

FOREVER YOUNG – WRITING FICTION FOR CHILDREN

Class: Forever Young – Writing Fiction for Children

Dates: Six meetings starting Thursday, April 3, 2025, until Thursday, May 10, 2025

Time: 10:00 am – 12:00 pm PST

Location: Golden Bear Center, Suite 300.

FOREVER YOUNG: Writing Fiction for Children is a six-week course for beginning and advanced writers who want to try their hand at or hone their craft in writing fiction for children. Though not directly fiction, we will also touch upon narrative nonfiction picture books, or those true stories that are told from the point of view of a protagonist. We will focus on stories for picture books and middle grade novels through reading and analyzing well-known and lesser-known books for children, as well as through writing exercises. In six sessions we will explore techniques on developing story structure, plot, story pacing, narrative voice, and how to create engaging characters. We will dive into world building in children’s stories and the function of the illustrator in picture books. At the end of this course, you will have a deeper understanding of what it takes to write for children, *and* you will have tested your own writing.

Week 1 – CHILDHOOD REVISITED

Thursday, April 3, 2025, 10:00 am – 12:00 pm PST

This introduction to children’s literature creates a deeper understanding of what children’s literature and writing for children entails. Among other things, we will explore different age groups and different genres, how they can overlap and how the content of stories is tied to those. We’ll kick this off by sharing our favorite children’s book.

Week 2 – WHO SAID THAT?

Thursday, April 10, 2025, 10:00 am – 12:00 pm PST

In this session, narrative voice and the creation of characters will take center stage. Voice is the one thing that an agent or an editor can’t fix. It’s yours and yours only. That goes for the narrator’s voice *and* for your characters’ voices. Using childhood memories as a tool, I will help you explore and find your voices, but also create engaging and compelling characters.

Week 3 – A PLOTTER’S PARADISE

Thursday, April 17, 2025, 10:00 am – 12:00 pm PST

Plot and story structure are the foundation of your story. Plot releases it bit by bit and builds up to the climax with the sole purpose of keeping the reader captivated and emotionally connected to the protagonist. Story structure is the roadmap for a successful telling of the story. This week, we will walk past several story structures and what they have in common. And we will explore how to shore up your story with a solid plot.

Week 4 – WHERE ARE WE?

Thursday, April 24, 2025, 10:00 am – 12:00 pm PST

Readers and especially young readers don’t have access to your characters’ environment until you give it to them. A reader needs a sense of place in a story as early as possible. In this session, we will dive into what worldbuilding in a story exactly is. We will find out what the challenges and opportunities are, and what the

role of an illustrator can be to illuminate the reader. We'll touch upon history, economy, sociology, linguistics, geography, and technology.

Week 5 – LET ME LOOK AT THAT AGAIN!

Thursday, May 1, 2025, 10:00 am – 12:00 pm PST

Revision or re-vision invites us to look at our texts again, to see our writings with fresh eyes and a critical view. It is the most creative part of the writing process, where you get to unravel and untangle stories, where you get to put the puzzle pieces together. In this session, we will address developmental revision, the big questions that help you shape your plot and form your story arc. We will also address organizational revision, where we focus on a story's narrative structure, its timeline. We will explore a tried revision technique for writers and screenwriters.

Week 6 – ENERGIZE YOUR PROSE

Thursday, May 8, 2025, 10:00 am – 12:00 pm PST

Creating and revising a compelling story is not enough to captivate agents, editors, and, eventually, readers. If readers get lost in information dumps, sucked into a rabbit hole of technical detail caused by a writer's diligent research, if they are unchallenged by stale prose or prose too purple, or by bloodless dialogue, they will give up and find something else to read. Energizing your prose means putting your story on paper in the most appealing way you can imagine. This session covers finetuning of your story, from the dreaded show, don't tell adage to finding new ways of thinking about language that appeals to children.

CLASS ORGANIZATION

- Informal lectures on craft, enriched by discussion, and handouts for each class.
 - Close reading of published picture books and middle grade novels.
 - In-class writing exercises and optional home writing assignments
 - Time devoted to sharing your impromptu work and home assignments in small groups.
- PS: Sharing is not mandatory. Always feel free to pass.

RECOMMENDED READING

- *The Crossover* by Kwame Alexander
- *A Good Kind of Trouble* by Lisa Moore Ramée
- *Lena and the Burning of Greenwood: A Tulsa Race Massacre Survival Story* by Nikki Shannon Smith, illustrated by Markia Jenai
- *Big Bear and Little Fish and an Ant* by Sandra Nickel, illustrated by Il Sung Na
- *One Word by Sophia* by Jim Averbeck, illustrated by Yasmeen Ismail
- *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak (bring a copy to Week 3: A Plotter's Paradise)

All books are available at public libraries. Used/new copies in bookstores and online.

WHAT TO BRING TO CLASS?

- Your preferred writing utensils: pen/pencil and paper, tablet, or laptop
- Your weekly writing assignments

GIVING PEER FEEDBACK

An important part of the learning curve of a writer is sharing your work with peers to receive feedback. Good feedback is enormously valuable for a writer as it can improve not only the story but also their writing skills. Please, keep the following rules in mind when giving feedback to your fellow students:

1. Talk about the text, never about the writer.
2. Don't repeat what has been said before. Once is enough.
3. Point out the good things first. What caught you the first time you heard the text?
4. Then move on to what you would like to know more about, what were the questions that popped up?
5. Lastly offer points for improvement (but never give plot or rewrite suggestions, that is the writer's prerogative).
6. Keep your tone of voice respectful. Appreciation has more effect than running a text down.
7. Talk about your views only (not: the text is poor, but 'I think this or that is unclear, or 'I interpreted it this way, is that what you wanted to say?').
8. Try to be specific in a text (not: the text doesn't work, but 'here you change the point of view, or 'there I somehow lost track').

THE TEACHER

Mina Witteman is the author of seven middle grade novels, a Little Golden Book, and more than forty short stories for children published in magazines and anthologies, all out in the Netherlands. Her next book, *Boreas and the Seven Seas*, is set to hit the shelves in the US in spring 2026. Mina writes in English and Dutch. Her inspiration? An abundance of adventurous memories from when she was a child and, of course, all the young students at the Dutch School Silicon Valley where she is the co-director.

To hone her craft, Mina completed the four-year course Writing Prose for Children at the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences, which led to her middle grade debut, *De wraak van Deedee* (Deedee's Revenge). A seasoned freelance editor, Mina learned editing through the master program Book Editing at the University of Amsterdam. She is a longtime teacher of creative writing, trained at and certified by the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences.

You can find more information at: minawitteman.com | [LinkedIn](#) | [Mina Witteman - Author Interview](#)