

The 2019 #PBChat Mentorship

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Lori Degman writes in rhyme, most of the time – but not always! She is the author of *1 Zany Zoo* – the winner of the Cheerios new Author Contest and featured title on the Illinois Reads Annual Reading List; *Cock-a-Doodle Oops!* – International Literacy Association Honor Book; *Norbert's Big Dream* and *Just Read*. Her picture book, *Like a Girl* comes out this fall and *Travel Guide For Monsters* comes out in spring 2020. Lori was a teacher of the deaf and now divides her time between writing children's books, doing kidlit-related stuff (like being a #PBChat Mentor), and babysitting her grandson! She lives in a suburb of Chicago with her husband and two dogs. Visit her at Loridegman.com.

Lori Degman will be accepting applications for: Rhyming picture book authors.

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

LAUGH

- 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.**

The show would be called OFF THE TOP OF MY HEAD and my first guests would be other sufferers of ADD and we'd all talk off the top of our heads. Squirrel!

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

I'd be an expert in solving the climate change problem because the clock is ticking.

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

Man, this is hard! Right now I'd say (in no particular order and it might change tomorrow) *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble*; *Miss Nelson is Missing*; *Thomas' Snowsuit*; *This is Not My Hat*; and *The Little House*.

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

Years ago, I'd submitted a manuscript for a critique at a conference and I'd felt really sure the editor would love it. I got to the conference early because I was so eager to read her comments and she pretty much tore it to shreds! She wrote one positive thing and then went on to tell me everything that was wrong with it. I almost left the conference because it made me question my writing ability and my own judgment about my writing. The funny thing is, ten days later, the same exact manuscript – word for word – won the Cheerios New Author Contest! Simon & Schuster published it and a small paperback version was put inside two million boxes of Cheerios! That editor's feedback taught me that this is a very subjective business; so do not let one person's opinion shake your faith in yourself!

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

Patience, practice and perseverance pay off! In both writing and in other parts of my life, this combo has led to success.

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

I'm proud of the help I've given to other writers, both with my critique partners and through my critique service! It feels great when a story I had a part in shaping gets published!

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

My first book was published when I was 51 and I had a 32-year career as a teacher of the deaf, so being an author is really a second/side career. I just hope I can continue to publish books so that kids can read them and I can keep doing school visits!

9. What are your strengths as a mentor?

I have a really good ear for meter, so I can help point out the areas where it is and isn't working. I'm also good at explaining how to listen for it and how to fix it. I'm honest, so if I say something positive, you can believe it. Also, when I do point out something that isn't working, I always explain why and try to help come up with a remedy.

10. Who are you not the best mentor for?

Writers of prose or nonfiction.

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

My ideal mentee would be someone who writes funny, rhyming picture book manuscripts. I'd like to work with someone who has been writing in rhyme for a while, so we don't have to spend too much time on the mechanics and can get through more manuscripts. I'd like to work with someone who can take constructive criticism without being defensive, but who will also not make every change I suggest if they don't truly agree with it.

12. What is your feedback/critique style like?

I point out the things I think are working and the things that aren't. I help guide the author through revisions and continue until the story is submission ready. And, as I mentioned in #9, I give thoughtful, honest feedback – there's nothing worse than saying something is working just to avoid making the author feel bad.

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

I will help my mentee develop their rhyming manuscripts by focusing on three aspects – story, rhyme and meter. For the overall story, I'll look at their opening, story arc, and ending. I'll do a line-by-line review of both rhyme and meter. I'm happy to help with pretty much any aspect of the writing/submitting process the mentee wants.

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

I hope we can have an open and honest dialogue. I want my mentee to feel comfortable asking me anything about writing and publishing, and about the feedback I give her/him. I hope we'll continue our relationship after the #PBChat mentorship is over. I was a mentor with Writing With The Stars in 2018 and I'm still in touch with my mentee.

15. What is your style of communication like?

I like to email because it's nice to have a written record of what we've talked about and I typically reply to emails within a day or two. I'm also happy to talk on the phone or do a Skype visit to help with communication. I'm a pretty casual person so it's usually anything goes.

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

I want to feel the thrill of discovering a natural rhymers and storyteller. I hope to read a manuscript that I know could someday be acquired by an editor.

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

I'm looking for someone who has invested in learning the craft of writing. Someone who has attended classes, conferences, workshops . . . to improve his/her writing. I'm looking for someone who is as passionate about writing in rhyme as I am! I'm also looking for someone with a good sense of humor – and if they're a pun nerd like me, that would be a plus!

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

I love helping writers make their stories the best they can be. It's exciting when you give a writer feedback and they run with it and create something better than either of you ever imagined!

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

I think it would be, "What happens after you've had your first book published?" I would tell them that nothing really changes and everything changes. There's too much about this to go into here but I hope I can discuss it further with my mentee!

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?

Give yourself permission to write a crappy first draft. If you try to make it perfect, by editing as you go along, you may never even finish the first draft. So get your story down on paper – or computer – and then go back and edit the heck out of it!