



Rajani LaRocca [She/Her] was born in India, raised in Kentucky, and now lives in the Boston area, where she practices medicine and writes award-winning novels and picture books, including *Midsummer's Mayhem* (2019), *Seven Golden Rings* (2020), *Red, White, and Whole* (2021), *Bracelets for Bina's Brothers* (2021), *Much Ado About Baseball* (2021), and more. She's always been an omnivorous reader, and now she is an omnivorous writer of fiction and nonfiction, novels and picture books, prose and poetry. She finds inspiration in her family, her childhood, the natural world, math, science, and just about everywhere she looks. To connect with Rajani and learn more about her and her books visit her at RajaniLaRocca.com and @rajanilarocca on Twitter and Instagram.

Rajani is accepting applications for: writers of fiction, non-fiction, not rhyming or rhyming texts. I love all kinds of picture books, including lyrical ones, silly ones, and heartwarming ones, always. STEM elements are a plus, as are texts from marginalized creators and stories that reflect the diversity of our world. While I love picture book biographies, I'm probably not the best mentor for those.

Rajani is accepting applications from: unagented/unpublished creators only

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

I would love to be a chef or an actor.

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

Lin-Manuel Miranda

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

- *Dreamers* by Yuyi Morales
- *What Miss Mitchell Saw* by Hayley Barrett, ill. Diana Sudyka
- *One Grain of Rice* by Demi
- *Your Mama* by NoNieqa Ramos, ill. Jacqueline Alcántara

- *The Ocean Calls: A Haenyeo Mermaid Story* by Tina Cho, ill. Jess X. Snow

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

I'm proud of writing lots of things, in different genres, using different formats. I write lyrical books and funny books, middle grade and picture books, poetry and prose, fiction and nonfiction. I'm proud to center characters in my stories who reflect my own experiences and create stories that I wish I'd had when I was a kid.

5. What about mentoring excites you most?

I'm excited to work with a writer at a different stage in publishing and give them help in terms of a manuscript critique as well as advice in terms of querying and publishing in general.

6. What are your strengths as a mentor?

I'm good at giving constructive critiques. I have a decent amount of publishing experience, but I'm still "new" enough at this that I remember what querying is like. I can help craft a good query letter and give advice on a writer's career. I've mentored a lot: in Pitch Wars, as a WNDB mentor this year, and in my profession as a doctor.

And once I've mentored someone, I consider them my friend forever. There's no getting rid of me! ☺

7. What is your feedback/critique style like?

I can always find something positive in a manuscript and will definitely lead with that. I will also be honest about what I think might need work. I often ask a lot of questions about what the writer is trying to accomplish, rather than telling them how to fix things.

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

I'm looking for someone who is open to accepting feedback and who is willing to work hard to achieve their publishing dreams. I would like to work with someone who has already spent some time developing their craft, who is a member of a critique group, and who enjoys working collaboratively. I welcome writers from traditionally underrepresented groups in publishing.

9. Who are you not the best mentor for?

Even in funny manuscripts, I like a picture book to have some heart at its core — so I'm probably not the best fit for 100% silly manuscripts.

I enjoy rhyming manuscripts, but only if the author has worked to make sure the rhyme is in service to the story and not the other way around.

And while I love reading nonfiction biographies, I'm not the best mentor for those.

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

I will help my mentee work on their manuscript(s), help identify their weaknesses and strengths, help them think about other ideas and develop them, help them polish their query letter and develop a querying strategy, as well as offering overall publishing insight and information.

11. What is your style of communication like?

Email/phone calls/Zoom as well as written feedback on a manuscript. I imagine “formal” meetings will take place about once a month, with more casual exchanges more frequently.

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

I’m looking for an open, optimistic outlook in a writer who is clearly committed to improving their craft. I hope your manuscript makes me laugh or makes me cry (in a good way); bonus points if it makes me do both!

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

Be yourself, and don’t be afraid to be vulnerable on the page.

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?

Writing is an act of courage — bravo for doing it! It’s not easy to put yourself and your work out there to be “judged,” but it’s a necessary step if you want to move forward in traditional publishing. Whether or not you are selected for this mentorship, you have accomplished something by applying! Whatever happens, your work and your stories matter . . . so keep going!