



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 where she hosts the #50PreciousWords International Writing Contest and the #50PreciousWordsforKids Challenge. 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, January 14, 2020); and *From Here to There: Inventions That Changed the Way the World Moves* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, Fall 2020). 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 will be accepting applications for: writers of any type of picture book – I'm especially strong on pb bios, but also love fiction...and I write in prose and rhyme.

1. If you could be in any movie or tv series, what would it be and what character would you play?

It's a toss-up between Jo March in *Little Women* and Nancy Drew in any of the *Nancy Drew* mystery chapter books.

2. If you could have any supernatural power, what would it be and why?

I'd be Joy Jolter...helping everyone find joy in their lives!
And if that job is taken, I'll be the Dream Driver...helping everyone follow their dreams!

3. What are your five favorite picture books not written, illustrated, and/or edited 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)

4. What writing and/or publishing-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.

5. What about 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. And I'm thrilled to say that my mentee from last year signed with a fabulous agent and already has her work out on submission!

6. 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!

7. 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.

8. 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.

9. 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. Humor is not my strong point...although I love humorous picture books and I just finished taking a class on the Heart and Humor of Amy Krouse Rosenthal.

10. 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.

11. 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.

12. What are you looking 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.

13. Any tips/advice for applicants to make their applications and/or manuscripts shine?

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!

14. 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!