

Desert Nights, Rising Stars

Virtual Writing Conference | February 18 – 20, 2021

*Literary Craft & Culture
In Your Living Room*



View the Schedule

The Desert Nights, Rising Stars Virtual Writers Conference
Thursday - Saturday, February 18 - 20, 2021

Featuring **over 80 workshops, craft talks, and panels**, the Desert Nights, Rising Stars Writers Conference is eclectic, comprehensive, balanced, and diverse, covering everything from fiction, creative nonfiction and poetry to memoir, young adult, romance, fantasy, the business of writing, and more.

Beyond the regular schedule, the conference also features [advanced workshops](#) and [pitch sessions](#) with agents and editors, too. **Early registration is only \$225 before December 31.**

Keep reading to view this year's schedule and register for the conference today at <http://piper.asu.edu/conference>.

Thursday, February 18, 2021

10:00 AM to 11:00 AM

Conference Welcome

11:15AM to 12:15PM

Writing as Adventure with Jeffrey Cohen

Taking seriously the fact that the word “adventure” comes from a Latin term for the arrival of the future, this talk will explore different ways of making the writing process more open, more creative, more thrilling – no matter what you are writing. Taking the specific example of an essay written on an airplane making the long journey from Sydney to Los Angeles, this conversation focuses on setting challenges that intensify imagination by connecting work done in the present to long histories of dreaming the world from different vantage points.

Tell the Truth: Writing Nonfiction for Kids with Lisa Crayton

Fiction is not the only literary child on the block. Rather, kids and teens need, and want, nonfiction material too. And thanks to curriculum standards, opportunities abound for writing nonfiction for them. Discover keys to unlocking success in a genre with increasing market and income opportunities. We will cover idea generation to publication, including market needs, pitching tips, and current opportunities (including social media pitch contests). Spotlights include writing for magazines, and writing books (pitching ideas and work-for-hire opportunities) for trade and educational publishers.

Notas Jotas: From Literary Experiments to Empathic Pedagogies with José Eduardo Sánchez

As the literary world tries to wrap its head around issues of representation, authenticity, and inclusion, working class, LGBTQIA Latinx and immigrant communities continue surviving, thriving, and creating. Over the past year, a group of writers, artists, and organizers have embarked on a literary experiment called Notas Jotas to uplift and celebrate the creative power of LGBTQIA Latinx and immigrant voices and create spaces for healing and collective action. This interactive session will invite participants to map the journey along our community engaged literary practice, discovering the contradictions, pleasures, intuitions, and relationships that guided us toward an empathic pedagogy, which presents and represents ideas, turning them into actions, spaces, and moments.

Disclosure of Information with Tom Provost

Disclosure of Information is the essence of storytelling. Every choice a writer makes on the page, in movies and fiction, reveals information to the audience or reader. How to reveal, when to reveal and why... these questions are of the utmost importance. Even a thirty-second purposeful delay in disclosure can affect a narrative in powerful ways, good and bad. How to gauge disclosure of information and what the effect will be on the audience/reader are the focus of this lecture, helping the writer determine the manner in which each and every piece of information in a story is revealed.

12:30PM to 1:30PM

Simple Magic: The Writing Possibility with Alberto Ríos

Magical realism in books and films is well-documented, but understanding where it actually—and authentically—comes from in real life bears some discussion. This session will offer a sociology of possibility, a daily world in which magic presents itself as a thoroughly modern and contemporary way of life, and how to engage this understanding in your own writing and thinking.

Panel: Making It on My Own: Publishing and Marketing for The DIYers

In an ever-changing world of technology and growing concern about the lack of opportunities within traditional publishing, more writers are deciding to strike out on their own. These writers will discuss tips and tricks for publishing on your own and how to get the word out without a big-name publishing house behind you.

Your Ideas Have Value: Generating Income and Status with Yi Shun Lai

In this session, writer and editor Yi Shun Lai will share with participants her tried-and-true technique for making money and earning status from the many ideas writers come up with. Attendees will get to workshop their own ideas, and walk away with ways to sell them to a ready market.

Traveling Stanzas: Community-Engaged Expressive Writing with Charles Malone

This interactive presentation will share lessons from community-based poetry projects around critical topics. At the Wick Poetry Center, we have built interactive exhibits revolving around a system of interactive digital tools in order to facilitate conversations about the stories of immigrants and refugees in our community, the history of pollution and rebirth of the Cuyahoga River, advocacy of reality-based decision making through our “Poets for Science” collaboration, as well as the 50th Anniversary of the shooting on our campus on May 4th, 1970. Using erasure poetry, community poems, and dynamic prompts, we’ve invited community members of all ages to share their voices with us. During the session, participants will be invited to engage with these same expressive tools.

Crafting Secondary Characters: Beyond Friends, Foils, and Foes with Karen Odden

Well-drawn, diverse, complex secondary characters can add nuance, humor, and conflict to a novel or short story. This session presents different types of secondary characters—beyond merely friends, foes, and foils—and explores how to develop them so they sing for themselves while also harmonizing with a main plotline. Drawing on concepts from film theory and psychoanalysis, we examine passages from novelists such as Toni Morrison, Tayari Jones, and Leif Enger as examples of techniques. Referring to their current work-in-progress, participants will respond to three writing prompts and leave with exercises in hand.

1:45PM to 2:45PM

Pulling from Multiple Genres with Erika Wurth

Whether you're writing realism, science-fiction/speculative/fantasy or a thriller, it's important to know how to imaginatively build the world your characters will inhabit. Today, we'll talk about how writers do that in different genres, what you can take away from each, and how this applies to language, form, structure, and characterization. In the thriller, structure is king, and there's much to be said for looking at a tried-and-true form. In science fiction/fantasy/speculative fiction, the imagination that goes into building imaginary worlds is something to take away. In realism and post-modern fiction, because these have been the literary fiction norms, writers in these genres are often masters at dialogue, inner-monologue, complex characterization, deviation from the formula in terms of form, and attention to language. We'll look at examples from each, so that you'll be able to take the strengths of every genre to what you're working on.

Enter Through the Side Door: Ways to Write Through the Darkness with Chels Knorr

As writers, we are often told to wait to write about our traumatic experiences—to give ourselves distance. But what if we don't have the luxury of space or time? What if we need to write to get through these experiences? Best to start somewhere else — to approach the hard topics not by barging in through the front door but by knocking on the side door. In this generative session, we'll discuss specific techniques, like the hermit crab essay, writing backward and illustrated note taking, to write about our traumatic experiences (though we'll practice with easy topics). Then we'll chat about how unpacking, sharing, and listening to each other's diverse stories can change the whole world.

Publishing with a Small Press: Q&A, What to Expect with Tiffany Meuret

Small independent presses are the lifeblood of publishing, and very often a place where writers get their start. It is imperative that we not only celebrate such presses and the engaging, oftentimes riskier work they bring to the table, but also inform authors of the risks and pitfalls so they are armed and knowledgeable as they navigate their careers. As with every industry, not all presses are alike, and predatory presses are very skilled at appealing to anxious, inexperienced, writers. Learn more about what to expect when publishing with a small press.

Bones and Narrative Energy: The Synopsis as a Creative Road Map with Meg Eden

When an agent or editor requests a synopsis, the process of honing our novel down into such a small space can be dread-inducing. However, writing a synopsis can help us reflect on the larger themes and values of our work, helping us focus and tighten our narrative structure--or even lay out a road map for a future project. In this workshop, we'll use the synopsis as a frame for discussing the bones and beats of plot, as well as using it as a guiding light through the drafting and editing process. In our time together, we'll practice getting to the heart of our projects through writing a one-line pitch, and using that pitch to outline our synopses.

3:00PM to 4:00PM

Saad Bahashni': Words from Their Stories with Shaina Nez

Consider your statement of aesthetic—has it enhanced your awareness of the necessity of beautiful language? In this session we will focus on selected examples from the works from Leslie Marmon Silko, Irvin Morris, and Terese Marie Mailhot, writers who have inspired and shaped my aesthetic of writing style, Diné language, and identity. We will focus upon selections from Silko's *Ceremony* (Penguin, paperback), Morris' *From the Glittering World* (University of Oklahoma Press, Norman Publishing), and Mailhot's *Heart Berries* (Counterpoint).

50 Editing Mistakes Authors Make with Chantelle Aimée Osman

A professional editor covers the best methods for approaching editing your work. We'll go over the top mistakes that editors find and correct in author's manuscripts, from grammar to dialogue, giving you the edge of a polished final product.

Absence in Perpetuity with Raquel Gutiérrez

Absence in Perpetuity invites thinking that goes beyond the “I” and the “you” in the poetic space of the page. We will think instead about distance and proximity, grief and mourning and address the context that underscores those losses. This is an inquiry based and reflective pedagogical approach to writing creatively against the backdrop of societal collapse brought on by pandemic and autocratic seizures of power. How might we make language for one another in an age of remote intimacy? These are prompt-based strategies to explore the absent other together in the Zoom age.

4:15PM to 5:15PM

When Form Meets Content: Is Experimentation Worth It? With Raluca Balasa

Writers are often told by editors to “write what feels right” and to avoid following literary trends. Yet often, these same markets purporting to desire diverse voices and styles will ask an author to resubmit the same story using a more traditional style. At what point does an author know when and how to experiment with form? How can we tell if our form complements our content, and is it worth experimenting if this makes a story harder to sell?

Veteran’s Writing Circle Reading

Healing Trauma Narratives through Hybrid Works with Carol Test

How do you write a story that doesn’t have a simple beginning, middle, and end? How do you tell a story that isn’t yours alone? How do you write when language gets lost? Together, we’ll explore craft techniques that give voice to those affected by trauma. For within the telling of any story lies the key to unlocking mechanisms by which people survive. Drawing on generative exercises and examples inspired by the work of Steven Dunn, Maggie Nelson, Hala Alyan, and Mark Wolynn, we’ll explore how trans-genre collage has the power to reveal—and potential to heal—trauma. (Extra time available after class for exercises.)

Ekphrasis, Memory, Scene, Story with Nicholas Bredie

Writers have always drawn on archives to generate work, but there is a new intimacy between archival material and writing on the page itself. In this generative workshop we will study how contemporary writers like Valeria Luiselli, Claudia Rankine, and Paisley Rekdal use the visual archive not just to inspire their text but as part of the text itself. Then as a workshop, we will develop a method for writing through images (ekphrasis) towards accessing the stories they contain. Please bring an image that is important to you and your work, whether personal or not.

Friday, February 19, 2021

10:00AM to 11:00AM

Dodging Diversity Tropes in Children's Literature with Hena Khan

As we see the increased call for diverse literature for children, how do we write authentic stories, and get them published? In this session, we will discuss trends in children's publishing, how to avoid well-intentioned mistakes, balancing joy and heavy themes, and creating the representation that kids deserve.

Conversational Creative Nonfiction with Kyla Hanington

Conversational creative nonfiction is engaging and relatable. Reading a conversational essay is to feel as though one is sitting across from the writer, drinking a cup of coffee, and participating in gentle chatter. We feel part of the essay, part of the experience. This workshop will consider techniques for imparting conversational tone in writing and provide prompts for participants to begin their own engaging creative nonfiction work.

From Trauma to Empowerment: Poetry for Healing and Resilience with Federica Santini

In *Beyond Words: Illness and the Limits of Expression*, Kathlyn Conway argues that while the cultural significance of illness narratives is now widely recognized, too often narratives of triumph or overcoming overshadow 'the more difficult aspects of illness and disability.' Through this session, participants will engage, personally and collectively, in creating poems that are valuable for the step towards resilience they represent, and thus start conceiving of their own illness/trauma narrative not as a direct trajectory, but rather as an articulated personal journey, with the intent of seeing writing as a continuous process of empowerment. Prompts (including tips for writers wanting to compose translingually or multilingually), focus words, and small group activities will be integrated in the session.

A Hero's Journey in 10 Steps: From Idea to Published Novel with Suyi Davies Okungbowa

This lecture will walk you through the ten(-ish) stages of the writer's path to publishing a novel, delivered as a fun analogy to the Hero's Journey. We will start at the Eureka moment of a shiny new story idea called to adventure and end at the return home with the prize in hand, your book in bookstores and avid readers lining up for signed copies. This will be a holistic peek into each stage of the writer's journey to publication and the challenges, frenemies and triumphs we encounter along the way.

Queering History: Writing LGBTQIA Historical Fiction with Kathrine Lim

In historical fiction about queer lives, a question that often arises is, “Is there any evidence that the character(s) are gay, or, if they are fictional, are their situations accurately portrayed?” But are these the right questions to ask? This workshop invites readers to enter the interstices in history in which the inner lives of queer men and women are reimagined. Reading excerpts from novels and short stories, we’ll seek to understand what each writer is doing in contextualizing real-life historical events within fiction, and find inspiration in these techniques for our own writing. Participants will discuss notions of stereotyping, power, and privilege—who gets to tell which stories?

11:15AM to 12:15PM

Modern Love, or The Great Existential Actuality at the End of Your Universe with Timothy Braun

This workshop will focus on organic narrative-based creative nonfiction, while building plots and characters using playwriting techniques to refine the worlds these characters find themselves in.

Beyond Sylvia: Writing toward and through Mental Health with Cameron Gorman

The "Sylvia Plath Effect" claims that poets, and women poets especially, are more prone to mental health issues than other writers. In popular culture, this is often a romanticized, fearful aspect of artistic work. What if, instead, we embraced it? In this workshop, we will read work about and from poets dealing with subjects pertaining to mental health and will generate and discuss poetry related to lived experience. How can poetry help us work through and process these experiences? How can it allow us to expand past the boundaries of self-censorship or shame?

MFA Reading

Woke, and Other Ways to Engage with your Community in *Woke: A Young Poet's Guide to Social Justice* with Mahogany L. Browne

Mahogany L. Browne summons readers of all ages to speak out, in the tradition of activist poetry by Maya Angelou, Sonia Sanchez and others. Tackling topics that include discrimination, immigration, empathy and ableism, Browne reflects on the joy and passion in the fight for social justice. “We are not yielding or bending because the conversation is uncomfortable,” she writes. “It is resisting to be comfortable/when we all have yet to feel safe and free.

From Womb to Doom: The Fantasy Writer's Otherness Complex with Emily Forney and Jessica Kanzler

Speculative fiction has been the starting point for many young authors; from fan fiction to Tumblr writing series, genre storytelling offers opportunities for fantastical escapism. To write about otherness and injustice through the lens of fantasy, as appealing and cathartic as it may be, requires responsibility from the author to not explore identity, sexuality, and race as a fetishized experiment. This session will explore techniques and research for writing otherness within fantasy stories—incorporating cultural acknowledgments within fiction. Participants will gain insight into writing character arcs, as well as receive tips for crafting rich and meaningful fantasy stories that are both uniquely entertaining and believably relatable.

12:30PM to 1:30PM

Panel: Writing for Change! How Do We Write for Activism and About it

How do we write to change the world around us? How do we write stories that honor past movements, and propel present ones forward? Is all writing that engages questions of race, gender, class, and ability a kind of activism? In this panel four authors will discuss the way activism informs their writing, or how writing is their activism of choice.

The Secret to Writing a Perfect Story with Evan Winter

Between the business and art of publishing there's a lot to learn and master, but at the heart of the work is a desire to tell the best story that one can. This session's goal is to define the ideal reader for your story and then explore how to best create for them.

Translingual Writing in America with Piotr Florczyk

This session will focus on sharing writing and professional practices of writers who write in an acquired language. It will address issues of acceptance and rejection by the literary community, the process of choosing a language to express particular narratives, feelings, or ideas, the ways in which self-translation becomes creatively generative, and strategies for finding publishers.

The Critical Moment: Mining for Meaning with Dahlma Llanos-Figueroa

This workshop is designed to create a pocket of calm and quiet in which to explore our feelings of this new world in which we live. We examine our lives for critical moments that have changed us or the way we see the world using personal experience or selected images. We will remember and consider. Then write. And finally, share our writing. This is how we build community. This is how we gain strength.

1:45PM to 2:45PM

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Writers with Lyzette Wanzer

Want to be taken seriously as an author, even though you have yet to publish the Great American Novel or place an article in *The Atlantic*? You need to learn to treat your writing—poetry, fiction, nonfiction—as a business. Believe it or not, one of the best ways of getting the literary world to notice you is to manage the less sexy aspects of your practice. That means realizing that writing is a business, not just an art. Marketing is a critical, often overlooked aspect of our craft. In this session, you will learn seven habits that will enable you to boost your writing career.

Writing through the Pandemic: Isolation and the Imagination with Marcelo Hernandez Castillo

As the months of the pandemic wear on, it has been increasingly difficult for creative individuals to stay productive. In the wake of uncertainty, overwhelming chaos, and general apathy at the state of the world, it can be incredibly difficult to put pen to paper. In this workshop with Marcelo Hernandez Castillo, we will work through exercises to not only stimulate writer's block, but also investigate the virtues that we can learn from the distances that have grown between ourselves through an examination of writers that use themes of isolation, distance, silence, and repetition in their work.

Let's Talk about Sex with Jenny Irish

Though we all have bodies and all have experience with their varied functions, writing about the body—particularly the body and sex—seems especially challenging for many. In this session, we will consider why we struggle to bring sex—the body in pleasure—to life on the page, engage with selected readings to discuss how they succeed in their representations, and do a little writing of our own.

Panel: The Business of Writing: Tips from Agents, Editors, and Publishers

It's easy to get lost in the talk of craft: starting stories, building characters, the big reveal, the poignant line, but what happens after the story is written? Navigating the world of editing, querying, and publishing can be overwhelming. This panel will discuss some tips on how to get your work out into the world and how to understand the fine print.

Branding for Authors 101 with Kateri Kramer

Being an author is HARD. There's a lot to juggle between your craft and the marketing of your work. Branding can make that easier, and it can make you 100% more marketable to publishers. In this crash course, we go over everything you need to know about getting a kickstart on your branding.

3:00PM to 4:00PM

Panel: Building Compelling Characters

Heroes that no one likes and villains you end up rooting for. How do we create dynamic, multi-faceted characters that feel true to our stories? In this panel, writers representing a range of fiction will share tips and tricks for creating and building characters we all want to know and read, and can't put down.

Drafting a House People Will Want to Build: An Introduction to Playwriting with Ashley Naftule

This class offers an introduction to playwriting—both the craft of writing for the stage and the business of it. The first half would focus on how to generate ideas, craft dialogue, and the fine art of underwriting stage directions. The second half will go in-depth on what to do with a script when it's done - how to organize staged readings, how to submit work to other theaters, and how the development process works when a play goes into production. The presentation will include a 10-minute period at the end for a Q&A, and handouts about resources, books, and tricks folks can use to enhance their theatrical writing.

The Middlepersons: What Agents and Editors Do with Kirby Kim and Sarah Bowlin

Get a behind-the-scenes look at what editors and agents do for writers like you. What is a query? Do you need an agent? How to figure out if an agent is the right fit for you. All of these questions and more will be answered with time left over for even more answers at the end.

The Novel Road Map with C.B. Lee

How do you go from idea to draft? Join C.B. Lee, bestselling author of *NOT YOUR SIDEKICK* as you work through key steps - brainstorming to outlining to all the different ways you can take your process and turn an idea into a novel, from first approaches to drafting to creating new worlds to help you create a road map for your story, with key destinations and goals. Learn what you need to

start your story road map and move through emotional beats and turning point scenes, and strategize when encountering detours and exploring new possibilities.

4:15PM to 5:15PM

Divinatory Poetics with tanner menard

Explore the use of divination in poetics. Class will center around selections from The Stephen Jonas Reader with possible examples from associated San Francisco Renaissance poets. The class will explore historical examples of poets who used divination & other techniques such as Channeling to produce poems.

A Peck of the Vampire Squid: Subverting Narrative Tropes of American Capitalism with Justin Noga

The ugly truth about much of American literature is that it's often situated within the confines of our own particularly rapacious breed of capitalism. A single mother struggles with rent, a poor neighborhood drinks lead-poisoned water for a decade without knowing, a landlord flips his eighth house—whether overt or subtle, these story conflicts can often be drawn straight to the flaws (or features) of American capitalism. Why is this the case? How can we avoid these tropes? But also: how can we embrace them and subvert them to gain new perspectives? That is the goal of this generative workshop, achieved through readings, lively discussion, and experimental prompts that, hopefully, divert us from well-worn narrative paths.

Journaling for Writers: An Exercise in Preserving Detail and Processing the Inner Life with Laura Kiechle

This session is an invitation to writers of all genres to consider incorporating the practice of journaling into their lives in order to benefit their craft. The habit of journaling, though it seems from the outside selfish and secretive, has healing powers, sharpens the brain to notice and describe detail throughout the day, and can serve as a window into a writer's own mind. We will discuss various examples ranging from David Sedaris to Virginia Woolf, and provide both modes of entry and tips and tricks for making this practice serve your writing life.

Ekphrastic Expansions: An Indigenous Perspective with Emily Woodworth

Ekphrastic writing is the translation of visual art into poetic form. In this presentation, we will first trouble and broaden this definition. Then, through examples from literature, we'll examine how extra-literary arts have always inspired writing (both poetry and prose) and writers of all backgrounds. We'll explore a variety of ekphrastic sources, from the so-called "high arts" to the ephemera of everyday life, from graffiti glimpsed on a commute to grandma's quilt. Finally, we'll look at specific ways modern-day Indigenous writers use ekphrasis to engage with their inherited culture while exploring brand new territory in their work. The presentation will conclude with a generative ekphrastic prompt, and suggestions for further prompts that writers can engage with later.

5:30PM to 6:30PM

Keynote: The World About You with Linda Hogan

Saturday, February 20, 2021

10:00AM to 11:00AM

Writing About Illness with Christy Lorio

Gain perspective on how to write about illness as you are going through it. As a stage IV cancer patient, Christy will share how she writes about her diagnosis while undergoing treatment. This session will include ways to reduce trauma while writing through it, how to write about uncomfortable experiences, reflecting on life before and after illness, how to decide on which aspects of your illness to focus on and which to avoid (or write later) and more.

Ode to Literature with Alan Dean Foster

Why books are more important than ever in times of crisis, and why science fiction is best of all.

Translation as Multilingualism with Patricia Hartland

When we translate into English, what English are we privileging? What does it mean to prioritize one version of English over another, and what is at stake for our modes of expression? This generative workshop and panel discussion will focus around the potentials for multimodalities and multilingualism in translation, to critically approach translation as inherently political and inherently creative--not limited to translators, I'd like creative writers to consider ways in which translation might become relevant/present in their own writing forms. What can become possible through the creative writers' engagement with translation? And beyond this, what happens when poets (for example) apply translation pedagogies and theories to their own practice?

Immersive Storytelling: Writing for Themed Entertainment with Heather Harris

Have you ever wondered how ideas turn into attractions, stage shows, or fireworks spectacles at your favorite theme parks? This session dives into the world of immersive storytelling and writing for themed entertainment environments. You can expect to leave with a greater understanding of writing based on existing narratives, as well as gain insight on how themed entertainment environments are structured. This session will be a mixture of lecture and creative exercises.

Voice in a Manuscript with Stephanie Winter

In this workshop, associate literary agent Stephanie Winter of P.S. Literary Agency will tell you how to take the skills you already have from academia to publishing in the consumer market. Whether you're writing essays or research papers; whether you want to write memoir or sci-fi, Winter will show you how to fine your skills and talent so they can shine for a broader audience.

11:15AM to 12:15PM

Bewildering Your Fiction with Charlotte Wyatt

In William Cronon's famous essay "The Trouble with Wilderness," he discusses the origins of so-called wild spaces in the United States, that wilderness is "the creation of very particular human cultures at very particular moments in human history." Which begs the question: why do so many revelations in American literature rely on journeys into spaces termed wild or uncivilized? In this generative workshop, we'll look at several examples of fiction that poke holes in the concept of the "nature experience," then use similar techniques in our own work to explore how questioning divisions between human and non-human life can open up new ways of exploring characters, settings, and themes.

Exploring Identity through Place with Cooper Gillespie

Where do you live? What is this place? Who is your community? Reflecting on questions such as these can generate powerful narratives. This workshop aims to connect us to our personal and community histories while examining issues of social and personal justice.

Publishing Contracts: A Review of the Most Important Clauses with Connie J Mableson

Most publishing contracts contain vital terms that affect your copyright rights, when you get your rights back, how you are paid, and what rights you convey. These clauses will be provided in handouts and explained in understandable terms.

Tag Yourself: Pathetic Aesthetic & Writing Image with Jerico Lenk

Tag yourself: I'm a grey Pacific Northwest beach, cardamom and musk, the ache in your jaw from clenching teeth, that Hozier lyric about felling trees and pyres of enemies. The power of popular online "tag yourself" mood boards and prose poem blog posts is IMAGE. We'll sharpen our eye and our pen, looking more closely at how they accomplish this, before jumping into some writing experiments to pull image to the forefront and let the story come to life in the negative space between: curating delicious vocab, innovation and invention, and deconstructing our own processes so we can harness that same storytelling specificity in our own writing.

Panel: Writing Wondrous Worlds

The taste of warm bread, the smell of sea or pine trees, the feel of the ground solid beneath an adventurer's feet. How can we build worlds that our readers can live within for a time and miss when they eventually leave? Join these amazing authors as they discuss how to turn words into worlds.

12:30PM to 1:30PM

Folklore, Legend and Myth in Horror with Cynthia Pelayo

The ghostly hitchhiker. Bloody Mary. A game gone wrong with a Ouija board. What is the power of folklore, legend, and myth in horror? What are some of the recurrent themes that we have seen in horror films and horror literature and why do they continue appearing? What power do these stories hold that we continue to fear them, to be scared by them? Join International Latino Book Award winning author, Cynthia Pelayo, in a discussion on the influence of folklore, legend, and myth in the horror genre.

Panel: Where Do I Start? The Tricks and Traps of Starting Your Story

We all know the first step can be the hardest. Maybe you've had an idea for a while or a character whose story you want to tell but can't seem to capture it when you begin to write. We will discuss some ways to get over that initial hurdle and put pen to paper.

Writing a Continuing Character with Tod Goldberg

How do you create a character that you can use for more than one book? How does a series character differ from a standard character? When you're thinking of a book, should you even think about a second novel with the same character...before you've sold the first? We'll talk about strategies, plans, and the very essence of a strong character that can be sustained for one, two...or even a dozen books.

Transformative Writing with Alana Saab

As writers, we have a tendency to draw from reality to create a world on the page, but what does fictionalizing our experience do to the psyche? How can it help us understand our own "real" world? How about our own mind? With the booming world of autofiction, these questions exist at the intersection of the creative arts, psychology, and self-actualization. Together, we will look at the scientific research which speaks to this topic and delve into writing exercises that may inspire both creativity and personal healing.

Writing from Every Angle: Point of View in Fiction with Alexis David

In contemporary narrative theory, focalization or point of view is often compared to the decisions a director makes when creating a film. Wide or close up shots can tell a story from a first person plural voice (“we”), like a group of teenagers, or from an up close singular, the “God” part of a character’s brain, or from an abiotic perspective, like that of a land feature, a river, or a family of trees. The possibilities are endless! This workshop invites writers to understand point of view by using generative exercises that will allow us to evoke stories from varying perspectives. How can changing the point of view of a story both change and inform your work as a writer?

1:45PM to 2:45PM

So, What's Your Story? With Jaime Parker Stickle

In this two-part workshop, participants will first learn how to craft personal experiences into a compelling and captivating written story. We will then take those words and read them aloud, examining how the written word and the spoken word differ, adding performance as another element of the craft. This workshop will provide tools, insight, and support to assist you, the writer, on how to find the extraordinary in even your most ordinary experiences in order to engage with an audience.

On Diaspora: Writing From the Other with Tamara Al-Qaisi-Coleman

What happens when we use the present moment or past moments in history within our writing? Not just moments of trauma that have affected you, but community sacrifice and how they can influence and inform your writing. We will examine the use of memory, the weird, the magical, the hyperreal, and other tools to decipher the moment and the story that’s there. You will learn how to center a character’s story under the umbrella of a bigger event that’s affecting the world, and how to create these layered narratives.

The Witness of Poetry with Seelai Karzai

In his “The Poetry of Witness,” the Polish poet Czesław Miłosz reflects on the idea of poetry as both a “participant and witness” in “the major transformations of our time” and that poetry “witnesses us.” This hour-long generative workshop will introduce you first to the poetics and poetry of witness. Then, we will discuss the themes of displacement, war trauma, gender, and sexual identities in selected poems and audio clips. Finally, through a generative exercise and a writing prompt, we will write poems that ‘witness us.’

Are We There Yet? The Apocalypse and Your Poems with Sally Ball

The world seems to have gone so haywire that we may feel remote from certain kinds of subjects and driven forward into others: how can we think about 2030 when people are still getting sick or facing complications from COVID or families are separated in detention camps or another city is rocked by an unnecessary and fatal shooting? How can we think about anything that isn't Everything? This is a class about intimacy and particularity in the face of overwhelm. What routes into material do poets have, where do the poetries of contemplation and outcry meet? And why are we doing it at all, writing poems? For whom?

3:00PM to 4:00PM

The Writing Process, the Publishing Process with Patricia Colleen Murphy

The Literary Publishing industry looks wildly different today than it did just a decade ago. Authors who wish to be published really have two full time jobs: the business of being a writer, and the business of promoting the writing. This panel will discuss techniques for perfecting your creative work through a developed writing practice and a writer's workshop, and perfecting the business side of writing through understanding the market and developing sound business practices.

Performative Eco-poetics: Rethinking Place and Subjectivity with Daniel Barton

As feminist and posthumanist scholar Donna Haraway observes about these precarious times called the Anthropocene, in which climate change troubles our old conceptions of what it means to live on this planet, "It matters what stories tells stories." Haraway intends we discover new ways of representing our interrelationships with the environment; however, while this is important, it also matters what stories tell stories because our experience of place is inextricably bound up with the experience of history, whether its personal or cultural. Using examples from diverse poets like Ed Roberson and Harryette Mullen, along with generative exercises, in this session we will explore new ways to evoke the interrelationships between place, history and identity.

You, We, He, She, They, Etc.: The Magic of Moving Beyond the I in Creative Nonfiction with Sarah Beth Childers

When essayists move away from I, disrupting reader expectations with second, third, or plural first, something magical often happens. Writers can implicate themselves as part of a group, obtain crucial emotional distance from a personal or global trauma, explicitly invite readers to more closely identify with diverse bodies and diverse lived experiences, intentionally highlight a writer's pronouns, and find new ways to both bring in imagination and get ever closer to capturing the elusive "truth." In this session, creative nonfiction writer and POV-experimenter Sarah Beth Childers will discuss flash Creative Nonfiction pieces that shift the writer's and audience's relationship to the material with a third-person, second-person, or plural-first-person voice, and she will lead writing exercises that feature these techniques.

4:15PM to 5:15PM

Queer Flash with Sarah Leamy

With a cultural shift towards accepting more nonconformist perspectives, queer flash disrupts the status quo of narrative forms. Our disjointed and unique experiences are best conveyed in fragments, the essence or vignettes that build into stories. Using examples from Maggie Nelson, Cooper Lee Bombadier, Eileen Myles, and others, we'll write in short bursts and switch up ideas, forms, and constraints. We'll also take prompts from headlines, photos, music, poems, short stories, and other flash fiction. With this freedom of form, your work will offer a sense of place, scene, and life in under three pages. These pieces are often less narrative and more evocative. They give us, the readers, a slice or quality of life, a moment of discovery, or a flash of illumination. They are complete and when you finish, the last line stains and lingers.

Point of View: What's the Big Deal? with Hallie Ephron

Point of view—you don't even know what it is until you start trying to write fiction. Then the questions start. Whose story is this? First person or third? Can I use omniscient? What about multiple points of view? How do I handle point-of-view shifts? Does it matter if the viewpoint slip-slides? How does POV relate to narrative voice? This workshop explores answers to all these questions and more.

The Art of the Pitch: How to Craft and Sell Ideas for Articles with Jeffrey Kronenfeld

If you want to get essays, opinion pieces, reviews or other articles published, first you have to write the pitch. What exactly is a pitch? How do you format it? Where can you find calls for submissions and ideas? In this session, we'll answer all these questions, and help participants craft their very own pitch.

Mystery vs. Thriller vs. Suspense: The Unholy Alliance of Narrative Fiction with Shaun Sanders

This presentation delineates suspense, mystery, and thrillers for the writer (something many are not too sure about) and demonstrates how they connect to past, present, and future contexts in narrative construction.

5:30PM to 6:30PM

Keynote: Black Love Matters: Beverly Jenkins and the radicalization of the American Historical Romance