



THE WRITER'S CENTER

MAGAZINE

SUMMER 2026

**05 Zach Powers
on his new novel**

**10 Writing classes
& free events**

**27 A writerly
crossword puzzle**

FREE



upcoming retreats/events

JUST 1 HOUR FROM DC & BALTIMORE,
IN MARYLAND'S CATOCTIN MOUNTAINS

2026:

July 16-21: Summer Novel Writing w/ Tammy Greenwood

Book by May 15, \$100 off

Sept. 20-25: Inspired Writing w/ Eugenia Kim

Oct. 12-16: Poetry and Yoga w/ Ann Quinn

Dec. 2-6: You Write, We Cook Getaway

2027:

Jan. 13-18: Winter Creative Writing w/ Diana Friedman

More to come in 2027!



More Info:

dena@zigbonefarmretreat.com

www.zigbonefarmretreat.com/retreats



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*New long-form workshops
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poetry & kid lit.*

Details coming soon!

writer.org/bookfarm

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THE WRITER'S CENTER MAGAZINE SUMMER 2026

04 FROM THE EDITOR

05 A SLOW DESCENT TOWARD HOPE
TWC Director Zach Powers on his new novel
The Migraine Daires
By Amy Freeman

07 AUTOFICTION
By Caroline Bock

10 SUMMER 2026 WORKSHOPS

24 FREE EVENTS FOR WRITERS

25 PUZZLING THROUGH
A Conversation with Crossword Creator
Malaika Handa
By Amy Freeman

27 CROSSWORD PUZZLE
By Malaika Handa

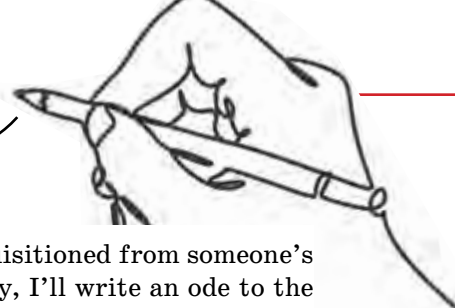
28 HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE WRITER'S CENTER VIRTUAL CRAFT CHAT SERIES

31 POEMS FROM *POET LORE*

33 WHEN PROSE ISN'T ENOUGH
Meg Eden Kuyatt on her novels-in-verse
and neurodivergence on the page
By Amy Freeman

36 FROM SCIENCE TO FICTION
A reluctant scientist's journey to debut novelist
By Rajendrani Mukhopadhyay

39 NEW BOOKS



50 years ago, the founding members of The Writer's Center first came together. I imagine a ragtag band, scrambling and scrapping to get the organization off the ground. I suspect the organization's early energy was an anything-goes sort of chaos.

Sometimes, stashed in a corner of our building, I'll find a relic of that era: a government-surplus paper

cutter, a chair clearly requisitioned from someone's dining room table. One day, I'll write an ode to the old podium in the Reading Room.

Part of me is jealous of the founders. Imagine your main responsibility being to try something new and see what happens. But even more than jealousy, I feel gratitude. The founders' grand experiment was sound enough to flourish. Here we are half a century later, maintaining the experiment, writing and helping others to do the same.

No, we may not be founding an organization, but I think one of the main appeals of being a writer is the chance, on any given day, to start something new.

—Zach Powers,
TWC Executive & Artistic Director



ABOUT THE COVER

JD DEARDOURFF

Capri Sun, 2024, Collage, 10 x 8 in.

Employing innovative rhythms and his signature blazing palette, JD Deardourff creates bold, graphic, bittersweet compositions that riff on traditional genres of landscape, still-life, and portraiture. His screenprints, murals, paintings, and collages draw their inspiration from the vocabulary of comic books: exaggeration, energy, movement, contour line, the interplay of sequential images, and, most importantly, artificial color. He combines these elements to form a world that is simultaneously optimistic and apocalyptic.

In 2012 Deardourff received a BFA with an emphasis in printmaking from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He has exhibited in Paris, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, Brooklyn, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and his native Washington DC. In addition to his personal work, JD has collaborated with commercial clients including Amazon, Apple, Capital One, and many more.

Learn and see more at deardourff.com.

A Slow Descent Toward Hope

A CONVERSATION WITH TWC DIRECTOR ZACH POWERS ABOUT HIS NEW NOVEL, *THE MIGRAINE DIARIES*

By Amy Freeman

When I was asked to interview Zach Powers, who is not only my friend, but also my boss, my only question was, “How annoying can I make this for him?” Given free rein, I decided to ask him questions about his latest novel, *The Migraine Diaries*, from the perspective of the protagonist’s headaches. Here’s how that went:

Migraine: I’m a little miffed that, although I’m arguably the backbone of the novel (if a migraine can be a backbone), I’m not a proper noun. You refer to me as “the hurt,” or “the pain.” In your own words, I threaten. I keep you moored to the spot. I sleep in a corner of your head. I’m a main character, I’m never capitalized. Why not?

Zach Powers: Damn, migraine, you’re coming right out with the hard hitters. I think when it comes to illness narratives, the way we talk about the illness is intricately tied to how we *experience* the illness. The illness has undeniable power over a person’s life, so I think it’s important, whenever possible, to not give in to the temptation (because it is tempting!) to grant the illness even more power. Migraine, you’ve mucked up my life more times than I can count, which inspired the narrator’s experience, so I’m not willing to grant you personhood. In reality you’re not a person. You’re literally in the narrator’s head. And fight you as much as he might, you can’t be a true villain because—I think I get into this in the book as well—you’re his self hurting himself. Turning oneself into the villain would add harm on top of harm for a person with chronic illness.



I, physical pain, first appear while the protagonist grapples with the emotional pain of a close friend’s death. Would this story even exist if the protagonist didn’t have to grapple with both kinds of suffering, in tandem and in perpetuity?

I wanted to write about the experience of you, migraine, but I also worried that would be a hard sell for readers. So, I decided to tie that to an experience I know readers love the heck out of: grief. It’s a little bit of a bait-and-switch. But also, the experience of pain and the experience of grief become metaphors for each other. From a writing perspective, that’s always where I get interested. I like to discover how two elements play against each other, and how the evolution of one reveals new things about the other, which then evolves itself, and they go back and forth redefining each other and further evolving.

This book holds a lot of pain, both physical and emotional, to wit: headaches (obviously), bruising, anaphylaxis, and immense grief. Can you talk about how the physical pain I inflict on the protagonist (sorry about that, but it’s my raison d’être) informs the emotional suffering he’s enduring?

I think one of the interesting things that emerged from the interplay of the two pains is that they *interfere* with each other. Instead of compounding, the physical interrupts the processing of the emotional and vice versa. In a way, this still ends up as a form of compounding, because neither pain gets properly dealt with. Also, grief is inherent to chronic illness. In the novel, it’s manifested in a

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I was interested in what my mind might discover if I dwelled in a place I would usually not want to dwell.

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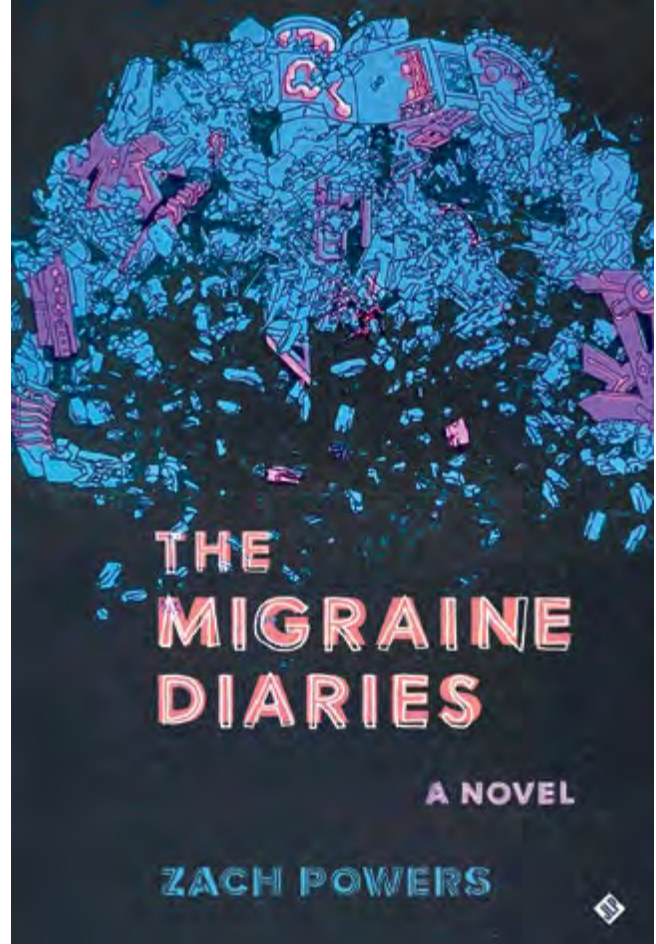
—Zach Powers

separate cause of grief, a friend’s death, but in real life, to become sick is to lose some part of oneself. That’s a sort of partial death. That’s grievable. I’m not a mind-body dualist, so to me that means the emotional has a physical component and the physical an emotional component. To hurt is to grieve and to grieve is to hurt.

The protagonist searches for a cure for, well, me, as he tries to heal from the loss of his friend. He’s looking for...something else. How does hope factor into this story?

One of the things I try to show in the novel is the unmaking of a life. A significant enough chronic illness can cause fundamental changes in a person. Hope, then, comes in the form of accepting, if not embracing, those changes. There’s no other side of a chronic illness. You don’t get better. The narrator doesn’t seem likely to stop having migraines. But there is another side to the *unmaking* (as opposed to the illness itself). So, maybe more accurately, hope comes from the process of remaking a revised version of self that accounts for the illness. Or something like that? In this way, illness narratives resist traditional story structures. I don’t want to spoil too much of the novel, but I can say that “endurance” can’t be a key moment or an event, much less a climax in the traditional sense. Maybe, then, the climax is the first migraine in the opening scene and everything after is denouement, a slow descent toward hope.

Personally, I’m not crazy about the whole “beauty is pain” trope I’ve seen bandied about. Yet, I think there’s some truth to it. I mean, you attribute moments of wonder to my appearances, like when you describe the twinkling phosphenes I show you. (A phosphene is the phenomenon of seeing light without light actually entering the eye. I looked up the term.) Sometimes, the



phosphenes form constellations, like the close friendship structures altered by KJ’s death. What’s your take on whether there is beauty in pain? And how does that affect the protagonist?

One of the instigating questions when writing this novel was whether or not it was possible to make art from this particular negative experience. The catch is that I don’t think there’s any beauty inherent to the experience. At the same time, I’d say there’s no beauty inherent to a clear blue sky or cherry blossoms. Beauty comes from the interaction of a human mind with a subject. So, it’s possible to take a crappy subject, like debilitating pain, and explore it, after the fact, in a way that leads to poetry or insight or meaning. I was interested in that poetical potential. I was interested in what my mind might discover if I dwelled in a place I would usually not want to dwell.

If you pen a sequel, can I have my own narrative arc?

Sorry, pal, no sequel this time. Anyways, a narrative arc implies chronology, and the first thing to go during a migraine is a sense of time. Instead of an arc, the novel’s structure is an infinity symbol. Migraine—like grief—is timeless and endless at once.

AUTOFICTION

By **Caroline Bock**

As John Gardner in his classic *The Art of Fiction* unequivocally states, “don’t try to write ‘what you know,’ choose a genre; create a kind of dream in the reader’s mind, and avoid like the plague all that might briefly distract from that dream...”

Except, what if you don’t know what you know? Or better yet, what if you don’t know what you don’t know? This was my dilemma in starting my novel, *The Other Beautiful People* (Regal House Publishing, on sale June 2nd). Who was that person twenty-five years ago? Am I looking through her/me in a wayback camera, the screen fuzzy, or can I dream the scenes, bring them all into focus for the reader today, who has no memories of a BlackBerry, of working in the chaotic, noisy joy of an office filled with a work-family, of 9/11 and the weeks and months after?

I had to trust myself, as a writer, first with the facts of my own life, so I could dive headfirst, like some Esther Williams-style pool, into synchronized patterns of fiction, the fictive dream.

“Write as if you were a movie camera. Write exactly what is there,” is another famous Gardner quote, from *On Becoming a Novelist*. I particularly like this one since my novel is set at the fictional cable network, the Cinema Channel. A documentary-style punch-list rundown of the scenes from my life began to take shape for *The Other Beautiful People*...

... like the main character Amy Greene, I was raised by my Pop after my mother suffered a massive aneurysm when I was four-and-a-half years old. As in the novel, my mother was institutionalized in the Hudson River State Psychiatric Center in Poughkeepsie, New York. Unlike in the novel, my mother lived for forty-five years after the stroke.

... I am a graduate of Syracuse University, which I attended on a full academic scholarship like Amy in *The Other Beautiful People*. Unlike Amy, I always wanted to be a writer. I had the great honor of studying at SU with Ray Carver. However, like



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I had to trust myself, as a writer, first with the facts of my own life, so I could dive headfirst, like some Esther Williams-style pool, into synchronized patterns of fiction, the fictive dream.

—Caroline Bock

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Amy, I married early and went straight to work in Manhattan. I was broke; I was driven. Amy would be, too.

... and like Amy, I worked in the cable industry during its go-go years, when “content was king,” and companies were launching new networks to fill the expanding television dial. In 1984, the year I graduated from Syracuse University, I was hired as a publicity assistant at USA Network, which had just relocated from New Jersey to Rockefeller Center, and stayed for five years, one of the first assistants ever promoted to manager. From 1989 to 2003, I held managerial roles in public relations and marketing at AMC, Bravo, IFC, and IFC Films. Notably, I was part of the executive team that launched the Independent Film Channel (IFC), and subsequently, IFC Films. When Bravo, the film and arts network, was sold to NBC in late 2002 (and became the powerhouse it is

today in reality programming), I continued at IFC/IFC Films as the senior vice president of marketing and public relations for the cable television and independent film divisions.

... to flashback, just like with Amy and her team at the Cinema Channel, there was a press conference/luncheon planned on 9/11 at a swanky downtown Manhattan hotel. Like Amy, I could not reach my husband. I will never forget that day or those that soon followed in Manhattan.

... I once also planned and executed—with a fantastic marketing/public relations team—a series of in-market screenings for John Waters' *Polyester* with 'Smell-O-Vision' scratch-off cards (as well as many other film, jazz, and arts events around the country).

... I always enjoyed Friday night happy hours with my coworkers, though there is no actual bar in midtown Manhattan that corresponds to the Cinema Channel's favorite pub, Donaglen's (where some of my favorite scenes in *The Other Beautiful People* happen). If there were, I'd certainly meet you there, treat us all to a pitcher of beer.

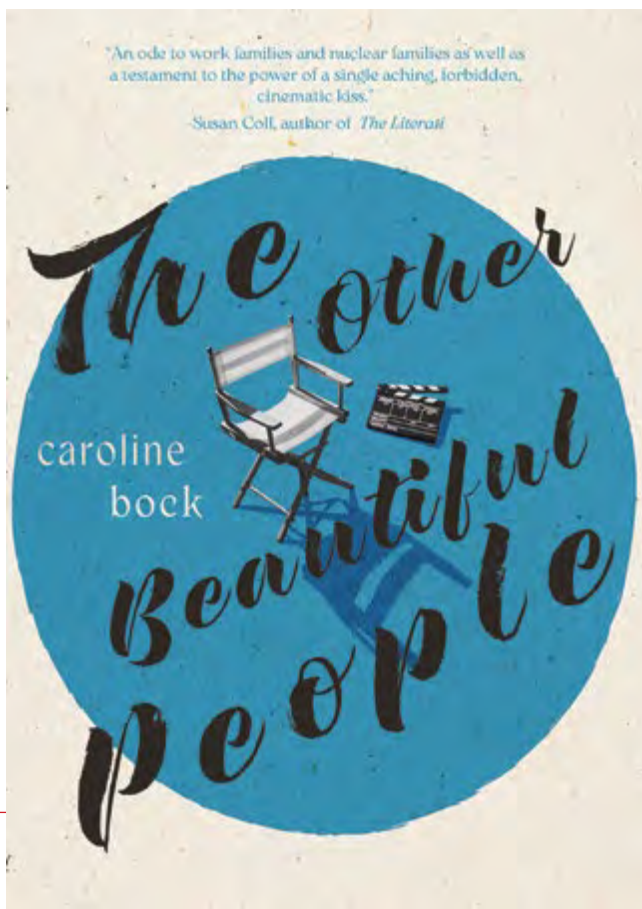
Ultimately, to write this novel, I focused my camera lens first on myself, to understand my truths,

so I would know how to write Amy Greene, write her story, *her* truths. This wasn't an exercise in solipsism, in ego, but in story, written in close-up. Call it autofiction if you must.

To zoom out, I resigned from IFC/IFC Films and the cable industry in late 2003 to focus on family responsibilities and my dream of becoming a writer. I had my son, Michael, a toddler at the time, and after some infertility drama, a second child, my daughter, Sara, now 20. I soon began graduate school at The City College of New York and earned an MFA in Fiction. I was there for my parents at the difficult ends of their challenging lives. In 2013, I moved to the DC area for my husband's job. One of the very first things I did was sign up for two workshops at The Writer's Center. Out of those workshops, I found friends with whom I still write all these years later; they are all in the credits for *The Other Beautiful People*.

And these days, as a writer and editor, I live in Maryland with my husband, Richard, a lawyer (retired after 28 years at the National Labor Relations Board, unlike Jack in the novel), but like Amy Greene's husband, a die-hard Mets and Giants fan.

And I write autofiction. Sometimes it's more close-to-the-bone fiction than not, and sometimes it's more memoir than not. A definition of autofiction could be seventy percent fiction, thirty percent memoir, or the other way around, but nothing in writing, my writing, is that exact. I wrote this novel for dear friends, for all the other beautiful people. I wrote *The Other Beautiful People* for me, and for you.



Caroline Bock is the author of *THE OTHER BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE* (Regal House Publishing, 2026), a workplace love story. She is also the author of the young adult novels *LIE* and *Before My Eyes* as well as the award-winning short story collection *Carry Her Home*. She is the co-president/prose editor at the Washington Writers' Publishing House. She lives in Maryland with her family.

Caroline will be leading a two-session workshop at The Writer's Center called *Your Personal Artifacts in Fiction and Nonfiction*, on Tuesdays May 19th and 26th. She will also be in conversation with Zach Powers on Sunday, June 7th, at 4pm in person at The Writer's Center.



WORKSHOP GUIDELINES

Write with us! The Writer's Center offers more than 300 programs every year in all genres and for all experience levels.

You'll work with published, professional writers as you explore the craft of writing in genre-specific as well as special-topics workshops. Take a look below at the basic levels of instruction, and then find our workshop schedule in the following pages. You can find detailed workshop descriptions and instructor bios at writer.org.

WORKSHOP LEVELS

BEGINNER

If you're new to creative writing, start here! Beginner-level workshops introduce you to the basic elements of the craft of writing. You'll take your first steps to creating stories, poems, essays, novels, and more!

INTERMEDIATE

Now that you've developed a writing practice, it's time to take it to the next level. Intermediate workshops help you learn new skills and improve your own original work.

ADVANCED LEVEL

Calling all confident writers! In our advanced workshops, you'll master elements of craft, finish polished pieces, and learn how to get your work published.

WORKSHOP POLICIES

REFUND POLICY

In the case of a workshop cancellation, participants can receive either a full refund or a credit toward a future workshop(s). Workshop participants can withdraw (at least 48 hours before the first workshop session) for a full credit valid for one year. No refunds are offered for withdrawals. For our full refund policy, visit writer.org/withdraw.

CODE OF CONDUCT

No jerks! The Writer's Center is committed to providing a welcoming environment for all program participants, instructors, staff members, and volunteers regardless of race, ethnicity, age, religion, gender, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, disability, appearance, or class. To view our complete code of conduct, please visit writer.org/code-of-conduct.

**SUMMER 2026
WORKSHOPS ARE
ON SITE & VIRTUAL**

LIVE VIDEO CONFERENCE workshops will be held via **Zoom**. You can view brief tutorials on using the platform at support.zoom.us.

ASYNCHRONOUS workshops will take place over **Wet Ink**, an online learning forum and discussion board.

Register now at writer.org!

SUMMER 2026 WORKSHOPS

KID LIT

THE FIRST 50 PAGES: CRAFT A SUBMISSION-READY OPENING with Charlene Thomas

6/4/26 - 6/25/26 • 4 Thursdays • 7:00 PM - 9:00 PM

The Writer's Center • All Levels • \$215

A craft, revision, and feedback-led course designed to help young adult writers transform their first 50 pages into a compelling, polished opening that captures the attention of industry professionals.

FICTION

INTRO TO THE NOVEL with Tammy Greenwood

5/1/26 - 6/19/26 • 8 Weeks • Asynchronous

Wet Ink • Beginner / Intermediate • \$395

The workshop will focus on everything from generating ideas to developing characters to establishing point of view. Participants will discuss many elements of fiction (dialogue, scene, etc.), but the emphasis will be on discovering the writing process that works best for each writer.

CREATING NOVEL CHARACTERS with Tammy Greenwood

5/1/26 - 5/22/26 • 4 Weeks • Asynchronous

Wet Ink • All Levels • \$215

When writing a novel, we must know our primary characters inside and out. We need to understand their desires, motivations, and frustrations, their histories and their futures. This workshop will focus on the development of authentic characters.

HOW TO WRITE A HEIST with Fran Wilde

5/11/26 - 5/18/26 • 2 Mondays • 7:00 PM - 8:30 PM

Zoom • Intermediate / Advanced • \$115

This generative workshop will help you brainstorm a heist story, explore how heists immerse the audience, and work out ways to up the stakes.

POINT OF VIEW with Kathryn Johnson

5/16/26 • Saturday • 10:00 AM - 12:30 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

Learn how to develop an effective and consistent perspective that will demonstrate your competence and enable readers to follow a story's progress while avoiding confusing "head hopping."

FLASH FICTION: A GENERATIVE WORKSHOP with Hananah Zaheer

5/29/26 - 6/19/26 • 4 Weeks • Asynchronous

Wet Ink • Beginner / Intermediate • \$215

Through guided prompts, participants will generate new work and have the opportunity to share drafts in a supportive, craft-focused environment. By the end of the workshop, participants will have written several original flash pieces and developed strategies for expanding or revising them into polished stories.

For details and to register, visit [writer.org](https://www.writer.org)!

PLOTTING YOUR NOVEL with Tammy Greenwood

5/29/26 - 6/19/26 • 4 Weeks • Asynchronous

Wet Ink • All Levels • \$215

In this workshop, participants will study the architecture of a novel and devise plans for plotting their novels. Using the three-act structure as a map, we will explore the basic components of a novel's plot.

CREATING BACKSTORY & FLASHBACKS with Kathryn Johnson

6/6/26 • Saturday • 10:00 AM - 12:30 PM

Zoom • Intermediate / Advanced • \$60

Your ability to understand your characters' history, and share glimpses of it with readers, will determine how realistic your paper people will seem. Discover how to shift between time frames within a story and show a character's life events before the beginning of a tale.

FROM NOVICE TO NOVELIST with John DeDakis

6/10/26 - 7/15/26 • 6 Wednesdays • 7:00 PM - 9:00 PM

Zoom • Beginner • \$295

This workshop will offer a practical plan that takes you from the mere germ of an idea all the way through the creative process, with an eye on getting a finished book into the hands of potential fans. We'll discuss how to transform the nub of an idea into a book-length project, populated with interesting characters, a twisty-turny plot, snappy dialogue, and an interesting setting. You'll come away from the class with the encouragement to begin and perfect your project.

WRITING ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH TOPICS IN FICTION with Chris Gamble

6/13/26 • Saturday • 11:00 AM - 1:00 PM

Zoom • Beginner / Intermediate • \$60

Learn to write about mental health topics in your fiction with accuracy and care.

LETTING YOUR CHARACTERS TALK: DIALOGUE INTENSIVE with Afabwaje Kurian

6/8/26 - 6/22/26 • 3 Weeks • Asynchronous

Wet Ink • All Levels • \$150

Over the three weeks of this course, you'll learn the mechanics of what makes dialogue flow on the page and how to make your characters sound natural or realistic. We'll do this by studying novel excerpts, scripts, and craft books. By the end of the course, you'll be able to apply new techniques that improve the dialogue in your own fiction.

REVISION! REVISION! REVISION! with Jade Song

6/18/26 - 7/9/26 • 4 Thursdays • 6:00 PM - 8:00 PM

Zoom • Intermediate / Advanced • \$215

In this course, we'll undergo unique revision exercises to refuel your imagination and broaden/extend your short story or novel chapters. Students will be expected to prepare a short presentation of their story for the class—this can include reading from your work and a short description of the plot & characters. Each class will open with a student presentation, then move into revision exercises with in-class writing time.

YOUR FIRST (OR NEXT) NOVEL with Kathryn Johnson

6/27/26 • Saturday • 10:00 AM - 12:30 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

Students will initiate a flexible writing plan that will keep their writing flowing. This is a great half-day session for the beginning long-form fiction writer, or for the more experienced author in need of a quick strategy brush-up.

THE ART OF DESCRIPTION with Afabwaje Kurian

7/6/26 - 7/27/26 • 4 Weeks • Asynchronous

Wet Ink • All Levels • \$215

This six-week interactive class is designed to give you the skills to write rich descriptive sentences and paragraphs that infuse life into your characters and the worlds you create. During this course, you will strengthen your powers of observation through a variety of assigned weekly readings and writing exercises. You'll also share some of your own writing and enjoy reading the work of other participants.

INTERMEDIATE NOVEL WRITING: THE 8 CS with Tammy Greenwood

7/10/26 - 8/28/26 • 8 Weeks • Asynchronous

Wet Ink • Intermediate / Advanced • \$395

Are you serious about writing a novel, but struggling? This intermediate course will examine the eight fundamental elements of the novel to help you find the strengths and weaknesses of your work-in-progress. Written lessons, curated online resources, and targeted exercises (along with instructor and peer feedback) will help guide you as you continue to draft your novel.

CREATING CONFLICT & TENSION with Kathryn Johnson

7/11/26 • Saturday • 10:00 AM - 12:30 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

Whether you choose to write literary fiction, mysteries, historical fiction, sci-fi or fantasy—you can learn techniques for drawing readers into your tales through action, dialogue, setting details, and plot twists that make your work stand out from the crowd.

ADVANCED FICTION WORKSHOP with Virginia Hartman

7/21/26 - 8/25/26 • 6 Tuesdays • 7:00 PM - 9:30 PM

Zoom • Advanced • \$295

Refine your accomplished stories in a supportive atmosphere. Apply by submitting a one-page summary outlining your previous fiction experience, plus the first fifteen pages of a piece of fiction you've written to laura.spencer@writer.org by June 22. Participants will be notified within five days of the submission deadline and should register for the course upon notification.

PLOT LIKE A PRO with Kathryn Johnson

7/25/26 • Saturday • 10:00 AM - 12:30 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

Think you can't plot? Join us for this course, and we'll show you how! Understanding how to structure a well-conceived story around a main character and central conflict, while paying attention to pacing, can make the difference between a finished, publishable manuscript and an abandoned work-in-progress.

NOVEL 101: HOW TO CRAFT THE STORY with Camille Cabrera

8/3/26 - 8/24/26 • 4 Mondays • 6:30 PM - 8:30 PM

Zoom • Beginner • \$215

This class offers the key concepts of plotting and pacing while delving into different genres. Beginners have the opportunity to share their works with the class while also building confidence in their craft. Short homework assignments will encourage practice outside of assigned class hours.

DIY NOVEL REVISION with Tammy Greenwood

8/7/26 - 8/28/26 • 4 Weeks • Asynchronous

Wet Ink • All Levels • \$215

Do you have a finished draft of a novel but don't know what to do next? This asynchronous workshop will take you through the revision and editing process step-by-step. From large-picture issues like plot and structure, characterization, etc... to line editing, we will look at what it takes to revise your own novel without the assistance of a professional editor.

POLISHING YOUR FIRST DRAFT with Carol Mitchell

8/15/26 • Saturday • 3:00 PM - 6:00 PM

Zoom • Intermediate • \$60

When the first draft is complete, the real work begins. You should not be your only editor, but you can be the first. Learn tips on how to tighten your prose, improve the immediacy and urgency of your work, identify plot holes, and more so that your work shines when you send it out wherever you decide to send it next.

MIXED GENRE**SHOW AND TELL INTENSIVE with Laura J. Oliver**

5/2/26 • Saturday • 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

Successful writers make readers feel and intuit precisely what they want them to by using the technique of showing writing. Through exploration of compelling published examples, exercises, lively discussion, and inspiring instruction, you will learn to elevate your stories to submission-quality prose.

GETTING UNSTUCK with Sarah Birnbach

5/12/26 - 5/19/26 • 2 Tuesdays • 7:00 PM - 9:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$115

Participants will have a chance to practice with several journaling methods to move ahead on a current work in progress, to jump start a writing idea, and/or to address their writing blocks.

EVOKING READER EMPATHY with Lynn Auld Schwartz

5/14/26 • Thursday • 6:30 PM - 8:30 PM

Zoom • Beginner / Intermediate • \$60

In this workshop, we'll discuss how to avoid clichés and heavy-handed moralizing while finding the right balance of internal thought, scene, and underlying tension. Through reading examples and participating in short exercises, you will practice and refine your ability to evoke empathy on the page.

EXPLORING SHORT PROSE with Ariel Katz

5/18/26 - 7/6/26 • 7 Mondays • 7:00 PM - 9:30 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$350

In this generative workshop, we'll explore very short prose forms, focusing on flash fiction, prose poems, and micro-essays of less than 2,000 words. Each week, participants will do in-class exercises and (optionally) share in-progress work for feedback. Note: No meeting May 25.

YOUR PERSONAL ARTIFACTS IN FICTION AND NONFICTION with Caroline Bock

5/19/26 - 5/26/26 • 2 Tuesdays • 10:00 AM - 12:30 PM

The Writer's Center • All Levels • \$115

Focus on real-life artifacts to jumpstart new works of fiction or creative nonfiction. The goal of the class will be both instructive and generative, focusing on layering stories with description, subtext, depth, and meaning.

HOW TO WRITE A LOT with Kathryn Johnson

5/30/26 • Saturday • 10:00 AM - 12:30 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

You may think you don't have the time, energy, or inspiration to write because of your hectic lifestyle. Wrong! Learn what professional writers know about organizing their time, establishing a productive writing routine, and getting their stories written. We'll share methods many professional writers use to complete their books in months instead of years, their short stories in mere weeks. Become the dedicated author you've always dreamed of being.

GETTING STARTED CREATIVE WRITING: TRY 3 GENRES with Patricia Gray

5/31/26 • Sunday • 1:00 PM - 4:00 PM

Zoom • Beginner / Intermediate • \$60

Find your creativity with fun exercises in poetry, memoir, and fiction. You'll take home two original poems plus at least one short piece of fiction and memoir. Opportunities to read your writing aloud and receive positive feedback can help you identify your specific writing talents.

THE WRITER AS ARCHIVIST: A GENERATIVE WORKSHOP with Abdul Ali

6/1/26 - 6/29/26 • 5 Mondays • 7:00 PM - 9:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$250

Let's have fun engaging research and/or ephemera as a strategy to approaching our poems or prose! We will read examples of poems and prose that invite readers to reimagine the work. We will engage material objects, personal and public history, and popular culture as a stage to explore surprising revelations in tight, lyrical, breath-stealing work. This class will have equal time for generating new drafts and to workshop.

WRITING FROM MEMORY with Rachel Coonce

6/6/26 • Saturday • 9:00 AM - 12:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

Examine examples of memoir to learn ways to translate memory fragments into a narrative on the page. Then participate in exercises to unlock distant memories and describe them using all five senses. Participants will come away with the beginning of a new piece and the tools to continue to write from memory.

THE WRITING SALON: CREATING AND SUSTAINING CREATIVE COMMUNITY with Kristina Tabor

6/9/26 • Tuesday • 7:00 PM - 9:00 PM

The Writer's Center • All Levels • \$60

Experience a writing salon from the inside, and learn how to create or join one that sustains your creative life.

STARTING A NOVEL OR MEMOIR with Melanie Figg

6/13/26 • Saturday • 10:00 AM - 1:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

Get your mind and body ready to write that novel or memoir! This class will provide you with a lot of information and tips to get on and stay on the right track.

ACTIVATING CREATIVITY THROUGH PLAY with Nikki Frias

6/16/26 • Tuesday • 7:00 PM - 9:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

This workshop is designed to help writers restart their creative engines through structured

exercises, collaborative prompts, and short creative challenges. Across a series of guided activities, participants will engage in quick writing sprints, storytelling games, and group sharing designed to lower resistance and spark new ideas. The goal isn't simply to "have fun," but to reconnect writers with the generative side of their practice, where curiosity, experimentation, and risk-taking often lead to unexpected breakthroughs.

FINDING YOUR LIGHT ON THE PAGE: A SUMMER SOLSTICE WORKSHOP with Lindsey Van Wagner

6/20/26 • Saturday • 11:30 AM - 1:30 PM

The Writer's Center • Beginner / Intermediate • \$60

This generative workshop invites writers to explore what becomes visible when we write toward the light. Through guided prompts, reflection, and discussion, participants will explore how internal censorship and perfectionism can obscure authentic voice and limit creative expression. By the end of the workshop, writers will leave with new material and practical strategies for writing more freely, with greater clarity and confidence.

UNCLOGGING YOUR BRAIN with Lisa Jan Sherman

7/14/26 • Tuesday • 7:00 PM - 8:30 PM

The Writer's Center • All Levels • \$60

Improvisation fearlessly puts you directly into the heart of the moment allowing your creative genius to 'script' on the spot in a judgement free zone. Prompts will spark memories, characters, and places, turning them into poems, scenes, dialogues, and stories. During 'UnClogging' you will likely come up with an 'idea' that you feel compelled to expand on, or perhaps be re-inspired to continue an unfinished work later. Find new perspective and confidence!

INTRO TO MICRO-MEMOIR AND FLASH FICTION with Lynn Auld Schwartz

7/16/26 • Thursday • 6:30 PM - 8:30 PM

Zoom • Beginner • \$60

In this workshop, we'll explore the surprisingly expansive world of micro-memoir and flash fiction. Whether you're a seasoned writer seeking a new challenge or a beginner ready to discover your potential, this introductory session will reveal what makes these little stories tick and send you home with fresh ideas and inspiration.

THIS ISN'T REAL: ADD DREAM LOGIC TO YOUR WORK with Donald Illich

7/21/26 • Tuesday • 7:00 PM - 9:30 PM

Zoom • Beginner / Intermediate • \$60

Become the next David Lynch—apply dream logic to your fiction, poetry, and hybrid work. Participants in this one-day class will learn what dream logic is and its methods. They will practice these strategies through an in-class generative exercise. Participants will leave with one piece started and ideas for further exploration.

THE EERIE TWINSHIP BETWEEN THE HAUNTED AND THE NOSTALGIC with Atina Hartunian

8/29/26 • Saturday • 1:00 PM - 3:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

This craft talk and generative workshop examines how absence, memory, and longing operate in fiction through the twin lenses of haunting and nostalgia. Handouts with selected excerpts will be provided, and short generative writing exercises will allow participants to immediately apply these concepts and build new material on the page.

WRITING AS A RESTORATIVE PRACTICE with GG Renee Hill

5/17/26 • Sunday • 2:00 PM - 5:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

This workshop is ideal for writers of all levels struggling with time management, critical self-talk, burnout, creative blocks, perfectionism, and procrastination. We will explore where our creative blocks come from and how to work through them so they don't stop our progress.

Whether you have been writing for years or are just starting or returning to the practice, you will come away with techniques and strategies that support you in building a restorative writing practice that brings your creative callings to life in a sustainable way.

HOW TO WRITE SUCCESSFUL MICRO MEMOIR with Laura J. Oliver

6/6/26 • Saturday • 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

Learn how to make your life story compelling to others by turning memories into moments that both move and entertain. We will examine inspiring published examples to learn exactly how the writer moved and entertained us. Using the same tools with which we craft fiction, this workshop is an excellent learning environment for both genres. We'll conclude with a review of where to publish.

HOW—AND WHERE—TO PITCH YOUR PERSONAL ESSAYS**with Christine Koubek Flynn**

6/8/26 • Monday • 7:00 PM - 9:30 PM

Zoom • Beginner / Intermediate • \$60

Personal essays are perhaps the genre that has the largest array of publication possibilities—literary journals, newspapers, magazines, alumni publications, and more all publish this form.

HISTORICAL RESEARCH FOR NARRATIVE WRITING with Saaret E. Yoseph

6/17/26 - 7/15/26 • 5 Wednesdays • 7:00 PM - 9:00 PM

Zoom • Beginner • \$250

In this workshop, you'll learn where to find writer's guidelines for popular newspaper and magazine essay columns (many with tips from the editor), how to create a submission plan to increase your success, and the pros and cons of submitting essays to newspapers and magazines vs. literary journals. By the end, you'll have a list of resources and actionable tips to move your submissions forward. Give that essay on your hard drive (or in your journal) a chance to be published.

USING THE TOOLS OF FICTION IN NONFICTION with Rachel Coonce

7/1/26 - 7/22/26 • 4 Wednesdays • 7:00 PM - 9:00 PM

Zoom • Intermediate / Advanced • \$215

Whether you are crafting an essay or writing a memoir, the tools of fiction can bring depth and suspense to your work. Each week this class will focus on one tool of fiction, reading both classic and contemporary examples of nonfiction pieces that utilize them, and using generative exercises to practice them. There will be the opportunity to submit your work and receive feedback.

Participants will leave with the confidence to bring characterization, dialogue, metaphor, and counterfactuality to their nonfiction. Writers should come with a piece they are working on or want to start.

TEN PRO TIPS FOR WRITING LIFE STORIES with Laura J. Oliver

7/11/26 • Saturday • 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

Where do you begin your life story and how do you guarantee it is interesting to others? With ten crucial tips and in-class writing prompts, learn how to capture your life on the page scene by

scene. From point-of-entry to transformative conclusion, you will find your story subjects, create tension, and most of all, meaning—so that the story you tell is the one that most mattered.

WORDS THAT HEAL: EXPRESSIVE WRITING FOR SELF-DISCOVERY with GG Renee Hill

7/19/26 • Sunday • 2:00 PM - 5:00 PM

Zoom • Beginner / Intermediate • \$60

In this workshop, we'll explore the practice of narrative healing—using storytelling and expressive writing to process life's challenges and uncover meaning in our experiences. Through guided exercises, reflective prompts, and discussion, writers will explore emerging insights that can be shaped into personal narratives, reflections, or creative pieces. This workshop focuses on self-discovery and meaning-making for idea generation, rather than structuring memoirs or book-length projects. Participants will leave with new insights, creative starting points, and approaches for continuing their own reflective writing practice.

BUILDING A WRITING PROCESS with GG Renee Hill

8/2/26 - 8/16/26 • 3 Sundays • 3:00 PM - 5:00 PM

Zoom • Beginner / Intermediate • \$150

Learn techniques to stop overthinking and get words on the page. You will experiment with different approaches to idea generation, prewriting, outlining, drafting, and revising so when you get stuck, you can reach into your toolbox and try a different method. Writers will come away with a rough draft of a personal narrative and a new appreciation for each stage of the writing process.

WRITING THE TRUTH with Lindsey Van Wagner

8/15/26 • Saturday • 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

Writers will explore how honesty and vulnerability can strengthen personal narrative. Through guided prompts, reflection, and discussion, participants will examine the internal barriers—such as fear, perfectionism, and self-censorship—that can prevent deeper truth from emerging on the page. By the end of the workshop, writers will leave with fresh insights for writing with greater authenticity and emotional clarity.

INTRODUCTION TO GRIEF WRITING with Diane Zinna

8/16/26 • Sunday • 2:00 PM - 4:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

In this gentle 2-hour class, we'll explore five different hermit crab forms that work beautifully for grief writing and take inspiration from freeing, empowering examples. Each participant will leave with the starts of five pieces of writing and inviting ideas for how to continue. There is nothing you need to prepare in advance—come as you are.

POETRY

READING POEMS TO WRITE POEMS with David Baker and Christopher Kondrich

5/2/26 • Saturday • 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM

The Writer's Center • All Levels • \$60

This is a reader's workshop, focusing on close readings of poems by two great American poets, Stanley Plumly and Natasha Trethewey. We'll dive deep into specific poems, identify each poet's signature tactics, and talk about the class's own practices.

MAKING A BROADSIDE with María Fernanda

5/4/26 • Monday • 6:30 PM - 7:30 PM

The Writer's Center • All Levels • \$60

A broadside is an art print with text and drawings. Participants will receive printmaking paper, stencils, stamps, and a surprise material based on the venue or setting to create a broadside. Generative writing exercises will be interwoven with examples of historically-revered posters, visual art pieces, and literary works printed by letterpresses.

POETIC RHYTHM with AI Basile

5/12/26 - 6/16/26 • 6 Tuesdays • 8:00 PM - 10:00 PM

Zoom • Intermediate / Advanced • \$295

We'll begin by scanning well known verse, become familiar with the rhythmic structure of our own lines, then practice rewriting one of our own poems in a metric form. In the second half of the course, we'll generate a draft of a new poem in either a verse form, or in free verse which has been rhythmically enriched.

HONORING THE ANCESTORS: A POETRY WORKSHOP with Maritza Rivera

6/6/26 - 6/27/26 • 4 Saturdays • 1:00 PM - 3:00 PM

The Writer's Center • All Levels • \$215

This workshop begins with a grounding exercise that prepares participants to begin a journey inward. With this experiential starting point, and specific writing prompts, attendees will delve into individual, shared and personal experiences and memories. These prompts are intended to provide the inspiration to connect with and create work that honor their ancestors.

WRITING POEMS OF TRAUMA with Jehanne Dubrow

5/27/26 - 7/1/26 • 6 Wednesdays • 1:00 PM - 3:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$295

Inspired by Jehanne Dubrow's craft book, *The Wounded Line: A Guide to Writing Poems of Trauma*, this workshop will provide poets with practical strategies for representing and exploring pain on the page. We'll study poems that can serve as role models for our work, and draft new pieces based on writing prompts, looking at approaches such as list-making, surrealism, and nonlinear storytelling. By the end of the workshop, participants will have written at least three poems inspired by different craft-based techniques.

THE DEEP ROOTS OF ENGLISH POETRY: A CRAFT WORKSHOP with Michael Battisto

5/28/26 - 7/23/26 • 9 Thursdays • 7:00 PM - 9:30 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$400

Each week, participants will study a distinct historical period through carefully curated poems and a focused craft lecture, then write an original poem directly inspired by the techniques and forms uncovered.

For details and to register, visit writer.org!

READING AND WRITING CONTEMPORARY POETRY with Emily Holland

6/15/26 - 7/6/26 • 4 Weeks • Asynchronous

Wet Ink • All Levels • \$215

Each week, we will read works published in contemporary literary journals from a diverse range of writers including Patrycja Humienik, KB Brookins, Kenzie Allen, Hanif Abdurraqib, and many others. We will also engage with their work via interviews/craft essays. We will then use techniques and inspiration from them to kickstart our writing process. With writing exercises and prompts, students can expect to write at least one poem a week.

POEMS AFTER ART, MEDIA, AND RUIN with Sylvia Jones

6/17/26 - 7/29/26 • 7 Wednesdays • 1:00 PM - 3:00 PM

The Writer's Center • All Levels • \$350

This workshop studies how poems can respond to paintings, films, and other public images without collapsing into summary or explanation. Each week includes a short reading, a brief craft talk, and a generative prompt, followed by discussion and optional sharing. By the end of the workshop, participants will have drafted a small sequence of poems that engage visual culture.

VILLANELLE CRASH COURSE with Claudia Gary

6/27/26 • Saturday • 10:00 AM - 12:30 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

Guided by an internationally published author of villanelles, sonnets, and other metrical poems, you'll first read time-honored villanelles to see how and why they work. Next, we'll write a group villanelle, and then, with or without shortcuts, you'll start one of your own. You'll leave with at least one new (draft) or improved villanelle, as well as insights about how writing poetry in form can unlock deeper meaning and enhance everything you write.

FINDING YOUR POETIC VOICE with Ann Quinn

7/2/26 - 8/6/26 • 6 Thursdays • 10:00 AM - 12:30 PM

Zoom • Beginner / Intermediate • \$295

In this workshop you will try on a variety of styles and forms on the way to finding your own poetic voice. We will read poems together and use them as starting points for your own work, both in and out of class. The goal is for you to come away from the class with a portfolio of favorite poems—poems discovered in reading, discovered in writing. Be prepared to cast aside your inner critic and write a lot! Required text: *A Poetry Handbook* by Mary Oliver.

WRITE THE DAY with Indran Amirthanayagam

7/11/26 • Saturday • 11:00 AM - 1:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

You will transform your day into poetry and fiction. We will read and then write poems and stories starting from close observation of our day.

LET THE SOFT ANIMALS SPEAK: WRITING THE WILD WITH CRAFT AND CARE with Courtney Sexton

7/30/26 - 8/13/26 • 3 Thursdays • 7:00 PM - 9:00 PM

The Writer's Center • Beginner / Intermediate • \$150

When Mary Oliver tells us to let the soft animal of [our bodies] love what [they] love, we know exactly what she means. But how does she engage the natural world to create pieces that linger on our tongues and in our hearts, and how can we endeavor to do the same? In this workshop, our goal is to learn how to enter the diverse topographies and umwelts around us and represent them authentically on the page.

POETRY

POETRY POTLUCK: 5 FORMS IN 3 WEEKS with Melanie Figg

8/5/26 - 8/19/26 • 3 Wednesdays • 7:00 PM - 9:00 PM

Zoom • Intermediate / Advanced • \$150

Build your literary muscles by practicing a mix of five contemporary and traditional forms: sonnets, golden shovels, abecedarians, villanelles, and sestinas. Classes are a mix of instruction, reading sample poems, lots of tips, Q&A, and sharing what we write (optional, but encouraged). Struggling to find time to write? Each class will include 20-30 minutes of writing time to begin drafting your own poems.

PERSONA POEM CRASH COURSE with Claudia Gary

8/9/26 • Sunday • 11:00 AM - 1:30 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

Guided by a widely published author of persona and other poems, you will read and discuss several time-honored examples, then start new ones of your own. You may find unexpected insights, expanding your poetic range in the process.

YOUR LITERARY LINEAGE: FROM BELOVED WORK TO NEW POEMS with Lesley Younge

8/20/26 • Thursday • 7:00 PM - 10:00 PM

The Writer's Center • Beginner / Intermediate • \$60

In this workshop, we will explore the ways we can ethically be inspired by and pay homage to the writers we align with, the ones who form our "literary lineage." Choosing from both existing prose and poetry, participants will generate new work.

SUBTLETIES OF METER with Claudia Gary

8/23/26 • Sunday • 11:00 AM - 1:30 PM

Zoom • Intermediate / Advanced • \$60

To explore some of the fine points of meter, we will examine how metrical patterns can vary between poets, do exercises to generate new poem drafts, practice scansion, and more. Participants are encouraged to bring a metrical poem they've already written, for feedback at the end of the workshop.

For details and to register, visit writer.org!

BOOK MARKETING ON A BUDGET with Rob Jolles

5/28/26 - 6/4/26 • 2 Thursdays • 9:00 AM - 10:30 AM

Zoom • All Levels • \$115

In this workshop you'll discover over 30 practical, budget-friendly book marketing strategies, from building a book launch to leveraging social media, blogs, press releases, and more. Each session will be fast-paced and packed with real-world tactics you can apply immediately.

SMART MARKETING WRITERS with Aaron Hamburger

6/16/26 • Tuesday • 7:00 PM - 9:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

In this session, you'll learn how to grow your author platform and publicize your book in smart, efficient, and cost-effective ways that go beyond social media posts and help you stay true to your authentic self.

BOOK PROMOTION THROUGH PODCASTING with Rob Jolles

7/16/26 - 7/23/26 • 2 Thursdays • 9:00 AM - 10:30 AM

Zoom • All Levels • \$115

Podcasts are a powerful way to get your book and voice out there, and grow your audience. In this workshop, you'll learn how to craft a winning podcast pitch, get booked on the right shows, and be an engaging guest.

BEFORE YOU HIT SUBMIT with Marija Stajic

7/18/26 - 7/25/26 • 2 Saturdays • 10:00 AM - 12:30 PM

Zoom • Intermediate / Advanced • \$115

Through focused discussion and practical examples, participants will learn how to assess readiness, identify appropriate literary journals and agents, and navigate the submission process step by step, from final revisions to tracking responses. Participants are encouraged to bring a piece of writing they are considering submitting and a draft of a query letter for feedback.

SELF-PUBLISHING 101 with Camille Cabrera

7/27/26 • Monday • 6:30 PM - 8:30 PM

Zoom • Beginner • \$60

Discover the core steps of self-publishing from a 40-time bestselling author. This workshop will explore editing, writing, and publishing tips intended to expedite the drafting journey. Please come prepared with questions which will be discussed near the end.

COVER LETTERS AND AGENT QUERIES with Diane Zinna

8/22/26 • Saturday • 10:00 AM - 11:30 AM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

Author and teacher Diane Zinna will help to demystify the process of cover letters for literary magazine submissions and agent queries! We'll look at how to craft a perfect third-person bio and explore the four things an agent query must do. You'll leave with real tools to help you find the literary champions looking for you.

PROFESSIONAL WRITING

FUNDAMENTALS OF PERSUASIVE WRITING with James Alexander

6/2/26 - 6/23/26 • 4 Tuesdays • 7:00 PM - 9:30 PM

Zoom • Beginner / Intermediate • \$215

Learn how to pack a powerful punch when writing persuasively! This four-week workshop covers the processes involved in writing persuasively and with confidence, whether it is crafting newspaper op-eds and speeches or official emails, memos, letters and proposals. This class features hands-on writing instruction, engaging discussion and an extensive reading list.

HOW TO WRITE A GRANT PROPOSAL with Cara Seitchek

7/11/26 - 7/25/26 • 3 Saturdays • 10:00 AM - 12:30 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$150

This workshop will cover how to research prospective funders, the elements of a good proposal, and how to approach funders. Please come to class with a non-profit or project in mind to use as the focus of your research and proposal. By the end of class, you will have a draft of a proposal to use for fundraising.

WRITE LIKE THE NEWS with Hank Wallace

8/20/26 • Thursday • 7:00 PM - 9:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

Emulate the vivid news examples you'll see in this workshop, and you'll strengthen your writing voice with lively, engaging news style. At 7 sharp, we'll critique TheWallStreetJournal.com, seeing how to communicate your main point in just a few words. To cover as much ground as possible, we'll have just a few writing exercises and most of them will take less than a minute each.

WONDERING HOW TO GET STARTED?
STRUGGLING TO STAY MOTIVATED?
WRANGLING WITH YOUR INNER CRITIC?

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WITH MELANIE FIGG

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SKILLED CREATIVITY COACH TO BUILD
AND BETTER YOUR WRITING LIFE.

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schedule a complimentary session:
WWW.MELANIEFIGG.NET

STAGE & SCREEN

HOW TO WRITE A STAND UP COMEDY ACT with Sheila Wenz

6/4/26 - 6/25/26 • 4 Thursdays • 7:00 PM - 8:30 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$215

Learn how to recognize a premise, extract the humor, and hone it into a stand-up act or funny story. Join an engaging, workshop class led by a professional writer and comedian who will guide you through the craft of comedy, from idea generation to polished performance. We'll study comedians and styles and work on your unique voice in a fun and supportive class.

READING YOUR WORK OUT LOUD with Jennifer Hamady

6/8/26 • Monday • 6:00 PM - 9:00 PM

The Writer's Center • All Levels • \$60

Spend an evening learning about and practicing the art of public speaking. You'll leave the workshop with an experience of camaraderie, community, and a more deeply rooted sense of your creative and expressive self. Please have on hand a number of pieces you'd be comfortable sharing.

WRITING THE FEATURE-LENGTH SCREENPLAY with Joy Cheriell Brown

7/9/26 - 9/10/26 • 10 Thursdays • 7:00 PM - 9:00 PM

Zoom • Intermediate / Advanced • \$415

Writers will complete a feature-length screenplay from outline to first draft.

Participants are expected to arrive with a developed idea they are ready to write. The course begins with a brief review of key screenwriting principles—premise questions, structure, and character—before quickly moving into reviewing written pages the second week. Writers will be expected to generate approximately 10 pages per week, building toward a complete 90-page screenplay by the end of the course.

FREE EVENTS FOR WRITERS

SUMMER 2026

OPEN MIC @ THE WRITER'S CENTER

Second and Fourth Wednesday
of every month, 7pm ET

POETRY BOOK CLUB

Every Second Wednesday
Zoom, 7pm ET

FICTION BOOK CLUB

Every Third Sunday
In Person, 2pm ET

HOW DO YOU PRONOUNCE THAT? A PANEL ON NON-ENGLISH WORDS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE POETRY

Wednesday, May 6, 7pm ET
In Person

VIRTUAL CRAFT CHAT ON NONFICTION W/ LAUREN WESTERFIELD

Thursday, May 7, 7pm ET
Zoom

VIRTUAL CRAFT CHAT W/ POET NUR TURKMANI

Thursday, May 14, 6pm ET
Zoom

VIRTUAL CRAFT CHAT W/ AUTHOR & PHYSICIST CHANDA PRESCOD-WEINSTEIN

Monday, May 18, 7pm ET
Zoom

RECENT GRAD WRITERS MIXER

Saturday, May 30, 11am ET
In Person

CLAIRE FULLER VIRTUAL BOOK LAUNCH W/ MELISSA FALIVENO

Thursday, June 4, 6pm ET
Zoom

CAROLINE BOCK BOOK LAUNCH

Sunday, June 7, 4pm ET
In Person



VIRTUAL CRAFT CHAT W/ NOVELIST PAIGE LEWIS

Thursday, June 11, 7pm ET
Zoom

LGBTQ+ WRITERS MIXER

Tuesday, June 16, 5:30pm ET
In Person

VIRTUAL CRAFT CHAT W/ POET KAY E. BANCROFT

Thursday, June 25, 7pm ET
Zoom

MELANIE MCCABE & BRAD BARKLEY BOOK LAUNCH

Saturday, June 27, 2pm ET
In Person

CAFE MUSE LITERARY SALON

Monday, July 6, 7pm ET
In Person

VIRTUAL CRAFT CHAT W/ POET JAKE ROSE

Thursday, July 9, 7pm ET
Zoom

Find more free events and register at writer.org

PUZZLING THROUGH

A Conversation with Crossword Creator Malaika Handa

By Amy Freeman

Malaika Handa recently published a collection of medium-sized, themeless puzzles called *Easy Crosswords for Peace*. She also writes crosswords for *Vulture* magazine several times each week, and has puzzles published in newspapers like *The New York Times*, the *LA Times*, and *USA Today*.

Amy Freeman: When I sat down to ask you some questions about crossword puzzles, I realized I don't know the correct terms to use! Does one "assemble" or "create" a puzzle? What's the right verb?

Malaika Handa: Crosswords (like any other creative or technical field) have lots of jargon! We say that you "construct" a puzzle. When I'm talking to people who don't know the terminology, I usually say that I "make" puzzles. I know other people who say they "write" puzzles, but that doesn't always click for me as much. The words in a puzzle are called "entries" (we write them in ALL CAPS) and the black squares are called "blocks." In a puzzle that has a theme, the entries that are part of the theme are called "themers" and the entries that aren't are called "fill." We also turn the terms assembling the grid and writing the clues into verbs—gridding is my favorite part of constructing, and I find cluing to be more difficult.

What is your process for (constructing) a puzzle? Can you describe the difference between (constructing), for instance, a themed versus a themeless puzzle?

My puzzles always begin with an entry. If it lends itself to wordplay, I will try to think of a theme that can go along with it. For example, the term GIVING

SIDEYE made me think of entries that have the letter "I" on both sides. I used it in a puzzle with themers like ITALIAN SALAMI and IN-FLIGHT WIFI. Or, I try to think of other entries that would match it. For example, I wanted to put the name DEMI ADEJUYIGBE in a puzzle, and thought it could work for a puzzle where other themers also had a term for "half" at the beginning of the word. I put it in a puzzle called "First Half" with the entries SEMINOLE NATION and HEMINGWAY. If I can't think of anything, then I'll put it in a themeless puzzle. DARK ACADEMIA and OLIVIA RODRIGO are two entries that I put in themelesses.

As you know, The Writer's Center focuses on the lit world. Do you, or does the puzzling world, consider crossword puzzles to be a form of creative writing? Why, or why not?

Crosswords lie somewhere on a spectrum of art vs science. When I make them, my process and output lands more on the side of science. I like for my puzzles to reflect current phrases, vibes, and media. Sometimes my puzzles feel like a snapshot in time. It's more akin to writing a report than a poem or fictional story. Other constructors whose process and goals are different from mine definitely think of it more as a creative work, though.

Whenever I write a piece, I ask friends to serve as beta-readers. Do you test each puzzle on people you know? Or maybe work with an editor?

The process for getting a crossword puzzle published is similar to other types of freelance writing. Some outlets require you ("you" can be anyone! We call this "open submission") to create a full, complete puzzle before sending it in. Then, they either accept

or reject it. Other outlets will allow you to pitch the idea of a puzzle, and then if they accept it, you can move forward with the construction. Other outlets have a fixed group of constructors that are responsible for making all of the puzzles. Once the puzzle is accepted, editors will rewrite some or most of the clues: they'll correct any grammatical issues, adjust their difficulty, and make sure the references and allusions are ones that align with the vibe of the publication. Then, the puzzle is sent to test solvers, who provide feedback on their solving experience which the editors can incorporate. Finally, some publications have copy editors look over the puzzle as well.

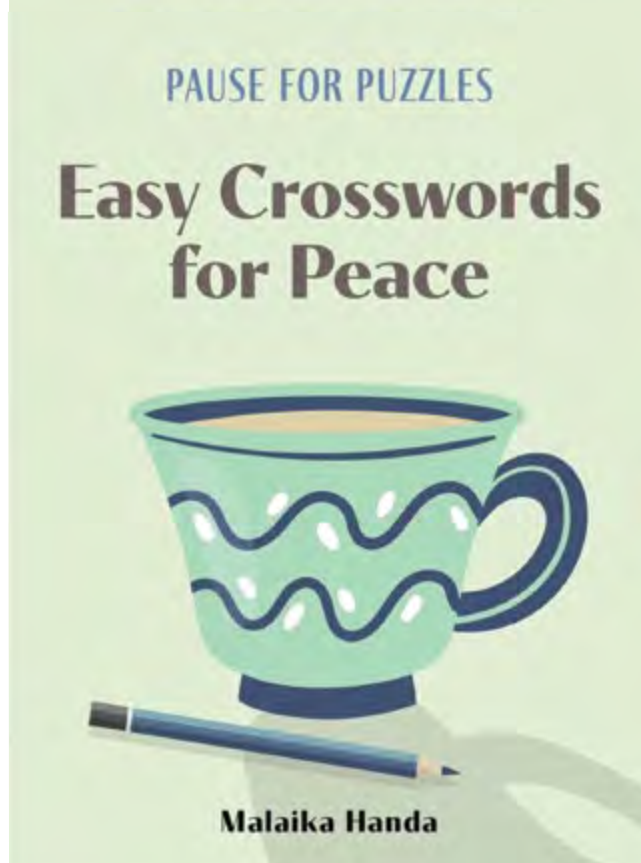
“ Crosswords lie somewhere on a spectrum of art vs science. When I make them, my process and output lands more on the side of science.

—Malaika Handa

How do you calibrate the complexity of the clues? I'm wondering how you know whether the clues are too challenging or too easy.

Two things that make a clue easy are how straightforward it is (meaning, no use of wordplay) and how specific it is. Consider the entry DRAW: [Engage in some sketchy behavior] (clues are formatted using square brackets) is a harder clue than [Do some illustration] because you have to think about the double meaning for the word “sketchy.” Similarly, [Make art] is a harder clue than [Make art using pencil and paper] because it's more vague. When I am writing an easy clue for a tough entry, I try to include as much information as possible. Trivia clues and clues for proper nouns are the hardest ones to gauge difficulty because I don't have a great sense of how many potential solvers know the same stuff that I know.

You published *Easy Crosswords for Peace* with Hachette. What was your path to publication? Did



you need a literary agent? Did you have to submit a proposal?

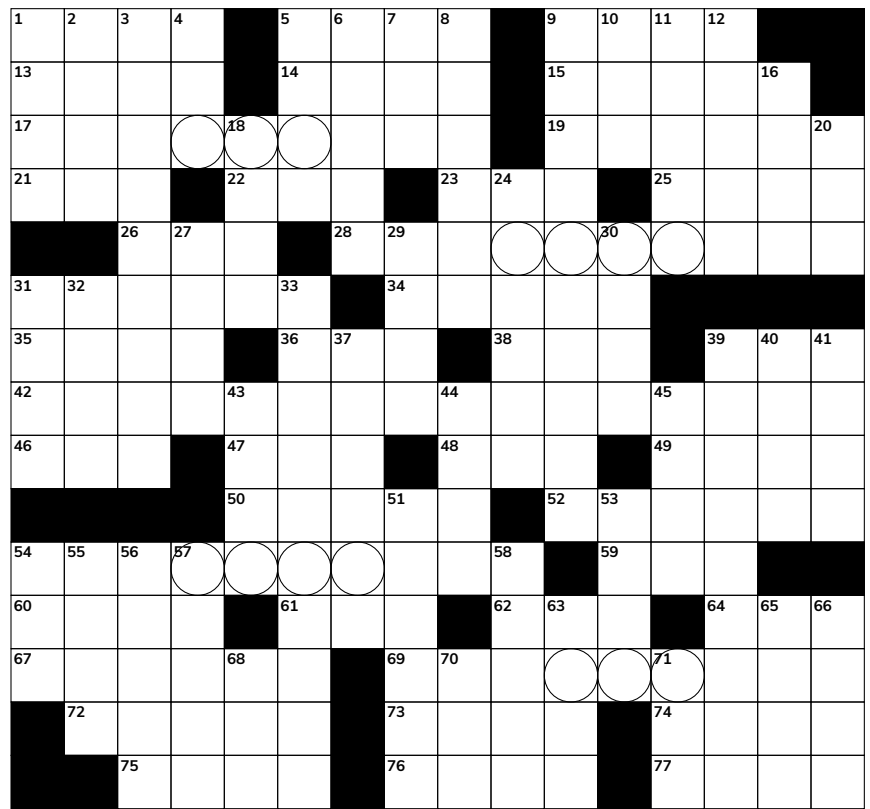
The world of crossword constructors is pretty small! I would estimate there are only about a thousand people who are making American-style crosswords right now (British-style “cryptic crosswords” are a whole other category). I am lucky to be published frequently with Vulture magazine, which means my name is out there. The editor I worked with, Francis Heaney, reached out directly to me to see if I would be interested in putting together the book. When they sent over the contract, I confirmed with a couple of published friends that the language and terms were similar to what they had experienced, and then moved forward.

What's next for you in puzzles?

Every April, Will Shortz hosts the American Crossword Puzzle Tournament. It is a competition, with divisions and prizes, but it also serves a convention for hundreds of solvers and constructors that travel to be in the same place for a weekend. I'll be there this year and I am excited to see everyone!

ACROSS

- 1 Piece that makes up half a chess set
- 5 "Dude!"
- 9 Digital assistant on an iphone
- 13 "___'s Island" (William Steig novel about a castaway)
- 14 Snazzy car
- 15 Collect
- 17 *Court -- "The Tell-Tale Heart" (1843) -- summons
- 19 Piece of tech that has replaced the typewriter
- 21 Where you're likely to see a cash grab?
- 22 One might cover a trapdoor
- 23 Ntwk. that originally aired "Cougar Town"
- 25 Tiny bit
- 26 "Such a Fun ___" (novel by Kiley Reid)
- 28 *Walkie-talkie -- "Atlas Shrugged" (1957) -- closing
- 31 "Careful, it's slippery!"
- 34 ___ Drafthouse (chain of movie theaters that originated in Texas)
- 35 Regarding
- 36 Trendy
- 38 Substance used to make maple syrup
- 39 Letters on a bottle of face moisturizer
- 42 DC nonprofit that offers workshops about fiction... or what the circled letters of each starred entry represent
- 46 Spot for a cartilage piercing
- 47 Aliens, for short
- 48 Sound while watching the end of a brilliant whodunnit
- 49 Word used in a proof
- 50 Banquet
- 52 Condition that affects the narrator of "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime"
- 54 *"Babe" -- "The Shining" (1977) -- character
- 59 Hand-held Sony console
- 60 Spencer, Emily, and Hanna's frenemy, in the "Pretty Little Liars" series
- 61 "Don't email me, I'm on vacation" letters
- 62 Condition discussed in David Sedaris' "A Plague of Tics"
- 64 Graphic at the beginning of some fantasy novels
- 67 Vietnamese sandwich
- 69 *Blackcurrant -- "The God of Small Things" (1997) -- cocktail
- 72 Sounds that signify the end of class
- 73 Part of a sheet paper that can give you a paper cut
- 74 Word that can be preceded by "who" and followed by "where"
- 75 Rudolph the Reindeer's was red
- 76 Requirement
- 77 Derogatory slang for AI-generated content



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DOWN

- 1 "Que ___?"
- 2 Touch
- 3 Employee that handles an organization's online presence
- 4 Field of AI that includes autocorrect
- 5 Actor Corbin of "High School Musical"
- 6 Drummer for The Beatles
- 7 Actress Thurman of "Kill Bill"
- 8 Affordable lodging for travelers
- 9 Flavorful sauce made with nuts and dried chiles
- 10 "___ Believer" (Smash Mouth song)
- 11 Quick
- 12 "Life ___ short..."
- 16 Yearly speech from the president (abbr.)
- 18 Cookie often split in half
- 20 Gentle tap
- 24 Brand of metal polish
- 27 Feature of some pregnant women
- 29 Device that teens use instead of smoking a cigarette
- 30 "Uh-uh"
- 31 Door to a garden
- 32 Agcy. in the Department of Labor
- 33 Stacky sound
- 37 "Now!"
- 39 Shopping plaza off a highway
- 40 Cribbage pieces
- 41 Word on a gift tag
- 43 Get a better mortgage rate, for short
- 44 Trini flatbread
- 45 Fixtures on either end of a basketball court
- 51 ___ word (style of poetry)
- 53 Formal hairstyle
- 54 Key that indents a paragraph
- 55 Like Laila Lalami
- 56 Fabric prone to wrinkling
- 57 Painter of "Las dos Fridas"
- 58 Canyon with steep walls
- 63 Reputation, for short
- 65 "The Sun ___ Rises"
- 66 Sound from a chick
- 68 Org. for Chicago Fire and Inter Miami
- 70 Chemical suffix for "sulf-"
- 71 Final word of the novel "Ulysses"

Highlights from The Writer's Center Virtual Craft Chat Series

**MARISA KASHINO DIVES INTO
THE MAIN CHARACTER OF HER
THRILLING DEBUT, *BEST OFFER WINS***



ON MAKING AN UNLIKEABLE CHARACTER ENDEARING

Even if you don't like her, at least hopefully you can sympathize or empathize with her. I mean, she comes from very humble beginnings. Her parents have a very challenged relationship with home ownership. So she comes from a background where she didn't feel like she had a stable home and that is another big motivating factor for her in wanting to create this dream life for herself now that she's in charge and she's the grown-up. She wants the beautiful, perfect dream home where she's going to start a family and she's going to create the environment that she really longed for when she was a kid.


So, I did think a lot about layering in plenty of that backstory, particularly in moments where she's making decisions that are pretty morally gray, I would say. Just so you could get in her head and really kind of understand where the motivation for this is really stemming from. And I think it does come from at least a sympathetic place even if it doesn't bring her to a sympathetic end. And then



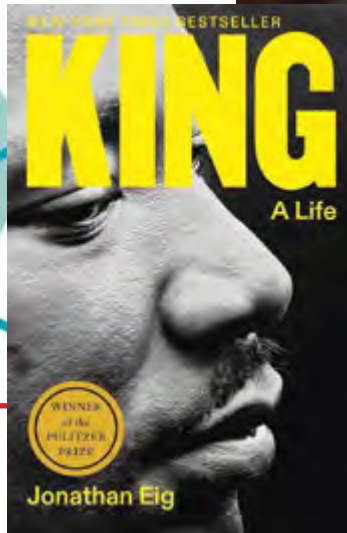
again, layering in the humor. She does say a lot of the quiet parts out loud. Hopefully she's relatable in some of those moments, like when her husband's driving her nuts or when she feels like she's carrying all the stress of this house hunt and she's working so hard and going the extra mile to create this perfect life for the two of them and he's not pulling his equal weight. I think in those moments the things that she's thinking, at least for some readers, are hopefully kind of relatable and make her somebody who you feel like is maybe someone you might be able to be friends with.

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upcoming schedule.*



**PULITZER PRIZE-WINNER
JONATHAN EIG DISCUSSES
THE PROCESS OF WRITING
BIOGRAPHY IN *KING: A LIFE***



ON CAPTURING PASSIONATE SPEECHES

Actually one of the things I've learned from doing this for a long time is that long quotes tend to bore the reader. So if it's his core philosophy of life, you may have to quote it at length, but most of the time you can parse it and summarize it for them. The fact that I was limited to fair use actually turned out to be better.

Since we're talking about writers, I think I'll go into some more detail here than I normally would, but that "I Have a Dream" speech, when you think about how to write that, it's a huge challenge. How do you write one of the greatest speeches in American history and try to attempt to match its power without being able to hear King's voice? You can't. When I wrote my first draft, not knowing whether the King family would give me permission to quote it at length—it's a 1,300-word speech, I probably used about 500 words, and the lawyers told me I had to get it down to 130 words—it was better when I cut it down to 130 words because you can convey the emotion better on your own than you can by using the long quotes. And it was a really powerful exercise for me in trying to find tricks to cut out words and still maintain the feel of that speech.

ON ORGANIZING RESEARCH

I'm not, by nature, a very well-organized person. So when you're working on a book that's going to take you five or six years, you have to really leave breadcrumbs everywhere. So, I leave as many

backup systems, as many different things that I can do to remind myself. But my main tool is a giant spreadsheet where I make a list of all my source materials. I create a link to the source material on the spreadsheet so that I can open it right away and I have a lot of tags on the spreadsheet. So if I have a document from, for example, the bus boycott, I'll have it tagged with the date, with the subject, with the names of the people who appear on the document and then I'll put that into a spreadsheet and I'll have the link so I can click and immediately open up the document in Google Drive.

Really important things that I want to be sure that I don't forget, I print out and I put in the file folders in my file cabinet in my desk drawer. These are the absolute gold nuggets that I want to make sure somehow I don't forget that I have because when you're taking in tens of thousands of pages of documents and you're doing hundreds of interviews, there's always a chance that you're going to forget what you've got. You interview somebody and then four years later you're writing a passage and you may not even remember that you have an interview that covered that subject. I just have to leave myself as many reminders and breadcrumbs everywhere that I can.

ALLY ANG TALKS ALL ABOUT THEIR DEBUT COLLECTION, *LET THE MOON WOBBLE*



ON LINE BREAKS

I think about a couple of different things. I do love a kind of cheeky line break where there's like word play involved where you break the line. I also love a surprising line break where you break a line and then you think it's going in one direction but then it goes in a different direction. I also love not just thinking about it as a sentence, but the lines as individual units as well. I'm always thinking about both of those things. I get really kind of playful and like I said, cheeky with line breaks sometimes.

I actually find it really challenging to write prose for that reason or even prose poems because I still feel like the line break is such a big way that I think about poetry that trying to write poems that don't rely as heavily on line breaks is a big challenge for me. I've actually been trying to write more prose poems lately just to see if I can still make a good poem without overly relying on line breaks. That's been a fun challenge, too.

ON WRITING IDENTITY

I try not to think about audience when I'm drafting because then I think that leads to self-censorship, but it's definitely something that I think about as I try to publish things. Especially if I'm writing about other people in my life or people that I don't know. I always want to be really respectful of other people's agency and attentive to the fact that they might not be able to really publicly respond to the things that I'm writing about them. So I always want to write with a lot of care. Especially, again, when it's not solely my experience that I'm writing about.



But I don't think that much about necessarily trying to make my experiences legible to an audience that is not familiar with my identities. For example, it's kind of like if you get it, you get it. And if you don't, that's okay. And that's how I feel when I'm reading poetry that, for example, incorporates words in a language that I don't read. I'm like, "Okay, I can look it up or I can just acknowledge that this part isn't written for me and that's okay. I'm not the intended audience and that's fine. There's going to be some things that I won't get and that's okay." And I think that can apply to my own writing as well. I mean, I think that this book can be understood and resonate with people regardless of identity. But I'm also not really interested in writing like "Queer 101" or over-explaining myself. I think again, if you get it, it's for you. And if you don't, that's okay.

From *Poet Lore* Volume 120 3/4

Carlina Duan

WHAT I KNOW OF FAITH IS A RED KNOT*for Karen*

my hand in your hand. summer. badminton paddles
in their black sleeves. neighborhood grocery store with the bell

that jingles each time we pass through; we glide past whole aisles
of glass jars. pickled plum. sweets flavored with *pepper* or *yam*—rebel

on the tongue. those white rabbit candies—we love to untwist
the rice paper wrapping, melt in mouth. *click, cling*, cash register bell

reminds us of power. red bills folded to squares in our hands. new country
with its rituals: powdered milk, watermelon trucks, rainbow arc of light, the bell

of language—a mother tongue—jangles us towards risk. we make our way
to the freezer, slide the glass door. chocolate cones bubbled in plastic, your face: a bell

ringing towards me. *Can I have—Can I?* persistent, this slow chime named *Awe*.
you call me *Sister*. your hand in my hand, without flicker. small belled

voice, aflame with hope. is there any other answer? say *Yes*: count cash, tear
plastic, steady sugar. look, luck: two girls leap beyond the building's brass bell.



From Patrycja Humienik's Guest Edited Folio: *On Devotion*

Chaun Ballard

**UPON ARRIVING TO THE FUTURE
SOMEONE WILL TELL YOU**

How the horses galloped to the back door.
That there could have been a stall.

They won't remember all the particulars.
You should know it was not a one-horse town.

But the road was solid dirt. A smudge of houses.
Maybe there was some gravel involved.

There was almost certainly a horse.
At one time or another a bull

but that's a different story entirely.
The road someone will say

almost certainly for horses *was made for horses*.
& the man with his horse hauling ice for the icebox.

You were not yet a story then
nor smaller than avocados.

Your grandmother hung clothes on the lines.
Folded bed sheets unassisted.

Your father was a gambler like his father.
Back when all gamblers were bad gamblers. & fathers.

After we lost our tethers in the afterbirth of homes
we prescribed for ourselves another world's dwelling.

Your grandmother was beautiful.
The way she could keep a house.

Your grandfather lost his father to the land.
It was the way of men to lose things.

To wager all as if tradition.
Collectors were sublime. You should have seen them.

How they mesmerized us.
The way they levitated the doors.

Ally Ang

**UNSEXED, MY BODY
UPENDS ITS TETHERING**

in the darkness, darkness draped
around me like a gown, my outline
mercifully obscured. I once believed

it was worship I craved, would prostrate
myself before any gilded calf whose marble
eyes beheld my image. now, I gnaw

at the hand that heeds me, my nakedness
impenetrable and mundane. is it possible
to fashion a new lexicon for desire

that doesn't demand my self
-betrayal? to be an unnameable
creature, belonging to no one, governed

only by my want; no signifier to cling to,
groping through the absence towards god
knows what—

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When Prose Isn't Enough

A CONVERSATION WITH MEG EDEN KUYATT ABOUT HER NOVELS-IN-VERSE AND NEURODIVERGENCE ON THE PAGE

By Amy Freeman

Meg Eden Kuyatt teaches creative writing at colleges and at our very own Writer's Center. She is the author of the 2021 Towson Prize for Literature winning poetry collection *Drowning in the Floating World*, the forthcoming *obsolete hill* (Fernwood Press, 2026), and children's novels including the Schneider Family Book Award Honor-winning *Good Different*, and the forthcoming *Perfect Enough* (Scholastic, 2026). Find her online at megedenbooks.com.

Amy Freeman: Focusing on *Perfect Enough*, a kidlit novel in verse and sequel to *Good Different*, what can you tell us about the process of writing a sequel? In some ways, I imagine it's like visiting old friends! Did you always intend to continue Selah's story? How does writing a sequel differ from writing a stand-alone book?

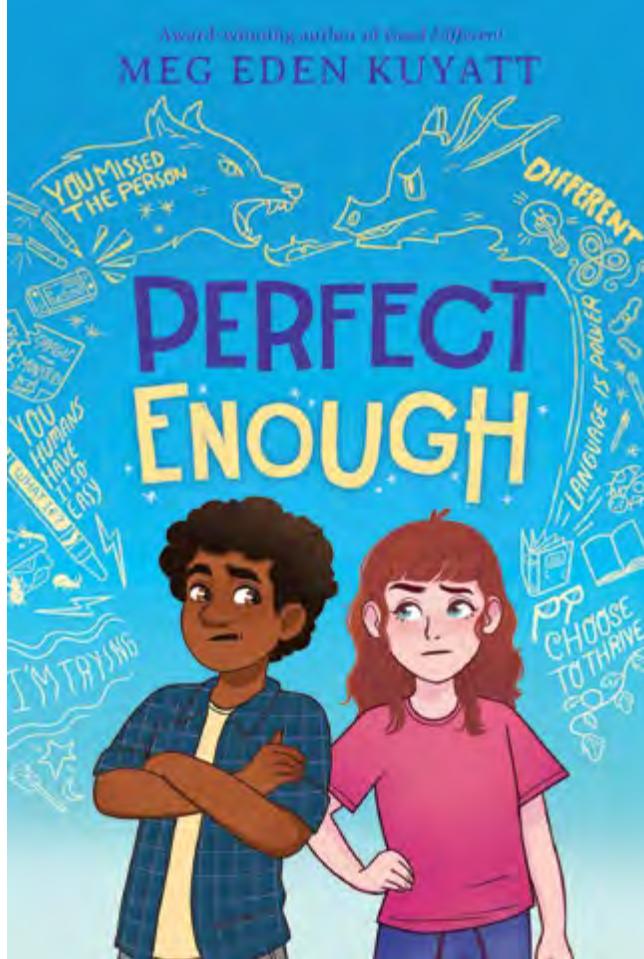
Meg Eden Kuyatt: It's so funny—I never set out to write a sequel! In fact, people often asked at the start if I would and I was very resistant. However, I had this concept about an autistic girl at summer camp, trying to figure out how to deal with the unique challenges away from home, proving she could “make it on her own,” and learning how to communicate better with her friends—and I kept getting stuck. I realized at some point it was because I was, in a way, trying to rewrite Selah! Once I tried writing it as Selah's story, the pieces quickly fell into place! Yes,



as you say it's like visiting old friends. I know the voice, the character, the world—it makes it much easier than having to figure out all those things from scratch. Selah is particularly easy for me to write, as she is very much, in spirit, me. The big thing I wanted to think about with a sequel was making sure I didn't repeat Selah's arc, that she retained what she had learned before but built off it. I also wanted to expand. For example, we didn't really get much of Ezra on the page in the first book, so I wanted to explore the other sides and complexities to these characters that only got quick brushstrokes so far.

Selah's autistic and her neurodivergence is a crucial part of the story. Your writing shows the reader a full, loving portrait of someone on the spectrum, and I'm sure Selah's delighted kids and parents alike. Can you share your thoughts about representation in the publishing world?

Representation is so important! I didn't have books about autistic kids, written by autistic folks, when I was a kid—and as a result, I was drawn to books that now I would probably deem problematic for their harmful representation. But I was so craving anything remotely resembling me! I struggled with books when I was younger. If there had been more books with kids like me, would I have felt differently? There is estimated to be an autistic kid in every classroom, and about 1 in 5 kids being neurodivergent in some sort of way—we are woefully behind those statistics in the publishing world!



“

We come to poetry when prose is inadequate, when the content can only be in verse.

”

— Meg Eden Kuyatt

We need stories about all kinds of kids so kids can see that they're not alone and that they can get through the challenging season that is childhood.

Why did you choose to write the novel in verse? Did you consider straight prose?

We come to poetry when prose is inadequate, when the content can only be in verse. There's that saying for musical theater, that the characters sing when the emotion's too strong for spoken word. They dance when the emotion's too strong for music. Poetry's like that. The emotion has to be so strong that it comes out organically in poetry. And my feelings about being neurodivergent in a neurotypical

world, all the exhaustion and overstimulation and confusion of not being able to keep up, the feelings were too big for prose. The first book, *Good Different*, just popped out in poems for me! It's Selah's organic voice, to talk in poems. I've also found that the verse helps readers who are different from Selah better understand an autistic perspective. The verse allows us to more viscerally feel what Selah's feeling. And that feeling, that helps create empathy for readers. So my hope is that the verse helps especially neurotypical readers increase in empathy and understanding of different autistic experiences.

You have two books launching this year, wow! *Perfect Enough* is out on June 2, and *obsolete hill*, a full-length poetry collection, launches in the fall. Did you write them simultaneously, and if so, how did you dance between manuscripts? Or did timing just work out this way?

There is so much we can't control as writers, and the publishing journey is one of them! I wrote the first draft of *obsolete hill* in 2020. It was accepted for publication with Fernwood Press in 2024. Ironically, around that same time, I proposed the idea for *Perfect Enough* and it sold! So it's just how it worked out this time. I didn't write them simultaneously, but a poetry collection tends to come in little pieces that are gathered over time. I tend to focus on one narrative project at a time (whether that's prose fiction or a novel in verse) but I always get ideas for other projects that I store away. I might chip away a little at a collection, or write down notes for a novel idea. I don't like transitions, so I try to focus as much as I can on finishing a draft before I move on to the next one, but we can't control when ideas hit us (or deadlines!). If I need to dance between projects, I find music helps me with the transition. Every novel at least has its own playlist, usually a video game soundtrack that helps get me in the headspace of that world.

Given that book promotion often falls heavily on a writer, what are the challenges of marketing two at once?

So I am very privileged in that Scholastic does market my kidlit books quite well. In fact, the marketing they do is much more productive than anything I could do on my own, connecting to educators and librarians who can get my book in the hands of kid readers. That said, I do still do marketing, though I've learned to really focus my efforts less on individual readers and more on

“

We need stories about all kinds of kids so kids can see that they're not alone and that they can get through the challenging season that is childhood.

—Meg Eden Kuyatt

”

librarian and teacher conferences, school visits, grants for school visits, that sort of thing.

The challenge right now for marketing two at once are the different audiences. While great for readers of all ages, *Perfect Enough* is particularly targeted toward elementary and middle school readers, providing opportunities to connect with schools and

school programs. *obsolete hill* is more literary in genre, and for older readers. I think what I'm telling myself this year is to just do the best I can, focus on what I enjoy, and be strategic on where I can kill two birds with one stone, or get the best marketing bang for my limited energy. I'm giving myself rules like, no pitching to conferences more than 2 hrs' drive away. Focus on virtual and local events. Collaborate when possible. Don't do it if your target readers aren't there. As a general rule, don't do any in-person events for free. For everything you say yes to, make sure to also say no—you cannot do everything.

What's next for you? Will we hear from Selah again?

We'll see! I have an idea for a third Selah book, but that's up to Scholastic. I think they'll want to see how well *Perfect Enough* does, so if the idea of a third book excites you, please support the release through preordering and/or requesting at your local library!

Editorial Consultant

Kathryn Johnson, Author for HarperCollins and Oliver-Heber Books, works with new and experienced authors to help them make their fiction the best it can be. If you're looking for professional support for your writing, consider reaching out to her for these services:

- Coaching
- Developmental Editing
- Critical Read/Manuscript Analysis

Kathryn@WriteByYou.com



FROM SCIENCE TO FICTION

A RELUCTANT SCIENTIST'S JOURNEY TO DEBUT NOVELIST

By Rajendrani Mukhopadhyay

I worshipped books and those who wrote them from a young age. I was also thrilled when every English teacher I came across praised my writing. However, when I turned 16, I made a decision: I silenced my heart's pleas to become a novelist and struck out to become a scientist. Since then, I have spent much of the rest of my life undoing that decision.

Thinking that science was the most practical route to a steady paycheck, I picked biochemistry as my college major as I couldn't decide between biology or chemistry. Through sheer grit and a mean competitive streak, I graduated with a bachelor's of science degree; then, like a racehorse with blinders on, I went for a graduate degree.

Graduate school was excruciating. I lacked the patience and manual dexterity needed for benchwork. I couldn't stand going through a weeklong protocol only to find that I had lost the precious protein or DNA sample four days before and was working with buffered water.

I learned that instant gratification wasn't a thing in research. It could take months, even years, to know if your research supported the hypothesis you set out to test. Getting data that were reliable and accurate took a lot of grunt work; getting satisfying results to take your research farther took a cool temperament. For someone who thrived on checking off a daily to-do list and immediately moving onto a new thing the next day, the crawl of research didn't suit me at all. I felt joyless with a lowkey dread of abject failure. I had to get out.

Getting out was not easy. The graduate program was designed to produce researchers and nothing else. I learned this the hard way when I asked the director of my graduate program during a student group

lunch where I could learn more about alternative careers. "Alternative careers" was the phrase used for any career outside of research at academic, industry, and government laboratories. "We are not here for alternative careers," was the curt response I received in a tone that made it clear that I was not to bring up the subject again.

Despair took over. I didn't have a back-up plan. I had worked so hard to get into this Ph.D. program that it hurt to think of the effort as wasted. Dropping out of graduate school was out of the question. It would have been an admission of defeat; I have always been stubborn about never throwing in the towel. I also recognized that I had been granted a chance of a lifetime to study at a premier science institution. I quietly asked my fellow graduate students if they knew about possible careers to pursue besides research. The options seemed limited to consulting and teaching. I knew I wasn't born to do either.

I grimly stuck with the program even as I felt my spark slowly extinguish. One day, I came across the university's adult enrichment program while I waited for an experiment to run. I discovered that the program offered writing classes. My boyfriend, seeing how miserable and dejected I was, suggested I revisit my childhood dream of writing. He gifted me a creative writing class that was held in the evening once a week.

At the first session, as we started the first writing exercise, I felt a weight lift from my shoulders. I almost laughed out loud in the class for feeling joy again. I was doing something that felt natural.

Of course, in my daytime existence as a graduate student, no one had an answer whenever I asked if there was a way for me to mix my scientific training with writing. I got a lot of blank stares until,

one day, I screwed up the courage and asked the department chair. Unlike some of the other faculty I encountered, he didn't believe in squashing student dreams of alternative careers. He excitedly told me, "Yes. It's called science writing and I will help you if that's what you want to do. I believe the world needs science-literate writers."

The department chair pushed me to read nonfiction writers, like Richard Dawkins, and, more importantly, used his connections to introduce me to science writers and editors, people that I didn't even know existed until he told me. He was friends with the editor-in-chief of a university magazine and talked her into taking me on as an apprentice.

The editor-in-chief wasn't thrilled to have a kid on her hands who had no idea the difference between a headline and a lede. But she was trapped by friendship. She handed me a 250-word assignment with a deadline two weeks away. I poured over those 250 words, emailed them to her, and, a few days later, trotted over to her office for her edits. She threw the printout of my submission back at me, shredded with red ink, and barked, "Study the science articles in *The New Yorker*, *The Washington Post*, and *The New York Times*. That is writing worth the ink." I was careful to cry only once I got back to my desk.

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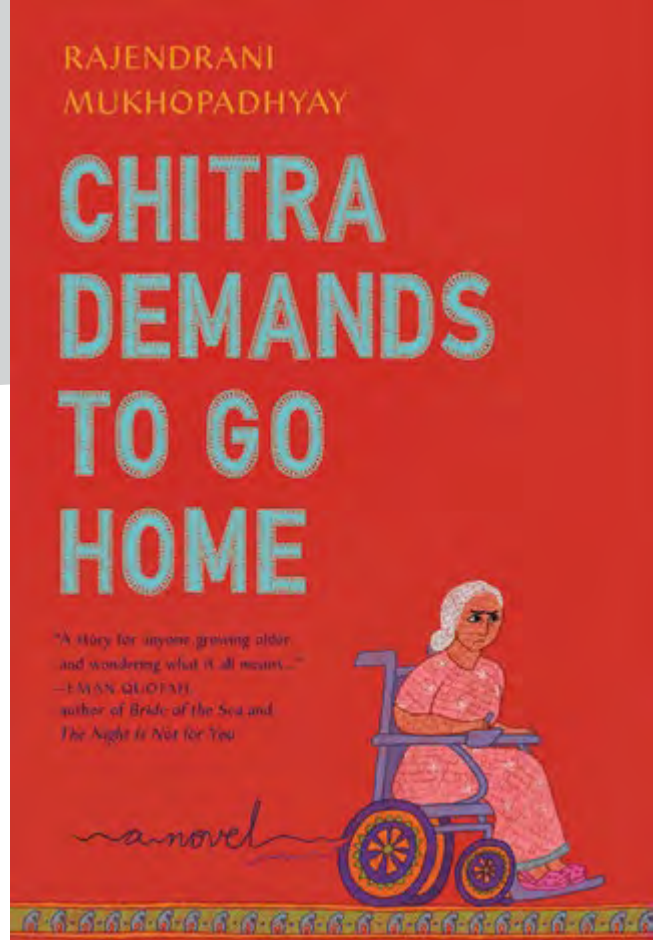
The scrutiny of other people's writing, not just reading for pleasure, became a habit.

”

—Rajendrani Mukhopadhyay

Once I dried my tears, I subscribed to the newspapers and began to pour over the Tuesday science sections of *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* and analyzed the sentence structures in the articles appearing in *The New Yorker*. The scrutiny of other people's writing, not just reading for pleasure, became a habit.

I redid the shredded assignment, this time listening to my own storytelling voice which I had ignored on the first round, thinking my natural writing voice wasn't worthy of being printed. I was told to keep the 250-word pieces coming. After the next assignment, the editor-in-chief, now feeling she had fulfilled the



favor, handed me off to her senior science writer who eventually became a mentor.

I was starting to clue in now: If I wanted to be a writer, I had to jerry-rig my own education. I kept taking evening classes, getting into the lab at 6:30am so I could show up for 7pm workshops. Smothering my fear of rejection, I started to ask other faculty members where I could learn more about science writing. One professor recommended I get in touch with a new hire in the university's media relations office. She took me under her wing. She and the senior science writer supported my application to the National Association of Science Writers, helped me craft cover letters and my resume for science writing jobs, and encouraged me to build up a portfolio by writing for any outlet willing to take my work.

I focused on finishing my Ph.D. and landing a science writing job. After a nearly yearlong search, I was offered a job at a science association that published several magazines.

Science is dense with detail. Scientists are trained to cram minutiae, from room temperatures to concentrations, into their papers and presentations so that other scientists can replicate the work.

Even outside of the scientific papers, scientists, bless their hearts, love to explain every intricacy, sometimes even without prompting. But a news story can't hold all those details. Working at print magazines was a merciless lesson in word count. I had to excel at knowing what details I must report to my readers and what to leave behind. If words had to be cut to fit the page, hold your whining. With the word count and overwhelm of scientific information to sift through, I learned to be brutal about details. The process taught me not to be precious about my words, understanding that my darlings would be killed by others, if not me. I grew to appreciate that my work was in service to the readers.

As years became a decade and the second decade began, I never changed my approach to writing. I remained a student of writing. I guarded my beginner's mindset, believing craft suffers when complacency sets in. I took classes periodically at The Writer's Center, even as I progressed up the professional ladder and, then as an editor, took on the mentorship of fledgling science writers.

But there continued to be twinges in my heart about writing a novel. I convinced myself that it was best not to test my good fortune by wanting more. I reminded myself of the cringing scraps of fiction I produced when I was in the graduate-school evening classes. Despite the voice telling me that I was a more experienced writer, I told myself that I didn't have the power to write fiction. I kept reminding myself of my powerlessness even when an idea for a novel—one about an elderly Indian woman feeling trapped in an American assisted living facility—started whispering to me in 2018.

I ignored the whispers until 2024, a few months after my father died the night before I was scheduled to have a total hip replacement. The gut-punch of simultaneously recovering from major surgery and grief woke me up. I started listening to the whispers.

I began to write the novel. As a science writer, I knew how to consider plot, use dialogue for effect, and craft a narrative arc. But there was still plenty of room for me to freak out.

In journalism, facts made up the beginning, middle, and end of a story. If you do your reporting correctly, the parts of the story are all there. In fiction writing, nothing is fact. The release from reality was frightening. Even giving my main character a name caused me *agita*. It took a lot of deep breaths to give myself the permission to make shit up.

Furthermore, in fiction, you keep writing until you decide to stop. There wasn't any word-count cutoff for me to adhere to. I felt like a cow on the lam, not sure what to do with my freedom from the fences of journalism.

After six months of writing, I abandoned the novel. I couldn't even decide on the main character's name. However, I had signed up for a workshop at The Writer's Center and didn't want the hassle of getting a refund. I showed up for the workshop series, thinking I could hone my craft as an essayist. I showed up to class one week and, to my horror, realized that I got the date of the open mic reading wrong. It was that day and I had nothing on me to read. I surreptitiously searched my phone under the table and discovered I had emailed myself a chapter of the novel a few months previously. I announced to the group that the excerpt was from my abandoned novel and read in an embarrassed rush. When I finished, there was a stillness. Then someone asked, "Why did you abandon the novel?"

I finished writing the rest of the novel. I put in a dedication page to my parents. After the whole novel was written, I panicked that the character's name would make one of my parent's friends think the book was about her, which wasn't true, but still, the fear rose up. I did a search-replace across the whole manuscript to change the name of the main character. (Later, I was thankful for the change because the name went on to feature in the book title; the original name wouldn't have the same musicality as the new name in the title.) Then I threw myself down the paths of uncomfortable places and unknown people in hopes that the manuscript would attract someone's kind attention. I came across Kathryn Fay, founder and publisher of Modern Artist Press, who looked past my fish-out-of-water vibe at the 2025 Washington Writer's Conference. Now, on May 12, 2026, my debut novel, *Chitra Demands to Go Home*, will be published by Modern Artist Press.

Rajendrani Mukhopadhyay, who goes by "Raj," originally trained as a scientist. After earning a Ph.D. in biochemistry and cellular and molecular biology, Raj launched a career in science communications. For nearly two decades, she worked as a science storyteller in various forms, including as a journalist and the leader of an award-winning custom content studio. Raj was selected by Poets & Writers to be one of the 2025 Get the Word Out fiction fellows. *Chitra Demands to Go Home* is her debut novel. Raj has lived in India, Kuwait, and Canada. She is now based in the U.S. with her partner, two children, two dogs, and two cats.



NEW BOOKS FROM THE WRITER'S CENTER FAMILY!

TURN (W)HERE: A GEOGRAPHY OF HOME Chet'la Sebree • chetylasebree.com

At eighteen, Chet'la Sebree began, as she writes, “perfecting the art of leaving.” After moving out of her parents’ house in Delaware for college, the lauded poet, essayist, and academic rarely kept the same address for more than two years—bouncing from city to city, country to country, perpetually in search of her next adventure. For Sebree, traveling has been a life-long passion, forged during family road trips and vacations with friends; college study abroad programs in Europe; and far-flung writing residencies and job opportunities. She dreamed of one day taking her own Great American Road Trip, Jack Kerouac-style—except refashioned as a millennial Black woman who had also begun considering her next chapter: settling down and starting a solo fertility journey. In *Turn (W)here*, Sebree turns to the page for answers, seamlessly weaving memoir with history and cultural criticism in a collection of inventive essays bound by themes of movement, home, inheritance, and belonging. Spanning continents, geographies, and states of mind, Sebree lights a pathway for the wanderer, the seeker—anyone propelled into the unknown by the desire for a place to truly belong.

THE GREAT WHEREVER

Shannon Sanders • shannonsanderswrites.com

At thirty-two, Aubrey Lamb is stumbling through adulthood. An underpaid gig worker in Washington, DC, she’s grieving the end of a serious relationship and the recent loss of her father. When Aubrey learns she has inherited his stake in a sizable Tennessee farm she sees an opportunity to get out of the city—and to erase a mounting pile of debt. Watching her arrival with great interest are four ghosts—Aubrey’s ancestors, who’ve staked their own claims to the farm and who never hesitate to pass judgment on the mistakes made by the living, whether romantic, financial, or sartorial. As Aubrey reconnects with her living family, another story

unfolds in parallel: the history of the land, beginning with its purchase by Thomas, Aubrey’s great-grandfather and one of the first Black landowners in his community. Though Thomas hopes to give his children a homestead on which they could flourish, the land proves to be a burdensome inheritance. Over the years, it turns the Lambs against one another, culminating in a catastrophic tragedy that splinters the family and echoes through the decades.

A ROOM IN BOMBAY

Manil Suri • manilsuri.com

Indian American author Manil Suri grew up in a large crumbling apartment in Bombay (now Mumbai) which his parents, who were Hindu, shared with three Muslim families. Their single room, at times a refuge from the religious and territorial tensions pervading the apartment, was also a prison that held them captive—his parents stuck in an unhappy marriage, the author unable to explore the dawning realization he might be gay. At age 20, Suri managed to break free and come to the US, where he finally found the freedom to embrace his sexuality and find a life partner. But the room, which still held his parents hostage, kept wrenching him back to Bombay. This remarkable, gripping memoir explores how an abode can shape destiny, while delving into the difficult question of how much to prioritize our parents’ happiness over our own. Inspired by over 2,700 letters the author wrote home over three decades, it is ultimately a testament to the abiding, unbreakable bond tying a son to his mother.



Page 27

Malaika Handa
Crossword
Answer Key

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lore (n.): a particular tradition.



poet (n.): **You.**

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