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# Children's Book Guild News



the  
children's  
Book Guild

of Washington, D.C.  
Since 1945

## Monthly News

Authors • Illustrators • Children's Literature Specialists

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Friday, November 27, 2015

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About Me



### Monthly News

The Children's Book Guild of Washington, DC is a professional organization of authors, illustrators and children's literature specialists promoting high standards in children's literature since 1945. Visit us at <http://www.childrensbookguild.org/>

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December 2015

MEG MEDINA TO DISCUSS WRITING AND CENSORSHIP

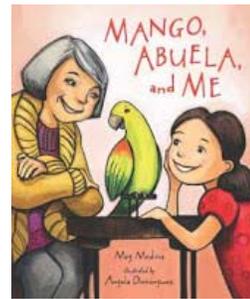


Meg Medina's work for children celebrates the lives of contemporary Latino families. Her books have earned starred reviews and national literary awards—but school officials and librarians have also censored them.

What is appropriate literature for children? Who decides? How do we define culturally sensitive work, and why is it important in today's schools and libraries?

On December 10, Medina will discuss the challenges of writing for a wide range of age groups. She will also share what she has learned firsthand about soft censorship and culture wars in the world of children's fiction.

Medina's works include *Milagros* (2008), *Tia Isa Wants a Car* (2011), *The Girl Who Could Silence the Wind* (2012), *Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass* (2013), *Mango, Abeula, and Me* (2015) and *Burn Baby Burn* (forthcoming). They have earned her the Pura Belpré Award, the Américas Book Award and the Ezra Jack Keats New Writers Medal, among other honors.



Date: Thursday, December 10

Time: 11:30 a.m. "social hour"; noon luncheon

Place: [Busboys and Poets](#)

1025 Fifth Street NW (at K Street)

Menu: All choices \$25 (\$26 when paid online via PayPal)

:: CHOICE OF SANDWICH (all sandwiches served with a salad of baby greens and house-made kettle chips) ::

- Falafel sandwich (vegetarian/vegan) with house-made hummus, cucumbers, lettuce, tomato and onion on whole-wheat pita, served with tahini sauce (vegan without tahini sauce)
- Honey-roasted turkey sandwich with Havarti cheese, Dijonnaise, lettuce, tomato and onion on wheat bread
- Grilled-chicken panini with chipotle mayo, caramelized onions, pepper jack, lettuce and tomato on chibatta
- Avocado panini

:: GLUTEN-FREE OPTION ::

**Beans and wild rice with fresh guacamole and pico de gallo**

**(We ask that you choose this option only if you need to avoid gluten in your diet.)**

**A note regarding beverages at our monthly luncheons: The menu price includes unlimited fountain drinks, iced tea and coffee. Hot teas are available for an additional cost of \$3 per person.**

**RSVP NOW!**

IN THIS ISSUE:

1. Emily Jenkins's Thoughts on Humor
2. Member News
3. Reader's Theatre at the Library of Congress
4. Support the Guild's Buy Local Initiative

TEA AND EMPATHY: EMILY JENKINS ON HUMOR IN CHILDREN'S NOVELS

*by Abby Nolan*

**Steering clear of cheap laughs and one-liners, Emily Jenkins is a forceful and funny advocate of the long-simmering, steadily developing joke. A prolific author of children's books, she has studied the art of humor for many years. For her talk at the Guild's November luncheon, Jenkins shared what she has learned by providing both entertaining anecdotes**

and pertinent examples from other children's-book writers.

The first bit of advice boils down to "you must ask for the tea," a phrase that comes from a story about the famous theatrical couple Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne. After describing how Fontanne told Lunt that he seemed to be looking for a laugh from the audience rather than staying in character, Jenkins argued that authors need to provide a sense of true motivation for characters in stories. Because there are no actors, audience or laugh track for the written page, the humor has to emerge from the material rather than from the performance.

Jenkins next spoke about the need to "self-identify as funny." Writers who want to write humorous stories should try first to figure out when and why they are at their funniest—with a certain friend, in the face of difficulties, with their kids and so on—and draw on that part of their personality. Jenkins went on to encourage writers to look at their own faults and magnify them as part of a story's plot.

Attention to details and word usage is also crucial, said Jenkins. Using specific words in an unexpected context makes something fresh, and bouncy words (like Pop Tart and labradoodle) put people into a mood to laugh.

Jenkins then made the larger point that the best humor stems from truth and pain. In reading from *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian*, by Sherman Alexie, as well as from an Alvin Ho book by Lenore Look, Jenkins showed that the stakes can be high, the situation painful, and the story itself very funny.

Another approach, Jenkins says, is making what seems trivial to readers into something that seems hugely consequential to the characters. Stories in diary form often take this approach, and Jenkins read from Meg Cabot's Princess Diaries series to show how readers can find the humor in slightly skewed perspectives.

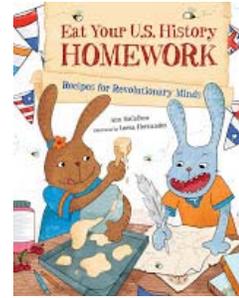
And then there's the "total dingus" approach, in which the main character is revealed to be clueless. Whereas phobic Alvin Ho is a sympathetic figure, these protagonists engender reader sympathy for the people who come across them. Jenkins cited Barbara Park's Junie B. Jones and Rachel from *Bras and Broomsticks*, by Sarah Mlynowski, as two shining examples.

Third-person narrators can also provide humor in children's novels. Jenkins cited Lemony Snicket's books and Maryrose Wood's Ashton Place series as having highly opinionated narrators who create a distance between themselves and the protagonists.

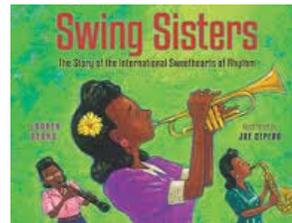
Through all these examples, Jenkins made it clear that believable characters are as crucial to comedy as they are to drama. The goal is to make great, long-form jokes and scenes that are funny each time you read them, not just the first time.

Jenkins's visit took a serious turn when she was asked about the controversy concerning her picture book *A Fine Dessert*. She said she had become convinced she had written a racially insensitive book and directed interested audience members to a statement she published last month. She had to come to terms with the fact that she couldn't "fix" the book or the situation quickly, but she also recognized the importance of engaging in the world and possibly making mistakes. In the end, she said, "Children will get better books."

## MEMBER NEWS



**ANN MCCALLUM** will be doing a book signing to celebrate her new release, *Eat Your U.S. History Homework*, at the National Museum of American History on Saturday, December 5, from 3 to 5 p.m. Please come to enjoy the Smithsonian Holiday Festival.



**KAREN DEANS's** book *Swing Sisters: The Story of the International Sweethearts of Rhythm* received a 2015 [Eureka! Gold Award](#) from the California Reading Association. The award assists teachers, librarians and parents in identifying outstanding nonfiction books for their students and children.

In March, **TERRY CATASUS JENNINGS** will speak at the National Science Teachers Association National Conference on using creative nonfiction in the classroom. Terry is very excited about this opportunity to work with educators.

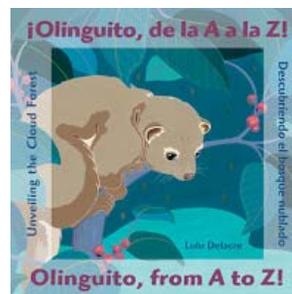
**PAIGE BILLIN FRYE's** handmade book *Nodding Acquaintances* will be in the Potomac Chapter of the Guild of Book Workers' show, "Life Along the Potomac," at the Bethesda Library during the month of December. Join Paige at the opening reception on Thursday, December 3, from 6 to 8 p.m.. The show will move to the Maryland State Archives in Annapolis for the months of January and February. The Guild of Book Workers is a

**national organization dedicated to the idea that people have a responsibility to sustain the crafts involved in the production of fine books. Its members who include book artists and conservationists, hope to broaden public awareness of the hand book arts, stimulate commissions of fine bindings and stress the need for sound book conservation and restoration.**

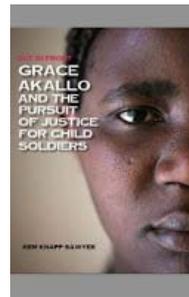


**TURNING THE PAGE** invited author-illustrator **ADJOA BURROWES** to engage with families and teachers at Patterson Elementary School in Washington, D.C., on November 4, as part of its Community Nights series, which gives families a chance to meet an author or illustrator, learn about the writing and art process, discover what inspired a particular book and take home a signed copy of the book at the end of the evening. Turning the Page is a nonprofit organization that supports DC public

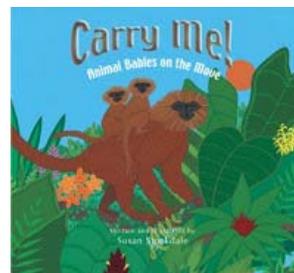
**schools in Ward 8 to increase their capacity to involve families in their children's education.**



**LULU DELACRE's** new bilingual picture book, *¡Olinguito, de la A a la Z!* *Descubriendo el bosque nublado*; *Olinguito, from A to Z!* *Unveiling the Cloud Forest*, is the recipient of **a Kirkus star!** Says Lulu, "For this book I crafted the Spanish version first and later the English, knowing the English version could not be literal if I wanted it to be lyrical, like the Spanish version. My goal was to give similar experiences to readers of either language. I am touched that this choice was lauded by *Kirkus*, rather than criticized. So I am over the moon!"



Book blogger Deborah Kalb interviewed KEM KNAPP SAWYER about her new book, *Grace Akallo and the Pursuit of Justice for Child Soldiers*: <http://deborahkalbbooks.blogspot.com/2015/11/q-with-kem-knapp-sawyer.html>. Kem spoke about why she chose to write about Grace and why her story matters.



SUSAN STOCKDALE will sign her picture books at the [University Club's Author Night](#), at 1135 16th Street in Washington, D.C., on December 2, from 5:30 to 8 p.m., and at the National Institutes of Health CRC Bookstore, at 9000 Rockville Pike in Rockville, Md., on December 16, from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

## DISNEY READERS THEATRE PROGRAM AT THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

The Young Readers Center (YRC) and the Center for the Book will host a program featuring a Disney Readers Theatre, with four new books based on the Star Wars Saga, at the Coolidge Auditorium, in the Jefferson Building of the Library of Congress, on Monday, December 11, from 10:30 to 11:30 a.m., followed by a book signing. Featured authors include Tom Angleberger (*Beware the Power of the Dark Side!*), Adam Gidwitz (*So You Want to Be a Jedi*), Alexandra Bracken (*The Princess, the Scoundrel, and the Farm Boy*) and Tony DiTerlizzi (*The Adventures of Luke Skywalker, Jedi Knight*). There will be limited seating for the public; no reservations will be taken. For more information contact the YRC at [202-707-1950](tel:202-707-1950).

DO YOU WANT MORE SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS?  
PLEASE HELP PUBLICIZE OUR BUY LOCAL PROGRAM  
*by Jacqueline Jules*

At my last author visit in Loudoun County, the librarian expressed how pleased she was to find a local author for her annual reading celebration program, because it is hard to afford travel expenses in addition to a

speaking fee. She was very pleased to hear about the Children's Book Guild and our Buy Local promotion:

[http://www.childrensbookguild.org/images/stories/members/buy\\_local/buylocal.pdf](http://www.childrensbookguild.org/images/stories/members/buy_local/buylocal.pdf)

Fred Bowen and Peggy Jackson recently started this initiative to publicize the availability of Children's Book Guild members for speaking engagements in the metropolitan Washington area. I would like to help, and I hope you will too. We need a mailing list of local librarians who annually invite authors to their schools. How can we get such a list? From you! If Guild members would share the contact information for local librarians who have invited them to speak at their schools in the last three years, we could compile a list of local schools that annually invite authors. This list will be used to send out a mailing (postal and/or email) advertising the Children's Book Guild of Washington, D.C., as a great resource for contacting local children's authors. A blanket mailing to librarians in an entire school district is not necessarily helpful, but a targeted mailing to schools who invite authors on a regular basis could help us all out.

Individual Guild members should send contact information to me at [jjulesATjacquelinejules.com](mailto:jjulesATjacquelinejules.com). I would also appreciate hearing from anyone who is willing to help with mailing the advertisement. Thank you!

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**NOTE ABOUT THE *CHILDREN'S BOOK GUILD NEWS*:** Would you rather print your newsletter than read it online? Current and past issues are now available for printing on the Guild's website at <http://www.childrensbookguild.org/guild-newsletters>. Look for the "Newsletter" tab on the left side of the Guild website. There is also a "Printer Friendly Version" link on the top left-hand side of this blog.

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**LITERARY EVENTS SPONSORED BY POLITICS AND PROSE:** The literary calendar at Politics and Prose lists many upcoming programs that may be of interest to Children's Book Guild members: <http://www.politics-prose.com/events>.

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