. And I would like to invite all of you to join me as well! Will you accept the challenge?

The challenge is simple--focus on your creativity by doing just three things each month:

1. Learn something new about your craft
2. Connect with another creative (in whatever way works for you)
3. Create! WRITE OR DRAW!

That's it! No word counts. No required attendance. Just time to write, time to learn, and time to connect. If at this point you're wondering how you could possibly add more to your already hectic schedule, look no further! Many of the upcoming events right here in our region will help you learn, connect, and create. You're already off to a great start simply by reading this newsletter!

(cont'd....)



A Word From Our Regional Team (cont'd)

Over the last few months, our SCBWI-Nebraska team has been hard at work brainstorming, planning, and coordinating events that we hope will help our members (*that's you!*) to learn, connect and create. We are thrilled to be a part of your writing or illustrating journey and look forward to “seeing” you at one of our upcoming events...

If you are an illustrator ready to hone your character design and visual storytelling skills, consider joining us for the ILLUSTRATOR INTENSIVE where you will complete pre-event assignments and receive live feedback during the event. The Intensive will be led by Ely Mellet, Designer at Lee & Low Books. A limited number of portfolio reviews are available so don't delay in signing up!

If you are an aspiring chapter book writer who wants to learn how to write chapter books but aren't sure where to start or if you just need some accountability, consider the upcoming WRITING FROM THE INSIDE OUT CHAPTER BOOK WORKSHOP an eight-month virtual workshop with a combination of instruction and peer critiques.

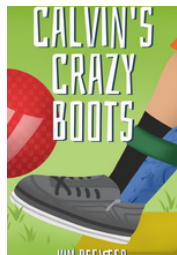
If you are an author or illustrator hoping to learn something new, be sure to join us for our regional meetings (now called Creative Connections) which are hour-long webinars featuring presenters who specialize in a specific topic. Creative Connections webinars are open to all SCBWI members but will remain free for our SCBWI-Nebraska premium members. Join us September 29th at 7:00pm for our first session--CREATIVE CONNECTIONS with Editor Adam Blackman from Cardinal Rule Press!

If you are wanting to make connections with other creatives, we have just thing! Consider attending SHOP TALK to discuss craft with other SCBWI-Nebraska members. Or, perhaps consider joining a CRITIQUE GROUP. And, if both connecting and creating are on your list, you won't want to miss our next STORY SPINNERS event where you'll have time and space to write or illustrate paired with time to connect with follow creatives.

This is just the beginning! More events will be added in the months to come. Be sure to bookmark the SCBWI-Nebraska website and follow our region so that you stay up to date on all of the amazing things happening in Nebraska. Let's learn, connect, and create together!

Heather

Let's Celebrate!



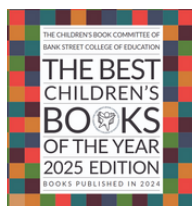
Kim Pfeiffer published her debut picture book, *Calvin's Crazy Boots*, in July. Calvin is a boy with cerebral palsy who wears his ankle-foot orthotic braces every day and his classmates don't understand why. Calvin feels misunderstood when peers say unkind things, but Calvin finds a way to help his classmates know him better. Congrats, Kim!



Library visits galore! Chloe Burgett visited 12 library branches this summer in Lincoln, Omaha, and Wahoo to talk about being a children's book illustrator and read her book *Camp Grandma and Grandpa*, written by Gina Bellisario and published by Two Lions. So exciting, Chloe!



Kelly Brakenhoff's *Duke the Deaf Dog* chapter books were honored on the 2025 Children's Book Council (CBC) Favorites Awards Lists! *I Belong Here* was named a Teacher Favorite and *IEPs R4U and Me* was selected as a Librarian Favorite. These national awards spotlight books that resonate with educators and young readers. And, this month, Kelly's fifth *Cassandra Sato Mystery*, also released! Way to go, Kelly!



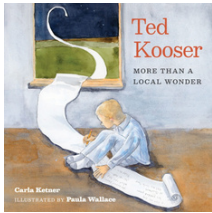
Bank Street College of Education included *Animal Climate Heroes* by Alison Pearce Stevens in their list of the Best Children's Books of the Year. The 2025 edition includes more than 600 titles chosen by the Children's Book Committee as the best of the best published in 2024. Hooray, Alison!



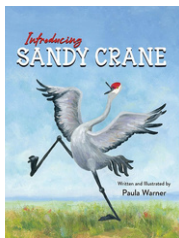
Alison Pearce Stevens is on a roll! Alison won the 2025 Nebraska Book Award for Best Cover for her book *Animal Climate Heroes* published by Godwin Books. Winners will be honored at the Nebraska Celebration of Book's (NCOB) literary festival in Lincoln on November 15th. We are thrilled for you, Alison!

Let's Celebrate!

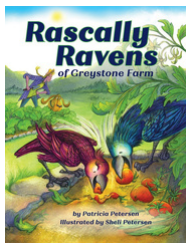
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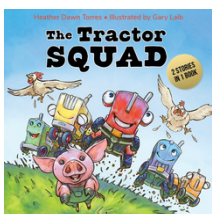
Ted Kooser: *More than a Local Wonder* by Carla Ketner and illustrated by Paula Wallace was selected to represent Nebraska in the National Book Festival's Great Reads from Great Places Program in Washington D.C. in September! Carla will be attending the festival and giving talks at libraries across Nebraska as part of the "Festival Near You!" Well done, Carla & Paula!



Kudos to Paula Warner who signed her children's books, *Introducing Sandy Crane* and *Mark Meadowlark* at Chapters Books & Gifts in Seward. Paula was also a featured author during the town's 4th of July celebration. The Turtle Creek Gallery in Ashland hosted Paula during Bay Days. At each event, the books came to life with a performative reading by Janet Warner and the "Sandy Crane" puppet. Great work, Paula!



Sheli Petersen's latest picture book, *Rascally Ravens of Greystone Farm* will be featured in the Greater Denton Arts Council exhibition Empowering Through Visual Storytelling, Sept 16 – Nov 29, 2025 in Denton, TX. The exhibition will include Sheli's process for designing and writing picture books, an interactive maker space, and a video version of the picture book with original soundtrack. We're so proud of you, Sheli!



The *Tractor Squad* by Heather Dawn Torres won the 2025 Imadjinn Award for Best Picture Book. As part of the Imaginarium Convention in Louisville, Kentucky, the Imadjinn Awards are a comprehensive series of juried writing awards that recognize outstanding achievement in a broad range of literary categories. Congrats, Heather!



Alison L. Bitz will be the headlining faculty for the upcoming *Ink & Paper Writing Retreat* in Springfield, Nebraska on September 20. In her keynote, "The Resilient Writer: Strategies for Working Through Challenges to Creativity" Alison will be speaking on resilience and a flexible mindset during the writing process. Huge congrats, Alison!

Featured Member



Sue Ray-Smolik



Let's meet Sue Ray-Smolik! As a country bumpkin who grew up surrounded by beautiful tree covered hills and clear running streams in western Pennsylvania, Sue feels blessed to live in another area with abundant natural beauty here in Nebraska which she has called home since 1985.

It is hard for Sue to believe but in two more years she will have been an elementary teacher for four decades!

When not teaching Sue enjoys singing, writing, and drawing. Whether it is working in her yard (mostly trying not to kill her flowers!), or riding her bike at the lake, the outdoors is definitely Sue's happy place.

Sue's daughter, her son-in-law, and adorable grandson Liam are all characters in Sue's book *The Evening Walk*! The family moved home from Colorado last year making Sue one very happy Grammy!

Sue and her husband currently reside near Elkhorn, Nebraska with their fur-babies; a Basenji dog named Tiggy (also a character in *The Evening Walk*), and a Calico cat named CoCo. And don't worry, Coco has her own special appearance in two other books lest she feel left out!

Sue fits in as much time into her life as she can for those things, minus the flower killing of course! As an author, the perfect day for Sue is having an uninterrupted amount of time to lose herself at the kitchen table, typing away, with a warm breeze shifting the curtains, birds singing in the pines...just being able to let the ideas flow, and feeling the peace as they do.

To learn more about Sue and her work visit: <https://the-writing-nook.com/>

Coming Attractions



SEPT. 13, 2025 - CHAPTER BOOK WORKSHOP

Get ready for our 2025-2026 Writing from the Inside Out Chapter Book Workshop! Calling all aspiring chapter book writers! Want to learn how to write chapter books but not sure where to start? Have ideas but unsure how to properly execute them? Need some guidance and accountability? Join renowned chapter book expert Marcie Colleen in this 8-month virtual workshop and learn how to captivate readers ages 6-10. Check out the [event registration](#) page for more info. [Register soon](#) as spots are filling quickly!

SEPT. 14, 2025 - ILLUSTRATOR INTENSIVE REGISTRATION ENDS

Calling all illustrators! Ready to hone your character design and visual storytelling? Join us for an illustrator's intensive with Ely Mellet, Designer with Lee & Low Books. Based on Ely's assignment, you will develop initial sketches for her review, apply her feedback, and prepare your final full-color piece to share during the Zoom Intensive on Sunday, December 7 from 11:00am - 3:30pm. A limited number of optional portfolio reviews will be available directly following the intensive. [Registration](#) for the intensive ends September 14. Registration space is limited so don't delay!



SEPT. 29, 2025 - WEBINAR: THE POWER OF TWO

Join us for Creative Connections with Editor Adam Blackman from Cardinal Rule Press! We all know about the power of three. But when it comes to picture books, it takes two: text AND art! The industry standard is that authors and illustrators work separately. In this presentation, we'll survey notable exceptions to this standard and explore how closer collaboration between authors and illustrators can lead to work that is more than the sum of its parts. Submission opportunities will be available to all participants following the event. This is a FREE event for all SCBWI-Nebraska members! Members from other regions will need to [register online](#).



Maximize Your Membership



Learn, create and connect this fall by participating in an online SCBWI event. Below are just a few options to consider. Visit the [SCBWI website](#) for a list of all regional virtual events.

- AUG 26 - [Building a Non-Fiction Book Proposal w/ Agent Maria Vicente](#) (Pennsylvania East)
- SEPT 2 - [4 Keys to Visual Writing](#) (New York Eastern Upstate)
- SEPT 11 - [Squaring Up for School Visits](#) (Maryland Delaware West Virginia)
- SEPT 15 - [Figuring Out Picture Book Pacing w/ Editor Bunmi Ishola](#) (Pennsylvania East)
- SEPT 21 - [Fall Harvest Virtual Conference](#) (Illinois)
- SEPT 25 - [Designing & Illustrating Covers w/ Kaz Windness](#) (Houston)
- OCT 4 - [Fall Writers & Illustrators Day](#) (SoCal)
- OCT 31 - [Halloweekend Conference IN PERSON EVENT](#) (SCBWI-Iowa)

Nebraska Critique Groups

Are you looking for someone to critique your manuscript,
hook, pitch, logline, or query letter?

Join a critique group today!

Email Judith Snyder, Critique Group Coordinator
scbwi.nebraska.critiques@gmail.com



Illustration Submission

Would you like for your art to be featured in our next newsletter?
Please send to: Heather at scbwi.nebraska.newsletter@scbwi.org
Label file as firstname_lastname.jpeg. (no bigger than 8 mb)



Shop Talk Recap



Ashley Karges
Shop Talk Co-Coordinator

A New Season for Shop Talk

Whether you are at the start of your kid-lit adventure, or far along the winding road, we encourage you to connect with us! Shop Talk is a unique opportunity to get to know local writers and illustrators. The goal is to build community among members, as well as provide each other with takeaways and motivation for our journeys!

Shop Talk occurs via Zoom over the lunch hour at the dates listed below. This year, the zooms will be structured as “working zooms” or “mini critiques.” We can’t wait to share writing prompts and discuss your works in progress as we cover First Pages, Messy Middles and Satisfying Endings. In addition, look for our Shop Talk article in each SCBWI newsletter. We look forward to a productive year!

New this season, all Shop Talks will be held from 12:00pm-1:00pm CST.

Mark Your Calendars for 2025-2026 Shop Talk:

- SEPT 18 - Let’s Talk First Pages
- JAN 22 - Messy Middles
- MARCH 26 - Satisfying Endings

Shop Talk is a free event exclusively for SCBWI-Nebraska members! We hope that you will consider joining us for an opportunity to build connections with others in our region. As a reminder, Shop Talks are NOT recorded so you’ll want to plan to attend live so you don’t miss out on the fun! So grab your lunch and join us in September as we discuss First Pages!

FOLLOW US AND FIND MORE ON:



Credits: Fall 2021 Texas Woman’s University Community-focused Design Studio
Layout Design: Nely Martinez, McCrae Milton, Simran Prasai | Banner Design: Roshad Bonner, McCrae Milton |
Feature Title Designers: Kelly Milliorn, Edgar Obregon, Susana Pina, Amanda Tritschler-Tucker | Teaser Layout Designer: Roshad Bonner
Art Director: Professor Sheli Petersen

Take Flight With Help From Our Volunteers



LEADERSHIP



Co-Regional Advisor

Jennie Gollehon
nebraska-ra@scbwi.org



Co-Regional Advisor

Heather Dawn Torres
nebraska-ra2@scbwi.org

PROGRAMMING



Workshop Coordinator

Katie Martens
scbwi.nebraska.workshop@gmail.com



Webinar Coordinator

Sheli Petersen
scbwi.nebraska.webinars@gmail.com



Shop Talk Co-Coordinator

Ashley Karges
scbwi.nebraska.shoptalk@gmail.com



Shop Talk Co-Coordinator

Mary Beth Rice
scbwi.nebraska.shoptalk@gmail.com



Social Events Coordinator

Stefanie Raszler
scbwi.nebraska.retreats@gmail.com

COMMUNICATION AND OUTREACH



Critique Group Coordinator

Judith Snyder
scbwi.nebraska.critiques@gmail.com



Published Member Liaison

Tim Hantula
scbwi.nebraska.pal@gmail.com

Open Volunteer Positions:

- Newsletter Coordinator
- Website Coordinator
- Promotions Coordinator
- Self-Published Member Liaison

Contact us for info on how to get involved!