

2021 New England SCBWI Spring Event

Faculty Bios

Keynote Speakers



Mike Curato

Mike Curato is the author-illustrator of the wildly popular Little Elliot picture books. Mike's debut title in the series, *Little Elliot, Big City* has won numerous awards and has been translated into over ten languages. There are now four additional Little Elliot books – *Little Big Family*; *Little Elliot, Big Fun*; *Little Elliot, Fall Friends*; and *Merry Christmas, Little Elliot*. Mike is the illustrator of *Worm Loves Worm* by J.J. Austrian, *All the Way to Havana* by Young People's Poet Laureate Margarita Engle, *What if...* by Samantha Berger, and *The Power of One* by Trudy Ludwig. He also wrote and illustrated his debut young adult graphic novel, *Flamer*, which has received critical acclaim.

Born and raised outside of New York City, Mike has been drawing ever since he could hold a pencil. As a boy, Mike also had a thing for cars, especially classic ones with big fins and chrome eyeliner. He collected Matchbox cars and Hot Wheels and "drove" them up railing highways and turned carpets into parking lots. But more than anything as a kid, Mike dreamed of making picture books.

Mike attended Syracuse University, earning a BFA in illustration. After college, Mike moved to Seattle where he worked as a graphic designer for the better part of ten years. But he still dreamed of making picture books. That dream became a reality when Henry Holt Books for Young Readers

offered Mike a three-book deal featuring everyone's favorite polka-dotted elephant, Little Elliot.



Padma Venkatraman

Padma Venkatraman is the award-winning author of *THE BRIDGE HOME*, *A TIME TO DANCE*, *ISLAND'S END*, and *CLIMBING THE STAIRS*. Her novels have secured over 20 starred reviews, secured numerous honors, and won awards such as the SCBWI Golden Kite, NESCBWI Crystal Kite, WNDB Walter Award, South Asia Book Award, Nerdy Book Award, Julia Ward Howe Young Readers Award etc. Her latest novel, *BORN BEHIND BARS*, is scheduled for October 2021 release from Nancy Paulsen Books, Penguin Random House.

Special Guests: A Conversation with Two Legends

Nikki Grimes

New York Times bestselling author Nikki Grimes is the recipient of the 2020 ALAN Award for outstanding contributions to young adult literature, the 2017 Children's Literature Legacy Award for substantial and lasting contributions to literature for children, the 2016 Virginia Hamilton Literary Award, and the 2006 NCTE Award for Excellence in Poetry for Children. The author of Coretta Scott King Author Award-winner *Bronx Masquerade*, and recipient of five CSK Author Honors, her most recent titles include the popular *Bedtime for Sweet Creatures*, Printz Honor and Siebert Honor winner *Ordinary Hazards*, ALA Notable *Southwest Sunrise*,

Boston Globe-Horn Book Honor title *One Last Word*, its much anticipated companion, *Legacy: Women Poets of the Harlem Renaissance*, and NYT Bestseller, *Kamala Harris: Rooted in Justice*, an IMAGE Award Nominee for Outstanding Literary Work—Children.

Jane Yolen

Jane Yolen, often called "the Hans Christian Andersen of America," is celebrating her 400th published book this year, *Bear Outside*. Her works, which range from very young rhymed picture books to novels for adults and every genre in between, have won an assortment of awards including two Nebulas, a World Fantasy Award, a Caldecott, the Golden Kite, three Mythopoeic awards, two Christopher Medals, the Jewish Book Award, the Kerlan Award, and the Catholic Library's Regina Medal, as well as six honorary doctorates from six different colleges and universities. She lives in Massachusetts in the winter and Scotland in the summer. She writes every day. One of her awards set her good coat on fire.

Workshop Faculty

Julie Bliven

Julie Bliven is editor at Charlesbridge, where she edits fiction and nonfiction board books, picture books, and middle-grade novels. Julie holds an M.A. in Children's Literature from Simmons University, where she has taught and mentored students in the University's M.F.A. program. She has also served as a member of the Children's Book Council Diversity Initiative. @Julie_Bliven

Erin Dionne

Erin Dionne's latest book for tweens is *Secrets of a Fangirl* (Scholastic 2019). She's the author of 6 other books for young readers, including the 2014 Edgar Award finalist *Moxie* and *The Art of Rule Breaking* (Dial 2013). Her first picture book, *Captain's Log: Snowbound*, released in 2018 from Charlesbridge Publishers. Her second, *Balletball*, came out in February 2020. She teaches at Montserrat College of Art and lives outside of Boston with her husband, two children, and a very indignant dog.

Carrie Firestone

Carrie Firestone is a former high school teacher and the author of the young adult novels *THE LOOSE ENDS LIST*, and *THE UNLIKELIES*, and

the middle grade novel DRESS CODED. She lives in Connecticut with her husband, their teenage daughters, and their rescue dogs.

Josh Funk

Josh Funk is a software engineer and the author of books like the Lady Pancake & Sir French Toast series, the It's Not a Fairy Tale series, the How to Code with Pearl and Pascal series, the A Story of Patience & Fortitude series, Dear Dragon, Pirasaurs!, Albie Newton, and more.

Anne (AC) Gaughen

AC GAUGHEN is the author of the Elementae series (Reign the Earth, Imprison the Sky) and the Scarlet trilogy (Scarlet, Lady Thief, Lion Heart). Dedicated to creating opportunities for young women to take on leadership, she works as a manager of Volunteer Engagement for Girl Scouts of Eastern MA and serves as a board member for Boston GLOW, a non-profit she helped found in 2010. She holds a Master of Letters in Creative Writing from the University of St Andrews (Scotland) and a Masters in Education (Arts in Education) from the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

J.R. Krause

J. R. Krause's career as a narrative artist spans three decades. His picture books have been featured in The Boston Globe, BookPage, Kirkus, the Picturebooking Podcast, and the SCBWI Bulletin. His PB Dragon Night was an Indie Next selection, a Bank Street Best of 2020, and chosen by the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra for the annual Schooltime Concert at Heinz Hall. He is also the illustrator and co-author of Poco Loco! and Happy Birthday, Poco Loco!, both written with Maria Chua. Since graduating from Rhode Island School of Design he has worked on many television shows including 500+ episodes of The Simpsons. To learn more visit jrkrause.com, Twitter @jrkrausebooks and Instagram @j.r.krause.

Rajani LaRocca

Rajani LaRocca was born in India, raised in Kentucky, and now lives in the Boston area, where she practices medicine and writes books for young people. Her middle grade debut, Midsummer's Mayhem (Yellow Jacket/Little Bee Books, 2019), was an Indies Introduce selection, an Indie Next pick, a Kirkus Best Middle Grade Book of 2019, and a 2020 Massachusetts Book Award Honor title. Her debut picture book, Seven Golden Rings: A Tale of Music and Math (Lee & Low Books, 2020) is set in

ancient India and involves a math puzzle and an explanation of binary numbers and earned starred reviews from Booklist and Publishers Weekly. Her middle grade novel-in-verse, *Red, White, and Whole* (Quill Tree Books/HarperCollins, 2/2021) involves heritage and fitting in, science and poetry, Hindu mythology and 80s pop music, holding on and letting go. You can learn about her other forthcoming books at www.RajaniLaRocca.com.

Jarrett Lerner

Jarrett Lerner is the author of *EngiNerds*, *Revenge of the EngiNerds*, the *EngiNerds Strike Back*, *Geeger the Robot Goes to School*, and *Geeger the Robot: Lost and Found*. He's the author-illustrator of *Give This Book a Title* and *Give This Book a Cover*, as well as the author-illustrator of the forthcoming *Hunger Heroes* graphic novel series (all published by Simon & Schuster/Aladdin). He can be found at jarrettlerner.com and on Twitter and Instagram at @Jarrett_Lerner. He lives with his family in Medford, Massachusetts.

Janae Marks

Janae Marks is the author of the critically acclaimed novel *From the Desk of Zoe Washington* and the forthcoming novel *A Soft Place to Land*. She has an MFA in Writing for Children from The New School, and lives in Connecticut with her husband and daughter.

Alison Green Myers

Alison Green Myers writes stories about home and family for kids. Her middle grade debut releases this fall from Dutton Children's Books. Alison is a National Writing Fellow and an SCBWI volunteer. She is the Program Director for the Highlights Foundation nonprofit organization. For more stories, poems, and activities, please visit Alison at alisongreenmyers.com.

Lesléa Newman

Lesléa Newman has created 75 books for readers of all ages including the novel-in-verse, *OCTOBER MOURNING: A SONG FOR MATTHEW SHEPARD*; the middle grade novel, *HACHIKO WAITS*; and the picture books *HEATHER HAS TWO MOMMIES*; *KETZEL, THE CAT WHO COMPOSED*; *WELOCMING ELIJAH: A PASSOVER TALE WITH A TAIL*; and *GITTEL'S JOURNEY: AN ELLIS ISLAND STORY*. She has received two ALA Stonewall Honors, two National Jewish Book Awards, two Sydney Taylor Book Awards plus the Sydney

Taylor Body-of-Work Award, a Christopher Medal, and the Massachusetts Book Award. She teaches writing for children and young adults at Spalding University's School of Creative and Professional Writing.

Lisa Papademetriou

Lisa Papademetriou is an author, entrepreneur, and founder/creator of the writing tool Bookflow.pub. She has written over 20 books for young readers, including *A Tale of Highly Unusual Magic* and *The Dreamway*, and teaches classes and workshops across the country. She'd love to connect on Twitter via @axyfabulous

Katherine Prosswimmer

Kate Prosswimmer has been an Editor at Margaret K. McElderry Books for a year and a half. She's enthusiastically acquiring picture books, middle grade, and YA fiction and is excited to be working with a group of talented authors including Amanda Foody, Cat Valente, Chelsea Pitcher, F.T. Lukens, and Laura Silverman. She previously spent five years at Sourcebooks where she had the privilege of editing a number of award-winning titles including Zoraida Cordova's Brooklyn Brujas series, Jess Keating's Shark Lady, and Jen Calonita's Fairy Tale Reform School series. Kate is always down for a great mystery, isn't afraid of books that will make her ugly cry, enjoys atmospheric and unusual settings, prefers middle grade stories that are both whimsical and earnest, looks for picture books that favor story over message or concept, YA that feels escapist in both contemporary and speculative genres, and stories across all ages that make the ordinary feel extraordinary.

Dana Meachen Rau

Over the past 20 years, Dana Meachen Rau has written more than 340 books for PreK to high schoolers, including early readers, picture books, biographies, and nonfiction on popular topics. Recently she has turned her focus to middle grade and young adult fiction. She received her BA in Creative Writing at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, and her MFA in Writing for Children and Young Adults at Vermont College of Fine Arts. Besides freelancing, Dana has also worked as an editor and illustrator. She teaches creative writing in various capacities and undergraduate literature and rhetoric at the University of Hartford.

Sera Rivers

Sera Rivers is a freelance editor and YA novelist. She launched Avenue A Books, a children's graphic novel imprint from Center for Responsive Schools. As Avenue A's acquiring editor, she worked with new and established children's book writers and illustrators on a work-for-hire basis from concept to publication. Sera holds a Master of Fine Arts degree in Writing for Children from Simmons College and a Bachelor of Arts degree in Creative Writing/Journalism Studies from UMass. She is an active member of SCBWI and was co-chair of the 2017-2018 NESCBWI Spring conferences. Sera's interests include writing YA novels that incorporate historical figures/events into current societal issues. Her YA Memoir *THE WICKED ONES* won the 2016 PEN New England Susan P. Bloom Children's Book Discovery Award.

Quressa Robinson

Quressa Robinson joined the Nelson Literary Agency in 2017 after working as an editor for five years. She is originally from San Francisco, but has been living in New York City for over a decade. As a New York based agent, she is eager to build her MG, YA, and Adult lists. When not curled on her couch reading, she plays video games, enjoys too much TV—mostly *Sailor Moon* and *Avatar: The Last Airbender (Fire Nation!)*, eats delicious things, drinks champagne, hangs out with her very clever partner, and adds another “dramatic” color to her lipstick collection. Quressa is also a member of the 2017-2020 WNDB Walter Grant Committee and holds an MFA in Creative Writing: Fiction from Columbia University. In 2020, she was named one of five PW Star Watch finalists.

Heidi E.Y. Stemple

Heidi E.Y. Stemple is the author of more than 30 books, mostly for children. Heidi didn't want to be a writer when she grew up. In fact, after she graduated from college, she became a probation officer in Florida. It wasn't until she was 28 years old that she gave in and joined her mother, author Jane Yolen, and both her brothers in the family business. Since then, she has published books in practically every genre and format for children--from nonfiction (*Counting Birds*), to fiction (*I Am The Storm*), a new novelty book (*People Shapes*), poetry (*Eek You Reek!*), and even a Step Into Reading book (*Toucan With Two Cans*). Heidi lives on an old tobacco farm in western Massachusetts where she writes, reads, cooks, sews, and once a year, calls and counts owls for the Audubon Christmas Bird Count.

Chris Tebbetts

Chris Tebbetts is the author and co-author of many books for young readers. Titles include the YA novels *ME, MYSELF, AND HIM*, as well as *M OR F?* (with Lisa Papademetriou). He is also the co-author of the #1 New York Times bestselling *MIDDLE SCHOOL* series with James Patterson, and the bestselling *STRANDED* series with Jeff Probst. His work has received children's choice awards in Oregon and Hawaii, as well as a Sunshine State Young Readers Award nomination, and a nod on the New York Public Library's annual list of Books For the Teen Age. He is a native of Yellow Springs, Ohio, and currently lives in Hinesburg, Vermont.

Charlotte Wenger

Charlotte Wenger is a literary agent in the Boston area with Prospect Agency. Prior to joining Prospect, she was an associate editor at Page Street Kids. She has her Master of Arts in Children's Literature from Simmons College (now University) and serves on the national advisory board of the Mazza Museum, the world's largest collection of original artwork by children's book illustrators. Charlotte is drawn to children's literature and art for all ages—board books through YA, but especially picture books. You can find her on Twitter at @WilbursBF_Char.

Dan Yaccarino

Children the world over know Dan Yaccarino from his children's books, new AppleTV animated series *Doug Unplugs*, Parent's Choice Award-winning animated TV series *Oswald (Nick Jr)*, Emmy-winning *Willa's Wild Life (NBC and Qubo)*, and character designs for *The Backyardigans (Nickelodeon)*, as well as his many illustrated toys, games, and other children's products. In addition to his own stories, Dan's bold, stylized illustrations add wit and energy to the work of such distinguished authors as Margaret Wise Brown, Jack Prelutsky, and Kevin Henkes. Dan's books have been translated into many languages and have inspired animated series, toys, ebooks, children's musicals, and video adaptations. People all over the world enjoy *Oswald*, Dan's animated series about the wonderfully whimsical world of a lovable octopus, which Time magazine chose as one of the top 6 shows to watch on cable. Animation Magazine hails him as "an American original." Dan's work has been recognized with a host of prestigious awards including the Bologna Ragazzi, The New York Times 10 Best Illustrated, ALA Notable, and the Parents Choice Award. Over 2.5 million of his books have been sold to date.