



THE WRITER'S CENTER

**MAGAZINE
FALL 2026**

FREE

- 08 Deesha Philyaw
on her new novel**
- 12 Writing classes
& free events**
- 36 A deep dive into
poetry translation**

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-Donna

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-Katherine

"It was one of the best retreats I have ever experienced... The atmosphere of the house and owners made this week a place that encouraged my creativity and provided a restful and beautiful setting."
-Barbara

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THE WRITER'S CENTER MAGAZINE FALL 2026

04 FROM OUR BOARD CHAIR

05 THE WRITER'S CENTER: THIRTY-TWO YEARS LATER

By Jen Siraganian

08 FUNNY, BRASH & GROUNDED

A Discussion with Deesha Philyaw about her debut novel, *The True Confessions of First Lady Freeman*

By Zach Powers

12 FALL 2026 WORKSHOPS

26 FREE EVENTS FOR WRITERS

27 THE ORIGIN OF STORIES

By Diana Rojas

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

33 HEALTHY DISRUPTIONS

An Interview with Diane Zinna about her new craft book, *Letting Grief Speak*

By Zach Powers

36 ONE POET, TWO TRANSLATORS

Preserving the Essence of Voice

By Yvette Neisser

39 NEW BOOKS

This summer, as our country marks its 250th anniversary, we here at The Writer's Center are celebrating a milestone of our own: 50 years of supporting writers and everyone who wants to write.

The timing of this anniversary at this moment in our country feels apt. The publishing industry is fracturing at the same time our national media system is undergoing significant changes. The literary community is among those national institutions engaged in debate over issues of freedom of expression, diversity of voice, and access to opportunity. And writers, like most Americans, are still working out what to make of AI.

We are not new to change and challenge. For five decades, the Writer's Center has been a steady presence, helping our community navigate changes in the literary world and evolving to meet the needs and interests of writers and creators. I, for one, can trace my own creative journey back to The Writer's Center. Over the years, it has served as a training ground for my writing, a proving ground for rough drafts, and a launching pad for my first book. The Center intends to remain that voice in the decades to come—a constant beacon for anyone in our community seeking resources, support, and fellowship.

I encourage you to dive into our fall issue and learn about our robust offerings of creative writing workshops and free events. Equally as important, look for opportunities to connect with fellow writers to talk through what's happening in publishing, in the literary world, and in the craft itself.

What has served our country well in the past, and what has served this institution well, is community: people of different views coming together and finding common ground around shared values.

Thank you for your continued support of The Writer's Center, and here's to 50 more incredible years.

— Steve Majors, author and TWC Board Chair



Learn and see more at lindsaymuellerart.com.

ABOUT THE COVER

Lindsay Mueller

A Few More Steps, 2024

Oil and plaster on wood panel
65 x 45 inches approx.

Lindsay Mueller is an artist fascinated by the layered relationships humans have with outdoor spaces, especially those shaped by American tendencies to romanticize nature. She creates paintings inspired by local fragments of landscape, often incorporating sculptural elements in her process.

Originally from Bucks County, Pennsylvania, she now lives and works in Arlington, Virginia. Mueller holds a BFA in Painting and a BA in Psychology from Boston University and an MFA in Visual Arts from American University. She has exhibited across the Eastern United States at venues including the University of Mary Washington, Adah Rose Gallery, the Peale Museum, and Chautauqua Institution. In 2023 she received the Bethesda Painting Young Artist Award, and she was a 2025 Sondheim Art Prize semifinalist. She is currently an artist-in-residence at MoCA Arlington.

The Writer's Center: Thirty-Two Years Later

By Jen Siraganian

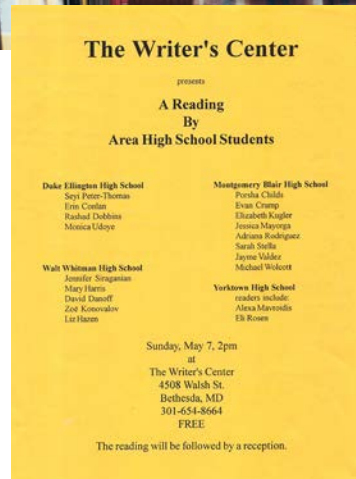
Concrete steps, gray brick, glass doors.

The first time I entered the double doors of The Writer's Center was in 1994 at the invitation of the late Dr. Martin Galvin, my favorite teacher at Walt Whitman High School and a poet who had already published a collection. He told me that TWC was hosting a literary reading featuring poets from local high schools, and he suggested my name. Wearing an itchy brown sweater dress purchased from my favorite thrift store in downtown Bethesda, I read poems at a podium to a room full of teachers and parents, including my own.

Two years later. I was in a dark place. During my first year at Columbia University, I expected to find happiness and endless writing classes, such as the ones attended by literary legends Louise Glück, Federico García Lorca, and Jack Kerouac. Yet upon meeting with the head of the creative writing department, I was informed that due to the core curriculum, there was no space in my schedule for poetry workshops until my junior year. After a few months, I realized that attending college in the middle of Manhattan was not only mesmerizing with nightly talks, Broadway plays, and free jazz clubs, but also completely overwhelming and depleting.

By the time I returned to my parents' home in May after that first year, I had lost twenty pounds, I listened to Trent Reznor CDs on repeat, and my skin exuded a grayish hue that others commented on. Most of all, I had no desire to emerge from my childhood bedroom.

I took many steps that summer to extract myself from my sadness. The first was to adopt a barely socialized



kitten from the basement of a three-story house across the street from NIH. The second was to enroll in my first formal poetry workshop.

When I walked into the workshop room at TWC, I saw my teacher, Rose Solari, with her large blonde curls, big-beaded chunky jewelry, and most of all, her intense warmth, exuberance, and energy.

We met weekly, generating a new poem for each session. The regularity and deadlines were essential elements which still prove necessary for my writing practice. Each week, I planned and brainstormed, drafted and revised. As if I was presenting a new gift to a beloved friend, I exuded pride and nervousness as I showed up each week holding copies of my printed poem to share with my classmates.

As we workshoped each poem, I adored how my classmates' poems served like little windows into their minds. After they read, I felt closer and softer to the vulnerable aspects of who they were. As I read my own poems to the group, I listened to the sighs or chuckles that echoed in the brick room or paid attention when there were no sounds at all—another telling sign.

Sitting at the workshop table, Rose provided various prompts, but most of all, she shared poems spoken by voices that took risks and pushed against the expected. Likewise, she encouraged us to write about the topics that terrified us. As I explored personal histories that had never solidified on the page, I wrote about the things that I shared with no one: witnessing my mother battle two bouts of cancer when I was an adolescent, my father's introverted nature, and my grandfather's racism.

That summer, TWC was one of the few places I ventured to outside of my bedroom, and it provided safety and acceptance, both of which I needed at the time. Rose demonstrated the importance of kindness in workshops, especially that raw honesty sprouts from the soil of safety, where risk and experimentation are encouraged.

In that small brick room, I was half and sometimes a third of the age of the other participants, but Rose never created a sense of othering or suggested that I was not equipped to use my voice. Instead, I could address topics such as cancer and no one questioned, "what do you know?" Here, no writer stormed out of the room, slammed doors, or burst into sobs when their poems were decimated, because no poems were decimated. No, Rose uplifted and encouraged us, and those walls were safe.



“

TWC built the scaffolding for essential lessons as a teacher, a poet, and a human being.

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—Jen Siraganian

At eighteen, I was far from a prodigy, and I still had much to learn in terms of craft, language, and form. But I recognized that I wanted to write poetry, and that this workshop fed me in a deep and significant way. The following year, I transferred to a college with an open curriculum where I could register for writing workshops each semester for the remaining semesters of my college career (and I did).

Twelve years later when the darkness descended again, Rose's teachings on embracing fear and taking risks resonated. I used the well of fear and hopelessness to take the leap I always wanted to do—move to California. Even though I knew no one, lacked an apartment, and did not even have a specific neighborhood in mind, I flew to San Francisco with three suitcases and a cat carrier containing the same cat I adopted as a kitten from the house near NIH.

Throughout the years, whether instructing students through Writers in the Schools programs, at libraries as the former poet laureate of Los Gatos, California, or at independent schools, I am still informed by Rose's teachings. I stress the importance of accessibility and openness, in hopes that students will feel included and invited. For creative writing to not only emerge but also flourish, I insist that during workshopping, students address



the positives and places of energy in a poem, before they raise the questions or identify any weakness. What is essential is a classroom that exudes safety and an accepting and encouraging teacher who pushes students to be fearless.

My debut poetry collection *Everything Has Been Moved, Even the Dead*, won the 2026 Perugia Press Poetry Prize and is about to be birthed into the world this September. I could not be more terrified. The poems in this collection are a decade in the making, and they grapple with fragmentation, inheritance, memory, belonging, and intergenerational trauma, as I describe my grandparents' survival during the Armenian Genocide, explore my father's childhood in Palestine, and debate an abortion after an accidental pregnancy.

Yes, excitement and anxiety go hand and hand, but to be addressing homophobia in the Armenian American diasporan community, the forced displacement of Palestinians (including my own father), or abortion in the current political climate cannot be treated glibly. At night, anxious questions boil over in my mind. Will I offend some readers?

Anger others? This book contains so many truths I wish I could have spoken when I was a young, and I attempt to push through the fears that have forced me to be silent.

After thirty years, I recognize how lucky I was to have a place like TWC and its wealth of resources located four miles from my childhood home. TWC built the scaffolding for essential lessons as a teacher, a poet, and a human being, and proved what I needed—warmth, acceptance, and a deadline to show up with a printed poem in hand.

Jen Siraganian is an Armenian-American writer, former poet laureate of Los Gatos, CA, and author of *Everything Has Been Moved, Even the Dead*, which won the 2026 Perugia Press Prize. Her poems have won the *New Ohio Review* Poetry Prize, and appeared in *AGNI*, *Best New Poets 2016* and *2025*, *Electric Literature*, *Poetry Daily*, *The Rumpus*, and *Heaven Looks Like Us: Palestinian Poetry*. A former managing director of Litquake: San Francisco's Literary Festival, she is a Lucas Artist Fellow at the Montalvo Arts Center.



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:

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Funny, Brash & Grounded

A DISCUSSION WITH DEESHA PHILYAW ABOUT HER DEBUT NOVEL, *THE TRUE CONFESSIONS OF FIRST LADY FREEMAN*

By Zach Powers



At The Writer's Center we were first introduced to Deesha Philyaw during a virtual event in 2020. Since then, her debut story collection, *The Secret Lives of Church Ladies*, exploded onto the national literary scene, garnering praise and not a few award recognitions. So, I was exceedingly excited to receive an advance copy of her debut novel, *The True Confessions of First Lady Freeman*, and honored that Deesha took the time to chat with me via email. If this is your first time learning about this book, I guarantee it won't be the last.

Zach Powers: I love that this novel is clearly connected to the concerns and writing style of your stories, but it's also a departure from them or, at the very least, an elaboration upon them. What were the rewards and/or challenges of bringing some of the narrative concerns you investigated in short form to long form?

Deesha Philyaw: The biggest challenge with long form was the same as with short form: to satirize and critique the Black evangelical church, without sneering at it. I try to stay mindful of this observation by George Saunders: "It's hard to be sufficiently involved in satirizing something you don't like. That's just sneering. Satire is, I think, a sort of bait-and-switch. You decide to satirize something, so you gaze at it hard enough and long enough to be able to say something true and funny and maybe angry or critical—but you first had to gaze at it for a long time. I mean, gazing is a form of love, right?" Both my books are me gazing at the Black church, which I

was a part of for nearly all of the first 35 years of my life. I love and appreciate folks who are still in the church. I love and appreciate the church at its best. I revere it as the cornerstone of the Black community and Black life after Emancipation. The first schools and colleges for formerly enslaved people and their descendants grew out of Black churches.

At the same time, I remember what James Baldwin said: "I love America more than any other country in the world, and, for this reason, I insist on the right to criticize her perpetually." My critique of the worst of the Black church is an ongoing project. The reward of the long form, the novel, is that I got to build a whole world as a canvas for this project. The compact form of a short story contains a whole world too, but with the forced economy of that form, there's much less possible in the way of world building. With my novel, the world I build holds multiple physical and psychical locales, multiple relationships, multiple timelines. There's more room for the love and the critique, more room to interrogate "isms," contradictions, double standards, and toxic binaries. And there's more room to revel and laugh and clutch pearls and delight in the multitudes of who we are as Black folks.

I think I'm always first struck by your narrators. I see them as empowered and aware of the artifice of their everyday lives, but also somewhat stuck in those lives and not always entirely self-aware. And I think Schar definitely fits that description. Can you talk about what interests you in a narrator? Why do you choose to write from the perspective of a particular character?

Sometimes, the character is a past version of me, so writing her is a kind of do-over. She's me, but younger or older or braver or more reckless or less conscientious. Me, but with the perfect comeback that I was too frozen in the real moment to spout off. Sometimes the character is someone I'm really curious about, someone I wish I knew. Or they are a villain whose unexpected layers I want to figure out.

Like the story itself, the character is my answer to the question, "What if. . .?" What if a girl who grew up on the wrong side of the tracks got everything she thought she wanted, and then it all came crashing down?" Building the character involves asking further questions, finding out more about this girl and what it was like for her growing up the way she did. Who raised her? Who mothered her? How was she loved and how does that inform how and who she loves and mothers now? Why does she want the things she wants? Who and what shaped her desires? Who made it possible for her to get everything she wanted? And what did it cost her? How many of her scars does she show the world?

So, even if the character/narrator doesn't know the answers to all these questions herself, I have to know the answers in order to determine if theirs is

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The reward of the long form, the novel, is that I got to build a whole world as a canvas for this project.

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—Deesha Philyaw

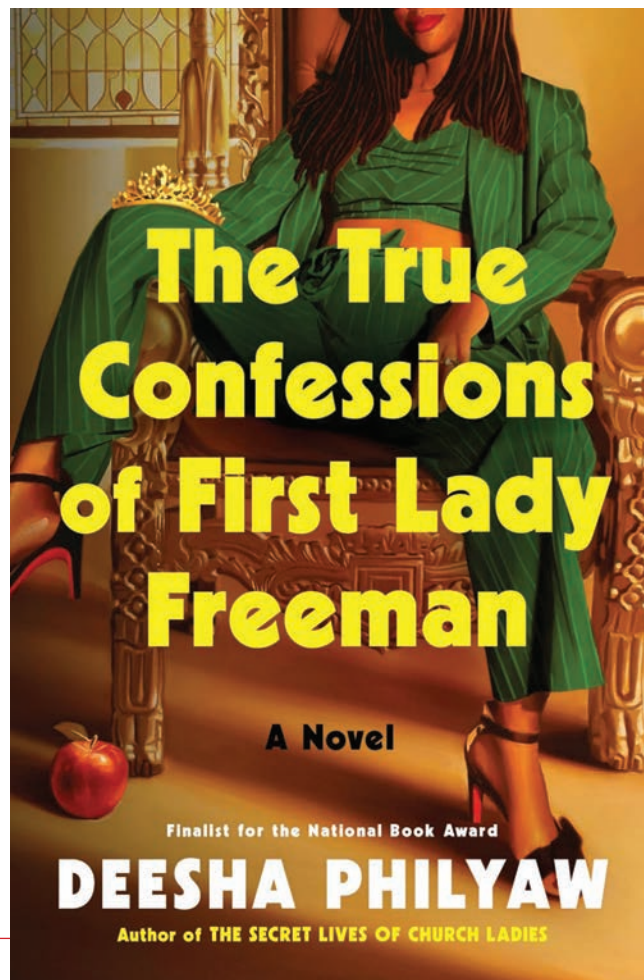
a compelling enough perspective from which to tell the story.

Let's talk tone! I think you have a brilliant knack for creating a surface-level tone that's in friction with a story's undercurrents. What's your approach to tone overall and, in particular, how did you think about and develop the tone in this novel? Is the tone in place in draft number one, or is it something you work toward in revision?

The tone is something that developed over the twenty years I was writing the novel. In the early incarnations of the book, my main character, Scharisse, was dissatisfied being a first lady, a pastor's wife. She had some humorous moments but her general demeanor was miserable, and the tone of the narrative was quite navel-gazey and woe-is-me. I hated it, and I didn't like the character. Schar, as I wrote her for nearly a decade, moved through the world the way I would if I was married to a pastor. Thankfully, with my agent's help, I eventually realized that in order to breathe life into this character and for her to have a real story, I would have to free her up to become someone who, unlike me, loved being a first lady and all that came with it. Once I rewrote the character to embrace the pageantry and performance of the Black church, her voice emerged—funny, brash, and grounded—and the tone of the novel followed suit.

I think there are so many scenes in this novel that might each be taken as a masterclass in scenic writing. How are you thinking about the novel as a collection of scenes, and how do you provide stand-alone energy within a scene?

Early in my writing career, my stories were weighed down by too much exposition, too much time in the character's head. These days, my drafts tend to



start with scenes and dialogue. Writing screenplays to adapt my stories for television helped my novel writing immensely in this regard. I learned to get into each scene as late as possible and end the scene as quickly as possible, with minimal exposition and minimal time spent in the character's head. I believe this is what, in part, gives a scene its energy. That tautness. However, at times in my novel draft, I was too good at that, too efficient. Those were some of the moments where my editor gave a note suggesting that I linger a bit longer, use some exposition. That rhythm—draft short, revise long—seems to work for me with a novel, but it's the opposite for short stories. With short stories, my process is to draft long and then pare back in revision. I also made cuts while revising the novel, but I was adding at the same time that I was cutting, trusting that, ultimately, I would land where I needed to.

I used the word “energy” in my previous question, and I think that’s a concept we don’t spend a lot of time thinking about as writers. The more I think about your work, though, I feel like I want to discuss energy as an element of the craft of fiction. Does that resonate with you at all? How do you feel energy and forward motion on the page, and how do you keep the energy going?

I’m my own first reader and audience, so I have to be

able to hold my own interest. And I get bored easily. Energy and forward motion in a story keep me from becoming bored. Playing with form is one way I stave off boredom. Another is raising the stakes for my characters and the story as a whole. Historically, my first drafts have been low stakes, including in my novel. So experimenting with ways to raise stakes is a great way to keep the energy and engagement flowing. Giving the character something to want (or want to avoid) more than anything. Letting the last thing the character wants to happen—the worst possible thing—letting that happen. What’s the most unfair or unexpected or ironic or messy thing that could happen? Or I might set a ticking clock. Something has to happen by this time, or at this juncture . . . or else. Or there’s the build up to a competition or other milestone event. Revealing your “good” character’s hidden or fatal flaws, or showing your villain’s vulnerabilities are also solid ways to raise stakes and keep the energy flowing.

What’s one piece of advice you’d give to a writer just starting out on drafting a novel?

Remember that your first draft has only one job: it just has to exist. It doesn’t have to be good. Embrace revision—many, many, many, many rounds of revision, including with your editor, after the book is sold.

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

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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!

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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.

**FALL 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!

FALL 2026 WORKSHOPS

KID LIT

THE FIRST 50 PAGES: CRAFTING THE YA NOVEL with Charlene Thomas

9/10/26 – 10/1/26 • 4 Thursdays • 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Zoom • Beginner / Intermediate • \$215

Over four weeks, participants will focus on the essential elements that make for strong opening pages in a YA novel, including narrative momentum, character development, and line-level clarity—with each session combining craft discussion and targeted revision strategies.

WRITING PICTURE BOOKS with Mary Quattlebaum

10/8/26 – 10/22/26 • 3 Thursdays • 7:00 PM – 9:30 PM

Zoom • Beginner / Intermediate • \$150

By the end of the workshop, participants should have written and/or revised part or all of a picture book and have a better sense of how to create one in the future. Feedback will be offered on in-class exercises only, rather than workshopping writing done outside of class.

WRITING PICTURE BOOKS II with Mary Quattlebaum and Joan Waites

11/19/26 • Thursday • 6:30 PM – 9:30 PM

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

Learn to revise and polish your picture book manuscript before submitting to an agent or publisher. During this hands-on workshop, writers will be editing their own manuscripts and enhancing their skills as picture book creators. Bring your questions and two double-spaced copies of a picture-book manuscript that you've revised.

FICTION

INTRO TO THE NOVEL with Tammy Greenwood

9/4/26 – 10/23/26 • 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, but the emphasis will be on discovering the writing process that works best for each writer.

CREATING NOVEL CHARACTERS with Tammy Greenwood

9/4/26 – 9/25/26 • 4 Weeks • Asynchronous

Wet Ink • All Levels • \$215

This workshop will focus on the development of authentic characters. Participants will explore the main character(s) in their novels-in-progress.

PREPARING YOUR WORK FOR SUBMISSION with Marija Stajic

9/12/26 – 11/14/26 • 10 Saturdays • 10:30 AM – 1:00 PM

Zoom • Intermediate/Advanced • \$415

This workshop will combine discussion of craft principles, practical publishing guidance, and analysis of participant work in a supportive, workshop-based setting. Participants should have a draft of a short story or novel excerpt up to 3000 words.

EXPERIMENTATION IN FLASH FICTION with Hananah Zaheer

9/14/26 – 10/5/26 • 4 Weeks • Asynchronous

Web Ink • All Levels • \$215

Discover how creative constraints can unlock surprising new possibilities in your writing. In this four-week generative workshop, we will explore how playing with time, form, and omission can change stories and move them beyond the familiar.

FROM NOVICE TO NOVELIST with John DeDakis

9/16/26 – 10/21/26 • 6 Wednesdays • 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Zoom • Beginner / Intermediate • \$295

This workshop deconstructs and demystifies the novel-writing process for struggling and/or aspiring writers. By the end of our time together, you'll be prepared to begin work on a novel and will be equipped with the skills to perfect it.

THE EXTREME NOVELIST with Kathryn Johnson

9/23/26 – 11/11/26 • 8 Wednesdays • 7:00 PM – 9:30 PM

Zoom • Intermediate / Advanced • \$395

Each author will commit to an aggressive writing schedule and learn the tricks to create a productive working environment. Each class will include accountability and progress reports from each student, a brief lecture on a key skill of fiction writing, and the opportunity to submit a portion of the students' works-in-progress to the instructor for individual feedback and guidance. (Note: This is not a workshopping course.)

NOVEL PREMISE & PITCH with Eva Langston

9/26/26 • Saturday • 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

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

In this workshop you'll learn three ways to create exciting ideas for novels and brainstorm a list of premises that are sure to get attention. You'll then craft short written pitches—for your completed novel, work-in-progress, and/or one of your new premises—and practice pitching your ideas to the class.

PLOTTING YOUR NOVEL with Tammy Greenwood

10/2/26 – 10/23/26 • 4 Weeks • Asynchronous

Web 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 CONFLICT AND TENSION with Kathryn Johnson

10/3/26 • Saturday • 10:00 AM – 12:30 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

Strengthening the conflict in any type of fiction will bump up the tension and turn limp, ordinary fiction into an extraordinary tale that will keep readers turning pages. Join us and leave with ideas to apply to your stories.

SHAPING BEGINNINGS & ENDINGS IN YOUR STORIES with Kelly Sather

10/13/26 – 10/27/26 • 3 Tuesdays • 6:00 PM – 8:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$150

Each week, looking closely at a few short story openings or endings, we'll discuss style, setting, characterization, and answer the often asked questions how to show and what to tell. Classes include generative exercises writing openings and endings, and guidance on developing a daily writing practice.

WRITING ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH TOPICS IN FICTION with Chris Gamble

10/17/26 • Saturday • 11:00 AM – 1:00 PM

Zoom • Beginner / Intermediate • \$60

Learn techniques to write about mental health with intention. Along with general guidelines, examples from popular media will be reviewed so you can learn how to avoid clichés and dig deeper into what shapes people’s various experiences with mental health. Participants will apply psychological concepts to plot and character development.

CRAFTING COMPELLING CHARACTERS with Katherine Pickett

10/22/26 • Thursday • 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Zoom • Beginner / Intermediate • \$60

In this class, we will explore three facets of character—tragic flaws, contradictory behavior, and backstory—and reveal how you can combine them to create characters readers will love. Come ready to write!

INTERMEDIATE NOVEL WRITING: THE 8 CS with Tammy Greenwood

10/30/26 – 12/18/26 • 8 Weeks • Asynchronous

Wet Ink • Intermediate / Advanced • \$395

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.

FICTION POV WORKSHOP with Tammy Greenwood

10/30/26 – 11/20/26 • 4 Weeks • Asynchronous

Wet Ink • All Levels • \$215

Do the multitude of Point of View options elude you? We will look at everything from the first person point of view to the editorial omniscient, as well as some of the less traditional points of view, to help you choose the best voice to tell your story.

REVISING THROUGH GENERATIVE PROMPTS with Atina Hartunia

11/5/26 • Thursday • 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

Through visual presentation, brief craft discussions, guided writing exercises, and opportunities to reflect and share, participants will use prompts to push both themselves and their characters in unexpected directions, breathing new life into stalled scenes and rediscovering the emotional momentum of their work.

CRAFTING FLASH FICTION with Ariel Katz

11/10/26 – 12/15/26 • 6 Tuesdays • 7:00 PM – 9:30 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$295

This course focuses on writing and reading *very* short fiction. By the end of the workshop, each participant will have written and received feedback on at least one very short story (under 2,000 words).

PLOT LIKE A PRO with Kathryn Johnson

11/21/26 • Saturday • 10:00 AM – 12:30 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

Learn the methods professional writers use to come up with winning plots for their fiction.

DIY NOVEL REVISION with Tammy Greenwood

11/27/26 – 12/18/26 • 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 workshop will take you through the revision and editing process step-by-step.

YOUR FIRST (OR NEXT) NOVEL with Kathryn Johnson

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

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

Learn how to generate a handful of plots to choose from, methods for effectively planning your story, and simple hacks for fine tuning your basic fiction skills. 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.

MIXED GENRE

FINDING YOUR AUTHENTIC VOICE with Lindsey Van Wagner

9/14/26 – 11/2/26 • 8 Weeks • Asynchronous

Wet Ink • All Levels • \$395

Over eight weeks, we'll be identifying unhelpful thoughts, deconstructing doubt, and building a sustained creative recovery practice that lets you write compelling pieces and foster a special connection with your readers.

WRITING SONG LYRICS with Al Basile

9/15/26 – 11/3/26 • 8 Tuesdays • 8:00 PM – 10:00 PM

Zoom • Intermediate • \$395

This course starts the participant on the practice of putting words together with music. We start with short phrases and build up to complete lyrics. By the end participants will have generated lyrics for a familiar existing song, and at least one lyric which can be set by a composer to produce a complete work.

HOW TO FIND AND END A STORY with Laura J. Oliver

9/19/26 • Saturday • 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

Using published examples, writing exercises, lively discussion, and expert instruction, this workshop will inspire from memory and imagination, the story you are meant to write with an ending that resonates.

BREATHWORK FOR CREATIVE BREAKTHROUGHS with Jenn Koiter

9/19/26 • Saturday • 2:30 PM – 5:00 PM

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

We will begin by learning a short breathwork technique that you can use whenever you write. We will then do a short experimental writing exercise to get in a writing headspace. The heart of the workshop will be a deep breathwork session, followed by a guided visualization to stimulate creativity. Please bring your own yoga mat and optional eye shade.

FINDING YOUR BALANCE: A FALL EQUINOX WORKSHOP with Lindsey Van Wagner

9/22/26 • Tuesday • 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

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

In this seasonal workshop, we'll use prompts and gentle ritual to reflect on what the past season has taught you, release what no longer serves, and write an intention to carry into what's next. You'll leave with several pieces of intuitive writing and a written intention for the season ahead.

YOUR WRITING JOURNEY BEGINS WITH YOUR JOURNEY with D. M. Cross

9/23/26 • Wednesday • 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Zoom • Beginner • \$60

With so many crazy things going on today, should you even think about writing your story? Come to this interactive zoom workshop and take the first steps in learning how to bring your writing into the world. Come prepared to put pen to paper or fingers to keyboard.

WRITE THE DAY with Indran Amirthanayagam

9/26/26 • Saturday • 11:00 AM – 1:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

In this workshop you will learn how to transform your daily life into poetry and stories starting from the close observation of everyday routines. This includes details ranging from waking up, preparing coffee and buttering bread, to recalling a dream, or walking in the woods.

ACTIVATING CREATIVITY THROUGH PLAY with Nikki Frias

10/7/26 • Wednesday • 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.

FROM IDEA TO FIRST DRAFT with Beth Kanter and Anna Kahoe

10/8/26 – 10/22/26 • 3 Thursdays • 6:30 PM – 9:30 PM

The Writer's Center • All Levels • \$150

The first session will focus on germinating new ideas or further exploring existing ones through prompts and discussion. The second is finding joy and harnessing the power of revision. The third and final session focuses on next steps and sharing your work. Writers will leave the class with a start of a new piece of creative nonfiction, memoir, or hybrid work.

WRITING BEYOND GENRE with Tonee Mae Moll

10/10/26 • Saturday • 11:00 AM – 1:00 PM

Zoom • Intermediate / Advanced • \$60

In this workshop, we'll explore writing that doesn't care what you call it, work that resists easy attempts at categorization and chooses to wow us instead. We'll read samples from some contemporary writers who are doing this best, then we'll get into prompts that lead us toward our own hard-to-classify texts.

UNCLOGGING YOUR BRAIN with Lisa Jan Sherman

10/13/26 • 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.

WRITING MARVELOUS MICROS with Caroline Bock

10/17/26 – 10/24/26 • 2 Saturdays • 10:00 AM – 12:30 PM

The Writer's Center • Intermediate/Advanced • \$100

Write 4-6 micros (stories 300 words or less) of fiction or creative nonfiction that are both standalone pieces and linked—and that dive into lyricism and emotional complexity.

HOW TO FIND YOUR VOICE with Laura J. Oliver

10/17/26 • Saturday • 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

Acquire the tools you need for developing a compelling voice of your own through the study of entertaining published examples, a clear explanation, and writing exercises designed to ignite your unique way of expressing yourself. You will enjoy a sense of excitement in this inspiring and instructive workshop as you successfully translate the voice in your head to the page.

CHARACTERS THAT MATTER (FICTION AND MEMOIR) with Lynn Auld Schwartz

10/17/26 • Saturday • 10:00 AM – 12:30 PM

Zoom • Beginner / Intermediate • \$60

Discover how to move beyond the superficial and cliché, crafting characters who invite the reader to explore the human condition. Illustrations and exercises will help you uncover your character's inner values (in memoir, that character is you), understand how flaws shape what a character wants and does, and recognize why a character must act—not just react—for a story to move forward.

JUMPSTART YOUR CREATIVITY: 3 GENRES with Patricia Gray

10/18/26 • Sunday • 1:00 PM – 4:00 PM

Zoom • Beginner / Intermediate • \$60

Jump-start 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 a memoir scene or character. Opportunities to read your writing aloud and receive positive feedback can help you identify your specific writing talents.

READING YOUR WORK OUT LOUD with Jennifer Hamady

10/19/26 • Monday • 6:00 PM – 9:00 PM

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

Spend an evening practicing and learning about the art of public speaking. This in-person coaching session will give you the opportunity to bring your voice—and self—to the words you've written. Please have on hand a number of pieces you'd be comfortable sharing during the meeting.

BOOT CAMP FOR WRITERS with Beth Kanter

10/20/26 – 12/15/26 • 7 Tuesdays • 10:30 AM – 1:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$350

This workshop is designed so that participants will have the start of six new pieces by the end of class. Each session will begin with a prompt followed by writing time. Participants will have the opportunity to share and discuss their work as well as receive in-class feedback. Note: No meeting November 3 and 24.

INTRODUCTION TO ART JOURNALING with Joan Waites

10/20/26 – 10/27/26 • 2 Tuesdays • 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

The Writer's Center • All Levels • \$100

Using quotes, poems and/or personal reflections, students will combine words with easy to follow art techniques to create an art journal reflecting their own personal style. *Students should bring to all classes a blank watercolor journal, 8x8 or larger. All other art materials used in class will be provided by instructor.

DIALOGUE MASTER CLASS with Aaron Hamburger

10/28/26 • Wednesday • 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

In this course, we'll look at transcripts of conversations from life and published work to develop strategies to make your dialogue shine in your writing. Then we'll do some targeted exercises to explore different types of dialogue strategies that go beyond direct quotation to create a symphony of distinct speaking voices for your characters.

MIXED GENRE

HOW TO WRITE A LOT with Kathryn Johnson

11/7/26 • 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! 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.

MAPPING STRATEGIES FOR STORY STRUCTURE with Lynn Auld Schwartz

11/14/26 • Saturday • 10:00 AM – 12:30 PM

Zoom • Beginner / Intermediate • \$60

There is no one-size-fits-all strategy for story structure. Let's discuss a plan that works for you. We'll examine your story's strengths and weaknesses, focusing on both the destination and the journey.

SHOW, DON'T TELL with Nikki Frias

11/18/26 • Wednesday • 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

This interactive writing workshop is designed to help participants bring their stories, ideas, and experiences to life on the page. Through creative writing activities, participants will practice moving beyond explanation and into vivid, specific, emotionally engaging writing.

NONFICTION

WRITING THE TRUTH: LESSONS IN NONFICTION WRITING with Eric Lichtblau

9/8/26 – 9/29/26 • 4 Tuesdays • 1:00 PM – 4:00 PM

Zoom • Beginner • \$215

The workshop is designed for beginning writers looking to gain a footing in non-fiction writing of different length and format, from first-person essays to long-form magazine writing and even book-length projects.

ARCHIVAL RESEARCH FOR CREATIVE WRITING with Saaref E. Yoseph

9/9/26 – 10/7/26 • 5 Wednesdays • 4:00 PM – 6:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$250

An introduction to archival research through narrative writing and experimentation. Learn how to work with historical resources and reconstruct your own story as a public history tool. Participants will engage in exercises to think and write through their own narrative projects, whether meant for personal memoir or public scholarship.

PUSHING GENRE BOUNDARIES: MORE THAN MEMOIR with Tonee Mae Moll

9/12/26 • Saturday • 11:00 AM – 1:00 PM

Zoom • Beginner / Intermediate • \$60

This workshop considers how big the genre of creative nonfiction can be by looking at the ways writers expand, explore, and break open different forms and sub-genres. We'll read a few short samples of contemporary writers who are pushing boundaries, then get into some prompts that lead us toward our own innovations in telling true stories.

For details and to register, visit writer.org!

TURNING YOUR WRITING PRACTICE INTO A CREATIVE OFFERING with GG Renee Hill

9/13/26 – 9/20/26 • 2 Sundays • 1:00 PM – 3:30 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$100

In this two-part workshop series, you'll first explore how to build a restorative, sustainable writing practice rooted in your values, interests, and natural creative rhythms. Then on day two, you'll learn how to thoughtfully shape your writing into a creative offering, identifying the messages you want to share and the platforms or projects that best align with your goals.

THE ART OF FAMILY NARRATIVE with Kim Dana Kupperman

9/16/26 – 10/7/26 • 4 Wednesdays • 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$215

Participants will learn about different nonfiction forms that feature robust, compelling family narratives. Each session will include writing prompts and in-class time to respond to the prompts.

WRITING THE FICTIONALIZED AUTOBIOGRAPHY: COMING-OF-AGE STORIES with Judith Harris, PhD

9/20/26 – 10/18/26 • 5 Sundays • 1:00 PM – 3:30 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$250

During each week of the course, we will write short pieces of memoir, based on places and individuals you remember, certain traditions, and even collective traumas that predate the first-person narrator, with the liberty to fictionalize and embellish the autobiographical story. We will develop a foundation for the elements of fiction: plot, character, internal monologue, and dialogue while studying published works in the genre.

LYRICAL MEMOIR WRITING with Chioma Urama

10/4/26 – 11/8/26 • 6 Sundays • 2:00 PM – 4:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$295

With in-class prompts, shared readings, guided reflection, and a workshop, you'll practice transforming raw memory into evocative writing that moves both you and your reader. You'll leave with 2-3 new pieces of writing.

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO FOOD WRITING with Dr. Kelly A. Spring

10/17/26 – 10/24/26 • 2 Saturdays • 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

The Writer's Center • Beginner • \$100

In week one, students will learn the basics about what food history is and the different ways that they can write about it. They will also delve into how to write and publish food history blogs and articles. In week two, learners will explore the ins and outs of writing and publishing books and memoirs on food history.

WRITING PRACTICES FOR BUSY MINDS with GG Renee Hill

10/18/26 • Sunday • 1:00 PM – 4:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

Traditional writing advice doesn't work for every writer. Created with neurodivergent writers in mind, this workshop is also for anyone whose writing process is shaped by a busy mind, limited time or energy, or the competing demands of everyday life.

ADVANCED NONFICTION with Eric Lichtblau

10/27/26 – 11/17/26 • 4 Tuesdays • 1:00 PM – 4:00 PM

Zoom • Advanced • \$215

This advanced class will go beyond the basics of nonfiction writing to provide an extra focus on fleshing out characters, incorporating a narrative voice, and developing more sophisticated tools for narrative storytelling.

NONFICTION

MEMOIR TOOLS FROM START TO FINISH with Rachel Coonce

10/28/26 – 11/18/26 • 4 Wednesdays • 7:00 PM – 8:30 PM

Zoom • Beginner / Intermediate • \$215

Whether you are writing short pieces or are embarking on a full-length memoir, you need a roadmap. Over the course of four weeks, we will cover the tools you need to write a memoir from start to finish. Participants will leave with the tools and confidence to start and complete a memoir project.

HOW TO WRITE COMPELLING MICRO MEMOIR with Laura J. Oliver

11/14/26 • Saturday • 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

This interactive workshop teaches writers to distill a moment of change, conflict, contradiction, or mystery, to its essence, so that the impact on the writer resonates with the reader.

RESEARCHING AND WRITING YOUR FAMILY HISTORY with Kenneth D. Ackerman

11/18/26 • Wednesday • 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

In this one-night introduction, historian/biographer Ken Ackerman shares the tricks of the trade for investigating our family roots, going back generations, using archives, interviews, family records, and memories - and ideas to organize and share our heritage with children and grandchildren.

PERSONAL STORYTELLING: FINDING THE EXTRAORDINARY IN EVERYDAY LIFE with Nikki Frias

12/16/26 • Wednesday • 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

Rather than focusing on perfect prose, this workshop encourages curiosity, authenticity, and play. Writers will experiment with different ways of approaching personal storytelling while gaining practical tools they can use long after the workshop ends.
voice in your head to the page.

POETRY

THE VISUAL LANGUAGE OF POETRY with María Fernanda

8/27/26 • Thursday • 6:00 PM – 8:00 PM

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

Delve into a poem's visual language. Participants will learn techniques that poets use to form undeniably poignant work. Generative writing exercises and examples will encourage participants to view their writing in a new way. This workshop emphasizes the poetic line and varying syntax.

HONORING REUBEN JACKSON: MUSIC AS MUSE with Abdul Ali

9/2/26 – 9/30/26 • 5 Wednesdays • 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$250

This workshop is a celebration and study of the life and work of Reuben Jackson, who mentored generations of writers and taught at The Writer's Center for over a decade. We will write vignettes about our interactions with this top-shelf teacher, poet, and jazz scholar. We will culminate this workshop at The Writer's Center in a public reading on October 4.

For details and to register, visit writer.org!

EKPHRASTIC FANTASTIC: RESPONSES AND CONVERSATIONS WITH ART
with Brandon Blue

9/12/26 • Saturday • 11:00 AM – 2:00 PM

Zoom • Intermediate / Advanced • \$60

In this generative workshop, participants will be encouraged to embody their piece of art (visual, music, or dance) as a means of saying what only they can say about that piece of art. Students will learn many different approaches to ekphrasis and will leave with a draft of a new poem.

READING AND RESPONDING TO GERTRUDE STEIN'S TENDER BUTTONS
with Karren L. Alenier

9/16/26 – 9/30/26 • 3 Wednesdays • 7:00 PM – 8:30 PM

The Writer's Center • All Levels • \$150

We will write response poems and learn from the strategies of this early Modernist poet who still intrigues well into the Post Modernism of today. Let's investigate and play with Stein's words such as, "The sudden spoon is the same in no size" or "grass greediness" or "a white hunter is nearly crazy." Please bring a copy of *Tender Buttons* to the first class.

WRITING THE CENTO AND THE BOP with Sylvia Jones

9/17/26 – 10/29/26 • 7 Thursdays • 7:00 PM – 8:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$350

Through close reading, discussion, generative exercises, and brief sharing, participants will explore the cento's collage of borrowed lines and the bop's movement through argument, refrain, and release.

THE POETRY OF HUMAN RIGHTS with Indran Amirthanayagam

9/19/26 • Saturday • 11:00 AM – 1:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

We will read and write poems that increase our knowledge of war and peacemaking.

FREEDOM WITH FORMS with Claudia Gary

9/19/26 • Saturday • 10:00 AM – 12:30 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

We will do brief writing exercises that use the enchantment of meter and rhyme to free your deeper imagination. After exploring several traditional forms, we will experiment with creating improvised (nonce) forms.

HAIKU, TANKA, AND SENRYU with Michele Simms-Burton

9/20/26 – 10/11/26 • 4 Sundays • 2:00 PM – 4:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$215

The goal of this course is to introduce the participant to three Japanese poetic forms: the haiku, tanka, and senryu and guide a writing practice that includes these forms. Each week the participant will read examples of poetry in one of the Japanese forms and then generate some poems. By the end of the workshop, the participant will have generated poems in the three Japanese forms and feel confident in writing in these forms.

FINISH YOUR POETRY BOOK with Megan Alpert

9/21/26 – 11/23/26 • 10 Weeks • Asynchronous

Wet Ink • Intermediate / Advanced • \$415

Whether you haven't yet started your manuscript, or have made significant progress, this course will help you get over the finish line. We'll learn how to structure your book in a way that adds layers of meaning to the poems within, generate new work to fill in the structure, and hone poems until they are book-ready. To finish, students will revise the book as a whole and make a publication plan.

POETRY

WRITING YOURSELF INTO A PERSON YOUR POETRY CAN BE PROUD OF with Mariah Barber

10/3/26 – 10/17/26 • 3 Saturdays • 11:00 AM – 12:30 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$150

This workshop is about using poetry not only to document your life, but to deepen your attention, integrity, and creative presence within it. Each week, participants will read and discuss poems that model artistic courage, self-examination, and transformation, alongside generative writing exercises designed to help them develop their own voice and habits of observation.

POETRY VS. TRAUMA with Claudia Gary

10/3/26 – 10/17/26 • 3 Saturdays • 10:00 AM – 12:30 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$150

This workshop will present some of the many ways poetry has helped writers both heal trauma and prevent post-traumatic stress syndrome. Guided by an internationally published poet and health journalist, you will explore the science behind this and learn a range of techniques, immediately putting several of them to use in drafting new work.

TRIOLET CRASH COURSE with Claudia Gary

10/4/26 • Sunday • 11:00 AM – 1:30 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

When you have an idea for a poem but aren't sure where to start, try a triolet. This eight-line framework can become a powerful poem, or a stanza in a larger one. We'll start by reading time-honored triolets to see how and why they work. Next we'll write one together, then individually, with time at the end for feedback.

WRITING POETRY FROM WHERE YOU LIVE with Donald Illich

10/6/26 – 11/3/26 • 5 Tuesdays • 7:30 PM – 9:30 PM

Zoom • Beginner / Intermediate • \$250

Participants each week can expect to learn about basic poetry elements, such as line, image, point of view, and rhythm/music, as well as workshop poems each class as a group. Students will also learn how the themes of suburb/city can be used to create poetry that has relevance and purpose for readers and editors.

READING LIKE A WRITER: IMITATION AS GENERATIVE WRITING with Brandon Blue

10/20/26 – 11/17/26 • 5 Tuesdays • 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

The Writer's Center • Beginner / Intermediate • \$250

We all read for pleasure, but a writer also reads to learn. It feeds a writer's writing practice. In this generative workshop, each week we will become familiar with the work of an established poet as a means to examine elements of craft and draft our own poems. This course also includes an optional workshopping element to receive feedback from your peers and the instructor.

WHOLE-BRAIN POETRY with Claudia Gary

11/1/26 – 11/29/26 • 5 Sundays • 11:00 AM – 1:30 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$250

"Whole-Brain Poetry" is an opportunity to explore some of the many ways poetry interacts with the brain, and to enrich your writing with that knowledge. This includes but goes beyond the use of metaphor. Through writing exercises, and close examination of time-honored and recent poems, we will examine the neurology and psychology of poetry, the relationship between time and memory, and more.

For details and to register, visit writer.org!

POETRY WORKSHOP with Judith Harris, PhD

11/7/26 – 12/19/26 • 7 Saturdays • 10:30 AM – 12:30 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$350

This workshop will offer a lecture each week, followed by workshopping participants' poems. The class will focus on the elements of story, musicality, figuration, and most of all feeling. Open to all poets at all levels who are curious about poetry and its craft and tools for revision.

HOW TO END A POEM with Sue Ellen Thompson

11/8/26 • Sunday • 1:00 PM – 4:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

This workshop will focus on closure—the strategies that poets have traditionally used to bring their poems to a clear, resonant conclusion. We will also discuss anti-closure—the resistance that so many feel toward poems that “click shut.” By looking at the work of several contemporary poets, we will discuss what worked best for their poems and might help yours.

GETTING YOUR POETRY PUBLISHED with Michele Wolf

11/14/26 • Saturday • 2:00 PM – 5:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

This intensive one-day workshop will offer all poets—whether they have yet to submit their first poem to a literary journal or are ready to present a publisher with a book-length manuscript—hands-on advice on how to achieve their publishing goals.

SYNTAX AS STRATEGY with Sue Ellen Thompson

12/6/26 • Sunday • 1:00 PM – 4:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

How poets handle syntax—the arrangement of words in a sentence—is crucial to everything from establishing the voice of a poem to evoking a particular response from the reader. In this workshop, we will take a close look at how sentences are put together and how changing their structure can send a poem off in a new direction.

SONNET CRASH COURSE with Claudia Gary

12/12/26 • Saturday • 10:00 AM – 12:30 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

Guided by an award-winning and internationally published author of sonnets, villanelles, and other metrical poems, you'll first read time-honored sonnets to see how and why they work. Next the class will write a group sonnet, and then—with or without shortcuts—you'll start one of your own.

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PUBLISHING

KNOW YOUR COMPETITION! with Katherine Pickett

9/17/26 • Thursday • 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Zoom • Beginner / Intermediate • \$60

For your book to succeed, you must know which books you are competing against. In this interactive workshop, we will look at resources for locating comparable and competing titles, analyze comparable and competing titles, and look at how to use that information to inform your writing as well as in your proposal or query letter.

CONTRACTS AND COPYRIGHTS FOR WRITERS with Kenneth D. Ackerman

9/22/26 • Wednesday • 7:00 PM – 8:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

Most writers understandably cringe at the legal jargon of book, magazine, or other contracts they need to sell their work. And copyrights can be downright scary. In this workshop, you'll get a primer on what writers need to know, in simple, understandable terms, about selling and securing their work.

THE ART OF THE PITCH with Megan Alpert

10/5/26 – 10/26/26 • 4 Weeks • Asynchronous

Wet Ink • Intermediate / Advanced • \$215

Students will read examples of successful pitches, learn a reliable pitch structure, and post pitches to Wet Ink for feedback. They will also send their pitches to editors over the course of the class.

MANAGING QUERIES WITH QUERYTRACKER with Michael Chorost

10/25/26 • Sunday • 12:00 PM – 2:00 PM

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

QueryTracker is a powerful tool for finding literary agents, sending them queries, and tracking their responses. In this course we'll cover the basics: search tools, the who-represents-whom tool, and data view options. Coupons for a free year of premium QueryTracker membership will be provided. Bring your laptop to follow along.

STAGE & SCREEN

WRITING THE FEATURE-LENGTH SCREENPLAY with Joy Cheriell Brown

9/17/26 – 11/19/26 • 10 Thursdays • 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Zoom • Intermediate • \$415

In this 10-week workshop, 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.

CREATING & WRITING YOUR OWN TV PILOT with Bo Kaprall

10/1/26 – 11/19/26 • 8 Thursdays • 6:30 PM – 8:30 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$395

Learn the steps necessary to have a completed script incorporating all of the “rules” of writing for television.

THE SKETCH COMEDY LAB with Sheila Wenz

10/7/26 – 10/28/26 • 4 Wednesdays • 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$215

Sketch comedy has a specific architecture, and learning it will sharpen every kind of writing you do. Over four weeks, we'll break down the formulas professional comedy writers use to build original characters, sharp dialogue, and hilarious situations from scratch.

PROFESSIONAL WRITING

FUNDAMENTALS OF PERSUASIVE WRITING with James Alexander

9/22/26 – 10/13/26 • 4 Tuesdays • 7:00 PM – 9:30 PM

Zoom • Beginner / Intermediate • \$215

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, letters, and proposals.

BOOK MARKETING ON A BUDGET with Rob Jolles

9/24/26 – 10/1/26 • 2 Thursdays • 9:00 AM – 10:30 AM

Zoom • All Levels • \$100

In this workshop you'll discover over 25 practical, budget-friendly book marketing strategies, from building a book launch to leveraging social media, blogs, podcasts, Amazon tools, press releases, and more.

BUILDING YOUR AUTHOR PLATFORM with Laura Di Franco

10/13/26 • Tuesday • 6:00 PM – 8:00 PM

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

In this hands-on workshop, discover three proven strategies to attract email subscribers, grow loyal social followers, and turn speaking opportunities into fans and clients. Walk away with clear calls-to-action and a platform strategy designed around your ideal reader audience.

BOOK PROMOTION THROUGH PODCASTING with Rob Jolles

10/29/26 – 11/5/26 • 2 Thursdays • 9:00 AM – 10:30 AM

Zoom • All Levels • \$100

In this workshop we'll focus on how to prepare your pitch materials, how to get booked on podcasts, how to be a great guest, and even how to create a professional podcasting environment.

WRITE LIKE THE NEWS with Hank Wallace

12/9/26 • Wednesday • 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.

FREE EVENTS FOR WRITERS FALL 2026

OPEN MIC @ THE WRITER'S CENTER

Second and Fourth Wednesday of Every Month

POETRY BOOK CLUB

Every Second Wednesday
Zoom

FICTION BOOK CLUB

Every Third Sunday
In Person

VIRTUAL CRAFT CHAT W/ POET DIANA CAO

Thursday, Sept. 3, 7pm ET
Zoom

INNER LOOP AUTHOR'S CORNER W/ HASAN DUDAR

Thursday, Sept. 10, 7pm ET
Zoom

HUNGER ACTION MONTH READING

Saturday, Sept. 12, 2pm ET
In Person

SUBMIT-O-THON!

Sunday, Sept. 13, 1pm ET
In Person

CAFE MUSE LITERARY SALON

Monday, Sept. 14, 7pm ET
In Person

VIRTUAL CRAFT CHAT ON FICTION W/ BRET ANTHONY JOHNSTON

Thursday, Sept. 3, 7pm ET
Zoom

RECENT GRAD WRITERS MIXER

Saturday, Sept. 19, 11am ET
In Person

VIRTUAL CRAFT CHAT W/ POET ALDO AMPARÁN

Thursday, Sept. 24, 7pm ET
Zoom

WRITER JAMES KLEIGER BOOK RELEASE

Saturday, Sept. 26, 2pm ET
In Person

LATINE HERITAGE THROUGH A LITERARY LENS

Sunday, Sept. 27, 1pm ET
In Person

VIRTUAL CRAFT CHAT W/ AUTHOR REBECCA LEE

Monday, Sept. 28, 7pm ET
Zoom

CAFE MUSE LITERARY SALON

Monday, Oct. 5, 7pm ET
In Person

INNER LOOP AUTHOR'S CORNER W/ LENNA JAWDAT

Thursday, Oct. 8, 7pm ET
Zoom

BIPOC WRITERS MIXER

Sunday, Oct. 11, 3pm ET
In Person

VIRTUAL CRAFT CHAT W/ POET KIRSTEN KASCHOCK

Thursday, Oct. 15, 7pm ET
Zoom

AN EVENING OF TRIBUTES TO TOBIAS WOLFF

Friday, Oct. 23, 7pm ET
In Person

LGBTQ+ WRITERS MIXER

Thursday, Nov. 5, 5:30pm ET
In Person

TWC 50TH ANNIVERSARY PARTY

Saturday, Nov. 7, 6:30pm ET
In Person

INNER LOOP AUTHOR'S CORNER W/ SHELAGH JOHNSON

Thursday, Nov. 12, 7pm ET
Zoom

VIRTUAL CRAFT CHAT W/ AUTHOR MATHANGI SUBRAMANIAN

Thursday, Nov. 19, 7pm ET
Zoom

CAFE MUSE LITERARY SALON

Monday, Dec. 7, 7pm ET
In Person

MIXER OF MIXERS

Sunday, Dec. 6, 2pm ET
In Person

Find more free events and register at writer.org

THE ORIGIN OF STORIES

By Diana Rojas



At a cocktail party in May, I was cornered on two separate occasions by people who had the same ice-breaker question for me: where do the stories come from?

I clumsily changed the subject because I had no easy answer. Once, at a reading, an author shared a passage he wrote about a character so poorly developed and obviously outside his realm of experience. When pressed about where he came up with this fellow (a politer way of asking: did you bother to do ANY research?), he aggressively tapped his noggin and said: “It’s all in here. I’m a storyteller.”

I’d love to be able to oversimplify like that. He’s not entirely wrong. William Faulkner said that “[a] writer needs three things: experience, observation, and imagination—any two of which, at times any one of which, can supply the lack of the others.” It’s not farfetched, then, to say that the kernels of stories can spring from the squishy folds of our brain.

But, supposedly, the human mind can’t dream up entirely new, never before seen faces. Our imaginations need to reorganize existing data, create a montage, and design new images from things we’ve already seen. It wouldn’t be a stretch to extend that creative limitation to storytelling. As we are all but the sum of our experiences, those ideas that we think materialize out of the void (or in the shower or in a twilight sleep flash) may just have their origin in our life experience, both from that which we have lived and from the way our particular minds bend to order information.

Take, for example, a crafted scene of lovers quarreling on a street corner: it might have been something we casually observed once, decades ago and that somehow found a permanent home in one

of the deeper pockets of our brain. That image gets folded into memories of one of our own quarrels with a lover, or our parents fighting in the kitchen, or a scene from a Harlequin romance we read in middle school. And all of those episodes will get pressed into this new Idea that we call a story. Faulkner’s three story sources create a loose braid that the writer uses like a rein in storytelling.

Writing fiction was a challenge I set upon myself in mid-life. Before that, literary fiction had been the solid core of my reading experience, and its provenance was as mysterious to me as to the people who questioned me at the cocktail party. I was a journalist: I could collect facts, distill them, explain them within whatever context I needed to, and write up a coherent article. But to make something up whole cloth? That was magic, I thought.

Then I tried it, and, like a magician knows, there is no magic. It’s just about creating illusions with the way our brains process information. Using words instead of sleight of hand, the fiction writer sets out to convince the reader that the story being told could be real, could even be theirs. That, maybe, in fact, this writer had been listening in to their conversation in a crowded restaurant. The same goes, I believe for fantasy or sci-fi, or speculative works—a skillful writer inserts bits of humanity in the story so that the reader can see themselves in a three-headed unicorn on the planet Tagusi. In other words, as I would remind my wonderful children as they were growing up, we’re none of us that original.

It took an acquaintance months to admit to me that she had read a novella of mine because she was livid that I had taken her family’s story. In her

imagination, her son, who was best friends with mine, had been telling me stories in dribs and drabs over many years, which I then rendered true to life in my so-called fiction. Her son never spoke of his family, and I didn't know it was dysfunctional. In fact, I didn't know her or them well enough at all to draw them in a story. I laughed with relief when I heard her confessional review and told her I was thrilled by her anger because it meant my fiction had worked its magic.

When I was a child, I had the reputation of being a storyteller—read, teller of tall tales, or liar-liar-pants-on-fire. That I may have artistically embellished the stories I'd recount at the dinner table I won't dispute, but I assure you that I told truths—stories I overheard or glimpsed from a distance. And then, naturally, I became a reporter and learned that the truth makes folks uncomfortable. “You misquoted me,” I'd hear every so often, or “that's not really what happened.” No, I didn't, and yes, it really did happen that way. It is part of the human condition to reconstruct the lives we live to a state we can abide by. I'd say it's our task unto death, telling our own story. Telling the story of the story, too.

In an Author's Note at the end of her story collection *Brawler*, Lauren Groff says that she daydreams as she swims laps “[...] revising the life I'd already lived with far more wit and style.” I do that while walking, and besides revising the wit and style of my life, I'll add bravery and resolution to the plain truths I manipulate. I sometimes joke that my fiction is speculative because I try to imagine a fantasy world where I break free from the constraints I've been trained in since birth and live an alternative, parallel life that, naturally, will have totally different outcomes. Fate, freewill, and karma as informed by the butterfly effect.

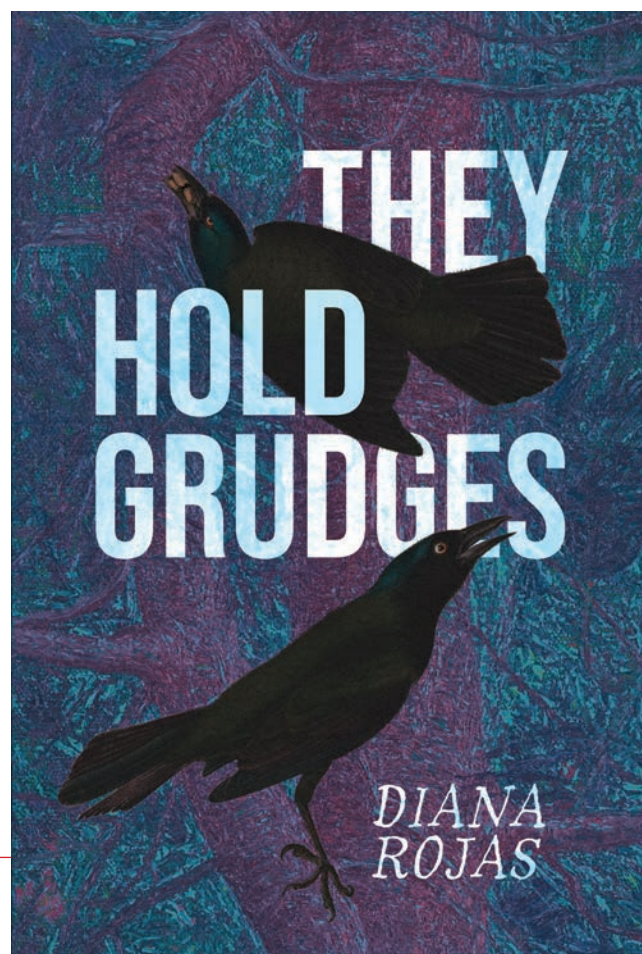
My new novel, *They Hold Grudges*, was born out of my mother's lifelong reminders that I carry too much rancor in me. She believes that applying amnesia is a necessary balm to preserve harmony in life and ensure the appearance of normalcy. I've tried, but, like Ivan Karamazov said, often I find I need “retribution not somewhere and sometime in infinity, but here and now, on earth, so that I see it myself.”

In fictionalizing my internal battle with forgiveness and rancor, I created a protagonist, Rob, who is

unable to forgive the cousin who falsely accuses him of a heinous crime, and whose extensive, tight-knit family spread gossip about it and hide behind empty platitudes of forgiveness. Rob is abandoned to navigate a tangled nest of love and resentment, believing along the way that only through retribution will he regain his own sanity.

In case you're wondering, I have never been accused of any crime, nor have I harbored such resentment that leads me to insanity. Mine has been an easy life. In his *Letters to a Young Writer*, Colum McCann recommends the technique of using “our imaginations in order to access the deepest darkdown thing.”

My deepest darkdown thing, in this novel, is my hardheartedness. I use my characters to puzzle out my own existential and philosophical questions, things I've been mulling over for a long time, even if not in a coherent linear story line. In *They Hold Grudges*, I indulge in watching the ripple effect of Rob's journey when he turns away from *my* inherent inclinations, *my* natural reticence at fighting back, *my* inherited guilt at not leaning into forgiveness. Would the weight of rejecting life-long conditioning drive one mad? Would adding this or that detail



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I use my characters to puzzle out my own existential and philosophical questions, things I've been mulling over for a long time, even if not in a coherent linear story line.

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—Diana Rojas

affect the reader's understanding of right and wrong? In her novel *The Hero of This Book*, Elizabeth McCracken calls this fiction's ability “to anatomize consequence,” allowing the writer to dissect the if X, then Y of situations in a way that real life often obscures. Because ultimately we write fiction to put order into our disorderly lives, to sort out the puzzle pieces, to imagine what might have been and to come to grips with what is and was.

When I write stories, every single one of my characters becomes a composite of at least ten people, usually more. I pull this feature from this person, that idea from another, that experience from a mish-mash of gossip about others, or from books I'd read or movies I'd seen. It is purposeful. This melding of the real and the imagined is, for this former journalist, the gift fiction offers the writer: we are not describing the exact color of someone's hair, nor are we quoting their actual words and reporting the events as they happened to the reader. We are creating new people, new worlds that sometimes explain real people and the world we actually live in. My relatives sometimes ask if my mirror shows them, if it reflects the details of their real story. The answer is an honest no, because the complications of our human dimensions make it extraordinarily difficult for me to squeeze their essence into a couple of paragraphs. Most of us are not heroic enough in our daily choices to become fictional characters; we're dimmer, less decisive. Our edges are more blurred. Because fiction condenses and sharpens our real human traits, it often feels more real than real

life, like for my son's best friend's mother. Once, a cousin reader marveled in reaction to a story of mine, “Does every person in our (humongous) family have our same trauma?” The whole world shares it, I said. It's called the human condition.

Maybe I now have a succinct answer, then, the next time someone at a party questions me about the provenance of my stories: they come from the space between real life and the lie. I'll say that the best stories are the ones where the internal chaos meets the external truth, and for a moment, the reader believes that they are the ones living it. I'll tell them that fiction gives us a chance to glue together all the bits and pieces to tell a deeper truth.

Understanding this, I'll keep spelunking into my deep darkdown places to mine for stories. And then I'll extract them and render them as real as the Velveteen Rabbit because, ultimately, the job is not to simply imagine things. As fiction writers, we're trying to make sense of the only life we have.

Diana Rojas is the author of the novel, *They Hold Grudges* (Arte Público Press, 2026), the novella collection *Litany of Saints: A Triptych* (Arte Público Press, 2024), and the forthcoming children's book, *Clara's Big Green Coat* (Piñata Books, 2027). Her essays are featured in *Grit & Gravity*, *The Washington Independent Review of Books*, *Barrelhouse*, *Latin@Lit*, *Anti-Heroine Chic*, *Latino News Network*, and the WWPH anthology *America's Future*, among others. A member of the Board of Directors of the PEN/Faulkner Foundation, she lives taxed and unrepresented in Washington, DC.

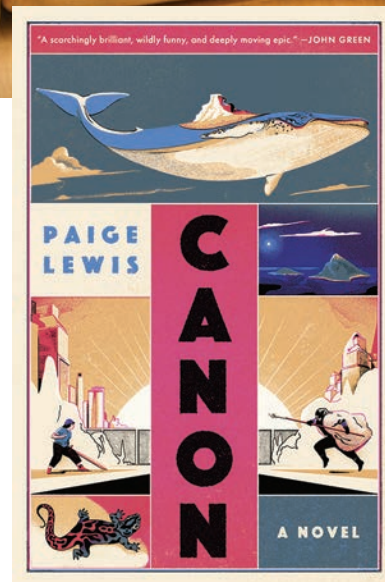
Highlights from The Writer's Center Virtual Craft Chat Series

PAIGE LEWIS ON THE ART OF THE TITLE IN *CANON*



I mean, poetry did it, right? I think that it was funny because I hate titling things. It's my least favorite part about writing because it feels like you have to do so much in a title or it feels like you can either win or lose your audience based on the title of a poem. Often when I was writing poems, I would turn my titles into pleading titles so that they would force the reader to keep going if they want to see how the end of the sentence works. And so when I started writing *Canon*, that was a sort of challenge I gave myself, to title every section. And for the titles to, hopefully, have meaning to the rest of the section or to a section previously or a future section and to cause friction sometimes; to sometimes get a laugh, but also sometimes just to complicate things and to maybe sometimes tease the reader a little bit.

But I'm really glad I did it because I don't know that I would have felt like I could continue writing an entire book if I didn't break it up into chunks of these short sections with these titles. You sit down to write a one-page poem and you can do that in a few hours and have a draft when you stand up. But to sit down and write a little chunk of what is going to be a novel and then to not feel that immediate gratification of "I have completed a thing" was very frustrating for me. And so this was my way to cheat the system and still feel like I could complete a thing and put a whole title on it and be like, "Yes, this is like a single thing that I have done." It kept me going for the rest of the book.

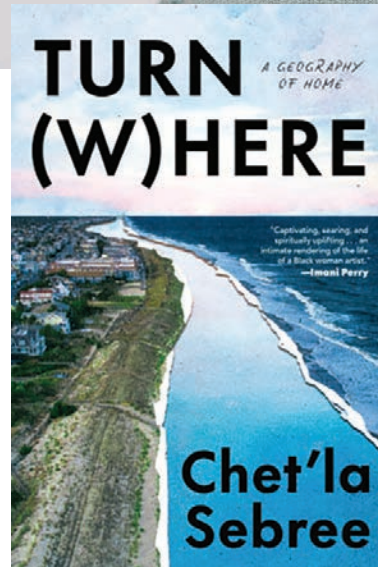


CHET'LA SEBREE ON WRITING TOWARDS AN AUDIENCE AND SURPRISE IN *TURN (W)HERE: A GEOGRAPHY OF HOME*

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Yeah, I feel like I'm writing first and foremost for myself because I'm often trying to understand something in the world. I'm trying to write to understand. And then I think my audience is generally other Black women. I'm trying to write to and for other Black women generally, simply because I feel like there aren't a lot of people who aren't us who are writing specifically with us in mind. And again that's a way in which I'm writing to myself, right, in terms of writing to this specific group of women. I think that those are two primary audiences.

The writer Ross Gay said once that he knows a piece is done when he's also surprised himself, when he discovers something, when there's like this spark of a moment. And I've really taken that to heart. Even though all of these are research essays, something has to unfurl for me that I didn't know or anticipate when I sat down to write this essay that then renders me anew because I think if I'm excited, then the reader will be excited and intrigued and on this sort of journey of discovery. And so I am thinking about the reader quite a bit because I had to take out a lot of things that I recognized in this book that no one actually would care about other than me. [...] So, I think about the audience quite a lot: What they need, what they don't need, what might be disruptive in an intentional way. How can I maybe disorient them in a way that's productive and when it is not useful to do that for them.



**CHANDA PRESCOD-WEINSTEIN
ON CRAFTING HER SECOND
BOOK, *IN THE EDGE OF SPACE-TIME:
PARTICLES, POETRY, AND THE
COSMIC DREAM BOOGIE***



I think I should say that my goal is always to get to a good sentence. And the way that I think about this is in terms of Jane Austen's prose. When you look at Jane Austen's sentence structure, every word is there for a reason and you can see the intention and the placement of the words and the word selection, the diction of it. And so I think I'm always striving for that level of intentionality with it. I think the interesting thing about a book is that it tells you about itself while you're writing it.

The beautiful thing about a first book like *The Disordered Cosmos* is that I started writing it in my late 30s and I had been thinking about those ideas for over two decades at that point. I, at some point, looked at one of the essays I wrote for college admissions and can actually see some of the ideas in *The Disordered Cosmos* in the essay I used on my Common Application for college. But a second book, you know, unless you really take another 20 or 30 years to write your second book, you don't get that much time with the ideas, especially if you put a lot of your first thoughts into the first book.

I still write with an idea that has really been germinating for a while. I think about it, I decide what I'm going to say, and then I sit down and I write it. And that doesn't mean I have it word for word. I don't have that kind of visual memory with words, but I have a sense of what story I want to tell with the piece of writing. And with *The Edge of Spacetime* [...] I had to learn to let myself write out of order. I had to learn to let myself sit down and not be sure what I was going to do.



**The Edge of
Space-Time** Particles,
Poetry, and
the Cosmic
Dream Boogie



**Chanda
Prescod-Weinstein** Los Angeles Times Book Prize-winning
author of *The Disordered Cosmos*

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Healthy Disruptions

AN INTERVIEW WITH DIANE ZINNA ABOUT HER NEW CRAFT BOOK, *LETTING GRIEF SPEAK*

By Zach Powers

Diane Zinna is someone I've long looked up to as a writer, a teacher of writing, and a literary citizen. With her new book, *Letting Grief Speak: Writing Portals for Life after Loss*, she brings all these skills to bear, showing a thoughtful, freeing, and at times even playful approach to writing about the subject and experience of grief. It's a book I'd highly recommend for all writers, whether grief is their subject or not. Diane kindly joined us to share some of the insights that went into this book and the broader project behind it.



Zach Powers: A lot of the time, ideas about the craft of writing come from other things we've read and what we discover as we try to write. I think the project of your book is extra successful because it adds a third component: the people who participate in your online writing group, Grief Writing Sundays. How did working with real, live people (as opposed to books written by people at a psychic distance) inform the way you think about writing?

Diane Zinna: Sometimes the ideas I offer feel a little risky. I think often of Emily Dickinson's advice to "tell the truth but tell it slant," and sometimes I present grief writing portals that are *very* slant: humorous, strange, or rooted in pop culture. I knew these ideas worked for me, but I worried they might be perceived as too goofy, too casual in the face of grief. Seeing them resonate with hundreds of writers helped me to trust my instincts, and witnessing so many meaningful, varied responses to a portal showed me possibilities beyond my own imagination. It was the reason I knew that I had to share their work in this book.

In the introduction you mention that when we focus on craft, "We remember that as storytellers, we can make decisions." I suspect that might feel counterintuitive to some people, that instead craft is this mechanical impediment between experience and expression. Can you elaborate more on what I might call the idea of craft as friend and ally? How can using the conventions of writing, instead of restricting us, actually free us as writers?

When we are writing a story about grief, it's possible to slide quickly into the hardest parts, find ourselves breathless, and lose our ability to continue on. Grief can be so raw, and early writing can feel that way, too. Or we can think that the *only* way to approximate what we felt at the time and to be true to it is to tell it in an exacting, fastidious way.

Think of the stories you have repeatedly told people in your life, especially the ones that involve loss, fear, or shock. I know that for me, I have a tendency to start them all in the same place, emphasize the same beats, include the same details, even pause

or gasp in the same places. It's like we drive these stories down into ruts in our brains, making deep grooves that we circle again and again. We start to think these stories can only unfold in this particular way, and if that story was about trauma or our worst day, we live it again and again like a haunting, broken record.

I think a focus on craft can disrupt those patterns in healthy ways. It can ask us to remember a situation from a different point of view, or from a different angle. It can change the rhythms of our story. It can slow us down enough to remember a brief moment of unexpected joy that might have otherwise flown by in a blip. Instead of being swept forward on a rush of emotion, we can play with constraints of setting, pacing, sound. We see what starting our story just a few days earlier does to the feeling of change in the narrative. We see how a different ending line affects earlier details. We play with craft in grief writing not to change the experience, but to expand it. That way, we're no longer cut by the sharp plot points we've always returned to.

Grief can feel stagnant and heavy, especially if we feel we've been acted upon by outside forces beyond our control. But just recognizing the craft tools we have available to us each time we sit down to a blank page can help. We are now active in how we choose to tell our story, how much to share, where to begin and end, and how long to be inside of that memory. It can be scary to begin, but craft allows us safe ways in and safe ways out.

One of my favorite qualities in a book is generosity, and I feel like this book is exceptionally generous. And I'd make the same claim about you as an author (and a person!). Does that feel like something you were aware of in writing this book? And do you, like me, value generosity as an element of effective craft?

Thank you so much! And absolutely. One of my favorite books for writers is Courtney Maum's *Before and After the Book Deal*. That thick book is not just about marketing and publishing. The "before" half is something all writers should read immediately. Courtney seems to address every question a new writer could have about their work. I've spoken to her about the decisions she made, and one thing I thanked her for specifically was a remarkable section called, "What happens if you die before your book comes out?"

I am currently in Stage 5 kidney failure and awaiting a transplant. (My kidney donor is actually having her surgery on this book's publication day.) Reading that question and the generous answer that followed felt like she was talking directly to me. I'd never heard anyone anticipate that question and give such a straightforward answer. Her book immediately became a favorite, in part because I felt that connection. So I was surprised to hear that was one of the little chapters that her editor suggested that she remove, saying that she couldn't imagine anyone would need to hear that. Courtney fought to keep it in.

That generosity, to think deeply about all communities and to insist on including such a section, has stayed with me, and it was one of the reasons I wanted to think through every kind of grief someone might experience and try to give them space in this book. I want people to feel seen. As I was editing, I listened to each sentence and tried to imagine a person who needed those specific words.

I'm honestly suspicious of any advice that smacks of shutting a writer down before they begin. That sense of, "no one needs to hear that" can stop writers before they even have a chance to get to something real. A long time ago, I read an interview with an author who was talking about the difference between scar writing and wound writing, and how we must always be writing from our scars. I feel like everything I have learned about grief writing runs counter to that idea. I want to make space for all of it. We need space—space to write things in a voice that screams or weeps or scares us, that others might not love, even the stuff that we know we'll eventually cut out.

Because here's the thing: writing begets writing. If you write that hard thing and you don't want to share it, you can cut it. But maybe something essential was hidden *behind* that hard thing. Sometimes the sentence you delete is the one that led you to the sentence you couldn't have reached any other way. I hope that people will feel that space, that kind of generosity, in *Letting Grief Speak*.

The book stays focused on grief writing, but I, as a proud interdisciplinary, always want to see how something intended for a specific field (this can be other topics, genres, or even other media) can be equally applicable beyond that field. I would strongly encourage all writers to read this book, whether or not they're specifically dealing with grief. Do you see a broader readership? And

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As I was editing, I listened to each sentence and tried to imagine a person who needed those specific words.

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—Diane Zinna

what would you hope that a curious rather than grieving writer might take from these lessons and portals and reflections?

I often say that living through a grief experience can feel like crossing over to another side. It can feel like you're suddenly in a place where you can't quite reach others and they can't reach you. But those who have experienced deep grief can sense it in others, as though they are wearing X-ray glasses. Not everyone will get what you are writing if you are writing about grief, and that might be because they haven't had that crossover moment yet. We all will, someday.

In this book, I talk about the loss of loved ones, friends, and partners. There are exercises for dealing with generational grief, the loss of a beloved animal, the loss of a way of thinking about one's body. How to write about special places that have changed, or the deep grief of separation, and of disenfranchised grief.

I believe all of that is love. Even if someone is writing fiction, these are exercises that can help us translate that kind of love on the page.

I say I'm trying to present foundational ideas for writing about grief. But they're really just foundational ideas for writing a loving human experience.

I've also written a manuscript focused on craft, and one of my main takeaways was that intensive focus on a subject (i.e. writing a book on it) significantly changed my own thinking on the subject. Is there anything new you discovered in the process of writing this book that didn't make it into the book itself, and that you'd like to share now?

I feel so lucky that Columbia University Press let me go over the word count stated in my contract by...

let's just say a lot. With space for 90 lessons, I was able to include most of my favorite ideas on writing.

Still, I kept going back and forth in the final editing days, wanting to include a favorite multi-part exercise that I love to give in my yearlong memoir classes. It's the most transformative exercise we do. It starts simply but evolves almost magically into an understanding of the story that must be told. It's the kind of exercise that gives that kind of "chills" moment, when the writer realizes what's been on their heart the whole time. It's also the kind of exercise that helps the writer claim a sense of confidence to tell their story.

I thought the ending of *Letting Grief Speak* could be this memoir exercise, a culmination chapter of sorts: *Now that you have tried these short, flash-style writing portals, have you thought about writing a full-length book?* But in the end, I knew I wanted writers to close the book knowing that the smaller pieces were never just stepping stones to a longer, more impressive or marketable product.

Getting the tiniest story down on the page can be a monumental undertaking. Writing "short" is perfect in its own way and has deep value, probably more value for someone who is grieving.

Finally, what's one piece of advice you'd give to a writer beginning to tackle the subject of grief in their writing?

I know a lot of us have heard talk about how publishers don't want sad memoirs anymore. Many writers worry that no one wants to read their hard stories.

Working in this area for so many years now and hearing hundreds and hundreds of grief stories, I am convinced this could not be further from the truth. During Grief Writing Sundays, when someone shares their writing, listeners will fill the Zoom chat box to bursting, affirming the words and ideas that resonate with them. I see it: people are actively seeking language that can help them process their own feelings. We're so lucky. Readers have a deep capacity for empathy. There are readers waiting, right now, for your scar stories *and* your in-the-thick-of-it wound writing. And what I want every writer to know is this: You don't need to be healed to begin.

ONE POET, TWO TRANSLATORS

Preserving the Essence of Voice

By Yvette Neisser

From the Diary of Madame Mao (originally *Del diario de la Señora Mao*) is an unusual collection of poetry. Written by María Teresa Ogliastri—a Venezuelan poet residing in Caracas—in 2011, the book is a fictionalized autobiography in verse. Ogliastri, with her vast imagination and extensive research, places herself in the mind and heart of Jiang Qing, wife of Chairman Mao Zedong and vilified leader of the Gang of Four during China’s Cultural Revolution. It is a daring move to write in the voice of such a despised authoritarian figure, known to be responsible for the deaths of thousands of Chinese intellectuals and political opponents.

And yet, Ogliastri manages to show “compassion” for Jiang (as noted in her prologue), by depicting her difficult childhood as a girl in a poor family, while also depicting the violence that Jiang was responsible for during the pinnacle of her power.

BACKGROUND

Broadly speaking, I came to the task as “the poet,” and Patricia as “the linguist.” I had been writing and publishing my own poetry for many years, and had been active in Spanish. Patricia brought to the journey two decades of experience as a professional translator, Spanish instructor, and language-learning materials developer. Since retiring, she had pursued her life-long passion for literature by taking courses in literary translation and had begun translating poems by a variety of poets. Thus, going into the project, Patricia’s strength as a translator was her wealth of knowledge of both languages, and mine was an ear for poetry. Nonetheless, we approached the translation as full partners, both contributing equally to every stage of the process.

TRANSLATION PROCESS: NUTS & BOLTS

Over the course of our first collaborative translation project—Ogliastri’s *South Pole/Polo Sur*—we developed a translation process that we also applied in translating *From the Diary of Madame Mao*. In the initial stage, each of us drafted the translations of a group of poems; then we would get together to discuss and revise. My draft translations often “sounded like poetry,” but missed the deeper

meaning of a word or two, while Patricia’s drafts impeccably conveyed the meaning, but had some lines that didn’t quite ring poetic. This process allowed us to work on the poetic, linguistic, and stylistic elements of the translations simultaneously.

Our monthly meetings—usually over morning coffee at my dining room table—were the most critical stage. Prior to getting together, we would exchange our newest draft translations by e-mail and make written notes of any suggestions or questions. At the meetings, we would start by reading the poems aloud—first in the original Spanish, then in English—to get a feel for the sound, the tone, and the overall gist. Then we would go through each translation, reviewing each other’s suggestions, researching context and specific words, and tackling specific phrases.

PRESERVING THE ESSENCE OF VOICE

Arguably, the most critical element in literary translation is re-creating the author’s voice in a new language. The most common question people ask when I say that I’m a poetry translator is some variation of “Doesn’t the poetry get lost in translation?”

Collaborating on Ogliastri’s poetry compelled me and Patricia to develop a method for ensuring that the poetry does *not* get lost. The word “translate” literally means “carry over.” Since each translator has her own writing voice or style, it was critical to identify the essential elements of Ogliastri’s style so that we could maintain consistency in the voice of the translations, regardless of who was working on it. Ultimately, we determined the following key elements: using as few words as possible to convey the desired image or feeling; using images to convey meaning; using line and stanza breaks to indicate syntactical relationships in lieu of punctuation; and minimal use of capitalization. We came to rely on each other to make sure the translation of each poem retained these characteristics—or in other words, to ensure that we carried over these elements from Spanish to English.

Of note, Spanish is a very multisyllabic language with most words ending in a vowel, whereas English has a wealth of monosyllabic words, often ending in a consonant. Thus, the most concise way to say a simple phrase in Spanish may take many more syllables than in English. I believe that if Ogliastri were writing in English, she would prefer to use the sparest words to convey her meaning. For example, in “Alfalfa Sprouts”—a tender poem about Jiang’s mother—the closing line in Spanish is “ese es el recuerdo más antiguo que tengo del amor” (16 syllables). In English, we were able to render this sentiment in just 10 syllables: “it is my oldest memory of love.”

Again and again, we found ourselves looking for creative ways to make a line or phrase more concise in order to retain the transparent, liquid nature of Ogliastri’s writing—whether by slightly changing the syntax or by eliminating a single article or preposition to reduce the syllable count of a particular line. In this process, the translation of each poem evolved from being “my translation” or “Pat’s translation” into our translation. We both touched and retouched the poems so many times that in some cases, we honestly don’t remember who did the initial translation.

In many poems, we found that we needed to translate image by image rather than word by word or phrase by phrase; we had to be able to visualize the scene or action being described. To do so, we discussed the image that each of us imagined when reading the verses; if we couldn’t agree on the image, we did research or sometimes consulted the author to clarify images we were unsure about. Ogliastri often uses animal behaviors to convey or symbolize human sentiments. For example, the poem “Outside a Frog is Croaking” depicts Chairman Mao’s infamous sexual ritual of deflowering young virgins by describing one girl’s experience of traversing the garden to enter Mao’s chamber. Rather than describe the sexual encounter, Ogliastri describes two stags in the distance:

*detrás de las celosías sombras en movimiento
reflejan una lucha entre alces*

*entrelazan sus astas y forcejean
hasta que uno cede
y se entrega*

These verses are laden with metaphor and emotion. The literal image is of two male deer fighting.

The verb “*forcejean*” means to wrestle or grapple physically. In the context of the poem, we interpreted that this image represented the physical struggle between Mao and the girl, who perhaps resists his sexual advances. But ultimately, one of the deer conquers and the other cedes. We had to ensure that the English words realistically conveyed two deer fighting while also metaphorically implying a sexual encounter: thus the word “surrender” was critical to imply the girl’s surrender to Mao.

*far from these jealousies moving shadows
reflect a battle between stags*

*they lock antlers and struggle
until one gives up
and surrenders*

TWO-LAYERED TRANSLATION: CHINESE CONTEXT CONVEYED VIA SPANISH LANGUAGE

Despite our established translation process, *From the Diary of Madame Mao* presented a new challenge: while the poems were written in Spanish, the cultural and historical context was China. Neither of us was familiar with this context. We felt that to translate the book, we needed to understand both Jiang Qing’s life and the broader societal context in which she lived. My belief is that in order to translate poems, I have to become the poet, or at least become her voice in English—that is, I have to write the poems the way that she would write them if she were writing in English.

We also knew that Ogliastri had never been to China nor was a scholar of Chinese history. So our first step was to ask her about her research. She said that she had read two essential books that guided and inspired this poetry collection: *The White-Boned Demon*, a biography of Jiang by Ross Terrill, and *Becoming Madame Mao*, a novel by Anchee Min. Pat and I read these two books, as well as Terrill’s biography of Mao Zedong.

Then, as we dove into the translation, we developed what I call a “two-layered translation” process: researching and understanding the context of the poem (its historical period, period of Jiang’s life, and specific references), and then translating the language from Spanish to English. That is, we had to go underneath the words to get to the meaning or references. For example, the poem “Para ser emperatriz” (“To Be Empress”) includes the following lines:

*cuando se vive tan cerca del peligro
debemos conocer el camino
a la Vía de los Espíritus
y esperar la bondad de los dioses*

“[L]a Vía de los Espíritus” is capitalized, so we realized it must refer to something specific. There are many ways to translate the phrase, literally meaning “the path/way of the spirits,” but we needed to know exactly what this phrase referred to in the Chinese context and how it is commonly known in English. We discovered that this term is generally rendered in English as “Spirit Path” or “Sacred Way” (sometimes but not always capitalized) and refers to the path leading to the tomb of an emperor or major dignitary. In this instance, and many others, what mattered was not translating the Spanish words, but understanding the contextual reference and identifying the right way to say that in English.

The poem “Demonio de huesos blancos” is titled with the moniker used by Jiang Qing’s opponents to vilify her: “White-Boned Demon.” Ogliastri writes:

*si él me decía ataca
yo atacaba
el ejército era mi daga
yo era el perro de mi amo
su hueso
su lado oscuro*

And she plays with a famous quote by Jiang during her trial: “I was Chairman Mao’s dog; whoever he said to bite, I bit.” Knowing this reference was critical to ensure that the English version of the poem would also play off the quote:

*if he said attack
I attacked
the army was my dagger
I was my master’s dog
his bone
his dark side*

THE COLLECTION AS A WHOLE

There were innumerable questions that we considered and debated over the course of the translation. What was the overall message of the book? What aspects of Madame Mao’s character was Ogliastri trying to convey, and how could we maintain this nuanced complexity in the English? Would the average American reader understand the poems without historical context? How would the

poems/book be received by people who had suffered under the Mao regime?

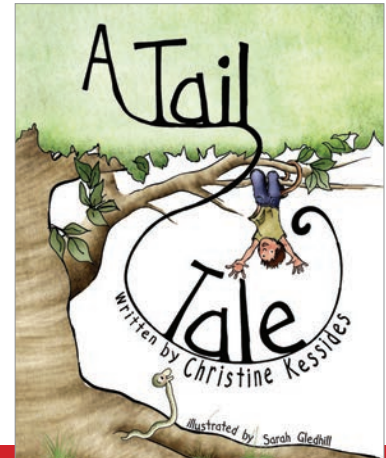
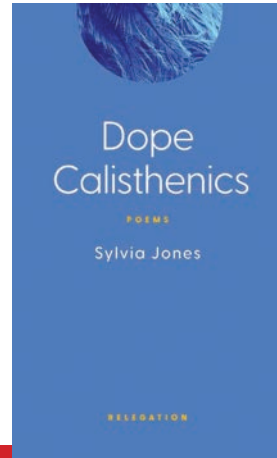
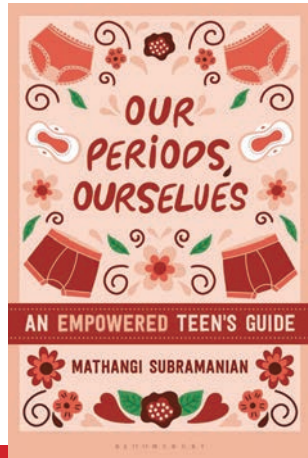
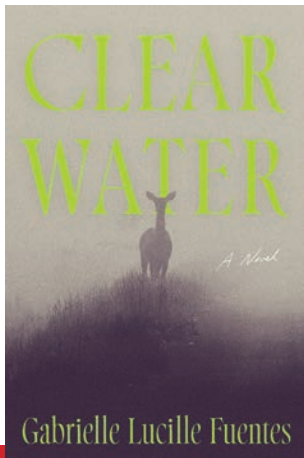
We wrangled with these questions as we focused on translating the individual poems, often consulting the author to clarify her intentions.

While many poems in the collection refer to specific historical events or periods of Jiang’s life, they are not organized chronologically, which we sometimes found confusing as readers. At one point, we asked Ogliastri if she would consider a chronological sequence for the English edition of the book. Rather than give a yes or no answer, she waited a few days before responding. Then we received an email asking us to include the following text at the beginning of the book: “For a long time, these poems were in a chest belonging to Madame Mao, left to the brutal devices of mice. They were rescued by a boy’s hand while he was flying a kite. They came to me in a beautiful disarray like fall leaves scattered by wind.”

María Teresa Ogliastri was born in Los Teques, Venezuela and lives in Caracas. The author of five collections of poems, she has been featured at poetry festivals throughout Latin America, and her poems appear in several anthologies of contemporary Venezuelan poetry. She has taught philosophy at the Universidad Central de Venezuela, as well as worked as a researcher and editor at public institutions such as the Venezuelan National Library, the Caracas Museum of Contemporary Art, and Fundación Cultural Fundarte.

Yvette Neisser is an award-winning poet and founder of the DC-Area Literary Translators Network (DC-ALT). Her poems, translations, and essays have appeared in such publications as *Foreign Policy in Focus*, *Tikkun*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, and *Split This Rock’s The Quarry*. She has taught writing and translation at George Washington University, The Writer’s Center, and other institutions. She lives in Silver Spring, Maryland.

Patricia Bejarano Fisher is a former Spanish instructor and learning materials developer at the University of Maryland. Her translations include poems in Laura Shovan’s *The Last Fifth Grade of Emerson Elementary*; *Bridges*, a trilingual collection of poems by Lidia Kosk in Polish, English, and Spanish (unpublished); and the co-translation of María Teresa Ogliastri’s *South Pole/Polo Sur*.



NEW BOOKS FROM THE WRITER'S CENTER FAMILY!

CLEAR WATER

Gabrielle Lucille Fuentes

gabriellelucillefuentes.com

Shatteringly beautiful and bracing, raw with grief and love, *Clear Water* is the story of a woman undone, who is still determined to avenge her losses. Seamlessly interweaving mystery, noir, myth, and horror, this singular novel is a tour de force and a warning: the lost girls of Brewer will not be forgotten.

OUR PERIODS, OURSELVES: AN EMPOWERED TEEN'S GUIDE

Mathangi Subramanian

mathangisubramanian.com

In *Our Periods, Ourselves*, Mathangi Subramanian covers how society shapes our monthly cycles just as much as science. She discusses how neurodiversity, disability, gender, adoption status, and immigration status can impact our periods while offering healthy, concrete recommendations for coping with these realities. Subramanian additionally examines how important issues such as reproductive rights, culture and religion, capitalism, and climate change affect access to the information and resources menstruators need to manage their physical and mental health.

DOPE CALISTHENICS

Sylvia Jones

sylvia-jones.com

Sylvia Jones's sophomore collection examines the pressure exerted on working-class Black life by spectacle, debt, inheritance, and the market's endless demand for performance. The poems move through Baltimore, television, retail language, protest remnants, and borrowed speech, tracking how public feeling hardens into product and how survival becomes a style others learn to consume. Class aspiration and class entrapment, the theater of mobility, and the material afterlife of slogans once the moment of display has passed all loom large as Jones asks what kind of consciousness repetition makes, and what remains when the shift ends and the bill arrives?

A TAIL TALE

Christine Kessides

christinekessidesauthor.com

When Wally's new classmates aren't so nice, he decides that maybe he doesn't want to fit in with them after all. One day after school, he meets the Tailor, a magical figure who creates tails for all the animals. As Wally tries on different tails, he also meets a snake who shows Wally a new perspective on friendship.



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