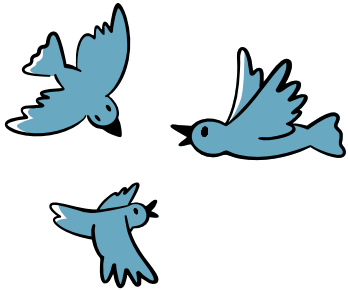


SCBWI SoCal NEWSLETTER

Spring/Summer
Issue 2026



A stylized illustration of a magnolia tree with pink and white blossoms and buds, set against a light blue background. The tree branches are dark brown and extend across the top and sides of the page.

Spring/Summer Issue 2026

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Illustration by Susie Schaefer

Art Day 2026

by Carlene Griffith

On Saturday, March 14th, SCBWI SoCal hosted its annual Art Day on the beautiful campus of Laguna College of Art and Design (LCAD) in Laguna Hills. This year's program featured a banner contest, two 90-minute presentations by illustrator-author guests Raissa Figueroa and Joey Spiotto, a 15-minute instructed yoga stretch, and two off-site critique opportunities.

Attendee NADIA ROLDAN said, "I loved being able to meet new people and see familiar faces while being creative together. Both guest speakers were inspiring! Raissa's *THE ART OF MESS* was such a great example of letting go and just playing with materials. It was inspiring to watch her process from traditional to digital. Joey's workshop was incredibly insightful. Starting the morning with yoga was a great idea. I liked the idea of doing figure drawing together. I just wish there was more time for it all." ANGIE DUPREE said, "This was my first children's book conference, and I was blown away! I loved mingling with so

many talented people all day and left feeling inspired and ready to take on my next projects! I loved the yoga/mindful breathing exercises. The speakers were amazing and so down to earth. Due to the size of our group, I felt like we had opportunities to ask questions and connect with them."

About a month prior to the event, we put out an announcement for a banner contest, and this year's winner was SUSI SCHAEFER. Her Story Bloom illustration featured a captivating and joyful scene with children, robots, and flowers. It was used on our webpage and all our advertising for the event and can be found here in the newsletter.

continued...



This year's committee members included HAANA YOO, LISA JOHNSTON HANCOCK, JOY HWANG, SU MOON, co-IC GINA CAPALDI, with co-IC HEATHER SOODAK as committee leader.



Haana



Lisa



Joy



Su



Gina



Heather

This was Heather's first year as leader, and she did a fantastic job, setting up meetings, planning and overseeing the event with advisors CO-ARA CARLENE GRIFFITH and RA BEV PLASS, to help when needed.



Though the day went smoothly, the event was not without its bumps. Two days prior to the event, Corporate was having trouble getting our insurance documents out to the college, and we were worried we might have to reschedule or move the event to the beach or a park. As we were scrambling to find available locations, we were able to secure some day-of event insurance which was accepted by the school, so we could continue as planned. Whew!

We are always so grateful to LCAD for letting us use their facilities and providing student volunteers on the day of the event to help. We truly benefit from the help, and the student volunteers enjoy attending the event for free and receiving lunch. One student said, "This really solidified my perspective on my own career, and how I would love to create more educational work for children."

Lunch was provided by The Taco Stand, with carne, pollo, and mushroom tacos, beans, and chips to choose from. Many attendees remarked how much they loved the food, though it was a little late getting there. Laguna Hills was hosting a St. Patrick's Day parade down the street from the college, and several streets were closed. Even with Carlene and Bev leaving early to get the food, traffic was terrible, causing a 30-minute delay. At the last minute, Lisa Johnston Hancock stepped in and offered an impromptu figure drawing activity to fill the time. Thank goodness for such talented, professional committee members.

With this being SoCal's third Art Day, we are excited to share that attendance has grown every year since we started in 2024, from around 30 to nearly 60 this year.

continued...

This number includes illustrators, author-illustrators and picture book authors. The downside is, next year's committee might have to consider finding another location that can accommodate more attendees. The intimate setting, with hands-on artistic focus workshops, are one of the main reasons we began this event.

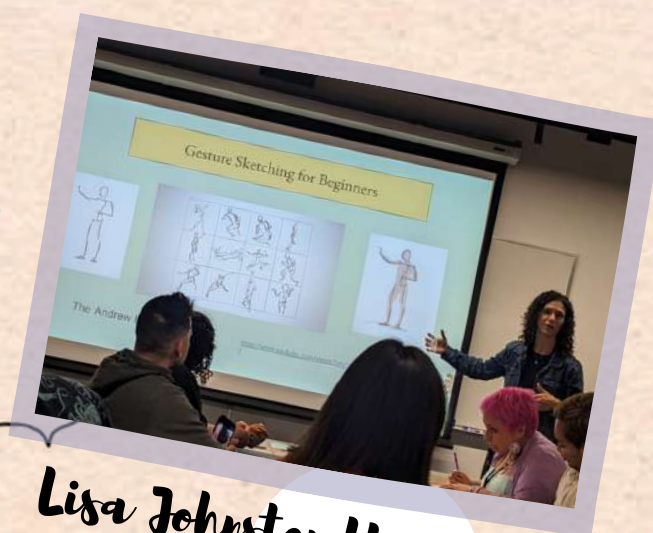
Our member artists wanted an event just for them, like the MG and YA authors' retreat our chapter hosts every year. HAANA YOO, when asked what she liked about the event, said, "The more intimate feeling compared to larger conferences. The hands-on workshops. Amazing lunch. I liked the table setup, which creates a little group." SHIHO PATE said, "I love how the workshop was mainly about art and the art process. I also loved that there was a time for everyone to interact."

If we outgrow LCAD, we might not be able to provide the same hands-on type of experience our artist members want, but if we keep it the same, we will have to cap attendance to 40-50 people. These are points we'll have to consider in future Art Day planning stages. If you're a chapter member and an illustrator, share your thoughts with Heather Soodak or Gina Capaldi, our chapter illustrator coordinators, or consider volunteering for our next Art Day event.

Overall, I'm glad to say Art Day 2026 was a success. I think attendee EORI TOKUNAGA summed it up best when she said, "It is always such a treat (and a privilege) to be in a space where I get to spend the day with my fellow creatives who are just as passionate about children's books as I am."



Raissa Figueroa

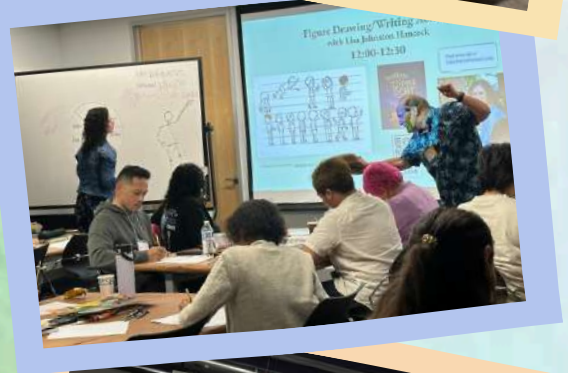


Lisa Johnston Hancock



Joey Spiotto





Art Day

Tahquitz Review

by Carlene Griffith

*"I look forward to this retreat every year," said attendee **Carol Hughes** on the first day of the SCBWI SoCal Chapter's Tahquitz Middle Grade and Young Adult Writer's retreat. The event was held Thursday, May 28th through Sunday, May 31st in Idyllwild, CA, at Tahquitz Pines Retreat facility. Other attendees expressed similar feelings. **Debra Schmidt** summarized it best when she said, "This retreat is a perfect way to immerse yourself in a craft-focused weekend set in a beautiful mountain retreat. You will receive constructive feedback from 2 to 3 industry professionals and a collaborative peer group. The retreat schedule also provides time to write, revise, socialize, and enjoy nature."*

This annual event is now in its 10th year and is so beloved that it sells out within the first 2 hours. One attendee explained how they'd saved up all year for the event and still didn't get in. Fortunately, they were on the waiting list, and an opening became available.

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



Even with selling out, the event turned out to be a delightful mix of returning and new writers. **Beth Colborn**, a first-time attendee, said, "I expected to be nervous, what I didn't expect was how quickly the nerves went away because of how warm and encouraging everyone was." **Leah Croft**, another first timer, said, "For me, being that this was my first time going to a retreat like this, I have to say the people made it wonderful. I felt included and welcomed by everyone. I was nervous and excited going into this, and I found the people were so generous with their time and answers to any of my questions. I am very thankful and feel really lucky to have found this group!"

The planning committee, which included **Heather Buchta**, **Bev Plass**, **Lori Polydoros**, and **Tim Burke**, intentionally kept the limit to 28 members to maintain the intimacy and keep the critique groups manageable. "It's an intimate, welcoming retreat in a beautiful location that provides lots of opportunities to learn from and make meaningful connections with other writers and the faculty," said an attendee.

continued...

The weekend's weather was perfect, with a high of 70° and a cool California breeze rustling through the pine trees as squirrels and bunnies roamed the grounds. Each day, participants gathered in four roundtable groups of seven to critique each other's pages, with a guest faculty member to review. Many attendees took advantage of the pre-event paid written critiques by faculty to implement recommended revisions and prepare for these valuable roundtable meetings. **Anne Hanovich** said, "It's so worthwhile to get a deep dive on a writing project. The feedback is constructive and challenges me to strengthen my writing."



Illustration by Lisa Johnston Hancock

This year's guest faculty included **Alison Romig** (Editor at Delacorte Press), **Anum Shafqat** (Editor at Simon & Schuster), **Paige Terlip** (Literary Agent and co-founder of Starling Literary & Media), and **Michaela Whatnall** (Literary Agent at Dystel, Goderich & Bourret). Many constantly commented on how generous and approachable this year's faculty was. They invited us to sit with them, visit, and encouraged us to ask questions, besides the one-on-one coaching sessions included in the retreat. **Debbie Meneses** said, "The faculty were excellent choices in 2026. They were approachable and offered lots of support." We can't thank them enough for coming and taking the time to really meet our needs.

Besides working on manuscripts, attendees had ample time to write and socialize at planned meals and activities. **Erin Clark** said, "The faculty and facilitators were great. I really enjoyed and appreciated every member of my critique group. I also particularly enjoyed having large blocks of time set aside for writing. I got a lot of writing done and found the entire experience very valuable." Hosts offered an optional hike, a pizza party, and a game night to connect. **Debra Schmidt**, a repeat attendee and co-RA with the San Diego chapter, also led a pickleball lesson if anyone wanted to play.

continued...



Alison Romig



Anum Shafqat



Paige Terlip



Michaela Whatnall



Illustration by Maynard Smith

Organizer **Heather Buchta** shared a funny story. “As I was about to tuck away into my writing cave, I ran into Michaela, dressed like they were ready for a safari. I was like, “Are you heading out on the hike?” And they were like, “YES! I don’t want to miss an opportunity. Are you?” And I was like, “Well, I wasn’t, but I’m totally getting swayed by your vibe! I feel like I HAVE TO go now!” I was so pulled into their positive attitude and excitement that I U-turned and ran into my cabin for a quick change. I went on the hike entirely because of them and ended up having the best time with everyone. Lots of great conversations, good laughs, and funny anecdotes of people’s lives that I never would’ve heard otherwise. I still got an incredible amount of writing done (and finished my manuscript!), but I also got my social and friendship cup filled to overflowing. Such a fun fun experience.” It was the perfect balance of work and play.

When asked what they benefited most from attending the retreat, **Kathleen Troy** said, “Just being in the company of others is inspiring and motivating. I have ten published books and, to tell the truth, no one in my life particularly cares about what I do. For four days I’m with other writers with inspiring stories and ideas. Heaven!” When asked what he liked about the retreat, new attendee **Timothy Martinez** said, “I have been writing for two years, and I often feel like a neophyte staring up at the monolith of the writing industry. Tahquitz made me feel like part of a community. I belong.”

Overall, it was a great weekend. I agree with Timothy when he said, “You should consider the Tahquitz Writers Retreat if you want to push yourself to the next level.” There is no greater benefit for your career and writing ambitions than setting aside time to write, getting feedback from other talented writers and professionals on your manuscripts, in a relaxing and creative, inspiring location. I believe I speak for most attendees in saying that we appreciate you and thank you for your hard work. Until next year!

Tahquitz Photo Review



LA Festival of Books

April 18-19, 2026



The Los Angeles Times Festival of Books, held yearly at the University of Southern California, is the largest book festival in the country and one of SCBWI SoCal's chapter most successful events. With 165,000 attendees, celebrity authors, and guest events, people from all over Southern California come to peruse book booths in every category from children to adult.

Every year, SoCal and LA leadership come together to give our talented authors & illustrators members the chance to showcase, sell, and sign books. Members sign up for 2 to 3 hour slots to represent their books over the two days. When asked if she had a good time at the festival, author **Melissa Bent**, who participated this year on Saturday, said, "I had a great time at the booth! It was wonderful seeing everyone again and meeting new faces. The attendees were enthusiastic and diverse in terms of other authors, teachers, doctors, and kiddos!" Next year the event will be held on Saturday and Sunday, April 17-18, 2027. Authors can book a booth directly as a vendor or try for a spot in our SBWI booth, but we warned they fill out fast.



REPRESENTATION MATTERS

by Kelly Powers

A few weeks ago, one of my regulars came into the library with their one-on-one aide. As they were perusing the shelves, they noticed I had a copy of the book *Hummingbird* by Natalie Lloyd on display.

With a nose wrinkle, they said, "My mom has been trying to get me to read that because the main character is disabled and I'm disabled."

I frowned and said, "Don't get me wrong, *Hummingbird* is a beautiful book and one of my favorites, but it wasn't written for you.

You already know what it's like to be disabled in a world that treats you like an afterthought.

This book was written for everyone else so, for just a minute, we can see what it's like for you and learn empathy."

Since then, I've thought about that conversation a lot, and with this platform, I'd like to expound upon the idea of learning empathy through books.

We've all heard the phrase, "Representation Matters." I've probably used it a few times in my articles already. It is a belief I hold near and dear to my heart and if need be, it will be the hill I will gladly die upon. But, what does it mean?

Kelly Powers has been a member of SCBWI for over ten years and leads one of the MG/YA critique groups for the SoCal Chapter. She's been a lover of kid-lit since she was old enough to hold a book in her hands and has turned that passion into a career as a junior high school librarian.

Librarian's Corner



On the surface, Representation Matters is a concept that every person should be able to go into a library or book store and find their life experience, their culture, sexuality, and their ethnicity in one or more books. They should be able to read and think, • ***I'm not alone.***

If that was all Representation Matters stood for, then it'd be a worthwhile endeavor. I mean, I'll never forget the time I had the book *Lucy and Linh* by Alice Pung on a display and a teacher gasped when she saw it. With tears in her eyes, she said, "I have never seen my name (Linh) on a book in my whole life!" And I was truly happy I was able to create that moment for her just by ordering that novel and creating a display.

continued...

But, you see, while Representation Matters is a mirror, it can also be a window.

I am a middle class, white woman, yet through books I have learned empathy for so many lives, cultures, and experiences I would've been blind to otherwise. I have walked in the shoes of a young boy dealing with the aftermath of his mother's deportation (*Efren Divided*). Understood the struggle of being deaf in the world of the hearing (*Song for a Whale*). Fought to find a home and livelihood after immigrating to a new country (*Front Desk*). Understood that love is love, no matter what form it takes (*To Redwood from Ponytail*, *They Both Die at the End*, *Simon vs. the Homo Sapien's Agenda*). Felt the fear and injustice of discrimination and police brutality (*Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, *The Hate U Give*, *A Good Kind of Trouble*), as well as the lasting impact that

political upheaval has on children (*Orange for the Sunsets*, *Diary of a Young Girl*, *A Night Divided*, *In the Shadow of the Sun*, *The Night Diary*, and many, many more).

Books show us that we're not alone, and that's important, but they also remind us that there's a bigger world out there beyond our own experiences. This is why Representation Matters is important and should be championed by everyone, especially those in Kidlit.

So, I invite you to take that proverbial walk in another's shoes all while staying in your favorite, comfortable reading spot. Select a book to read this month that is completely outside of your normal worldview. It can be historical fiction, nonfiction, or modern-day, as long as it is a perspective you know little to nothing about. I promise, you will feel yourself grow and learn in new, unexpected ways.

And of course, reach out to myself or your local librarian if you need any recommendations.



Illustration by Lisa Johnston Hancock

breaking up with your AGENT

by Jodi Rizzotto

Signing a contract with an agent is a risk. You're putting the future of your writing into someone else's hands. Your agent is your champion who will try to guide your story into the hands of a big publisher, resulting in a large advance and the possibility of publishing future books.

Or your project could "die on sub."

I was more than excited to sign with my agent a few years ago. She had recently left a larger agency and was starting one of her own. She connected with two of my manuscripts, and we went out on submission with editors quickly. Several asked for full manuscripts, and we both had high hopes.

The rejections trickled in. You may think rejections from agents are bad, but the ones from editors at publishing houses are brutal. Some of the comments were helpful, and I went back and did more revisions. Other comments were generic, like "not right for the current market" and "Middle Grade is a tough sell right now."

Almost two years went by with no success.

Was it me? Was my work not yet ready to be published? Was my agent well-enough connected to get my work into the hands of the right editors?

These questions tormented me as

I headed to our SCBWI Spring Retreat at Tahquitz. One of the faculty, an editor and writing coach, asked me if I'd talked to my

Jodi Rizzotto is SoCal's co-Assistant Regional Advisor. Her writing genres include MG and YA contemporary fantasy, and speculative short stories for adults.

agent about my concerns. She reminded me that



my agent worked for me, and I should clarify my goals with her.

The idea grew in my mind that it was time to move on. As lovely and knowledgeable as my agent was, our relationship was not moving my work forward. Considering our breakup caused me much anxiety. I had spent many years and hundreds of queries trying to land an agent. I had read that many writers' first projects died on sub before they finally got a book deal. But I couldn't shake the feeling that I was wasting time. That I was stuck. Maybe if my agent had been part of a larger agency, she could have gotten some feedback from her peers. Maybe I should be looking for a more experienced agent. I reviewed my contract, which stated either of us could end our business relationship.

So I took a deep breath and emailed my agent. I let her know I was moving on. She answered right away and was gracious. She sent me spreadsheets with my submissions so that if another agent worked with me, we would know which editors had already passed on my projects.

Another year has passed. I've queried more agents, but no offers yet. I've decided to publish one of my books on my own with the help of a company that provides publishing services. I'm still looking for an agent for other projects.

Time will tell whether I made the right decision to break up with my agent. I don't regret the years spent with her. I've learned more about the publishing business, and that I'm the only one who can champion my writing career.

Sometimes that means cutting ties and moving on.



Illustration by
Carrie Schneider

Before You Hire a Self-Publishing Company

By Kathleen Troy

Congratulations! You've made the decision to publish independently and for all these right reasons.

- Creative control. You will decide what your book looks like, how it's marketed, and when it's released.
- Speed. Traditional publishing can take years. Independent publishing lets you move at your own pace. Once your book is ready, you can hit Publish.
- Better royalties. In traditional publishing, royalties often range from 8-12% of the retail price. With self-publishing, you can earn up to 70% on platforms like Amazon Kindle Direct Publishing.
- Building your own brand. This may sound scary at first but honestly, it's one of the most rewarding parts. You're not just creating a book you're getting a chance to connect with readers who love the same kinds of stories and characters you do. Yippee!

Thanks to the internet we have the world at our fingertips. Before you hire a self-publishing company decide what you need and what you want.

What You Need:

- A business plan. Sure, writing a book is fun and brings us great joy but it's also a business. If you don't have a plan, you're not a businessperson, you're a gambler. (There is a reason why artists die poor.) You should have a plan of where you want to go and how you want to get there. This will enable you to make well thought out decisions.



- The Goldilocks test. You want a self-publishing company that is just right. Not too big, not too small. Ideally the company should operate as a team with each member having an area of expertise.
- Knowledge. Writers are generous people and are very willing to share their knowledge and experiences. Start with the obvious and ask your friends at SCBWI what company they used. What were their experiences? And the biggie: would they use that company again.

continued...

Kathleen Troy is a published author and owner of Dylan and Friends Publishing Company and Dylan and Friends Audio Company. Kathleen welcomes hearing from you. Please get in touch with her at kathleen@kathleentroy.com or www.kathleentroy.com

Before You Hire a Self-Publishing Company

What You Want:

- A face-to-face initial free consultation or, at the very least, an initial free Zoom consultation. Any self-publishing company can write convincing copy and put it on the internet. But nothing beats talking with the individuals of the company. Go with your first impression. It is usually the best one.
- Efficiency v. Effectiveness (and know the difference).

Efficiency occurs when the publishing company is seemingly busy but not yielding results. In other words, you paid their fee but your book is still in limbo. Ask for periodic progress reports — oral or written. Evaluate them for reasonableness and confirmation that your book is moving closer to completion.

Effectiveness yields results. Ask for a realistic timetable of what happens when. Think of *The Little Engine That Could*. Some progress will be faster than others, but your book should always be moving toward completion. Be aware that delays may occur if your manuscript requires considerable editing or if deciding on the perfect cover proves difficult.



Illustration by Lisa Johnston Hancock

Illustration by Carrie Schneider

- *The Big Print Giveth and The Small Print Taketh Away.* Attorneys love to quote this old saying because it's true. Read your contract carefully. If you do not understand it request time to have an attorney look it over. (You spent how long writing your book? A consultation is typically an hour—you owe yourself and your book that.)

How many edits does your contract allow?

What is your recourse if you and the self-publishing company come to an impasse?

Also, after your book is published who owns what?

Do not assume anything. Lastly, most contracts have a clause stating any changes must be made in writing.

- Concierge services v. ala carte services. Most self-publishing companies offer a variety of plans, and many are agreeable to accommodating requests. For example, if you are an author/illustrator you won't need a cover artist.

Beware of companies that offer ala carte services. Initially it may seem more affordable. But, in reality, it's often a classic case of bait and switch and results in unexpected fees.

- Communication. Routine updates—oral or written, should be a part of your relationship. If you do not hear anything, ask. Your book is your baby, and it is your job to take care of it. You wouldn't leave your child with a stranger, would you?

GRAMMAR NERD

by
**Tim
Burke**

Tim 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.

Today's topic: the COLON
(see what I did there ...?)

Here's the formula for using a colon correctly:

STATEMENT
(complete sentence)

COLON

SPECIFIC EXAMPLE OF
STATEMENT

1

STATEMENT: specific example of first part of sentence

She feared only one thing: failing math.

Dr. Johnson realized the cause of the problem: poor communication between parents.

vs.

NOT specific example of statement before the colon

incorrect

I had three different tests today: all of them were hard.

incorrect

This year's team is in first place: they have lots of talented players.

2

Unnecessary. In all the following incorrect examples, there is no need for the colon to connect both sections.

unnecessary/incorrect

I bought: pens, pencils, and paper.

corrected

I bought 3 items: pens, pencils, and paper.

unnecessary/incorrect

I studied some languages including: French and Spanish.

corrected

I studied some languages: French and Spanish.

unnecessary/incorrect

You need to have: skates and a lot of different pads.

corrected

You need several things to play ice hockey: skates and a lot of different pads.

The statement needs to be a complete, independent clause

KILLER Openings



There was a corpse in my neighbor's front yard. Sprawled before a hedge of juniper bushes, its twisted arms and legs flung out bonelessly, as if it had plummeted there from a passing helicopter, there was an enormous granite boulder where its head should have been.

Last Seen Leaving/Caleb Roehrig

Arnie Yashenko

Too bad Yash only has four letters. Having our name spelled out by a squad of cheerleaders feels pretty great— and it's over practically before it starts.

Sluggfest: Underdogs Unite in Summer School Gym Class/Gordon Korman

It's official— my traitorous chin is growing a zit.

Grow Up, Tahila Wilkins/Karina Evans

Miss Cackle's Academy for Witches stood at the top of a high mountain surrounded by a pine forest. It looked more like a prison than a school, with its gloomy gray walls and turrets. Sometimes you could see the pupils on their broomsticks flitting like bats above the playground wall . . .

The Worst Witch/Jill Murphy

Pay Attention.

Listen.

This is a story about an ogress.
She is not who you might think she is.
(But really, is anyone?)

The Ogress and the Orphans/Kelly Barnhill

The Astounding Unbelievable Secret Origin of Ordinary Boy
Sure it sounds like a great opening title, but the reality is, well . . . I'm ordinary. I know you're thinking, "What's the big deal? So are most people. That's why it's called being ordinary." The problem is, I live in a place where absolutely no one is ordinary.

The Extraordinary Adventures of Ordinary Boy/William Boniface



Member

GOOD NEWS

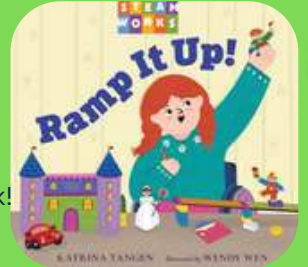
COMPILED BY DESI ST. AMANT

Robin Martinez has published her first of two books in THE ADVENTURES OF DIAMOND AND RILEY series.



IG: @AIRBORNE.ANNIE, @R.MARTINEZ6060
WEBSITE: [HTTPS://THEADVENTURESOFDIAMONDANDRILEY.COM/](https://theadventuresofdiamondandriley.com/)

Katrina Tangen's next picture book, RAMP IT UP!, is now available for pre-order in hardcover, paperback, and ebook! It's also available in Spanish as ¡ELEVA LA RAMPA!



IG & THREADS: @KATRINATANGEN
WEBSITE: WWW.KATRINATANGEN.COM

Tootie Nienow's picture book, FOR ALWAYS FRIENDS, will be coming out this Fall. It is illustrated by Katherine Ahmed and published by Blue Dot Press.



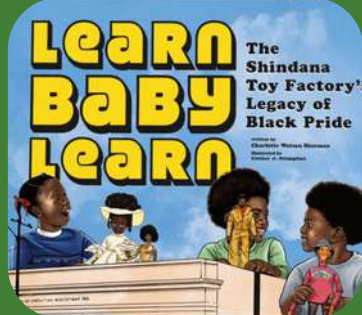
IG: @TOOTIENIENOWAUTHOR
WEBSITE: TOOTIENIENOW.COM

Make Me LAUGH, Nonna!



Lynette Townsend has self-published a children's picture book: Make Me Laugh, Nonna!
WRITTEN BY LYNETTE TOWNSEND
ILLUSTRATED BY EMILY MARSCHNER
Instagram: @joyfull_scribbles2
www.lynettetownsend.com

Charlotte Watson Sherman's picture book, LEARN, BABY, LEARN: THE SHINDANA TOY FACTORY'S LEGACY OF BLACK PRIDE published March 10, 2026. Illustrated by Esther Stimphat and published by Reycraft Books, the book tells the story of a Black toy factory created in partnership with Mattel Inc., after the Watts Uprising in 1965.



IG: @charlottewatsonsherman
Website: www.charlottewatsonsherman.com

Jamie Rodarte's debut picture book, NO WAY, JOSÉ Y JOSÉ Y JOSÉ!, was just announced. Illustrated by Sara Palacios and published by Little, Brown, it is set to be released in the summer of 2028.

Instagram: @AuthorJamieRodarte
Website: JamieRodarte.com



© The Lee

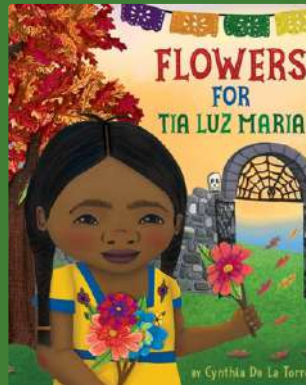
Mary-Kate Gaudet at Little, Brown has acquired world rights to *No Way, José y José y José* by debut author **Jamie Rodarte** (L.), illustrated by **Sara Palacios**. In this humorous picture book, a child must come up with his own unique nickname to stand out from classmates with the same name. Publication is slated for summer 2028; Joyce Sweeney at the Seymour Agency represented the author, and Minju Chang at BookStop

Literary Agency represented the illustrator.



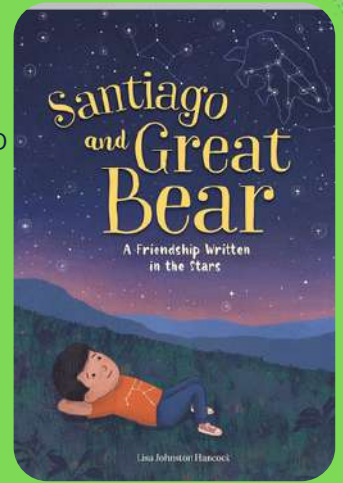
Member GOOD NEWS

Cynthia De La Torre's debut picture book that she wrote and illustrated, **FLOWERS FOR TIA LUZ MARIA**, comes out this summer from Quill Tree, an imprint of HarperCollins.



Instagram: @CynthiaGDeLaTorre
www.CynthiaDeLaTorre.com

Lisa Johnston Hancock has written and illustrated a new picture book, **SANTIAGO AND GREAT BEAR**, coming out in June 2026. Blending lyrical storytelling with astronomy and moon phases, as well as themes of hope, friendship and self-confidence, Santiago and Great Bear sparks children's curiosity and offers comfort and inspiration to children navigating big changes.



Poetic, tender and filled with wonder, this book invites children to look up at the night sky – and to be open to new opportunities in every change. It also fits well with STEM units focus on the sky and constellations.

IG: @lisajohnstonhancock
www.lisajohnstonhancock.com/childrens-book-work/

Carrie Schneider's debut picture book as illustrator, **WHAT IS A SAFE SPACE?** by trans-rights activist Stevie Bees, was published in February by Barnstormer Publishing! This book teaches its readers how to be a safe, accepting space for others, and it encourages readers to identify safe spaces for themselves and to truly believe that they, too, deserve safety and acceptance.



Find it at BarnstormerPublishing.com, StevieSafeSpaces.com, or Amazon!

IG: @cs_auth_illus
Website: <https://carrieschneiderauthorillustrator.com/>



Wendy Soleil has written a new picture book, **QUEST FOR A CURE**. It's a lyrical story about Ana who, on a quest to find a cure for her brother, meets colorful jungle animals in a kooky call of the wild. The book is beautifully illustrated by Hanna Smith (@hannaxart) and great for young readers, ages 3-9.

Gayla Bratta has published her first children's book, **BEATRICE THE BEWILDERED BUMBLEBEE**. It's written by her and illustrated by Dubravka Kolanovic.



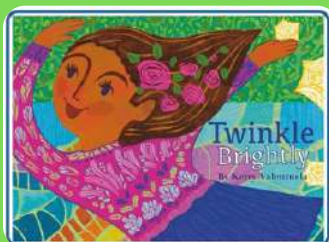
IG: @bewildered.books
Website: bewilderedbooks.net



Justin Krasner at Sourcebooks eXplore has acquired world rights to *Fold & Find: Home, A My First Origami Book* by **Moni Ritchie Hadley (J.)**, illustrated by **Genna Blackburn**. This interactive board book with hidden surprises invites the youngest readers to try their hands at basic origami folds as they build a house for Inu the dog. Publication is set for spring 2028; Sarah Stephens at Red

Fox Literary represented the author, and Lauren Ashleigh at IllustrationX represented the illustrator.

Kerry Valenzuela has self-published her first picture book: **TWINKLE BRIGHTLY**. It's written and illustrated by her, and it's available on Amazon.



IG: @kerryvalenzuela
<https://valenzuelakerry.wixsite.com/kerrylynnvalenzuela>

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-good-news/> and fill out the online form.

Announcements! News! Awards! Upcoming Events!

New Social Media Coordinator

Alli Straus

Alli is a social media content creator and picture book author. She and her two pugs, Oski and Cali, volunteer at local libraries in southern California to help children improve their reading skills as a BARK-certified literacy therapy dog team



Woop Winner

'26: Jodi Rizzotto!

Every year, from August 15-September 15, SCBWI accepts submissions from our Regional Advisors, Assistant Regional Advisors, Illustrator Coordinators, and Translator Coordinators (and emeritus Regional Advisors) for the RAM (Regional Advisor Marketing) and WOOP (Work of Outstanding Promise) grants. The Work of Outstanding Promise Grant (WOOP) offers up to \$2,000 to help in the completion of a promising manuscript by an RT. We are so pleased to announce that chapter co-ARA Jodi Rizzotto won for her submission "THE OVERNIGHTER."



New Newsletter Art Director Carrie Schneider

Carrie is very excited to contribute to SCBWI SoCal as a member of the newsletter team!

Carrie (she/her) is an illustrator and author of picture books and middle grade stories. She creates for a kinder, safer, more inclusive world, with a special focus on neurodivergent and LGBTQ+ stories (like hers!). She has a literature PhD and she loves learning new languages, collecting dragons, and enjoying nature. Her debut as published illustrator, *What Is a Safe Space?* by Stevie Bees, just came out this year!

[CarrieSchneiderAuthor
Illustrator.com,](https://CarrieSchneiderAuthorIllustrator.com)
[@cs_auth_illus.](https://twitter.com/cs_auth_illus)



SAVE THE DATE

- **September 20, 2026**

Orange County Children's Book Festival
Come support our members!

- **October 3, 2026**

Fall Harvest Writers & Illustrators Day
Conference.

Deadline June 20th

Banner Contest SCBWI SoCal Fall Harvest Conference 2026

Design our website banner for Fall Harvest 2026! The winner will get attributed on our website - great for publicity - PLUS get free registration to our Fall Harvest Event. Fall theme For more details go to: www.scbwi.org/regions/socal/banner-contest-for-fall-harvest-2026.

NEWSLETTER STAFF

CHAIR: Bev Plass

As a writer and speech-language pathologist, she creates materials and stories that get kids talking!

Email: socal-ra@scbwi.org

Website: www.beverlyplass.com

Twitter: @PlassBev

ASSISTANT EDITOR: Kelly Powers

Kelly is a Middle School Librarian and has a passion for writing Young Adult Novels.

PROOFREADER: Christine Henderson

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

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: Carlene Griffith

Carlene Griffith is a child at heart and loves all things writing, theater, and playing pretend.

Email: socal-ara@scbwi.org

Website: carlenegriffith.com.

ART DIRECTOR: Carrie Schneider

Carrie is an author and illustrator (Picture Books, Middle Grade, & more) who loves creating for a kinder, more inclusive world.

@cs_auth_illus, @CarrieSchneider.bsky.social, cschneiderauthorillustrator@gmail.com, www.carrieschneiderauthorillustrator.com

MEMBER GOOD NEWS COORDINATOR: Desi St. Amant

Desi St. Amant is a high school English teacher and a middle grade novelist.

Website: www.desiwrites.com

Email: dstamant07@gmail.com

Twitter: @desistamant



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