

The Acorn

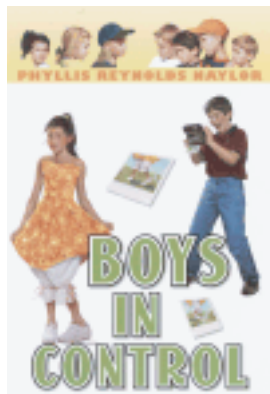
Newsletter for the North/Central California Region of the SCBWI

An Author Profile

Phyllis Reynolds Naylor

By Patti Newman

Phyllis Reynolds Naylor was eating a bowl of shredded wheat when the American



Library Association called to tell her she'd won the Newbery Award for *Shiloh* (Atheneum, 1991). Then, *The Today Show* called to invite her to appear the following morning. "My husband was out jogging at the time, but he said I was standing on the front porch waiting for him and the first thing I said was, 'I have exactly 24 hours to lose 30

pounds!'"

Naylor has been a writer her entire life. In fifth grade, she remembers dashing home from school to search through the wastebaskets trying to scrounge up enough scratch paper for her stories. She'd write her words on the top of each page and draw her pictures at the bottom. Naylor didn't write her stories for audience approval; she wrote them because it was "gratifying to make a little book."

When Naylor was 16, her former Sunday school teacher asked her to write a story for the church school paper. "Mike's Hero" was Naylor's first and only baseball story, for which she received \$4.67. Over the next two years, Naylor submitted several dozen stories to the school paper, most of which were accepted. Then she had an epiphany. "Why am I wasting my marvelous



Katherine Lambert Photography

talent on this small school paper? I could be writing for the big magazines."

Apparently the editors didn't agree with her

assessment, because none of them bought anything! She began to think she had no talent and her Sunday school teacher had only humored her. Naylor wrote to every editor to whom she'd submitted stories and withdrew them from consideration—planning to burn the whole lot. All of her stories were returned to her, except one. In its place she received a \$60 check. The fact that someone who didn't know her liked one of her stories kept her going.

Then she sold another. And another. Today, Naylor has written over 2,000 short stories and 100 books.

Story ideas come to Naylor "like bees at a picnic." She sees story possibilities in the small, every day things. A trembling, starving dog that followed her home in West Virginia, forced her to put all of her other work aside and write *Shiloh*. An immigrant on a train told Naylor about his first U.S. train trip and the fear he felt



because he didn't speak English. His story is the seed for a new book called *Emma's Fortune*. There are times when Naylor actually commands herself not to think of any new ideas because they intrude on her current projects.

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Patti Newman is a transplanted Easterner from Burlington, Vermont. She attended Cornell University and after graduating, she taught high school math and raised money for Cornell. She's written for *National Geographic Explorer*, *AIM*, *Spider*, *AppleSeeds*, *Storyworks*; and *Boys' Quest*. Her first book, *Jingle the Brass*, will be out in September 2004.

SELECTIONS FROM PHYLLIS REYNOLDS NAYLOR'S LIBRARY

Alice in Blunderland,
Atheneum, 2003.

Boys in Control,
Delacorte, 2003.

*Bernie Magruder and
the Bats in the Belfry*,
Atheneum, 2003.

Starting with Alice,
Atheneum, 2003.

*I Can't Take You
Anywhere*, Atheneum,
1997.

The Fear Place,
Aladdin, 1996.

*The Shiloh Trilogy:
Shiloh*, Atheneum,
1991.

Shiloh Season,
Atheneum, 1996.

Saving Shiloh,
Atheneum, 1997.

*King of the
Playground*,
Atheneum, 1991.

*One of the Third
Grade Thinkers*,
Atheneum, 1988.

*Beetles, Lightly
Toasted*, Atheneum,
1987.

*How I Came to Be a
Writer*, Aladdin, 1987.

Night Cry, Atheneum,
1984.

UPCOMING

Including Alice,
Atheneum, May 2004.

Girls Rule!, Delacorte,
September 2004.

Lovingly Alice,
Atheneum, September
2004.

Well-known for several successful series, Naylor continues to add books to the "Boys and Girls" series, the "Alice" series, and the "Bessledorf" mysteries, averaging about two series books and one stand-alone book per year. She knows her characters' personalities intimately and can write their escapades off the top of her head.

Naylor usually writes the first two drafts of her series books on Amtrak while traveling to speaking engagements or school visits. She revels in the uninterrupted time-no phone calls, no email, nothing. Each chapter is written in Naylor's unique shorthand and immediately copied over so she can read it clearly. After the first two drafts, she types the story into the computer. Her husband is her first reader, followed by her critique group, then her editor. According to Naylor, "an awful lot of work goes into revision. Art is an elusive thing. Sometimes you don't know why a story's not right." *Ice* (Atheneum, 1995) went through 18 revisions, and a recently sold 500-page novel for adults took 18 years to write. "I never want to read those two books again!" quips Naylor.

According to Naylor, "the best part about writing is the moment a character comes alive on paper." She doesn't know how she makes her characters seem so real, but if her fan mail is any indication, her readers strongly identify with Alice, the Malloy girls, the Hatford boys, and Bernie Magruder. Naylor lives in Bethesda, Maryland with her husband, Rex. When she's not writing, she loves to snorkel, swim, play the piano, and visit her two sons and their families. But according to Naylor, "I'm not happy unless I spend some time every day writing. It's as though pressure builds up inside me, and writing even a little helps to relax it." Naylor assures her readers that she will go on writing as long as she can hold a pencil. 🖊

HOW TO CONTACT PHYLLIS REYNOLDS NAYLOR

Website/Fan Mail:
www.simonsayskids.com/Alice
Appearances: Victoria Stapleton at
Simon and Schuster, 212-698-7432



From left to right, author Patricia McKissack, chatting with Sally Crock from the Los Angeles SCBWI office, author Alexis O'Neill and SCBWI President, Stephen Mooser at the Friday evening reception before the October 18, 2003 conference in Fresno.

Words and Pictures: The World of Children's Books

Fresno Conference Workshop Report

By Roz Duthie

As the conference title promised, participants at the regional SCBWI conference October 17 and 18 at California State University, Fresno enjoyed a weekend immersed in "Words and Pictures: The World of Children's Books."

During sign-in for the Saturday workshop, each participant received an information-packed book bag imprinted with the logo for the Arne Nixon Center for the Study of Children's Literature-the beginning of an information-packed day. First to welcome attendees was Angelica Shirley Carpenter, conference co-organizer and founding Curator of the Arne Nixon Center.

Conference co-organizer Tekla White, Regional Advisor of the North/Central California Region of the SCBWI, described the prior evening's reception at the Arne Nixon Center in the Madden Library on the Fresno campus, saying that Arne Nixon believed, "It is the function of some people to be a lamp, and for some to be a mirror."

"Arne was like a mirror," she said. "Because of him this world is a much brighter place."

Stephen Mooser, SCBWI President and Co-founder, filmmaker, treasure-hunter and author of over fifty books, opened with the day's first presentation. Mooser has donated his papers to the Arne Nixon Center. Mooser told how experiences growing up in Fresno influenced his work. He encouraged writers to, "Start out strong...a strong opening is most important." In a personal anecdote Mooser told of asking author Sid Fleischman to read a story he'd written. After reading the story Fleischman told Mooser, "You haven't sweated



Speakers' books and pictures were displayed in the Henry Madden Library at Fresno State University for the October conference.

over this story...you haven't studied every word." Mooser said, "It was some of the best advice I ever had." Deborah Nourse Lattimore, writer and illustrator of dozens of books, and art teacher said, "My first stuff wasn't even good for dart practice." She regaled the audience with tales about living her childhood with an eccentric grandmother who taught her, "Ask a question about anything...as long as you ask politely." Lattimore challenged illustrators and writers alike to, "Look at everything carefully, as if you are a scientist with no preconceived notions....Focus-don't go on what you think you see....The object at which you're looking-pretend it's not there and look at everything around it." Alexis O'Neill, picture book writer, regional SCBWI advisor, and writing teacher advised writers that there are four crucial words, "Why yes, of course." These, she said, are the four words you always say when an editor asks if you are willing to re-write. O'Neill reminded attendees to "be businesslike-it's a business." She also gave suggestions for dummied books and getting paid for writing. Dianne Hess, executive editor for Scholastic Press, addressed trends in "publishing books in the new millennium." Among recent changes in

publishing, Hess included: legislation-related trends in the educational market; a new focus on the "Twins" market; books going out of print quickly; the need for writers to self-promote; and children's-only bookstores disappearing. Celebrated author Patricia McKissack wrapped up the workshop with advice on character, action, setting and ideas. McKissack, who calls herself a wordsmith, is author of more than 80 books along with her husband, Frederick. Their book honors include five Coretta Scott King awards, Newbery and Caldecott honors. In discussing her work, McKissack said, "I write to tell the different story—a story that has been forgotten or marginalized." On voice, McKissack advised, "Get your voice out and let the characters tell the story. You've got to find a voice that resonates truth—a true voice." Throughout the day, conference attendees had enjoyed a display of illustrations by Fresno third graders inspired by McKissack's, *Goin' Somewhere Special*. In talking about the book based on her childhood experiences,



Speakers at the reception for the October 18th, 2003 conference in Fresno. Deborah Nourse Lattimore, author and illustrator; Dianne Hess, author and editor for Scholastic Press; Patricia McKissack, author.

McKissack said, "I waited so that I would not write it with anger or hostility. I wanted people to come away with a sense of triumph and joy." After basting all day with some of the best in "The World of Children's Books," conference-goers left with information-packed bags and brains, renewed enthusiasm for writing and illustrating...and a sense of triumph and joy. ☺

Roz Duthie is an educator who is committed to children's literacy development and assessment. She has published work on reading and writing development and assessment, and on school improvement, and has given presentations at international, state and regional conferences. She works with educators across the United States and abroad and has enjoyed visiting schools in many parts of the world. Her broad range of professional

experiences in both education and publishing include educational researcher, publisher's literacy consultant, classroom teacher and mentor, child mental-health project coordinator, and community newspaper publisher. Roz is currently completing several manuscripts for children's books, combining her love for children, writing and adventure.



Deborah Nours Lattimore and Tekla White at the reception for the October 18 conference in Fresno.

Looking for a class in your area?

Sharon Gerhard will be teaching a writing workshop, beginning Wednesday, January 21, 2004. The class will meet in Novato from 7:30-9:30PM, and each workshop consists of eight weekly sessions. The class uses the Amherst Writers and Artists method



Score a Contract With a Winning Book Proposal

By Connie Goldsmith

One way to be sure that a publisher wants to buy what you want to write is to submit a proposal. Consulting an astrologer may work for some people, but if you prefer to avoid the paranormal, consider using a book proposal to score your next contract. Not only does a formal proposal let you tailor your manuscript to the publisher, it helps organize your work. Once you get the go-ahead, you'll be ready to move.

While there are different ways to structure proposals, they generally include similar material. This format worked for me:

1. Title page: Includes the usual information along with a working title and the targeted publishing house. ("Jaws," a book proposal for Shark Publishing).

2. Overview: Describe what your book will be about, why it should be written, and how you plan to write it. Will you include sidebars or anecdotes, interview experts, research the web or historical archives?

3. Author background: Tell the editor why you're the best person to write this book. Include professional experience or education. If you're unpublished, emphasize your passion for the topic, describe the research you'll be doing, and your role as an active SCBWI member. If you have publication credits or a relevant resume, include them here. This section requires a fine balance between self-confidence and arrogance!

4. Competition: The publisher wants to know that what you're going to write is fresh. Search on-line, peruse catalogs, and check the library for similar books. Make a simple table for comparison using headings like: publisher, year, title, comments.

5. Marketing and promotion: Who will buy your book and what will you do to help promote it?

6. Chapter outline: The outline lays the foundation for your book. Include chapter titles and a couple of paragraphs describing what will be in each chapter. Don't forget end material - bibliography, references, glossary?

7. Writing samples: Write a few pages in the voice and style of your planned book. If you have published clips, include them here. Someone who is not yet published may want to include a longer sample to give the editor a better chance to judge the writing.

Another thing to consider is this: does it make sense to query before doing a proposal? A formal proposal can take 15 - 20 hours. Do you want to spend that time if an editor has absolutely no interest in your planned work? Earlier this year I wanted to do a career book about nursing. I queried half a dozen houses that I thought might be interested. None of them liked the idea.

However, one publisher saw my nursing experience and asked if I had any ideas about adding titles to their medical book series. I came up with a few suggestions. The publisher selected one and asked me to prepare a proposal. My project was accepted 48 hours after the editor read the proposal. So give the proposal a try. It could be just what you need to see your name on a book contract! ☺

Connie Goldsmith has information under People in the News. Connie is a nurse and a freelance writer. See People in the News for more about Connie.

Connie Goldsmith's next book, "Invisible Invaders: new and dangerous infectious diseases," will be published by Millbrook Press in the fall of 2004.

Information You Can Trust: Spotlight on the Librarians' index to the Internet

By Linda J. Goossens

With a motto like Information You Can Trust (in italics) and a searchable, annotated subject directory of more than 12,000 internet resources, the Librarians' Index to the Internet (www.lii.org) is a valuable resource for writers and researchers.

The high-quality internet resources included in the Librarians' Index to the Internet are selected by

librarians based on selection and evaluative criteria that includes availability, credibility, authorship, authority, content, design, and function. Specialized internet search directories provide a viable alternative to search engines and can save you from having to rigorously review and evaluate web resources yourself. Time saved researching = more time for writing! ☺

Specialized Search Directories

Librarians' Index to the Internet

KidsClick!

Search Engines With Subject Directories

Google

Yahoo

URL

www.lii.org

www.kidsclick.org

URL

www.google.com
(click on the Directory tab)

www.yahoo.com

Description

Well-organized, reliable, trustworthy, librarian-selected Internet resources.

A searchable, browsable directory of over 6,300 Web resources for children and those who work with them.

Description

The web organized by topic into categories.

Sites organized by subject.



Regional Advisor's Corner

By Tekla White

North/Central California SCBWI

January 2004

Happy New Year! I'm beginning with a word of advice: It's best to back-up everything you write.

When Jeff Jackson, our Acorn Graphic Design Editor, told me my column didn't attach, I searched my computer for the original document. There it was, on my desktop. I opened it and found two blank pages. I'm sure it was an outstanding literary masterpiece, but it will remain one of the great mysteries of the universe—lost in the black hole that haunts my computer.

The Advisor's Column - Version II

Our conference on October 18, 2003 was a great success. Many thanks to the Arne Nixon Center for the Study of Children's Literature and the Arne Nixon Center Advocates for their work for the conference. Denise Sciandra, the president of ANCA, organized a Friday evening reception at Fresno State University's Henry Madden Library. Authors' books were displayed, and the authors introduced themselves while members and guests enjoyed food and refreshments.

Angelica Carpenter, the curator for the center, helped set-up the conference. She managed all on-site details. Thank you Angelica and Denise for an outstanding event! Be sure to read Roz Duthie's report about the conference in this issue of The Acorn.

Assistant Regional Advisors

Thank you, Connie Goldsmith, for your help as assistant regional advisor. Your work with mailing copies of The Acorn and the Critique Groups is appreciated. Connie organized two mini-conferences in Sacramento, as well. Connie resigned at the end of 2003, but she has promised to volunteer when she has time.

Our new assistant regional advisor is Genny Heikka. She'll be the new critique coordinator and our Good News Editor for The Acorn. Read more about Genny in the People in the News column. Thank you, Genny! You can email Genny at Hikes@fastkat.com.

Jeff Jackson will put together The Acorn. He's the new graphic design editor. Many thanks to Jeff! I hope one of our North Central members will volunteer to be our editor for 2004 and work with him to produce our Web site newsletter. Please let me know if you are interested in volunteering. Your help will be appreciated by all our

members.

Nancy Barnet has served as graphics designer and editor for The Acorn. She will continue to manage the illustrators and general lists for Northern California SCBWI members. If you wish to be added to the lists, email Nancy nbarnet@att.net.

Thanks, too, to all the contributors to The Acorn. Their outstanding articles have entertained and informed all our readers.

I want to thank Sara Kahn for her work as Webmaster for www.scbwinorca.org, our Northern California Website. She posts the news and information for three regions of the SCBWI. Thanks for helping with events and our newsletter, Sara.

Our next conference will be in Davis, California on April 3, 2004. I hope to see everyone there. The conference information and the registration form will be posted on the Web site.

Joy Allen is our featured illustrator. Joy, Sara Kahn, Nancy Barnet, and Diana Thewlis will take part in an illustrators question and answer panel. We have four editors speaking. Judy Burke is an editor at Highlights. Karen Riskin, an editor with Dial, will talk about picture books. Anne Hoppe is an executive editor with HarperCollins. She will focus on emergent readers. Stephanie Lane from Random House will give a presentation on middle grade and young adult fiction.

Registration materials will be mailed to Northern California SCBWI members. There are opportunities for manuscript critiques.



Best wishes and lots of contracts for 2004!
Tekla





Characterization in Illustration

By Diana Thewlis

Drawing is fundamental to everything else in illustration. It is the foundation of a picture and the one skill that an illustrator must have.

An artist needs to carry a sketchbook and draw as much as possible from life to gain clear references. Draw quick gestures of children at the playground, animals at the zoo, people at the mall, different types of trees, etc. The sketchbooks of artists who draw exclusively from their imaginations are easy to spot. Their drawings are stiff, the shapes vague, and the characters often stereotypical. We are visual people and direct observations help us to form ideas whether we apply them to realism, stylization or cartooning.

In children's illustration is it important that the characters we create be readable and have life. Characterization goes beyond what the character looks like. We must develop a character in the same way that an author does. Consider what your character is wearing.

Decide what kind of personality the character has. How would your character move? Use the face, hands (or paws or whatever), and the body to show expression. Push that expression by 10%, or if you are looking for more humor or drama, exaggerate the expression even more.

Do not try to draw like a child. Children draw the way they do because of their age, coordination, and experience. As adults, we cannot go back and recapture our childhood drawings. Instead, our simplified or stylized drawings will need to be based on our skills and sophistication.

"Cutesy" characterizations should be avoided. They are based on a stereotype and are usually lifeless. Base your character upon accurate observations. This is as true with animals as with people. If your character is a duck, study ducks, even if you do not intend to draw a realistic duck. Stylized and cartooned characters must be based on the animal's natural qualities and actual characteristics. If you are anthropomorphizing an animal, compare its structure to human structure to make the necessary changes.

If you are animating an object, use its existing features to give it life instead of merely adding a face. Look at Arthur Rackham's or Brian Froud's illustrations of trees.

It is essential that your characters be appropriate to the plot, its time period, the mood of the story, and the age group you are illustrating for.

Once you have created your character, draw it from many different points of view including the front, back, side, and other points of view that are important to the book. By doing so, you will know your character as much as possible in three dimensions on a two-dimensional surface.

Howard Pyle, the Father of American Illustration, who wrote and illustrated over 200 books said, "Throw your heart into the picture and then jump in after it...." The characters we draw affect the children who see them. When we illustrate for children, we owe it to them to give our very best. 🍷

Diana Thewlis has been a freelance illustrator for over twenty-five years, working in most genres including children's books and educational art for children. She is an instructor at the Academy of Art College in San Francisco, California where she teaches children's book illustration as well as several other courses.



A Look at the Year Ahead

By Nacny Barnet

Over the last few weeks, as my husband and I have gone through the paperwork and farewell parties that make his retirement from a long career in safety service a reality, I've been asked by many if I'm also planning to retire.

Interesting question, and not one I'd ever given serious thought to. Do artists and writers ever, truly, retire? Although I don't plan to "retire" anytime soon, 2004 will be a year of transition for my husband and I, and it's also the reason I've had to pull back on my volunteer activities with the SCBWI for a while. We'll soon be packing up twenty-plus years in our current home and moving to another with a bit of acreage - and tackling all of the projects settling into a new home will entail. For the next four to six months I'll also be immersed in ancient Egyptology as I work on illustrations for an historical fiction for middle readers being published by the Cleveland Museum of Art. When I have an odd moment here and there I'll be developing new art in polymer clay. Clay is a new medium for me and a real treat after working two-dimensionally for eighteen years.

The dust from my transition year will settle eventually and I'll be able to step back into a more active volunteer role with NorCA SCBWI. In the meantime, I hope those of you fellow illustrators who have been so enthusiastic about (and helpful with) the positive changes we've made in illustrator-specific activities within our three regions will keep the momentum going. I also want to thank all of you who have been so helpful in bringing our region's newsletter to its new, digital form! I've enjoyed working as the production editor for the past year and am so glad there are willing and capable hands ready to make it even better. I look forward to seeing you all at the Davis conference on April 3rd! 🍷

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Good News

by Genny Heikka

Elizabeth Koehler-Pentacoff - picture book - John Muir and Stickeen: An Alaskan Adventure (Millbrook Press); as well as article about writing nonfiction, appearing in The Children's Writer. Caryn Huberman Yacowitz - Comanche Indians (Heinemann Library, 2003); Lakota Indians (Heinemann Library, 2003); Seminole Indians (Heinemann Library, 2003); Iroquois Indians (Heinemann Library, 2003); Navajo Indians (Heinemann Library, 2003); Inuit Indians (Heinemann Library, 2003); Shawnee Indians (Heinemann Library, 2003); South Dakota, Sea to Shining Sea Series (Children's Press, Scholastic, 2003). Connie Goldsmith - Invisible Invaders: New and Dangerous Infectious Diseases (Millbrook Press/Twenty-First Century Books, 2004). Genny Heikka - poem - "Faith Friends" (DevoZine, 2004). Ann Martin Bowler - Supplemental text book, 3rd grade level - The Appalachian Trail (Pearson Publications, 2004); Her first book written for adults: The History of the Paso Robles Inn, More Than a Century of Pride (2003). Ginger Wadsworth - Selected for the Outstanding Trade Books for Students K-12, 2004, a cooperative project of the National Science Teachers Association and the Children's Book Council: Benjamin Banneker, Pioneering Scientist illustrated by Craig Orback (Carolrhoda 2003); Words West, Voices of Young Pioneers (Clarion 2003), received a starred review in Kirkus; Woolly Mammoths, On My Own Science (Carolrhoda 2006); Annie Oakley (History Maker Series with Lerner Books 2005).

Members in the News



Genny Heikka

Genny is North Central's Good News editor. She has an MBA from California State University Sacramento. She worked in management positions at Hewlett-Packard for five years before she became a stay-at-home mom for her son and daughter. During her time at home with her children, she has been pursuing her life-long love of writing. She says, "Although I have just one work published at this point (Faith Friends, DevoZine, May/June 2004), I am loving every minute of it." Genny will be the new assistant regional advisor in 2004. ☺

Jeff Jackson

Jeff is The Acorn's new graphic designer and production editor. He earned his degree in Graphic Design: Illustration/Animation from San Jose State University. He has had the opportunity to work as an animator, storyboard artist and illustrator. His first children's book, "The Silly Chicken" from Hoopoe Books is now available. Jeff enjoys sunrises, puppies, walks on the beach, straight eights, and hockey fights. He currently teaches figure drawing, animation, storyboarding and perspective drawing at Cogswell College in Sunnyvale. He lives with his wife, three snakes, two axolotls, and Tiffany, a blue tongued skink, in San Jose. ☺

Connie Goldsmith

Connie Goldsmith is retiring as the SCBWI assistant regional advisor for North/Central California at the end of 2003. She served as assistant regional advisor for 2-1/2 years. She has coordinated two Sacramento conferences and helped with the newsletters. Connie won the SCBWI Works-in-Progress grant for her first book, Lost in Death Valley. Her second book is Neurological Disorders. On the way are Invisible Invaders new and dangerous infectious diseases (Millbrook Press 2004) and Lyme Disease (Millbrook Press 2005). She reviews books for California Kids, and has written stories for "Boys' Life", "Cricket", "Highlights" and many other magazines. Connie has contributed articles for adult writing publications and she has written about 100 articles for magazines for adults. Most of the articles are for health care professionals. Connie is an RN, who works half-time as a telephonic triage nurse after many years in hospital ICUs and managed care organizations. She has one grown daughter and four cats. ☺

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Acorn Submission Guidelines

The Acorn would love submissions of articles of interest to children's book writers and illustrators, and photos on N. CA. SCBWI events

For Articles, please query Tekla White at tnwrites@cal.net or other editors listed in this newsletter. Photos should be in JPG or GIF format as close to 150 dpi as possible (but if you have prints you can mail, that's okay too - enclose a SASE and they'll be returned to you) We'll need the usual who, what, and where for the caption, and the photographer's name for the credit line.

Payment for one-time rights (or reprint rights) is not extravagant. In addition to a byline or credit line and the heartfelt gratitude of your peers, the acorn can offer you a gift from the SCBWI collection of logo items.