

The 2019 #PBChat Mentorship

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Annemarie Riley Guertin is a newly minted, international author. Her debut picture book *How the Finch Got His Colors* flew onto shelves in 2018. Her second book, *Why Evergreens Keep Their Leaves* releases on September 1, 2019 (Familius, 2019). Annemarie graduated from Wheelock College and Fitchburg State University, earning both a bachelor's and a master's degree in education (summa cum laude). Annemarie works as a district literacy coach and reading teacher in Salem, MA. She lives in Haverhill, MA, with her husband Michael and their two children.

Annemarie Riley Guertin will be accepting applications for: picture book authors.

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

Dreamer.

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.**

- a. Ellen DeGeneres
- b. Michael Buble
- c. Walt Disney (if he were still alive)

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

Forensic Science. I am obsessed with real crime type shows and have watched every single episode of *Forensic Files*. My grandfather was a homicide detective, so it runs in my blood.

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

- a. *Spoon*-Amy Krouse Rosenthal
- b. *Rudy's Pond*-Eve Bunting
- c. *The Little Rabbit Who Wanted Red Wings*-Carolyn Sherwin Bailey
- d. *The Stranger*- Chris Van Allsburg
- e. *Tikki Tikki Tembo* -Arlene Mosel

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

One of the reviews that *Finch* received shattered me. There was a line in there that said my work was "off-putting" because the Finch wanted to change the color of his "skin/feathers." I cried

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when I read that. That is NOT the message I was trying to put out to the world. It was disheartening to read and so very wrong in its interpretation. It just goes to show you that not everyone will like your work.

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

I think that the most important lesson I've learned is that you need to share your writing with other people if you are serious about getting published. There isn't a single story out there that was written perfectly the first time (even though you will think yours is) or that didn't go through several rounds of revision. Another critical piece of advice: Do not have family critique your work because you'll never grow as a writer. No one wants to hurt your feelings so they will hold back their thoughts to spare your feelings.

Another important lesson I need to share is that publishing moves at a snail's pace- literally. I know in the picture book world that it takes at least two years after you've signed your contract to see your baby out in the world. You will need patience- lots and lots of patience.

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

I believe my greatest accomplishment to be getting my first book published all on my own. I was in the driver's seat from start to finish. I learned so much about publishing having negotiated my first contract on my own. I know all of the ins and outs of publishing because I didn't have an agent at the time to help guide me. I had to learn for myself. It was life-changing.

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

I have three big dreams/goals for my writing future...One of my dreams is to write level reading texts for classroom libraries. I am a teacher, and I use them every day for guided reading instruction. I'd love to see my name on the cover of some of them!

My second big dream is to have a movie based off one of my books.

My third dream would be to have a number one best seller. My hope is that someday my book sales will afford me the opportunity to focus on my writing full time.

9. What are your strengths as a mentor?

Well, I am a Literacy Coach by day, and part of my job is to provide direct feedback to teachers on ways they can strengthen their craft. This will translate well to working with an aspiring writer. I am organized, thorough, and thoughtful in my feedback. I navigated my first book contract on my own, so I know a lot about publishing and what happens after the agreement is signed. I have built myself from the ground up and have a lot of insight on what it takes to make it in the publishing world.

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10. Who are you not the best mentor for?

Rhymers. I have not figured out the art of rhyming just yet. It's not my strong suit.

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

I am looking for a serious writer. Someone who has been dreaming this dream for as long as they can remember. I am a driven person, and I like "doers." I like people who are open to feedback and won't be hurt if I find places where they need to lift their level of writing. I always appreciate critical feedback because it helps me grow in my craft. I aspire to be that type of mentor for someone else.

12. What is your feedback/critique style like?

I prefer working with MS word but can work with Google Docs if it's an issue. I read manuscripts and use the comment option on the side. I am direct in my feedback; I don't sugarcoat things. I will offer suggestions or point out areas that need work so we can put the best piece of writing in front of an editor.

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

I am open to helping my mentee with any of the above areas. I can provide industry insight. I can critique a story. I can help craft or strengthen a query letter or offer suggestions on how to build their social media presence. I have experience with all of these areas. It really depends on where my mentee needs my help.

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

I am hopeful that we will have a good working relationship that will blossom into a friendship.

15. What is your style of communication like?

I prefer email or skype (nights/weekends). I work full time and have two children. We are in the throws of sports right now, so my schedule is pretty full. I always check my email, so that is the best method of contact.

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

This really depends on the genre they're writing in. If it's emotional, I want to cry. If it's magical, I want to feel as though I am in it. I want to get lost in the story.

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

For starters, I will be looking for the picture book authors. That is where I am most comfortable in providing my mentoring services. I will be looking for the writers who are chasing their dream. Then I am going to scoop them up and hopefully get them across the finish line.

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

I've mentored in many areas of my profession. I think the excitement of working with someone to help make their dream a reality is extraordinary. I have mentored a few writer's and have been there when they announce their book deals. It's really a wonderful thing to be a part of!

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

How did you find your agent? I would tell them how and where I caught her eye. It's such a fun backstory, and I'll share it with my mentee.

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?

Don't let the fear of rejection stop you from chasing your dreams. You will receive rejections, we all do. And when they roll in and slam you to the ground, pick yourself up and keep moving forward!