

The 2019 #PBChat Mentorship

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Anika Aldamuy Denise writes stories that tickle her funny bone, tug her heartstrings, feed her curiosity, and celebrate her heritage. From famous librarians, to villainous vehicles, to vivacious performers—her characters make for an eclectic group. And that’s just what she enjoys: writing all kinds of books, for all kinds of readers. A native of Queens, New York, Anika now lives in Rhode Island with her husband, illustrator Christopher Denise, three kids, and one cuddly kitty named Charlie. Her books have been featured in The New York Times, Kids’ Indie Next List, A Mighty Girl, Book Riot, Children’s Book Council’s Around the World showcase, and Latinx in Kidlit.

ANIKA ALDAMUY DENISE will be accepting applications for: women and/or IPOC writers of fiction or non-fiction

1. If you had to wear the same t-shirt with one word on it for a year, what word would you choose?

GRATITUDE

2. If you had your own talk show, who would your first three guests be? Bonus points for sharing the name of your show and what it would be about.

1. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, 2. America Ferrera 3. Elizabeth Acevedo (FUEGO! Conversations with powerhouse Latinas changing the world!) ☺

3. If you could instantly become an expert in something (non-writing-related), what would it be and why?

Surfing! It seems like such a Zen sport. Plus, then I’d have an excuse to move to Hawaii.

4. What are your five favorite picture books not written and/or illustrated by you?

1. Swan by Laurel Snyder and Julie Morstad
2. Stick and Stone by Beth Ferry and Tom Lichtenheld
3. Little Pea by Amy Krause Rosenthal and Jen Corace
4. The Snowy Day by Ezra Jack Keats
5. Imagine by Juan Felipe Herrera and Lauren Castillo

5. What is the toughest feedback you’ve ever received?

I dread hearing that a picture book is “too quiet.” I believe there’s a place and a need for quiet stories. But they can be challenging to write and sell. When I hear that comment, it’s usually accompanied by a *sad trombone* in my head. At the same time, “quiet” can be code for lacking in structure or “just kind of meh,” which means I need to rethink and revise.

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6. What are some of the most important lessons you've learned so far?

Not to compare myself with others

That the journey is where the joy lies

To celebrate each success, big and small, and not immediately raise the bar

To express gratitude to everyone: illustrators, editors, teachers, librarians, critique partners, readers, mentors, and friends who support me and my books

To share what I've learned wholeheartedly with other writers

7. What writing-related accomplishment are you most proud of?

Writing and publishing *Planting Stories*

8. What are your dreams and goals as an author?

To finish and publish my mg. novel. To support myself with writing and speaking (full time). To serve readers from marginalized communities. To give voice to my bicultural experience. To help more women and IPOC writers get published.

9. What are your strengths as a mentor?

I'm a goofball and therefore give you permission to be a goofball, too. (That's maybe not technically a strength, but important for you to know, nonetheless.) I get super-excited to see writers grow and reach their goals. I give constructive and encouraging feedback.

10. Who are you not the best mentor for?

I'm not an illustrator, so while I can give feedback on pacing, and page-turns, and leaving room for the illustrations to tell the story, a mentee looking for a deep dive on craft of illustration and putting together a dummy may ask for their money back (metaphorically speaking).

11. What are the most important things you're seeking in a mentee?

Open-mindedness, willingness to be fearless in revision, a sense of humor. I love lyrical texts. I love books with heart, or humor, or both! I get super-excited when stories and characters empower kids, defy expectations, or surprise me in some way.

12. What is your feedback/critique style like?

I'm not overly prescriptive with my feedback. I ask questions, I pose possibilities, I make suggestions. But I'm always mindful of letting a writer's words and ideas breathe.

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13. During the mentorship, how will you help your mentee and their stories develop?

I always begin by asking my mentee what would be most helpful to them, what their challenges have been so far, and what they'd most like to work on. I think it's important to set intentions and articulate goals at the outset so they have something tangible to work towards. I'm happy to work with them to develop their strongest ideas or critique a specific ms. I love using mentor texts, so once I get an idea about what interests them and what we'll be working on, we'll explore mentor texts together. I can share marketing tips, too: what they can do prior to publication to help them build a presence; how to connect to various audiences of influencers and readers.

14. What type of relationship do you hope to establish with your mentee?

Open. Fun. Productive.

15. What is your style of communication like?

Informal. (See above) ☺

16. While reading prospective mentee's manuscripts, what do you hope to experience?

I want to feel: "The world needs this voice, this story!"

17. What will you look for in the applications you receive?

I'd like to work with a woman or IPOC writer, if possible. Other than that, it will probably be a gut thing.

18. What about the idea of mentoring excites you most?

Seeing a writer succeed and knowing I helped in some small way.

19. Is there anything, author-related, you wish people would ask you about? If so, what, and how would you respond?

The truth and challenges of the finances of this business still seems like a taboo subject. So I think we could all benefit from bringing the compensation conversation a little more out in the open. Many picture book writers have day jobs, many have partners or spouses who make a living that can support a household, and many invest a great deal of time in doing school visits to earn enough to get by. And, as in most industries, income parity for men and women is an issue. It's helpful to know what to expect.

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20. What advice or inspiring and/or motivational words would you like to offer up to anyone applying to be your mentee or simply reading this questionnaire?

Hi, mentee out there whose name I don't know yet. I can't wait to meet you!

First, I promise we're going to have fun. I believe the best picture books are created from a place of **joy** and **curiosity**. What feeds *your* joy? What sparks *your* curiosity? What books did you love, or need, or crave when you were a child? What made you giggle? What made you worry? What made you wonder? Let's meet that child on the road and bring them along on this journey.

I also promise that this will be a **safe space** where you will feel supported—and challenged!

Every one of the mentors in the #PBchat mentorship has stood where you stand now, on the precipice, with big ideas, lots of questions, and dreams of publication. Often what separates the published from the unpublished is simply showing up, doing the work, and believing.

You've shown up. Now let's do the work. I believe in you!