

The 2019 #PBChat Mentorship

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Hannah Holt is a children's author with an engineering degree. Her books, *The Diamond & The Boy* (2018, Balzer+Bray) and *A Father's Love* (2019, Philomel) weave together her love of language and science. She lives in Oregon with her husband, four children, and a very patient cat named Zephyr. She and her family enjoy reading, hiking, and eating chocolate chip cookies.

Hannah will be accepting applications for: fiction, nonfiction, prose, verse, humorous, or serious stories.

Special Note: Hannah's mentorship will run from September-November 2019.

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

Break the rules!

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.

My show would be called, "World's Cutest Nappers" and my first three guests would be a baby sloth, twin kittens, and a red panda. The show would just be napping.

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

Can I be an instant athlete? Like boom—suddenly my body knows how to run a four minute mile? If so, I choose that.

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

So hard! These are just a few that came to mind...

Classic: Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day

Nonfiction: Joan Procter, Dragon Doctor

In Verse: Once Upon A Twice

In Verse for the very young: The Big Red Barn

Within the last year: The Remember Balloons

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

When my first agent and I parted ways, she called me "demanding" and "unprofessional." I took a hard look at myself. Was I demanding? Was I unprofessional? I realized my fear of ending that business relationship had turned me into someone who was a little demanding and needlessly needy. I resolved never to let fear turn me into someone I didn't want to be.

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6. What are some of the most important lessons [in creating and/or publishing, or even life in general] you've learned so far?

Rejection is an essential part of life (and publishing). If you aren't being rejected, you're probably not moving forward. Get out there and embrace the rejection. (P.S. kudos to everyone applying for this mentorship! You are putting yourself out there. You are doing it!)

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

I'm proud of the data research I've done in children's publishing. I want children's writers to have access to information, so they can make good long-term decisions for their careers.

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

Finish that middle grade novel I'm kicking around.

9. What are your strengths as a mentor?

The ability to identify and draw out strengths and a desire to cheer you onward!

(I'm also probably one of the few mentors who will consider nonfiction and/or rhyme)

10. Who are you not the best mentor for?

I'm probably not the best mentor for:

- *books with a heavy-handed moral lesson*
- *books where animals and humans talk to each other (Talking animals is fine! They just can't also talk to humans)*
- *stories with the word "noticed" in them*
- *nonfiction by white authors about people of color*
- *someone just "winging" rhyme*

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

Flexibility, dedication, and a willingness to work.

12. What is your feedback/critique style like?

Wordy.

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

I'm flexible. It depends what the mentor needs. I'm guessing the mentorship will involve some combination of:

- *Polishing a lead story for agent submission*
- *Polishing a query letter for that story and/or pitching assistance*
- *Reviewing additional manuscripts for high level feedback*

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- *Discussing strengths/weaknesses and what to send when an agent requests more work*
- *Advice on researching agents*
- *Discussing long-term publishing goals*

But maybe not all of the above. :)

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

I hope to stay in touch for the long haul, so I can cheer for their successes all along the way!

15. What is your style of communication like?

The positive stretch: I'll always tell you something I like and something to consider changing.

As for format, we'll probably do most of our communicating via email.

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

I hope to feel something authentic. One of the things I love most about children is their unfiltered view of the world. I'd love something that has that kind of freshness with the skill and craft of someone devoted to writing as a career.

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

I'm an omnivorous writer and reader. I'll consider fiction, nonfiction, prose, verse, humorous, or serious stories.

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

The kidlit community has been wonderful to me. I'm looking to giving back and helping someone take the next step in their career!

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

Them: How can we send you large amounts of chocolate?

Me: No, no! I really appreciate you asking but I'm trying to eat more healthily.

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 hope this comes off as inspirational. Over the years I've applied for many scholarships, grants, pitch parties, and mentorships. Most of the time, I don't get them. Similarly, most of the editors I apply to don't take on my projects. I receive way more rejections than acceptances...but I've also won scholarships, grants, and pitch parties. I've been lucky to find some really great mentors. I've had two books published and have more in the works.

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If this opportunity works out for you, THAT IS FANTASTIC. I hope it does! However, if not, I hope you apply for the next opportunity and the next. Resilience and a commitment to growing your craft will take you farther than any one shot at success.