

More About Our Presenters

Al Batt is a writer, speaker and storyteller. He writes five columns a week for many newspapers and magazines, does weekly radio shows and writes a number of cartoon strips that are nationally syndicated. He is the author of the book, "A Life Gone to the Birds." His mother thinks he's a big deal.

Krista Betcher is a mom, a teacher and a creator. Throughout her career, Krista taught various grades and found her passion in the middle school "transition" years. It is her hope that students will remember the bits of advice she offers as they venture into a new chapter in their lives.

Aimée Bissonette was born in Pennsylvania, the sixth of seven children. Growing up, she moved many times (attending eight different schools before graduating from high school!), which led to a love of travel and storytelling. Aimée also loves dogs, sports, history and anything outdoors. Her picture books include "North Woods Girl," "Miss Colfax's Light," and "Aim for the Skies: Jerrie Mock and Joan Merriam Smith's Race to Complete Amelia Earhart's Quest." More books are coming soon! Aimée lives with her husband, family and dogs in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Mary Bleckwehl is a longtime teacher, do-it-yourselfer and children's author from Northfield, Minnesota. She says ideas float in her head all the time and it's when they clump together that she knows she has a story. She has written the award winning "Henry you're late AGAIN!" and "Henry you're hungry AGAIN?" books as well as her new release, "Claire's Hair," about the girl who gets a BIG hairy idea. She enjoys eating Whoppers candy and walks with her big doggy.

J. Michael Blumer is the author of the young adult fantasy series "The Secret Books of Gabendoor." He is a long time storyteller who found time to be a writer after encouragement from his children who dubbed him an "alternative life form" for his creative parenting techniques.

Lisa Bullard is the author of more than 100 books for young readers. Her offerings range from picture books to nonfiction titles to a middle grade mystery. Her novel "Turn Left at the Cow" was a Maud Hart Lovelace Award nominee for the 2017-18 school year. Lisa enjoys presenting at schools and is a longtime writing teacher at the Loft Literary Center. Her Writing Road Trip blog, carried by Bookology magazine, offers tips for teaching writing to young people. Lisa grew up in small-town Minnesota and now lives in Blaine, Minnesota.

Lynn Callahan is a local educator and artist.

Susan Chambers is a poet who has presented in schools nationwide. She won the National Federation of State Poetry Societies Grand Prize twice and is published in many anthologies and magazines. Her book "Good Thunder, Blue Earth" was published in 2016.

Bill Cosgrove (Professor Origami) is a Professor Emeritus of English. He has more than 40 years of college teaching experience, including traditional undergraduate and graduate classes as well as classes offered in the evening for community and nontraditional students. He has initiated and taught scores of community outreach classes sponsored by the Minnesota Humanities Commission and the North Dakota Humanities Council funded by grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities. He has performed his one-man show "An Evening with Mark Twain: 'The Trouble Begins at Eight'" more than 100 times for audiences ranging from grade schoolers to senior citizens.

Peggy Cosgrove is the right-hand person to Bill Cosgrove, though she's left-handed.

Jennifer L. Davidson is the author of three books in the Kody Burkoff Mystery Series and is hard at work editing her fourth stand-alone novel. She lives in Rochester, Minnesota with her husband and three children and enjoys writing, reading and sharing all she's learned about being creative with others.

Laura Doyen is the owner of Design & Wine Crafting Workshop.

Marcella Eilders is a local longtime crafter and card maker.

Susan Hamen is a freelance writer, editor and fact checker. She has written more than 30 biographical/historical event books for middle school and high school readers on subjects including the Wright Brothers, the Lewis & Clark expedition, Pearl Harbor, engineering, World War II and the Cuban Missile Crisis. Additionally, Susan has written books that walk high school students through the process of constructing academic papers. She has also served as lead editor on a number of books. Her clients have included Capstone Publishing, Red Line Editorial and Lerner Publications.

Rachel Hanel is a writer and professor of mass media at Minnesota State University, Mankato. Her memoir, "We'll Be the Last Ones to Let You Down: Memoir of a Gravedigger's Daughter," was a finalist for a Minnesota Book Award. Rachel has written several nonfiction books for children and her essays have appeared in online and print literary journals. She is working on a doctorate in creative writing at Bath Spa University.

Melanie Heuser Hill is a graduate of Hamline University's MFA program in writing for children and young adults. She lives in the Twin Cities with her husband and children. "Giant Pumpkin Suite," her first novel, has received acclaim for its music, math and pumpkin-growing themes. Look for her first picture book, "Around the Table That Grandad Built," illustrated by Jaime Kim, available in 2019. Melanie enjoys speaking with young readers at schools, libraries and festivals where, sometimes, she is accompanied by a cello.

EI Holly is the author of the YA fantasy series Phantasmic Wars, which is described by readers as "completely unique" and "very imaginative." When she isn't writing, she enjoys teaching high school English online at Minnesota Virtual Academy, drinking coffee and going on random excursions with her family. She lives in Coon Rapids, Minnesota with her husband, their two kids and a dog that is more of a fluffball than anything else.

Wing Young Huie is a celebrated photographic artist. For more than 30 years he has captured the complex cultural realities of American society. Wing's photographs have been shown in international museums – over half a million people have viewed his traveling exhibit in China. His best known works, Lake Street USA and the University Avenue Project, were public art projects that transformed Minneapolis and Saint Paul thoroughfares into six-mile photo galleries, reflecting the everyday lives of thousands of their citizens. Although his photographs have been shown in galleries and museums around the world, it's in classrooms and non-arts venues where his work has had the most impact. He's given over a thousand presentations to audiences of all kinds—including K–12 classrooms, colleges, museums, nonprofits, corporations and places of worship—showing the various ways he's photographically engaged thousands of people. His new educational resource, "What Do You See?" is a simple learning tool where students are asked to discuss his photographs that are loaded with suggestion yet open to interpretation, before a back-story is revealed that will complicate and challenge perceptions. Learn more at <http://www.wdys.blog>.

Ryan Jacobson is the author of more than 50 titles including comic books, ghost stories, "choose your path" adventures, football biographies and more. On top of that, he has nearly 15 years of experience working at a book publishing company and is the co-owner of a publishing company. The award-winning author greatly enjoys sharing his knowledge of writing and book publishing at schools and special events. When Ryan isn't working on books, he likes to build LEGO sets, play board games and try new restaurants. He lives in east-central Minnesota with his wife and two sons.

Marie Kreft Marie Kreft is an educator and storyteller. She is a longtime speech coach and judge and play director.

Dennis Lo graduated from the Tyler School of Art with a MFA in printmaking in 1998. He taught at Philadelphia University, Moore College of Art and Design, and Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia before moving to Minneapolis, where he teaches printmaking classes at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design. Dennis' artwork has been exhibited nationally and is in the permanent collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Nancy Loewen grew up on a farm north of Mountain Lake, Minnesota surrounded by library books and cats. She has published more than 130 books for children and young adults. "The LAST Day of Kindergarten" and "Four to the Pole" (co-written with polar explorer Ann Bancroft) were Minnesota Book Award finalists. Nancy lives in St. Paul and holds an MFA from Hamline University. Find her on Facebook, or visit her website at www.nancyloewen.net.

Ken Lonnquist is an award-winning composer, songwriter, performer, musical theater composer and recording artist.

Terri Michels is an author and photographer with 64 children's nonfiction works, more than 100 magazine articles and lyrics to two published songs. Her first picture book entitled "Simon, of Cyrene, Legend of the Easter Egg," was released in 2017 from Pauline Kids Books and Media in Boston and was awarded the 2018 CPA Book Awards Honorable Mention for Children's Books and Books for Teens. Terri writes daily but does make time to present at schools and Young Writers & Artists Conferences around the upper Midwest throughout the year. She enjoys inspiring students to read, write, be kind, use their imaginations and follow their dreams.

Nick "Oz" Ozment is a widely published author and leading Minnesota tour guide. He has a MA in English.

Colleen Patterson is a local educator and artist.

Scott Rolfs Scott Rolfs received his BFA in illustration at the School of Associate Art. He has worked for design studios creating kid-friendly character designs, graphic novels and children's publications and for freelance clients. He especially enjoys working on his own comic projects and attending comic conventions. He has been presenting drawing classes for young artists since 2007.

Patrick Ryan has written more than 30 books on sports as well as a book of short stories entitled "The Baseball Dietbook." He is currently working on a play called "Ernest and Fidel." Patrick was recently awarded a grant from the Prairie Lakes Regional Arts Council.

Melanie Schmidt is the youth development program coordinator for Mankato Community Education/ Recreation, a speech coach and presenter at Young Writers and Artists Conferences around the state.

Kari Sehloff has taught a variety of students in grades PreK-8 over the past 28 years. She also presents at educator workshops.

Kathleen Sheridan is an origami teacher and member of the board of directors of Origami USA. As director of the local Minnesota chapter and founder of her own business, Origami and You, she works full-time to share her passion of origami through workshops, demonstrations and classes both in the U.S. and abroad.

Bryce Stenzel is a historian, educator, author, playwright and costumed historical interpreter.

Art and Barb Straub are longtime elementary teachers with strong environmental education backgrounds. They currently are curators of the nature area in the Joseph R. Brown River Center in Henderson. The Straubs take nature programs to elementary classrooms in all parts of south central Minnesota. In addition, they make monthly presentations to nursing homes and civic groups in the LeSueur and Henderson vicinity. When students are unable to come to the JR Brown Center, the specimens from the center visit the students! Barb and Art also write a weekly nature column for the Henderson Independent newspaper.

Kate Stuart is a certified dance instructor who teaches at the Northfield Senior Center and the Northfield Arts Guild.

Kathryn Sullivan writes young adult fantasy and science fiction. She lives in Winona and is owned by a cockatoo who graciously allows her to write about other animals, as well as birdlike aliens.

Paul Warshauer is the producing director for Murders4Fun and a nationally recognized murder mystery writer, presenter and retired theater teacher. He travels to all 50 states, England, France and on cruise ships presenting more than 400 original murder mysteries.

Jacqueline West is the author of The New York Times bestselling middle-grade series The Books of Elsewhere (Dial/Penguin) and the YA novel, "Dreamers Often Lie" (Dial/Penguin, April 2016). Her debut novel, "The Shadows" (The Books of Elsewhere, Volume One), won the CYBILS award for fantasy/science fiction and was named a Publishers Weekly Flying Start. Jacqueline's books have been selected by the Junior Library Guild, garnered many awards and nominations, and are published in 11 other countries to date. A former English teacher, occasional actress and sometime musician, she lives with her family in Red Wing, Minnesota, surrounded by large piles of books and small piles of dog hair. Visit her at www.jacquelinewest.com.

Delanie Wiedrich is a former Miss North Dakota in the Miss America Organization. She is the creator of the North Dakota school tour of Beyond the B-Word: A New Stance on Bullying based on her own experiences. Delanie is a senior BFA Musical Theatre candidate at Minnesota State University, Mankato. She is currently an acting instructor and director at Riverfront Performing Arts.

Gregory Wimmer has worked for 30 years in illustration and design. His work is created on the computer as well as by hand using paint, pastels, ink and pencil. Greg has painted huge wall murals for both the private and public sector, as well as worked collaboratively with schools and students on mural projects. For fun he sketches people in live settings. Learn more at gregsgraphicart.com.

Victor Yopez is a multidisciplinary bilingual teaching artist, muralist, sculptor and musician.

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