



Prairie Song

SCBWI Nebraska Newsletter

Perfect Writing Weather

October, 2026

WRITING AN ENGAGING MYSTERY:

ATMOSPHERE, TENSION, PACING AND PREMISE



Join us as literary agent Christa Heschke provides tips to ensure your premise stands out.

CreativeConnections



OCT. 27, 2026

WORLD BUILDING

Take your story from flat to unforgettable by using author Jessica Khoury's six practical principles!



CreativeConnections



NOV. 3, 2026

Tips on Illustrator Portfolio Curation



Join Tracy Shaw, Art Director for Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, with advice on what she looks for in an illustrator's portfolio.

NOVEMBER 8, 2026



1:00-2:00 pm (CST)
\$15 Members | \$20 Non-Members

Meld together creepy or atmosphere, swift pacing, and surprising twists to keep your reader in suspense!

Tuesday, October 27 at 12:00 pm [Register here.](#)

Skyborn series author Jessica Khoury's simple yet highly effective techniques will help you transform your settings.

Tuesday, November 3 at 7:00 pm [Click](#) for more details!

Curious about what art directors look for in a children's illustration portfolio? Art Director Tracy Shaw shares her best practices advice!

Sunday, November 8 at 1:00 pm [Click](#) for more!



Jennie Gollehon

SCBWI-Nebraska Regional Advisor

A note from Jennie...

Over the weekend, I attended the Letters & Lines conference hosted by the SCBWI Rocky Mountain Chapter in Golden, Colorado. It was a weekend filled with craft intensives, panel discussions, and breakout sessions all taught by industry professionals, award-winning authors, and exceptionally talented illustrators.

While I could share many pearls of wisdom I gleaned over the weekend, there is one in particular I think we all need to hear.

It started with Kate DiCamillo's opening keynote. She was introduced as "legendary" and by all rights, she is. But the story she shared of her pre-legendary days was of working in a nursery and later, a book warehouse, endlessly telling others she wanted to be a writer, while spending a lot of time not actually writing. In order to be a writer (or illustrator), you have to do the work. As she said, you must, "Get to it."

Later, the ever-exuberant Kim Tomsick spoke passionately about connecting with other creatives. She encouraged members to not only get involved but to, "Step both feet into your dream."

And lastly, while discussing how sometimes the work we put into our craft can be long, leaving us tired and exhausted, and ready to stay home, Megan E. Freeman, author of the multi-award-winning book *Alone* said, "Show up, anyway."

As we enter the final quarter of the year, flying headlong into the wintery season of tenuous weather, holidays and family visits, and the hustle bustle of life; it's tempting to call it a year. To put off the goals and ambition until January.

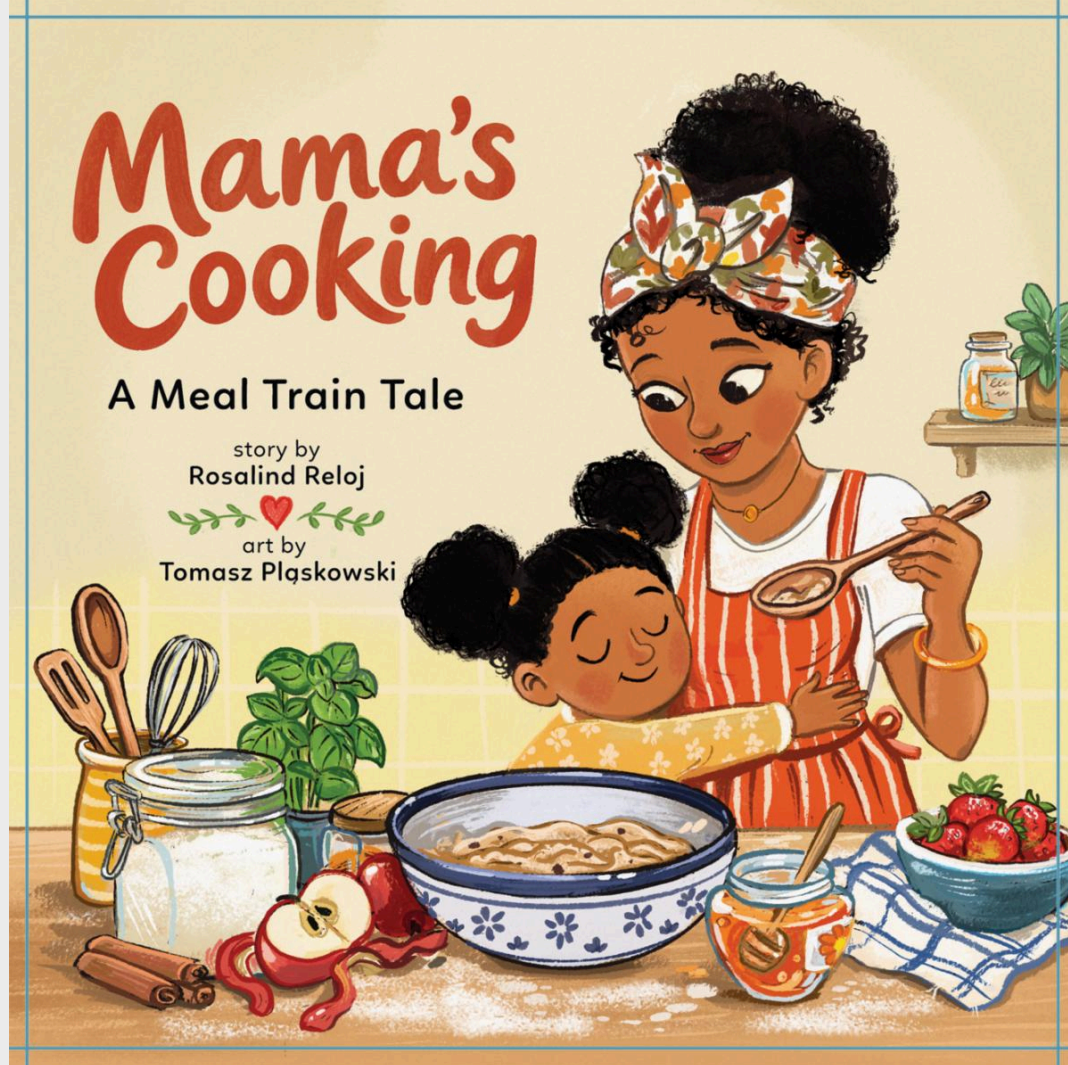
But I want to encourage the opposite. Even when it's a slog, show up, anyway. Step both feet into your dream. And get to it.

There are 77 days left in the year. Think of what you can accomplish.

Better yet, don't think. Just do.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jennie". The signature is written in a dark, fluid ink.

FEATURED MEMBER:
It's Rosalind Reloj!



Rosalind Reloj has a new book coming out this season – "Mama's Cooking" – which she describes as "taking every ounce of energy to wrap my head around printing this baby"! That I can believe, publishing a book on your own can be a daunting task, and it most certainly has a steep learning curve. Rosalind is planning on assembling more marketing for "Mama's Cooking", possibly even a book tour.

From Rosalind:

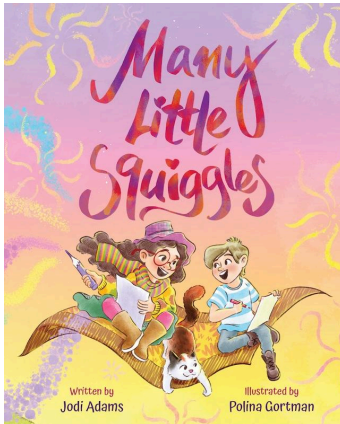
"The book was born from several experiences I had when family and friends brought meals after I had my two sons. When my sister had her third child, I remember my three-year-old niece saying, *"I'm tired of eating out."* So many people had bought them gift cards and deliveries from Grub Hub. It's totally a parent's dream to be catered to for weeks on end, but from a kid's perspective it was fun... until it wasn't.

My niece sorely missed the comfort and familiarity she found in her mom's cooking. Already dealing with the changes of a new baby in the house, she truly wondered if she'd ever taste her mother's cooking again."

Rosalind Reloj and her family enjoy cooking. "Mama's Cooking" celebrates the bond connecting family and food and reflects the Reloj family's ethnic rainbow, including: African American, Native American, Irish, Russian-Romanian Jewish, Puerto Rican, and Filipino. The dishes featured in the book are a tribute to her children.

Congrats to Our Nebraska Members!

SHELI PETERSEN - Sheli Petersen's illustration portfolio placed as the Grand Prize winner in the 2026 SCBWI-Austin Conference Portfolio Showcase. Judges noted Sheli's cinematic approach to visual storytelling, rich color palettes, and lively character interaction.

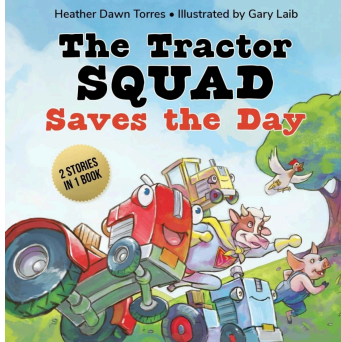


JODI ADAMS - Young At Heart Publishing, LLC has released *Many Little Squiggles*, the new picturebook written by Jodi Adams and illustrated by Polina Gortman.

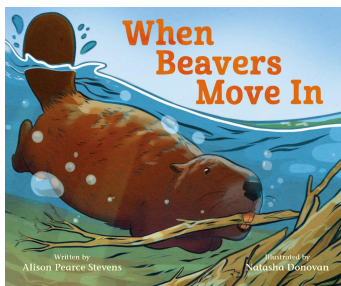
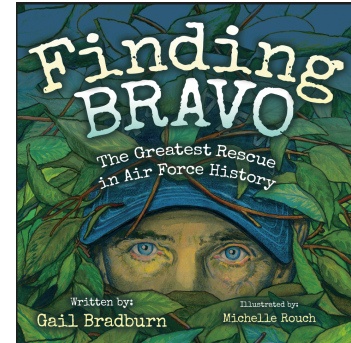
JODI ADAMS - The Nebraska Center for the Book announced the 2026 Nebraska Book Awards after our last newsletter was released. *One little Squiggle* by Jodi Adams and illustrated by Polina Gortman won for best illustrations! Congrats Jodi and Polina!



HEATHER DAWN TORRES - *The Tractor Squad Saves the Day* written by Heather Dawn Torres and illustrated by Gary Laib received an Illustration Honor as part of the 2026 Nebraska Book Awards.



GAIL BRADBURN - Gail Bradburn has published *Finding Bravo: The Greatest Rescue in Air Force History*. This picture book for ages 8-12 is the true story of a downed airman during the Vietnam War and surprising sport that saved his life.



ALISON PEARCE STEVENS - Alison Pearce Stevens's picture book, *When Beavers Move In*, is a Boston Globe-Horn Book nonfiction award nominee. Alison got to travel to Boston to accept the award in person.

RACHEL BACHMAN - *Excuse My Whimsy*, Rachel's Substack newsletter, recently reached 1,000 subscribers. She started it in early 2026 as a place to think and write more deeply about children's books and the world surrounding them.

STEFANIE RASZLER - Stefanie Raszler earned an honorable mention in this year's PBParty — her fourth in a row!

TIPS ON ILLUSTRATOR PORTFOLIO CREATION WITH OPTIONAL PORTFOLIO REVIEW

November 8, 2026



Calling all illustrators! Curious what art directors are looking for in a portfolio geared toward the children's publishing industry? Join us as Tracy Shaw, Art Director at Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, shares advice on best practices for organizing/curating your portfolio. Apply learned techniques to your portfolio, and assess the effectiveness of those changes by signing up for an optional 15-minute virtual portfolio review. Portfolio reviews participants are invited to a Virtual Happy Hour to debrief with other attendees and build community. The webinar will be on Sunday, November 8, 2026, at 1pm CST.

REGISTER NOW!

Upcoming Events in Nearby Regions:

[Developing a Cinematic Eye for Illustrators](#)

October 24, 2026 (registration closes October 22): Take Two! Developing a Cinematic Eye for Illustrators with Sheli Petersen. You've got a great manuscript and character studies—now what? In this workshop, we'll put you in the director's chair by covering the basics in staging your character.

[Seeking Representation: Next Level Querying with Sera Rivers](#)

Join SCBWI Minnesota for Sera's Virtual talk about what every writer needs to know about querying right now. Following her talk, attendees interested in feedback on their query letter can participate in a roundtable session to get direct feedback on their query from Sera.

[Nonfiction Connect: Middle Grade Nonfiction](#)

SCBWI Rocky Mountain begins this webinar with a brief overview of recently published MG nonfiction and how to categorize it (hint: natural disasters feature prominently!). Come ready to share the MG titles that you have heard of. We'll then discuss and brainstorm about how you might find your next MG NF project.

[Writing Early Readers That Kids Want to Read with Kiah Thomas](#)

In this hour-long webinar from SCBWI Rocky Mountain, author Kiah Thomas will talk you through the process of creating the Lone Wolf series, look at the structure of early readers (what works and what doesn't), and give tips and tricks for writing early readers that kids remember. *This event is made possible by a grant from SCBWI and the Authors Coalition of America.

[Using Art and Photo References in Illustration with Meredith Lucius](#)

Meredith Lucius, illustrator of six children's books, will show us how she uses art and photo references to guide her illustration practice. You'll learn how to use references in a way that doesn't feel like cheating and that inspires to create something new, rather than rigidly adhering to your reference.

MORE VIRTUAL EVENTS



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





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