

## The 2019 #PBChat Mentorship

Visit [justincolonbooks.com](http://justincolonbooks.com) for more info.



Ariel Bernstein has the voice of illustrated characters. In other words, she's the author of children's books! You can find out more about Ariel and her books, such as *I HAVE A BALLOON* and the *WARREN & DRAGON* series, online at <https://www.arielbernsteinbooks.com>.

**Ariel Bernstein will be accepting applications for writers of fiction, non-rhyming picture books.**

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

CHANGE. As in, I'd love to change my shirt because I keep getting asked why I am wearing the same one every day.

**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.**

It would be called THE MERMAID HOUR. First I'd invite fellow mer-person and kidlit author Jason Gallaher because I only know him online and he seems like he'd be an awesome person to hang out with in real life. Next I'd invite Andrea Loney, another kidlit author, because I have met her in person and if I was worried about how to fill air time, I know for a fact Andrea has a never ending supply of stories to tell. When she was on I'd probably just go sit in the audience to listen. Finally, I would invite J.K. Rowling so I could ask her why George and Fred never noticed their brother Ron was living in his dorms with Peter Pettigrew when they looked at the Marauder's Map. Because honestly.

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

Cooking. I'm a decent baker, but have yet to master the art of cooking a meal that everyone in my family will enjoy.

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

To be honest, this list could change tomorrow! It's really hard to think of a top 5 that stays constant because there are just too many that I love at any given moment. But here are 5 of my favorites and why:

KING BABY by Kate Beaton. As a parent I love how spot on the concept is of a new baby being in charge once they arrive on the scene. As a reader, I crack up at Beaton's text and the King's hilarious expressions.

## **The 2019 #PBChat Mentorship**

Visit [justincolonbooks.com](http://justincolonbooks.com) for more info.

GRANDMA'S PURSE by Vanessa Brantley-Newton. This book is pure, relatable FUN! Just the cover alone makes me smile. The story transports me back to being a kid and having that special relationship with a grandparent.

HERE COMES VALENTINE CAT, written by Deborah Underwood and illustrated by Claudia Rueda. This book is the perfect mix of text and illustrations working together to show voice, humor, personality, and a subtle message with heart.

LITTLE ELLIOT BIG CITY by Mike Curato. Sure, this story has two adorable main characters, a friendship theme, and of course, cupcakes! But what strikes me every time is how gorgeous the art is. I could look at those pages everyday and never get tired of it.

MAE AMONG THE STARS, written by Roda Ahmed and illustrated by Stasia Burrington. I don't write non-fiction picture books, and I don't always think of them right away when I consider my favorite picture books. But stories like MAE remind me how layered and engaging biographical stories are. MAE especially is one that both me and my kids wanted to read multiple times.

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

I got a professional critique on a chapter book once and while the criticisms were mostly helpful, there wasn't one note of positive feedback. I wasn't sure if the person reading it didn't think there was anything positive, or felt that their responsibility was only to note what could be improved. Either way, it was not an easy critique to read through!

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

It's okay to take breaks, it's okay to shelve a manuscript that's not working, it's okay to get frustrated and impatient, and it's okay to not know how to move forward. But if you want to be a traditionally published author, don't let any of those things stop you in your tracks. Find your support system, whether it's with a critique group or an agent or friends and family who understand how important writing is to you.

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

I feel very proud anytime I get to meet with young readers – whether it's at a school visit, a book festival, or bookstore and library events. It always feels a bit surreal that I get to talk to kids about my books, answer their questions and (hopefully) hear them laughing.

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

My goal is to keep publishing quality books with wonderful editors and illustrators. My dream would be to travel more for author events.

### **9. What are your strengths as a mentor?**

## **The 2019 #PBChat Mentorship**

Visit [justincolonbooks.com](http://justincolonbooks.com) for more info.

I'm very honest and thorough when giving feedback on a manuscript. I always make sure to let the writer know what I think is working well, and if I think something can be improved I let them know my reasons why.

### **10. Who are you not the best mentor for?**

I'm probably not the best mentor for concept books. I appreciate those books, but as I don't write them myself or really study them, I wouldn't have the most detailed feedback.

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

I'm looking forward to working with a mentee who understands that a successful manuscript isn't necessarily one that gets published, but is one that improves their skills as a writer. I love books that have humor, a distinct voice, and subtle messages.

### **12. What is your feedback/critique style like?**

I usually go through specific details first – title, characters, page turns, ending, etc. I point out any words I think could be cut or left to an illustrator. And then I look at the story overall to see what can be improved with the problem/conflict, story arc, the resolution, the themes, and if the manuscript has readability.

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

I don't have a specific plan but I imagine it will involve manuscript critiques and revision feedback, discussing their strategy with querying, and answering any questions they have about publishing.

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

I hope that when my mentee wins the Geisel, or the Newbury, or any and all awards, I will be the first person they thank well ahead of family members or editors. I also expect they'd dedicate their books to me. Okay, I shouldn't expect they'd dedicate ALL their books to me, so but maybe just the first three. If for some reason my mentee isn't cool with that, I'd hope they'll at least follow me back on Twitter.

### **15. What is your style of communication like?**

Lots of email but I'd be happy to have some phone discussions when I want to sound important to my family by saying I have to schedule a 'work call.'

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

I hope that by the time I get to the end, I'm excited to go back and read the story again.

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

## **The 2019 #PBChat Mentorship**

Visit [justincolonbooks.com](http://justincolonbooks.com) for more info.

I think it's important to know that the writer has at least one critique partner they share their work with, because that tells me they are open to getting feedback. Other than that, it won't matter to me what experience they have or organizations they are involved with.

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

When I started writing kidlit, I got a ton of great advice from published authors, and over time I was fortunate enough to find a wonderful critique group and critique partners. I also realize how I've benefitted from things like attending SCBWI conference and being able to afford professional critiques. Not everyone has the resources to do the same, and I'd like to offer a free mentorship as a way of giving back.

### **19. Is there anything, author-related, you wish people would ask you about?**

If so, what, and how would you respond? Q: What's your favorite part of creating a picture book?

A: Seeing the illustrations! It's just the coolest thing to write these words and then see how an illustrator interprets them.

### **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?**

I'm looking forward to reading your story, and whether or not I end up as your mentor, I appreciate you taking the time to apply. You believe in yourself and I hope you never stop.