

2021 Virtual Fay B. Kaigler Children's Book Festival

Breakout Session Presenter Bios:

Kate Albus's upcoming middle grade historical novel, *A Place To Hang the Moon*, is about three orphaned siblings who hope the World War II evacuation of London will be their chance at a forever home. In this story, set against the backdrop of an actual event experienced by a million children, Kate weaves a tale about the dire importance of family and the ways stories can sustain us. Kate grew up in New York and now lives with her family in rural Maryland. She enjoys getting to know new characters, both by writing and reading about them.

Daniel Aleman is the debut author of the upcoming young adult novel, *Indivisible*. He was born and raised in Mexico City and is a graduate of McGill University. Daniel is passionate about books, coffee, and Mexican food. After spending time in Montreal and the New York City area, he now lives in Toronto.

Maria E. Andreu is the author of the forthcoming *Love in English* (Balzer + Bray 2021), a Junior Library Guild Gold Standard Selection and recipient of a starred review from *School Library Journal*. Her debut young adult novel, *The Secret Side of Empty*, is a Junior Library Guild Gold Standard Selection, a National Indie Excellence Book Award winner, and an International Latino Book Awards Finalist.

Kelly J. Baptist is the author of the middle grade novel, *Isaiah Dunn Is My Hero*, and the upcoming picture book, *The Electric Slide and Kai*.

Lindsey Beck serves as President of the Magnolia Book Awards Executive Board. She holds degrees in Education and Library Science, as well as certificates and training in family literacy and youth programming. Lindsey works as the school librarian for New Hope High School in Lowndes County. Lindsey's background includes serving as a former youth services coordinator for the Columbus-Lowndes Public Library and working as a school librarian at the PK-5 level.

Valerie Bolling has been an educator for 28 years, and her debut picture book, *Let's Dance!*, was published in March 2020. She has two books scheduled for release in 2022 and two more slated for 2023. Valerie and her husband live in Stamford and enjoy traveling, hiking, reading, going to the theater, and dancing. Learn more about her at valeriebolling.com or on Twitter (@Valerie_Bolling) and Instagram (@valeriebollingauthor).

Fleur Bradley is the author of many middle-grade books aimed at reluctant readers, including her most recent (spooky) mystery, *Midnight at the Barclay Hotel*. Fleur is passionate about two things: mysteries and getting kids to read, and she regularly speaks at librarian and educator conferences on reaching reluctant readers. Originally from the Netherlands, Fleur now lives in Colorado Springs with her husband, two daughters, and entirely too many cats. For more information on Fleur and her books, visit www.ftbradley.com, and on Twitter @FTBradleyAuthor.

Mac Buntin is an employee at the Mississippi Library Commission where he is a library consultant. His major professional interests are trustee training and library law, with a dash of statistics for spice. He is an advocate for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) in all facets of librarianship and library services as a social justice issue. Mac has accepted a two-year appointment to the American Library Association's Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Assembly, and he is the founder of the Mississippi Library Association's Social Justice Roundtable.

Ramona Caponegro is an associate professor of children's literature at Eastern Michigan University and the Director of Educational Programming and Content for the Ezra Jack Keats Award's 35th Anniversary Leadership Team. She conducted a Mock EJK Award program with her college students and 2nd-5th graders in an after-school program.

Kelly Carey is an award-winning children's author from New England. She has been publishing magazine fiction stories for over a decade and her debut picture book, *How Long Is Forever?* (Charlesbridge, April 2020), received a glowing review from *Kirkus*. She is a graduate of the Institute of Children's Literature, an active member of the Society for Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI), and the co-founder of 24 Carrot Writing (www.24carrotwriting.com). Learn more about her at www.kcareywrites.com and on Twitter and Instagram @KCareyWrites.

Bethany Carlisle serves as Vice President of the Magnolia Book Awards Executive Board. Bethany is the youth services coordinator for the Jackson-George Regional Library System, a position she has held for eleven years. Prior to taking the youth services coordinator position, she worked at the Vancleave Public Library, where she found great joy in being the community "library lady." Bethany loves living in coastal Mississippi and feels privileged to promote libraries and literacy in Jackson and George Counties.

Abi Cushman is the author-illustrator of *Soaked!* and *Animals Go Vroom!*

Susan Muaddi Darraj's short story collection, *A Curious Land: Stories from Home*, was named the winner of the AWP Grace Paley Prize for Short Fiction, judged by Jaime Manrique. It also won the 2016 Arab American Book Award, a 2016 American Book Award, and was shortlisted for a Palestine Book Award. Her previous short story collection, *The Inheritance of Exile*, was published in 2007 by University of Notre Dame Press. In 2018, she was named a Ford Fellow by USA Artists. Susan also is a two-time recipient of an Individual Artist Award from the Maryland State Arts Council. She has also been awarded a Ruby's Artist Grant from the Greater Baltimore Cultural Alliance and a grant from the Sustainable Arts Foundation.

Keila Dawson wrote *The King Cake Baby* and was a co-editor of *No Voice Too Small: Fourteen Young Americans Making History*.

Alda P. Dobbs's upcoming middle grade novel, *Barefoot Dreams of Petra Luna*, was inspired by her great-grandmother's experience during the Mexican Revolution in 1913. Alda was born in a small town in northern Mexico and moved to San Antonio, Texas, as a child. She studied physics and engineering before pursuing her passion of storytelling. She's as passionate about connecting children to their pasts, their communities, different cultures, science, and nature as she is about writing. She lives with her family outside Houston, Texas.

Payal Doshi has a Master's in Creative Writing from The New School, New York. Having lived in India, the United Kingdom, and the United States, she noticed a lack of Indian protagonists in global children's fiction and one day wrote the opening paragraph to what would become *Rea and the Blood of the Nectar*, her debut middle grade novel. Payal lives with her family in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and can be found daydreaming about fantasy realms to send her characters off into.

Meg Eden is a 2020 Pitch Wars mentee, and her work is published or forthcoming in magazines including *Prairie Schooner*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *RHINO*, and *CV2*. She teaches creative writing at Anne Arundel Community College. She is the author of five poetry chapbooks, the novel *Post-High School Reality Quest* (2017), and the poetry collection *Drowning in the Floating World* (2020). She runs the *Magfest MAGES Library* blog, which posts accessible academic articles about video games (<https://super.magfest.org/mages-blog>). Find her online at www.megedenbooks.com or on Twitter at @ConfusedNarwhal.

Laura Anne Ewald is a former librarian turned freelance writer, editor, public speaker, and puppeteer. An eclectic scholar with degrees in classical studies, drama, library science, and organizational communication, she has become an avid storyteller, writing novels, short stories, and puppet plays for both adults and children. Founder and puppeteer of the Everyman Puppet Theatre, she is committed to bringing this fun and incredibly diverse theatrical art to children of all ages through both puppetry workshops and performances.

Melinda Falgoust is an internationally award-winning author whose writing has appeared in *Reader's Digest*, *AHMM*, and other places. Most recently, she was recognized as a finalist in the Clive Cussler Adventure Writer's Competition. She has presented on craft worldwide, most recently at the Japan Writer's Conference, with the Plaquemines Parish Library Summer Reading Program, the Killer Nashville Writers' Conference, the Picayune Writers' Symposium, the Deep Valley Book Festival: Virtual Cabin Fever Edition, and the Pages Promotion Virtual Book Festival. Also a veteran actor of stage and screen, she often reaches into her actor's bag-of-tricks to introduce quirky characters that bring her presentations alive!

Vicky Fang is the author of *Layla & the Bots*; *Invent-A-Pet*; *I Can Code*; and *Friendbots*.

Carrie Finison is the author of *Dozens of Doughnuts* and *Don't Hug Doug*.

The team from **Friends School of Baltimore—Frances Morrissey, Diana White, Andy Hanes, and John Scott**—is now in their third year of holding a Mock EJK Award program with early elementary students (PreK-Pre1st). Collaboratively, they developed their version of the Mock EJK Award criteria and short list with refinements every year. They have found the power in the Mock EJK Award program lies in developing critical thinking skills while celebrating the diverse offering of children’s literature that heralds the EJK Award.

Wendy Greenley used her M.S. in microbiology and her law degree before pursuing her dream of writing books for children. She is the author of several stories in *Chicken Soup for the Soul* and the picture book, *Lola Shapes the Sky* (2019). Learn more about her at www.wendygreenley.com and on Facebook and Twitter @wendygreenley.

Dee Hare is the director of the Northeast Regional Library system. She holds a Master’s degree in Library and Information Science from the University of Southern Mississippi with a certificate in Youth Services and Literature and a Bachelor of Arts degree in English Education from Delta State University. She has over twenty years of experience working in public library services.

Shannan L. Hicks is the library services director at the William F. Laman Public Library in North Little Rock, Arkansas. In this position, she manages programming and acquisitions for children’s, teen and adult departments. Prior to that, she was an elementary school librarian in Shreveport, Louisiana. Shannan has expertise and interest in book selection and served on the 2021 Randolph Caldecott Committee. A graduate of the School of Library and Information Science at Louisiana State University, she has been a volunteer at the Children’s Book Festival for many years.

Linda Oatman High is an author/playwright/poet/journalist who holds an MFA in Writing for Children and Young Adults from Vermont College. Her books have won many awards and honors, and Linda has been teaching creative writing for the past 25 years. Information on the author and her work may be found on www.lindaoatmanhigh.com.

Soline Holmes is a school librarian in New Orleans. She serves on the Louisiana Young Readers Choice Award committee and has presented at local and national conferences. She co-authored an article for *Children and Libraries* and was interviewed, with Alicia Schwarzenbach, for *Book Links* about using graphic novels in the classroom.

Leigh Hood is the administrative assistant and branch services coordinator for the Northeast Regional Library system. She has over 14 years of experience working in public library services.

Darshana Khiani’s picture book, *How to Wear a Sari*, debuts in June 2021.

Vivian Kirkfeld constantly takes leaps of faith, jumping out of a perfectly good airplane when she was 64 years old and jumping into writing books for children the very next year. A former kindergarten teacher, her narrative nonfiction biographies bring history alive for young readers and include *Sweet Dreams, Sarah* (2019); *Making Their Voices*

Heard: The Inspiring Friendship of Ella Fitzgerald and Marilyn Monroe (2020); and *From Here to There: Inventions That Changed the Way the World Moves* (2021). Connect with Vivian at www.viviankirkfield.com and on Twitter and Instagram @viviankirkfield.

Isabella Kung is the author/illustrator of *No Fuzzball!* and the illustrator of *123 Cats* and *ABC Cats*.

Angela Kunkel is a school librarian and the author of *Digging for Words: José Alberto Gutiérrez and the Library He Built* and *Penguin Journey*.

Susan Kusel's debut picture book, *The Passover Guest*, illustrated by Sean Rubin, earned a *Kirkus* star.

Lynne Lambdin is the electronic resources librarian at Delta State University. She is a Michigan native, enjoying the mild winters in the south. She also spends time teaching the English-speaking language virtually to children in China. She enjoys reading, collection development, and seeking out all the latest fiction releases.

Rajani LaRocca was born in India, raised in Kentucky, and now lives in the Boston area, where she practices medicine and writes award-winning books for children. She is the author of *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. Learn more about her at www.RajaniLaRocca.com and on Twitter and Instagram @rajanilarocca.

Jacqueline LaRose is a professor of education at Eastern Michigan University, where she primarily teaches courses in curriculum and literacy methods. Prior to working in higher education, she was a public school educator in New York state for nearly twenty years.

Kirsten W. Larson is the author of *Wood, Wire, Wings*, *Emma Lilian Todd Invents an Airplane*, and *A True Wonder*.

Irene Latham is the author of many books for children, including novels, poetry, and picture books. Winner of the 2016 ILA Lee Bennett Hopkins Promising Poet Award, she writes poetry inspired by nature, art, and the experience of being human. Together with Charles Waters, she's written *Dictionary for a Better World* and *Can I Touch Your Hair?: Poems of Race, Mistakes and Friendship*, which was named a Charlotte Huck Honor Book and a *Kirkus* Best Book of 2018. Irene lives on a lake in Alabama where she does her best to "live her poem" every single day by laughing, playing the cello, and birdwatching.

Dion Leonard is an Australian/British *New York Times* bestselling author, motivational speaker and ultra runner. In 2016 while running a 155-mile race across the Gobi Desert in China, a little stray dog joined Dion and ran 80 miles with him. Dion adopted the dog, named her Gobi, and promised to bring her home. After the race ended, Gobi went missing, which started a search for the pup on the streets of China. The story of *Finding Gobi* became an international bestseller in 21 languages. Dion has since gone on to

write a young readers' edition and children's picture book of their story. *Finding Gobi* is also currently a Hollywood film in production. In 2020, Dion released his fourth book, *Lara the Runaway Cat*, which tells the fictional story of his real cat Lara and her runaway adventure around the world to find herself. Having never left the comfort of home before, Lara seeks a courageous adventure and different life across the other side of the world, and she finds herself torn between returning home to her worried family looking for her or staying to help the people she meets along the way and changing their lives forever.

Teri Lesesne (rhymes with insane) is a distinguished professor in library science at Sam Houston State University in Texas. She teaches classes in literature for children and young adults. Teri is also the author of 3 professional books, numerous book chapters, and articles.

Melanie Lewis has been writing and performing puppet shows for libraries for over seven years. She holds a Bachelor of Science in family and child development from Virginia Tech, a Master's in Library and Information Science from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and a Master's in Education from North Carolina State University. Melanie has made it a priority to partner with local schools not only to bring books to life through theatre, but to bring the students' stories to life. She is passionate about empowering children's services specialists to explore dramatic play in day-to-day programming, as she has lead workshops on one-person puppetry and puppetry basics.

Margarita Longoria is the author of the upcoming young adult anthology, *Living Beyond Borders*. She's a lifelong bookworm, book blogger, and high school librarian in South Texas where she founded Border Book Bash: Celebrating Teens and Tweens of the Rio Grande Valley. Margarita grew up on the Texas/Mexico border known as the Rio Grande Valley and lives with her family in Texas.

Jennifer Luetkemeyer is an assistant professor of library science at Appalachian State University. She is interested in the ways that students access information and knowledge, in what resources and information they have access to, and in how information and knowledge are presented to them. The fundamental principle that all students deserve, and should be provided with, equal access to information, knowledge, and resources guides her work.

Kaitlyn Lynch is a graduate student in the University of Alabama Masters of Library and Information Studies Program. She currently works as a youth librarian at Tuscaloosa Public Library in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, and has published on the topic of library services to LGBTQ+ youth.

Vikram Madan grew up in India where he really wanted to be a cartoonist but ended up an engineer. After many years of working in the tech industry, he finally came to his senses and followed his heart into the visual and literary arts, creating work that can be humorous, quirky, fun, lighthearted, philosophical, thought-provoking, and, sometimes, all of these at the same time. When not painting and making public art, Vikram writes

and illustrates humorous poetry. His poetry books include *A Hatful of Dragons* and the Moonbeam Book Award winners, *The Bubble Collector* and *Lord of the Bubbles*.

Mary Beth Magee is an author, journalist, publisher, and trainer. She writes in several genres, including nonfiction and children's books. She leads sessions on aspects of writing, creativity, and publishing for writers of all levels. Her degree in psychology focuses on learning.

Jen Malia is an associate professor and the author of *Too Sticky!: Sensory Issues with Autism*.

Lindsay H. Metcalf is the author of *Beatrix Potter, Scientist; Farmers Unite!*; and *No Voice Too Small*.

Amanda McCrina was born and raised in Atlanta, Georgia. She graduated summa cum laude from the University of West Georgia with a Bachelor's degree in history and political science. After three years of teaching secondary English and history at an international school outside Madrid, Spain, she now lives in Franklin, Tennessee, where she works as a bookseller. Her areas of interest include the World Wars and Soviet/post-Soviet Eastern Europe, particularly Poland and Ukraine. Her upcoming novel, *The Silent Unseen*, looks at the use of children as forced laborers by the Nazi and Soviet regimes and the weaponization of ethnic identities on the eastern front of World War II.

Saira Mir is a physician and the author of *Muslim Girls Rise: Inspirational Champions of Our Time*.

Malcolm Mitchell is the rookie who helped the New England Patriots win Super Bowl LI and is the author of *The Magician's Hat* and *My Very Favorite Book in the Whole Wide World*.

Oge Mora received the 2019 Ezra Jack Keats Illustrator Award for *Thank you, Omu!*, which also received a Caldecott Honor and the Coretta Scott King/John Steptoe New Talent Award.

Kirstie Myvett received a Bachelor's degree from Columbia College and works in higher education. She is passionate about philanthropy and has worked and volunteered in the nonprofit arena extensively. Kirstie is co-founder of KidLit in Color, a group of traditionally published BIPOC creatives who nurture, amplify diverse voices, and advocate for equitable representation in the industry. Kirstie's work has appeared in *Country Roads Magazine* and on *Black New Orleans Mom Blog*. Her debut picture book, *Praline Lady*, was released in November 2020.

Jamie Campbell Naidoo is the Foster-EBSCO professor at the University of Alabama School of Library & Information Studies. A former school librarian and children's librarian, he regularly teaches on the topic of diversity in children's literature and library services to diverse populations. He has published numerous professional books and

articles related to connecting children with books offering mirror, window, and sliding door experiences.

Tootie Nienow is the author of *There Goes Patti McGee: The Story of the First Women's National Skateboard Champion* (Farrar Straus & Giroux 2021). Tootie is a school librarian who, after reading hundreds of books to an enraptured audience, decided to write her own. Mining her childhood experiences in southern California, she crafts stories about skateboarding, surfing, hiking, and California's unique weather. You can follow her on Instagram (@author2t) or check out her website (tootienienow.com).

Carolyn Tara O'Neil grew up in a tiny New York City apartment filled with thousands of books. Carolyn has lived in France, Spain, and Japan and has dedicated her career to the education and rights of young people. She loves to travel, study languages, and spend endless hours discussing TV, books, great hiking trails, and how we can work together to build a more equal society. Her debut novel, *Daughters of a Dead Empire*, is set during the Russian Revolution and will be published in Fall 2021.

Colleen Paeff is the author of *The Great Stink: How Joseph Bazalgette Solved London's Poop Pollution Problem* (Margaret K. McElderry Books/S&S 2021) and *Rainbow Truck* (Chronicle Books 2023). A former preschool teacher and bookseller, her passion for picture books is rivaled only by her love of research, especially when primary sources are involved. Find her on Twitter and Instagram @ColleenPaeff and online at www.colleenpaeff.com.

Karin Perry is an associate professor of library science at Sam Houston State University in Texas. She teaches a wide variety of library science classes, including literature for children and young adults. She is the author of *Sci Fi on the Fly* and co-author of *Sketchnoting in the Schools*.

Zeena Pliska is the author of *Hello, Little One: A Monarch Butterfly Story*. She is a progressive, child-centered educator who strives to create a culture of listening to children in her classroom. She lives in Los Angeles, California.

NoNieqa Ramos's debut picture book, *Your Mama*, illustrated by Jackie Alcántara, earned a *School Library Journal* star.

Julie Rowan-Zoch is the illustrator of *Louis* and the author/illustrator of *I'm a Hare, So There!*.

Molly Ruttan grew up in Hastings-on-Hudson, New York. She holds a Bachelor's of Fine Arts in graphic design from the Cooper Union School of Art and currently works as a children's book author/illustrator in Los Angeles. Her titles include her author/illustrator debut, *The Stray*, from Nancy Paulsen Books/Penguin, and *I Am A Thief!* by Abigail Rayner for NorthSouth Books. Molly has three additional titles forthcoming. You can find Molly online at www.mollyruttan.com.

Former teacher **Laura Purdie Salas** believes reading small picture books and poems can have a huge impact on your life. This Minnesota author has written more than 130 books for kids, including *Lion of the Sky* (*Kirkus* Best Books and *Parents Magazine* Best Books of the Year), the Can Be... series (Bank Street Best Books, IRA Teachers' Choice), and *BookSpeak!* (Minnesota Book Award, NCTE Notable). Laura shares inspiration and practical tips with educators about poetry, nonfiction, and more. Visit Laura at laurasalas.com.

Debra Kempf Shumaker is the author of *Freaky, Funky Fish; Tell Someone;* and *Peculiar Primates*.

Alicia Schwarzenbach is a New Orleans native with twenty-five years of experience in libraries. Alicia has presented at conferences including the Louisiana Library Association (LLA), Conference for Young Adult Literature Louisiana (CYALL), and LOUIS Users Conference (LUC) and has published in ALSC's *Children and Libraries* and *Book Links*.

Chieri Uegaki received the 2015 Ezra Jack Keats Writer Award for *Hana Hashimoto, Sixth Violin*, which also won the Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature in the Picture Book Category.

Lonna Vines is currently the children's librarian at the Hickory Grove branch of the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library. She serves on the systemwide theatrical training team and is the team lead for the Frontline Puppeteers. She has her Master's in Library and Information Science from the University of Illinois, has worked in libraries for over 10 years, and loves incorporating music, puppetry, and performance into every aspect of her job.

Phoebe Wahl received the 2016 Ezra Jack Keats Illustrator Award for *Sonya's Chickens*. Her most recent picture book, *The Blue House*, was honored with the 2021 Robin Smith Picture Book Prize.

Caroline Ward is a youth literature consultant with over 40 years of experience in public libraries. She has served on the Ezra Jack Keats Award committee, including three terms as chair, and has conducted Mock EJK Awards with 3rd graders in Stamford, Connecticut.

Candy Wellins's debut picture book, *Saturdays are for Stella*, was named a *Kirkus* Best Picture Book of 2020. She is also an educator and the author of *The Stars Beckoned*.

Since receiving her undergraduate degree in playwriting in 2002, **Becca Worthington** has had twelve of her plays performed in four states, two countries, and in three languages. While serving in the Peace Corps (2006-2008), she started the first library in her village and served as the theatre specialist for the Republic of Moldova to create social interactive theatre at orphanages throughout the country. Upon her return to America, she ran library marketing events on behalf of the Association of American Publishers and served as literary manager and playwriting instructor of award-winning

off-Broadway theatre company, The Barrow Group. After receiving her Master's in Library Science from Queens University, she moved to Charlotte, North Carolina, for the delightful and magical experience of serving as children's librarian at ImaginOn, the only hybrid children's theatre/children's library in the country.

Munevver Mindy Yuksel is the author of *In My Mosque* and *One Wish: Fatima al-Fihri and the World's Oldest University*.