

## The 2019 #PBChat Mentorship

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Rebecca Gomez can't get the sound of her mother reading poetry out of her head, not that she's ever actually tried. That must be why she's drawn to poetry as a writer and a reader. She writes verse novels and picture books (mostly rhyming), and when she's not doing that she likes to read, create art, watch movies, and drag her family to the woods for a hike.

Rebecca J. Gomez will be accepting applications for: rhyming picture books.

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

SERENDIPITY because it's fun to say and it's always been one of my favorite words.

**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.**

Maybe it could be a book themed cooking show. I could call it Cooking the Books! My first guests would be...Sharon Creech (for an author's perspective), my dad or mom for the cooking perspective, and a child fan of Sharon Creech's books, chosen via an essay contest or something. On the first show we could discuss Granny Torelli Makes Soup and share a recipe for soup and homemade bread. Sounds fun to me!

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

Calligraphy! Because it combines two of my favorite things: words and art!

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

It's hard to narrow it down to five, but here goes!

BEAR SNORES ON by Karma Wilson, THE FORGETFUL KNIGHT by Michelle Robinson, A DANCE LIKE STARLIGHT by Kristy Dempsey, JOHN RONALD'S DRAGONS by Caroline McAlister, and ONE DAY IN THE EUCALYPTUS, EUCALYPTUS TREE by Daniel Bernstrom.

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

As a rhymers who writes fairly short and often tightly structured manuscripts, it is tough to hear that a story needs more character development or a stronger emotional arc, especially when there isn't much room for added length! But revising accordingly, though a big challenge, usually results in a stronger manuscript.

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

In writing and publishing: Don't write to sell books. Doing so sucks the joy out of writing, at least for me.

In life: Being kind doesn't count if you're only kind to those who (you think) deserve it. Also, if something is worth doing, it's worth the effort it will take to do it right.

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

That's a tough one. I think it would have to be getting a publishing deal for my debut picture book, *FEDERICO AND THE WOLF*, which will be out next spring, after years of writing and publishing books with Corey Rosen Schwartz (which I am also quite proud of, naturally).

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

I just want to keep writing and publishing books, knowing that readers (especially kid readers) are enjoying them.

### **9. What are your strengths as a mentor?**

As a mentor, I think my greatest strength stems from my passion for poetry. In writing picture books that translates not only to polished rhyme and meter, but also concise language and often a tight story structure.

### **10. Who are you not the best mentor for?**

I am not the best mentor for writers who write books with an ideological focus, books that are lesson heavy, or books that lack a traditional story arc (with the possible exception of cleverly written concept books).

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

Someone who truly enjoys the process. Someone who writes for the children, not for the adults in children's lives. Someone who is open minded and flexible, and is eager to grow as a writer. I'd like my mentee to be someone who has some foundational skills as a rhymers/poet, but needs help to make their work truly shine. Also, I'd like them to write stories that have universal appeal.

### **12. What is your feedback/critique style like?**

I like the sandwich method. Start out with what is working or what has the most potential to work, then get into what's NOT working and why, and end on a positive note.

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

My primary focus will be first on polishing his or her strongest manuscripts and then working to perfect query letters. I will also be happy to share what I've learned about writing and publishing from my own experience. I guess that's a pretty broad topic!

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

A friendly working relationship based on honesty, mutual respect, and the shared goal of writing and publishing quality books for kids.

### **15. What is your style of communication like?**

As prompt and direct as possible.

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

Mostly, I want to enjoy what I'm reading. But I will be looking for potential, not perfection!

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

I will look for evidence that the applicant is clearly dedicated to the craft and willing to put in the work it takes to write a story in rhyme. Also, decent grammar and punctuation skills. :-)

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

I love the idea of sharing what I've learned with someone who is eager to grow. Younger me would have loved to have an opportunity like this beyond my little critique circle. I'm excited to see what comes of this experience!

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

What my least favorite books are, and why.

### **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?**

Some advice about advice: Even great advice can be bad advice if it doesn't truly work for you. Be open minded, thick skinned, and willing to "kill your darlings," as Stephen King said. But you get the final say. That said, always do what is right for your story. Even when it hurts. And it usually hurts, at least at first.