

The 2019 #PBChat Mentorship

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Street magic performer. Hog-calling champion. Award-winning ice sculptor. These are all things Tara Lazar has never been. Instead, she writes quirky, humorous picture books. She also runs the annual Storystorm challenge for picture book writers and serves as co-chair of the Rutgers University Council on Children's Literature One-on-One Plus Conference.

Tara Lazar will be accepting applications for funny fiction picture books written in prose, not rhyme. Jewish writers especially 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?**

INSPIRE.

- 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.**

TARA ROARS HER TERRIBLE ROAR. Guests would be allowed to duct-tape my mouth if I won't shut up and stop interrupting. It would be all about kidlit, so I would invite three kidlit people from different areas each week. Like an editor, author and bookseller. Or a librarian, book blogger, and bookish kid. Art director, book designer, and illustrator. You get the idea.

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

CHEESE. Have you seen those Whole Foods commercials where the guy said he "went to cheese school"? I want to go to cheese school!

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

That Rabbit Belongs To Emily Brown by Cressida Cowell and Neal Layton
Click, Clack, Moo: Cows that Type by Doreen Cronin and Betsy Lewin
Otto Grows Down by Michael Sussman and Scott Magoon
Little Pea by Amy Krouse Rosenthal and Jen Corace
Spoon by Amy Krouse Rosenthal and Scott Magoon
Arnie the Doughnut by Laurie Keller

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

That my manuscript had too many page breaks for a 32-page picture book. This was before I knew that 32 pages is the PB standard.

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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?

Besides that 32 pages is the PB standard? I've learned that even though your PB topic may be ridiculous, crazy or absurd, the logic of the story still has to make sense.

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

When a child tells me that their "most favoritest" book is one I wrote. [insert warm and fuzzies here]

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

I would like to keep creating books for the rest of my life.

9. What are your strengths as a mentor?

I am brutally honest.

10. Who are you not the best mentor for?

Non-fiction writers, rhymers and lyrical writers.

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

Someone who is receptive to criticism. If you're overly defensive, it's not going to work. If you already think you know it all, then you don't need a mentorship!

12. What is your feedback/critique style like?

I am more about the big picture. I don't line edit. I help people find out what their story is really about and help them structure it.

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

I like to critique manuscripts as a discussion (usually via Skype or other video conferencing app). I find the back-and-forth nature helps discover even more about the story than I am able to pinpoint alone. My goal is to get you to have 3-5 strong manuscripts before querying agents.

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

A friendly one!

15. What is your style of communication like?

I like talking it out over video.

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

Laughter!

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

Someone who really needs the help. (That means I am NOT looking for a ready-to-go manuscript! If all your writing is ready, you don't need me.) Like someone who has a good concept but hasn't executed it to its full potential.

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

All the writing talk! In the comfort of jammies!

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

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?

Go for it!