

The 2019 #PBChat Mentorship

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Barb Rosenstock likes true stories about real people. She combines deep research and playful language into picture books that bring history to life. Barb loves visiting schools, Broadway musicals and her garden. She was born, raised and still lives near Chicago with her family and a white standard poodle named Nikki. Her book, *The Noisy Paint Box*, illustrated by Mary Grandpré was awarded a Caldecott Honor in 2015. Other award-winning titles include: *Through the Window*, *Otis & Will Discover the Deep*, *The Secret Kingdom*, *Dorothea's Eyes*, *The Camping Trip that Changed America* and many more.

Barb Rosenstock will be accepting applications for: picture book nonfiction or historical fiction only for grades K through 5.

Special Note: This particular mentorship (with Barb Rosenstock) will begin on August 12 and end on November 8th.

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

Curious.

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.

Abigail Adams, Martin Luther King, David Bowie. Show Title: Personalities

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

Saving the planet and making people do it! Because, no planet? Nothing else counts.

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

Officer Buckle and Gloria (Rathmann), The Irridescence of Birds (MacLachlan/Hooper) Play Mozart Play (Sís), Life (Rylant/Wenzel). Me...Jane (McDonnell) ---ALSO IMPOSSIBLE TASK, that's just a super small starter set.

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

Direct quote: "This is trite and doesn't deserve to be a book." (and now it is a book, but yeah...well, that was a bad day.)

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

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You have to work harder than you think and perfection is your goal AND your enemy.

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

Having the manuscript for my first book be chosen out of a slush pile, no agent, no publishing contacts.

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

Just to keep writing on subjects that interest me and I'd really like to finish a novel in verse and maybe learn more about social media.

9. What are your strengths as a mentor?

Honesty, thoroughness.

10. Who are you not the best mentor for?

Anyone who will tend to be hurt by criticism. Anyone who is too personally connected to their work. Anyone who doesn't realize this is a business.

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

Openness to feedback, a bit of a tougher skin, I only will work through email (so no handwritten/mailed stuff.) Please know how to use basic editing/comments on a WORD document (I'm not that technical, so just the basics is fine...you can probably teach me a bunch!) The shorter the story, the happier I am to critique it and nothing over 5 pages at a time. I will not critique work that is very similar to something I myself am working on, so I'm going to request a topic/theme/description heading for any piece you send. For example: if you send me a piece on the Statue of Liberty and I'm working on a book about her (or might) I will not read/critique it (not fair to either of us.) I think that's it, I think I'm making myself sound less flexible than I actually am. I'm practical, if it works for both of us, it works.

12. What is your feedback/critique style like?

Style? Does brutally honest count? I do like to start with strengths, but you may often see more negative comments than positive ones. I am hard on my own work and will be hard on yours. I will also work as hard as YOU are willing to work. Thorough research, preparation and presentation will result in a much more thorough mentorship. I'm honest (it was the best feedback I ever got and the only kind that works) which some people think they want, but often in reality find off-putting. However, I need authors that are independent enough to realize that this is ONE person's opinion and this is nothing if not a subjective business. I learn every day and expect that you will too. Some things are non-negotiable, most are totally negotiable.

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

I will identify what I see as strengths, weaknesses and marketability in terms of what I know. Industry insight and info as far as I can. Examples of mentor texts that may help you and techniques that I use. I can work on dummies in terms of page breaks but not in terms of art (I am not an illustrator.) I will help polish query letters, but never did many of them myself (but then again, the ones I did, worked, so...)

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I'm not that even competent at social media but will pass along anything I've learned or heard. Basically, I'm a great believer in sharing information, so if you ask, I'll tell you what I know or possibly find someone else who can guide you if I can't.

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

A positive, professional one. We may turn into friends someday, but I tend to start out way more businesslike. And as much as possible, try to be flexible. I usually can respond pretty quickly, but am traveling or doing school visits a good part of the time, so can't always answer in 24 hours.

15. What is your style of communication like?

If you can't tell from these answers, I don't have a better word for it.

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

A sense that there is a unique point of view or that this manuscript or its author has could be on its way. In general, make me FEEL something. If I don't feel anything, there's nothing to critique.

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

A willingness to work hard, be open, I don't care if you've accomplished nothing previously in terms of writing or won a National Book Award, it's the story I care about. I do prefer someone to have done some basic homework on the business if possible; but if you haven't and you sound like you're willing to learn, then I'll start from scratch, as I most of the time feel like I'm starting from scratch and learning every day. I need to know why YOU want a mentor and what YOU expect to get out of it and why YOU want to write for kids. And I need you to understand that I certainly do not have all the answers!

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

It's time to give back, that's really it. I hope I have something to contribute that will help you.

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

I'm not even sure I understand this question, and maybe that tells you something right there about my inability to sometimes use the language. I guess enough people don't ask about the psychology and emotional parts of the business. I would respond that things like keeping yourself healthy and motivated and inspired and just OK with the world may be more important than getting a book published.

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?

You can do this. Take the chance. Your story is important.