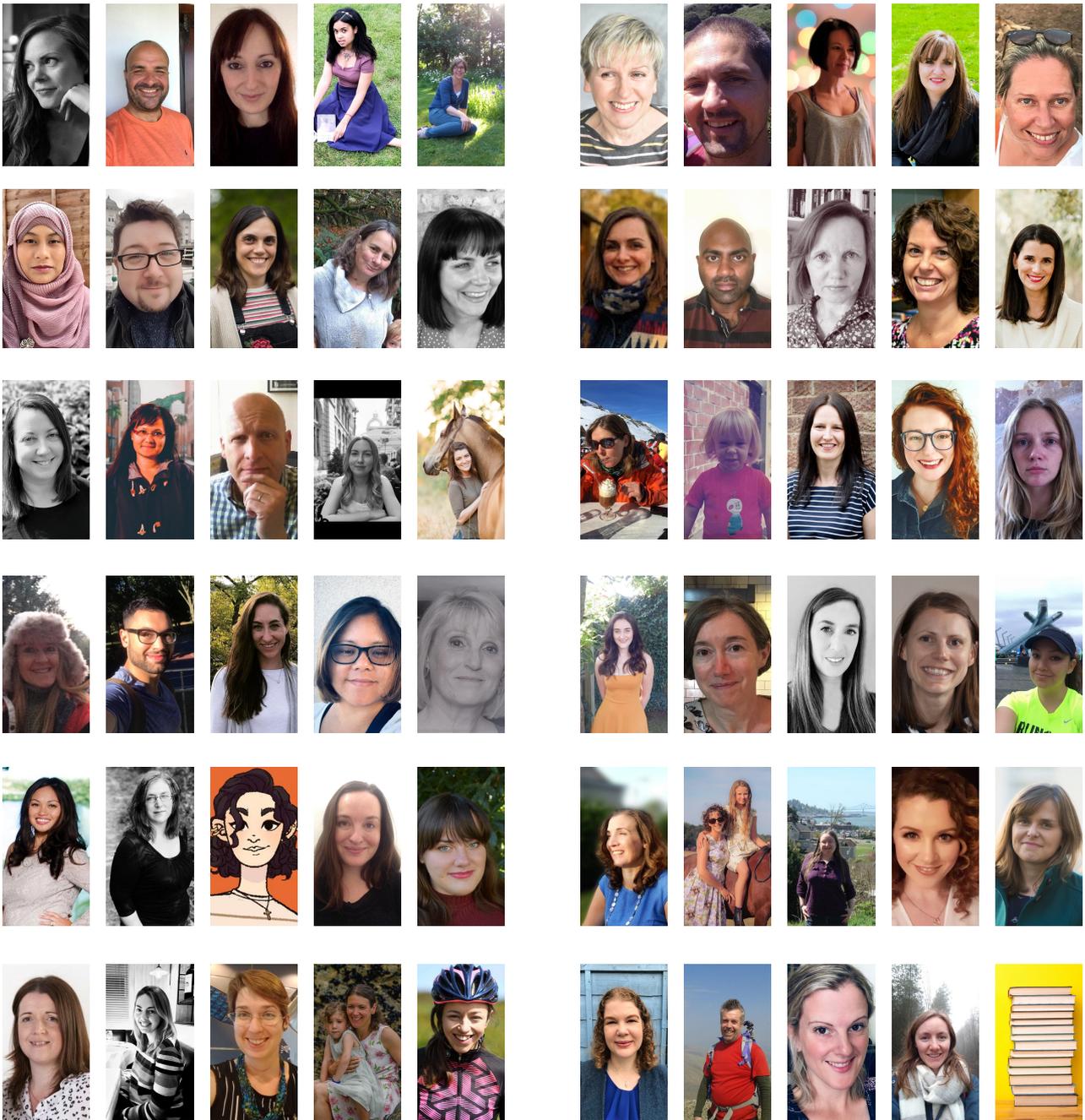




WriteMentor

Summer Programme

2020 Anthology



Featuring the work of our 2020 class, from Picture Books to YA



WriteMentor



2020 MENTORS

A.J. Sass
Alex English
Amy Beashel
Anna Britton
Anna Mainwaring
Brandy Woods Snow
Carolyn Ward
Catherine Emmett
Claire Winn
Cynthia Murphy
Deb Maroulis
Destinee Schriener
Donna David
Eden Endfield
Ellie Lock
Emma Finlayson-Palmer
Gabriel Dylan

George Jreije
Gerardo Delgadillo
Hannah Gold
Hannah Kates
Heather Powell
Helen Harvey
Jen Griswell
Jenni Spangler
Joan Haig
Jodi Herlick
Jon Cox
Jonathan Eysers
Julie Marney Leigh
Kathryn Kettle
KC Karr
Kereen Getten
Kimberly Wisnewski

Khadijah VanBrakle
Kristin Jacques
Lindsay Galvin
Lisette Auton
Louisa Reid
Lu Hersey
Mandy Rabin
Marisa Noelle
Meagan Dallner
Melissa Welliver
Nicole Brake
Olivia Levez
Sabrina Prestes
Sarah Daniels
Skylaar Amann
Sophie Kirtley
Tasha Harrison



WriteMentor

Foreword

by Stuart White

Welcome to our first WM anthology,

Our mentees were keen to commemorate their time and their work, so this was our solution.

To all of mentees, I salute your persistence, hard work and dedication to overhauling and improving your work this summer, listening closely to and applying your mentors feedback, and to always, always seeking to improve. You have been a wonderful class and I wish each and every one of you the upmost success in the future, whatever you wish that to be.

To our mentors, I cannot thank you all enough or show my appreciation in the way I'd like to. You are great authors, marvelous mentors and above all, wonderful humans. You have sacrificed 4 months of your writing time and family life, during a time that couldn't be much worse for creatives, and focused your energy into a (at the start) complete stranger, and given them all that you can. Your selflessness astounds me, and I will be forever grateful for your work this summer.

To everyone else reading, if you wish, you can read and give encouragement to the mentees, and I feel certain this would be appreciated by our mentees. We are such an open and loving community and it's so warming to see the support you all give to one another. Please always do this, the world is a better place for it.

Stuart

May the Force be with you!



Index

Picture Books
Page 4-15

Chapter Books
Pages 16-23

Middle-Grade
Pages 24-67

Young Adult
Pages 68-125

Picture



Books





Name: Jo Dearden

Title: Grandad's Missing Memory

Genre: Contemporary

Mentor: Donna David

Mentor comments

Jo, it's been so lovely working with you. Your writing is beautiful and I have no doubt that I'll be queueing up one day to buy one of your picture books.

'Grandad's Missing Memory' is a truly special book and I believe it could help so many children. I wish you all the luck in the world for your submissions and I'm excited to see what comes next for you.

'Grandad's Missing Memory' is a 500 word rhyming story that shows, in an age-appropriate way, how the whole family can help a loved one live well with dementia. When Grandad starts acting differently, his grandson tries to find his 'lost' memory for him. At first the little boy thinks putting up posters and sending out search parties might help but, as the story unfolds, he discovers other things he can do that will have a positive impact on Grandad's life.

Here in the UK, a person is diagnosed with dementia every three minutes. Over 850,000 people are currently living with dementia in the UK alone, and that figure is expected to rise to over 1.6 million by 2040 (source: Alzheimer's Society). As dementia continues to touch more and more children's lives, I decided to write something that would help them, and their families, cope with this potentially worrying situation. (I remember how confused I felt when my own grandma was diagnosed with the condition.)

My aim was to create a story that was simple without being simplistic, and hopeful without offering false hope.

I really like the way Kes Gray uses humour and rhyme in his book 'Mum and Dad Glue'. I hope that 'Grandad's Missing Memory' will help a child's understanding of dementia, in the same way that 'Mum and Dad Glue' helps a child's understanding of separation and divorce. I'm a working class writer based in the North of England. My picture book texts have been shortlisted for various prizes including The Writing Magazine Picture Book Prize, The Stratford-Salariya Picture Book Prize and the Greenhouse Funny Prize. Other stories – some rhyme, some prose – available on request.

Thanks for taking the time to read the first half of my story!

GRANDAD'S MISSING MEMORY

BY JO DEARDEN

Sp 1

There's something wrong with Grandad
He doesn't seem the same
Something's wrong with Grandad
I wonder what's to blame...

Sp 2

He used to laugh and tell me jokes
but now he's really silly
He went to bed in all his clothes
It wasn't even chilly!

And then he called me Dad's name
and that was kind of weird
'Cos I am
small
and dad is
BIG
and has a bushy beard

Sp 3

And then I heard some talking
I think I know what's wrong
They said he's lost his memory!
It can't have been gone long...

Sp 4

I felt so sad, I made a plan
to help with all of that.
I'll go round putting posters up,
like when we lost our cat[illo note:
hand-drawn 'missing' poster featuring
a brain]

Sp 5

And then I think a gang of us
should go out when it's dark
in case he left it at the beach
or even in the park

Sp 6

But then my mum sat down with me
She said it's not the same
Grandad's lost his memory
but he's still got his brain

And Grandad's brain is getting full
and here's the strangest bit
It's so ram-jammed with all his life
that new stuff just won't fit

Sp 7

I said, "Is there is potion
or a spell or magic pill
or any kind of medicine
to stop him being ill?"

Dad scrunched his mouth and
blinked his eyes
and slowly shook his head
But then he told me lots of things
that we can do instead...



Name: Lauren Pippa

Title: The Ketchup King

Genre: Funny

Mentor: Jon Cox

Mentor comments

My experience working with Lauren has been a delight from day one. Her assurance with rhythm and rhyme shone out from the 100+ potential mentee texts I read, and she has responded perceptively and intelligently to feedback throughout. Our relationship has been so easy and fruitful (she has even helped me with some of my stories!). Lauren is SUCH a talented writer – I have no doubt at all that she will be picked up by a (lucky) agent in the not too distant future. Thanks, Lauren, for making this process such a pleasure.

Dan LOVES tomato sauce; he is the self-proclaimed Ketchup King. Waited on by his ‘Butler’ and tended to by his ‘Doctor’, he swans through his royal life pouring ketchup on everything he eats. Until, one day, his skin starts to turn red. When a kingdom-wide ketchup ban is imposed, Dan has no choice but to try alternative condiments. But can any new flavour ever really cut the mustard with someone so committed to their sauce?

The Ketchup King is a 573-word picture book for 3- to 5-year-old fussy foodies and their pooped parents. Inspired by my own son’s refusal to eat anything unless it is covered in ketchup, it has a subtle message about not being afraid to try new things. It is a character-driven, fun story that will appeal to fans of the playful rhyming picture books of Lucy Rowland and Caroline Crowe, as well as anyone who enjoys Kes Gray’s classic, Eat Your Peas.

I am a #WriteMentor 2020 mentee and Golden Egg Academy Picture Book 2020 graduate, and have previously attended picture book writing courses run by The Guardian, Nosy Crow and SCWBI. I am also a volunteer school librarian and member of two picture book critique groups. As well as 12 years’ experience as a trade journalist, I have more recently spent two years working as a learning support assistant in a primary school.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my manuscript. I have attached the first 248 words of The Ketchup King below, and have many other completed picture book manuscripts that I would be delighted to send you on request.

The Ketchup King

By Lauren Pippa

Spread 1

There once was a boy known as Ketchup King Dan
Whose mealtimes were ruled by his one royal plan:
To squeeze bright red sauce on each dish that he ate,
To squirt it on everything put on his plate.

Spread 2

[Illo: Dan covered in ketchup, wearing paper crown and cape. 'Butler' Dad horrified.]
Each day King Dan splattered and spurted that sauce,
All over whatever was served for main course.
But, one day, as Dan slurped his ketchup on stew,
His Butler shrieked loudly, "What's happened to you?"

Spread 3

[Illo: 'Doctor' Mum just home from work, despairing at her ketchup-covered son.]
His Doctor was summoned and started to check
The King's bright red arms and his speckled red neck.
"King Dan," she announced, "From today, you begin,
A week without ketchup – on food or your skin!"

Spread 4

"A week!" shouted Dan, "No, I'll put up a fight!
Ketchup-free dinners are simply not right.
All food without ketchup is tasteless and bland.
I won't eat my veggies if red sauce is banned."

Spread 5

[Illo: Dan in bed still wearing crown. Dad trying to cheer him up with a sandwich.]
"Oh, come now, King Dan," said his Butler. "Don't cry.
Together, we'll find you new sauces to try.
Let's start with these slices of cheese in brown bread.
Then leave out the ketchup, add pickle instead."

Spread 6

Dan looked at the lumpy brown sauce in dismay.
(He really was having a difficult day.)
But, bravely, he picked up the sandwich and tried
First sniffing, then licking the strange stuff inside.
The Ketchup King paused as he took his first bite.
Then, smiling, he said, "Wow, this combo's all right!
But don't think this means that I'll swap anymore.
If food needs improving, that's what ketchup's for!"



Name: Rachell Abalos

Title: The Nipa Hut

Genre: contemporary, #ownvoices

Mentor: Skylaar Amann

Mentor comments

It has been a privilege to watch Rachell grow over the mentorship period. Rachell brings a unique point of view, a passionate dedication to writing, and a creative vision that I'm so glad I got to be a part of! Rachell approached revisions with enthusiasm, willingness, and flexibility—all key ingredients in the business of writing. I have loved watching her and her story transform over the summer. I can't wait to see what's next for her and her special story, THE NIPA HUT, a tale of a resilient home that's more family than house, and the little girl who takes care of it. Thanks for all your hard work, Rachell! Here's to great things in your future!

Yelena Mendoza takes care of her family's beloved nipa hut. She checks the foundation, gathers materials, and repairs it regularly, as if it's a member of the family. Papa says their special home is built to withstand anything in the Philippines. But when a ferocious storm threatens to destroy the nipa hut, Yelena must protect it, before her family loses everything.

THE NIPA HUT is a 575-word picture book for children ages 4 to 8. Readers of *The Little Blue Cottage* by Kelly Jordan and *Bess the Barn Stands Strong* by Elizabeth Gilbert Bedia will enjoy this story.

This manuscript is an #ownvoices story influenced by my childhood in the Philippines, where I've seen many types of nipa huts throughout my parents' hometown. I am a first generation Filipino-American with a BA in Literature and Writing. I have published several microfiction stories and won Most Original Story in Sweek.com. I was also recently an honorable mention in the "Warm Fuzzies" category for the 2020 Spring Fling Kidlit Writing Contest. You can learn more about me at rachellabalos.com.

The first 225 words of my manuscript are included with my WriteMentor post.

The Nipa Hut

By Rachell Abalos

Spread 1:

A palm leaf falls from the roof of the nipa hut. It tickles Yelena Mendoza's nose and wakes her up. She jumps off the bed, and her little feet bend the bamboo floor.

CREEEAAAKKKK!

The sound startles her baby brother Marco. Yelena pats him on the back, then tiptoes away.

Spread 2:

Yelena opens the big window.

[Illustration: Papa is in the garden. Mama is outside frying fish. Grandmother is feeding the chickens.]

She waves at Papa. He waves his straw hat, and shouts, "Magandang umaga!" It is a beautiful morning indeed. "Check on the house," Papa reminds her. "The nipa hut is family, too."

Spread 3:

The house stands tall on its long legs, its feet buried into the ground. Its simple design has stood for generations before her. Yelena inspects each stilt, looking for cracks and flaws that may need attention. TAP! TAP! TAP! TAP!

She hugs the last leg. A stray palm leaf playfully taps her on the shoulder.

"I'll take care of you and you will take care of us," Yelena says.

Spread 4:

She walks around the house and picks up loose and broken leaves and bamboo along the way.

"Papa, the nipa hut is shedding." Papa nods, and they walk to the beach.

"Even the humble house needs new clothes," Papa says, gathering materials to weave into the nipa hut.

Spread 5:

"Bagyo." Papa points at the gray clouds. A storm is coming.

"What if our nipa hut is not ready?" asks Yelena.



Name: Stephen James

Title: Coronation Chicken

Genre: Funny rhyming narrative

Mentor: Catherine Emmett

Mentor comments

When I first read Stephen's text 'Coronation Chicken' there was quite a lot going on! It was bursting with character and personality and was written in the most energetic and hilarious rhyme! I could immediately see that Stephen was a real talent and that the story had tonnes of potential - it just needed sliming down and a bit more focus. I couldn't wait to get started!

Working with Stephen has been an absolute pleasure! He immediately understood what needed to be done and has worked tirelessly to improve it. As a result Coronation Chicken is in brilliant shape for the Agent Showcase! Stephen has a real talent for expressing character and humour through rhyme and I don't think I've ever managed to read this text with out chuckling to myself! I can't wait to see what the agents think!

Whatever happens though, I expect big things from Stephen! He has a real talent and has improved so much during this process. I can't wait to read more of his stories!

Coronation Chicken

Ingredients:

1 dreamy maid
1 mean queen
1 kind-hearted chicken
1 ancient stone tablet
A bucketful of hope
(And a dash of guile!)

Method:

Mix the ingredients in a palace until you have a quirky, humorous rhyming picture book, perfect for fans of Peter Bentley and Jonny Duddle.

I am a musician and have a background in songwriting. My songs have been aired on BBC Radio 3's Late Junction and I've performed at many great venues. The flood of story ideas I've had since my daughter was born four years ago has completely turned my attention from song lyrics to picture book verses and prose.

I want to build a lifelong writing career, so I'm very dedicated to studying the craft. This year, in addition to the learning I've had from my mentor, I've completed many writing courses/workshops. I'm starting a new course with Clare Helen Welsh in September and I'm booked onto a number of workshops at WOWCON 2020. I find courses and events really inspiring, as they keep pushing the bar higher and higher. I'm a member of the SCBWI.

I've taught team building workshops in more than 300 schools. I hope that one day I'll be using the communication skills I've developed alongside my writing skills to deliver exciting author visits.

Coronation Chicken

By Stephen James

SPREAD 1

[Art note: There is a thought bubble over the maid's head filled with images of her dream life]

In Bleakington Palace a maid with a mop
Paused while she pictured a scene –
Of living her life by a lake making art
And...

SPREAD 2

[Art note: The Queen shouts at the maid]

“BIRDBRAIN! Stop DREAMING and CLEAN!”

[Art note: A silhouette of the maid (Elise) working on her art in her tiny house. There's an image pinned to the wall of her dream home by the lake]

Elise gave her days to the meanest of queens.
She scrubbed and she sewed a fine seam.
At nighttime, she sketched and perfected her craft
And ALWAYS believed in her dream.

SPREAD 3

One morning the Queen yelled some news at her staff,
“I'm planning a GLORIOUS ball.
And YOU have the honour of losing your homes
So I can extend the Great Hall.”

“PLEASE,” begged Elise, “we have NOWHERE to go!”
The Queen looked annoyed and then smiled,
“Birdbrain, you fool – your queen is not cruel...”

SPREAD 4

...you can live with the chickens, dear child.”

[Art note: A silhouette of Elise working on her art in her tiny house]

That night Elise worked on her dream until dawn
Then left without packing a thing.
She crept in the coop feeling lonely and sad
But a hen took her under her wing.

Next morning when builders demolished the village
They dug up a tablet of stone.
“This funny old writing,” the foreperson gasped,
“Says something to do with the throne.”

SPREAD 5

[Art note: A close up of the stone tablet. The words are carved in ancient lettering. There is an asterisk next to the word ONE*]

When midnight arrives and the bells ringeth twelve
On the day that this stone hath been found.
The ONE* who is first in THE COURT of the Palace
Shalt sit on the throne and be crowned.

[Art note: Elise has the chicken that took care of her on her head. This chicken is with Elise in all subsequent scenes]

Elise brought Her Majesty news of the stone
But the Queen bellowed, “THAT IS A LIE!
For scattering rumours whilst wearing a chicken
I'll have you both put in a pie!”



Name: Tracy Curran

Title: My Mummy's a Witch

Genre: Magic and mystery

Mentor: Stuart White

Mentor comments

Tracy has been a pleasure to work with this summer. She is an outstandingly dedicated and motivated writer and her desire to write the very best books is only paralleled by her appetite to learn and improve her craft. Her attitude and hard rate are truly inspirational and I am certain that her books will find a great home very, very soon.

My Mummy's a Witch-Anna is spellbound by the idea that her mummy is a secret witch. Her friend's aren't convinced until Anna dazzles them with proof. Now they are super impressed. But Anna has forgotten one crucial ingredient. Has she possibly got the wrong end of the broomstick?

I am a primary school teacher who writes picture books and chapter books beside the sea in Cornwall. I have just graduated from the Golden Egg Academy Picture book programme, am an active member of SCBWI and run a book review blog, <https://www.thebreadcrumbforest.com/> and a writer's blog, <https://www.tracycurran-littlecornishwriter.com/>

In December 2019, I was shortlisted for the 2019 Picture Book Prize and was also a finalist in Susanna Hill's 'Holiday Treat' contest in the USA. In May 2020, My Mummy's a Witch came in the top three in the WriteMentor Children's Novel Award, with four manuscripts on the longlist.

I am fully committed to forging a career in writing for children and have taken every opportunity available to develop my craft. I have strong links with local schools and have recently been asked to deliver some storytelling workshops for a local intergenerational project.

MY MUMMY'S A WITCH

BY TRACY CURRAN

1

“My Mummy’s a witch!” announced Anna at school.
She sounded so proud – witch mummies are cool.
“Mum keeps it a secret but I’ve been and spied.”
“So what did you see?” asked her friends, all wide-eyed.

2

(I.N: Anna is peeking around the doorway, watching her mum knitting. Behind her there is a mysterious, cloaked figure standing where the cobwebs are, stroking the spiders.)

“Well...
our home’s packed with cobwebs, the corners are full.
Mum knits them at night with her glittery wool.”

3

(I.N: Under the bed there is a mixture of both mum and dad’s stuff, with the potions hidden in between.)

“Next, there are jam jars of rainbow bright potions...
under the bed hidden next to her lotions.”

4

(I.N: Mum is trying not to sneeze as a tabby cat wanders by. Someone is secretly pointing a wand from around the corner and conjuring the bats. A black cat is also sitting on this corner. Again, Anna does not see this.)

“And on Halloween I chose trick and not treat.
Mum twitched her nose and black bats filled the street.”

5

“That sounds sorts of witchy!” a little boy boos,
“But it’s not enough proof! Are there any more clues?”
“Of course,” Anna sniffs. “For I’ve had a good look
and down in the shed...”

6

(The cookbook illustrations show the recipes in it. ‘Star lollipops to make you fly.’ ‘Toad transforming toffees.’ ‘Slug Sparkle to make your hair shimmer and shine. *Her friends are asking her these questions.)

“lies a witch’s cookbook!”
“Then where is her cauldron? There’s no hiding that!” *
“And if she’s a witch then she must wear a hat!”

7

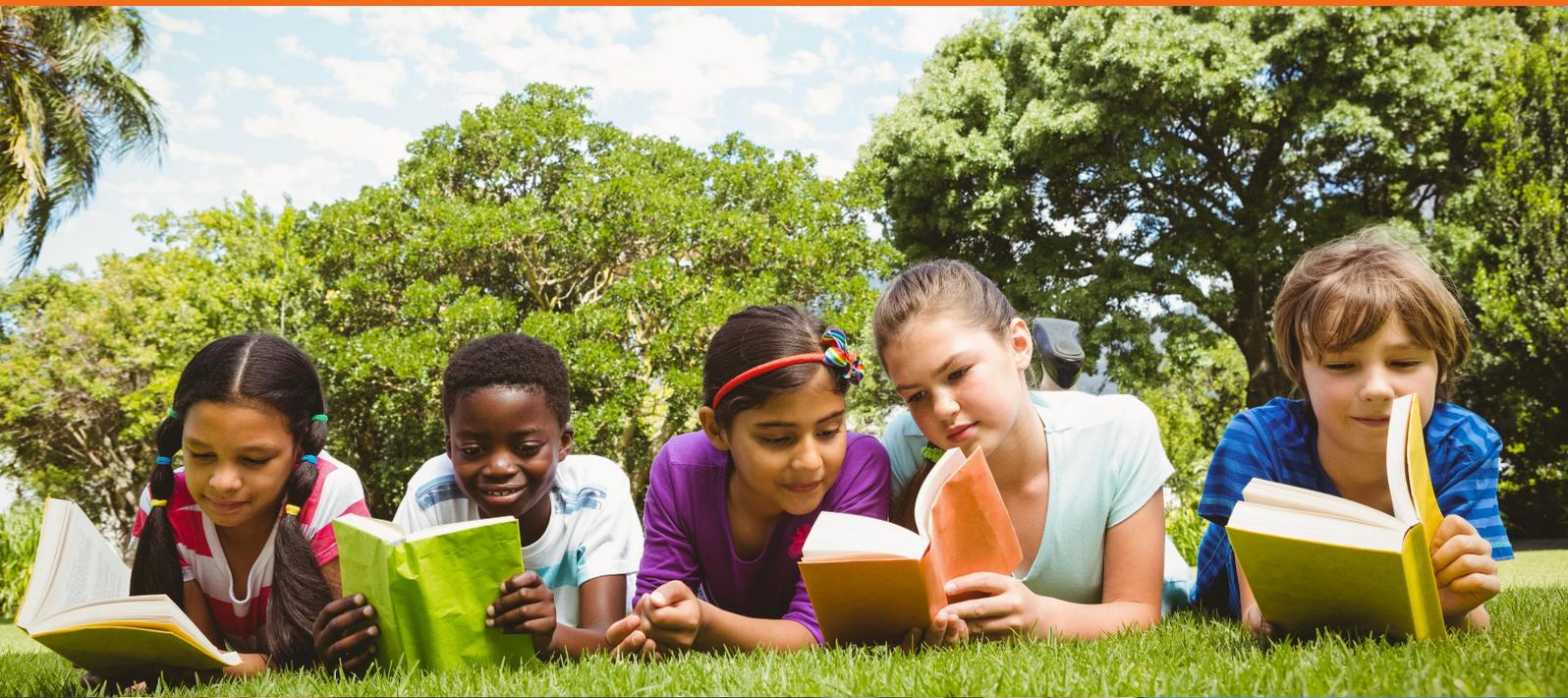
(I.N: Anna is peeking out of her bedroom window at a cloaked and hatted figure who she assumes is Mum. But behind her in the bedroom doorway, Mum is there smiling. The cauldron is hidden in a patch of nettles.)

“She does,” giggles Anna, “she wears a black cloak.
At night, round a fire, she conjures up smoke.
She heaves out her cauldron which squats in the flames
and sprinkles in charms marked with magical names.”
“The flame-fizzing liquid spits sparks like sunbeams.
It boils and it bubbles, it glows and it gleams.
Then if a full moon shimmers high in the sky...”

8

(I.N: Illustration shows her mum cooking in the school canteen. A ginger cat sits on the open window ledge and her mum is shooing it away, trying not to sneeze.)
she brews up a broomstick and-WHOOSH -she can fly!”

Chapter



Books





Name: Danielle Dale

Title: The Curry Catastrophe

Genre: Funny

Mentor: Helen Harvey

Mentor comments

Scruffball and Grumpy Face: The Curry Catastrophe is the hilarious story of two stray cats with lots of character and heart. I don't know how Danielle crams in so many jokes, and the cat puns are 'meownificent'. This funny, fast-paced escapade is perfectly pitched for chapter book readers and I can't wait to read their further adventures, and find out what scrapes Scruffball gets the pair into and whether Grumpy Face fulfils her dream of opening a cat yoga studio.

The Curry Catastrophe is a feline comedy for 7-9s with series potential, complete at 16,000 words.

Narrated by the self-styled 'greatest cat burglars this side of Fat Rat Hill', this is a story of feline friendship, positivity, courage and claw-ful cat puns, which will appeal to readers of the Dave Pigeon or Dog Diaries series.

Scruffball is the leader; daring, adventurous and full of cataclysmically good ideas. According to her that is. Grumpy Face is an opera singing yoga guru, whose hilarious poses come in handy when trying to outwit prison guards or sneaky seagulls.

When a chicken curry robbery goes wrong, the alley cat criminals find themselves behind bars for the first time in their lives. They fall in with the Long-timers (cats nobody wants to adopt), who scare them with terrifying tales of the CATNAPPERS. Scruffball and Grumpy Face make up their minds to escape, vowing to give up their life of crime and open a feline yoga retreat. Then... catastrophe! A little girl wants to adopt the alley cats and will return in 3 days to collect them. Panicking, Scruffball plans a series of increasingly hilarious escape attempts. Will the alley cats break free before the catnapper returns? And can they convince the Long-timers to join them?

The Curry Catastrophe was shortlisted in the 2020 Write Mentor Children's Novel Award, and a second chapter book, The Mind Boggling Adventures of Cark Parker, reached the longlist. My fairytale, Jackson and the Giant Beanstalk Competition, was recently shortlisted in the 2020 RNIB illustrated story competition. In 2018, I graduated from the University of Winchester with an MA in Writing for Children (distinction). It was there that I discovered a love for funny young fiction. I'm passionate about engaging reluctant readers, which is a key motivator in my writing. I live in the South Downs with my family and a black rescue cat who doesn't look good in photos.

THE CURRY CATASTROPHE

BY DANIELLE DALE

A big MEOW to my favourite furballs!

If you're reading this, it means you've got your lucky paws on the very first Survival Guide for Alley Cats. As you know my feline friends, life on the streets isn't always a river of salmon. More like a murky pond. If you dip your paw in, you never know what you're going to find. Some days you get nothing but pond weed. Other days, a nice juicy fish leaps straight into your jaws. I call these BIG FISH days and they are the BEST! Speaking of fish, I hear the rattle of the Fish and Chip shop door. It's dinner time! I must get there before the gigantic pirate seagulls gobble up MY food!

Nips and scratches,

Scruffball x

p.s. Whatever happens, don't share this book with human catnappers, mad dogs or sneaky seagulls. It contains TOP SECRET tips and BRILLIANT and DARING escape plans. It is for CAT'S EYES only.

Grumpy Face: Aren't you forgetting someone, Scruffball?

Me: Be patient, Grumpy Face. This is MY book and I want to talk about ME. After all, I am the greatest cat burglar this side of Fat Rat Hill.

Grumpy Face: Hmmm

Me: Aha! Fooled you! Of course, I wouldn't forget my partner-in crime. You may not be quite as brave and daring as me, Grumpy Face, but you are brilliant at singing and yoga. Two very handy skills for a master cat criminal to have.

Grumpy Face: Thanks. I feel like I could almost smile.

Me: Really?

Grumpy Face: No

Me: Phew! Otherwise you'd have to change your name.

Grumpy Face: True

Me: Anyway, we mustn't keep our feline fans waiting. This is a story that every moggy on cat's earth wants to read...

Chapter 1 Operation Caterwaul

It was the day of the Great Chicken Curry Robbery. That's when our lives changed forever.

We'd done lots of robberies before, Grumpy Face and me. We were cat partners in crime. But this time, it went a bit wrong. Actually, it went a lot wrong. It was a CAT-astrophe! It was the Cattiest Catastrophe known to Catkind.

The day had started well. Grumpy Face always starts the day with yoga:

The Forward Facing Feline

The Whisker Widener

And her favourite...The Pot Plant

I joined in with my Sleeping Cat pose. I'm not so good at yoga, but I'm very good at the Sleeping Cat.

After all that hard work, it was time for breakfast.

Grumpy Face and I were just searching through the bins behind the fish and chip shop, like we did every morning. We found a few soggy chips and a couple of fish tails. Not exactly a banquet, but you take what you find when you're an alley cat.



Name: Lucy Bulkeley

Title: The Fairy Cycling Squad: Sophia's Stabilisers

Genre: Fantasy

Mentor: Emma Finlayson-Palmer

Mentor comments

Lucy has been a pleasure to work with and has been eager to learn and worked hard to make her story the best it could be. The story itself is close to my heart as it combines magic and sport, a combination I have in my own writing and it has been exciting to work with such a passionate athlete. This is an empowering story for young girls with a healthy sprinkling of magic! I can't wait for this story to ride off into the world and find others who love it as much as I do!

I'm writing to you to pitch a children's chapter book concept full of learning how to ride a bike, fairies getting into trouble and talking gnomes. 'The Fairy Cycling Squad: Sophia's Stabilisers' is a fantasy book of 9,492 words and could possibly be compared to the likes of 'Flying Fergus' by Chris Hoy and the 'Rainbow Magic' Series by Daisy Meadows.

'Sophia's Stabilisers' follows young girl, Sophia Brookes, who happens to be crazy about mountain biking like her big brother Charlie. Sophia is desperate to ride her bike without stabilisers, which is where Bella the Cycling Squad fairy comes into the story. When staying at her Nana and Grandad's farm, Sophia meets Bella the fairy who wants to help her cycle without stabilisers. On her pursuit to ditch the stabilisers, Sophia learns about the Fairy Cycling World Cup and the Fairy Cycling Squad HQ underneath Turnhill Velodrome. When the boy next door to Narrow Lane Farm, Henry, captures Bella it's up to Sophia to save her before the sun sets where Bella would lose all of her magical powers.

The main aim of the book is to inspire young girls to try cycling. Sophia's love for the outdoors is clear throughout the book, so I hope the book sparks the drive for adventure in the young girls who happen to read it. Sophia actively thinks on her feet and solves problems when it comes to saving Bella demonstrating her independence.

The cycling theme stems from the fact I'm a cyclist myself. I've cycled for as long as I can remember, but have taken part in competitive cycling since the age of 16. Cycling has provided me with some funny memories that still put a smile on my face, yet it has helped me through some tough times without me even realising it. I guess The Fairy Cycling Squad is my way of putting everything I've learnt from cycling onto paper. Lessons intertwined with a young girl hopelessly trying to get rid of her stabilisers, and a cheeky fairy with a talking gnome who flies around on a Buzzard named Sprocket.

THE FAIRY CYCLING SQUAD: SOPHIA'S STABILISERS

BY LUCY BULKELEY

“Sophia, darling. Chop, chop, we’ve got to get you to Nana’s before driving your brother to Scotland,” Mum called, but Sophia didn’t hear a thing as she sat cross-legged with her eyes glued to the TV screen. Edie Smith was about to win her 6th World Cup Mountain Bike race this season! Sophia wasn’t up for going anywhere.

“Sophia!” her Mum shouted again.

“Oh Mum, but there’s one lap to go... please can I just see if Edie wins? Charlie isn’t even ready yet.” Sophia pleaded.

“I don’t think there was ever any chance we’d get ourselves a ballerina from you, was there Sophia?” Mum said with a giggle.

“Ugh, those tutu’s are itchy,” Sophia replied.

Sophia watched the TV screen intently as Edie made her way around the mountain bike course. Edie’s stark rival, Tallulah-May, was getting ever closer and Sophia jumped at the slightest sign of Edie coming off. Edie would have a perfect season of 6 World Cup wins if she could stay on her bike to the finish line.

“AND EDIE CROSSES THE LINE! WHAT A GREAT SEASON FOR THE BRITISH RIDER!” Screams came from the TV as commentator, Ross Bryant, jumped out of his seat.

Sophia jumped so high in the air with excitement that her signed cap from Edie Smith herself fell to the floor.

“Most people would have that autographed cap displayed on the wall,” Charlie said as he picked it up and handed it back to Sophia.

“Is she racing with you next weekend?” Sophia asked.

“Yea, I think she is. In the Elite Women’s category. We’ll have to try and get you another cap, won’t we?” Charlie replied.

Wow, Sophia thought as she wondered what Charlie might be able to find at the big race. Charlie had to concentrate when he was racing, which is why Sophia would go to Nana’s, but he’d always bring her something back.

“Come on you two...we’d best be off now,” Mum shouted one last time.

Sophia quickly switched the TV off and grabbed her bag and bike helmet. “Dad put my bike in, didn’t he, Mum?” Sophia asked.

“I did it myself,” Charlie replied, as he picked Sophia up, span her round then raced her to the campervan.

It wasn’t too long of a drive to Nana’s house, but enough for Sophia to fall asleep after all of the excitement of the World Cup race. Sophia often dreamed about racing like Edie Smith and this dream was no different.

Sophia was pedalling as hard as she could up a tricky woods section. Bump, bump, bump her bum went on her bicycle seat as she rode over tree roots and rocks. Sophia may have been dreaming, but that didn’t stop her bum from hurting! As she pedalled out of the trees, she zoomed down a fast section overtaking Edie sending her into 1st place. With only the finish straight left, Sophia was pedalling and pedalling.



Name: Saran Shantikumar

Title: CLARA'S LAB BOOK

Genre: STEM adventure; humour

Mentor: Carolyn Ward

Mentor comments

It's been a complete delight to work with Saran on his clever book - and follow the feisty Clara as she figures out the mystery virus at her school.

He has absorbed everything and worked at high speed, even though he is an esteemed doctor and has been kept very busy in the global pandemic! I am very excited to see this story in the world, empowering kids everywhere with the STEM theme and the age-appropriate explanation of scientific thinking.

I also want to take the opportunity to thank him again for the lovely music he wrote!

Well done Saran, I wish you all the luck in the world with Clara's Lab Book.

CLARA'S LAB BOOK is a STEM-based humorous chapter book; complete at 14k words with huge series potential.

When the school bully and other children catch a mysterious illness, 9-year-old paintballer and imminent scientist Clara decides to investigate. Facing wilful misdirection, unforeseen treachery and conifer-lined combat, can she discover where "the sickness" is coming from before the whole school is infected?

I am a doctor and lecturer in public health, and in my spare time coach a youth football team, am a school governor and run a free community "Geek Club" for local gifted and talented children. This is my first chapter book, having previously focused on non-fiction titles (a series of medical student textbooks and scientific research papers).

I am passionate about inspiring children in all areas of STEM, and have plotted further adventures for Clara in areas of public health and environmental science.

CLARA'S LAB BOOK

BY SARAN SHANTIKUMAR

Thwack.

Watching the red liquid spread over the soldier's chest, Clara knew she had hit her target.

Three down, three to go.

She wiped the sweat from her forehead and ducked behind a tree stump that was sticking out from the floor of conkers and dry twigs. The blasts of gunfire were deafening. They were looking for her, and she didn't exactly choose the best place to hide. At least here in the forest there was plenty of shelter.

Click-click. Clara cocked her weapon, ready to fire. Crack. A twig snapping to her left, she glanced towards the sound. There stood a soldier slyly grinning at her, rifle raised triumphantly. Before he could pull the trigger, Clara pressed her own gun to her body, rolled to the right, and fired a quick shot. The soldier let out a yelp as the bullet smacked his shoulder. Clara jumped to her feet and bolted, not even turning to watch his body collapse to the ground.

Four down, two to go.

The people versus Clara. One weapon each. Everyone out to get her. This wasn't the first time she had been in this position. In fact, she quite enjoyed the challenge. The opportunity to be a hero. No second chances. She lunged behind the trunk of a large oak tree.

"Claaaa-raaaa! Where are you?"

She recognised that voice. Barry. Barry the Bully. Barry, who spent his days picking up kids' lunches, picking on the small kids, and picking his big nose. Barry, who would happily shoot Clara in the neck and prance off to celebrate with chocolate ice cream.

Barry would be Clara's next victim.

I'm good at this. This is my thing, Clara reminded herself. Her lungs heaving with worry and fear, she waited behind the oak trying to not make a sound. It was hard to stay silent when you were fighting for breath, but she knew that if Barry heard even a peep he'd be on to her.

"I know you're there, Clara," Barry declared. "You can't hide from us. Just give up. Get rid of that pathetic red gun-toy of yours and surrender. I'll do you a favour and make it quick."

As if.

Most of Barry's soldiers had been eliminated – Clara had seen to that. His hand-picked good-for-nothing team had so far been unable to have a decent shot at her, let alone catch her. They may as well have had water pistols for weapons rather than rifles. Clara held her breath as the soft crunch of Barry's footsteps approached. She knew she had to make a move and make it quickly. Leaning against the tree she felt something firm in her back pocket. Spare ammunition. Grabbing a handful of the rounded bullets, she catapulted them over her shoulder. Hopefully they would distract Barry, giving Clara an opportunity to escape.

Listening for the sound of movement, Clara could only hear her own breathing and the rapid thump of her heartbeat.

Middle



Grade





Name: ALEX MONK

Title: THE GIANTS OF MACHU PICCHU

Genre: Historical Fantasy

Mentor: Stuart White

Mentor comments

Alex is a fantastic talent with a wonderful and natural storytelling ability. From the first pages of *Giants*, you get this fantastic sense of world-building that can only come with extensive experience, and that second sentence just hooks you right into this story world and the rest of it never lets you go. Alex has worked on both this book and her next this summer, and I am sure we will be reading her work in print at some point very soon!

The Giants of Machu Picchu is a middle grade historical fantasy, complete at 53,000 words. It is set in the 15th Century Inca Empire and based on South American mythology.

Orqo is one of the giants forced to build Machu Picchu for the Inca Emperor. When he angers the Emperor's son, Orqo is sent to Cusco as punishment. His task – transporting an Inca princess on a sightseeing tour – provides an unexpected opportunity. He decides to kidnap the princess and use her to win the giants' freedom.

Princess Izi, raised as a gift to the sun god, believes giants have no feelings. When Orqo's father orders him to return the princess, Izi persuades Orqo to escape with her. On the run together, Izi overcomes her prejudices and the pair form an unlikely friendship.

After university, I spent eight months travelling in South America. Visiting Machu Picchu was one of the highlights of my trip. Initially I found it difficult to comprehend how any human could have built the magnificent Inca structures. Only when I studied South American mythology did I realise there could be an alternative explanation – giants.

I was a solicitor for eight years before changing careers to become a primary school teacher. I continued to have adventures in South America – learning tango in Argentina and capoeira in Brazil. Now as the parent of two pre-schoolers (and their menagerie of invisible friends), our best adventures are often in our imaginations.

The Giants of Machu Picchu was shortlisted for the Write Mentor Children's Novel Award and placed sixth (and judge's favourite) in the Ink and Insights Competition.

THE GIANTS OF MACHU PICCHU

BY ALEX MONK

Inca Empire 1455

Chapter 1 – Talking treason

It started with a low rumble. As if the mountain had eaten too many potatoes and its belly was growling in protest. The air seemed different, heavier. Orqo laid down his tools and glanced around the plaza, wondering if anyone else had noticed. The other giants were still working on the Sun Temple, chipping away at huge blocks of granite with hammer stones and bronze chisels, forming the rocks into a towering wall.

A human soldier stood close by, armed with a truncheon and bronze spear. He was there to keep the giants in line. Not that he needed to do much. Giants might be more than twice the size of humans, but Orqo's workmates wouldn't dream of complaining. Right now, the soldier was yawning and scratching his bottom. He couldn't have noticed the rumble. Only a llama seemed to be troubled. The animal had wandered away from its herd and stood in the centre of the plaza, long neck rigid, eyes open wide.

'Here Orqo.' A clay water bottle whizzed towards his head. Orqo stretched out his arm and caught it with ease. His sister, Apichu, clutched another three bottles. She smiled at him. 'Good catch!'

'Api – you almost knocked my head off!' Orqo said. 'Did you hear that noise?'

'Nope.' Apichu was already walking away. 'Better get back to work.'

'Don't lift anything too heavy,' Orqo called after her. He couldn't see her face, but he imagined Api was rolling her eyes. Overprotective. That's what she called him. Good sense, more like. His sister was only ten, four years younger than him. If Orqo had his way, she wouldn't even be working yet.

There it was again. The noise was louder this time, a firm complaint from the bowels of the earth.

Orqo raked his fingers through his hair. All the giants, male and female, had the same bowl-shaped haircut, but Orqo's thick black hair never laid flat. It stuck out in wild angles as if he'd been struck by lightning.

He called to his friend. 'Pidru, did you hear that?'

Pidru had been slotting a huge stone into the temple wall. He rested it on his thigh and turned to Orqo. 'Huh?'

'The rumble,' Orqo said. 'I thought you'd have heard with those ears. Filled with wax, are they?'

'Big ears, big muscles, big energy,' Pidru grinned. 'What rumble? Was it thunder?' Orqo shook his head. The skies were blue; the only clouds were pale wisps. 'Last time there was a noise like that was just before the—'

The ground gave a huge jolt.

'Earthquake,' Orqo gasped, clutching the half-finished temple wall as the ground shook.



Name: Anna Moutran

Title: Amelia Skyhart and the Iron Age Treasure

Genre: Adventure/Mystery

Mentor: Meagan Dallner

Mentor comments

Anna is an absolutely brilliant writer. Her hard work and dedication inspire me daily, and I feel so honored to have her as a mentee. Her story of courage and adventure and hope grabbed my heart from the submission pile and never let go. I cannot wait until others can read and fall in love with Amelia Skyhart just as I have. Amazing work, Anna!!! <3

Amelia Skyhart and the Iron Age Treasure is a 49,000-word upper middle-grade adventure with series potential. Set in an alternate Britain where wild animals like wolves, lynx and bears still roam and with a focus on conservation, Amelia Skyhart and the Iron Age Treasure will appeal to fans of Lauren St John.

Twelve-year-old animal lover Amelia Skyhart longs to be on her mum's latest adventure; a trip to the Wildlands in search of an Iron Age burial site. Unfortunately, last time she accompanied her mum, a wolf under her protection died, all because she trusted the wrong person. She'll never forgive herself or adventure again, no matter how lonely it gets. The animals are safer without her.

But when her mum disappears, accused of stealing a priceless gold bracelet, Amelia must go to the one place she vowed never to return – the Wildlands. With secret agents and treasure thieves in pursuit, Amelia must learn to trust herself and others in order to decipher clues and maps to find her mum and the burial site first. If she fails, Amelia will not only lose her mum but will also jeopardise the conservation efforts in her beloved Wildlands, including all the animals that call it home.

I am a member of SCBWI and have a Bachelor of Law (Hons.) degree. My winning short stories have featured in WriteMentor magazine. I live in the West Midlands with my family, writing middle-grade stories inspired by nature, strong girls and the power of friendship.

AMELIA SKYHART

AND THE IRON AGE TREASURE

BY ANNA MOUTRAN

Chapter 1 – The mystery of the golden bracelet

Amelia checked her watch again as the school bus rumbled along. Come on. She wiped condensation from the window and pressed her forehead against the cold glass, willing her stop to appear. At last Steeple Hill's crumbling townhouses reared out of the yellow smog, glossed doors and iron railings glistening in the damp evening air.

Amelia leapt off the bus, cold water trickling into her socks as she splashed through puddles, racing for home. Perhaps Mum would already be there, full of exciting stories about her two weeks away in the Wildlands. Reaching her house, Amelia clattered down the basement steps and into the hot steamy kitchen. The smell of sizzling sausages wafted out. 'Where is she?'

'Not here yet, sorry.' Zara poked the sausages in the pan, her pink hair frizzy in the steam. 'I think these are done. It's a nightmare trying to get this old stove to cook anything properly.'

Amelia's shoulders dropped. She plonked her bag on the worn oak table, pulling off her damp coat and hanging it on the brass hook by the door. 'I thought she'd be home by now.'

'I'm sure she won't be long.' Zara placed two plates piled high with fat juicy sausages and creamy mash on the table. 'How do you turn this thing off?'

Amelia twiddled the stove dials. 'Mum said we can redecorate once she's home. We didn't get a chance before she left.' She thumped the stove and it clicked off.

Zara tilted her head, her mouth curling. 'It's what you'd call quirky.'

'And home,' said Amelia. She loved the old house, quirks and all, because at last, after years of moving from one place to another, she and Mum finally had a place of their own.

'Home is being with the people we love.' Zara twisted the beads on one of her bracelets as she sat down. 'You should have gone with your mum.'

Amelia stared at her plate, a lump rising in her throat. 'No I shouldn't. I'd ruin everything.'

Zara squeezed Amelia's hand. 'I wish you'd tell me what happened. I'm a good listener, and everyone makes mistakes. It's learning from them that counts.'

The front doorbell clanged. 'Mum's home.' Amelia jumped up, relieved to have an excuse to avoid answering. She darted from the kitchen, snatching a sausage to eat on the way and climbed the worn stone steps up to the dark panelled hallway. The cobwebbed grandfather clock tick tocked steadily, out of time with Amelia's fluttering heart.

A figure stood silhouetted against the front door's yellow and blue stained glass. Amelia wrenched back the bolt and flung the door open. Her smile froze. A tall man loomed out of the shadows, his sharp features dimly lit by the murky yellow street lights. Amelia's eyes widened. Uncle Brassbeak. Mum warned her to avoid him but would never tell her why, only that they'd fallen out. Up until now that hadn't been a problem.



Name: Cara Lovelock

Title: The Children of Ink and Flame

Genre: Speculative Adventure

Mentor: Lisette Auton

Mentor comments

I knew, on first reading of the incredibly small samples we were given, that I wanted to work with Cara Lovelock on 'The Children of Ink and Flame'. There was something magic in it and I couldn't let it go. Working with Cara has been beyond anything I could have imagined. Not only is her writing a delight, but so is her company – to talk story and books and ideas and how we pull them from our heads and form them on the page has been a privilege. Cara has worked unbelievably hard. I offered a partial mentorship, and we blasted straight towards a full, she was so willing to explode the story apart to find the thread that would pull it all back together again. She sends me work and it gives me goosebumps, there are times I gasp out loud. There's also one particular sentence that's the most beautiful that has ever been written and I'm ludicrously jealous and want to steal it. This story has heart, and adventure, and I so want to be the protagonist. I want it to be on shelves, so other children can want to be the protagonist. I completely and utterly believe that this book deserves to be published, and I can't wait to receive my signed copy.

In a divided world, freedom exists in the wild lands beyond the Wall.

A map hidden amongst Fern's tattoos shows the secret tunnels between the two lands.

When a stranger arrives, Fern must decide what is most important – protecting the wild lands and its people, or her brother.

Thirteen-year-old Fern is determined to keep herself and her brother free in the wild lands they escaped to. She has woven elaborate stories to hide their true history. But, bit by bit, the strands of her deceit are being unravelled by those around her. Her past catches up with her when the leader of her old world arrives seeking the map, and kidnaps Fern's little brother, believing he has it. Fern must rescue her brother while still trying to keep the map's location a secret, just as she promised her dad she would do. Fern sets off on an adventure that will see her flying through the clouds and plunging into the deepest canyon in a desperate attempt to save all that she loves.

The Children of Ink and Flame is a fast-paced, speculative, upper MG adventure. At its heart the book is about a determined and independent girl discovering that to be truly free she must first give up the secrets she holds and find the courage to show her true self to the world, for only then can she find what she has lost and build a future of her own making.

The manuscript is complete at 56,000 words and is a standalone with series potential. I believe The Children of Ink and Flame would sit alongside debuts such as Orphans of the Tide by Struan Murray, The Middler by Kirsty Applebaum and Where the World Turns Wild by Nicola Penfold.

I'm a part-time volunteer school librarian at my children's primary school where I run a student librarian club. An earlier draft of The Children of Ink and Flame had an honorary mention in the Undiscovered Voices 2020 anthology, a place on a DHH Literary Agency competition and was recently selected for the WriteMentor Summer mentoring programme.

The idea for The Children of Ink and Flame was born when I moved my children from inner city London to rural Suffolk. I became aware of how individual their experience was; while one longed to return to the concrete jungle the other revelled in jumping off bridges into our local river and watching kites glide above him. I was interested in exploring the different ways children experience being an outsider and how, as we grow up, we must find the courage to discover our own path.

THE CHILDREN OF INK AND FLAME

BY CARA LOVELOCK

Fern hid behind a large blackberry bush that ran alongside the forest path. She closed her eyes. Listened. Really listened, just as she had been taught when she arrived on the brink of death over five years ago. Fern inhaled and then as she exhaled, she sent out her senses as far as they would go. No sound, except for the tweeting and rustling of the forest coming to life.

Perfect.

She crawled to the edge of the path and took another look. No one. Not yet. The villagers on the rota for dawn foraging or the Hunters would be walking by any minute now. All she had to do was to keep to the shadows and not get caught.

Fern knew that she could stalk as quietly as any that were born there. She understood the dangers of getting caught. It had happened before, back then she had come up with a childish excuse of catching butterflies, but she wasn't a child anymore. Fern couldn't have them knowing about her tree, and especially what she could see from it.

Fern took her chance. She sprinted deeper into the forest, her brightly coloured tattoos gleaming in the dim morning light.

She reached the old oak and leant against it to catch her breath. She checked to see if her climbing pegs were still in place. Still there.

Then she spotted him.

A dappled lynx stretched out on the old oak's branch – one of the branches she needed to climb on to get to the top.

'No. Not again,' said Fern, scraping her spiky hair from her forehead and double checking the path. She didn't have time for this.

'Could you move?'

He didn't.

'Please.'

The lynx yawned and his tail wrapped around the branch, he clearly believed the tree was his.

'Come on,' she said. 'It's my tree! The sun's nearly full and if I don't get up there before Aunt Aura wakes, she'll make me sit through all of the Birthing Festival.'

The birds dawn chorus filtered through the trees. A purple emperor butterfly danced through the air and away over a nearby branch.

The lynx closed his eyes and lowered his head. He didn't seem to care. Not one bit. Did he really believe it was his tree now?

Fern craned her head back to scan the treetops. None of the other trees reached as high as the old oak. None had the willow platform she had built at the top or the secretly etched chart of the Sky Lines in its bark. None would get her above the tree canopy and give her an unbroken view of the Wall and the enormous, genetically engineered falcons, the Wings, who guarded it.

Fern lowered her eyes to show she was no threat and stepped towards the lynx. 'Right if you don't move, I'll dart you. Got it?' She tried to hide her smile, a tell-tale sign that she was bluffing – she'd never dart a lynx.



Name: Chrissy Sturt

Title: Be Brave Boy

Genre: Historical

Mentor: Hannah Kates

Mentor comments

As soon as I first met Hagen, I knew I HAD to have him. This real, overlooked hero of history grabbed my heart and held fast. Chrissy has done such an astounding job refining her voice, her characters, and Hagen's incredible hero's journey—I've never seen anyone make so much progress in so short of a time. BE BRAVE, BOY, is a book forever written on my heart. I'm so excited to watch it soar!

As a racehorse, Hagen has only ever wanted to win. But when he fails to live up to expectations, he's cast aside. Flogged to the British Army, Hagen has a new chance to shine as a cavalry charger. His greatest wish is to please his stern new master, the Duke of Wellington, and help him lead the fight against Napoleon's forces in Spain.

But the French fight hard and the confusion of battle threatens to take Hagen back in time to the horrors of the racecourse. As both men and horses fall, Hagen lives in constant fear that he—or one of his herd—will be next. Off the battlefield, there's no peace either. Turnham, Wellington's evil coachman, is constantly plotting to punish Hagen for his long-forgotten past. Even worse, there's hunger, disease and gruelling mountain marches.

Hagen must believe in his stallion strength and trust his instincts. Only he can feel when Wellington begins to falter in the face of an overwhelming enemy. At Waterloo, the fight has never been fiercer and Hagen must keep Wellington safe for the sake of the entire army. Man and horse must work together to overcome Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte and his elite forces, or all of Europe will be lost.

BE BRAVE BOY is 60,000-word middle grade historical fiction based on Wellington's real-life stallion, Copenhagen, who was buried in Wellington's garden with full military honours. This is a fictionalised re-telling of his life from reject racehorse to war hero.

I am a Hampshire-based equestrian and award-winning BBC journalist. I was a finalist in 'The Hook' at last year's SCBWI conference, a #WriteMentor mentee, an adult favourite in Write Mentor's #CNA 2020 and second in a recent flash fiction competition.

BE BRAVE BOY

BY CHRISSY STURT

Chapter 1 – Hidden in Shadows

Winter Wind ambushes me from the side. I swing towards her, flicking out with my tail stump. Her chill touch is on my hindquarters, over my back, in my ears. I give chase for a few strides, but she's gone again, surging up through the old yew tree with a wild screech.

I skid to a halt under the dark branches as they creak and groan, needle-sharp leaves leaking their bitter odour. Cold air swirls in my nostrils. The ridges of frozen tree roots start to turn my hooves to ice, but a warm dribble of dawn just reaches the tips of my ears. I tilt my face and the shaft of light falls down my nose. It's unusual to feel the touch of the sun. Usually, I'm hidden in shadows.

The nasty old yew tree sprawls in all directions, throwing my enclosure into darkness. It completely blocks my view of Eaton Hall, home to the Grosvenor family. Its brittle branches drag down to the ground, reach up to scratch the sky, and stretch out to each side. I've given up trying to see the big house, its stables and paddocks, dotted with Grosvenor horses. Mother is out there somewhere. I try not to think of our separation.

I sigh—long and deep—and my cloud of breath hovers in the air.

I've been stuck here for many weeks, with no view in any direction. Dense evergreen hedges line the other three sides of this small enclosure. I'm a young stallion. I should be on the lookout for my herd.

Yet again, the thought I've nobody to keep watch for makes my skin shiver and my wet wound pulse. That's my hidden hurt, near my heart—the scar that can't be seen. Unlike the others.

Winter Wind dives back down, seeking me out. She skims along my spine and lifts tufts of my mane, trying to rile me into rough play. I lower my neck and give her flat ears. She can't stir any excitement in me. Not like she used to.

Could I jump the hedges? I scrape a foot, assessing the height—as I have a thousand times—before jerking away with a snort. I'm no jumper. I'm a good for nothing fellow. That's what Cribbage calls me.

He's my jockey at the Eaton Hall racing stud and works for General Grosvenor, my owner. Turn him away, Cribbage said. To disappoint those you most want to please is a terrible feeling. They took away my rugs and levered off my shoes, leaving my feet bare. Wearing shoes shows you have a job. We're not just pretty field ornaments. Every horse must work. All that happened some time ago, before the Autumnal chill set in. I've been waiting for someone to come for me ever since.

My ears pick up the far-off clop of Grosvenor racehorses heading out to the gallops. I miss their company. How nice it would feel to lean over my door and do touch noses or scratch pact—a brisk groom of each other's hard-to-reach places—the way Mother taught me.



Name: Emily Randall

Title: The Flood Child

Genre: Magical realism, ghost story, folk horror

Mentor: Emma Finlayson-Palmer

Mentor comments

I knew I had to work with Emily from the moment I read her pitch and I have loved every minute of working with her. She's hardworking and a pleasure to edit with, and I can't wait to see her story in the world. I'm sure this story will be snapped up, and loved by others as much as I've loved it :)

The Flood Child is an Upper MG book of 52k words. It's a mixture of ghost story, magical realism and folk horror. Comparison titles would be Catherine Doyle's THE STORM KEEPER'S ISLAND and Helen Cresswell's MOONDIAL with elements of THE WICKER MAN and Shirley Jackson's short story THE LOTTERY.

Thirteen-year-old Autumn sees dead people, much to her annoyance. When her father drowns and he's the one ghost that doesn't appear, it's down to her to solve the mystery of his death.

She's convinced that he was hiding something, particularly when a clause in his will forces her to move to his childhood home of Imber, a strange island in the Celtic Sea. Autumn's warned that Imber is 'wrong to its bones' and it certainly seems a little peculiar, what with the towers of white stones, odd ceremonies and an obsession with the 'here and now.' It's impossible to find out anything about Dad, but when 'Find Me' appears etched into his old bedroom door, it becomes clear that his spirit is in trouble.

With unwelcome nightmares, a mysterious wise woman and a talkative ghost vying for her attention, Autumn begins to understand that she can't fight who she is anymore. To find Dad, she must first accept her gift and uncover the island's dark secrets.

I am a graduate of Curtis Brown Creative's Writing YA & Children's Fiction, a member of SCBWI, a Write Mentor Flash Fiction winner and a winner of the Cornerstones Literary Consultancy's #corpitch competition with my pitch for The Flood Child. I was a professional actor for eight years and subsequently worked for the National Trust, writing interpretation, trails and exhibitions. Indeed, it was my creation of an interactive murder mystery game for ages 8-16 that reignited my love for children's writing, particularly thrillers and mysteries.

THE FLOOD CHILD

BY EMILY RANDALL

Normality was overrated, although sometimes, Autumn thought, it would be quite nice.

She was standing in the middle of a tube station platform with a gentleman in a top hat on one side of her and a woman in overalls on the other. They were talking at the same time, because neither had any idea that the other was there.

Anyone alive watching Autumn would've seen a small thirteen-year-old girl with wild dark hair stuffed under a mustard beret, reading a book intently. In fact, Autumn had read the same sentence of Rebecca forty-three times because Overalls Ghost was singing We'll Meet Again in her ear and Top Hat Ghost was moaning about the state of the British government.

A guttural roar and a flash of lights and the tube rumbled through the tunnel. The carriage doors swept open with a beep and Autumn dashed nimbly inside, squeezing herself into a corner. The ghosts, unable to leave their platform, chased the train as it left the station, swooshing through waiting commuters and stone pillars until they disappeared underneath an advert for skin cream. They couldn't go any further, of course. But Autumn wasn't sure if they knew that.

She breathed a sigh of relief. There were too many businessmen squashed together with bulky coats and bags for a ghost to reach her here. She briefly considered just going round on the tube all day instead of going to school, but they'd call Mum — again — and she'd have to make up a reason — again — and quite frankly it was easier to just show up and hope nobody noticed her.

She put Rebecca in her school bag and pulled out a pen and a little purple notebook. Even though she couldn't fully extend her elbows, she scribbled as best she could as the tube juddered.

Top Hat Ghost

- Tube Station, Westbound Platform
- About 50? Beard and hairy cheeks
- Victorian, I think
- Appeared from behind the tube map
- Asked me to write to the Prime Minister about the state of the drains

Overalls Ghost

- Tube Station, Westbound Platform
- Pretty, young. Nice accent
- I think she was from the war. Worked in a factory
- Was waiting for me
- Wanted me to find her sister

Autumn closed the notebook and put it back in her bag before anyone could peer over her shoulder and have a nosy. She'd have to avoid this tube platform for a while. In the past six months she'd had to stop walking to school because of the park ghost, stop getting the bus because of the conductor that kept asking for her ticket, and had to use a different tube station because Matthew the tube station ghost had been particularly noisy about the upcoming apocalypse. Granted, he was one of her usuals. But he was a lot more chatty than normal.

But it wouldn't get to her today. Today was special. She would go through anything to get to that evening, because finally Dad was coming home.



Name: Emma Norris

Title: The Belongsong

Genre: Speculative/fantasy

Mentor: Jonathan Evers

Mentor comments

The Belongsong feels as timeless as a classic, but it tackles themes about inclusivity that feel very current. A story about an unusual relationship between a girl and a whale shark, both of them outsiders, its concept and prose leapt out at me immediately. It was beautifully written before mentoring, but it is a novel transformed now. Emma Norris is a veritable workhouse, never afraid to start again from scratch when she knows something isn't working or knows she can make something work even better. Sensitive, moving, thought-provoking and exciting with it, The Belongsong is an adventure I am sure many middle grade readers will want to dive into.

The last humans survive in a flooded world, unaware that humpback whales keep them in No Hunt Zones, protecting them from the ocean's predators. But with shoals disappearing and dolphins sabotaging their fishing and hunting trips, the floating village is on the brink of starvation. When Mayu, a girl born different, hears a voice underwater and a white whale shark, Ragged Tooth, returns to the No Hunt Zone, the villagers accuse Mayu of being a Half-fish, in league with the marine animals attacking their way of life. As the lives of girl and whale shark collide, they seem like enemies from different worlds, but their paths have crossed before and they must work out who the real enemy is before the world they share is torn apart.

The Belongsong is a speculative, fantasy adventure for upper middle grade readers. It is a dual narrative with two misfit protagonists.

I grew up underwater in Gibraltar, and my best friends lived in my amateur aquarium where they frequently ate each other. When I couldn't bear to be a child psychologist any longer, I started to write. I wanted to show the beauty of our ocean habitats for children who can never be there, and explore a message that we can all find our place, even between worlds, and the unseen lives of our sea creatures are invaluable and our fate intertwined with theirs.

THE BELONGSONG

BY EMMA NORRIS

It's Father's fault I stole his kayak.

He should have let me go foraging, or taken me with him to the Whale Graveyard. I love it out there; the sea grass meadows are so shallow you can see the enormous humpback skeletons from the surface.

I twist the shaft of Father's double-blade paddle in my hands, and paddle along the edge of the reef, working hard to keep the kayak tracking in a straight line. It's too big for me. The cockpit is too wide and the seat too low, so a strong wave could swing the prow out of my control.

The gap in our reef looms ahead. It's where the white sands of our lagoon end and the drop-off begins. Our floating village is anchored in a shallow bowl, inside the rim of our sunken volcano, Churuuk. Outside, the wildsea's waves smack against the black lava rocks and orange-yellow corals, and white froth and seaspray bursts up, showering me with a cooling mist.

My heart flip flops like a fish out of water. I have never sailed out without Father or my siblings.

The deepdark water shifts and bubbles, a million tiny crests spilling streaks of white foam as far as the horizon. I can't go back now. I may not be able to walk, or swim, but I can kayak better than anyone my age and I have never capsized.

I turn the kayak and send it lunging into the wildsea. My shoulders roll and my arms cycle as I lean into my stroke, the breeze ruffling my hair. The hull bounces through the swell, the splashback spatters my face and arms, and my heart balloons. I am out.

Fast, and flying and free.

I head west, away from the dawning sun and settle into the rhythm of my paddle strokes. Inside the lagoon, our teepees and kabins are dark silhouettes, like weird dorsal fins on the backs of our anchored rafts of kelpweed. Our people are starving. The shoals have disappeared and everyone's out hunting or foraging or fishing. Everyone except me.

If I catch something Father will have to listen to me.

A splash in the distance catches my eye. A dark shape darts along beneath the surface. It's big, whatever it is. I reach into the cockpit, shifting the harpoon I swiped from Father's kabin up onto my knees. I can't believe my luck. I paddle towards the gliding figure, and maybe it hears the splash of my rowing because it twists around, looking at me from beneath the surface.

It's a seal.

Flipping spinefish! No animal ever comes near our lagoon. I have only ever seen them in the distance, or as lifeless carcasses, ready to be skinned and chopped.

The spotted grey seal curls around and swoops away through the blue, whirling and gliding. I don't know if I can spear it, but a full-grown seal would feed half the village and I am sick of limpets and mussels.



Name: Emma Pearl

Title: The Mirrorbirds

Genre: Fantasy adventure

Mentor: Lu Hersey

Mentor comments

Working with Emma has been a real joy. Her descriptive writing is beautiful and the idea behind Mirrorbirds is really imaginative. Emma has been really open to working with me to edit and streamline her story, and I think she'll make a fantastic client for any agent who recognises her potential and is keen to help her on the path to publication.

The Mirrorbirds is a middle grade fantasy adventure, complete at 57,000 words.

12-year-old Mazy lives with her family in the rural idyll of Deaven. It is a simple, pastoral way of life, but Mazy yearns to break free and go to sea with her uncle, a fisherman. Only her mirrorbird – the magical bird-shaped manifestation of her spirit that reflects the truth in its surfaces – is more cautious, and her Pa is adamant she's too young.

When the mysterious Ambrose arrives in town without a mirrorbird of his own, he causes a stir. Mazy is enchanted by his tales of travelling and freedom, but he is only after her mirrorbird. When she refuses to part with Bell, Ambrose sets an elaborate trap and the entire town's mirrorbirds are endangered.

Mazy is shocked by the betrayal and the ensuing carnage. She sets out in pursuit, determined to retrieve the mirrorbirds and exact her revenge. She must battle stormy seas, a hole in the ocean and imprisonment in a strange, cold land. If she cannot escape, the mirrorbirds may be lost forever.

I grew up in a world full of books. Roald Dahl was my great uncle and a huge presence, inspiration and figure of general awesomeness in my early life. He taught me how to swim and how to see magic in ordinary things. He also dedicated The Twits to me, which was one of the MOST exciting things ever to happen to a 7-year-old bookworm! How could I fail to grow up a lover of stories and all things bookish?

I have written stories for as long as I've been able to hold a pencil, but only began writing for young people seriously about three years ago. Since then, I have been frantically learning, reading, writing and honing my craft. I've completed three novels and have many more in progress. My YA novel A Sea Full of Wonder was longlisted for the Write Mentor Children's Novel Award 2020.

THE MIRRORBIRDS

BY EMMA PEARL

Your mirrorbird is your gift from the universe – your guardian angel, your conscience, your intuition.
The Book of Souls

The air is humming with the promise of Midsummer, the sky is the colour of forget-me-nots and the whole town is buzzing with anticipation. Bell and I are tingling all over with it as we make our way through the crowds to the inn.

Scarlett must have seen us coming because she runs out across the green to meet me. Pip and Bell, our mirrorbirds, greet each other warmly, chasing each other's tails as they flutter in a tight circle above us. Scarlett and I link arms. She is brimming with excitement and her cheeks are even rosier than usual.

"I can't wait!" she breathes.

"Me too," I say, and we squeeze each other tight.

The morning is set-up time, and everyone's busy rushing to and fro. By midday, the band is playing and the green has been transformed. There are tables and chairs covering every inch of grass, and garlands of flowers hung on anything that will hold them. It's pretty as a picture.

While we're waiting for the festivities to begin in earnest, me, Scarlett and Noah, her twin, mess around, chasing between and under the tables, causing several of the grown-ups to tut and scold. No one stays cross for long though. I grab a cupcake from one of the tables when nobody's looking, and the three of us hide under a table to eat it, giggling helplessly. We emerge, wiping crumbs guiltily from our faces and trying not to draw attention to ourselves.

Suddenly I am aware of an intense burning in my chest. Bell feels it too and flinches, nestling into the crook of my neck. I turn around, scanning the crowd. My heart is racing and I don't know why. Everyone is laughing, talking, drinking, eating, enjoying themselves. Everything seems normal. Yet I can't shake the feeling. Noah has disappeared and Scarlett is urging me towards the maypole.

"Just a moment," I say to her, a little impatiently.

Bell sees him first.

Over towards the inn, shimmering in the heat haze coming off the hog roast, a boy is staring at me. And yes, Bell is right. The burning sensation in my chest is coming directly from him.

I stare back. He don't look away. He's wearing a hat and leather gloves, which seems strange in this hot weather. It also means I can't see him properly. All I can make out is the eyes, shining cold, piercing me to my very soul.

Who is he? I ask Bell silently.

I don't know, Mazy, she replies. *He scares me.*

I don't think he's from round these parts, I say. *He don't look familiar. He don't look right, somehow.*

He don't have a mirrorbird is why, Bell whispers, hardly daring to put those words into my head.

What? I say, confused.

But the longer I look at him, the more I fear she might be right.



Name: Gina Gonzales

Title: Talented

Genre: Dark Fantasy

Mentor: Hannah Kates and AJ Sass

Mentor comments

I was holding my breath for a new, fresh take on horror. Boy—did my wish come true! Gina has built a jaw-dropping world of lore and monsters that stretches far beyond her unforgettable characters. *TALENTED* didn't just rivet me to the edge of my seat. This incredible book also tugs right at your heartstrings and has you cheering for Madge Boudray every step of the way. Well done, Gina! I can't wait to see this book on my shelf.

Deep within the tangles of the swamp lies the home of The Narluu. The price to live in its territory is Talent, and it has collected every month for centuries without fail. On those nights, the inhabitants of its domain shiver beneath their blankets and wait, hoping they won't be next.

Everyone, except thirteen-year-old Madge Boudray, sibling to the most Talented person in town—her older sister, Bryce. With Bryce around, The Narluu would never have a reason to steal from her. It's the one good thing about being Talentless.

But when their Daddy's Talent is taken, Madge follows Bryce into The Narluu's underground lair to steal it back.

Bryce leads the charge, but after a horrific encounter with the monster that ends in an accidental explosion, Madge is the one who stumbles home clutching all that is left of her older sister—her magically sentient hand. At first, the townspeople hail the girls as monster slayers, but when Talents begin disappearing again, the town fears The Narluu is still alive and out for revenge, and banishes the entire Boudray family.

Hoping all will be forgiven if they can prove the monster is dead, Madge and Bryce race back toward the lair. But along their journey, they make the shocking discovery that The Narluu hadn't only been terrorizing their town—it had also been protecting it. Now, it's up to Madge, the girl without Talents, to gain the courage and confidence to step out of her sister's shadow to save her town from the greater evil that lurks within the swamp.

TALENTED is a 65,000 word middle grade dark fantasy. It is a sibling quest with self-acceptance themes similar to *Over the Garden Wall* with the swampy atmosphere of *Evangeline of the Bayou*. I am a 2020 #WriteMentor mentee, a SCBWI member, and have been running a writing group with my husband for several years with assistance from our dog, Jasper.

TALENTED

BY GINA GONZALES

Bryce's Shadow

It was cold behind The Teeth.

The grove of pearly white cypress trees stood bright against the night sky, their fluttering leaves beckoning like dancers' fingers.

Madge ached as she gazed up at them, wishing she was back near the jagged entrance instead of staring up at them from inside the underground lair of The Narluu.

Shivering, she scooted back against the chilly rock wall behind her and squeezed her older sister's hand twice.

Love. You.

Three squeezes came back.

Love. You. Too.

Letting out a controlled breath, Madge carefully reached into the right pocket of her jacket (right for raspberry). She removed a packet of jelly that she gave to Bryce before grabbing a lemon curd for herself (left for lemon). Quiet food.

Biting open the wrapper, the citrusy curd added a bright tart smell to the dank cave air before melting into the complete darkness. Madge's inventory system was simple, yet effective, and kept her from fumbling around. She might not be Talented, but at least she was organized.

Her hollow stomach yowled, unsatisfied by another curd meal. It would be just her luck. They'd gone the entire trip silently communicating with hand squeezes, pinches, and scratches, but it would be her ungrateful stomach that was going to get them caught.

Bryce pressed her unopened jelly packet back into Madge's fingers and squeezed. If they weren't in a monster's nest, she would have given it back. Her sister must be as hungry as she was. But it was Bryce who ran away. Bryce who took Daddy's canoe into the swamp.

Bryce who wanted to steal Daddy's Talent back from The Narluu. So even though Madge wasn't sure about any of these things, she followed along as always in her sister's shadow.

Madge sucked on the raspberry packet, the fruity smell reminding her of breakfast toast. Daddy always made it just right, golden brown for her and amber for Bryce. Amazing that one whiff could carry an entire memory. Maybe hiding underground in the pitch black for hours had heightened her other senses. She waved a hand in front of her face. Nothing. It would be nice to see, but it was also nice not having to wear glasses for awhile.

Bones and rocks crackled beneath her as she stretched out a leg. If everything went according to plan, soon they'd be out of this suffocatingly dark place for good. Home to Daddy and her best friend, Coralynn. Back under the grey cypress that bent over you like elderly grandparents gazing into a cradle. Even the hot humid air and getting her boots stuck in the mud sounded wonderful.

The Teeth began to vibrate. Both girls froze. A buzzing sound bubbled up from deep within the nest. It grew louder as it engulfed them, like they were in the middle of a beehive. The sisters held each other tight to keep from screaming. Raspberry jelly sat on Madge's tongue like a lump.



Name: Judy Darley

Title: Windstruck

Genre: Survival adventure with elements of eco-fable

Mentor: Lindsay Galvin

Mentor comments

I knew I wanted to work on Judy's brilliant story WINDSTRUCK from the first half of her cover letter - it had many elements I love; survival adventure, inventive post apocalyptic realism, and just the right dose of science. Luckily, when I read the sample I found myself immersed in Judy's visual style and was soon rooting for her determined cast of characters in this all too plausible near future world. Judy was a dream to work with - incredibly driven, open to suggestions, and so creative in her solutions. I can't wait to see what happens next with WINDSTRUCK.

'Windstruck' is an upper MG novel complete at 55,000 words. The genre is survival adventure with elements of eco-fable. It will appeal to fans of 'Where the World Turns Wild' by Nicola Penfold.

Until the year she turns twelve, Lutta has never needed to know anything about survival. But then plastic-eating microbes evolve to devour every scrap of plastic they encounter, destroying human society in the process.

On the day that power clicks off around the world, Lutta's island town erupts into violent mayhem. Networks have gone down, industry has halted, and the microbes' appetite has released toxins into oceans, rendering rain poisonous and accelerating the climate crisis.

Lutta escapes with her uncle Laurie (doctor and ex-soldier, almost always in control), brother Jacob (diabetic, epileptic drama queen) and young cousin Alfred (sweet enough to rot your teeth, when it suits him), in one of two solar-powered, non-plastic hot air balloons they've built. Lutta's family are seeking a cloud valley where Lutta's scientist aunt Agati (who they've had to leave behind) believes they will be safe. However, Lutta will soon discover how perilous life is as a refugee on the far side of the ocean, where jaguars, bears and coyotes are less dangerous than some humans they'll meet.

An organic scientist at Oxford University read an early draft and advised on the sections regarding plastic-eating microbes.

'Windstruck' is a stand-alone novel with series potential.

I've worked as a freelance journalist since 2008. Prior to that I was a staff writer and feature writer on travel magazines. I've had short fiction published by magazines and anthologies in the UK, New Zealand, India, US and Canada, including The Mechanics' Institute Review, Mslexia, Unthology 8 and SmokeLong Quarterly. My short story collection Sky Light Rain is out now from Valley Press.

I regularly share my short fiction at literary events across the UK, including Bristol Festival of Literature and the Flash Fiction Festival. In my spare time I run culture blog SkyLightRain.com, spreading the word about literary events and opportunities, and sharing news of my own publications.

WINDSTRUCK

BY JUDY DARLEY

Chapter 1 – The ending of life as I know it

The power clicked off a month after I turned twelve.

I was sitting at the kitchen table live-messaging my bestie Imo when my tablet made a small tick noise and left me staring at a blank screen. At the same time the fridge juddered and fell silent.

Moments later, my brother Jacob and cousin Alfred burst in. “TV’s died!”

Aunt Agati stood up from the far end of the table, her eyes narrowing. “The WiFi’s gone too. You know the drill.”

We hurried upstairs to the living room, where Uncle Laurie was already drawing the curtains closed. The fabric was patterned with green and gold, so it was like being inside a forest back when trees still quivered with leaves, like they did when I was no older than Jacob and Alfred.

I began a game of Monopoly to keep the boys distracted while Laurie and Agati raced through the house, checking we hadn’t missed anything essential. The earthy tang of the coffee Laurie brewed earlier that morning still laced the air, his half-drained mug waiting on an end table beside his favourite book: Encyclopaedia Of Islands.

My heart skittered in my chest as we heard a loud crash outside. Glass shattered somewhere too close for my liking.

“Hang tight,” I said, creeping across the room and peering between the curtains. People were rushing out of their houses lugging rucksacks and wheeie suitcases. One man had a wheelbarrow laden with what looked like paintings and books. I couldn’t work out why he’d decided those were the important things to save. Most people wore t-shirts and jeans or hiking trousers like me, but one woman was decked out in turquoise chiffon and jewels like she was late for a ball. Some locked their doors as they departed; others let them stand wide open – giving up on anything they couldn’t carry.

It was as though our island was an anthill someone had poured boiling water onto. The windows of the supermercado on the corner had been smashed and figures beetled in and out, emptying it of every tin and bottle. Nothing plastic though. Everyone knew that taking anything plastic would be inviting the microbes along for the ride.

I watched the collision of two groups dashing in opposite directions along the terraced street. As arms and legs flailed, someone got lamped in the face and their nose gushed crimson. The sight of that red vital substance seemed to ignite the air. Fists started shooting out with purpose and shrieks tore upwards. When the throng dispersed, some individuals were hobbling.

Jacob leapt to his feet. “What’s happening out there, Lutta?”

“Nothing,” I lied. “Just a few grown-ups being silly. Stay away from the windows.”

“It’s only another power cut,” Jacob said, brows knitting together over his flint-blue eyes.

I focused on his freckles, trying to keep my breathing steady. “I think this might be the final one.”



Name: Kate Chapman

Title: Ghost Girl

Genre: Magical realism / humour / mystery / fantasy

Mentor: Jenni Spangler

Mentor comments

Working with Kate this year has been a fantastic experience. I fell in love with her story at first read (ghostly voices, sinister clowns, tandem bicycles! what's not to love?). She has put so much work in over the summer and I am really excited to see her characters out in the world for other people to appreciate. I'm expecting BIG THINGS and can't wait to cheer her on through the next steps of her writing career.

Who believes in things they can't see? Not twelve-year-old Clara Clutterbuck who refuses to accept that her mum and gran have psychic powers.

Ridiculed at school over her family's so-called abilities, Clara starts hearing ghostly voices herself after suffering a nasty blow to the head. One of them belongs to her grandpa, whose spirit hints at a long-held family secret – but can Clara use her new-found talent to unlock the secret of her dad's mysterious disappearance?

Everyone believes he is the notorious thief who stole the priceless Star of Prussia jewels from Alfredo's Magnificent Circus. Clara's sixth sense says otherwise and helped by school pal, lovable misfit Arjun Patel, she sets out to prove her dad wasn't the criminal mastermind everyone thinks.

It's a race against time as a local newspaper reporter is on the case too – determined to expose the truth and publicly shame Clara's family for her dad's crimes. Can she crack the case and prove his innocence before the shocking story hits the front page?

Ghost Girl is a contemporary magical realism mid-grade novel – with elements of humour, mystery and supernatural/fantasy. Complete at 52,000 words, it would appeal to fans of Ross Welford and MG Leonard's mystery stories. Long listed for the Write Mentor Children's Novel Award 2020, Ghost Girl is a stand-alone book with series potential.

I'm a journalist by trade, with almost 20 years' experience and for the last decade have been freelance, with bylines in everything from Woman's Weekly to Farmers Weekly.

I'm married to a potato farmer, am a mum of two and in my spare time enjoy reading, running and baking (doing the second means I don't feel so guilty eating the spoils from the third!)

GHOST GIRL

BY KATE CHAPMAN

‘Hey, Clara! Claaaaara, look out! Duck!’

I turned to see who was calling my name, but it was too late. A bright red comet-like blur streaked through the sky above the school sports field. It was heading right towards me, but I was rooted to the spot, there was nothing I could do to move and then – THWACK! – it hit me between the eyes. Hard.

The force of the blow sent my glasses skittering across the playground and the books I was carrying quickly followed suit as I tumbled over, crashing to the ground. It was like one of those slow-motion cartoons you see on the TV. Then everything went black.

I was only out of it for a couple of minutes, but when I came to, a sea of blurry faces had gathered around, peering over me as I lay sprawled on the cold concrete. Mr Cheeseman, our PE teacher was shouting for someone to ‘Dial 999’. When no-one responded I could hear him frantically yelling at anyone listening to ‘Call an ambulance – NOW!’

I tried to sit up, but he kept pushing me back down. As he turned to shout for help again, the dozen whistles hanging around his neck dangled in my face, roughly jabbing the spot where the cricket ball had made contact a few minutes earlier.

‘Fine... Sir... I.... honestly,’ I said, struggling to get my words in order as I forced myself up onto my elbows. My attempts to convince him there was no need for any fuss and certainly no need for an ambulance failing miserably. That’s when I saw the lake of crimson blood pooling around my elbow – and Arjun Patel.

He’s the rather annoying boy who sits at the back of my class and never pays attention. Now he was face down on the floor beside me. He’d stopped me on my way to the canteen to tell me how his hamster Jaws had eaten his homework. Again. I mean seriously, who calls a hamster Jaws?

As I found out later, he’d fainted and smashed his nose on the playground after I was knocked over. I couldn’t see properly, everything kept swimming about in front of me in a messy, hazy blur and the spot between my eyes really hurt – even more than when I broke my arm falling off the swing when I was six.

As I drifted in and out of consciousness I could hear Arjun whimpering, ‘No please, you can’t put that up my nose – it’ll never fit!’

Then the paramedic turned to me and made a funny sound – like a rush of air escaping a balloon – and said, ‘Ouch! That looks nasty!’

That’s the last thing I remember before it all went black – again.

When I next came to, I was in a small hospital room all alone. My head throbbed – front and back – and felt like it was about to explode. And that’s when the funny stuff really started.



Name: Katherine Shingler

Title: The Orchestra Thief

Genre: Contemporary adventure

Mentor: Joan Haig

Mentor comments

In *The Orchestra Thief*, Katherine has written a gorgeous story with loveable characters and a lingering message about friendship and perseverance. Katherine is a sparkly, empathetic writer - and she churns out rewrites in record-beating time. It's been nothing short of a privilege and pleasure working with her on this lovely manuscript - I can't wait to see which lucky publisher gets to put it to print.

THE ORCHESTRA THIEF is a contemporary adventure for middle-grade readers, complete at 45,600 words. It will appeal to fans of classics by Eva Ibbotson and Katherine Rundell, as well as stories with a real-life setting and a touch of magic such as Jenni Spangler's *The Vanishing Trick*.

If someone stole your dreams, how far would you go to get them back?

TOMMY BEATTY is an ordinary boy with a not-so-ordinary passion for classical music. He longs to be a conductor when he's older, but as a shy black kid from an inner-city estate, he's not sure if he'll ever fit into the elitist world of classical music - at least, that's what the school bully keeps telling him. Tommy can't believe his luck when the kindly *PROFESSOR MACDUFF*, director of the Royal Concert Hall, agrees to mentor him for the Young Conductor of the Year competition. But when Professor MacDuff's orchestra disappears, Tommy's dream is suddenly in jeopardy. He and his best friend *JESSIE* help Professor MacDuff to search the labyrinthine cellars beneath the concert hall for clues, and find themselves embroiled in a dangerous underground chase through a network of tunnels beneath London, as they pursue the missing musicians and the mysterious orchestra thief. Finally tracking down the orchestra to an ice well-cum-underground concert hall, they discover that the thief is not exactly the evil genius they expected, and has her own tale of broken dreams and thwarted ambitions to tell.

As the companions travel through a series of secret tunnels and hidden places - including an underground reservoir, a disused telephone exchange, a runaway Mail Rail train, and an extremely stinky sewer blocked by the world's biggest fatberg - Tommy proves to himself that he has the courage and determination to overcome all obstacles and make it as a conductor. *The Orchestra Thief* is a story about friendship, the power of music, and following your dreams, no matter what - even when there's a fatberg in the way.

In my time off from writing, I'm a university lecturer, a mother of two, and a volunteer school librarian. I write for adults as well as children, and had a story shortlisted for the 2019 Aurora Prize for Fiction. As I hope *The Orchestra Thief* demonstrates, I am passionate about writing diverse stories in which today's children can see themselves, their everyday experiences, and their hopes and dreams.

THE ORCHESTRA THIEF

BY KATHERINE SHINGLER

Tommy Beatty was just coming out of the school gates when a sharp thump landed on his back, between his shoulder blades. The blow sent him staggering forwards and he reached out to break his fall, hands scraping over loose bits of stone that littered the pavement. Wincing, he turned and looked up, squinting into the afternoon sunlight, to see who or what might have hit him. He was not altogether surprised to discover that his assailant was Barry Stamp, the class bully who had seemed, in recent weeks, to reserve his attentions just for Tommy. Other kids were pouring out of the school gates: some simply walked on as if there were nothing at all to see; others gathered around to watch the confrontation, their faces full of glee.

‘It’s your doing, isn’t it, geek boy?’ Barry sneered down at Tommy. ‘Bet you sucked up to Miss Lane for ages to get that stupid orchestra trip.’ Miss Lane, the music teacher, had announced in the last period that their class would be going to the Royal Concert Hall the following week, to see an orchestra play. Tommy was over the moon about it, but he couldn’t help noticing there was a lot of grumbling and eye rolling going on in the class: no one else seemed to think the trip was a great idea. He got the feeling that most of them – not least Barry – would rather eat their own belly-button bogeys than listen to an orchestra.

Tommy slowly picked himself up from the ground. He tried his best to look Barry straight in the eye as he stuttered, ‘I di-didn’t.’

‘Yeah you did,’ Barry spat back, jabbing him in the chest. His pockmarked face loomed close enough for Tommy to catch the tang of Monster Munch on Barry’s breath.

‘You love that classical music rubbish,’ Barry continued. ‘Well, here’s some news for you: it’s not for the likes of us. It’s for the poshos at expensive private schools. It’s for the little Theodore Fancy-Pantses and Fenella Nerdy-Faces whose mummy and daddy make them play the violin. It’s not for me, and it’s definitely not for you!’

And with that, Barry turned on his heel and stomped off, apparently satisfied with himself. Tommy let out his breath, finally, relieved to have got off so lightly. But what would it be next time? Probably more than just a shove.



Name: Laura Warminger

Title: The Great Prime Minister Swap

Genre: Contemporary

Mentor: Helen Harvey

Mentor comments

The Great Prime Minister Swap has a heart-warming and hilarious voice and a fantastic concept that I fell in love with at once. Laura has been so hardworking and receptive and it's been fantastic to see her shape the story. I love the way protagonist Katie now completely drives the plot, and I'm so glad Laura brought cheeky Billy out from backstage to help Katie solve the mystery and save the day. This story breaks my heart and makes me giggle in equal measure.

The Great Prime Minister Swap is a Middle Grade contemporary novel, complete at 39,000 words. It was written especially for my daughter, who had outgrown her adored Kes Gray's series of Daisy books, but would sit happily beside Mark Lowery, Lara Williamson and Jenny Pearson.

Katie Ramble is a vlog superstar, but only in her head. Mum can't afford wi-fi or an iPhone so she has to imagine her mega amazing videos. Mum just doesn't have the money to send Katie on the Year Six trip either, but Katie is desperate not to be the only one in the whole year group who will never get to sleep in a yurt.

The Prime Minister is touring the country's pound shops trying to prove she understands how the common people live, when her car breaks down outside Katie's flat on the Morton Estate. Katie's mum, angered by the PM's lack of empathy, challenges the Prime Minister to swap places for a week. The family find themselves living in Downing Street and Katie's eyes are opened to a life beyond Morton.

However, Katie quickly discovers that MP Edward Rankin and his scruffy reporter friend Mr Knight are plotting to unseat the PM. Katie must stop Edward Rankin from stealing the Prime Minister's job before he exposes the family's secrets in front of the whole country.

This year I won the SCBWI Undiscovered Voices 2020 competition and have had various short stories and flash fiction published in anthologies. I live in Norfolk and have spent the last ten years working as a receptionist for a local school. Through this I have met lots of amazing children, some of whom have had very difficult experiences. I like to include characters in my books that perhaps haven't had things easy but approach life with optimism and humour. Why shouldn't children from council estates get to go on brilliant adventures and believe that they have the power to change the world?

THE GREAT PRIME MINISTER SWAP

BY LAURA WARMINGER

“When you say maybe, that really means no.” I press my forehead to the dirty glass of the bus window, desperate to catch some of the cool air that’s coming in as we drive along.

“For heaven’s sake, Katie, no means no. Maybe means I’m thinking about saying no.” Mum pulls Benji up onto her lap in an effort to get him to sit still.

One day, when I’m a superstar vlogger, we won’t have to get the bus home from school. I hate the bus. It smells of sweat and cheese and onion crisps. “Everyone else is going. I’ll be the only one who isn’t.”

“I’m sure that’s not true. Sit still, Benji, almost home.” Mum starts whistling softly as Benji likes this.

“Please, Mum, I really want to go. Mrs Osbourne said that we’ll get to go climbing and rafting. There’re going to be these yurk things to sleep in and we can have a campfire at night. Everyone is saying it will be the best Year Six trip ever.” I try to see Mum’s face past Benji’s head as he pulls her mouth open to try and figure out where the whistle comes from. “You’re not listening, Mum!”

“It’s yurt not yurk. I am listening. Get ready to press the bell, we’re almost at our stop.” Mum scoops up her bag whilst Benji is busy peering into her mouth.

“We could ask Dad if he would give me some money. You could ring him tonight.” My voice is a little too loud now.

“Your Dad’s under a bit of a black cloud at the moment. I don’t think now’s a good time to be asking him anything. Press the bell now. Come on, Benji, down you get or we’ll miss our stop.” Benji starts to cry. He hates walking up the bus when it’s moving.

“Mum, please. If you don’t go you have to spend the week in Year Five. Listen, Mum.”

“Bell, Katie, press the bell.” Mum tries to carry Benji and the bags as the bus lurches to a stop. “I’m so sorry.” Mum nearly falls into the lap of the man in the seat opposite. I watch her set off up the aisle trying not to hit anybody with the bag on her shoulder.

I press the bell, but stay firmly on the seat. I don’t want to get off the bus. If Mum is going to say no, then I want to stay on it until it takes me somewhere else. Somewhere far, far away. Where people sleep in yurks.

Mum stands beside the driver and shoots me a glare. “Katie Anne Ramble, let’s get off this bus. I’d rather not sell tickets to one of your performances, thank you!”

Nearly everyone on the whole bus turns to look at me. Under the weight of the stares, I stomp my way slowly up the aisle.



Name: Lauren E. E. Persons

Title: Lacewing & Coal Dust

Genre: Fantasy Adventure

Mentor: Andrew Sass and Hannah Kates

Mentor comments

There's something about *Lacewing and Coaldust*—a very real, tangible charm that hooked my heart as beautifully as *Neverland* or Gaiman's *London Below*. But Lauren hasn't just crafted a beguilingly beautiful world. She invites you on the adventure of a lifetime. With action that leaves you breathless and characters you will never forget, Lauren has done an amazing job of polishing, resetting, and pacing this gem. This swashbuckling story shines so bright! Every piece of it makes my heart soar.

Jazzy has a plan for everything, but even she couldn't anticipate her grandpa's clarinet being stolen by a man with a lightbulb for a head. If she's ever going to play in her middle school band again, she'll need to learn to improvise—and that means chasing the thief through a magical antique shop and into another world to get her instrument back.

When her clarinet is sent to be sold at a black market in the clouds, Jazzy barter her way onto an airship, where she encounters an captured jinni who promises he can help—assuming he doesn't get distracted by his own quest for buried treasure, first. Jazzy breaks him out, and his sky-pirate captors come chasing after. But when the lightbulb-headed man offers her a deal—her clarinet for the jinni—she'll have to decide if betraying her friend is worth her prize and a sure way home.

LACEWING AND COAL DUST (67,000 words) is an upper middle grade fantasy featuring a diverse (PoC, non-binary, gay, lesbian,) cast. Fans of *The Trials of Morrigan Crow* by Jessica Townsend and *The Serpent's Secret* by Sayantani DasGupta will enjoy a similarly determined girl navigating a strange world full of even stranger people.

I am a queer woman in the Denver area who, like Jazzy, plays a variety of musical instruments in my spare time. *Lacewing & Coal Dust* would be my debut novel.

LACEWING & COAL DUST

BY LAUREN E. E. PERSONS

Midtown was a small city in middle-something America that prided itself on not knowing exactly where it was. It was too far from the Atlantic to be coastal, too far east to be Midwest, and depending on who you talked to, their ancestors had fought for the North or the South. The locals liked to say they lived in the middle of everywhere.

On a decrepit street just off Midtown's downtown sat a little storefront called Lacewing and Coal Dust, which might explain why it escaped most people's notice. Passersby rarely spared it a glance, and those who did only stopped at the insistence of their children, who pressed their noses up against the glass in awe. Behind the floor-to-ceiling window was a jungle of metal: ornate clocks and bicycle parts, compasses and telescopes, lanterns and hubcaps. Oddities filled the storefront to the brim, but if one were curious enough and found just the right angle, they could catch a glimpse of the creations stored deeper in the emporium. In those dusky shadows loomed weird shapes full of brass spools and giant gears. Forms that hinted at wings and silhouettes that might have belonged to automatons. Never did two looks into that shop turn up the same scene of ancient clutter. It was just as strange, then, that no one was ever seen inside tending to their wares. The paint on the door read, "Lacewing and Coal Dust: Forgotten Treasures for Lost Travelers," but an OPEN sign never hung in the window, nor was the door ever found unlocked when tried.

To the few kids who noticed the shop, it was full of wonder and mystery. To their parents, it was nothing more than a building full of abandoned junk.

And abandoned it might have been, for the shop had rested there, untouched, for many years. Decades, the adults would say.

But the children—the ones that stopped to look in the windows of Lacewing and Coal Dust, the ones whose imaginations were swept up by its copper contraptions like cobwebs in a hiss of steam—could feel a hint of the truth.

The store was old. Older than them and their parents and even their great-grandparents combined. This place was something else. Something still and sleeping.

Until one evening, somewhere in the darkest depths of the shop, a light flickered on.



Name: Marie Day

Title: Escape From Nowhere

Genre: Magical realism

Mentor: Julie Marney Leigh

Mentor comments

Marie's story 'Escape from Nowhere' impressed me from the very beginning with its strong concept. I was hooked. I loved the excitement of the opening and couldn't wait to find out where the story was heading. It's been such a joy to work with Marie this summer on her book. She's worked so hard and has been so dedicated to making her story the best it can be. No detail is too small and no edit note goes unnoticed. Her work ethic is inspirational. Plus, she's been so cheerful and happy throughout the whole process it's been like one long summer writing camp. I wish her every success with her writing career. She deserves it. I can't wait for everyone to read 'Escape from Nowhere'.

'Escape from Nowhere' is a 50,000-word magical realism novel for middle grade readers. It will appeal to children who like atmospheric stories like those by Eloise Williams.

A young familiar with magical powers she can't yet control, searches for a way to escape the witch who has imprisoned her in a shapeshifting house on the Yorkshire Moors.

Nobody comes to the hospital for 'Nowhere Girl', the child with no memory of her past. When spooky whispers call for her return to the moors, she escapes the hospital to discover the truth of her identity. Lost in a thunderstorm, a howling beast in pursuit, Nowhere Girl accepts the help of two strangers. But their tiny stone house and the animals that visit the garden harbour many secrets.

When Nowhere Girl discovers her real name is Kasia, memories start to return. She is a witch's familiar, able to change between child and panther form. To her horror, she realises the strange house where she's seeking refuge is the house she ran away from. Xandrina, the witch, had always told her escape was impossible. But Xandrina hides a secret and needs Kasia's magic. Can Kasia learn to use her growing magical powers to rescue the other familiars and break free from the witch forever?

I'm a member of SCBWI and though I predominantly write for children, I enjoy writing stories for different ages and genres. My flash fiction for adults has won competition prizes and been published in anthologies including National Flash Fiction Day. I've had writing for children published by Aquila magazine and BBC online. In March this year I won the Writementor Children's Short Story competition.

ESCAPE FROM NOWHERE

BY MARIE DAY

The curtain around my hospital bed is torn.

I press my cheek against the cold window and the distant moors creep into view. That's where they found me. One look at those jagged hills and last night's dream claws into my mind.

'Before you ask, I've no idea how it happened.' My breath fogs the glass. 'It doesn't matter how many of you interrogate me, I don't remember.'

The nurse runs her fingers through the rips in the curtain. 'No one's interrogating you...'
She pauses. This is the part where she'd say my name. If she knew it. If I knew it.

'Call me Nobody.'

'I won't do that, my angel. You are somebody. And you'll remember everything soon enough. It's only been a few days.' She examines more holes on my bed sheet and runs her hand underneath the pillow. 'No sharp objects lying around.'

'Course not. I've got...' My voice breaks. 'Nothing.'

She leans over and gives my arm a gentle squeeze. 'Are there any names you like?'

'No.'

'Poppy, Isabelle, Georgia...' She lists every girl's name ever. 'How about River or Storm?'

Those feisty green eyes make me think you've got a free-spirited name.'

'None of those are my real name.' I leave the window and pace the small room. 'And before you ask how I know, I just do.'

I scratch the dressing above my eyebrow. The cut itches. If she catches me, she'll tell me off again. I don't want the glue to come off because it could leave a bigger scar.

'It doesn't make any sense,' she whispers.

'You're telling me. How come I know that's called a bed?' I spin around pointing at the contents of my private room. 'That's a table, that's a window, you're a nurse. Nurse Isla Mackenzie. How come I remember your name, but I don't remember my own? Or where I'm from?'

She pokes her fingers through another set of rips in the bottom sheet. 'I meant this doesn't make sense. I'll change the bedding.' She taps her name badge. Nurse Isla. 'Maybe I've got a problem with my memory too. I don't remember telling you my surname.'

I shrug and dig my hands into the horrible pink dressing gown. 'Must've seen it somewhere.'

Worries about me cloud her sunny face. 'Why don't you go down the corridor to The Den while I make your bed?'

The Den. Exactly what I need. A roomful of kids bored of being in hospital, staring at me.

The girl no one wants. The girl from nowhere.

'You might make a friend.' The nurse tugs the top sheet from the bed.

'I doubt it,' I mumble but leave anyway. If Nurse Isla's run out of questions, there'll be someone else with a briefcase full of them along soon. That's all this place is. One question followed by another. I greet each one with the same silence because I have no answers to give them.



Name: Mathew Iredale

Title: Persephone's Map

Genre: Fantasy Adventure

Mentor: Sophie Kirtley

Mentor comments

I wish Mathew all the luck in the world with his vibrant, quirky, exuberant novel Persephone's Map. I loved the magic and adventure in the story right from the start and I've really enjoyed working with Mathew as he reshapes and condenses his amazing narrative to get the best from his dazzlingly creative ideas. I can't wait to see this brilliant story as a real live BOOK one day!

I am seeking representation for my middle grade fantasy novel, PERSEPHONE'S MAP, complete at 53,000 words.

Twelve-year-old Persephone Dashwood lives in a large, ramshackle old house with her parents. When her father mysteriously disappears one night, and her mother seemingly abroad, she discovers a secret room at the top of the house with a huge enchanted map on one wall. Persephone's search for her parents takes her to an alternative England steeped in witchcraft, superstition and folklore, where history has taken a very different course and danger is never far away...

I am a fundraiser for the charity Shelter and this is my first novel, although I've previously written a philosophy book (published by Routledge) and two fundraising books.

My novel has been shortlisted in the Wells Festival of Literature Book for Children Competition and chosen by David Fickling Books as one of the Top 5 Runners-up in their Master of the Inkpot Competition.

PERSEPHONE'S MAP

BY MATHEW IREDALE

It began with a nightmare, a nightmare so real, so vivid, that the next morning Persephone had to check it was just a dream. That was when she discovered her father was missing.

Persephone felt a strange tingling in her hands and feet. She was standing on the landing outside her bedroom. The air thickened, as if time were slowing. The hairs on the back of her neck stood up on end. Then everything blurred, just for a moment.

Her father screamed her name, making her jump.

“Dad!” She took a step towards her parents’ bedroom, then another, but the door seemed just as far away. She took several more steps but against all reason she was still standing in the middle of the landing. She tried to call out, but her throat was dry and her voice hoarse. A deep, throbbing hum arose within the house and as it did so, giant sparks crackled up the walls and across the ceiling like huge fingers of electricity probing the corners of the room. The edges of the walls and doors glowed with an eerie white light and – strangely, even in a dream of peculiarities – there was an aroma of damp leaves in the air.

Her father shouted again, but this time he sounded far away. The humming was now unbearably loud, making the floor vibrate horribly. The walls twisted and buckled, as if the house was trying to turn itself inside out. Persephone fell to her knees. The noise became one horrifying wall of ear-splitting thunder as the house shook and she was thrown around the floor like mouse being tossed by a cat.

There was a blinding flash and Persephone awoke. She was lying on her bedroom floor, her heart pounding. The early morning light filtered through the curtain. It was just a dream. And yet she had the overwhelming feeling that her father was missing. She leapt up and ran into her parents’ bedroom to give him the biggest morning hug she could and banish the nightmare from her mind.

Empty.

OK, he must be downstairs, in the kitchen.

But the kitchen was also empty. And the back door was locked, so he couldn’t be in the garden. She went and checked the front door. Bolted, so he hadn’t gone out that way. Which meant he was still in the house somewhere. She was about to start looking for him when two letters dropped through the letter box and there was a knock on the door. There was something reassuringly routine about the arrival of the postman, so Persephone quickly opened the front door...

...and gasped.

The postman wasn’t there. But nor were her parents’ cars or even the gravel drive! There were just lots and lots of trees, as if someone had picked up the house and plonked it down in the middle of a forest.



Name: Pete Hepworth

Title: Towers of Kingswick

Genre: Dystopian fantasy

Mentor: Olivia Levez

Mentor comments

Towers of England (title to be confirmed) gripped me instantly. I'm a sucker for dystopian fiction, and with this one I knew I was in safe hands! It has all the ingredients: strange, out-of-kilter words and names, foraging, climbing to get away from the mysterious and menacing Mist...Pete has been great to work with, with a highly professional approach.

Towers of Kingswick is a dystopian fantasy of 60,000 words, aimed at MG. It will appeal to fans of Kiran Millwood Hargrave's *The Girl of Ink & Stars* and of Zillah Bethell's *A Whisper of Horses*.

Misty misty Gorrer crawled up the Tower spout
Down came the sun and washed the Gorrer out
Out came the dark and chased away the sun
So misty misty Gorrer came to kill everyone.

Jak (12) dreams of joining the Watchers who protect Kingswick from monsters called Gorrers that lurk in the Mist. The Watchers have banned technology, blaming it for the Mist's creation, but Jak likes to investigate and invent. He also loves scaling their homes, the Towers that pierce the green Mist, which appears every night, as relentless as the tides.

Then Jak discovers the Mist is getting higher every year, and that humans face extinction.

Judging Day arrives, the day when every child is assigned to their lifelong guild. Jak decides to impress the Watchers by attempting a tightrope walk between Towers, but the rope snaps and he falls. Regaining consciousness, Jak finds he has shattered his hip. The Watcher's Code is clear: no one older than two winters may be helped into a Tower. Night falls and the Mist rises.

I am a teacher, which allows me the time to lose myself in *Towers of Kingswick*, aided by my shrewd and critical writers' group. With the background thumps and whoops of my daughters and their attempts to play Quidditch without functioning broomsticks, I am now having enormous fun with my next novel. This recently won third place in the Skylark Fabulous Fiction for Fives to Teens Competition at Winchester Writers' Weekend 2020. For both novels, I have been mentored by the Golden Egg Academy.

TOWERS OF KINGSWICK

BY PETE HEPWORTH

It was All Hallows' Eve. Jak knew that children once dressed as monsters on this night, charged around the streets, demanding sugar. He often tried to imagine the taste of sugar, tried to imagine being on the streets at night.

But nobody dressed as monsters any more.

Jak clambered out through the splintered door, clutching his discovery. He peered at it, eyes blinking after the dark of the cellar, and turned to Aliss as she crawled after him.

'I can't believe nobody's found this before,' Jak said. He threw the object, the blue label still attached, into the air and caught it with a whoop. 'A hundred-year-old tincan of beans.'

'Not everyone is stupid enough to go digging under a collapsed roof.' Aliss, her brown skin dotted with freckles, brushed dirt from her trousers. Her father's family were originally from Afrik. Jak could barely imagine somewhere so far away. She walked past him, wading through a mound of leaves that had gathered against the door. They swirled in a gust of wind. She looked up. 'Er, Jak?'

'My mother's going to be so excited about this,' Jak said.

'Jak, look.' 'Hmm?' Jak was automatically studying the outside of the building. The main door had been taken for firewood years before. The one remaining wall had dozens of windows, every one smashed, but he could see lots of handholds in the grey stone for climbing.

'Jak, look at the sky.'

'The sky? What are you . . . Oh.'

It was dark. Darker than it should have been.

A bell rang, a single chime, followed by others joining in from all around Kingswick.

'Is that the fourclock bell?' Jak asked, realising they must have been tunnelling under the abandoned house for longer than he'd thought. Or is it later? The stirrings of something, not quite fear, bubbled in his stomach. He didn't know what time it was and he couldn't remember that ever happening before.

'We need to go,' Aliss said, hurrying down the drive.

Jak followed, past a skeleton of rusting metal that might once have been a motobike.

'Come on,' Aliss said, breaking into a jog, her dark hair bouncing in a ponytail. 'Knew we should have come out earlier.'

'It's fine,' Jak said as he ran to catch up. He looked around, eyeing two decaying houses, slumped together like a pair of apprentices, drunk on Exmasday applesider. None of the buildings were high enough. Couple of the bigger trees might do if they were desperate, but that would mean clinging to the branches all night. The Tower wasn't far away.

'It's not fine. Hurry up.' Aliss was pulling ahead down a passageway, boots echoing off the brick walls.

'Loads of time,' Jak said, between breaths. A second bell rang, a double chime. 'Or perhaps not.'

'Two-minute bell,' Aliss said, her voice strained. 'It's fourthirty of the clock, not four.' As they careered around the last corner, Jak could see Smikel Tower ahead.



Name: Reba Khatun

Title: Dawud and the Peculiar Case of the Pets

Genre: Mystery

Mentor: Mandy Rabin

Mentor comments

When I first read Reba's story, I was struck by the combination of warmth, humour and a wonderfully endearing protagonist. It was clear from the outset that Reba would need to think about restructuring her story - a daunting task, which she tackled head on, reading, learning and working hard in order to improve her manuscript. It has been an absolute pleasure to work with Reba. She already has an impressive writing cv and I look forward to hearing about her successes in the future.

When the pets are acting strangely or disappearing, Dawud's on the case.

I am seeking representation for my #diverse middle grade mystery, DAWUD AND THE PECULIAR CASE OF THE PETS for ages 8-12 and complete at 47,000 words.

Ten-year-old Dawud loves animals, so when local pets start disappearing, he's worried for his own beloved kitten. Together with his best friend, Dawud investigates, evading his over-protective parents and discovering their town isn't quite as ordinary as they thought.

DAWUD AND THE PECULIAR CASE OF THE PETS is like Anisha Accidental Detective meets Planet Omar, Accidental Trouble Magnet. Dawud's family are Bangladeshi Muslims like mine.

I wrote this story because I want children like my daughters to see themselves represented in books. I won the 2009 Muslim Writers Award (MWA) sponsored by Penguin with a story featuring Dawud. An earlier version of this story was shortlisted for the 2011 MWA. I received Highly Commended in the 2017 Faber Andlyn BAME (FAB) Prize and won first prize in the 2018 FAB Prize. My poem 'New Mother' and artwork 'Mended Heart' are included in The Colour of Madness anthology (Stirling Publishing). My story 'The Attack' is published in The Best Asian Short Stories (2018) by Kitaab International. My middle grade contemporary was included in the TLC Free Reads anthology printed in partnership with the AM Heath Agency. I was selected as a mentee on the #WriteMentor programme.

DAWUD AND THE PECULIAR CASE OF THE PETS

BY REBA KHATUN

The Wild Man's red eyes bulged and his mouth twisted in a snarl. He advanced with threatening steps, giving Dawud the shivers. Usually he wasn't so easily scared. Vampires and monsters lived in his head all day long. He must be losing his touch.

Green slime covered the Wild Man's putrid body and had it not been for the pane of glass between them, Dawud would've been overpowered with the stench of rotten flesh. Dawud's breathing was shallow and fast, making him feel light-headed. He switched on his voice recorder. "The time is eighteen hundred hours, location bedroom. The Wild Man is travelling south and as of yet has no knowledge of being observed." He flicked his long, black hair out of his eyes.

At that precise moment, as if the Wild Man could hear him, his head snapped up and spotted Dawud at the window. Oh no! You were safe as long as he didn't notice you. What should he do? Dawud's heart galloped like a race horse and a whoosh of heat flooded his head. He had to save himself.

Dawud dived off the chair and scuttled beneath the window. He put a hand on his chest to calm his pounding heart. The other hand brushed against the spiky leaves of a plant.

Mum burst into the bedroom, shaking water droplets off her hands. Her bun had loosened and strands of hair framed her square face. "Up to no good again?" She scanned the room, the light reflecting off her glasses.

"Get down," Dawud hissed, waving his arms. He got up and peered over the window-ledge.

The Wild Man lifted his arm and shouted something at him. 'Stay home. Monsters prowling the streets,' was something he had taken to shouting lately. Was that what he was saying now?

Dawud took a deep breath and prepared himself to look the Wild Man directly in his eyes, but by this time he had lost interest in him and moved past his house. Dawud slumped onto the chair and shut his eyes.

Mum cleared her throat.

Dawud had forgotten she was there. "Oh sorry, what were you saying?" He glanced over his shoulder. With her green outfit she blended perfectly with his leafy wallpaper.

"I heard a crash." Mum picked up the clothes on the floor, chair and desk, and added them to the clothes on the bed.

"I dived off the chair to hide from the Wild Man.

"Still holding a pajama top, Mum put her hands on her hips and narrowed her eyes.

Oops. Dawud forgot about her views on using that term.

"Don't call him that." She waved the top in Dawud's face making his nose tickle.

The Wild Man was actually a normal man called Mr Mason. He was homeless and wandered the roads, muttering to himself or anyone he could find. His brown trench coat was grey with dirt and reeked if you got close enough.

"Mr Mason is harmless."



Name: Ryan Leston

Title: Trolls and Tribulations

Genre: Comic Fantasy

Mentor: Ellie Lock

Mentor comments

I've been so impressed by Ryan's willingness to pull his manuscript apart and rebuild it in order to realise its full potential. He's worked incredibly hard and it's been a thrill to watch him hitting his stride and really enjoy writing.

Have you ever wondered why trolls are so obsessed with bridges?

Ten-year-old Berk isn't like all the other trolls. For one thing, he's rubbish at building. And he's not really bothered about bridges, either. Building bridges is everything in the town of Ogghampton, especially when you're the son of Chief Builder Thudd.

But Berk doesn't want to be a builder. Instead, he wants to be an inventor.

Sprocket, the town's only goblin engineer, has already taught him a thing or two. And Berk is desperate to join him as an apprentice – even if Sprocket's pet gremlins make inventing a bit tricky.

But when Berk's dad enrolls him at Builder's School, it's time for desperate measures. He's determined to prove himself once and for all. But will the Build-O-Matic – Berk's latest invention – get him through his final exam? Perhaps if it wasn't such a handful...

Trolls and Tribulations is a light-hearted lower middle-grade novel for 8 – 10-year-olds. At 30,000 words it's How To Train Your Dragon meets Muncle Trogg with a bit of Wallace and Gromit thrown in for good measure.

As for myself, I graduated in 2011 from the University of South Wales with First Class Honours in Creative & Professional Writing. I have since worked as a journalist for the BBC, The Guardian, Metro UK and Yahoo! News among others.

I wrote Trolls & Tribulations with the hope of inspiring children to gain the courage to be different. Although the trolls treat Berk harshly, he's strong-willed, determined and he never gives up on his dream, even when it isn't easy. This was partly inspired by my relationship with my own father – a former footballer who wanted me to follow in his footsteps.

TROLLS AND TRIBULATIONS

BY RYAN LESTON

Not so long ago in the town of Ogghampton a smallish troll with a biggish shovel was building an enormous bridge. Well, sort of. He was actually just shovelling cement.

“Why do I get all the rubbish jobs?”

Berk jabbed his shovel into the open bag. Then he tossed an entire shovelful into the cement mixer. Berk had been mixing cement all morning but there were still at least a dozen bags of the stuff left.

“Get a move on!” shouted Foreman Stern. “We haven’t got all day!”

Foreman Stern rarely spoke quieter than a full-blown bellow. He was short and squat with a great big bushy moustache that twitched furiously when he spoke. He was exactly the kind of troll you wouldn’t want to find underneath a bridge. But he was mostly harmless.

“Yes sir!” said Berk.

The trolls were building yet another bridge. Berk didn’t really see the point – there were eighteen bridges across Ogghampton already. But bridges are a matter of pride where trolls are concerned. It was Chief Builder Thudd’s crowning glory – his biggest and sturdiest bridge yet.

Of course, they had said the same about the last one... and the one before that.

Berk picked up his shovel and really put his back into it.

Any other troll would have made quick work of it. But not Berk. At the age of ten, most trolls were almost fully grown. They were big and bulky and could carry twice their weight in building supplies. But Berk wasn’t like the other trolls. Not by a long shot. He was rather small for a troll and wasn’t particularly good at building, either.

And he was the only troll in Ogghampton who wasn’t bothered about bridges.

The other trolls were obsessed with them.

You see, building was everything in Ogghampton and Berk had to try to fit in. That is, if he didn’t want everyone to know his secret.

He checked his watch. “Four hours?” he cried.

“Four more hours?”

Berk tapped the dial of his watch to make sure. After all, it would tick backwards every now and then. And if the alarm went off, he couldn’t get it to stop unless he gave it a really good bash. But no, it seemed to be working just fine.

Berk was proud of that watch. He had made it himself from an old alarm clock he found at the junkyard. He tied it to his wrist with some rope and spent an entire weekend fixing it. By the time he finished, it was as good as new.

Well, almost.

For a troll, Berk was really good at fixing things. While the other trolls practiced bricklaying or digging foundations, Berk spent all his time fixing broken machinery. He even built his very own contraptions out of junkyard scrap. But that was a secret. Because Berk didn’t want to be a builder like all the other trolls.

Berk wanted to be an inventor.

And his inventions were itching to get out...



Name: Sharon Hopwood

Title: Maddie Masters

Genre: Action – Adventure

Mentor: Hannah Gold

Mentor comments

Sharon is an amazing writer, but more than that, she's an amazing person. I've been blown away by her commitment this summer and her ability to dig deeper than she ever has before and write a whole new book. She's brave, bold and brilliant and will always be a true champ in my eyes.

MADDIE MASTERS is a MG contemporary action story of 40,000 words about a big-hearted girl who doesn't quit. She's part girl, part boxer – all champ.

Maddie yearns to become a boxing champion just like her father did. And you can't break promises – especially to dead people. But when she's faced with moving to The Ditch, an estate where crime is high and no-one believes in dreams, Maddie has two choices; go the distance or let life knock her down.

This is a book particularly close to my heart as I grew up on inner-city council estates in Northern Ireland and Birmingham. It was through my love of boxing that I learned to fight for a better life for myself and I hope the rawness and power of Maddie's story proves that dreams can come true no matter your background.

Maddie's story will appeal to readers of Cathy Cassidy and Jacqueline Wilson and can be summed up as Rocky for girls.

I am an active member of SCBWI and Write Mentor and have completed a Curtis Brown Creative Writing for Children course. Most importantly, I now feel ready to take my writing to the next level and find an agent who can realise Maddie Master's commercial potential in a market that, I believe, is crying out for inspiring stories set in working-class environments.

Finally, I am also a 4th Dan Black Belt in British Free Fighting and the Principal Instructor at a Fight Centre where I teach children confidence through self-defence.

MADDIE MASTERS

BY SHARON HOPWOOD

I stood in the centre of the boxing ring ready to fight the only opponent that I, Maddie Masters had ever lost to. My stomach churned. I mean it proper flipped about, doing cartwheels and somersaults. Like the time I ate too many sweets and ice-cream at my birthday party and ended up puking into a yellow bucket all night. I swallowed back the lump rising in my throat and waited for the sound of the bell.

This was it. The Midlands Junior Boxing Championship. I'd promised Dad I'd win this, just like he'd won it when he was my age.

And you can't undo promises. Not to dead people.

It all began two Saturdays ago when we had to move back to The Ditch. The first day of the summer holidays and like always, I'd arranged to go to my best friend, Samina's house. But instead I had to stay at home and pack the last of my stuff into boxes while Mum, bleary-eyed, bossed the removal men about. She's got really good at bossing people about since Dad died. Especially me.

I still think of him every day. He was a professional boxer and always smelt of shower gel and shampoo; earthy and fresh, like sunshine after a storm. He died three years ago when I was eight. Mum says that he's still watching over us, making sure we're happy.

But the truth is, I don't think that's true anymore.

For a start, Mum hates her job. Working shifts at the biscuit factory makes her tired. She says if she sees another broken digestive, she'll go bonkers – and I believe her. She's trying to set up a web-design business so she's spending every spare second with her head in her laptop. And she's so busy, sometimes I think she's forgotten I'm there.

Then there was that stupid letter. I mean, Dad could have stopped the postman from delivering it or got our dog Rocky to chew it up or wee all over it. If he'd done that, we wouldn't have got evicted from our home.

Mum says evicted means asked to leave but I heard Samina's parents talking about it and they said we were being 'kicked out for not paying the rent' and that's why we were having to move back to The Ditch estate. She also said that everyone who lived in The Ditch were thieves. I wanted to tell them that they were wrong but then I'd have to admit to listening to their conversation and grown-ups don't like that. Especially Samina's mum.

We left the Ditch when I was six. I don't remember much about it. But I do know that it's proper dodgy and there's no way I want to leave our nice big house with a back garden and go back there. And I'm absolutely certain that Mum doesn't want to live in The Ditch either.

And so that's when I came up with the plan.



Name: Tricia Gilbey

Title: The Green Heart Tree

Genre: Contemporary Fantasy Adventure

Mentor: Alex English

Mentor comments

It was an absolute joy working with such a talented and motivated writer. *The Green Heart Tree* is a fantastic middle-grade adventure, full of green magic and Tricia's love for the natural world. I'm thrilled that it's now heading out into the world. Tricia has worked incredibly hard and deserves every success!

The Green Heart Tree is a 49,000 word MG contemporary fantasy adventure brimming with the green magic of the natural world.

Eden's looking forward to a fun summer at Moongate Manor with Mum. Mum's been away since her uncle died, studying the unique plants in Moongate Wood. Mum asked her to take care of a tree sapling and Eden can't wait to show her how big it's grown. But Mum's not well, and after whispering a mysterious message about planting the tree, she falls into a deep and deadly sleep. Eden's left alone with creepy Mrs Rudge, who says strange things about killing giants.

Eden escapes into the natural world to find out where to plant her tree. Badger cub, Bup, shows her a secret older than time—a giant green boy who should be sleeping under the old Green Heart Tree to protect the wild world. But the old tree is dying, and Eden must plant her tree to help him sleep again. When the new Green Heart Tree is stolen, Eden and Bup must believe they're not too small to make a difference as they venture into the perilous enchanted forest, and confront the green boy's ancient enemy.

The seeds for this story grew from an Icelandic poem about a giant who sleeps under the ground and from legends of the green man. Helping children feel a connection with nature is very close to my heart, and as a teacher I helped children build a large pond, create wild and gardening areas, and plant trees.

The Green Heart Tree is about protecting hope, both for and through the natural world. It's a standalone story, but I have ideas for a series of Moongate Manor books featuring Eden's adventures in the Forests of Memoria.

THE GREEN HEART TREE

BY TRICIA GILBEY

In my dreams I'd come back to Moongate Manor to see Mum again and again, always travelling through the shine of summer, down over the stone bridge, along by the duck pond, and up past the we-are-very-nearly-there pub.

Now at last, we were nearly there for real. I looked up at the pub sign, The Green Man. His face had a mane of twigs and twisting ivy, and he gazed at me with eyes like blue-green pools. Bright new leaves sprouted wildly from his mouth.

My tree, balancing on my lap in its clay pot, had leaves the exact same green. It was a sapling, a promise of a tree, trying to get bigger with every gleaming, silver-green leaf that it proudly unfurled. A moonbeam tree Mum called it, but you won't find one of those in any tree book, or even online. I couldn't wait to show her. When she gave it to me it was just a little stick with two twiggy branches and only five leaves—it was nearly hitting the roof of the car now.

Dad was humming like he always did when he thought he might go wrong.

'It's next left and up the hill,' I said.

'I know. Only came up a few weeks ago.'

'Five weeks and three days!' But it seemed like forever.

Dad was glancing down at the sat nav. He'd forgotten the lane wasn't on there. The sun shone in my eyes and it was lucky I spotted the turning.

Moongate Manor

PRIVATE ROAD

So private that Great Uncle Bill never wanted me and Dad here. As we turned up the lane the overhanging branches stole the light. I stared out, seeing nothing, but suddenly, from the shadows, coming down the bank, a flash of black and white.

'Dad!' I yelled, hugging my tree.

He braked and swerved. I slammed into the side window, my face full of leaves.

'Eden?'

I untangled myself, ran my hand through the leaves trying to breathe, and there, just standing in the road, a badger cub—head up, whiskers twitching. He looked curiously at the car, then clambered up the bank.

'Wow...' I watched his stumpy tail disappear into the woods at the top.

Dad restarted the engine. 'He's lucky you spotted him.'

As we came up into the sun again, past fields of sheep and along the hornbeam avenue, the manor rose in front of us, and hope rushed like blood to my head. There were the tall chimneys, the tower with the steeple on top, and the library wing with the balcony and the up and down bits like a castle. I felt my excitement might fizz right out of my ears if I didn't hold it in. I was actually going to see Mum for real, instead of on the laptop, at last. She'd stayed to finish her uncle's survey of the spring flowers in Moongate Woods, but now it was the holidays we could all stay here, all summer long.



Name: Wendy Barker

Title: The Headhunters of No1 Morphus Place

Genre: Contemporary fantasy

Mentor: Mandy Rabin

Mentor comments

Wendy's wonderfully quirky, dark humour is absolute genius, and it was this that made her submission stand out. Structure, clarity and point of view were the main issues that needed addressing, but Wendy made a lot of progress in all of these areas in a short amount of time. There's still work to be done on her novel, but it will be worth it, because in the end she'll have a story that's unique and strong enough to hopefully secure a publishing deal.

There exists an endless list of names. If yours is on it (NO peeking!), The Headhunters of No1 Morphus Place are coming to get you! Two families: The Hunters versus The Hunted. But both are victims. And to get to the truth the hunt must first begin...

The Headhunters of No1 Morphus Place is a 60k word contemporary, fantasy, upper-MG with a dark-tinged edge and an element of other worldliness. Its quirky, enigmatic tone could be likened to Malamander. I have been told the concept is highly original: Lemony Snicket x Almighty Boosh.

The venomously enigmatic Morphuses: a kick-ass family of Bear Grylls (minus the waterproofs plus the heels with a spritz of Chanel No5 or SO2). These merciless head-hunters, who were blackmailed into ridding the world of poison, face their toughest ever 'guest' when their home transports them to England to vanquish a family of slave traffickers. But when this family reforms, the Morphuses are faced with a conundrum. However the price for choosing justice is priceless.

During my writing journey I have received positive feedback/suggestions for revision, which were instrumental in developing my writing. I have had 'near-misses' and requests for full manuscripts and other writing. Several agents have said my talent is innate but I needed to work on other areas. However as a self-taught writer I had reached the point where I needed a guiding hand. Being selected for the #WriteMentor Summer Programme has been that hand and a turning point for my writing.

I am currently undertaking a Writer's Online course, and Keris Stainton, who critiqued my work via her writing course, likened my writing to Ruby Redfort and Mr Gum.

My voice typifies my Liverpudlian/Irish working-class heritage, synonymous for its dark, tongue-in-cheeky humour. I am happiest trotting through the woods on my imaginary Connemara mare, acting out my scenes and frequently giving walkers a laugh or a reason to run in the opposite direction!

THE HEADHUNTERS OF NO1 MORPHUS PLACE

BY WENDY BARKER

SENSITIVITY WARNING:

Contains flashing imagery and obnoxious characters you wouldn't ever wish to befriend.

For most of us, moving house is stressful enough without the additional stress of what to do with the bodies...

But the Morphuses are not "most", and for them it's all in a day's work. They were never boringly normal like the rest of us, but on a fateful day 20 years ago atop the White Teeth Mountain in the Swiss Alps they became very more un-normal than previously. On that day the Morphus family (the head-hunted) became the head-hunters and no longer in charge of their own lives.

The Morphuses. Secretive yet open. Shrewd but naive. Dangerous yet harmless. But always utterly charming, freshly showered and deodorised.

Before you dive in I sincerely hope for your own sake – and safety – that you're not:

- (a) a serial (or even one-off) killer;
- (b) a serial liar;
- (c) a con-teen;
- (d) an e-vile child (including 'cheaters' who change the rules when it's their turn to be 'IT');
- (e) any other type of obnoxious person (including selfie addicts, pouters and posers).

Hmmmm?? Be honest...

Fine. Moving on.

Should you ever bump into the Morphuses (I've enclosed their photo for ID purposes so please carry it with you at all times) PLEASE remember your manners: Tatianus Morphus is particularly hot on a 'please' and a 'thank you'.

You must understand that I cannot disclose too much at this point without blowing their cover because of course I'd have to kill YOU before being sentenced to life imprisonment for Treason in somewhere far worse than Azkaban, or being murdered by a Foreign Agency – or possibly Tatianus Morphus herself. And we don't want that.

So for now I can tell you only this... the Morphuses never stayed long enough in one place for anybody to really get to know them, because when their work was done it was time to move on...

...20 years to TODAY (yet the Morphuses haven't even aged 1 day, let alone 7300!)...when we find Mini and Maxi Morphus in their jeep, hidden amongst dense jungle vegetation, about to begin their next mission: Operation MacFurrectomy. So radio silence please as we parachute in to watch it unfold...

SUMATRA. THE LEUSER RAINFOREST.

Outside a fenced-off compound with Buckingham Palace-level-suspicion-rousing barbed wire & 'Beware of Lions Tigers & Bears' (oh my!) where only exotic animal traffickers, exotic animals, poachers & the Morphuses would dare to venture (& probably David Attenborough & his brother, John Hammond, closely followed by a T-Rex), because this place has stepped right back in time...

High above his body Maxi's eleven-year-old bloodshot eye dangled from the collar of his pet Harris Hawk – codename Hawkeye – like a highly-polished, amber Tiger's Eye stone, controlling the bird and watching the movements of the two men in the compound below – Angus and Fergus MacFurry. Their targets. The next on No1 Morphus Place's list.

The eye's observations were reported by Maxi's unflappable mouth (attached

YOUNG



ADULT





Name: Ann Dayleview

Title: A Curse of Light and Darkness

Genre: Fantasy

Mentor: Claire Winn and Nicole Brake

Mentor comments

Ann is an amazing writer who's dedicated to her craft, and willing to undertake big rewrites. Her intricate world and complex plot were a challenge that she tackled with grace and enthusiasm. We can't wait to see where her career goes!

Most princesses receive jewels or flowers for their seventeenth birthdays. Anjeli's betrothed sends her a severed head.

Anjeli swears revenge when her best friend is murdered by the man her family is forcing her to marry. Marriage will be a death sentence unless she can best him in building an empire.

Wielding volatile light and shadow magic controlled by her moods, she crafts a plot to take his kingdom—and his life. They both set their sights on a corrupt neighboring kingdom that could either give Anjeli the resources to conquer her betrothed's land or increase his hold over her.

Alec scrapes out a living as a prostitute after banishment from Anjeli's betrothed's court. If not for Anjeli's promises of revenge, the shame of his new life would crush him. But to reclaim his title, his wealth, and his dignity, Alec must overcome his self-loathing and become the general Anjeli needs.

While spying on the merchant kingdom, Anjeli comes face to face with her first love, whom she thought her betrothed murdered. As old feelings resurface, they threaten her efforts to unite the kingdom's gangs, poison the monetary system, and corrupt the nobility. If she fails, she risks marriage to a man she wishes dead, the lives of those she cares about, and a depression that will cause her shadow magic to rip her apart.

A CURSE OF LIGHT AND DARKNESS speaks to fans of the heist-style storyline of SIX OF CROWS and the mental health issues in THE STORM CROW, and it is #ownvoices for bipolar disorder and PTSD. This multi-POV, young adult high fantasy is set in a world that blends the cultures of Central America and the Caribbean—the cultures that make up my family—and is complete at 99k words. Claire Eddy at Tor and Molly Cusick at Sourcebooks have requested to see the manuscript, pending agent representation.

I am one third writer, one third marketing nerd, and one third cupcake queen with degrees in Journalism and Spanish. I have experience in book marketing for several authors including a nonfiction NYT Bestseller.

A CURSE OF LIGHT AND DARKNESS

BY ANN DAYLEVIEW

What kind of sick, deranged, son of a river rat sent a severed head as a birthday gift?

Anjeli's knuckles whitened around the curved teeth of her jaguar skull mask. The head's blank eyes stared up at her like the fish the rivermen sold in Dock Market. The Aurian word for "spy" was scabbing over, branded into his forehead—a warning.

She pressed her lips together, suppressing a shudder. "Who found him?"

Mickiel glanced down, tawny skin hidden behind the jaw of his bear skull mask. Beside him, Valeria rubbed her shoulders—her round face hidden by the beak of an eagle. The masks marked them as leaders of the Shadow Guard, the most feared gang in all Salrio.

"I did. The box was behind the barracks." Valeria jerked her gaze back to the head. "How will we tell his family?"

"Best to let them believe he went missing. They'll ask too many questions." Micky placed a hand on Anjeli's shoulder. "It's not your fault. He knew what he was signing up for."

Anjeli sucked in a breath. It killed her to lose people, but she couldn't relinquish her freedom...her revenge...her future. The rust from the abandoned coffee roasters mingled in the air, tasting of blood.

Had Luce looked like this when Hadrian finished with him?

Shifting shadows twisted away from old crates, creeping along the ground, hungrily seeking her misery. Her parents were mad—no kingdom was worth a marriage to a sadist.

She shook Micky off. "I know. I just hate how he caught me off guard." If she'd been there, she could've cloaked herself in shadows so Hadrian would've never seen her...not until her light magic resurfaced.

"We'll need to bury him."

"And the others?" Valeria's voice wavered.

"I'll tell them." Anjeli cringed but raised her chin. "It'll remind them of the consequences of failure." It'd remind her, too.

Micky and Valeria exchanged looks.

"Anjeli—"

"I'll break the news gently. I do know how to be soft."

Micky looked doubtful but hefted the box onto one shoulder. "We should go."

"One hour. Don't be late." Valeria pointed from Micky to Anjeli.

Anjeli nodded. "Make sure you travel separately, and watch your backs. Whoever dropped him off might still be nearby."

"We know," Micky said.

He slipped out of the warehouse into the maze of alleyways in Old City, the half of Lenca where sinners and those who couldn't afford salvation skulked the streets. Valeria saluted and ducked out the back.

Once alone, Anjeli let out a breath. Her vision swam, the spy's milky white gaze turned gray as his skin paled and features twisted into those of Luce. Her best friend, Hadrian's brother. He was gone, too, killed in Hadrian's jealous fury for the hint that she might prefer Luce.

Perhaps that was her fault, too.

Shadows wafted over her like fine silks. Anjeli gasped and summoned a happier thought to push them back.

Revenge.



Name: Camille Carine

Title: Die for Me

Genre: Speculative

Mentor: Sarah Daniels

Mentor comments

In *Die For Me*, Camille has created a chilling dystopian adventure that features environmental calamity, over-population, and political intrigue. I was hooked on the rich detail of her world and cast of characters from the first extract. Camille worked tirelessly throughout the WriteMentor process, editing and rewriting her manuscript through numerous drafts. What impressed me most was her ability to come up with fresh plot elements when it became clear that certain parts weren't working the way she wanted them to. I've no doubt that she has multiple vast worlds waiting to be written, each one as exciting and detailed as the one she's created in *Die For Me*.

A gun in her hand and a choice: kill herself to spare another or shoot them to save herself. That's the question a virtual simulation asks Kateryna Barasch every time she tries to Vouch for a stranger.

In a country reliant on Vouching, which equates popularity to worth in the face of overpopulation, Kateryna's life rests in another's hands. Left Vouchless on her seventeenth birthday, she's sent away and given a year to find someone who'll virtually give their life for her before she must forfeit her own. When she lands a job in the government's frivolous Chateaux, she must find a way to face the hidden dangers and prove herself to a society that already considers her dead.

Eighteen-year-old Nicholas Cosmos gains the power to rule by giving and receiving more Vouches than anyone. No one knows he cheated. Or so he thinks. Guilty of conscious manipulation, he forces himself to die in millions of simulations to raise his own Vouch count. When Nicholas's personal assistant confronts him with the knowledge of his crime, Nicholas is blackmailed into an extremist uprising with the very people who wish to dismantle the society that gave him his power.

As Kateryna fights to earn her place within society, Nicholas finds himself, for the first time, outside of it. In a world of shaky alliances and bids for power, they'll each have to find their place – within the system, or by destroying it.

DIE FOR ME is a queer YA speculative novel complete at 96,000 words. It combines the deadly social media of the Black Mirror episode *Nosedive* with the cut-throat world of Katharine McGee's *The Thousandth Floor*.

I am a Jewish author who is entering my second undergraduate year at the University of Toronto. I have been mentored in the Write Mentor Class of 2020, and I've worked with a mentor in TeenPit twice over the years where a previous manuscript won 3rd place in 2018.

DIE FOR ME

BY CAMILLE CARINE

My life ceased to be my own a long time ago, not that anyone knows. After a morning spent in the mega-mall's designer shops and entertainment hubs—trying on expensive gowns and fawning over our favorite celebrities—my friends and I stop to rest on a bench outside a café. Rays of sunlight trickle onto my shoulders as I throw my head back, reveling in the warmth. For a moment, everything feels normal. I'm almost able to bury the weight I've carried since last year, when I first realized my time was running out.

Almost.

Beside me, Jasmine stretches like a cat and raises her eyebrow in the way that means she's about to start gossiping. "Was I the only one who saw those V.E officers by the theater? I did not spend sixty commzies to have our day disturbed by some V.E investigation."

I can't believe I hadn't noticed them. The Vouching-Enforcement officers and their silvery suits never bring anything but resentment from anyone. They never come out unless they have to. Anticipation, so thick it runs through my veins like oil, builds within me. Not because I fear the unknown, the wonder of what they are possibly pursuing. But because I know their target.

Lily's eyes spark. "I can't even imagine the embarrassment of being taken by them."

A mother and her child pass us, eyeing our group with interest. Mega-malls used to be the to-go hang out for teens before occupancy-laws forced the entry fee to skyrocket. Now seeing a teen, let alone a group of four, is as rare as seeing an un-refurbished phone.

Jasmine leans into me. "Katie, wasn't your cousin caught?"

My stomach knots. "Um..."

"Yeah, you had to leave early from Zander's party to pick them up, right? It must've been so exciting, getting to see their headquarters and all!" Tara's excitement is genuine, so much that her bag falls onto the ground from her lap. She's always had a passion for true-crime stories. She retrieves the bag with rehearsed gracefulness.

"It was horrible," I say to distract them from my hesitation. "The place was so bright, it was like stepping into the sun. One thing's for sure, if they tried escaping from there, someone would definitely take notice."

The girls giggle, their bubbling laughter twisting something inside me. I should be laughing alongside them, not with faux excitement but genuine mockery. After all, Vouching is the whole reason we're still here. We each have at least one Vouch. Promptly after our seventh birthdays, when our Vouching chips were implanted, we took each other's lives into our hands—and did so eagerly. It's why when each of our seventeenth birthdays passed, we celebrated with no reason to be wary of every V.E officer we saw. That's why we're here today, enjoying each other's company in the mega-mall's filtered sunlight. Like my friends, my seventeenth birthday has passed without trouble, because I've been Vouched for too.

At least that's what they think.



Name: Catherine Ogston

Title: The Ice Window

Genre: Contemporary/Family and Paranormal

Mentor: Jodi Herlick

Mentor comments

I fell in love with THE ICE WINDOW from the very first page. Catherine is amazingly talented. Her writing is lyrical, and she captures intense emotions on every page. Her story is magical and descriptive, and I can't wait for everyone to meet Cassie and Jamie and experience the beauty and terror of Antarctica in a unique, paranormal way. Catherine was a lovely mentee who soldiered through in the face of adversity to polish up an already beautiful story. It was truly an honor to work with her on THE ICE WINDOW.

When her mum finally loses her battle with cancer, 17-year-old Cassie doesn't know what to do with her life. She's failed her exams and doesn't have a place at uni, her aunt is focused on her love interest, and her dad lives at a research station in Antarctica and Cassie hasn't seen him for years.

So when her dad calls her up and invites her to join him at his research base, she decides to go – even if their relationship to this point has been strained, at best. But her father's clumsy attempts at parenting and refusal to talk about her mother's death only worsen their relationship, which lurches from one disappointment to the next.

In the midst of her struggles with her dad, Cassie meets Jamie, a handsome young man who always seems to appear when Cassie needs a listening ear and good advice. Except Jamie says he lives in 1993, while Cassie lives 30 years later. Cassie searches the archives and discovers the dreadful truth of Jamie's fate: he's doomed to perish in the unforgiving wilderness of Antarctica. She vows to alter the past by saving him, but her deteriorating relationship with her dad puts her stay in Antarctica at risk. Can Cassie patch their fractured relationship in time to save Jamie from his tragic fate?

THE ICE WINDOW is a complete manuscript with a word count of 66000 words. It is a contemporary young adult story with paranormal elements. THE ICE WINDOW has been long listed for the Exeter Novel Award 2018 and the Caledonia Novel Award 2020. It could be described as Quantum Leap crossed with Geraldine McCaughrean's The White Darkness.

A teacher by day, I have been writing for ten years and have had work published with New Writing Scotland, Storgy, Momaya Press, Honey and Lime, Story Attic, Bath Flash and National Flash Fiction Day anthologies. I write short stories, flash, MG and YA novels. I won the TC Farries Crystal Thistle for a children's manuscript in 2018.

THE ICE WINDOW

BY CATHERINE OGSTON

Mum died on a Tuesday.

I was with her when it happened. I had been there at her side for weeks, but in that last twenty-four hours everything had sped up. She went from talking to silent, from lifting her hands and turning her head to immobile, from a warm living body to a shell. She stopped speaking in sentences, and then she was unable to utter more than a few words here and there. Her eyes closed, and I stared at her eyelids, willing them to open for one last time so I could feel that connection with her. But she fell into the sort of sleep that I knew was pulling her away from me, further and further.

As dusk fell, I listened to the rattle in her lungs wind down and then fade out. Her skin took on a stretched, waxy sheen, and her face looked sunken. I held her hands, but they didn't feel like part of her: the hands that had held me, fed me, bathed me, wiped my eyes when I was upset, clapped for me and held me safe at every dangerous corner of my life. These hands were only bone, dry skin, blood growing cold within them. At the end, the person lying there wasn't my mum anymore.

When we realised it was all over, Aunt Sarah guided me out of the room and sat me in the hospice lounge. We were both numb, and when a nurse asked if we would like some tea, Aunt Sarah's voice cracked out of her throat, like she was pushing her words past a huge lump. I couldn't say a word, and my hand shook when I lifted the tea cup to my lips. The nurses moved calmly in the corridor. Doors opened and closed, voices chattered, telephones rang, a burst of laughter came and went. People walked up and down, right past the closed door to Mum's room, like everything was normal.

'We'll get through this, Cassie,' said Aunt Sarah in a brave voice. I nodded slowly, all my movements needing to be tiny and slow. I tried a feeble smile because I knew her heart was breaking too. Then we both sipped our tea without talking about the fact that after months and weeks and days of waiting for it, Mum's death was a relief. She had been descending down a spinning rope for a long time; we had known for a while there was no climbing back up. Now the cord was cut.

Friends came and went. Flowers and cards arrived. Strangers, or perhaps people I should have known but couldn't quite place, sent letters and knocked at the door. I developed that smile needed for when people tell you they are sorry for your loss, but I felt like my body was made of wool, knitted together to make the 3D outline of me when inside I was hollow, and it would only take one tiny snag and I would unravel.



Name: Clare Harlow

Title: The Shape of a Girl

Genre: Ghost Story

Mentor: Cynthia Murphy

Mentor comments

Clare's manuscript pulled me in immediately and I found that I couldn't stop thinking about it. It's so darkly atmospheric and contains some of my favorite things; a boarding school, Shakespeare, a love story and a whole load of dark secrets. I felt like it was written for me. Her dedication to making this the very best it can be means it's a slick, pacy ghost story which teen readers will adore - I can't wait to see someone snap it up!

The Five rule the school. New girl Helen would do anything to impress them, even brave the 'haunted' East Wing. But the ghost supposedly preys on those with guilty souls, and Helen has a secret that might just make her its next victim. Six months previously, she was responsible for her sister's death. Now, her belongings vanish without explanation and a mysterious figure watches her across the grounds. As a series of pranks against her escalates, Helen's paranoia threatens to destroy her relationship with the Five's enigmatic leader, Leia. But either the ghost is real or someone else is out to hurt Helen. She must uncover the truth - or pay with her life.

THE SHAPE OF A GIRL is 75,000-word YA ghost story, aimed at readers who have enjoyed The Graces series by Laure Eve and We Were Liars by E. Lockhart. It was selected as one of the winners of the 2020 SCBWI 'Undiscovered Voices' competition.

While I don't have any first-hand experience of ghosts, I did attend several super-creepy boarding schools. I then studied English at Cambridge University and spent over a decade working as an actress, before taking the Curtis Brown Creative 'Writing for Children and Young Adults' course with Catherine Johnson. The story I wrote before this one was longlisted for the Bath Children's Novel Award and the Msexia Children's Novel Competition, while my current MG project won this year's Skylark Literary 'Fabulous Fiction' competition.

THE SHAPE OF A GIRL

BY CLARE HARLOW

I'm only eighty miles from home, but it might as well be a thousand. The road winds steeply upwards, caged by a tunnel of trees, branches crisscrossing above us like outstretched arms.

"It's less creepy in the daytime," Steve says.

"I like creepy."

"Bollocks." He never lets the responsibilities of unclehood restrict his language, does he?

"I do."

I mean, who knows what I like anymore? New year, new start. That's what he said when he suggested this. Maybe I'll go goth. Our headlights pick out a high stone wall, interrupted by a pair of padlocked wrought-iron gates.

"That's the main school entrance." Steve plays tour guide, slowing the car so I can get a better look. "But it's only us and the caretaker on site till Monday. This next turning's ours. The flat's in the old stable-block."

We judder down a pockmarked track, white as moon rock and banked by tall hedges. Then the engine's off, a security light blinking awake as we heft my luggage across a cobbled courtyard and up a thin spiral of wrought-iron stairs to a door marked 'private'. The air tastes strange, thick with cold earth and a faint drift of woodsmoke. I huddle deeper into my coat as Steve rummages for the keys.

"What's below us?"

"Storage, mainly. A couple of music practice rooms. Now, there's a trick to this handle. You have to lift and then give it a good hard push, like so." He reaches inside and flips a switch. A large open-plan space is illuminated – and immediately plunged into darkness again. He groans. "Bloody fuse. Wait here a sec, Hel. Text your mum and dad if there's enough reception. Let them know we've arrived in one piece."

He clatters off down the spiral, leaving me on the little platform at the top. Cold nips my fingers as I take off one mitten so I can type.

Hi. We're here. Everything's fine

I add three kisses. Delete one, then all of them. Then the whole message.

Arrived safely

Will they be up, wondering, or will they have gone to bed? Beyond the courtyard wall, the craggy shape of the main house juts into view. Brightwood College. 'Together we shine', it said on the website.

There's nothing bright or shiny about it now. The silence sticks to me like sand. I hadn't considered quite how isolated this place would be. What will I do without the traffic hum, without the sea whispering its secrets in my ear?

I add the kisses again, but I've left it too late and the signal's gone.

"Not to worry," Steve tells me when he clatters back up. "I told them it might be a problem.

There's a landline. We can call first thing."

"Or I can email."

"Sure." His voice is careful. He moves past me, flicking on a lamp. "So, this is it."

"It's nice." A bit empty though, which is odd, seeing as he's been here since the autumn.



Name: Daphne Dador

Title: Challenge The Stars

Genre: Sci-Fi/Adventure/Romance

Mentor: Marisa Noelle

Mentor comments

When I read Daphne's submission, I was immediately intrigued and knew I wanted to read more. *Challenge The Stars* is a fantastic YA sci-fi with a fabulous romantic element that weaves itself into the plot interactively. Daphne's protag, the very determined and plucky SJ, is an amazing character. Her personality leapt off the page and I knew I wanted to follow her on her adventures. As we have been working together, the book has changed dramatically, and the plot has become more complex, more thrilling with higher stakes. Daphne has been a dream to work with and not only takes my advice and works hard, but always comes back with more! I know *Challenge The Stars* will be a fabulous success and I cannot wait to hold a signed copy! And...crane jump.

I am seeking representation for my YA #ownvoices sci-fi, CHALLENGE THE STARS. Complete at 89,000 words. Its adventure and romance would appeal to fans of the Ash Princess and *Divergent*, with the voice and setting of *Aurora Rising* and *The Expanse*. It is written to standalone, with series potential.

S.J. Muros has trained for over a decade to get into Space Coast where only the school's top students become officers in the Astronaut Corps. But when rumors of war with Mars arise, defeating her wealthy and well-connected classmates is not her only challenge. Now S.J.'s true-identity puts her in danger.

Born in a settlement on Mars and sent to Earth at six years old for her safety, S.J. longs to reunite with her family in the Martian highlands, which only Astronaut Corps officers may travel to. To avoid suspicion and discrimination, S.J. must keep her origin as Martian-born secret, including from the boy who has fallen in love with her. Asher is the school's best student and heir to a family corporation that is rumored to be oppressing S.J.'s people on Mars.

As S.J. faces dangerous tournaments testing her space combat and exploration skills, she also finds herself caught in a growing war: Martian rebels seek her assistance to spy on her classmates, the children of their enemies. S.J. is forced to blur the lines between friendship and duty, and finds herself having to make an impossible choice: help her people start a war, or prevent it with the aid of a boy she is forbidden to love.

This manuscript was selected for the 2020 WriteMentor Summer Programme, which paired me with a published author who guided my revisions. I am a Filipino-American, as is my protagonist, and a member of SCBWI. I work for NASA, and am passionate about commercial, character-driven fiction with hard science.

CHALLENGE THE STARS

BY DAPHNE DADOR

I stare at the list of astronaut names. Heroes who died for Earth by stepping into the darkness of space. Their names, containing flecks of gold to symbolize the stars, are etched into a formidable obsidian monument that faces east, reflecting the morning sun. And Mars. Where these brave women and men perished.

Unlike the other students, I'm not searching for a specific person. I don't let my fingers trace the letters. I keep a few feet back as if I'm not worthy to touch it. There is so much power here. So much history. The monument barely contains it.

I will be a hero like the people on this wall one day. Just like my parents, even if their names aren't here, could never be here.

Tita Lorna's snuffle brings me back to Earth. My forehead wrinkles. I should have known to avoid the monument, as much as I wanted to see it. Any reminder of the Red War brings on Tita's tears, sometimes mine, too. Because of the war, my parents are in some unmarked grave in the Martian highlands.

"It's okay, Tita." I whisper. To her credit, she held in her tears all through registration this morning. "My orientation will start soon. Otherwise, I could spend all day saying goodbye to you."

Not that I have the time or energy for this outpour of emotion. Space Coast Prep is where the best of the best train to be explorers for all of humankind. Tita blows her nose loudly. As an aspiring badass astronaut this is not exactly the first impression I had in mind. But I should give Tita anything she wants. She raised me, her sister's problem daughter, since I was six.

I try not to fidget as she lifts a hand near my hair, fingers lingering by my side braid. "Anak ko, you are like your mother. Both of you wore pigtails running around in space costumes," she finally says. Her brown eyes are warmer than I deserve.

I wink. "Yes, and soon I'll be wearing an actual astronaut suit."

Tita frowns, tsk-ing at me. "S.J., no. We talked about this. You are going to pursue a job on the ground. It's safer than being an astronaut. I couldn't bear it after what happened to—"

Her tears come again. Not that she has much to worry about. Students with my background never get to be astronauts. We're always stuck with boring support roles on the ground. My school's leaders will agree with Tita.

Mission Objective One: I need to crush it my first year here. I will be an astronaut, not on ground crew. No disrespect to ground crew... but just like my parents, I'm meant for the stars.

As our eyes lock, we are both surprised when a hand taps Tita's shoulder causing her body to crackle and fade. The girl jerks her hand away and my Tita's hologram returns. "Sorry! I didn't realize your Aunt was a holofeed," she says.



Name: Debbie Roxburgh

Title: Cheese Boy

Genre: Contemporary

Mentor: Anna Britton

Mentor comments

Debbie was an absolute delight to work with. Dedicated to her writing and incredibly hard working, she has created a story that stole my heart immediately! I will be a cheerleader for her long after our mentoring is finished and I know she will do great things :)

Jude Chalk is guilt-ridden after the accident that killed his best friend. Seizing the opportunity to help Jude rediscover a love of life, terminally-ill Eddie Bree challenges him to complete his unfinished bucket list. But can a list of unfulfilled dreams save Jude when he doesn't believe he deserves to find happiness?

Jude and Eddie become good friends after they meet in the psych unit of the local hospital and discover a mutual love of Star Wars. Unable to escape the blame he feels around Nat's death, fifteen-year-old Jude faces the prospect of long-term mental health issues. Plus he's now in a race against time to finish Eddie's bucket list.

With Eddie growing weaker, Jude is faced with the final mission – a bungee jump. With a deep-rooted fear of heights, Jude isn't sure he can do it. Time is running out as Jude stands on a platform over the River Tees. Will he take a leap of faith and move on from the burden he's carried around since the accident? Or will he chicken out and let Eddie pass away knowing the bucket list was never completed? One step is all that lies between a future free of guilt or one filled with remorse.

Cheese Boy is a contemporary YA novel complete at 70,000 words. It was longlisted for the Write Mentor Children's Novel Award 2019. It explores the themes of friendship, loss and mental health through the friendship between two teenage boys, a theme often overlooked in this genre. I believe the distinctive voice of Jude compares to that of *The Boy Who Steals Houses* by C W Drew. I worked with teenagers in special needs education for a number of years and saw first-hand the impact mental health issues have on young people. I have a physical impairment and know the huge positive effect it would have had on me to have seen characters like myself in stories as I was growing up.

I live in South Somerset with my husband and deaf eighteen-year-old cat, who is the perfect audience when I'm reading my manuscripts aloud. I am an avid reader of YA fiction and have recently enjoyed *The Sky is Mine* by Amy Beashel and *Gloves Off* by Louisa Reid.

CHEESE BOY

BY DEBBIE ROXBURGH

Having a friend hooked up to a drip has its benefits. Like the fact he can't get up and walk away when I launch into another of my mind-blowing ideas.

"Just think how great it would be if Ghandi and Yoda were morphed into one. The most compassionate human soul on the planet meets the greatest mind in the universe."

I look across at Eddie who's lying in a hospital bed. Eyes too big for his face and a grim prognosis.

"Not that again, Chalk. Ghandi was great, but Yoda is complete perfection. No Jesus sandals, no John Lennon glasses, just the real deal."

I like how Eddie humours me. It keeps my mind from slipping back to the day of Nat's accident and watching it play out, over and over again.

"You're losing sight of the bigger picture," I say. "Think of it as a Yoda evolution programme. We could roll it out across the country."

"There is no bigger picture." Eddie shakes his head. "A Yoda evolution programme? Are you kidding?"

"I think it's a brilliant idea."

"Therein lies the problem. You allowed yourself to think."

I lean back in the standard edition hospital chair. This confined area has become my safe place since the accident. And Eddie has become the one person I'm comfortable talking to. My parents haven't forbidden me from visiting him, but I know it unsettles them. I mean, I lost my best friend, Nat, a few months back and now I've hooked up with Eddie, who's got a death sentence hanging over him. It's not the healthiest situation to walk into but Eddie's great and I won't give him up.

"We could go out for tea," Mum said when I got home from school earlier. "Or maybe you'd like to go for a walk."

She meant a walk with her. Or Dad. Or a happy band of three. They know that any walking I do alone generally leads me straight to Cattermole Ward.

"You're a poor loser." Eddie pulls me back to the here and now.

He may be dying but that doesn't appear to have knocked the competitive streak out of him. I've only known Eddie for a few weeks but I can see him aged four building the tallest Lego construction in nursery. By seven, he'd be the kid who always got ten out of ten in the weekly spelling test. By nine, he'd be the only kid in the entire school to have never had a day off sick. I glance across at the cannula taped to the back of his hand.

Eddie's positivity and stubborn disregard for his situation are what keep me coming back to the ward pretty much every day. We haven't known each other long but Eddie gets me and that's huge when your best friend isn't around anymore. Plus his situation is different to Nat's. I already know Eddie's going to die, so it'll be easier to cope with this time round, right?



Name: Deborah Bailey

Title: Team Guilty

Genre: Contemporary

Mentor: Brandy Woods Snow

Mentor comments

I was immediately captivated by the unique premise of Deborah's manuscript. But not only was her writing phenomenal...her work ethic and positive attitude blew me away! She charged headfirst into a substantial revision of the novel with enthusiasm. The result has been amazing, and I'm thrilled to have had the opportunity to work with Deborah on Team Guilty.

Kyla Tanner's mom dates serial killers—once they're safely behind bars, at least. So when her mom marries the infamous Tim “Trojan Horse” McCutcheon, sixteen-year-old Kyla isn't fazed given that he's on death row with days to live. But when a TV documentary gets his conviction overturned on a technicality, he moves off death row and into her house, his sullen teenage son in tow. Her mom acts like they're one happy family, but Kyla refuses to play along, even for the documentary crew now following them everywhere. After all, Tim was released due to police evidence tampering, not because he's innocent of murder.

When Tim foils Kyla's attempt to break up him and her mom, his increasing hostility makes one thing clear: Kyla must get rid of him before he gets rid of her. She finds an unlikely ally in her new stepbrother, who insists that Tim committed other murders. But their investigation flounders, and worse, revelations about the original crime emerge that seem to clear Tim's name—or prove he's more dangerous than Kyla ever imagined. Now alone in her determination to prove Tim's guilt, Kyla must decide if inciting a killer is worth the chance of catching him.

TEAM GUILTY is a 77,000-word YA contemporary where Making a Murderer meets Veronica Mars. An earlier draft was longlisted for the Exeter Prize and Lucy Cavendish College Fiction Prize under its working title “Until Guilty.”

My short fiction has appeared in Liquid Imagination, where it received the Silver Pen Association's annual award, as well as in Mirror Dance and Luna Station Quarterly, including the Best of... anthology, among others. I am a graduate of the Clarion Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers' Workshop. My debut novel, Remember Wednesday, is forthcoming in 2021 from Melange Books' Fire and Ice YA imprint.

TEAM GUILTY

BY DEBORAH BAILEY

I first meet my stepfather two days after he's supposed to die.

He's why I'm stuck on the wooden bench outside South Carolina State Supreme Courtroom 3E, legs swinging above the tiled floor, hoodie pulled low in case of stray cameras. He's in there, and so is Mom, waiting for the gavel to come down on whether Tim's murder charges will be thrown out due to evidence tampering. "Fruit of the poisoned tree," it's called.

Funny how that sums up my entire life as well, ever since a TV documentary learned the cops moved a key piece of evidence. Even then, the governor refused to "wuss out" by offering clemency—until the case made national headlines and sparked protests, that is.

The bench is hard, and the corridor's dark wood panels have to be older than Mom. They bounce sound around so the chatter never seems to end. At least no one tries to talk to me, especially none of the journalists doing mic checks and quick sound bites for their studios. Maybe it's because over these last few years, I've perfected my stay-the-hell-away glare. Or maybe it comes naturally. How do you really know? Nature or nurture, just like being a killer.

So I guess I should be glad my glare isn't quite good enough, because one of the journalists wanders over. "Kyla Tanner?"

He's young, with dark hair stiff from hairspray. "Not in there supporting your stepfather?"

His clipped accent marks him from out of state.

I want to give him the finger, but I don't. That's probably the answer he wants even more than the honest one, that Mom wanted me in there too, but no way in hell. Our compromise was my waiting out here with the cameras and the poor schlubs dealing with other cases, like the boy my age a few benches down. He's dressed in black, black, and black—ditto his hair and eyeliner—but what catches my eye is the anywhere but here aura he radiates so strongly I could get high from the fumes.

The woman next to him tugs at the South Carolina Department of Social Services badge dangling from a blue lanyard around her neck. Her beige suit has a boxy cut and big shoulders straight out the 1980s. She shrinks from the media circus crowding her against the wall.

Welcome to my life. Not really glamorous when people only care because your mom's a freak.

The reporter presses too close while managing to not actually touch me. "You really have nothing to say?"

It takes everything I have to not leap to my feet, tell him—no, better, storm over to the whole gaggle of gawkers and shout to the rafters what I think. Fruit of the poisoned tree, my ass. Call it what it is: getting away with murder.



Name: Georgia Roworth

Title: Guitars, Bras and Heading for the Stars

Genre: Contemporary

Mentor: Anna Mainwaring

Mentor comments

Georgia, I have loved working with you this year. The first thing that got my attention was the brilliant title - 'Guitars, Bras and Heading for the Stars' - and then I fell in love with the characters. I love the witty dialogue, the friendships and fall outs and how this disparate group of awesome girls change the world around them for the better. This is just what young people need to be reading today! You have taken on board all the big changes that we've discussed and just got on with it - a true professional. I'm really excited to see this go out into the world. This book is so full of heart and hope - I love it.

GUITARS, BRAS AND HEADING FOR THE STARS is a contemporary teen/YA novel with series potential complete at 78,025 words.

Four mismatched teenagers form a feminist rock band with two goals in mind:

1. Win the local JamFest Rising Stars competition
2. Take down the social hierarchy at Cedarview High School

Selena Li (lead guitarist and founder) is a rebel with a love of staging protests.

Rumi Evans (drums) is a rocker with a hectic home life.

Sundari Basu (lead vocals) is a popular kid with a footie star boyfriend.

Erin James (keyboards) would rather be lost in a book than be a star.

In order to defeat rival band, Deathstar, they must transform not just their own lives, but the world around them too. Together, they tackle back-stabbing besties and crappy ex-boyfriends and discover that no matter how different their lives may be, music brings everyone together.

Geek Girl's learning to follow your dreams meets the unlikely musical friendship of Lemonade Mouth.

I studied Professional Music Performance with a specialism in contemporary songwriting at The Academy of Contemporary Music. After university, I returned to Suffolk to set up a music tuition business teaching guitar, piano, singing, ukulele and songwriting. I spent most of my teen years surrounded by music, performing as a singer-songwriter and dreaming of the stars. This novel is how I feel life would've been had I met four awesome girls to share that dream with.

I was fortunate to be chosen by YA author Anna Mainwaring for the WriteMentor 2020 Summer Mentoring Programme, who said of the novel: 'Guitars, Bras and Heading for the Stars is the book girls need to read this year. Witty, empowering and proudly feminist, this contemporary YA explores how young people can find their voices, literally and metaphorically, and work together to make their world a better place.' I also recently had my flash fiction shortlisted for the WriteMentor Magazine August 2020 competition. I have taken part in short courses run by authors Aisha Bushby and Alexandra Sheppard and am a member of SCBWI.

GITARS, BRAS AND HEADING FOR THE STARS

BY GEORGIA ROWORTH

Erin hated standing out. Unlike the girl with the spiky fringe currently sticking 'RECYCLE, YOU DUMBASSES, OR THE PLANET DIES' flyers onto the front of everyone's lockers. She'd get detention for it, but it wouldn't matter to a girl like that. She'd just turn up the next day with twice as many flyers and twice as much tape. Erin, however, would die if she ever got detention. She would literally fall down and wait for the Earth to consume her because things like detention meant that people noticed you. And being noticed was never good. That was why today was going to be the worst day to ever happen in the history of the planet.

'Would you just stop panicking? It's making me all on edge,' Sam said from where he walked along next to her with his thumbs hooked into his trouser pockets. Sam was the sort of person that was neither popular nor unpopular. He just drifted through life on a cloud of chillness, never worrying about anything. He'd always been that way, ever since they'd met on the first day of primary school. It never mattered if something embarrassing happened to him because he'd just laugh it off in an I'm-such-a-cool-guy kind of way. It was infuriating.

'Maybe I wouldn't be panicking if you and Gran hadn't forced me to come to school looking like this!' Erin hissed.

'No one is going to notice!' Sam said, a little too loudly for Erin's liking. The corridor was becoming increasingly cramped, people shoving past each other and fighting to fit bags into lockers. Any one of them could flick their eyes in her direction at any moment.

'Oh, really? Then how come you squealed when you saw me this morning?'

He frowned. 'I did not squeal.'

'Yes you did! I opened the door and you looked up and squealed like the frickin' wheels on your bike.'

'Okay, well, maybe I was a little surprised to see you looking so... fruit-like, but honestly, it's no big deal.'

Erin stopped dead and stared at his innocent expression. 'Fruit-like? FRUIT-LIKE?'

He studied her face. 'Well, you see something round and orange and you think... orange.'

'Bloody hell, I'm going home,' Erin said, turning.

'Erin, just chill, alright? No one is looking at you.'

It was true, everyone seemed preoccupied. Perhaps she'd be alright. Perhaps she'd get away with it if she kept her head down and didn't speak to anyone. It's not like she had loads of friends to talk to these days anyway; if she didn't spend lunchtimes with Sam, then she spent them alone practising piano in the music rooms.

'Well,' Sam said, slamming his locker shut. 'I've got to get ready for the footie game. Good luck!'

And just like that, he was gone. Erin cursed under her breath.

Why would they stock fake tan right next to the tinted moisturiser? Why would they do that unless they specifically wanted to ruin someone's life?



Name: Graine Milner

Title: Hazard Perception

Genre: Mystery/Thriller

Mentor: Eden Endfield

Mentor comments

I really responded to Graine Milner's thriller, 'Hazard Perception' from the get go. The writing was polished and the story flowed, but best of all was the humorous voice of her protagonist Alex, who gets himself into trouble with a people smuggling ring but learns to appreciate his family all the more because of his experience. Graine was a lovely mentee, open to suggestions but pretty much in charge, great qualities for a writer! Her experience as a school librarian really fed into the setting and dialogue in this teenage drama. I was really happy to be of help...fingers and toes crossed for the next step, I have a gut feeling this story is going to fly! It's been a real pleasure to be involved with WriteMentor, what a great program!

'Hazard Perception' is a teen mystery/thriller in which new driver Alex stumbles across a people trafficking scheme run by the driver of the coach used by the unwitting visiting French exchange students.

Alex's life is going fine – driving test passed, thoughts turning to uni applications and escape from his small-town life and family – when a video clip caught on his dashcam uncovers a dangerous secret. When Alex's driving instructor disappears, and a teacher is found dead, things begin to look even more sinister. But who's behind it all? And who can Alex trust? What you think you see, and what's really happening, aren't always the same thing. As Alex is drawn deeper into the mystery, and finds out what lengths some families will go to to survive together, he realises how much his own family means to him – and how far he will go to protect them.

'Hazard Perception' started life as a NaNoWriMo project after brewing in my mind for some time, and has undergone a number of re-writes since then. It's now complete at 74000 words. A 'clean teen' novel, I think that this would appeal to fans of Sophie McKenzie, Anne Cassidy and Sue Wallman.

I work as a librarian in a lovely secondary school in north London, where I am lucky enough to be able to read all the middle grade, teen and YA fiction I can lay my hands on. I'm a member of SCBWI and have loved the opportunities to improve my writing that this has given me. My middle grade short story, 'Frog Boy', was longlisted for the National Literacy Trust and Bloomsbury's Short Story Prize.

HAZARD PERCEPTION

BY GRAINE MILNER

Theory

To pass the hazard perception part of your driving theory test, you've got to be totally focussed on the road ahead. It's the only view you get. There's no rear view mirror POV on that computer screen – hindsight's 20/20, but too late to be helpful. What good is a backwards glance at the pedestrian you just ran over? That's a fail.

So you look ahead, checking all those parked cars for the sudden appearance of little children, junctions for cars unexpectedly pulling out in front of you, twisty bends in that country road hemmed in by high hedges.

And if you click the mouse at exactly the right time, you pass, and everything's fine.

Real life isn't like that.

Monday

Emergency Stop

I'm totally focussed on the road ahead, watching the two mums on the opposite pavement next to the pedestrian crossing. They're busy taking photographs of their kids in their buggies, but it feels more like they're playing chicken. I have no idea if they're actually planning on crossing the road or not. I check my hands – perfect ten to two position. It feels like I've been here forever. They must have about a million photos by now. They can post them to Instagram later. Please let them post to Instagram later.

I put the car into first gear, and then back into neutral. Les tuts. He hates it when I do that, so I apply the handbrake to cheer him up a bit and leave my hand sort of floating above the gear lever while I try and work out if I should go or not. It would be really bad to run over babies so soon after passing my test. Like, within five minutes. And especially on a pedestrian crossing.

One of the mums takes a step towards the kerb; I move my floating hand away from the gear lever and double-check the handbrake. I am the boss of hill starts. I am calm. I am prepared.

Until an earsplitting shriek nearly makes my foot slip off the clutch. I'd have been rattled by it even if the car windows were closed, but they're all wide open, rolled down even in November to try to save me from the reek of Les's cigarettes, so I get the full surround-sound nerve-jangling benefit of the shriek, unmuffled by any glass, straight into my ears.

I check my mirrors while I restart the engine, but I can't see anything unusual, just the usual boring selection of pedestrians and people out running. I've no idea who's screaming or why, but it's not stopping, and it's doing my head in. Les's too, by the look of him.

But now the buggy mums have stopped again, and I realise that the insane shrieking is coming from one of the buggies. Nobody's being attacked, but there are some serious anger-management issues going on here.



Name: Heather Fishwick

Title: Mirrored Snow

Genre: Fantasy, Fairytale Retelling

Mentor: Marisa Noelle

Mentor comments

When Heather applied to me with her gender reversed YA snow white retelling, *Mirror*, I knew I had to have it. It was one of those books I wish I'd written. The idea was genius - the story told from the point of view of the magic mirror, a girl trapped inside it. Not only did it give a fresh perspective on the entire story, it brought an entirely new character with a complicated back story and plenty of stakes. Step out of line, and the queen kills one of her real life friends. And then, of course, the prince. I was captivated by Heather's writing, which came already very polished. Together, we worked on the opening, drafting and re-drafting until we felt we had the chapters in the right place. Not once did Heather complain and she diligently set to work implementing all the ideas, with perfect execution. The result is a perfectly paced novel with so much intrigue and tension, I can barely breathe while I'm reading it. This is only the beginning for Heather. She is a talented writer (and blogger) and I know she will gain interest with this fabulous book.

MIRRORED SNOW is a YA gender-reversed retelling of Snow White, told from the perspective of a girl trapped in the queen's magic mirror. It is complete at 72,000 words.

Unseen by all, *Mirror* has spent her entire life spying for Queen Maia from inside palace mirrors, her reports condemning courtiers and servants to the queen's cruelty. She dreams of living beyond the confines of her mirror, and having friends who know she exists – rather than the one-way conversations she is used to carrying out with castle staff. But if she defies the queen, the castle workers she watches and loves will be killed. *Mirror* already lives with the guilt of one death, and refuses to be responsible for another.

When Prince Snowdon arrives – and is the first person other than the queen who can see her – *Mirror* dares to consider an alternative future. With Snowdon on the throne, her friends will be safe and *Mirror* can look for a solution to the curse that traps her, without putting anyone at risk.

However, the queen is intent on killing Snowdon, and helping the prince will put her friends, and her own existence, in greater danger. But spending time with Snowdon is everything *Mirror* hoped having a real friend would be, and she soon realises she cares about him too much to let her fears stand in the way of saving him. If *Mirror* is going to defeat the queen and protect her friends, she will have to see herself as more than an empty reflection first.

Mirrored Snow will appeal to fans of Marissa Meyer's *Lunar Chronicles*, Kalynn Bayron's *Cinderella is Dead*, and *A Throne of Swans* by Katharine and Elizabeth Corr. It was longlisted for the Write Mentor Children's Novel Award 2020.

I live in Northamptonshire and am currently studying for an MA in Creative Writing for Children and Young Adults through Manchester Metropolitan University. I am also a member of the Wattpad Stars program. I review a wide range of children's literature on my blog – <http://heatherfjames.blogspot.com> – and @makexbelieve on Twitter.

MIRRORED SNOW

BY HEATHER FISHWICK

“Yes, yes, you are still the fairest in the land.” I sighed. I had been answering this question for as long as I could remember, and the answer never changed.

The queen was using my mirror to paint her lips a deep, gory red. Knowing her, it was probably made from the blood of her enemies. Pale powder from the crushed bones of those she had killed. Maybe her fake nails weren’t actually fake...

But even without stolen body parts, the queen was breathtaking. I couldn’t lie in response to her question, but I would never need to. Which was for the best – the backlash to a different answer would shake the palace to its foundations.

“Although if you ask me, ‘fairest’ isn’t the right term. It evokes a sense of... justice. Not a word I’d associate with you.” I flicked an imaginary speck of mirror-world dust from my plain black dress to avoid looking up. There wasn’t really any dust where I was trapped. There wasn’t anything – except me and a small box of white space surrounded by an opulent gold frame. “Fair as in beautiful, I’ll give you; fair as in, well, a decent human being... Not so much.”

Beyond her, the royal suite was a flawless sea of palest grey with striking gold and crimson accents. A world I had never stepped into, although it was the last room in the palace I wanted to enter.

The queen tutted but didn’t reply, her focus on the edges of her lips, not me. Never me.

Even

though, unlike my friends in the kitchen, she could actually see me.

I hugged my arms around my stomach, trying to sooth the aching emptiness that filled me whenever I was with the queen.

Stop it, I chided myself. It was for the best that my pretend friends couldn’t see me.

If they could, they would hate me.

It was my fault danger surrounded them like a constant knife to the throat. My affection put them at risk. I wouldn’t – couldn’t – forget the last person to suffer the repercussions of the queen’s disappointment in me. Lyona’s devastation when the boy she loved vanished without a trace. My chest tightened, as though all the air had been sucked from my lungs. Black spots threatened at the edges of my vision. I closed my eyes and counted to ten, pushing the panic down.

I needed to think of something safe. Something positive. Something like the event which had been fuelling kitchen gossip for weeks. Prince Snowdon would be arriving later that morning: the boy whose eighteenth birthday would mark the end of the queen’s reign in Rosenberg.

The queen put down her lip stain and picked up a pot of dark, glittering powder. She was taking longer to dress than usual. She was nervous.



Name: Jan Dunning

Title: Nightshade

Genre: Contemporary with speculative/magical elements

Mentor: Olivia Levez

Mentor comments

I knew the moment I saw the title that *Nightshade* was for me, and I wasn't disappointed! I read it at a gallop, hugely enjoying this behind the scenes glimpse into the fashion world - with a supernatural twist. Jan has been utterly professional in her approach to edits and a joy to work with.

Aspiring photographer Yuki Jones knows which side of the camera she's meant to be on. Perfect beauty - like that of Dad's new model girlfriend Bella Wilde - is an unobtainable dream.

Isn't it?

When Yuki catches Bella performing a strange ritual in front of an antique mirror, she starts to wonder if there's something sinister and supernatural about this supermodel. Her suspicions are confirmed as her widowed Dad falls further under Bella's spell. Suddenly his memories - including those of Thea, the mum Yuki's never known - are under threat.

Then Bella insists on sending Yuki away to stop her from interfering with a mysterious new 'project' - and Dad's involved. Only by facing the fashion world she fears can Yuki save Dad and stand up for the past, before Bella plunders family secrets for fashion world domination, and the truth is lost forever.

NIGHTSHADE is a YA contemporary novel with speculative/magical elements, complete at 79,000 words - Snow White meets Dorian Gray, for the Instagram generation. It would appeal to readers who have enjoyed 'The Burning' by Laura Bates or 'The Graces' by Laure Eve.

I'm a photographic artist and teacher, and I've been writing seriously for a number of years. I developed *NIGHTSHADE* with the support of the Golden Egg Academy before being selected for the Write Mentor Summer Programme 2020 by my mentor, Olivia Levez.

My inside knowledge of the fashion industry stems from working as a model during my twenties. This experience led me to think about definitions of beauty and how 'perfection' - as presented in fashion imagery and on social media - can impact on self-image. As a photographer, I've always found flawed or 'imperfect' subjects powerful and compelling, so beneath the surface of a fast-paced mystery, *NIGHTSHADE* also conveys this positive message to teen readers.

NIGHTSHADE

BY JAN DUNNING

I freeze on the landing.

From this angle, the doorway frames her perfectly.

Bella.

It means *beautiful* in Italian, and she is.

On the outside.

I grip the camera in my hand.

She isn't supposed to be here. There was a job today – some photo shoot in Hackney. Her driver came before I left for school. But it's not even four and she's back already. I'd have gone to Sam's if I'd known. I've avoided this for a week but it had to happen sometime, I suppose.

Being alone with Bella.

I swallow. How bad can it be?

She's perched on a stool, her back toward me. I wait for her to turn, say hello, but nothing. Perhaps she hasn't heard. Then I see she's busy – absorbed – gazing into the mirror of her dressing table. A dark oval frame, carved with twisting stems. She leans further, her face pressed close to the glass.

Too close.

I shrink back into the hall. I can still see Bella's reflection, side-lit and warm in the sun. As she stares, I count the seconds. Six... seven... eight... Will she never blink? Then she licks her lips and the intimacy of the gesture makes me flinch. I look for her make-up, the lipstick she's about to put on, but the table before her is bare.

My heart thumps.

I should go.

This is none of my business. What do I know about models and their beauty rituals? And I've got photos to edit from class.

But why should I leave? It was my house first. Mine and Dad's. Bella's the intruder, not me.

I stay where I am.

My eyes are glued to her face.

Even though she's tired – and I can only just tell by the faintest of shadows underneath her eyes, the tiny vein pulsing at her temple – I've never seen anyone so... *perfect*.

How would that feel?

I push the thought away. No point wondering. I know my side of the camera.

I lift it up to my eye.

Just one shot. *She'd never know.*

Then Bella clears her throat. The sound makes me jerk my camera down. Sweat beads on my forehead. *Breathe*. She isn't talking to me. She's talking to the mirror, lips moving fast.

A ribbon of ice slides down my spine.

Her voice is a murmur, the words bleeding together, impossible to make out. Speculo... something. What language is that? Sam said she's lived in Milan. Typical of him to check out her profile on the Façade Agency website. But Italian sounds beautiful and melodic. This is too... throaty. Snarling.

Goosebumps pepper my arms. Something else is happening. The mirror's surface is distorting, rippling, like pebbles in a pond. *No*. It's old, that's all. The glass is cloudy and cracked. *Foxing*, it's called. It happened to the mirror inside Dad's vintage Rolleiflex.

But if I didn't know better, I'd almost say that Bella's face is changing.

Right in front of my eyes.



Name: Jeff de León

Title: Princess of a Fading Star

Genre: Science-Fantasy

Mentor: Sabrina Prestes & George Jreije

Mentor comments

Sabrina: Working with Jeff on his YA sci-fi fantasy this summer has been an incredible experience. Learning about what it takes to build an expansive, post-apocalyptic world with lovable, very much messy characters. Jeff has succeeded in crafting a story that will appeal to not only sci-fi fans, but younger readers new to the genre. From the beginning I was awed by this world and the nuance in its themes—shining light on some of humanity's bad habits while also emphasizing a message of hope. I can't wait for readers to discover this book!

George: Jeff's novel stood out from the first read for its balance of action and heart. His writing is lyrical. More than his writing, however, was the enthusiasm he brought to our mentoring. Whatever the future brings, the world is going to be lucky to have a writer like Jeff coming into the fold.

Seventeen-year-old Prince Aleczander always dreamed of his wedding day, the day he would finally leave his abusive mother and cruel northern kingdom behind. But when his betrothed, Princess Alessia, runs away days before their wedding, Zander must cover for her, or else the fragile alliance between their kingdoms could shatter. To buy time and to prove himself, Zander accepts a suicidal mission to hunt down the last of the Machine-Gods that once ruled the world.

Meanwhile, hidden beneath the Earth, Celene wakes in the ruins of a ship once meant to sail the stars. Though human, she was designed by artificial intellects to be perfect and powerful—a weapon to manipulate and destroy humanity. But when the runaway princess Alessia discovers Celene, their mysterious connection puts them at the heart of a secret war between immortal kings and ancient machines.

As Zander leads an army against her home, Celene must decide whether she is on the side of Alessia and humanity or on the side of artificial perfection—a decision that will plunge the surviving remnants of civilization into chaos.

PRINCESS OF A FADING STAR is a young adult science-fantasy novel set in a future world that echoes CWTV's *The 100*. Told in multiple points of view that include #ownvoices queer and latinx representation, this story of wondrous kingdoms competing for ancient technology will appeal to fans of *Six of Crows* and *Skyward*.

I hold a B.A. in English and an M.A. in Literacy from Touro University. As a teacher, I understand how intensely young readers crave complex stories filled with mystery and wonder. I set out to write a myth that fills that need as well as a greater need for diverse characters and empowering heroes.

PRINCESS OF A FADING STAR

BY JEFF DE LEÓN

CHAPTER 1: Zander's Dream

You know us as machines bound to resurrect, guide, and protect humanity, but the blue storm at the heart of the Moon changed everything.

- Composer-013-042

Breathless, Zander strides through the courtyard toward the palace, his heart picking up speed with every step closer to the girl he has been sworn to marry since he was born. Heat rises in a rippling haze from every golden tile, urging him onward toward the towers casting precious shade ahead.

Earth's two ivory rings curve along the bright blue sky, shimmering white over the city's colossal stone walls. The smell of salt lingers, though the sound of ocean waves below has faded. A seagull squawks every now and again, circling overhead.

Zander's heart blazes when Alessia rushes down the steps to greet him, bronze skin radiant against her white dress. They will be married whether they want to or not, but one thing remains within their control: how they will spend their lives together.

At the base of the steps, Alessia's green eyes scour him for only a second before she rests her hand on the hilt of her sword, blocking his way into the palace. He muffles a sigh; he'd hurried here for a reassurance of love or even friendship—not swordplay.

"Shall we begin?" Alessia raises her silver blade into the light between them. "It's been so long since I've had a worthy sparring partner."

Zander forces a nervous smile. "Whenever you're ready."

She shuts her eyes and takes a breath. A golden necklace shines against her dark skin as the breeze runs waves through her hair. Hesitantly, Zander lifts Meteora, the gray blade that had belonged to his brother, and waits.

The duel begins when Alessia's black lashes flutter open like a moth's expanding wings.

Zander parries her first slash, but she presses him backward, her longsword shining like a weightless extension of her very soul. Desperate footsteps, dodges and leaps are the only thing keeping him from defeat—until he splashes into a nearby fountain.

Rhythm interrupted, Alessia's merciless slash rends his black tunic. As Zander steps out of the water, the blood dripping down his abdomen washes off in the fountain's spray, and his skin knits itself back together.

He laughs at the tickling sensation of the minor wound, but stops when he sees Alessia's face. Lips pressed together, her eyes are focused but unconcerned. The cut that was funny a second ago begins to sting. Alessia had been reserved in the past, but Zander thought it was because she was afraid to hope for something more from life.

He's afraid too, but the long-awaited day is nearly here.

"Do you blame me for..." Zander pauses, "the betrothal? The wedding? I was born into this life, same as you."

Alessia blinks, confused. "No, of course not. That was an accident."

Liar.

Zander shoves a fallen lock of black hair away from his eyes. "Do you wish to continue?"

Alessia inches closer, sword held in a reverse grip behind her. "Yes."



Name: Jess Birch

Title: Lady Em

Genre: Contemporary Verse Novel

Mentor: Louisa Reid

Mentor comments

It has been such a pleasure to work with Jess on her brilliant YA verse novel, 'Lady Em'. From the outset I loved the ambition of Jess' work, and with each new draft I have been delighted and awed to see how she's built on my suggestions and taken her manuscript to new heights. Never afraid of a challenge, Jess has taken on the master, Shakespeare, and given voice to Lady Em - a darkly compelling character, brilliantly supported by a wide cast who are all vividly characterised. Jess' writing is ambitious and inventive and the widely-studied and loved Macbeth is interpreted in an exciting and relevant way. I hope that this story will find many readers who will adore it as much as I do.

LADY EM is a YA contemporary verse novel complete at 35,000 words. A fast-paced, dark, and modern re-telling of Macbeth, it would sit alongside YA Shakespeare re-tellings such as Under a Dancing Star and contemporary verse novels with a supernatural twist such as Long Way Down.

Academically gifted but not much liked, 17 year-old Emilia Campbell, or “Lady Em”, is on the verge of losing everything to her charismatic twin brother Duncan. Favoured by their father, it seems like he is going to snatch away everything that she holds dear: their father’s company, her place at Cambridge University and her beloved piano.

As her brother threatens to steal everything that matters in her life, Emilia is left increasingly desperate to regain control. In the aftermath of her brother’s death, Emilia feels the increasing presence of the Caledonian witches. Her every move is picked apart by the vindictive vlogger “Punch” and she turns to the mysterious school counsellor for guidance during these troubled times. Soon, however, she wonders if the consequence of stopping her brother has been the creation of someone even more dangerous. She must decide what she is willing to do to stop them and whether the family secret that she learns of is a gift or a curse.

In 2019, I was a teacher judge for the UKLA books awards whose entries showed me how effective moving away from traditional prose can be. I studied English Literature at Newcastle University, where I wrote and directed my own play. I also have an MSc in Global Ethics from the University of Birmingham, specialising in the care of conjoined twins. I wrote this book whilst on maternity leave with my second child with the help of a jumperoo and a bouncy chair.

LADY EM

BY JESS BIRCH

THE GAME

They smash into each other,
again, and again, and again,
these boys,
these almost men.
It's rugby,
or so they claim.
They love it,
this legalised violence,
this excuse to tear,
and swear
and bite
when the ref's not looking.
My brother's the worst.
As head boy,
and flanker,
he's always pushing, pushing, pushing,
often too far,
often until shirts tear,
bones break,
and they scream out in pain.
But he doesn't stop.
And that's what makes him so good.
Or so they say.
And so our father believes.
They're here for once,
our parents,
for this game
for this match
for the local hospice.
How kind of them.
Mum's sat on a blanket,
with Grace, our dog,
beneath the August sun.
Dad's shouting on the sideline,
puce in the face:
"come on, come on, come on"
as if his words alone,
could
push
my twin,
forwards,
onwards,
towards the line.

I don't sit with them.
I sit with Annie instead.
We should be cheering on our boyfriends, Duffy and Mack,
who, like my brother,
slice,
endlessly down the field.
But we don't.
Instead, we toy with our strawberries, flicking the green stalks
at each other's bare feet,
often missing our target:
the chipped paint on our toes,
but always smiling.
Our phones are face down,
silenced,
as we allow ourselves to pause
for a moment,
before we
step
into
our last school year.

LADY EM

A first year titters, trips and topples, Over Annie's dark legs
but I catch her,
as she falls.
Her friends gasp,
mouths covered,
"Lady Em," they say.
What have I done
what have I become
to scare them
this way?
I smile,
and tell her that it's ok,
that it's fine,
that it doesn't matter,
as she backs quickly away.

TRY

The crowd cheers:
Benno,
with the sun soaking his brindle hair, has
snatched
the ball
from the air.

He runs,
like a whippet
down the wing,
toward Mack,
who steals it,
whistling
from the pass
and smashes it against the ground like a head, like a baby, like a trophy you don't want
but so desperately need.

Dad cheers through his teeth. But Mum's by his side,
holding his bleating phone. PLEASING HIM

He soon smiles.

It must have been good news,
it usually is.

People like to please him,
and I understand why,
because so do I.

THE FIGUREHEAD

The final whistle blows:
we've won.

And even if it's just for charity the boys howl and scream and squeeze each other until it must hurt.
They hoist Duncan high in the air; like a ship's figurehead
he smiles down at his waves.

A KISS

Mack frees himself from the pack, and squeezes in
between Annie and me.

He's damp,
with sweat,
mud,
and something else.

He peels away his gumshield; blood shines on his teeth
which he spits
flicks,
and wipes across the grass.

I brace
as he plants
this winner's kiss
on my
reluctant
lips.



Name: Julie Farrell

Title: We Are Fractals

Genre: Own-voices, contemporary romance

Mentor: Amy Beashel

Mentor comments

I loved Julie's writing from the off. The passion in her words is as heated as the passion between Jess and Isaac (Hot! Hot! Hot!) Equally as thrilling is Julie's willingness to chop, change and deliver. It's been wonderful to watch the already brilliant *We Are Fractals* develop into a novel I'm now even more excited for people to read. As kind as she is creative, Julie deserves every success coming her way.

The ones you love hurt the most.

Seventeen-year-old Isaac's family is at breaking point, ignoring his mom's mental illness which he's terrified he's inherited. It's like someone pulled a cloud over the sun and it only comes out when he's with his lifelong best-friend, Jess.

Jess's family broke when her mom gave her up for adoption as a baby. Thankfully, she found love, security and family with her wonderful adoptive parents. So why would she rock the boat now, by searching for her birth mom?

Both Jess and Isaac have secrets they hold in dark spaces. But through their friendship they've found the light. So when they unexpectedly kiss in a beautiful collision under the stars, that friendship becomes something bigger, brighter – and more dangerous – because now they have so much more to lose.

When Jess's search for her birth mom takes an unexpected turn, and Isaac's anxiety over his mom spirals; secrets unravel and they are pulled in opposite directions. As Jess and Isaac struggle to overcome their fears, save their families and fight for their futures, they must face their biggest fear of all: losing each other forever.

WE ARE FRACTALS is a dual POV own-voices, coming-of-age contemporary, where *Love From A to Z* and *When The Stars Lead To You* meet *Breathless* in a sweeping story about family, love and identity. It's set in the stunning landscape of Redding, California. Complete at 89000 words, it was recently awarded a special mention by the International Write Mentor Children's Novel Award, and runner-up for the Jericho-Marjacq Underrepresented Voices competition.

I'm a writer and accessibility consultant with professional writing credits, and I've freelanced in publishing for nearly a decade as a children's bookseller, a children's agent reader, and marketing executive. I'm a member of SCBWI and active in the writing community. I was a finalist in the Iceland Writers Retreat Alumni Bursary Award earlier this year, with an excerpt of WE ARE FRACTALS.

The novel is inspired by my experiences of living with mental and chronic illnesses, and having been a young carer for my mum. I've recently completed courses in screenwriting and business start-up and I'm currently outlining my next novel. When I'm not writing, I'm playing guitar or piano, cooking epic veggie meals, and going for long walks up big hills – always chasing the sky.

WE ARE FRACTALS

BY JULIE FARRELL

JESS

We're lying on the hood of Isaac's car – the hard metal is doing a number on my back, but I don't care. He drove us up to the Shasta hills, where the view expands for miles and miles, and the falling darkness ignites a thousand little lights below us, like a swarm of fireflies getting ready to take off. The stars are much brighter here and we've already seen a couple of meteorites flashing ethereal luminous trails across the inky sky. Whenever I see one, it's like the world is so much bigger than me – that anything is possible if we chase the stars.

I'm scanning the sky with my binoculars but am acutely aware of Isaac watching me. I control my breathing so he can't hear my heart trying to escape from my chest.

Butterflies have been dancing in my stomach all day. I shiver despite the warm, balmy night.

We've been here an hour, talking about random stuff and waiting for meteors. But I know Isaac needs to talk about something. He's not himself. Although he seems okay right now, his beautiful face had a shadow over it when he picked me up. A sort-of haunted look.

I keep the concern out of my voice when I ask, "So, how are things?" I don't move my eyes away from my binoculars either, but I should know better.

"Jess..." He turns his head away.

This time I pull the binoculars down and look at him. "It's okay I get it, you don't want to talk. I'm worried about you is all." I pick at a squished bug that's been mummified to the hood.

"I know. I'm okay, Jess." He looks at me, as if he's weighing up whether to say something else. "Look, my mom had a – an episode, it stressed me out, kinda." He looks up at the sky again. "But I'm fine now."

He closes his eyes for a moment.

So it's his mom.

For as long as I've known Isaac, Marie has been chronically ill. Depression, panic, pain. The last time I saw Marie, we'd gone to Isaac's house after school, in our junior year, and he'd told me she'd be in bed because her health was getting worse. We were in the middle of annihilating each other on one of his computer games when she appeared in the living room like an apparition, in a floaty white nightdress, with a matted halo of black curls and a glazed look over her eyes. She wasn't like that every time I went over, but eventually he stopped inviting me, and now he always comes to my place.

He never talks about his family.

I take a deep, centering breath.

"What do you mean – episode?"

He runs his hand through his hair, then rubs his thumb over the tiny black Obsidian pendant, on a leather cord round his neck. He usually fiddles with it when he's anxious.



Name: Katerina Ermolin

Title: It's New

Genre: Contemporary romance

Mentor: Deborah Maroulis

Mentor comments

Kat has done an extraordinary job taking in all the resources I've thrown at her and eagerly asked for more. I'm so proud of the work she's put in and the book she's produced.

Alex Carr knows one thing for sure—guys leave. Her father being a prime example, disappearing into a whole new family. Now, fresh off a summer heartbreak, Alex wants junior year to be nothing more than books, her BFF, and barista-ing—until she meets Nate Wood, a playboy who has been wounded more often than she has.

When she walks in on him tongue deep in a make out session the day before the school year, she pegs him as a no good player. It's just her luck when they are partnered together for a semester long English project, but something about the way he shields himself from others draws her in. Alex is determined to keep her feelings at bay, especially when he acts like grades are something rich kids like him can buy, but when they bond over their estranged fathers, a surprise romantic dinner ends with an unexpected kiss. Just when everything seems to be going well, she discovers why he trusts no one—the betrayal he's experienced runs deeper than she imagined, and she soon realizes she is in over her head.

Now she has a choice to make—to be forever haunted by her past or risk another heartbreak that could hurt her even worse than the last one did.

IT'S NEW is a YA Contemporary romance complete at 72,000 words with elements of the vulnerability of romance in *Our Chemical Hearts* and the mystery in *Moment of Truth*. It is a stand-alone novel with series potential.

I currently work in Finance in the Silicon Valley. When I'm not crunching numbers or writing, I'm most likely out riding my horse through the California hills. I look forward to writing more novels in the future.

IT'S NEW

BY KATERINA ERMOLIN

The guy whose hand I was holding was someone most girls would feel privileged to kiss in a dark room at a party. I didn't. He was a means to an end. I didn't actually want to sleep with him. I just wanted people to think I did so Dylan would hear about it.

The crowded hallway left little room to navigate, but I managed to squeeze through the bodies of my intoxicated classmates as I tugged him along, opening door after door searching for an empty room. I slammed it every time the room was taken. People were starting to stare. Good.

"Damn, Alex," Austin, a notorious playboy with a good body and a killer grin, snickered behind me. "You really want us to get a room, huh?"

I ignored him and turned the silver door knob at the end of the hallway, swinging the last one open.

The hallway light pierced the dark, unveiling a redhead straddling a brown haired boy. I recognized the redhead—Tammy, I think?—but not the boy. She sat up as soon as she saw us, covering her chest with her arms, while the boy, whose fingers stroked her jeans, looked at us and smirked.

"Nice, Nate," Austin said behind me, approval in his voice. Nate's attention turned to me. He raked me with his eyes, and the corner of his mouth curled slightly as he sized me up.

"What?" I said through my teeth.

"Nothing." Nate's head drew back, only as far as the pillow would let him.

His gaze shifted to Austin, who shrugged.

I scoffed. Irritation coursed through me as the guys engaged in their silent contest, no doubt giving each other mental checkmarks for having a girl. Not that either of them "had" us.

Tammy flushed and quickly climbed off.

Nate adjusted his jeans and interlaced his fingers behind his head, his smirk making a reappearance. "Do you two want a ticket to the show, or...?"

"Hardly," I bit and slammed the door closed. What an ass.

"Well," Austin said, flashing his infamous panty-dropping grin that had zero effect on me.

"We might not have a bed, but my car is parked outside."

I smashed my lips together, resisting the urge to twist my face in disdain. Austin was good-looking, yes, but I didn't want to hook up with him that badly. He was just a pawn. Besides, not enough people would see us going to his car and word wouldn't reach Dylan, which would render this entire charade useless. There were already less people in the hallway than before so even making out here wouldn't serve any purpose.

Before I could come up with a polite, yet firm rejection, Nate sauntered out into the hallway. His hair was in disarray, sticking up silently in the back and my stomach twisted. It was beyond obvious what had just happened in the room, especially with Tammy smoothing out her hair behind him.

"Hey." Austin gave him a fist bump and I seized the opportunity of the change in his attention to flee.



Name: Kathryn Heligman

Title: Gladiatrix

Genre: Fantasy

Mentor: Claire Winn and Nicole Brake

Mentor comments

Kathryn has been incredibly enthusiastic and welcomes even the toughest feedback. Our every suggestion has been met with a positive attitude. She's so passionate about her story and the ideas we've worked on together, and she has a true gift for voice!

I am seeking representation for *GLADIATRIX*, a 75k word YA fantasy manuscript centered around a gladiator striving to prove her worth as a hero outside the arena. *GLADIATRIX* is inspired by ancient Greco-Roman mythology with a modern twist, a la *A Knight's Tale*, for fans of both *Circe* and Netflix's *GLOW*. This manuscript was selected for the WriteMentor Summer 2020 program and received mentoring from industry professionals.

After gladiating moved from deadly violence to choreographed flash and showmanship, Atalanta became a star. She's been idolized her whole life, and has all the baggage, damage and attitude to prove it. Atalanta's character in the ring is *The Huntress*: the chosen child of the Goddess of the Hunt, Diana. Atalanta wishes the relationship was only part of her character, and that the goddess would stop lecturing her about her tendency to perform with a hangover and waste too much money.

Atalanta rules Rome's social scene between brutal, yet staged, bouts in the arena. When a new competitor comes to town and goes off-script, she beats Atalanta mercilessly and destroys her image as an unbeatable fighter.

Hoping to flee the wreckage of her career and regain her reputation, Atalanta joins other wannabe heroes on a quest to rid a nearby town of a monstrous boar. But it turns out rival glory hunters don't stick to fight choreography either, and skirmishes with hydras and centaurs can lead to wounds more permanent than embarrassment. Real heroism doesn't come with cheering crowds or the perks of fame, and when defeating the boar means interfering with the gods' divine punishment, flashy stage-fighting might not be enough to protect anybody, not even herself.

GLADIATRIX is intended as a standalone novel, but has series potential. This is my second completed manuscript, and when not writing, I love riding horses, fostering dogs and working as a software engineer.

GLADIATRIX

BY KATHRYN HELIGMAN

Thousands of voices rose, screaming my name, cheering for me, yet it rang hollow. I waited for the rush their adoration always brought, but it never came. Just once, I wished they would look away.

All eyes were on me though, demanding a show, and it was my destiny to deliver. Beads of sweat mingled with drops of blood as they rolled down my body. I wished I was anywhere else, anywhere but in front of the bloodthirsty audience screaming for me. My head throbbed in time to the crowd's noise as they whistled and stomped, the noise rising until it blocked all thought, constricting me in its crushing embrace.

I looked across the dusty arena and my eyes locked onto my opponent. Blood dripped down her face from the shallow cut across her forehead as she gave me an almost imperceptible nod. The healing priests would have their job cut out to make sure that didn't scar.

Heads nodded to confirm, and Johanna let out her battle scream, lowering her spear as she charged. Her flat sandaled feet churned up clouds of dust from the arena floor as her powerful legs ate up the distance between us.

I raced forward to meet her, summoning up my showmanship for the final move. My own battle cry tore from my throat, only to be quickly swallowed by the thunderous noise of those staring down at us.

“For the Goddess!”

We clashed in the center of the arena in a fury of limbs. Her foot landed on my knee and I placed a hand on her waist, guiding her momentum up and over as she pushed off of my braced leg, exactly like we had practiced.

She flipped over my head and landed on her back, a puff of sand billowing up around her.

Her chest rose and fell as she panted, mouth open and eyes wide. The thrill of victory was muted, dozens of practice repetitions dulling what used to be razor-sharp. Of course I'd won. Just as we'd planned.

I tossed my long white braid over my shoulder and placed one sandal on the armored woman lying on the ground. I waved, inviting them all to share in my victory. Playing to that crowd I was so sick of, yet who invaded my every thought.

They roared in response, exactly as I knew they would.

Sometimes I wasn't sure if I was controlling them, or if they were controlling me.

I raised a hand, and as one, the audience quieted, riveted by me. “Diana has found you wanting,” I bellowed, my catchphrase sending them into another riot of cheers.

I wiped my gritty hands on my tunic and reached down to disarm the woman prone in front of me.

“That was perfect. You okay?” I pulled the spear from her unresisting fingers. She gave a small nod, the cut on her forehead leaking blood into her eyes. I tossed her spear aside, but gently. I knew how much these cost.



Name: Kim Crisci

Title: All the Time in the World

Genre: Speculative

Mentor: Kathryn Kettle

Mentor comments

Working with Kim to hone 'All the Time in the World' has been a fantastic joy. When I came across Kim and her work I saw a great hook, an interesting play on traditional time travel stories and an opportunity to play with themes that spoke to me, as well as some of the challenges I have had to learn to face in my own writing. Kim threw herself into learning about her story and characters, honing her themes and early chapters, bringing us closer to experiencing the world and hearing authentic voices to pull us in as readers. She has been unafraid to make changes and to really play to find what would bring out the best version of Derek & Michelle's story on the page. I'll miss our catch ups and the opportunity to shape her magical and fascinating work.

Seventeen-year-old Derek Lyttle knows damn well what he wants in life. He's going to play professional baseball, marry his best friend, Corinne, and live as far from Oregon as possible. As Astoria High's star second baseman, he's on track towards achieving that dream. But Derek is thrown a curveball when he meets two stranded children with a big secret: they're his future son and daughter. To make matters worse, Derek learns he doesn't marry Corinne, but his shrewd, overachieving classmate, Michelle, and their marriage is falling apart.

A reluctant Derek and Michelle must work together to balance life as teenager and parent, all while searching for a way to send their children home. While Derek initially struggles with the changes, he slowly embraces fatherhood, finding more joy in holding his daughter than holding a bat.

And when he realizes he's in love with both Corinne and Michelle, Derek finds himself torn between the life he envisioned and the life he never saw coming. If he chooses Michelle, he'll lose his soulmate. If he chooses Corinne, he'll lose his children. The clock is ticking and Derek better choose one now, before he loses both.

My novel, ALL THE TIME IN THE WORLD, is a speculative YA that marries the emotional complexities of Emily Wibberley's TIME OF OUR LIVES with the character driven tension of Lexa Hillyer's PROOF OF FOREVER. It is complete at 101,000 words.

I hold two BAs in journalism and political science from the University of Nevada. My work in voter turnout has served to remind young adults the power of choice, and the importance in appreciating one's future.

ALL THE TIME IN THE WORLD

BY KIM CRISCI

2009

Dad used to say there was never a bad time to pick up a bat. So get out there and play like you own the numbers on the clock.

Derek grips the neck of his father's Louisville Slugger, scrapes his sneaker against the makeshift plate, his brother's deflated Slip-n-Slide. Feet apart, knees bent, eyes straight ahead, he raises the bat over his shoulder.

It's seven a.m. in Astoria. An April drizzle coats the ground, changing dirt into backyard mud, grass into flattened mush. Cold beads form on his skin, rolling down his arm, dripping off his elbow.

The pitching machine launches a baseball and he swings, the crack of impact thundering through the low-hanging clouds blanketing his coastal town. The ball is a meteor against the grey, destined to land in the Columbia River with a muted splash. Except the practice net catches it first, repelling the ball back to the ground.

Derek whistles, bobbing on the heels of his feet. "Another duck to the pond," he says, lips curling to a smirk. "How do you like that one, college scouts?"

"Derek!" His mother shouts from the living room window. "Get inside. You're going to be late!"

He swings again. The bat whooshes through the air. Strike. He takes off his Giants hat, allowing the rain to wash the sweat on his neck. Derek walks over to the pitching machine, flicks the switch to off, and heads for the back door.

Right away, he hears Mom pacing from room to room, heels clicking against the hardwood, abruptly muffled when she moves onto carpet. She's talking on the phone, or rather, berating someone for allowing someone else to change an inspection date. She wants it moved back. That someone will comply. No one says no to Kathryn Lyttle.

The front door is open; her luggage waits by the window, neatly stacked, and every thirty seconds, a man in a suit steps inside, takes a couple bags and wheels them to his car.

Derek's brother, Oliver, sits at the kitchen table, double-handing a peanut butter and honey sandwich. He's still wearing his pajamas, the ones with Tonka trucks on the pants, and the matching shirt that reads "NOT DIGGING BEDTIME", which Mom assured didn't make him look like a thirteen-year-old toddler.

As he passes, Derek grinds his knuckles into Oliver's hair.

"Ow—hey!" Oliver shrugs, ducking away. "You're going to crush my food."

It's Oliver's favorite meal. He usually puts too much peanut butter inside, so the mix oozes out the ends as he takes a bite, coating his fingers in a tan, gelatinous goo which he disgustingly licks up.

Derek opens the pantry and pulls out a box of Pop-Tarts. "I thought you stopped eating dog food."

"It's not dog food," Oliver replies, smacking his lips. "Dirt Pie is the breakfast of champions."



Name: Krista Barrett

Title: The Unraveling of James Hayward

Genre: Contemporary

Mentor: Jodi Herlick

Mentor comments

Krista has written an amazing story about a young man's struggle with love, family, and OCD. It's a story that's filled with heart, humor, and hope in the midst of darkness, and I can't wait for it to be out in the world so everyone else can laugh and cry over James's struggles too. Krista was a fabulous mentee. She worked hard throughout the summer, did remarkable edits incredibly fast, and is a sweet friend. It's been an absolute pleasure to work with her!

Be quiet. Be invisible. Don't change anything. That's how sixteen-year-old James Hayward has survived. His OCD is all-consuming, he shies away physical touch, his father is heartlessly strict, and the school bully is ruthless.

But he's been able to suppress all of that...until he falls head-over-heels in love with new student Charlotte. She sparks an unraveling of his quiet, wallflower ways and low-expectation attitude, leading him to want something he's never wanted before—romantic love. But he doesn't know how to fight through his OCD obstacles, and when the bully decides he wants Charlotte for himself, James must figure out how to fight him as well.

When his best friend ends up in the hospital, and he discovers a secret about his father, James's very identity is called into question and he hits an emotional overload. He's faced with a choice: he can let his obsessive traits command how he lives and stay in the bubble he's created, or he can break his habitual patterns and take a chance. Not the easiest thing for a guy who likes to do things the same way every single day. But he wants change. And he wants the girl.

THE UNRAVELING OF JAMES HAYWARD is a young adult contemporary novel complete at 81,000 words that touches on mental health and first love themes. It will appeal to readers who enjoyed *Now is Everything* or *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* and anyone who feels like they just don't fit in.

I'm a happily married stay-at-home-mom with three teenage kids, and have personal experience with OCD, ADD, and depression. My sweet spot for writing is YA Contemporary, and I love tackling big issues. I have two other completed young adult manuscripts. My other passion is creating sea glass and silver jewelry. I hail from beautiful BC, Canada.

THE UNRAVELING OF JAMES

HAYWARD

BY KRISTA BARRETT

I hated not being able to silence myself.

There had always been something wrong with me. Something that clawed and scratched at my insides until they bled with anxiety and obsession and compulsiveness and longing. And my brain talked at me. All. Day. Long.

It was the first day of eleventh grade, and I was doing my best to not obsess over what might happen this year. It was hard to hold onto my runaway thoughts. After all, if history proved anything, it was that high school sucked.

Perched on my Vilano R2 Commuter Aluminum Road bike, I counted to four, four times fast, and changed my gears four times before I sped off for my best friend Lewis's house. It took ten minutes to ride away from our pretentious neighborhood, one that most of the students at my school couldn't afford. I lived in Alder, Washington, aptly named after the Alder tree which grew in high numbers like a natural force field around our sleepy little town. But they didn't block out the stupidity of the bullies who tormented me and Lewis on a daily basis. But this was a new year. Maybe, if we were lucky, the bullying would be a thing of the past. Maybe they'd matured just enough to finally leave us alone.

At Lewis's house, I leaned my bike against their rickety wooden fence. Its white paint was peeling, and the front lawn grass was up to my shins. To say their house hadn't been kept up was an understatement. But that didn't bother me at all. Shrink would say that it should, what with my OCD and all, but I could relate to its unkempt state.

I pulled a face mask out of my left pocket and put it on. It was one of those ones that dentists wore. My mother started buying them after I'd come home with a handkerchief tied around my face. Rather than allow me to continue looking like a bank robber, she kept me in a steady supply of masks. I always wore one at Lewis's house.

I used the bottom of my shirt to cover the doorknob before turning it four times and walked in. They never locked their doors, which was terrifying to me. Lewis said once, "Why would we lock the doors? There's nothing to steal in here, and if someone did steal stuff, I would say 'thank you'." The reason: his grandma was a total hoarder. But she was the loveliest little hoarder I'd ever met.

I used both hands (with the help of my shirt) to push open the front door as the piles of "stuff" on the other side resisted me.

"Lewis? I'm here!"

The sunlight filtered through their front window, accentuating all the dust floating around the room. I watched the dust beams, dazed by their hypnotic swirl downwards. Or maybe upwards. Did anyone really know which way dust flew? I would no doubt obsess about that later.



Name: Leah Mecrow

Title: All That Glitters

Genre: Contemporary with strong romantic elements

Mentor: Lee VanBrakle

Mentor comments

From the beginning of the mentorship, Leah's enthusiasm and work ethic have been top notch. She is hard working and very dedicated to her story and making it the best it can be. Leah was more than willing to work around my own revisions I had to turn into my agent during these summer months. Her story is filled with riveting twists and turns. I can't wait to see it on bookstore shelves one day.

Harley Gold, sixteen-year-old daughter of pop sensation Saxon Gold, has the perfect life. She lives in a mansion, attends an elite private school, and has glamorous friends. But her controlling parents hide the reality, pressuring her to fake friendships and remain the world's favourite golden girl. Harley just wants to be free and honest, and show off her long-time crush, Finn, but he's a scholarship student and not parent-approved. And when you're Harley Gold, you don't get to do everything you want. You only do what your dad approves of.

Coerced into throwing a house party when her parents are out of town, Harley's façade of a life crumbles as the house is wrecked and a classmate goes missing. When she confesses to her parents, the pressure piles up. With no leads about her friend's disappearance and increasing tension in her friendship group, Harley hides away the one authentic part of her life, Finn, instead treating him as her guilty little secret. But before Harley can make amends with a hurt Finn, she's kidnapped right off the street. When Harley comes face to face with her hostage-taker, she's shocked to realise she isn't the only one who hides her true self. And she must risk everything to escape or she might not make it out alive.

ALL THAT GLITTERS is a YA Contemporary novel of 68,000 words and would find an audience among fans of fiction such as Sara Barnard's 2016 novel *Beautiful Broken Things*, as well as stories exploring fame, such as Erin Watt's 2017 novel *When It's Real*.

I am a young adult writer working a fast-paced hospital job and hold an A-level qualification for English Language and Literature.

ALL THAT GLITTERS

BY LEAH MECROW

ONE WEEK BEFORE THE DISAPPEARANCE

Fame is fun when you're little. But now at sixteen, it's like treading water in one big sea of pressure. Waves submerge my head from every angle, plunging me deeper, making it harder to escape.

I slump against the shiny, black surface of our kitchen table. A mouthful of soggy cornflakes clogs my throat and coats my tongue with sugary milk. I swirl the spoon around the bowl to revive the disintegrating cereal. The radio jingle blasts through the surrounding speakers, the presenter introducing me.

"We have Harley Gold on the line. Good morning, Harley. Are you excited about your dad's new album releasing today?"

Absolutely not.

"So excited," I shout towards the phone on speaker, reading from the makeshift script Mom scribbled. "He's worked so hard. These are his best songs yet."

"We agree. Do you enjoy your dad's music?"

Not really.

"Of course." I yawn, muffling it with a hand, staring down at the pool of milky mush. "His songs are always on shuffle. I'd never get tired of his voice. You're gonna love the new tracks as much as me."

Christ, Mom's outdone herself with the lines this time.

"We already love them. They'll be on our playlist too. Now, thousands of teens would love to be you. But do you enjoy the fame?"

Nope...Oh, God. The next line of the script stares back at me. It's the worst one. The one which makes me want to end it all, right here right now, with my blunt cereal spoon.

Deep breath. "Yes. I'm incredibly lucky to live this wonderful life. It's amazing to be supported by so many of Dad's fans."

"I bet. So, tell our teen listeners what a typical Monday morning is like in the Gold household."

I flick around the silent room, the glitter of the black tiles catching in the morning sunlight. The silver hardware of the oven shines, the glass as spotless as the day we bought it. It's the perfect room for homemade family dinners, so it's pointless in our house.

"Eating breakfast and getting ready to start the final year of high school. Dad's new album is blasting from the speakers too. It's impossible to pick my favourite track."

I raise the spoon, ready to stake myself in the heart.

Goodbye cruel world.

"Are your parents with you? Do you enjoy breakfast together?"

"Dad's super busy in the living room with promotional work. But Mom's here," I say, speaking towards the empty chairs surrounding me. "We're having a lovely breakfast together."

The microwave pings, the scent of cooked oats wafting towards me. Mom's weird, instant chia-seed porridge is hidden with fresh fingerprints since the cleaner scrubbed it yesterday. "We cherish family time."

"How lovely. We know you have a close relationship with your parents. Do you hope to follow in your dad's footsteps?"

No chance. Get me out of this life.

Is this spoon durable enough to dig an escape from the Gold household?



Name: Manuia Heinrich

Title: The Fifth Warrior of Ana'a

Genre: Contemporary Fantasy

Mentor: Heather L. Powell & Jennifer Griswell

Mentor comments

Heather: I could go on and on about my love for Manuia's Writementor story. It's unique, lol funny, with a cast of characters who have given me more joy than any YA story has in years. Manuia is a brilliant author who took Jen and my notes and ran with them, like a queen. She's going to go a long way in her career and I can't wait to cheer her on in the process. I am honored to consider her not only an amazing mentee, but a true friend as well.

Jen: I fell in love with the writing and voice of my mentee's story immediately while reading submissions. As I read the manuscript, it grabbed me and didn't let go. My mentee was eager and open to all suggestions and an absolute pleasure to work with. She is a hard worker and the final version blew me away. I am so proud of Manuia and I can't wait for the world to read her wonderful story!

Eighteen-year-old Sawyer is one date away from getting the ideal life.

She's in college, has the coolest best friend, and soon she'll have the perfect boyfriend, as planned by a very reliable resource—her astrology book. What she doesn't count on? Three unruly ghosts popping into her world and ruining it all.

After a few too many nights of dealing with her new obnoxious guests, Sawyer decides to scour the second most reliable resource—the Internet—for ways to get rid of them. When her investigation reveals that the ghosts are from Ana'a, her dead mother's Polynesian island in the Tuamotus, Sawyer reaches an impasse. Her mother Fetia died in childbirth, and since her father never recovered from losing her, Sawyer's guilt makes her reluctant to pursue the matter further.

As a last resort, she enlists the help of Noarai, an overconfident guy from Ana'a, thinking he might know the quickest way to ditch the ghosts. Unfortunately, his plan isn't what Sawyer had hoped for. Claiming that her only choice is to ask Fetia's spirt for help, Noarai insists that Sawyer travel to Ana'a with him. But crystalline blue waters and sunny beaches aside, Sawyer doesn't need any reminders that she caused her mother's death. Worse, Noarai warns that between Fetia and her will stand evil ghosts and ferocious warrior trials. Now Sawyer must decide if she'd rather face it all—guilt and mother's ghost included—or be haunted forever.

THE FIFTH WARRIOR OF ANA'A is a 82,000 word YA contemporary fantasy. This ownvoices novel embarks Disney's Moana on an adventure with mischievous spirits, pairing her with a curse similar to Ghost Squad (C. Ortega), while adding in a slow-burn romance à la Sorcery of Thorns (M. Rogerson).

I'm doing a PhD in Literature and Cultures of the Pacific in Wellington, New Zealand, and write stories grounded in my Polynesian origins.

THE FIFTH WARRIOR OF ANA'A

BY MANUIA HEINRICH

According to very accurate, very powerful astrology calculations, tonight is the best time to set my Ideal Life Plan in motion.

And boy do I feel it.

The restaurant's warm light wraps around me like summer. Soft ambient music flits between the tables, mingling with mouth-watering, spicy scents of cardamom and thyme. I straighten a little in the booth, my reflection in the window looking older and wiser in a high neckline lacey dress. This astrology book is a lifesaver.

As I wait for my date and future boyfriend, Ben, to arrive, I watch the couple next to me. They champagne-toast, drinking in each other's eyes. I plop my chin on my fist and sigh through a smile. It's the planets' alignment, I know it. Positive energy infuses the brick walls, the satin brown benches, even the painting of a red tiger behind the hostess stand. No doubt the Universe will hand love and success to me on a silver platter tonight.

A waitress stops before me. "Can I get you anything to drink, Miss?"

My gaze flies to the clock above the red tiger. Ben is not precisely late. I just arrived early. Maybe I should order without him.

"We have this new cocktail that's very popular, Cupid's Potion," the waitress continues. "I can bring you one and come back for appetizers later."

"Yes, thank you," I tell her. Cupid's Potion? I sigh contentedly. The Universe.

Through the window, I stare at the city lights soaking up the streets like spilled neon-glow painting. Auckland's Sky Tower rises like a lighthouse among the glass buildings, shaming the stars. It's a sight I rarely got to see before, but now things are changing. For the better.

There's a damp spot under the glass of my pink cocktail by the time Ben arrives. He's really late now, but it must have been the traffic. He plummets into the seat, eyes wide, back straight as a boat mast when he says with a mechanical voice, "I've been sent to kill you."

My smile freezes while my brain tries to decide how to react. But then a laugh bursts out of him.

"It's a line from my acting lab play," he says through a charming, crooked smile. "I'm a humanoid hitman. It's actually why I'm late, I had to learn my script."

"Oh." I dig up a smile. Not traffic then. "You got me there. When is it due?"

"In two weeks."

Okay... Well, I'm not annoyed or anything. What are—I glance at the clock—thirty-two minutes when homework and a potential career are on the line? If anything, I admire his dedication. When he's a famous actor in a few years, we'll laugh about tonight and he'll say, "It's a good thing I learned those lines and ran late, now we have this ideal life." Yes, it is most definitely okay. I brush a strand of my hair aside and take a huge gulp of Cupid's Poison. I mean Potion.



Name: Marianna Leal

Title: Hall of Fame

Genre: Contemporary

Mentor: Gerardo Delgadillo

Mentor comments

Marianna's passion for baseball shines in her manuscript, HALL OF FAME. I love-love-love how she turned feedback into tasks, worked on them like a champ, and how well she dove into the whole rip-apart/re-write editing process. I feel like a proud Papá -- proud of her LatinX YA contemporary story about girl power! I cannot wait for the world to see it. LatinX representation to the max. ¡Harina!

HALL OF FAME is a YA contemporary romcom novel with strong Latinx representation, complete at 85k words. Its emotional beats compare to the contemporary works of Brigid Kemmerer and the wit of Ten Things We Did (and Probably Shouldn't Have) by Sarah Mlynowski.

Who said baseball isn't for girls? Not Peyton. All she wants is to someday become the first female coach in major league baseball. The first step to achieve her goal, and get the college credits she needs, is to become her high school's assistant coach. But she faces two obstacles—the coach is her dad, and he refuses to hire her. Peyton doesn't take no for an answer and before her complaints turn into her high school's biggest PR disaster, the principal and her dad agree to let her become the assistant coach on one condition: dating any of the players will be strike three and she's out.

No big deal, except the team's star player and Peyton's childhood friend, Santiago, hasn't touched a baseball bat since his older brother, the ace pitcher, died in a tragic accident last year. Now that Santi's back from a trip to his home country, Venezuela, Peyton must convince him to be in the lineup if the team is to stand a chance this season. But as she coaches him back in the game, her feelings for him grow deeper, and she finds herself at a 3-2 count between a trailblazing future in baseball and her heart.

Writing as Marianna Leal, I have two goals with my books: bring Venezuelan and Latinx representation, and entice the younger generations into carving a better future. Luckily, I get to work on the same goals at my day job in a renown engineering company. I currently live in Florida, USA, after a couple of years of living in the Midwest—after a few years of living in Scandinavia—and nowadays, enjoy traveling through my books more than through cross-continental moves.

HALL OF FAME

BY MARIANNA LEAL

INNING ONE—WELCOME HOME

First female MLB coach.

The idea hit me like the crack of my bat against the ball. My teammates cheered as the ball vanished in the outfield, while the opposite team burst into boos and whining.

Jimmy, the pitcher, stomped the ground, sending a cloud of red dust flying around him. I sensed the beginnings of a tantrum as he said, “That’s not fair.”

After coaching my neighborhood’s peewee league for the duration of winter break, the six- to eight-year-olds had as good a grasp on the basics as expected. Some of them were little prodigies while others still didn’t know which end of the bat to hit the ball with. Knowing that basics were boring for kids with the attention span of a rock, I shook things up with a practice game on the last session before school started—and shook them up some more by joining one of the teams.

“This is life, kids. If you see an opportunity you gotta take it.” I dropped my bat, jogging at a leisurely pace toward first base. Rounding the diamond I added, “In this case the opportunity was the easy pitch, which will still be a strike if you don’t practice your swings.”

A chorus of whines rose up. Swinging the bat was one of the least popular drills, along with anything that didn’t have them running around the field like wild goats.

Meanwhile, my heart hammered in my chest thanks to that wild idea I couldn’t shake off.

A diamond was supposed to be a girl’s best friend, except in baseball. It didn’t matter that in my peewee days I’d been the best. At bat, at catching, at pitching, at sliding to base like a boulder if I could put my team in the game. The fact was I’d come out of the birth dugout without dangly bits between my legs, which meant as a batter I was out. Three strikes before my first wail. Before I was able to prove I deserved a bigger role in baseball than spectator.

What if I wanted to be more than that? Making the ball fucking fly was exciting, which was why for a while I tried playing softball. But it wasn’t quite the same, not just because the ball was bigger and softer. With so few eyes on the sport, how I could leave my mark?

The peewees gave me the answer.

Pedrito was next at bat. His swing nearly decapitated the catcher. I corrected Pedrito’s stance and showed him where to aim. Two strikes later, he made a decent hit and took off like a rocket. He would never forget how success felt like a shock to the body.

This was what I wanted to do: mold the next generation of baseball players like my dad did, as coach of my high school team. I wanted his job.

Well, not his specifically. I wanted to be the first female coach in a professional league.



Name: Noelle Strader

Title: Kaleidoscopes Collide

Genre: YA Contemporary with Speculative Elements

Mentor: Kimberly Wisnewski

Mentor comments

I knew as soon as I read her first page that I wanted to work with Noelle. Her witty, incisive voice shines throughout the book, and this story about two teens who must learn to take control of their own lives is so touching and universal. The synesthesia/chromesthesia element brings a new and unique layer to an already engaging story. Add dual-POV and will-they/won't-they teen angst, and I was sold! Throughout the editing process, Noelle went above and beyond to make this book shine. Every time I read through her edits, I could see how much work and passion had gone into every page, every word. I'm so glad Noelle submitted to me and that we got to work together as mentor/mentee, but now that the program is over, we can continue to lean on each other as critique partners and friends!

Sixteen-year-old Hadley Holland dreams of becoming a professional cellist. Luckily, her chromesthesia—the ability to see colors with sound—works to her advantage as she vies for a spot in Carnegie Hall's youth orchestra. But astrology-loving Hadley's left on edge when a psychic instructs her to find her first love between the upcoming blue moons, or risk derailing her fate. Cello dreams included.

Connor Mahoney's dyscalculia, the inability to accurately assess distance, gives him an invisible handicap on the basketball court, leaving him in the shadow of his golden-boy older brother. If Connor doesn't dazzle recruiters, he won't be eligible for a scholarship, placing an additional financial burden on his father. Fortunately, things look up when his mom's spirit assists him on the court and transforms him into a star player.

As basketball manager, Hadley builds a quick connection with Connor—one that feels almost otherworldly. But when Hadley's cello skills plummet and her chromesthesia colors fade, she pushes Connor away. With Hadley gone, so is Ghost Mom, and Connor is once again an ordinary player. As the window between blue moons closes, Hadley's youth orchestra spot is in danger, and Connor risks losing what's left of his mom. If Hadley and Connor don't stop relying on things beyond their control and take matters in their own hands, they'll miss out on their dreams—and their shot with each other.

Complete at 89,000 words, KALEIDOSCOPE COLLIDE is a YA Contemporary with speculative elements. Told in dual POV, it combines the romance and astrology in *Summer of Supernovas* by Darcy Woods with the familial grief and paranormal elements in *How the Light Gets In* by Katy Upperman.

By day, I'm an orthodontist, having earned my doctorate from Harvard University. By night, I read many of the same books as my YA patients. I belong to the Florida Writer's Association and have twice participated in Nina LaCour's Slow Novel Lab. A NY transplant, I now call Orlando home with my husband, two kids, and calico-tabby.

KALEIDOSCOPIES COLLIDE

BY NOELLE STRADER

HADLEY

It's downright degrading. Waiting for a school bus while bracing myself (and cello) against the wind. Cold, January wind. At least in the city, I had provisional shelter in the subway station. Here in suburbia, I'm on display to all drivers zipping past.

Hadley Holland: Frozen scarecrow with musical pursuits.

My morning routine might be tolerable if it involved a known end time. Unfortunately, the school bus's estimated time of arrival lacks consistency. It could barrel my way any second, or crawl to a stop in fifteen minutes.

I strike a pose as a strong gust challenges my center of gravity.

This is depleting. What I need is an energy boost. Specifically, crystal-induced. Re-working my scarf, I seek my pendant necklace, but my fingers only brush goosebumps and clavicles. My chest instinctively tightens.

I forgot it.

The necklace is on my nightstand, its chain swirled in the shape of a crescent moon. No way can I get through the school day without a crystal. Not when Carnegie's internship could be emailing their acceptances any day now. My entire future hinges on that email.

With a hug to my cello case, I give a less than elegant three-legged run back to the house. I never thought twice about lugging the case around city streets, crawling with like-minded artists. Strange that Soundpoint feels remote when Manhattan is the actual island.

Intersecting shadows of bare branches thin out, a sign that I'm almost at the Grand Chateau. I squint up, finding it cloaked in a thin veil of sunlight. The house, nicknamed by moi, belongs to my grandparents. Mom and I moved here last summer. Now it's just us. My grandparents left weeks ago to snowbird it in Florida.

I tromp up the porch steps, then slip a key in the rusty doorknob. Thanks to the unrelenting salt breeze off the Long Island Sound, the entire house is in desperate need of a WD-40 squirt. When the lock releases, a welcome blast of warm air finds me.

"Mom?" I call, expecting her to be puttering around, beginning her own morning. The house is pin-drop quiet. My attention pulls to Grandpa's beach inspired artwork, two seagulls in flight. The birds resemble a steadfast couple, like it's them against the wind. That's when it hits me. Mom's sleeping in. She's tired. Of course, she's tired.

It's January 26th after all.

Mom and I know this date all too well. But maybe today will be fine. This year's anniversary feels different...no, off. Not once has Mom mentioned my father's birthday. Not that it's my place to judge or anything; I've never even met my dad. He's not a deadbeat father. He's just dead. That variety of absent. The same type he's been since I was in the womb.

Still, this day always gets to me. What might have been. My dad would be forty-four today, but let's face it, he's forever twenty-seven, barely a decade older than I am now.

Math can be so weird.



Name: Ranee Stemann

Title: The Blackshire Three

Genre: Horror

Mentor: Sarah Daniels

Mentor comments

The Blackshire Three is a spine tingling supernatural horror that explores domestic abuse, vengeance and vigilantism. I read Ranee's full manuscript in a few hours and was immediately hooked by her concept. She has a real talent for writing distinct voices, and I love her descriptions of the breathless heat and oppressive atmosphere of her small town setting. Ranee worked intensively throughout the summer, expanding on the world and ironing out the plot of The Blackshire Three. I can't wait to see where this novel goes from here.

Ten years ago, Hannah unknowingly created the Blackshire Three to protect her mother from her abusive father. She never intended for them to kill him. Ever since, the trio of avenging wraith-like women have been murdering the violent men of her small-town community.

Now sixteen, Hannah has always believed the women to be good and just, eliminating only the most depraved men of Blackshire. That is, until she witnesses the murder of an innocent man, and she realizes her creations are more malevolent than she ever imagined. As more innocent men die, Hannah must work alongside the murdered man's attractive but vengeful grandson to discover how she created the Blackshire Three so that she can destroy them.

Failure will mean losing everyone she's ever loved. But stopping the Blackshire Three may mean sacrificing herself.

THE BLACKSHIRE THREE is a young adult horror novel, complete at 65,000-words. In addition to being selected as a mentee in the 2020 WriteMentor Summer Program, I also attended Wordsmith Workshops in 2019, where I worked closely with three established authors on an earlier draft of this novel. I have a BA in English, and my short fiction has been published in various literary magazines. I'm also a member of SCBWI as well as a local writer's group.

THE BLACKSHIRE THREE

BY RANEE STEMANN

The first strike of the broken clock tower tolls at midnight, loud and unapologetic in its promise of death.

I bolt from my bed, yanking my robe from the hook on the back of the door. I stagger through the hall, shoulder knocking into the wall as I shrug my arms through the sleeves. A picture frame crashes to the floor, but there's no time to clean it up. They're almost here. Cold from the air conditioner wafts over me as I slip into my mom's room.

The third toll bellows as I grip her shoulder and shake. Why does it always take so long to wake her?

"Hannah?" Her voice is heavy with sleep.

"The clock," I say, as the fourth toll rumbles the hardwood beneath my feet. "They're coming."

Her eyes widen. It's been over a year since the clock has made a sound.

She scrambles from the bed, stumbling in her haste, and I grip her elbow to steady her. She grabs my hand, the bones of my fingers crushing together. We race down the hall, barrel through the living room, and out the front door. My bare feet press into the concrete of the sidewalk, my steps quick and anxious in my need to find out who's going to die.

The humidity slithers over my skin, and the dark clouds overhead whisper of a storm rolling in. The air is tinged with the smell of rain.

The sixth toll rings out.

It's almost time.

The door of the neighbor's house opens, and Fred emerges. The porch light makes his hair appear more silver than gray, the wrinkles of his face more prominent. He grants me a nervous look, not quite smile, not quite frown.

I drag my mom closer to the curb, my toes curling over the edge, desperate for a glimpse of the clock tower half a block over. Desperate to see them. The tower stands tall and lean, a facade of red brick, a clock near the steeple. A simple construction. My favorite part of Blackshire for as long as I can remember.

I search the other homes, people spilling through doors in nightgowns and bare feet, boxer shorts and t-shirts, robes and slippers. Hair set in curlers. No one considers their appearance on these nights. Some porches remain empty, the residents ignoring the tolls, not wanting to see.

"How many times has it chimed?" an elderly woman across the street asks.

"Seven," someone else says. A man. A distinct quiver in his voice. He's nervous, just like every other man here. Each wondering if he's next.

No one asks the question we're all thinking. Who are they coming for?

My eyes flick to the power lines overhead. I swear I can hear them buzzing, excitement pulsing through the wires, as if they, too, know what's about to come.

I catch sight of the turquoise first, and my heart lurches in my chest. The Blackshire Three glide down the street, feet seeming to hover.



Name: Sophie Toovey

Title: The Day Of The Dice

Genre: Speculative Romance

Mentor: Anna Mainwaring

Mentor comments

Sophie, you have been brilliant to work with this year. On one of the twitter chats, you told me about your book and as soon as I heard 'dystopian Pride and Prejudice' you had my interest! I'm so pleased you put me as one of your choices. Your novel is complex, beautifully written and I love your theme of personal freedom in relationships and in society. I'm really excited to see your work out there - people will love William and Elise's progress as they seek to change the harsh world in which they live for the better.

It's the future, but it feels like the past. Elise farms the land with a community of ten families, the last people left on Earth. She dreads the Casting, where boys roll dice to choose which girl they are paired with for enforced child-bearing, a system established by her aggressive uncle, General Hunter. Elise discovers her mother's death in childbirth could have been prevented, but the General wanted her dead. Now she fears the same thing will happen to her.

But when Elise travels on the only boat to a forbidden island, she discovers there are other survivors. She returns determined to escape forever, but her plan depends on the privileged William. Their cover-story romance feels increasingly real, despite her cousin Alice's best attempts to keep them apart. Elise begins to consider what it would mean to stay and challenge her uncle's harsh regime, despite the risk of history repeating itself. Torn between love and freedom, Elise will have to carve out her own path for the future she wants.

THE DAY OF THE DICE is an 84,000 word YA speculative romance that blends dystopian elements of THE GRACE YEAR but with the same belief as S.K. Ali (LOVE FROM A TO Z) that "there's more love in the world than hate, more hope than fear." It is the first book in a planned trilogy with crossover potential for older readers. It was selected as a runner-up in the Kate Nash #NearAndFarNov Sci Fi competition and I was offered representation by Paige Wheeler of CMA New York following #KissPitch in February, but I decided that I wanted to pursue representation from a UK-based agency, given that I live in Wales (rainy but beautiful). I was thrilled to be accepted onto the Write Mentor programme with Anna Mainwaring (REBEL WITH A CUPCAKE) as my mentor. Anna says, "PRIDE AND PREJUDICE meets THE HUNGER GAMES, THE DAY OF THE DICE is a richly written, complex and compelling YA speculative fiction novel which asks us to consider what it means to be in love, what it means to be free and what sacrifices we make for the people we love."

THE DAY OF THE DICE

BY SOPHIE TOOVEY

Today is the day I lose my best friend.

Bracing against the sharp wind, I look beyond the last field to the sinister shape of the Infirmary, a crushed metal pinecone marking the edge of Whitecroft, grey against a white-cold sky. I shudder.

This is the place where my mother died.

I would never come here, but Ada suggested we meet in secret. Struggling through waist-high overgrowth, I try not to speculate about what goes on behind these icy walls. There's a high pitched cry; at first I assume it's a scream, but then I see the kites making a low circle, their wingspan marked with two ivory strips.

Swallowing my fear, I wait by a pile of discarded, empty sacks, under the looming construction.

Overhead, cloud obscures the sun. The Casting will begin soon.

Holding up the carved cormorant, I give a final inspection. I burnt hours worth of candles in the night to perfect it. A thousand memories of running together along the shoreline shaped each feather's curve.

A parting gift for Ada, before everything changes.

A door nearby swings open, hinges squealing. I'm not supposed to be here. Apparently my mother was good at breaking rules too.

I dart to hide behind a tree, dropping the cormorant in my haste. I clench my fist and silently curse my idiocy.

"I told Charles," the abrasive voice of my uncle, General Hunter, carries on the wind, along with the cloying smoke from his pipe, "choose one who can bear the most children."

"Some struggle after three." It's the Doctor, his response muffled by his menacing cone-shaped mask.

"They should do their duty," my uncle snaps. "The less compliant will experience a painful and untimely death otherwise."

With the pang that never fades, I consider my mother. Even as I took my first breath, she took her last. A painful and untimely death.

"What's this?"

I shift to watch as the General stoops to pick something off the ground. My nails dig into my palms. Please, no...

The bell rings from the Square. The General tosses it down, then his boot grinds it with a sickening crunch. I can barely wait until they've walked a few yards before I run back to retrieve the carving, my heart a frozen lump in my chest.

The wooden cormorant lies in the dust, its wing broken.

I sink down onto the sacks, too numb to cry. I have nothing to give Ada now.

I have never had anything to give Ada.

All through School, her mother would upbraid me as the 'disgrace of the nation', the only one with no father. My mother never revealed his identity. It's a small town; I can't escape the permanent stain of illegitimacy. That's why my uncle never speaks to me.

I pick up the ruined present, and a gasping sob escapes too soon. The General whips round.

Despite the distance, he sees enough. He gives a chilling smile.

I crouch lower into the Infirmary's glacial shadow.



Name: Sue Cunningham

Title: 49 Sisters

Genre: Magical Realism

Mentor: Melissa Welliver

Mentor comments

When I first read the opening of *49 Sisters*, I knew it was for me. The synopsis was packed full of feisty feminists and scientific heroines, and I just fell in love with the idea of brilliant women working together and stealing the story. Sue has been an absolute joy to work with this summer and I wasn't even surprised when she went on to win the WMCNA. I know Sue and her stories will be widely read by so many young women one day, and I feel so privileged to have been a small part of helping that dream come true. I made a new friend in this difficult year and I hope we will always stay in touch. From your Frentor, to my Freetee! Congratulations Sue!

49 Sisters is a YA novel with magical realism and humour, complete at 84,000 words. It will appeal to readers of E. Lockhart's *The Disreputable History of Frankie Landau-Banks* and Rainbow Rowell's *Simon Snow* series. It was inspired by an article about the varied life of Emma Hamilton (most famous for being Nelson's mistress) and a 'what if' moment led me to a twist on that famous quote:

Behind every great man stands a great woman. *Or a great witch.*

When seventeen-year-old Alice inherits weird supernatural science skills, she's seriously underwhelmed. Her new talents have turned her into some sort of nerd when all she wants to do is jam with her band. Worse still, she's expected to join the 49 Sisters, an uptight secret society with even more rules than school. In history, the Sisters' magical powers of persuasion were used to elevate ordinary men to greatness – in 2020, it's all about levelling the playing field for women.

When the Sisters persuade Alice to swap her beloved bass guitar for a STEM summer placement helping a female scientist develop a new wonder drug, her only compensation is meeting cute fellow intern, Jez. Unfortunately, wherever the 49 Sisters go, an ancient establishment of witch-hunters follow. But what's the worst that can happen? It's been centuries since anyone stood trial for witchcraft, right?

49 Sisters recently won the *Write Mentor Children's Novel Award 2020*. I've also won competitions run by *Writer's Forum* magazine and Darley Anderson/Orion and have been shortlisted in others. I've sold more than fifty short stories to women's magazines in the UK, Australia, Sweden, Finland and South Africa.

I live in Manchester with my husband, two sons and our female cockapoo (a last-ditch effort to even up the sexes). When I'm not writing or standing on minute pieces of Lego in bare feet, I work for the NHS.

49 SISTERS

BY SUE CUNNINGHAM

Prologue

“Killing me will change nothing. There’ll be another to take my place soon enough.” She stared through the misted windscreen to the starless sky beyond.

“There’ll be one less.” The man in the wetsuit bent to check the tape securing her wrists. “If we move fast, we can purge the whole lot of you before you have the chance to regroup.”

“Others have tried before.” Her short thumbnails scratched surreptitiously but the tape held firm. “What makes you think you’ll succeed this time?”

“We’re powerful. We’re men.” He slammed the car door, trapping her inside.

She gave a short laugh of contempt. “Keep telling yourself that. Your nose is still bleeding, by the way.”

He wiped the scarlet stripe from his upper lip and leaned in the open window to release the handbrake. “Goodnight, witch.”

She braced herself as the car gathered speed and rolled towards the deserted harbour. It launched in a graceful arc and hung suspended, headlights briefly illuminating the night sky, before plunging into the inky water.

Chapter 1

I looked down at the dead body and felt a wave of revulsion. Turning away, I clamped one hand over my mouth, resisting the urge to gag.

Mrs. Wilson stood at my shoulder. “Get on with it, Alice.”

“I can’t, Mrs. Wilson. I’m going to puke.”

“Don’t be so dramatic.” She swivelled the dead frog, spatchcocked on its wooden board, towards me. “Let’s see your blade.”

I held out my hand, fingernails curled under the scalpel so she couldn’t have a go at me over the navy-blue varnish.

“Good girl. Now, a nice firm incision down the abdomen to slice him open.” Her coffee breath mingled with the formaldehyde, making me feel worse.

“You know I’m a vegetarian, right?”

Her narrow lips twitched. “I’m asking you to dissect him, Alice, not eat him.”

Beside me, Lucy was cracking up. A butcher’s daughter, my best mate had zero sentimentality about dead stuff. She could watch her dad eviscerate a pig and then tuck into a BLT without a second thought.

Wilson whipped round, glaring at her. “I hope you’ve finished, young lady.”

Lucy rummaged inside her frog. “It all looks the same in there.”

I turned my attention to my little green corpse. Hands trembling, I prodded the scalpel into his belly to reveal the glistening innards.

A lilac film misted across my eyes. For one horrible second, I thought I was going to pass out.

Don’t faint. Lucy would pee her pants laughing. And the Rugby Boys were working at the bench right behind us.

Nothing could be more embarrassing than fainting in front of the Rugby Boys. For starters, I didn’t have the right build to swoon prettily like a Victorian heroine. I’d go down like a ton of bricks, size seven feet in the air and Primark knickers showing. Worse still, what if I sparked out at their feet and they *didn’t even notice*?



Name: Susan Staab

Title: Normal is Relative

Genre: Contemporary

Mentor: Destinee Shriner

Mentor comments

Susan has worked incredibly hard this summer with completely rewriting a book and being super dedicated to learning the craft and I couldn't be prouder. I know she'll go far in this industry.

Trying to keep your grandmother out of jail for indecent exposure isn't what sixteen-year-old Daisy had in mind as being normal. But neither is best friend Charlie cheering her on. Maybe Daisy could deal with all of this if she wasn't late for the big announcement from her two fathers.

Daisy is stunned to find out she's going to be a big sister through a new surrogate. This stirs memories of asking about her own birth mother only to be told it was better not knowing the truth. Before the announcement she'd shrugged it off, her dads were extremely loving parents if not quirky. Still, the new baby meant Daisy wouldn't be the center of their world anymore.

But when Daisy discovers more answers about her birth mother, she's determined to track her down and get the whole story. Daisy must uncover the hidden truth of her past and come to terms with her very unusual family before a new member comes and changes everything.

I live in Tennessee with my husband of 28 years, two teenagers, a demandingly affectionate cat, and I teach full time at an inner-city Nashville school. This will be my debut novel.

NORMAL IS RELATIVE

BY SUSAN STAAB

Grandmas Ain't What They Used to Be

Thank God Grandma agreed to this retirement home. After being kicked out of the other three, the family had one nerve end left and she pecked at it like a starving chicken.

Madison Manor looked more like a three-story resort hotel than as she put it, 'a place for old farts to go die' so I had hope.

Afterall, miracles happened every day.

Sucking in a breath, I swung the Grounds for Reading delivery van into a front parking spot. When I turned off the ignition, it rattled, shook, and coughed in protest before it shuddered to a halt.

"Their Christmas party is hoppin'." Charlie rolled his shoulders and wiggled his hips in the passenger's seat as he watched Madison Manor's couples twirl in the lobby to big band music.

I kind of liked the old timey tunes, except one song. I hoped to never, for the rest of my life, hear it again.

"We're not here to dance. Grandma retrieval only," I said, redoing my ponytail. "My dads would shoot me and throw my carcass on the back porch if we showed up late. This last-minute big announcement they're making must be big deal. The entire family is there."

"It'd be fun to learn some ancient moves. I bet your grandma would love to cut a rug with me."

"Cut a...what? Charlie, focus."

"Ugh, fine." Charlie slouched. "Remind me why we're friends again?"

"You did not just say that to me." I crossed my arms and faced him.

He grinned, snatched the keys from the ignition, and bolted.

"Seriously?" I got out and slammed the door behind me. "You're supposed to be helping me. This is not helping."

Charlie dangled the keys in front of him on the far side of the van. "Come on, live a little." His words rose as steamy wisps in the grey winter light.

"Give me the keys."

But before Charlie could give a smart comeback the music inside the retirement home stopped and a new song began. I froze.

Oh no, no, no. It couldn't be. The notes clawed at my ears.

"Daisy?" Charlie stopped circling, stood straight up, his face dropping. "Dude, are you okay? Here, here take the keys. My bad."

"Shh, shh, let me listen." Was it...Oh shit, it was Sonny Lester and his orchestra. "Does she have the fans? Did someone give the fans back?" Each note tightened around my throat like a hangman's noose as I sprinted for the front doors.

"Fans? What are you talking about? What fans?" Charlie chased behind me.

I poked in the entry number on the keypad. The pin light flashed its evil red eye. I entered the number in again, slower. It blinked, once again denying me entrance.

"Oh my God." I jabbed at the keypad. "1. 4. 7. 4. Can you see her? I don't see her." I squinted through the glass.

"See who? Your grandmother?" Charlie asked. He looked from me to the lobby then back at me.



Name: Tess James-Mackey

Title: Lost Inside

Genre: Thriller

Mentor: Cynthia Murphy

Mentor comments

Tess has been SO hardworking through this whole process and I really enjoyed brainstorming her story with her. The amount of work she has put in is incredible and I really feel her MS is stronger for it. She barely batted a lash at the plot changes I suggested and pulled off a rewrite in mere weeks. A fun, creepy thriller with a strong teen voice, I can't wait to make space for it on my bookshelf!

LOST INSIDE is a Young Adult thriller complete at 62,000 words.

15-year-old Nia would do anything to win the approval of her friends, even explore the depths of an abandoned prison to honour a dare. Dark tunnels, distant noises and the creepy mementoes left behind by the criminals who once called the sprawling fortress home will all be worth it in the end if her friends finally start treating her like she's one of the group.

But when Nia realises she's got both herself and her little sister Kayla trapped inside, she forgets about the dare – all she wants is out. While searching for an escape route, Nia stumbles across a lair in one of the cells. The walls are plastered with disturbing artwork, including a poster of a missing girl, her eyes scratched out and DEAD GIRL written across her face.

And then Kayla vanishes from right behind her, missing just like the girl in the poster. Nia's phone is dead, her ankle is twisted, and instead of finding Kayla, she uncovers a horrifying secret within the prison's walls. The prison was built to lock people up forever – and someone is now hell bent on making sure Nia and her sister become its last inmates.

Good Girls Die First x Point Horror, Lost Inside is a story of toxic relationships and terror told within the confines of a few claustrophobic hours.

I am a Risk Consultant by profession and have been writing seriously for three years. As well as being part of a local writing group, I was selected for the WriteMentor Twitter programme in 2018, 2019 and 2020 with other novels, and was long listed for the 2020 Children's Novel Award. Lost Inside is based in my hometown, where the local prison was closed down and part of it inexplicably turned into a soft-play centre for children.

LOST INSIDE

BY TESS JAMES-MACKEY

Prologue

He shrank away from the prowling forms circling him.

“Please,” he whispered. “Please leave me alone.”

But they wouldn’t leave, and his sanctuary, his home, suddenly felt like the prison it really was.

Their laughter echoed through the cavernous room.

The blows landed, one after another. He whimpered as his skin bruised and split beneath their frenzied attack. He reached out, imploring the only one who could help him. But they stumbled backwards, shaking their head in horror as his screams grew louder.

His glassy eyes stared up at the bars on the window above him.

And the laughter continued.

Chapter 1

An amateurish sign reading “Prison Funhouse” was blue-tacked to the crumbling brick wall. The paper had gotten wet at some point, the ink dribbling down like mascara tears.

“As if,” Nia groaned. Of all the places to spend her Saturday.

Mum was scrabbling around at the bottom of the nappy bag for change as the girl behind the counter grinned manically. Nia turned away in disgust. How could anyone be that chirpy working in a place like...this.

Nia couldn’t get her head around it. They were in prison. A literal prison. And even though it was ancient, it had been packed full of criminals only a year ago. And not just any old criminals, but the worst ones – the ones who killed people and chopped them up and stuffed their remains in the walls. And now...ball pits and babies?

“Mental,” she muttered, gazing up at the gatehouse. The wind hurtled through the archway and whistled as it passed through the iron bars of the gate. Nia folded her arms tighter across her chest. The overly-cheerful girl in the kiosk didn’t seem bothered by her working conditions, even though her nose was bright red from the cold.

“Sorry, how much did you say it was?” Mum asked as she readjusted baby Deon on her hip.

“Well adults go free, so you just need to pay for the three children,” Little Miss Pretend-to-be-Perky replied.

Nia tore her gaze away from the entrance gates to glare. “I’m fifteen. I’m obviously not here to go on the bouncy castle.”

Perky’s smile faltered and Nia felt a twist of satisfaction. “Oh, um, I’m afraid a child counts as anyone under sixteen, I think. I don’t actually know.”

Nia groaned. She was probably the only teenager who had ever been dragged here.

“Mum,” she whispered urgently. “Just let me go home, you don’t want to have to pay for me too. It’s a waste of money.” She crossed her fingers inside her pocket, hoping that the temptation to save money would be enough to convince Mum to let her leave.

But Mum didn’t even look at her as she hissed out of the side of her mouth, “No, Nia. I need you to stay here, with me, where I can keep an eye on you.”

Nia stepped back, defeated. What was it going to take for Mum to forgive her for that night?

The following mentees were part of the 2020 class but didn't take part in the showcase, so no work has been presented here.



Name: Philip Kavvadias

Title: Microraptor

Genre: MG: Humorous adventure

Mentor: Tasha Harrison

Mentor comments

Phil's story Microraptor, about a boy who discovers a dinosaur egg while on holiday in the Alps, had me laughing right from the first few pages. It was packed with humour and zany, imaginative adventure and, while I loved many of the submissions I received, I couldn't stop thinking about this one. Phil was easy to communicate with and was super-grateful for my feedback report. I don't know what changes he made, but whatever he did, he nailed it, because he landed an agent and I'm absolutely thrilled for him. My fingers are firmly crossed that Microraptor goes on to find a publisher, because not only is it a warm-hearted, entertaining story that will make kids laugh their heads off, but Phil is a lovely guy and a talented, hard-working writer.



Name: Louise Cook

Title: The Eternal Return of Clara Hart

Genre: YA: Contemporary, Speculative

Mentors: Carolyn Ward and Emma Finlayson-Palmer

Mentor comments

Lou is a talented writer who has created this amazing, gripping, complex book. Getting to work on Clara was brilliant fun. Well done Lou, and all the best for your writing career - Carolyn
It has been our absolute pleasure working with Lou this summer. She's hardworking and always takes suggestions on board. I'm so excited to see this story go into the world and can't wait to see it snapped it and find a home with someone who has loved it as much as we have :) - Emma



Name: Becky Wilson

Title: The Pet Princess

Genre: PB

Mentor: Jon Cox

Mentor comments

The zing and joy in Becky's writing jumped out at me from the off. She's got a wonderful ear for language, humour and rhythm. Working with her has been an utter delight - she's so responsive and so appreciative of feedback. No surprise at all to me that she was signed by an agent before the mentoring process was done. Go Becky!

Name: Al Holloway

Title: Watch Out Baked Beanies!

Genre: PB: Adventure, Funny

Mentor: Catherine Emmett

Mentor comments

When I first read Al's story 'Baked Beans Ahoy' I couldn't stop laughing as it was so crazy and the humour was just brilliant! I knew I definitely wanted to work with a writer who had such an irreverent and light hearted style! I've loved working with Al on his other story 'Socks' as I've really seen Al develop as a writer. Taking a story apart to restructure it is difficult, but once a writer has a strong handle on structure it makes a huge difference to their writing. I've absolutely loved seeing Socks develop as Al has worked to get to the core of the story! Socks has a lovely message with some crazy humour and I cannot wait to read it when it is finished! Al won't be taking part in the Agent showcase due a broken clavicle, but I'm looking forward to keeping working with him on this text to get it into submission shape! Watch this space!!!

Name: Nessa Reen

Title: These Wishless Souls

Genre: YA: Fantasy

Mentor: Gabriel Dylan

Mentor comments

It's been an absolute honour working with Nessa - her Nordic fantasy grabbed me from the opening line, and I was so happy to land her as my mentee. She's been super cool to work with, really honing her opening chapters and working hard to get her manuscript submission worthy. Good luck Nessa, can't wait to see 'These Wishless Souls' on the bookshelf!

Name: Bethany Pleydell

Title: Grow Me a Rainforest

Genre: PB: Contemporary

Mentor: Skylaar Amann

Mentor comments

I'm so grateful I got to work with Bethany during WriteMentor 2020. Her story, GROW ME A RAINFOREST, is an imaginative, heartfelt, and unique story about the bonds of love, grief, and the natural world. Bethany brings a thoughtful approach to her writing, and she's always willing to revise, try new things, and improve the story. She has a great talent for beautiful language and visuals, and it's been so fun helping bring out even more of her style in the writing. I have loved watching her story change in wonderful and unexpected ways over the course of the mentorship, and I'm excited to see where she takes her writing in the future! Congratulations on your lovely story, Bethany! Can't wait to see what's next!

Name: Sierra L Cook

Title: The Eye of Raava

Genre: YA: Fantasy

Mentor: KC Karr

Mentor comments

Sierra has wonderful story ideas, and I truly believe she'll be a force in the YA world.

Congrats!



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