

The 2019 #PBChat Mentorship

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Jill Esbaum's recent picture books include *How to Grow a Dinosaur*, *Frankenbunny*, *If a T. Rex Crashes Your Birthday Party*, *Elwood Bigfoot*, and *Teeny Tiny Toady* (starred review, *Kirkus*). Several of her books have been nominated for state awards, and her *I Am Cow*, *Hear Me Moo!* won SCBWI's Crystal Kite award. Coming in 2020 are *Frog Boots*, *Where'd My Jo Go?*, and *We Love Babies!*

She has authored 24 series books for National Geographic Kids, as well as a picture book, *Animal Groups*. More picture books and nonfiction are in the pipeline.

Jill created a group blog of fellow picture book writers and illustrators called *Picture Book Builders* (www.picturebookbuilders.com), visits schools around the country, and co-hosts the Whispering Woods Picture Book Writing Workshop each summer. Find more information on her website, www.jillesbaum.com

Jill Esbaum will be accepting applications from: writers of fiction or nonfiction, especially those whose manuscripts display humor and heart. Rhyme is fine, but if you aren't sure you do it well, please submit prose. She is especially drawn to strong voices, quirky characters, and out-of-the-box topics.

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

BREAKTHERULES

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 TELL ME ABOUT IT and would be me interviewing writers of wildly varying styles/genres that I greatly admire. My first three guests? Jack Gantos, Kristan Higgins, and David McCullough.

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

Wildlife photography, because of the awesome/breathtaking/wondrous photos in my National Geographic books.

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

Today they would be...*I Ain't Gonna Paint No More* (Karen Beaumont); *John, Paul, George, and Ben* (Lane Smith); *We Don't Eat Our Classmates* (Ryan Higgins); *Creepy Pair of Underwear* (Aaron Reynolds); and, in the Wish-I'd-Thought-of-That category, *The Book With No Pictures* (BJ Novak).

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

I can't think of any that really set me back or had me contemplating another career choice. I've been fortunate to have excellent, encouraging mentors and critique partners. So that's what I strive to be for others.

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

-You can't please everybody.

-Rejections shouldn't be taken personally. Most of us get way more rejections than acceptances...no matter how long we've been in the business. (Rain off a duck's back, baby!)

-And writing IS a business.

-Revision is where the magic happens.

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

That *I Am Cow, Hear Me Moo* won a SCBWI Crystal Kite, because those votes came from other writers.

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

There are too many to list. Let's just say I want to do it ALL.

9. What are your strengths as a mentor?

Pinpointing trouble spots. Big-picture revision suggestions & line editing. Cutting word counts. Finding ways to pump up characterization and add heart/humor.

10. Who are you not the best mentor for?

I wouldn't be a good mentor for somebody who thinks their writing has no room for improvement, for somebody who writes encyclopedic nonfiction, or for somebody who insists they "have to" write every story in rhyme.

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

Open-mindedness. Resiliency. Determination. Knowledge of basic grammar.

12. What is your feedback/critique style like?

I use Track Changes to mark up a manuscript, but I also provide a letter to better explain any of my suggestions (the reasons for them or how you might implement them, for example).

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

Honestly, this varies from person to person. In many years of critiquing, I've found that (brace for bluntness) most writers are overly concerned with finding an agent/publisher when what they should be doing is learning the craft and writing the best manuscript they're capable of. That really is where it all starts—with a quick, concise beginning; irresistible characters; humor & heart; surprises along the way;

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etc. I'll let you know what you do well, what you need to work on, and help you move forward to the best of my ability. I'm an open book, pretty much, willing to share anything I've learned in the past 22 years. Just ask!

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

I'd only pick somebody I'd be willing to friend on FB, so I hope our relationship will be a lasting one. I don't plan to cut off all communications the day the mentorship ends.

15. What is your style of communication like?

I'm informal, more apt to treat you like a buddy than a business colleague. That's probably because I'M ON YOUR SIDE! I'd love to see you get published. There's room for everybody—at least everybody who's willing to work hard and never stop learning.

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

Goosebumps. I've been critiquing other people's work for a long time now, so excellence pops out at me quickly.

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

I do want to know how long you've been writing and submitting, about classes you've taken, etc. But those won't factor into my final decision. I'll give the most weight to the manuscript itself—to originality, good writing, and marketability/*potential*.

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

Giving somebody a little boost and then seeing them SUCCEED. Several manuscripts I've critiqued have been published, and I always feel like a proud auntie.

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

I don't know what that would be. Anybody can ask me anything.

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?

Anybody who tells you they've mastered writing picture books is full of ... uh, beans. There's always, *always* more to learn. Knowing that keeps me motivated. I'd hope for that same attitude in a mentee.