



Cassandra Federman [She/Her] Cassandra was born and raised in Massachusetts, where she spent her childhood reading comic books, playing action figures, drawing superheroes, and participating in all things nerdy (before that became cool).

After graduating from Brandeis University, she moved to moved to Los Angeles, where she worked in film and television. Over the course of her life, Cassandra has been many things — a hand model, a wrestler, a manatee rescuer, an actor, and a mystic wood elf — but her favorite so far has been a children’s book author/illustrator.

She made her author/illustrator debut in 2019 with THIS IS A SEA COW. The sequel, THIS IS A SEAHORSE, came out in 2020 and received multiple starred reviews.

Cassandra is accepting applications for: authors or author-illustrators of non-rhyming fiction. Manuscripts and/or book dummies welcome.

Cassandra is accepting applications from: unagented/unpublished creators AND agented/unpublished creators.

1. What’s one non-publishing-related career that you wish you could have?

A TV writer-- for the collaborative aspect of it. And also... the cold hard cash.

2. If you could have dinner with one person, dead or alive, who would it be and why?

My dad who passed away a few years ago.

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

The hat series by Jon Klassen (I’m counting that as one), The Very Impatient Caterpillar by Ross Burach, A Hungry Lion, or A Dwindling Assortment of Animals by Lucy Ruth Cummins, That Is Not a Good Idea by Mo Willems, We Don’t Eat Our Classmates by Ryan T. Higgins.

Apparently I love funny picture books where someone gets eaten. I'm not sure what that says about me.

4. What writing and/or publishing-related accomplishment are you most proud of?

I've had a number of different careers over the years, so deciding to go all in on writing and illustrating was a scary-difficult decision to make. Many people (including myself) have a habit of defining themselves by their career, so giving up my other career pursuits felt like giving up on a part of myself. Sure, those other pursuits no longer brought me joy, but I'd invested so much time in them--like a long-term relationship that wasn't bad, but wasn't the right fit either. Those long-term relationships, or long-term career pursuits if I can stick with my own metaphor here, are tough to leave. I'm thrilled I had the courage to do so. (And I'm lucky to have a partner who supported me.)

5. What about mentoring excites you most?

I won a mentorship several years ago through Tara Leubbe's Writing with the Stars Contest. I have no doubt that the advice from my mentors helped me land my first agent. I'm excited about the possibility of helping someone else get to the next level of their career.

6. What are your strengths as a mentor?

I LOVE critiquing and brainstorming solutions to problems. Picture books are like little puzzles to solve and I find the moment that everything snaps into place to be SO satisfying. I'm also good with dialogue and humor.

7. What is your feedback/critique style like?

I'm pretty blunt. I have to remind myself to point out the positive things first because my instinct is always to dive in and begin problem solving and pitching ideas. I don't care so much if someone takes or leaves my pitches because my goal is to get their brain-gears turning. I want my mentee to come up with an even better solution than whatever I come up with—unless my pitch is undeniably brilliant.

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

Openness and communication. I want to work with someone who won't get defensive about notes, but I also want them to be willing to throw away ideas I pitch that don't feel right in their gut. They should be willing to play around with their work, which might mean changing the entire layout of their dummy or changing the tense/POV of the main character in their manuscript. Or maybe even changing the main character entirely.

The nice thing about picture books is you can write a draft, then throw it away (and by that I mean save it and start a new file) and then rewrite the same book idea in a completely different way until you find what works.

9. Who are you not the best mentor for?

Rhyming picture books, lyrical picture books, and purely non-fiction books. Also, I'm not right for artists who work traditionally and want advice on art supplies/techniques. (I work almost entirely digitally—procreate and photoshop.)

10. How will you help your mentee and their stories develop?

I'm happy to critique manuscripts and/or dummies—finding strengths and weaknesses as well as pitching ideas. I'm also happy to give industry and agent advice. And if they are a digital illustrator or a mixed media one, we can talk about that as well.

11. What is your style of communication like?

I'd like to have monthly check-ins with my mentee via phone or zoom. For critiques, I prefer using google docs. In between monthly check-ins, email is best because I have a young child and can't easily hop on the phone. But if my mentee has a lot of questions about notes or is in need of advice, then we can always set up additional phone calls. And if this schedule needs to be adjusted that's fine. Who knows if we will even be in the same time zone!?

12. What are you looking for in the applications you receive?

I am looking for someone that I will mesh with personality-wise. Someone who has put time into learning their craft(s). I hope to read something in which I see a lot of potential and that sparks my imagination.

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

Be as thoroughly yourself as you can be in your application. Submit the type of manuscript that you see yourself writing most often in your career. For example, if you have one quiet manuscript in rhyme and one that is commercial and funny and one that is a non-fiction biography, then submit the manuscript that feels the most authentically like your writing voice. That way, if you use the manuscript to query agents, you will be more likely to land an agent that likes your voice. Don't polish up a non-fiction manuscript just because you believe that is what the market or agents want right now, especially if you don't want to write a lot of non-fiction in the future.

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?

Be yourself, but always try to explore, experiment, grow, and reshape who you are at the same time (I feel like that is just vague and confusing enough to sound wise).