

The 2019 #PBChat Mentorship

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VIVIAN KIRKFIELD

Writer for children—reader forever...that's Vivian Kirkfield in five words. Her bucket list contains many more than five words – but she's already checked off skydiving, parasailing, banana-boat riding, and visiting critique buddies all around the world. When she isn't looking for ways to fall from the sky or sink under the water, she can be found writing picture books in the quaint village of Amherst, NH where the old stone library is her favorite hangout and her young grandson is her favorite board game partner. A retired kindergarten teacher with a masters in Early Childhood Education, Vivian inspires budding writers during classroom visits and shares insights with aspiring authors at conferences and on her blog, Picture Books Help Kids Soar. She is the author of Pippa's Passover Plate (Holiday House); Four Otters Toboggan: An Animal Counting Book (Pomegranate); Sweet Dreams, Sarah (Creston Books); Making Their Voices Heard: The Inspiring Friendship of Ella Fitzgerald and Marilyn Monroe (Little Bee Books); and From

Here to There: Inventions That Changed the Way the World Moves (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt). You can connect with her on her website, Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, Linkedin, or just about any place people with picture books are found

Vivian Kirkfield will be accepting applications for picture book writers of prose or rhyme, fiction or nonfiction...and she really loves nonfiction biographies.

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

Proceed

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.

1. Peter Reynolds, author of The Dot. I've recently connected with him and did a book event at his Blue Bunny Bookstore and I'm a total fan of his books and his kid-empowerment mindset and the organizations he has started which help kids move forward with their hopes and dreams and ideas.
2. Julie Hedlund, founder of 12x12. She's built a fabulous community of positivity and resources for kid lit authors and illustrators and I've been a member of it since its inception.
3. Carole Boston Weatherford, I heard her speak at a webinar and I admire her grasp of writing nonfiction and her ability to share her expertise with others.

Name of show: Build Your Dreams...guests would be ordinary people who accomplished extraordinary things as they built their dreams into reality and helped/inspired others.

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

Stock market investor – so I could make a mega amount of money to fund wells in places where there is no water and to provide money to help repay student loans for those who are weighed down by them.

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

1. The Little House by Virginia Lee Burton (first book I remember my mom reading to me when I was very young)
2. The Rough Patch by Brian Lies (perfect book for dealing with loss, whether you are a child or an adult)
3. The Journey/Return/Quest trilogy by Aaron Becker (totally in love with the concept of these wordless books)
4. The Remember Balloons by Jessie Oliveros (beautiful story that touched my heart)
5. I Ain't Gonna Paint No More by Karen Beaumont (The humor is fabulous, the rhythm and rhyme are addictive, and the illustrations are joyful)

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

An editor told me the manuscript was amazing...the words so lyrical that she got lost in them...it was a book every child needed to have—but no thank you because it was a bit too quiet for her list. (Several months later, another editor did not think it was too quiet and he bought it and it is now a book: *Four Otters Toboggan: An Animal Counting Book*.)

6. What are some of the most important lessons [in creating and/or publishing, or even life in general] you've learned so far?

1. Be positive: There is always something to be glad about. And by being positive, we can have a wonderful effect on others.
2. Be generous: Everything is better if we share, whether it is an ice cream cone or a writing tip or our time.
3. Be kind: Like Mary Poppins said, a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down.
4. You've got a winning formula when you combine passion, productivity, patience, and persistence.

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

In the fall of 2017, I signed the contract for a picture book biography compilation with Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. I had two of the stories complete, but only eight months to research, write, and polish to submission-readiness the other seven. Thanks to my amazing critique buddies who were always ready, willing, and able to give me feedback, the nine stories were on the editor's desk by the deadline: May 1, 2018.

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

Years ago, my mission as a kindergarten teacher was to encourage kids to be lovers of books and reading...and as an author, that continues to be my goal. Life is bliss because I am living my dream...and I love to inspire other writers, both children and adults, to follow their dreams because nothing is impossible if you can imagine it.

9. What are your strengths as a mentor?

I'm EXTREMELY patient and kind, but at the same time I am diligent in pointing out where a manuscript needs changes. I have a pretty good ear for the rhythm of a manuscript and its marketability. And I never give up!

10. Who are you not the best mentor for?

I could probably work with anyone. ☺ I love to write in rhyme, free verse, and prose...and both fiction and nonfiction.

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

I guess I'd like to work with the person who needs me most. ☺ I enjoy working with people who are passionate about their writing journey and who embrace revision.

12. What is your feedback/critique style like?

I'm kind, but honest. I look at the big picture of the story, but I also pay attention to the details. I have to admit that I sometimes 'hijack' the story, providing examples of alternate words or phrases that might, in my opinion, move the story forward more smoothly.

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

During the mentorship, I hope to read the mentee's body of work (up to five manuscripts) and we can decide which to move forward with at this time. I love critique and plan to provide feedback on the manuscript/query/cover letter/pitch and also on any revisions the mentee does. I also plan to share my experiences in this publication process (with the editorial team/publicist) and how I've used social media for marketing and promotion both before and after I got book deals.

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

I hope we will become friends...and remain friends...forever!

15. What is your style of communication like?

Style of communication? Frequent...I try to always be available to the kid lit community and will almost always respond within 24 hours.

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

I hope to read a story that touches my heart in one way or another and that I feel will touch a child's heart...a story I feel I can be helpful in making smoother and stronger and ready for submission so that an agent or editor will fall in love with it and buy it!

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

I'll look for a unique story idea or an old story idea told in a unique way or from a unique perspective. I want to see that the applicant is making writing a priority, even if he/she has family and/or job obligations or health issues. It doesn't need to come first (and in fact, it shouldn't in many cases), but I need to see that efforts have been made to take classes/attend webinars/participate in the kid-lit community/and most of all, write and revise.

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

The idea that excites me most? Helping someone else follow their dream and build it into reality. This has happened many times with my #50PreciousWords Writing Challenge...and it's a thrill to hold a book in my hands that got its start from a 50-word entry.

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

How did a timid girl gain the confidence to move forward on her journey to publication? At the age of 64, I went skydiving and realized that if I could jump out of a perfectly good airplane, I could probably do just about anything I wanted to do. And then I reached out and connected with an incredible kid lit community, joined 12x12 in 2012, and wrote my head off. And now, eight years later, I'm working harder than ever before, but loving every minute of it!

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?

The only failure is the failure to keep trying. So, follow your dreams, because nothing is impossible if you can imagine it!