



the acorn

Newsletter for the North/Central California Region of the SCBWI

An Author Profile

D.B. Johnson

By Patricia M. Newman

Inside This Issue:

Author Profile	1
Spring Davis Conference	2
Online Foreign Language Resources	2
Staying Motivated	3
Publicizing Your Book	4
Productive Interviewing	4
RA's Corner	5
Member's Good News	5
Acorn Deadlines	6
Submission Guidelines	6
Contact Information	6

Contributors

- Tekla White
- Patricia Newman
- Genny Heikka
- Erin Dealey
- Nanette Cooper-McGuinness
- Cindy Ann Ganaden
- Bitzy Kemper
- Caren McNelly McCormack

As a commercial illustrator, D. B. Johnson was accustomed to tight deadlines. Creating a piece of art for the New York Times Book Review or the Los Angeles Times would take less than a week from initial assignment to idea to completed work. "I loved the intensity," says Johnson. "I was afraid to think about a long-term assignment that lasted four or five months." But in 1998, he had no illustration work scheduled because of a lull in the market. He cracked open the idea file he kept next to his drawing table and settled on a children's story about one of his favorite authors, Henry David Thoreau.

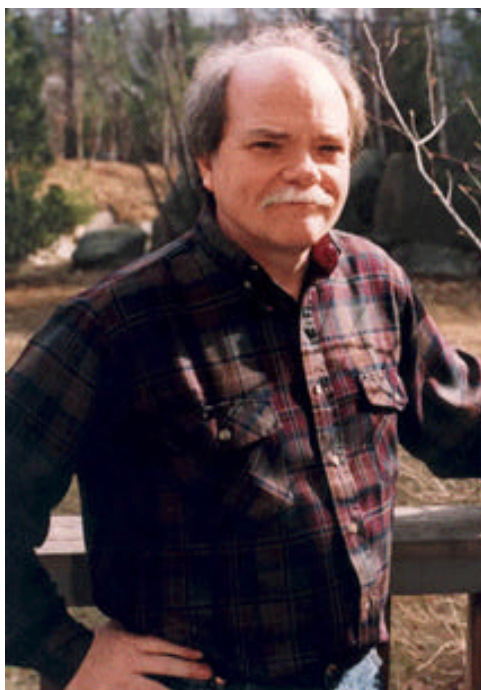
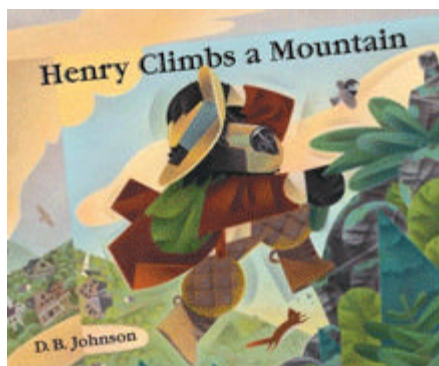


Photo credit: Medora Herbert



As a student at Boston University, Johnson read Walden for the first time and became fascinated with Thoreau's guide to simple living. Today, he reads Walden continuously, opening the book to random passages. Thoreau's paradoxical thinking appeals to Johnson. "He takes the most outrageous things and makes them true," Johnson says. For instance, according to Thoreau, walking to Fitchburg will take less time than taking the train. Johnson began work on a manuscript that he titled Mr.

Thoreau Takes a Walk. He wanted to cast Thoreau as an animal because animals are accessible to children and would tie in to Thoreau and Johnson's love of nature. Johnson also knew that Thoreau's contemporaries thought of him as a magnanimous fox and a philosophical woodchuck. But the story didn't coalesce until Johnson drew his Henry character as a bear. Renaming the story Henry Hikes to Fitchburg (Houghton Mifflin, 2000), Johnson trusted his new character to lead the way. "The stories come into my head," says Johnson, "but Henry tells me what happens next."

After the publication of Henry Hikes to Fitchburg, Johnson received the Ezra Jack Keats New Writer Award. Up until that point, he'd always approached his work from an illustrator's point of view. "It changed my thinking a bit. It was the first time I thought about myself as a writer. It was a great feeling."

Johnson writes about another Thoreau paradox in Henry Climbs a Mountain (Houghton Mifflin, 2003)-the idea that you must relinquish your own freedom to obtain greater freedom for others. In Johnson's story, Henry is hauled off to jail for not paying his taxes because his state supports slavery. A long-time abolitionist, Thoreau spent time in jail for the same reason. According to Johnson, Henry Climbs a Mountain "fell into place when I added the mountain to the story." Henry draws a mountain on his cell wall, climbing waterfalls and marching in and out of clouds. Johnson says, "I combined civil disobedience

(Continued, see "Profile" page 2)

HOW TO CONTACT D.B. Johnson

Website: www.henryhikes.com

SELECTIONS FROM D.B. Johnson's LIBRARY

- Henry Works, Houghton Mifflin, 2004.
- Henry Climbs a Mountain, Houghton Mifflin, 2003.
- Henry Builds a Cabin, Houghton Mifflin, 2002.
- Henry Hikes to Fitchburg, Houghton Mifflin, 2000.

Upcoming

Eddie's Kingdom, Houghton Mifflin, Fall 2005.

Patricia Newman's first picture book, **JINGLE THE BRASS** (Farrar, Straus & Giroux), is now available.

Visit her website at:
www.patriciamnewman.com

SCBWI Springs Into Action At Davis

By Erin Dealey

More than 300 writers and illustrators celebrated SCBWI's Spring Spirit in Davis on March 19th. Harcourt Editor Samantha McFerrin urged potential writers to create irresistible characters, riveting plot lines, satisfying endings, beguiling voice, rich settings, and imaginative details. She suggested illustrators use promotional cards with new art, get a good web site, build up a portfolio and send it around, and think about getting an Art Rep.

Julie Strauss-Gabel, Editor at Dutton Children's Books, is looking for "young, sweet" picture books as well as books for teens. Her recent acquisition, John Green's *Looking for Alaska*, contains many emotional universals. A self-described "developmental editor," Strauss-Gabel praised Green's ability to "embrace revision with a passion." She told writers to target their submissions and acknowledged that while simultaneous submissions are a reality, she would prefer exclusivity for a time.

Viking Senior Editor Joy Peskin asked artists to send samples directly to her. Peskin, looking primarily for novels, said the "current picture book slump" is due to an overpublishing of similar themes and the high cost of four color printing.

Stephanie Jacob-Gordon of WRITERS INK reviewed first pages from the submissions to the manuscript review. She advised that writers learn proper manuscript format; to use said in dialog instead of fancy alternatives; to show, don't tell; and to stay in the main character's point of view.

Illustrator Joy Allen recommended studying Children's Book Writers and Illustrators Marketplace. She said that portfolios should include a three picture sequence, one good spread, cover, black & white dummy, and two color spreads made from the dummy. She also suggested to look to educational markets and magazines for work as they need monthly artwork.

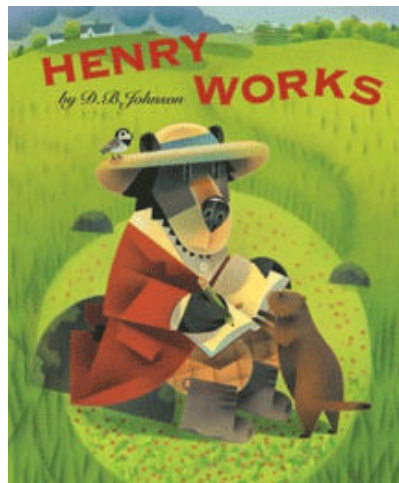
The overwhelming response to portfolio submissions kept Sara Kahn and crew busy all morning. Kudos to the wonderful presenters, as well as to the tireless team of Regional Advisor Tekla White and assistant Genny Heikka, and their committee for helping us spring forward in our careers. 🌱

Profile

with Thoreau's love of the mountains. [Henry's] never confined even though he's in jail."

When Johnson thought about the illustrations for his Henry books, he rejected the idea of a historical biography on Thoreau. "I'm lifting from Thoreau, but I'm making it mine. . .I aimed for a present day energy-something that spoke to kids today."

Although the clothes and building in Johnson's illustration indicate a historical context, Marc Chagall's cubist style influences much of his art. Fractured pictures-the horizon lining up with Henry's shoulders or people and objects slanted on the page-bring the reader's attention into



Johnson's illustrations quickly.

In his next book, *Eddie's Kingdom* (Houghton Mifflin, Fall 2005) Johnson has developed a new character that lives in an apartment building where everyone always fights. Eddie decides to draw a picture of everyone in the building. Based on another historical character that he's keeping under wraps, Johnson says there's a surprise at the end of the book.

Like Thoreau, Johnson begins each day with a walk in the woods. When all of his friends were buying expensive homes, Johnson and his wife sold their dream home for a condominium so he could continue illustrating. "The most important thing in life is to do the things you love," he says. Johnson has chosen to keep his life simple to be prepared to take advantage of opportunities as they present themselves.

And the choice paid off. When Johnson turned to his idea file at the age of 55, Thoreau's rules for simple living allowed him to pursue a new career writing children's picture books. He's never looked back. In his most recent book, *Henry Works* (Houghton Mifflin, 2004), Johnson's theme is that the best work can feel like play. He's not only writing about it, he's living it! 🌱

So You Want To Say "Please" In Portuguese?

Online Foreign Language Resources

By Nanette Cooper-McGuinness

Parlez-vous français? Sprechen-Sie Deutsch? Maybe so, maybe not.;but perhaps your protagonist does, and you'd like to sprinkle your text with a few foreign words. There are three basic types of online resources you might consult: dictionaries and glossaries, machine translation sites, and professional translator association portals.

Online Dictionaries

- www.wordreference.com
- www.lexicool.com
- www.foreignword.com

(Continued, see "Language" page 3)

Language

The best and easiest-to-use online source for French, Spanish, and Italian is WordReference, a bidirectional dictionary that also includes common idioms. If you're looking beyond those three languages, try Lexicool, a simple but useful site that directs you to online resources for each language combination. More ambitious than Lexicool and simultaneously more frustrating, Foreignword covers some languages better than others and includes a large number of outdated links. But it's still valuable.

Machine Translation

www.freetranslation.com
world.altavista.com (Babelfish)
In machine translation, the computer software automatically translates a phrase or sentence. Caveat: because word meaning varies according to context and idioms differ from language to language, sometimes machine translation works well, sometimes not. Since you don't speak the language, how will you know?

Translator Associations

www.proz.com
Finally, there are myriad translator association web portals, sites where translators compete for clients and help people wrestle with tough terms. While a new translator site pops up almost daily, my favorite continues to be Proz. It's user-friendly, has a large number of native speakers registered, and provides quick answers. You can search the site's database of previously-asked vocabulary (click on "Kudoz" from the menu at the top and then on "Search Glossaries") or else you can have a query sent to all the translators who've agreed to participate (click on "Kudoz" again and then "Ask Question"-only one phrase or sentence per query). Often you'll have your answer within minutes.

Internet foreign language resources vary in quality-some are good and some are mediocre. The few listed above are my favorites: they may well be all you need. 🍌

How To Stay Motivated And Keep Your Momentum

By Cindy Ann Ganaden

Here are a few tips on how to stay motivated and keep the momentum going.

Join or start a critique group. A critique group makes you accountable to others and will "force" you to do your work. It provides social interaction with other writers and gives you a new perspective on your current projects. It will celebrate your successes, support you through rejections, and excite you enough to carry on.

Remove the TV from your living room. According to the TV Turn Off Network (www.tvturnoff.org) the average American watches over 4 hours of TV each day-that's more than 60 days of TV-watching per year! How much you could produce in 60 days? Abandon that TV and start working.

Get involved with industry events. Attend various conferences. Illustrators, for example, might consider The Icon Illustration Conference (www.theillustrationconference.org) to be held in San Francisco on July 7-9th. It offers a Pre-Conference Portfolio Event called the "Roadshow" and the opportunity to interact with of art directors and buyers in the greater Bay Area.

Online, Illustration Friday (www.illustrationfriday.com), the creation of illustrator Penelope Dullaghan (www.penelopeillustration.com), posts a weekly challenge every Monday. Participants have a week to come up with and submit their interpretation. All topics are suggested by participants, and most of the participants are fellow children's book illustrators.

Be conscious of your work while you are doing mundane tasks. Think about your work while you are cleaning, doing laundry, or cooking. The time passes quicker and problems often get resolved.

Get yourself a Creative Coach. A creative coach helps you with all aspects of your creative life, by asking open ended questions designed to help you understand your true feelings. A good source is www.ericmaisel.com/service.html, Eric Masel's free client program where you can work with a coach-in-training. Or be your own Creative Coach by reading Eric Masel's Coaching the Artist Within and Fearless Creating.

Create your own blog. A blog is an easy-to-use web site, where you can post and share your thoughts and interact with others. Often other bloggers will leave you encouraging feedback. If you are interested in learning how to create a free blog check out Blogger www.blogger.com 🍌

Your work could go here!

Or Here!

Or Here!

Or Here!

Or Here!

Or Here!

Illustrators!

Want to have your artwork adorn the pages of the Acorn? Submit 72dpi jpegs (640px) to Jeff Jackson via email sonjebasa@gmail.com No we won't pay you for it but, you can show everybody how cool you are! Not to mention getting your work out there!

Or Here!

Or Here!

Or Here!

Maybe HereToo!

Publicizing Your Book

The Effect Of Cause And Effect

By Bitzy Kemper

"Shallow men believe in luck. Strong men believe in cause and effect." Ralph Waldo Emerson wasn't talking about front-page coverage of a newly published book, but the harder you work, the more likely you are to get "lucky."

If you have a book coming out, or one that needs some attention, here are some tips to help create your own cause and effect for promoting success.

Tie-ins:

On the NorCa Yahoo UseNet
http://finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/SCBWI_Norca/
 What is your book about? Can you tie it into a season or holiday, something you know the media is going to cover anyway? You might want to take a look at a "today in history" type website to brainstorm a unique story, such as
<http://www.scopesys.com/today/>.

Target Audience:

Think about who might buy your book. Would it work as a baby shower gift, for example? Contact a local baby/maternity store - sponsor a series of raffles or offer a book signing at their next big sale or event.

Your Angle:

What else is unique about you or the book or how it was written? Brainstorm your unique selling point - something no other author or book has - and contact your local newspaper or radio station.

Ask Around:

Your local Chamber of Commerce might know of a new PR or marketing agency, or if an established one has recently hired someone new. They might be willing to swap free or low-cost help in exchange for adding you to their client list. Or check with your area's Small Business Association to locate potential experts in your book's theme for advice.

Read up:

If you are truly new to the world of marketing/publicity, read some books to get a feel for the kinds of books available. Read at least one from cover to cover. It will be well worth the time invested. 🍷

Bitzy Kemper is an author in search of a few good publishers.
 If you have specific questions on publicity, feel free to contact her via www.BitzyKemper.com.
 She will be interviewed/quoted in the Publicity chapter in the upcoming "Writing Children's Books for Dummies".

Productive Interviews Bring Detail To Writing

By Caren McNelly McCormack

The Google at our fingertips offers a quick source of facts, but to bring our writing to life, often we need ideas and observations from real people. Whether we write fiction or non-fiction, interviews can give us details we can't find anywhere else. Though the idea of a live interview daunts many writers, remembering a few simple tips can help.

1. Be prepared.

Know the basics about the subject and the interviewee before beginning. The interview isn't the place to find information easily found from other sources. Write a list of open-ended questions to use during the interview.

2. Warm up.

Spend the first few minutes of the interview in casual conversation. It will set a relaxed atmosphere, for both parties, which will pay off later.

3. Follow up.

Encourage interviewees to expand on their original answers. The meat of the interview lies here. Pose how, why, when and what next questions.

4. Appeal to the senses.

Ask about smells, tastes, feels, colors and sounds. This is a corollary to follow up and uses the same digging deeper technique. Writing filled with sensory details comes from asking sensory questions.

5. Give it time.

Embrace silences. Give the interviewee time to process. You'll get more thoughtful answers.

6. Stay flexible.

Deviate from ordered questions, if the interview runs that way. A line of questioning can kill the momentum of an interview, whereas a side track may bring unexpected information.

7. Note the unspoken.

Jot down hand gestures, sitting postures, inflections and other observations. These details will help build a realistic characters and scenes.

8. Paper or recorder?

Recording methods are a matter of personal preference. On your notepad, reserve a corner box for notes that wander off the main interview. With a tape recorder, a pen and notepad are needed for what you won't hear on the tape-clothing, gestures, environmental details.

With these tips interviews can become a doable part of our writing tool kits. We can tap into the wealth of live sources around us. 🍷



Good News

Genny Heikka

Nanette Cooper-McGuinness' article, "En Garde with Maureen Griffin," is scheduled to appear in the upcoming March/April issue of PositiveTeens.

Sally Engelfried's story, "Selena the Hunter," has been published in Ladybug.

Diana Greenwood won first place in the Children's Literature Division for an excerpt from her new YA novel, **THREE PENNY POET**, at the recent Whidbey Island Writer's Conference. **THREE PENNY POET** also won Best of Conference, receiving the Benefactor's Award for the best overall manuscript. The final judge was Jane Yolen. To view additional information about the conference and writers contest, go to www.writeonwhidbey.com.

Dana Kessimakis Smith's picture book **A WILD COWBOY** won the Creative Child Magazines Seal of Excellence Award. The second book in the series, **A BRAVE SPACEBOY** will be released in April 2005. Dana has recently acquired an agent and now hopes to spend more of her time writing.

Geraldine Lanier's first book, **CROSSING THE THIN BLUE LINE**, will be released in Fall, 2006, by Scobre Press (distributor/Scholastic Press). Her other young adult novels, **BORN TO ROCK** and **NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH**, are also under contract for Scobre's new career series. Geraldine is the founder and former regional advisor for SCBWI's Northern California Chapter.

Tim Myers just sold his seventh and eighth picture books to Cavendish. He is also going to be featured in a "Meet the Author" section in "Cricket" fairly soon.

Linda Joy Singleton announces a writing contest for kids. There is no entry fee and she invites kids ages 8-12 (in 2005) to mail in an essay describing their own alien pet (in 200 words or less). First place: \$100 Second place: \$50 Five third place winners will receive autographed books. *Extra bonus for the first place winner: a set of autographed books for their classroom/library. Complete details at her website: www.LindaJoySingleton.com



Regional Advisor's Corner

By Tekla White

North/Central California SCBWI

I enjoyed visiting with the writers and illustrators at the Davis conference on March 19th. I wish I had more time to talk to everyone. The best part of the SCBWI conferences is spending time with so many talented friends. Spring Spirit was everywhere in spite of gray skies and drizzle.

It was exciting to see so many outstanding portfolios. I know the editors were impressed with the work that was displayed. I want to thank the reviewers who gave one-on-one critiques and portfolio suggestions in the afternoon. Renate Lohmann, Connie McLennan, Brooke Scudder, Sara Kahn, Kris McLeod, Nancy Barnet, and Sarah Wilson stepped in to work with the large number of illustrators who displayed their portfolios.

Our volunteers were outstanding. Laurie Wigham designed and illustrated our Spring Spirit brochure. It was picture perfect! Our remarkable Genny Heikka worked on the program and helped before and during the conference. Many members shopped and carted in food. Volunteers who worked during the conference were Pam Wilkinson, Kris McLeod, Bitsy Kemper, Dorothy Leland, Erin Dealey, Sherry Smith, Betty Provost, Linda Boyden, Linda Goossens, and Margaret Speaker Yuan, the new regional advisor for San Francisco East and North.

There were 143 manuscripts submitted in January. The critiques, provided by Writers Ink and the editors, were set out at the end of the conference so everyone could rush home and work on the suggestions.

I hope you caught a good case of Spring Spirit at the conference that will make your writing and illustrating soar.

Lost and found: One yellow umbrella, two black umbrellas, and one jacket are looking for their owners. Genny Heikka is caring for the black umbrellas and I have the yellow umbrella and the jacket. If you left these items at the conference. We'll return them or adopt them. Send me an email from time-to-time. Let me know how you are and tell me about your creative life. ☺

Best wishes,
Tekla White
SCBWI Regional Advisor
North Central California



Welcome Amara Monique Jackson

Born April 11, 2005

To Lynette and

Jeff (The Acorn designer) Jackson

We Love You!

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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.

Acorn Submission Deadlines

The Acorn is a tri-yearly publication. Issues will be posted on the SCBWI NorCa website <http://www.scbwinorca.org/news/newsletter1.htm> on or around the first day of January, May, and September of each year. The deadline for submissions is one month prior to each publication date. Please contact Linda Boyden about submission due dates or for more information.

The Acorn

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