

More About Our Presenters

Joel Arnold is an author and presenter for both youth and adults. His writing credits include dozens of publications in a variety of magazines and anthologies. Joel has been a judge for the annual CONvergence short story contest for nine years as well as a judge for Speculative Literature Foundation's Older Writers Grant. He received a 2010 Minnesota Artist Initiative Grant, a Speculative Literature Foundation's Gulliver Travel Research Grant as well as a Midwest Book Award for Best Young Adult Novel of 2011 for his historical novel "Ox Cart Angel."

Elen Bahr is the author of "Music Smells Like Oranges" and "Baseball Smells Like Cinnamon." Elen teaches children how stories bring imagination to life. She teaches children's writing workshops throughout the Midwest.

Al Batt is a writer, speaker and storyteller. He writes five columns a week for many newspapers and magazines, does weekly radio shows and writes a number of cartoon strips that are nationally syndicated. He is the author of the book, "A Life Gone to the Birds." His mother thinks he's special.

Betsy-Tacy Society board members and volunteers will lead sessions on journal making, basing the presentation on the works of Mankato-native Maud Hart Lovelace and her beloved characters Betsy, Tacy and Tib. Maud Hart Lovelace wrote the Betsy-Tacy series based on experiences from her own childhood growing up in Mankato. She was able to recall the events of her life some 25 years after leaving Mankato by referencing the journals she kept as a youngster. Learn more about the Betsy-Tacy Society at www.betsy-tacysociety.org.

J. Michael Blumer is the author of the young adult fantasy series, "The Secret Books of Gabendoor." He is a long time storyteller who found time to be a writer after encouragement from his children who dubbed him an "alternative life form" for his creative parenting techniques.

Rachel Britz is an author, speaker and cookie baker. She is a compassionate friend, storyteller, and advocate for those in seasons of grief, loss and transition. Rachel is a faith and inspiration blogger, Lulu Tree ambassador, and cookie baker. She is the author of "Good-Bye, Lover" a coming of age historical novel based in Ireland. She lives in Mankato with her husband and three kids.

Tracy Calmes enjoys helping children and adults discover a love for working with clay. For many years, she has instructed wheel throwing and handbuilding classes. Tracy has been participating in youth conferences since 2014. She is amazed by the passion children have for the arts and feels lucky to watch their skills develop and their appreciation for art grow.

Susan Chambers was a practicing attorney for more than 32 years and served as the Blue Earth County Court Referee, a judicial position, for nearly five years. Susan currently has a full alternative dispute practice. She has written poetry throughout that time. Susan's manuscript, "Good Thunder, Blue Earth," was published by RiverPlace Press in March of 2016. She won the National Federation of State Poetry Society's Grand Prize (\$1,000 and \$1,500) on two separate occasions (NFSPS "Encore"). Susan is published in numerous anthologies: County Lines-Loonfeather Press, Moccasin-League of Minnesota Poets, Encore (multiple years), Pasque Petals-South Dakota State Poetry Society, The Best of Northlight Writers Conference and the on-line publication "Write on." She was a winner for three years in a row in the MnLIT poetry competitions and the 2015 and 2016 arts/poetry collaboration competition by The Crossings of Zumbrota. Susan has presented poetry workshops in schools in Minnesota, Texas, Utah and Iowa. She has presented poetry, copyright and publishing contract speeches in Louisiana, Arkansas, Indiana, Iowa, Utah, Florida, Minnesota, South Dakota, Utah and Wisconsin.

Bill Cosgrove (Professor Origami) is a retired Professor Emeritus of English. He has more than 40 years of college teaching experience, including traditional undergraduate and graduate classes as well as classes offered in the evening for community and nontraditional students. Bill has initiated and taught scores of community outreach classes sponsored by the Minnesota Humanities Commission and the North Dakota Humanities Council funded by grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities. He has performed his one-man show "An Evening with Mark Twain: 'The Trouble Begins at Eight'" more than 100 times for audiences ranging from grade schoolers to senior citizens.

Terri DeGezelle is a photographer and author with more than 60 published children's non-fiction titles as well as several photos in national publications. She continually strives to blend her two art forms, writing and photography. Terri is a presenter at Young Writers and Young Artists Conferences around the Upper Midwest. In her perfect world she would be reading, writing and photographing the world around her.

Preston Drum was born and raised in Charlotte, North Carolina. He earned his BFA from Memphis College of Art in 2006 and his MFA from Minneapolis College of Art and Design in 2016. While his past work was focused on producing mixed media paintings, he has recently turned to building interactive installations that explore notions of memory and performance through non-linear storytelling. Preston's installations and performances are often site-specific and collaborative in nature, framing the audience as a participant. Preston's work has been exhibited throughout the Midwest and southern United States at venues such as Jonathan Ferrara Gallery, The Minneapolis Institute of Art and The Walker Art Center. Preston currently works as an educator and studio artist in Minneapolis.

Marcella Eilders is a local long time crafter and has a Bachelor of Science degree in therapeutic recreation from Minnesota State University, Mankato.

Christina Flaughter is a past president of the League of Minnesota Poets and a member of the Southern Minnesota Poets Society. She served as the Youth Competition Chairman, encouraging young poets to publish their works. Christina has published a chapbook and won a college scholarship in the National Federation of State Poetry Societies. She is published in numerous anthologies including Moccasin, League of Minnesota Poets and Encore (multiple years). Christina won the 2002 Edna Meudt Scholarship Award and is author of the manuscript "Intervals in Life." She also writes fiction in addition to poetry.

Ryan Jacobson has written more than 40 books, including picture books, graphic novels, chapter books, ghost stories and choose-your-path books. He has presented at countless schools, organizations and special events throughout Minnesota. For more about the award-winning author, please visit his website at www.AuthorRyanJacobson.com.

Jackie Jenson is a children's book author, freelance writer and owner of By Jackie Jenson, LLC. A business editor and newspaper veteran, she is native of northwestern Minnesota and has been a working writer for the last 20 years. In addition to teaching a variety of young writers' workshops, Jackie writes for various sports, home and trade magazines. Her passion is crafting magically funny children's books designed to inspire the next generation of readers and writers! Jackie's first picture book, "Jon and the Soggy Leaf" is a children's picture book about one boy's struggles to say goodbye to his favorite season, fall. Her latest offering, a middle grade poetry book entitled "Sharp Bites and Other Pesky Poems," lends a bit of comedy to the world of the average middle schooler.

Susan Hamen is a freelance writer, editor and fact checker. She has authored more than 20 biographical/historical event books for middle school and high school readers on subjects including the Wright Brothers, the Lewis & Clark expedition, Pearl Harbor, engineering, World War II and the Cuban Missile Crisis. Additionally, Susan has written books that walk high school students through the process of constructing academic papers. She has served as lead editor on a number of books and managed manuscripts through the entire editorial process with authors, copy editors, content consultants and fact checkers to keep the manuscript moving forward. Susan also works on photo research, image selection and index creation. Her clients have included Capstone Publishing, Red Line Editorial and Lerner Publications.

David Kamish is a published author and illustrator, artist, designer, animator and father. David is the co-founder of Pigs and Pens Publishing. He is the co-author and co-illustrator of the Frank Henry and the Zooband Band series. David has two prior books published by Random House that he created with his son Daniel (then 6 years old). He is working on a number of new books with Frank Henry Kamish as well as books using images drawn by his daughter, Mikaela. His artistic skills include caricatures, conceptual design and creative development. David is co-owner of Kamish Creative, a Minneapolis based art studio.

Frank Henry Kamish is an artist, actor, musician, character and fifth-grader at Lake Harriet Elementary. Frank drew all the line drawings in "Frank Henry and the Zooband Band" and in "Frank Henry and the Zooband Band Go to Washington." He is currently working on another book, "When you are Big and I am Little," with his dad, Paul Kamish, and uncle, Dave Kamish. Frank loves to run, hop, skip and jump. He enjoys acting, drawing, painting, golfing and playing. Some of Frank's early goals are to be on Nickelodeon and to become a rock star. He loves music and singing. In fact, he sings all day long, even when he talks. He also loves playing tag and noshing on truffle popcorn and root beer while watching re-runs of the Rockford Files.

Paul Kamish is an artist, sculptor, author, entrepreneur and Frank's dad. Paul is the co-author of "Frank Henry and the Zooband Band" and co-founder of Pigs and Pens Publishing. He is involved with creating a number of new books as well as the development of products and programs for Pigs and Pens. Paul is also co-owner of Kamish Creative, a Minneapolis based art studio. He lives in Minneapolis with Frank and his wife Victoria.

Cassandra Labairon is an artist and poet from the fantastic state of Minnesota. She loves music, funny movies and vegetables. She makes bold art, writes poetry and writes tongue twister books like "Harold Hickok Had the Hiccups."

Cheryl Minnema is an Ojibwe author and artist. Cheryl was raised in a traditional Ojibwe family of mostly women where beadwork was always on the table. Over the years, she has beaded many pieces of traditional clothing including moccasins, leggings, vests, belts and capes. With an ambition to challenge her beadwork skills, Cheryl began to research certain pieces of beadwork within the Ojibwe culture that are either rarely made today or not made at all. The Bandolier Bag "Gashkibidaagan" quickly caught her eye. These bags are thought to have originated in the 1840's and were worn by Woodland men as objects of prestige. This bag was so valuable that Woodland people could trade one bag to the Dakota for a pony. Through research, Cheryl learned of only three families within Ojibwe Country that still bead bandolier bags. It was then that she became determined to teach herself the art of beading such an extraordinary piece of work. As an Ojibwe woman, Cheryl feels it is her responsibility to continue using and teaching the skills of floral bead working to insure the continuation of what Ojibwe artists are known for. Cheryl is also the author of the children's picture book "Hungry Johnny" and a graduate student at Hamline University, Master of Fine Arts in Writing for Children and Young Adults.

John Olive is a widely produced (the Old Globe, the Guthrie, Steppenwolf, ACT/Seattle, Hartford Stage and many others) and award-winning (Bush Fellowships, McKnight Fellowships, Kennedy Center Award and National Endowment for the Arts) playwright. He has written extensively in the area of Theater for Young Audiences (First Stage/Milwaukee, Seattle Children's, Oregon Children's, the Arden and many others). John has also written screenplays for Amblin' and Disney as well as novels. His newest book, "Tell Me A Story In The Dark," a guide to the creation of magical bedtime stories, was published last March.

Nick Ozment has taught both college courses and youth-conference classes about fantasy and science fiction for more than 10 years. In other words, he has talked about monsters to all ages! Nick has also created quite a few of his own. His poems and stories have appeared in more than 100 publications for both youth and adult readers, and his novel "Knight Terrors" is a humorous fantasy story featuring a dragon. These days, Nick reviews stories and films for the website Black Gate, which gets more than one million visitors a month!

Laura Nelson has been creating and painting since she was a young child. In her early 20s she and her mother started a crafting business called Simpler Times. They paint on "junk" (windows, plates, miscellaneous kitchenware, etc.) for home decor. Laura exhibits at several vendor fairs with mixed media canvas and recently started a business, Design & Wine (Painting & Punch for youth), focusing on painted canvas using acrylic paint and layering methods.

Scott Rolfs is a freelance illustrator that loves drawing character driven art. He is a professional illustrator who has created kid-friendly art for children's books, graphic novel stories and food packaging. He enjoys helping young artists use their imagination to create characters that they never thought they could draw. Visit www.facebook.com/drawfromyourwildside to see some of his and his past students' artwork.

Melanie Schmidt is the youth development program coordinator for Mankato Community Education/Recreation, a speech coach and presenter at Young Writers and Artists Conferences around the state.

Kari Sehloff has taught a variety of students in grades PreK-8 over the past 27 years. She also presents at educator workshops.

Kathleen Sheridan is passionate about sharing the magic of origami through teaching, community events, window displays and gifts for all occasions. She began folding in elementary school and is still amazed by what can be created with paper. As a licensed teacher who taught Spanish for 18 years, she is now following her paper dreams! Visit her at www.origamiandyou.com.

Lisa M. Bolt Simons is a writer who has published three middle grade "choose your path" sports novels, more than 20 nonfiction children's books (with more on the way) and an adult history book. She's also been a teacher for more than 20 years. You can learn more at www.lisamboltsimons.com.

Barb and Art Straub are long-time elementary teachers with strong environmental education backgrounds. They currently are curators of the nature area in the Joseph R. Brown River Center in Henderson. The Straubs take nature programs to all parts of south central Minnesota elementary school classrooms. In addition, they make monthly presentations to nursing homes and civic groups in the LeSueur/Henderson vicinity. When students are unable to come to the JR Brown Center, the specimens from the center visit the students! Barb and Art also write a weekly nature column for the Henderson Independent newspaper.

Bryce Stenzel is a costumed historical interpreter portraying President Abraham Lincoln for more than 25 years, a licensed social studies teacher, author, director of Lincoln's Traveling Troupe Youth Theatre Organization and chair of Mankato's Boy in Blue Civil War Veterans' Memorial committee.

Kate Stuart is a dance and fitness instructor at the Northfield Arts Guild and the Northfield Senior Center. She is a certified dance teacher.

Kathryn Sullivan writes young adult fantasy and science fiction. She lives in Winona and is owned by a cockatoo who graciously allows her to write about other animals, as well as birdlike aliens.

Jacqueline West is the author of the New York Times bestselling middle grade series *The Books of Elsewhere* (Dial/Penguin) and the YA novel, *"Dreamers Often Lie"* (Dial/Penguin, April 2016). Her debut novel, *"The Shadows"* (*The Books of Elsewhere*, Volume One), won the CYBILS award for fantasy/science fiction and was named a Publishers Weekly Flying Start. Jacqueline's books have been selected by the Junior Library Guild, garnered many awards and nominations, and are published in eleven other countries to date. A former English teacher, occasional actress and sometime musician, she lives with her family in Red Wing, Minnesota, surrounded by large piles of books and small piles of dog hair. Visit her at www.jacquelinewest.com.

Paul Warshauer is a professional director, producer, teacher and author of more than 400 original murder mystery performances for all ages.

Gregory R. Wimmer is a graphic designer and mural artist. Early in his career he painted a few wall murals in southwestern Minnesota. Eventually, Greg found his way to Rochester and worked for a small ad agency for 15 years. He has since been a freelance artist and designer for another 19 years. Greg's design business includes designing logos, brochures, displays and book covers. He has also illustrated several books. More recently Gregory has once again been involved in painting wall murals for communities as well as for businesses. This is the work he loves to do and has had the opportunity to do many large projects in Rochester, as well as South Dakota and Denver, Colorado. Greg's work can be viewed at www.gregsgraphicart.com.

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