

The 2019 #PBChat Mentorship

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Brian Lies is the author/illustrator of the 2019 Caldecott Honor winner *THE ROUGH PATCH*, and of *GOT TO GET TO BEAR'S!* He also created the New York Times bestselling bat series, including *BATS AT THE BEACH*, *BATS AT THE LIBRARY*, *BATS AT THE BALLGAME*, and *BATS IN THE BAND*. He's the author and/or illustrator of more than two dozen other books, including *MALCOLM AT MIDNIGHT* (by W.H. Beck, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt) and *MORE* (by I.C. Springman, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt). He has won many awards for his work, including the 2011 Bill Martin Jr. Picture Book Award (Kansas State picture book award). Born in Princeton, New Jersey, Brian lives in eastern Massachusetts with his wife and daughter. He has loved libraries and books

since he was little, and enjoys working with students in schools around the country. When he travels, he rarely misses an opportunity to explore the local library.

Brian Lies will be accepting applications for: fiction picture books. I'm open to text only OR author/illustrator, and don't have a preference.

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

RESIST

2. If you had your own talk show, who would your first three guests be?

My TV talk show would be "Let's See What Happens!", and I'd try to get interesting—or risky—guests on at the same time, to spend an hour creating something together at a table full of craft materials, musical instruments and food items. So—first three guests? Nigella Lawson, Joan Jett and Mike Pence.

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

I'd want to be an expert in pickling and natural ferments. Pickled and fermented foods are really good for us, and I like most pickles and ferments I've tried.

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

- Fun Projects for You and the Kids (by David Stiles)
- TUESDAY by David Wiesner
- MISS SUZY by Miriam Young, illus. by Arnold Lobel
- THE DANCING TIGER by Doyle Malachy, illus. by Steve Johnson and Lou Fancher
- THE MYSTERIES OF HARRIS BURDICK by Chris Van Allsburg

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

"We like your ideas, but your drawing's not ready" (140 different newspapers, when I was trying to find work as an editorial cartoonist. This was pre-art-school.) My solution? Art school. Two-and-a-half years later, I started getting published.

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

Focus on craft. And don't wait for inspiration. Inspiration is what comes when you show up to work.

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

The 2019 Caldecott Honor for *The Rough Patch*.

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

My goal is to be able to find homes for the many picture book manuscripts I have rattling around in my head or sketchbooks...especially the odder or more ambitious ones! My dream? To be able to create stories and pictures that people can't forget—the way certain stories I read seem to become a part of my being.

9. What are your strengths as a mentor?

I think I've got a good ear for language, and I'm definitely a stickler for continuity, pacing and things that tear the "fabric of believability" of the words and pictures. I listen, and try to understand what the mentee is hoping to achieve, in order to help her/him/them create the strongest work possible.

10. Who are you not the best mentor for?

I'm not the best mentor for someone who is looking primarily for affirmation. If the mentee isn't willing to accept criticism, including what may be very difficult things to hear, and isn't open to revision, there doesn't seem to be much point in pursuing the mentorship. The purpose is to help, and though I definitely point out the *good* stuff, the strengths in a project, I think most of us know where we've gotten things *right*.

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

I'm hoping to work with someone who is really interested in working on her/his craft. I'm open to people who are at different stages in their publishing lives—just starting out, getting ready to submit, or even published authors.

12. What is your feedback/critique style like?

I try to be a "chameleon" teacher, looking at a person's strengths, hopes, and areas that could use improvement, and working from where that student is at the moment. Given there are so many different ways of storytelling, I have no interest in trying to get people to draw, paint or tell stories like me, and no set idea of what "good storytelling" looks like. I prefer back-and-forth discussion to simply firing out a critique.

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

I'm not the best social media person, and it's been ages since I've sent a query letter. So someone hoping for help there is going to be disappointed. But critiquing manuscripts and dummies, working on revisions, identifying strengths and weaknesses in words and pictures are all things I'm comfortable with. I'm assuming that we'll go back and forth with discussions about work, looking at revisions, etc. until we're content with the progress we've made.

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

I think if a mentorship goes really well, both mentor and mentee feel like colleagues at the end of it—not like student and teacher.

15. What is your style of communication like?

I'm comfortable both with email and phone—though sometimes you can cover much more ground in a phone call, and it feels more collaborative because you can respond to tiny things you hear in the other person's voice—or a moment of hesitation.

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

The hope is that I'll see a piece or pieces that feel like they've got something strong going on inside them—whether it's a clever/funny/heartfelt story and/or voice, unique idea, etc.—and that I'll feel as though I can help the mentee move the piece(s) forward.

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

I think I'm going to be looking for a story or stories that appeal to me, as well as a sense that the mentee is willing to accept suggestions. I'm not looking for arguments!

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

I've found that I've learned lots while mentoring—in order to explain something that you might do instinctively, you have to bring it forward into conscious thought and apply words to it. That process of “defining what you mean” always makes me

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

Question: “Do you totally love everything you've ever published?” My answer: No! I've done a lot of mediocre work over the years, but everything I've done was the best I could manage at that time. It's really only during the last dozen years or that I've started to feel my work has mirrored my aspirations for it!

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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?

I guess my best advice would be: keep working, keep learning, keep trying! And it's important to be able to set things you love dearly aside, if you learn that those things may not be in the best interest of your story or your craft. Gripping onto one particular story idea when you've had a lot of feedback that it's perhaps not something you should focus on (at least for now) can keep you from moving forward in your art and career.