

The 2019 #PBChat Mentorship

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Patricia Valdez is a scientist and author of the award-winning picture book biography, *Joan Procter, Dragon Doctor*. She earned her Ph.D. in Molecular and Cell Biology from the University of California, Berkeley and currently works at the National Institutes of Health. Originally from Texas, she now lives in the Washington, D.C. area. Find more at patriciavaldezbooks.com and on Twitter @Patricia_Writer

Patricia Valdez will be accepting applications for any combination of the following: fiction, non-fiction, STEM, history, and biography. No rhyming manuscripts, please. Marginalized creators are encouraged to apply.

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

Pithy

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.**

I'm too much of an introvert to host a talk show, but if I had to choose three guests, they would be: Michelle Obama, Jesmyn Ward, and Rita Moreno

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

I would become an expert in pre-teen and teen behavior so I could better handle the emotional rollercoaster of raising them!

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

Balloons Over Broadway by Melissa Sweet

The Remember Balloons by Jessie Oliveros

Cloth Lullaby: The Woven Life of Louise Bourgeois by Amy Novesky

The Gashlycrumb Tinies by Edward Gorey

The Story of Ferdinand by Munro Leaf

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

That something I wrote read more like an essay than a picture book manuscript. That one went back in the drawer.

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

Patience is important on so many levels. First, you should never rush a manuscript. It needs time to marinate. Second, the publishing business runs on its own timeline. Waiting can be frustrating, but that's just the way it goes.

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

I am really proud that a biography of a little-known woman scientist went to a five house auction. I'm also proud of coming up with the title - Joan Procter, Dragon Doctor.

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

I hope to tell more stories about woman scientists. I also hope to write some middle grade stories with a STEM bent, starting with non-fiction and moving to fiction. I also love horror stories, so I hope to someday write scary middle grade stories. Stories I would have loved at that age!

9. What are your strengths as a mentor?

I bring many perspectives to the table because of my background and experiences as a scientist and writer. I have a good ear for lyrical text, but I prefer not to deal with rhyme. As a parent myself, I understand the importance of a good read-aloud manuscript. Clunky text draws me right out of a story.

10. Who are you not the best mentor for?

I'm probably not the best mentor for someone who needs to be in contact on a daily basis. Since I don't illustrate, I'm probably not the best choice for illustrators or author-illustrators.

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

I'd like to work with someone who doesn't feel the need to over-explain their artistic choices in writing. I would like to work with someone willing to rework their story's structure if needed and someone who can clearly explain why they are the best person to write the story.

12. What is your feedback/critique style like?

I give feedback on overall structure and language choice. I'll also give line edits once we are at that stage. I also love brainstorming titles. A good title can get an agent or editor's attention.

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

I'm happy to provide general industry insight and advice and help with developing ideas on future manuscripts. I can critique and help polish 1-3 manuscripts. I'm also happy to help with the query letter.

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

I hope that my mentee relationship extends beyond this year and that my mentee always feels comfortable asking for my advice well after the official mentorship ends.

15. What is your style of communication like?

I'd like to have a phone call at the start, followed by weekly email communication. Since I have a full-time job, I'm most likely to call or email in the evenings or on the weekend. I'm in the ET zone, fyi.

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

I hope to learn something new or think about something in a new way. I hope the text sings to me.

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

I'll be looking for an enticing manuscript to start. I'll also be looking for signs that the person is committed to writing in many ways, not only by attendance at workshops and conferences, but also in ways that do not require the monetary burden.

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

I enjoy helping new writers because I know I could have used some direction when I was starting out. I'm excited to help new writers take their manuscripts to the next level, and I'm excited to share all that I've learned on this journey.

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

What traits do you think are important for an author? Persistence and patience.

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?

Rejection is part of the process. Just keep swimming.