

Washington FAMILY

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MARCH 2021

CAMP
DIRECTORY

THE PLAY'S THE THING

THE BENEFITS OF
INCLUSION PROGRAMS
IN THEATER

Meet 5 local authors—
and a kid illustrator!

CONCUSSIONS:
YOUR QUESTIONS
ANSWERED

OUR FUTURE LEADERS WILL COME FROM MONTESSORI

If the COVID-19 crisis has taught us anything, it is that we are part of an interdependent, fragile world. It has also taught us the vital importance of scientific thinking. Finally, it has taught us that problems of this magnitude and complexity require adaptive leaders who can work with others to create effective strategies around which all segments of society can coalesce.

Fostering an interdependent mindset, scientific thinking and adaptive leadership skills has been foundational to the Montessori approach to education since Maria Montessori launched her first school in 1907. These outcomes are natural by-products of the way Montessori classrooms function: teachers introduce concepts in a big-picture perspective, allowing students to move about freely and work in small groups, experimenting and engaging in self-directed projects. This structure provides many opportunities for students to practice leading teams and working together to accomplish a goal.



Sometimes parents ask, "How will my child be prepared for the real world?" Our answer is that Montessori principles are the very things our children need to learn to not only be successful in the world, but to improve the world. Montessori principles such as self-motivation, initiative, creative thinking, scientific theory, emotional intelligence, ethics, communication and leadership will be integral if we want to see a world that can better address the next global crisis.

At Oneness-Family Montessori High School, the only Montessori high school in the Washington area, we are building a 21st Century Leadership program founded upon Maria Montessori's vision. We've gathered a team of exceptional thought leaders to create a program that incorporates essential leadership skill sets and will have students joining together for a real-world capstone project in their community each year. The program will launch in September 2020.

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MARCH 2021



Local authors of children's books tell us why they love writing for kids. Pg. 17

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FEEDBACK



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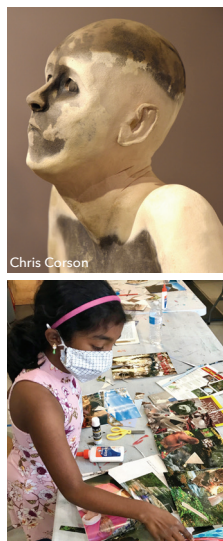
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WashingtonFAMILY.com • 301-230-2222

Craig Burke, Publisher

EDITORIAL

PJ Feinstein, Editor • 301-230-6696 • pfeinstein@midatlanticmedia.com

Michael Vyskocil, Managing Editor • 410-902-2319 • mvykocil@midatlanticmedia.com

Katie Beecher, Staff Writer • 410-902-2328 • kbeecher@midatlanticmedia.com

ADVERTISING

Account Executives

Mary Ramsdale, Kim Coates Schofield, Stacie Shapero, Sylvia Witaschek

BUSINESS

Kris Ries, Accounting Manager • 443-471-5355 • kries@midatlanticmedia.com

CONTRIBUTORS

Amy K. Alapati, Nathania Cantanucci, Elena Epstein, Aliza Friedlander, Shannon Levitt,

Sarah Lyons, Amanda M. Socci, Jennifer Marino Walters

INTERNS

Jenn Attanasio

CREATIVE

Jay Sevidal, Graphic Designer

James Meskunas, Digital Media Manager

MID-ATLANTIC MEDIA

Craig Burke, CEO/Publisher • cburke@midatlanticmedia.com

Jeni Mann Tough, Director of Marketing & Custom Media • jmann@midatlanticmedia.com



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11900 Parklawn Drive, Suite 300 | Rockville, MD 20852 | 301-230-2222 or 703-318-1385 | washingtonfamily.com



PJ Feinstein
Editor
pfeinstein@midatlanticmedia.com

Facebook
@WashingtonFamilyMagazine

Twitter
@FAMILYMagDC

Pinterest
@familymagazine

Instagram
@washingtonfamilymag

Email us
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Take a Look in a Book

In the year since the pandemic began, my 9-year-old son has downloaded 137 Boxcar Children books onto his Kindle—and read them all. He's also finished stacks and stacks of juvenile mystery, fantasy and fiction books borrowed from the library or delivered to our doorstep from Amazon. If he's not playing Minecraft or Roblox with friends, practicing karate or arguing with his younger brother, he's probably reading in his room.

I was just like him when I was a kid. Books were my escape, and I read them quickly, too. My favorite series when I was my son's age was The Baby-Sitters Club by Ann M. Martin, and I can remember how excited I was each time a new book was published. Eventually, I outgrew the series, but my love of reading remained steadfast.

Naturally, I'm excited that March is National Book Month. To celebrate, we're shining a spotlight on five local children's book authors and one very lucky little girl whose artwork is featured in J.K. Rowling's new book, "The Ickabog." Our spring intern, University

of Maryland senior Jenn Attanasio, did a fantastic job interviewing the talented 8-year-old artist as well as writing about art subscription boxes for crafty kids.

Also in this issue: Writer Aliza Friedlander explores the growing popularity of Little Free Libraries and how you can set one up in your own front yard or neighborhood. Our friends at Montgomery County Public Libraries are joining us for the first time to share books about drawing, painting, sewing, filmmaking and other visual arts. And we take a look at the benefits of theater arts programming for children of all abilities.

For almost a year, Washington FAMILY has been producing only digital editions. So it feels a bit like serendipity that we're making our return to print in a month that's all about reading and writing. I hope you enjoy this issue as much as we enjoyed making it.

Stay safe and healthy! ■

Feinstein

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For more product reviews, visit nappaawards.com

By Elena Epstein, director of the National Parenting Product Awards

OWLCRATE JR

A subscription box designed to encourage the love of reading and learning. Includes a newly published hardcover novel; an exclusive letter from the author; a cool activity, game or additional book; plus an assortment of fun goodies related to the theme of the month. \$27.99, ages 8-12, owlcrate.com



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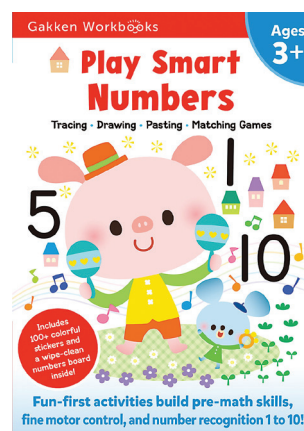


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Lucky Shamrock Cookies

Little leprechauns will love these mint chocolate treats

As green as four-leaf clovers, these mint chocolate chip cookies are the perfect dessert for St. Patrick's Day.

To start the recipe, whisk together flour, baking soda and salt in a large mixing bowl. In a separate bowl, add butter, sugar, eggs, green food coloring and peppermint extract for that crisp mint flavor. Beat with a hand mixture and combine the ingredients in both bowls together.

Add chocolate chips to the mixed cookie batter. Scoop onto a baking sheet and bake at 375°F for 11-14

minutes until the edges of the cookies are light brown. Cool on a wire rack before devouring.

With so much mixing and scooping to be done, kids can help make the cookies, too. One of the best parts of the recipe is creating the eye-catching color. Watch children's smiling little faces as the batter turns from light brown to dark green for a priceless reaction.

Serve these mint chocolate chip cookies with a big glass of milk. ■

Find more recipes, celebration ideas and dessert favorites for every occasion at Culinary.net.



Mint Chocolate Chip Cookies

Servings: 24-32

- 2 ½ cups flour
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 cup butter, softened
- 1 ¼ cups sugar
- 2 eggs
- 30 drops green food coloring
- 1 teaspoon peppermint extract
- 1 package (12 ounces) chocolate chips

Heat oven to 375°F.

In large bowl, mix flour, baking soda and salt until blended. Set aside.

In medium bowl, beat butter and sugar until combined. Add eggs, food coloring and peppermint extract; beat until combined.

Add wet ingredients to dry ingredients; beat until combined. Stir in chocolate chips. Drop spoonfuls of cookie dough onto baking sheet.

Bake 11-14 minutes, or until edges are lightly browned. Cool on wire racks.

NOMINATIONS HAVE STARTED



Nominate your favorite people, places
and things in the DMV!

The winners are chosen by popular vote, so let
your friends know it's time to cast their ballot.
As a business, share with your audience to help
you win the title of "Best" in your category!



**New Hometown
Heroes Category**






Nominations close March 7

Voting for the winners starts on April 1. Winners will be contacted in June, and the results
will be in the July issue of Washington FAMILY magazine.

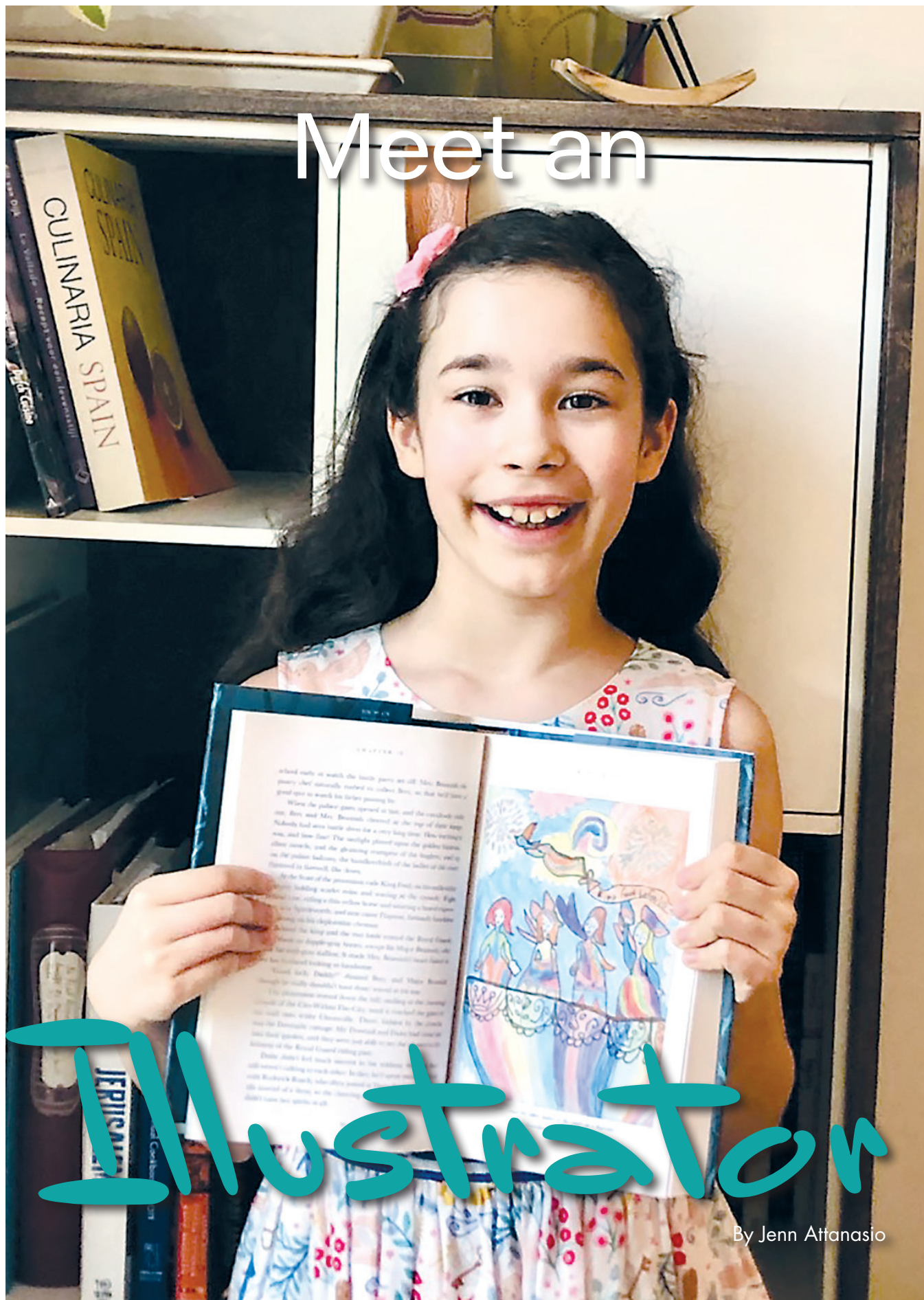
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Meet an



Illustrator

By Jenn Attanasio



D.C. Student's Artwork Published in J.K. Rowling's "The Ickabog"

Annika Pind has always loved drawing and reading. Like many kids her age, she really enjoys the Harry Potter series. So when the 8-year-old learned last spring about an illustration competition for J.K. Rowling's newest work, "The Ickabog," she was eager to enter.

Annika submitted many drawings of scenes and characters from "The Ickabog" after reading chapters of the book online, which Rowling released prior to its publication to give children and their families something fun to read during pandemic-related lockdowns. Rowling herself shared and complimented a few of Annika's drawings on Twitter, calling one "extraordinary."

Then in August Annika learned one of her drawings—four characters in bright costumes in front of a bright blue sky and swirling background—would be published in the North American edition. "I felt very happy and excited," she says.

Annika, who lives in Washington, D.C., is one of 34 children from the U.S. and Canada whose illustrations are featured in the book. The contest, which was open to children ages 7 to 12, received more than 42,000 submissions, according to Scholastic.

In addition to being published, each of the winners got to donate \$650 worth of children's books to any library or school. Annika chose

to give the books to Oyster-Adams Bilingual School, where she is in third grade.

Published in November, "The Ickabog" is Rowling's first children's book in over a decade. It tells the story of Bert and Daisy, two children on an adventure to learn the truth about a mysterious monster, but Annika says that Lady Eslanda, who loves to read, is her favorite character.

This fall the young artist had the opportunity to meet Rowling on a virtual call with other winners from around the world; the British edition of the book features illustrations by children from the U.K., Ireland, Australia, New Zealand and India. Annika, who was one of two Americans on the call, calls the experience "a dream come true."

"I kept asking my mom and dad, 'Was this a dream or was it reality?'" she laughs.

"The Ickabog" isn't the first time Annika's artwork has gotten attention from the public. After the death of Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, she created a pin in her memory and put it up for sale on Etsy. She also designed a "Vote" button before the 2020 election that quickly sold out. Annika and her family donated the proceeds to the nonpartisan group When We All Vote.

Annika, who takes art classes, is now interested in trying watercolor and oil painting. She's part of a book club that meets every week and is performing in a production of "Annie" soon. At school, Annika enjoys studying math and science and says she wants to be a robot scientist when she grows up.

"I want to be very clever and brave like the adults in 'The Ickabog,'" she says. ■



Spotlight on INCLU

Theater programs offer
kids the opportunity to shine.

THEATER has always been a big part of Leah Wolfson's life, so she was excited to find classes for her young son with people who understood his unique challenges.

Wolfson's son is on the autism spectrum, and he's learning important life skills through his theater classes at Imagination Stage in Bethesda, such as cooperation and social interactions. For example, he can make suggestions and see which ideas the teacher and students like and which they don't. In theater class, he can practice navigating tricky situations while having fun.

"It's a really great laboratory for kids with particular needs to try out different things," Wolfson says. "My child benefits and others do too from having their challenges normalized."

Scott Turner, teaching artist and Access and Inclusion Coordinator at Imagination Stage, describes theater as a safe place where children

with disabilities can be comfortable to be themselves and enjoy the process of learning skills without the formality that is expected in an academic setting. He has seen his students increase their confidence by learning to have fun and be silly and practice reciprocal conversational skills in a lighthearted setting.

The key, according to Turner, is working with students individually. Understanding that children have different levels of need, Imagination Stage does not operate from a "one-size-fits-all mentality," says Turner. "We talk to families to develop that secret sauce together."

Turner recalls a unique situation with a student who came to Imagination Stage as an "eloper," someone who runs away from a situation. The starting goal was getting him to stay in the classroom for a small amount of time that increased, just a little, every week. After several years of work, this student was able to enter the building, check in at the table and walk into his class "ready to go," Turner says. "He'd taken so many classes at that point, he was teaching the teachers and making suggestions."

When Lilly Sherman started taking Imagination Stage dance classes at 5 years old, her family knew right away that it was a good fit. Lilly has Down syndrome, and the school provided an extra adult in the classroom—not an assistant. Just that little extra put Lilly and her parents at ease. Now 14, Lilly has taken many more dance and stage make-up classes at Imagination Stage and participated in a month-long theater camp.

Imagination Stage teachers know when to give extra help without hovering,



By Shannon Levitt

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"Performance is transformative, a way to find your voice and find your creativity and strength."

Heller An Shapiro

explains Cathleen Sherman, Lilly's mom. "With each thing she's done, Imagination Stage gave her the right amount of support," she says. "She's really proud of herself at the end of each class."

Plus, Lilly's self-confidence keeps growing. She auditioned for the lead in "Aladdin," and although she didn't get that role, she intends to try again in other Imagination Stage productions.

ArtStream, based in Chevy Chase, also offers classes specifically for kids with intellectual and developmental disabilities who might otherwise get left out of traditional theater programs.

Penny Russell, a teaching artist at ArtStream, says theater programs benefit children with disabilities by helping with social and emotional development. "Working through emotions in character can help a child recognize their own emotions as well as the emotions of others. This leads to greater empathy ... [which] will help the participant throughout their life," she says.

Turner also sees theater classes as a place for new ideas to flourish. Creativity happens naturally when "students use imagination for games and exercises," he says. For instance, they may receive fictional scenarios and be asked to

create their own characters and scenes as part of improvisation. This is where children with disabilities blossom as they use their own vision and draw from their personal preferences and lives to create new things.

Time management, meeting deadlines, flexibility, thinking on one's feet and problem solving are also skills kids learn in a theater class, says Heller An Shapiro, ArtStream's executive director.

"Performance is transformative, a way to find your voice and find your creativity and strength," Shapiro says. More than that, it provides the opportunity for parents and others to see a child on stage. "They see them in a whole new light and recognize talent and confidence they didn't know that student had."

When Cathleen Sherman watched daughter Lilly onstage in "Aladdin," singing and dancing as part of the ensemble in nearly every scene, she was amazed. Lilly's friends came to watch her and couldn't believe what she was capable of.

"That was one of our favorite memories," says Sherman. ■

Additional reporting by Amanda M. Socci.



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Dr. Seuss once said, “Fill your house with books, in all the crannies and all the nooks.” Now, people in the Washington metro area are taking that concept one step further, filling their front yards with Little Free Libraries of books for neighbors, friends and community members to enjoy.

“When I first offered to have the Little Free Library in my yard, I didn’t anticipate it would grow into this little neighborhood destination,” says Janet Jaworski. “I planted flowers, made a rock garden and put some plastic Adirondack chairs around the library. And Stephanie, who came up with the idea for the library, bought a bench for the space. It’s become a little pocket park on the side of my yard.”

The Little Free Library, which is in Jaworski’s yard in the Old Lee Hills neighborhood of Fairfax, Virginia, was the brainchild of Stephanie McCarthy and her four children.

“Every summer my kids and I create a bucket list,” explains McCarthy, who knew Jaworski from the neighborhood. “Two summers ago I suggested we do a lemonade stand to raise money for a Little Free Library to put in our neighborhood. The community was

so generous, and the lemonade stand was a huge success.”

McCarthy and her kids took the money raised and bought a little library, which they painted with colorful, cheery scenes of rainbows, flowers, birds and a tree with a swing. Then, last April, McCarthy teamed up with Jaworski, who offered to host the library in her yard. The McCarthy family dug a huge hole with a postal digger, mounted the library box on a fence post and the neighborhood’s Little Free Library was open for business.

“The timing of this, which we didn’t plan, has been a nice community thing for our neighborhood,” says McCarthy. “The pandemic has been hard for everyone, including kids, parents and schools, and having this library is a nice for our neighborhood. It’s fun to walk by and take a book.”

McCarthy recently registered the library with the Little Free Library organization, the world’s largest book-sharing movement. Founded in 2009, the nonprofit organization “builds community,



Take a BOOK, Leave a BOOK

Little Free Libraries
are popping up in
neighborhoods across
the DMV for readers of all
ages to enjoy.



inspires readers, and expands book access for all through a global network of volunteer-led little libraries.”

Once they receive their Little Free Library plaque, McCarthy and her kids can hang it on their library box to become an official Little Free Library. The plaque comes with a number for them to register on the organization’s website, at which point their library will be added to the map of Little Free Libraries worldwide.

There are no set rules for the Old Lee Hills neighborhood library; anyone can come and take a book or leave a book, and the whole community is respectful of the process.

“When it first went into the ground back in April 2020, people, especially those home with kids, started coming immediately,” recalls Jaworski, who says the library requires very little maintenance. “It was like a little field trip when schools were completely asynchronous. I found myself going to the kitchen window or door to look out and see if anyone was at the library. It brought me a lot of joy to see people from afar and wave to them without being next to them.”

Jaworski, a substitute teacher at Daniels Run Elementary School, wanted to have the library at her home to provide her another way to connect with the kids in her community. And while she says the library is most popular among families with kids ages 10 and younger, there are many others who benefit from the books.

“There is an older couple who live on my street, and when they take their nightly walks they will sit on the bench, take a little rest and grab a book to look through,” says Jaworski. “It’s really been a great distraction for everyone and a great little outing.”

Across the Potomac River in Bethesda, Maryland, Michelle Gins and her family are sharing books with their neighborhood too. They purchased their little library five and a half years ago after seeing the concept on a drive home from the beach.

“We wanted to do it because we thought it would be a great benefit to our community, and we think reading is so important,” says Gins, who has two kids, ages seven and nine. “It’s been really fun to be able to walk out of the house and have a free mini library. My kids love watching people come and take a book or put a book in; they get excited whenever they see people outside.”

Their library also has very few rules; people are allowed to take as many books as they want and leave as many as they want. After five years, the Gins needed to replace the library door, but other than that, there has been no upkeep aside from adding books. Because the Gins opted for a two-story library, the family put a step stool outside so little kids can see inside.

“People in our community are constantly bringing books and will stop by and say how much they love the book box,” Gins says. “Because I’m home more as a result of the coronavirus, I see more people getting books and peering inside. I think because most of us are home and doing more things outdoors, the library is getting more action these days.” ■



HOW TO SET UP A LITTLE FREE LIBRARY:

In honor of Dr. Seuss’ birthday, March is National Reading Month. A Little Free Library is a fun way to increase reading within your community. Interested in setting one up? Here are the steps you need to take:

1. Decide if you want to purchase or build your Little Free Library. Buying one will cost between \$250 and \$350. If you want to build your own, Little Free Library has plans and blueprints on its website.
2. Once you build your library, you can set it up in your front yard or anywhere you want around your neighborhood.
3. Libraries purchased through Little Free Library are automatically registered in their database. If you purchase yours elsewhere, like the McCarthy and Gins families, you can purchase a plaque to register it with the Little Free Library. The plaque costs \$40.
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The *Write* Stuff

Local children's book authors share
their creative processes

By PJ Feinstein

Does your preschooler beg you to read the same book night after night? Do you have an elementary school-age child who finishes books faster than you can replace them? What makes children's books so engaging, and how do authors come up with stories that capture the imaginations of young people?

In honor of National Reading Month, we spoke to five local authors of children's books to learn why they love the genre and what inspires them to create. Their answers may very well inspire you to pursue your secret ambition of writing a book or help you to support your own budding author.

These interviews have been lightly edited and condensed.



ELLEN OH

Ellen Oh is the author of six books and the editor of two anthologies. She is also the cofounder of We Need Diverse Books, a nonprofit organization dedicated to increasing diversity in children's literature. Her newest book, "Finding Junie Kim," which will be published in May, is the most personal one she's ever written. The story was inspired by her mother's real-life experiences as a lost child during the Korean War. Oh lives in Potomac with her husband and three children.

When did you first realize you wanted to be an author?

When I was pregnant with my first child, I remember going to bookstores in order to start a library of children's books. And I couldn't help but notice that there were not a lot of books with Asian faces on the covers. It was not that different from when I was young. Then The Washington Post named Genghis Khan the "Man of the Millennium," and I was so shocked to see an Asian on the cover that I started reading all these biographies about him. I learned more ancient Korean and Asian history in the biography about a Mongol than in all my years of schooling. It was so fascinating, and I thought, why didn't we know any of this history? Why weren't there books about this? At that moment I decided that if I couldn't find the books I wanted to buy for my kids, I would write them.

Where do you get your ideas for your books?

My new book came from my family history, but my other books have come from dreams, being stuck in traffic and having a moment of road rage, researching random bits of history and trivia, etc.

What do you love about writing children's books?

It is hearing from my kid readers that I love the most. Getting their letters, emails, artwork, talking to them in person. They are always a joy and truly why I adore writing for children and young adults.

What does your writing process look like?

Process? What process?! I do have somewhat of a process in that I have to have a fully fleshed out outline with a conclusion before I can start writing. But once I have that done there is no process; I just write whenever I can until the story is done.

What advice do you have for kids who want to improve their own writing?

The most important tip of course is the one we hear the most: Read. A lot. But I also think that what makes a writer is taking notes. Whether from observations during the course of a day or through research, take notes of things that you find interesting or weird or unbelievable. I find that taking notes—jotting down ideas, facts, news items,



research—all these things help stimulate the desire to write.

KATIE WEAVER

Katie Weaver's first book as both author and illustrator, "When the Sky Roars," available in May, is a rhyming story about a little boy determined to conquer his fear of thunderstorms. She also illustrated "Oodles and Oodles of Noodle Noodles" by Cindy Nimmi Grant. Weaver lives in Centreville with her husband, four sons and newborn daughter.

When did you first realize you wanted to be an author?

I've always been interested in children's picture book artwork and thought it would be a lot of fun to do. As a stay-at-home mom, in the evenings after the kids were in bed, I learned how to use Photoshop and a digital Wacom tablet to hand-draw digital art. Knowing that it would be difficult for an author to place their trust in a new illustrator, I decided I would write my own book, illustrate it and publish it for my portfolio. So I wrote a rhyming ABC book, which I later tossed out because it was terrible! Before I could get the next story flushed out, Cindy Grant found me and hired me to illustrate her book. I loved working on her book so much that I really wanted to create my own book, and I knew that was meant to be my path forward. By the time I finished her book, I had a notebook full of ideas for children's books.

Where do you get your ideas for your books?

Every night before bed, my children ask me to tell them a bedtime story. And every night I make up new stories—crazy, outlandish stories. If my story isn't to my two-year-old's liking, he will make me start over, so they have to be really creative! I get most of

my story ideas from my children by incorporating our own real-life adventures and the things they're most interested in.

What do you love about writing children's books?

I think the part I have enjoyed the most is challenging myself to become a better writer, better rhymers and better illustrator in order to effectively tell a story to children in a way that is captivating and entertaining. I haven't gotten to the part where I get to see my book being enjoyed by the children I created it for, though. I suspect that will be my new favorite part once I get there.

What does your writing process look like?

I prefer to write in rhyme because I find well-written, lyrical stories to be the most fun to read. What I've realized about myself is that some days I can rhyme and it comes naturally to me and some days I simply can't. (Similarly, I have days I can't draw a stick figure, and other days artwork just flows out of me!) So, when I am able to get into the rhythm of writing in rhyme, I have to get out as much as I can.

What advice do you have for kids who want to improve their own writing?

My 8-year-old has shown an interest in writing and is actually excellent at creatively telling a story. We've encouraged him to read ... a lot. The more he's read and been exposed to, the better writer he's become. We also encourage him to read a lot of different types of books—different





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genres and styles. I think the most exciting part of becoming a writer is learning what kind of writer you are and what your voice sounds like. Practice, practice. And explore learning new words to express yourself.

JONATHAN ROTH

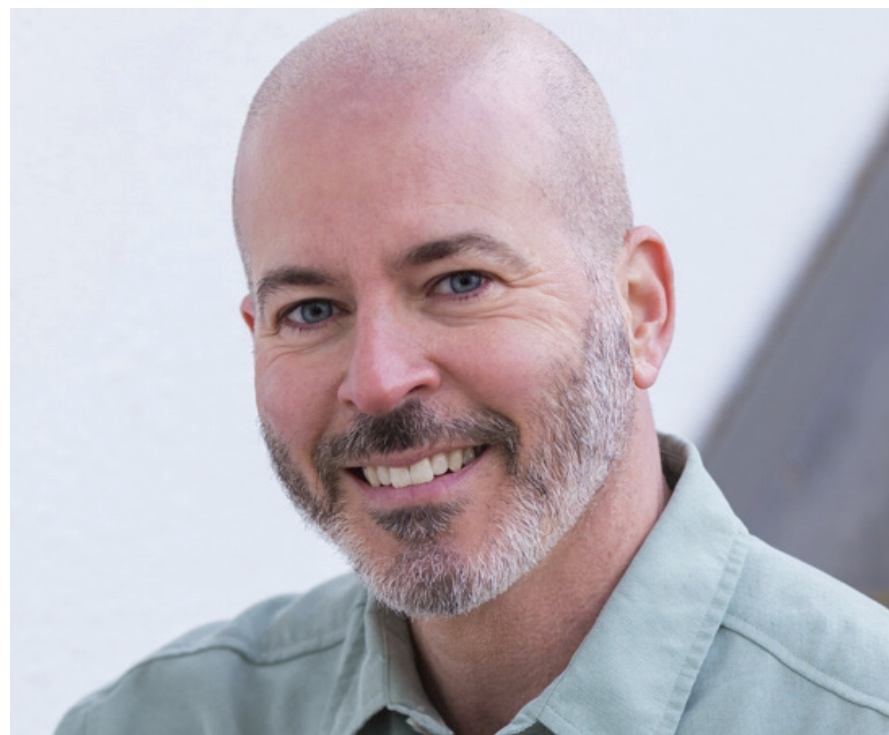
Jonathan Roth is the author and illustrator of "Beep and Bob," a four-book series about space-school attendee Bob and his alien bestie, Beep. His new graphic novel series, "Rover and Speck," will be published in 2022. Roth, a Montgomery County Public Schools art teacher, and his wife live in Rockville.

When did you first realize you wanted to be an author?

I still have a notebook from when I was 10 that I filled with a 60-page story called "Duel in Dimensions." It stars an obscure character named "Batman" who journeyed to a place called "Wonderland." Nowadays we would call it a fan-fiction mash-up, but back then it was my first attempt at a novel.

Where do you get your ideas for your books?

All over! And I mean that literally. I cycle, walk or hike daily, not just for the air and



exercise, but because inspiration comes best to me when I'm moving. Activity is good for the mind! (Note: I learned early on that carrying a small notebook works better than trying to balance an entire desk on my bicycle.)

What do you love about writing children's books?

I love that I can be funny and silly and play with fantastical ideas. Kids are very open and have great imaginations, and when I create for them I can kind of be a kid too!



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When did you first realize you wanted to be an author?

I never really considered it as a possibility when I was growing up, although I've loved writing since I was pretty young. It wasn't until I was in my late twenties and a friend asked me to work with her on some books for Scholastic Book Clubs that I realized I could write for kids—and that I could actually be published. And that made me start thinking about the types of stories I didn't have when I was growing up, that I wanted to see in the world. I had written a number of books for Scholastic for different series, and still couldn't call myself an "author" for many years.

Where do you get your ideas for your books?

Most of my ideas originate from something that has happened to me or someone in my family,

something fascinating I have heard about or read and from conversations that I have

with others. I often have a fleeting thought of "that could be a book," and if it stays with me, I start to see if it shapes into something that I can develop into a story.

What do you love about writing children's books?

I love so many things about it! But my favorite is getting to connect with readers of my books and hearing feedback from kids and adults who share what my books have meant to them or have impacted them in some way. It's always amazing to have people pick out details or make connections that allow them to feel seen or understood. And it's incredible to meet young readers who are so thoughtful and smart and to be able to engage with them in schools, at events and online.

What does your writing process look like?

It's honestly kind of agonizing! When working on a novel, once I feel like an idea has merit, I'll flesh it out into a synopsis and then work on a loose outline. And then I start to write from the outline, adding things and changing details along the

And though writing may seem solitary, one of my greatest joys is being part of the larger kidlit community and bonding with other authors, illustrators, librarians, educators and children's book fans. The best group of folks you'll meet!

What does your writing process look like?

Even with graphic novels, I always start with the words. I have the most fun with dialogue. I rework beginnings many, many times, because I find that without a solid foundation, my stories start to crumble. But then I rework the rest of it too. Writing is mostly re-writing!

What advice do you have for kids who want to improve their own writing?

The same advice I have for pursuers of all things: practice! Practice more! Take a break. Then keep on practicing! Sorry, kids, there are no short cuts for true improvement. Also read. Read a lot, whatever you like! Books teach you how they're written if you pay attention. Hang in there, you can do it!

HENAKHAN

Hena Khan is the author of 14 titles, including picture books, novels and choose-your-adventure stories. She's also written one eight-page comic for DC Comics. Her newest middle grade novel, "Amina's Song," a sequel to "Amina's Voice," is out March 9. Khan lives in Rockville with her husband and two sons.



way. As I write, I tend to go back and edit myself pretty heavily. So it's a slow two steps forward and one step back. I have a lot of self-doubt as I draft, and I get very distracted and antsy. But once a draft is complete, I enjoy going back over it and tweaking and polishing and making sure it flows the way I want.

What advice do you have for kids who want to improve their own writing?

I think the best way to improve your writing is to actually do it. That means making sure you write as often as you can, and to get into the habit of letting other read your work and critique it. A writing group, club, or critique partner helps to keep you on track and get you used to getting feedback. Also, read as much as you can! It's the easiest way to become a better writer without even realizing it's happening.

TERRY CATASÚS JENNINGS

Terry Catasús Jennings is the author of a new chapter book series, *Definitely Dominguita*, about a Cuban American girl whose adventures are inspired by the classics she reads with her abuela. The first two titles, "The Knight of the Cape" and "Captain Dom's Treasure," have just been published by Simon and Schuster. She has also written six children's books about science and history. Jennings and her husband live in Reston.

When did you first realize you wanted to be an author?

I have always known that I wanted to be a writer, because there was nothing that I liked better than reading. I didn't pursue it right away, though. It's hard to even think of being an author when you are an immigrant. At least it was for me. My parents wanted me to have a good job. A dependable job. Because of that and for several other reasons, I never considered a writing career. But stories were always rolling around in my head. When my youngest child was in high school and I didn't really need to be volunteering any more, I decided to see if I could actually write. The first essay I ever submitted was published in the Style section of The Washington Post, so that was very encouraging. From then on, I just kept trying to do better and do more.

Where do you get your ideas for your books?

For the science books, if I see something that interests me or that hasn't been covered well for children, I try to find a story to explain it. Many of the ideas that I am working on right now came from the immigrant experience. Trying to show an immigrant or child of



immigrant character who has an adventure or encounters a problem that has to be solved. The character is no different than her peers, and the adventures are those that anyone could have. The stories just take place in a household where Spanish words are used and Cuban food is revered.

What do you love about writing children's books?

I love children, and I love writing something that will help them laugh and maybe bring them to the understanding that we are all the same: all human beings with the same hopes and dreams. But what I really love about writing children's books is that I get to go into their schools and their classrooms and talk to them. And that's the biggest benefit of all. Besides, when else do you get to give your character a chocolate-covered toilet plunger for a weapon?

What does your writing process look like?

Once I get an idea, I start thinking about

it, writing down notes on my phone and the first paragraph in my head. I do a lot of writing on my phone at the beginning. It helps me not to forget good things. I try to get a couple of chapters down so I get to know the character and maybe find out if the problem works. After that, I write a loose outline. Something that lets me know where I want to go. Fairly detailed. Sometimes I run the idea by my agent to see what she thinks. And from there I write my story.

What tips do you have for kids who want to improve their own writing?

The best recommendation to being a good writer is to read. Read, read, read. Understand what makes the books that you like likeable. Then write. The more you write, the better you will write. I am the kind of writer that needs to know where the story is going, so I definitely recommend loose outlines. Don't ever think your story is bad. But don't ever think your story can't be better. Not until you're really, really sure. ■



With each new milestone that our children reach comes the need for information to guide them (and us) through this stage. This is particularly true when our children are old enough to attend summer camp. How do we know which camp is right for them? In an education-centered community like ours, there can be a lot of options—where do we even get started? Right here, actually, with these listings. Read about these camps, what they offer and the ages they serve. Then visit their websites to learn more. On our website, WashingtonFAMILY.com, you can find even more listings to help you in your search. Be sure to check back on our website and in our magazine in upcoming months for more stories and helpful tips.

Note: The camps on the following pages were still planning to be open as we went to press; however, that may change as we get closer to summer. Please be sure to contact the camps directly for up-to-date information about their operating status.

Good luck! Here's to a great summer.

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Arts & Crafts

MADE EASY

By Jenn Attanasio



7 Subscription Boxes to Boost Kids' Curiosity and Creativity

After a year of painting, building and making at home, even the most artistic kids may be feeling less than inspired right now. Art subscription boxes, which include everything little artists need to complete a project, are a fun and easy way to jumpstart their curiosity and creativity. Plus, what kid doesn't love receiving mail?

Whether you have a preschooler still practicing fine motor skills or a tween interested in STEAM, there are monthly kits available for all ages and interests. Here are seven of our favorite art subscription boxes for nurturing creative minds.

» KIDARTLIT

Each month your little reader will receive a picture book with a related craft that will help them connect with the book and its message. For example, a book about the Grand Canyon was accompanied by a fun nature hunt craft. Ideal for siblings, this box contains enough supplies for two projects. \$33.95 or \$49.95/month, ages 3-8, kidartlit.com

» WE CRAFT BOX

Designed to be shared between two children, each themed box is filled with all the material they'll need to create several art projects based on a story. March's Gnome Butterfly Garden Box, for example, comes with supplies to make DIY sock gnomes, decorative mesh butterflies, paper lanterns, posters and more. \$29.99/month, ages 3-9, wecraftbox.com

» KIWICO KIWI CRATE

This monthly box combines art and science for a STEAM-based learning experience, such as building a paint pendulum, a mini paintball machine and even a DIY kite. Each kit also includes a magazine and access to online activities. \$16.95/month, ages 5-8, kiwico.com

» KID MADE MODERN MONTHLY CRAFT CLUB

A collaboration between Kid Made Modern and art instructor Meri Cherry, this subscription box allows kids to try new materials and techniques. The kit provides instructions on the given craft—one past box included a diorama house—but there'll be many supplies left over for little ones to explore their own creative ideas. \$34.99/month, ages 6+, kidmademodern.com

» ANNIE'S CREATIVE GIRLS CLUB

Scrapbooking, sand art and friendship bracelets are just a few of the projects this subscription offers. Members receive two boxes every month, but if a child is looking for more crafting fun, the site also sells past projects as individual kits. \$19.98/month, ages 7-12, annieskitclubs.com

» ANNIE'S YOUNG WOODWORKERS KIT CLUB

Curious builders learn essential woodworking skills like hammering, sanding and measuring as they make assorted crafts and toys like airplanes and turbo racers. Each box includes kid-friendly tools and instructions as well as pre-cut wood pieces with pre-drilled nail holes. \$19.99/month, ages 7-12, annieskitclubs.com

» GUIDE DOTS

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The MISUNDERSTOOD Child

Sensory Processing Disorder 101

A typical morning in my home begins with my 4-year-old daughter complaining: “My clothes hurt me! They are too loose! I need new clothes!” After much time, many tears, lots of tight hugs and a good dose of frustration, she’s finally content to wear the same dress she wore the day before and many days before that. The process of getting dressed, which seems simple to most, is the biggest challenge my child faces on a daily basis.



BY SARAH LYONS

This situation is one example of what living with a child with sensory processing disorder is like. “Imagine being in an environment where the noise around you is amplified to the highest level, the temperature is the coldest or hottest you have ever felt, you are wearing the most uncomfortable clothing that has ever touched your skin and you are nauseated by a repulsive smell. All at the same time. What would be your response? Most would quickly escape the situation,” says Dana Lyons, an occupational therapist. “These are examples of what a child with sensory processing disorder feels, but they cannot escape the symptoms. As a result, these children may respond with anger, frustration, or ultimately avoid situations which may cause a breakdown.”

Sensory processing is a term that refers to the way the nervous system receives messages from the senses and turns them into appropriate motor and behavioral responses. “Everyone processes sensory input, but some people process it differently than others,” says occupational therapist Carrie Grosdidier. “When the processing of this information interferes with our ability to function on a day to day basis is when we have a problem.”

Sensory processing disorder (SPD) can be hard to

diagnose because it affects each person differently. “Any of the five senses can be affected by being hypersensitive (overstimulated) or by being hyposensitive (under simulated),” says Lyons.

A child who is hypersensitive, or sensory avoiding, may:

- Feel overwhelmed by loud, crowded environments
- Dislike being touched or hugged
- React strongly to certain smells
- Find buttons, tags or certain fabrics unbearable

A child who is hyposensitive, or sensory seeking, may:

- Constantly need to touch people or textures
- Have a high tolerance for pain
- Fidget and seem unable to sit still
- Be clumsy or fall often

Children can have one or many of these characteristics as well as some from each category and in varying degrees of severity.

“Unfortunately, these responses are viewed by others as children behaving badly when in fact they are not,”



Lyons says. “The most important thing to understand is that children with SPD are not ‘bad’ children. They are simply trying to survive in their own skin, in a world with heightened or lowered sensations. Typical punishment for ‘bad’ behavior is not optimal and can cause regression rather than progression.”

Stephanie Beaudry, a mom of two children with SPD, says, “When trying to explain my son’s hyperactivity or clumsiness is due to SPD, we get told, ‘Oh it’s just his age.’ But it’s actually because his nervous system doesn’t respond as it should in certain situations.” Sensory seekers may fall a lot or crash into things because they need that physical contact, or proprioceptive input.

SPD can create challenges for families, but there is treatment available for kids who struggle with it. “We had a fabulous occupational therapist who helped my son. She gave us tools and gave him permission to figure out what worked for him and what didn’t,” says Joy Alsup, a mom of four. “He has a high need for tight, long hugs and we

understand that this is what helps him. It’s a huge priority for us.”

With the help of an occupational therapist, kids with SPD can find ways to balance their sensory input, such as swinging, wearing a weighted vest, pushing or pulling heavy objects across the room or jumping on a trampoline. Many of these activities are fun for the child and can be integrated into playtime at home.

“The therapy helps more than just their physical strengths but also their emotional strengths,” says Beaudry. “When my daughter first started therapy, she was extremely shy. She wouldn’t even talk to children her own age when they approached her. Now, four months later, she is a social butterfly.”

An occupational therapist’s main goal is to educate parents about SPD and give families tools they can use to help the child progress at home. Although families dealing with SPD may have struggles with things other people see as “normal” activities, many parents find hope in their child’s progress and support from other

parents dealing with these issues.

“One thing I have learned after experiencing our journey is that I am not alone. There are so many others that understand what I am going through and we are there to support each other in many ways,” says Beaudry.

As a mother of a child with SPD, I would encourage others to educate themselves about sensory processing and begin to approach the situation from the child’s perspective. Parents can then begin to use the tools needed to adjust their environment and celebrate as their child meets their goals and overcome challenges.

“When my son was diagnosed, I felt like he would be limited in his future. He has worked through many of his issues and I see his SPD as part of what makes him unique. I wouldn’t have him any other way,” Alsup says.

It takes a lot of patience, persistence, and love to parent a child with SPD, but when that child feels acceptance and supported, they can work through their struggles, and thrive in school and at home. ■



Your Concussion Questions **ANSWERED**

BY JENNIFER MARINO WALTERS

When

parents think about sports-related concussions, they often think of football. But in reality, other popular youth sports—soccer, lacrosse, volleyball and even baseball—can put kids at risk for brain injury. And spring is the season that many of these sports start back up.

As parents prepare to send their kids back onto the field, Dr. Melissa Womble, neuropsychologist and director of the Inova Sports Medicine Concussion Program in Fairfax, answers their biggest questions about youth concussions and how to prevent them.



**March is
Brain Injury
Awareness Month.
Learn how to
prevent and spot a
concussion and
help your child
heal from one.**

What is a concussion?

A concussion is a brain injury that can occur when someone receives a blow to the head or a hit to the body that causes the brain to bounce around in the skull. This can create chemical changes in the brain or stretch and damage brain cells, causing a temporary disruption in normal brain function.

According to a 2016 study published in “Pediatrics,” the official journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics, 1.1 to 1.9 million sports- and recreation-related concussions occur each year in children age 18 and younger.

What are the signs and symptoms of concussion?

The most common immediate symptoms of concussion are headaches, nausea, confusion, visual changes and dizziness.

“Dizziness is one of the symptoms that can lead to a prolonged recovery,” says Womble. “So if your child is reporting dizziness, he or she needs to be evaluated.”

But symptoms won’t always show up right away. “Generally, symptoms can present up to 72 hours after injury,” Dr. Womble says.

Where should I take my child to be evaluated?

If your child has an excruciating headache with nausea and vomiting, is acting very confused or differently than normal, or has significant emotional changes, take her to the emergency room. They’ll likely need a CT scan to rule out a more significant injury like a brain bleed, which is rare.

Otherwise, Womble recommends following up with your child’s pediatrician or a concussion clinic three days after the injury.

How are concussions treated?

Most concussions can be managed at home. On the first night, Womble says to let your child get a full night’s sleep. “It’s an old wives’ tale to wake your child up every hour. Kids need good sleep after an injury,” she says.

After the initial 24 hours, she says, “We want to start getting kids back on their normal schedule with breaks and certain restrictions.” It is especially important for kids recovering from a concussion to stay hydrated and to eat well.

Some children, however, may need additional therapy. Kids with a lot of dizziness may require vestibular therapy, for example, while those with vision changes might need vision therapy.

How long will it take my child to recover?

“General recovery from concussion is about one to four weeks,” says Womble. “But there can be cases that are more prolonged. A lot of

it has to do with genetic risk factors.”

For example, children with a history of migraines, anxiety or depression can take longer to recover from concussion.

How will the doctor know when my child is recovered and can return to play?

Your doctor will do a battery of tests to assess your child’s verbal and visual memory, processing speed and reaction time, and to make sure their vestibular and ocular motor systems appear normal. The doctor will also want to see that your child is asymptomatic while resting and during physical and cognitive activity. Once your child meets those milestones, they’ll likely be cleared to return to their sport.

Can concussions cause long-term effects?

Though there’s still a lot of research to be done on that, concussions are considered treatable, and multiple concussions don’t necessarily put kids at risk for long-term effects. What can put them at risk, though, is not properly managing and treating the concussion.

“A lot of parents push to get kids back in the game sooner than they need to,” Womble says. “Then the kid can be injured again really quickly.”

How can parents help prevent concussion in kids?

Concussion prevention goes beyond making sure your child wears protective equipment such as helmets and face shields.

“One of the most important ways to keep kids safe is to make sure they have good form and technique,” says Womble. “The coaches should make sure kids are working on those areas, but parents should also help make sure their kids are in good physical shape to be able to engage in sports the right way.”

This includes making sure kids stay well hydrated and eat healthfully and regularly, especially when routines change, such as during travel tournaments.

Despite the concussion risk, Dr. Womble says it’s important not to prevent your child from playing sports. The physical, cognitive and social benefits are far too great. But knowing the signs and symptoms of concussion—and what to do if your child gets one—will help them fully recover and get back in the game. ■

16 Great Reads for Artsy Kids

March is Youth Art Month,
and this year's theme is
"Art Connects Us."

Children and teens can further
connect to art through literature,
so here's a selection of fiction
and non-fiction books celebrating
the visual arts for young people.

BY AMY K. ALAPATI,
HEAD OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES AT THE DAMASCUS BRANCH
OF MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARIES

PICTURE BOOKS

"Kahlo's Koalas: 1, 2, 3, Count Art with Me"

Illustrated by Grace Helmer,
edited by Jocelyn Norbury,
designed by Jack Clucas

What better way to introduce math than through fine art? Joyous animals leap off these board pages in homage to various styles of renowned artists. From Monet to Kahlo to Lichtenstein, the youngest children will delight in the details while learning to count.

"The Pencil"

Written by Susan Avingaq and
Maren Vsetula,
illustrated by Charlene Chua

Living in an igloo means being thrifty with resources, so three children are astonished when their father lets them use their only pencil to draw pictures on their only sheet of paper. What will their mother say when she returns? This celebration of creativity draws on the author's life in Nunavut, Canada.

"Drawn Together"

By Minh Lê, illustrated by Dan Santat

A boring day turns magical when a boy and his grandfather discover a shared love of drawing. They might not speak the same language, but sometimes people don't need words to communicate. Elaborate, richly

textured drawings in two styles elevate the layered story.

"The Chalk Giraffe"

Written by Kirsty Paxton,
illustrated by Megan Lötter

When a chalked giraffe comes to life and demands an increasingly elaborate chalk world, the exasperated artist rubs him out with her shoe. The next day, filled with regret, she uses her empathy (and her chalk!) to fix her mistake. Vibrant colors make the lush world pop off the black pages.

EARLY ELEMENTARY

"My Life in Pictures"

Written and illustrated by Deborah Zemke

Bea Garcia's best friend moved to Australia, and a monster moved in next door. Bea copes with the rambunctious bully by drawing in her journal, until a teacher recognizes and helps resolve the situation in an unexpected way. This early chapter book is a charming blend of text and doodles. First in a series.

"Radiant Child:"

**The Story of Young Artist
Jean-Michel Basquiat"**

Written and illustrated by Javaka Steptoe

Once there was a boy who couldn't stop making art. Sometimes it was sloppy or weird, but it was always beautiful and full of life. Lyrical text





and evocative illustrations in this Caldecott winner recount the struggles and triumphs of a visionary street artist who rocketed to mainstream fame long before Banksy.

"Fancy Party Gowns: The Story of Fashion Designer Ann Cole Lowe"

By Deborah Blumenthal,
illustrated by Laura Freeman

Ann Cole did not let anything stand in the way of her dream; she persevered to become the first African American woman designer of couture clothing. Ann was dedicated to creating unique dresses, prized by movie stars and presidents' wives. Brilliant illustrations showcase her stunning fashions in this poetic biography.

"If Picasso Painted a Snowman"

Written by Amy Newbold,
illustrated by Greg Newbold

A cuddly hamster invites young readers to reimagine what a snowman could look like in the unique styles of 17 diverse artists, including Jacob Lawrence, Pablita Velarde and Sonia Delaunay. Readers are then encouraged to create their own. Artists' biographies are included.

MIDDLE GRADE

"Inkling"

Written by Kenneth Oppel,
illustrated by Sydney Smith

Ethan Rylance's family is unraveling—until the day an inkblot seeps out of his father's sketchbook and into their lives. Inkling feeds on the words and pictures printed in books and on Mr. Rylance's sad memories. But can this boisterous, unpredictable creature help a grieving family to heal?

"Nightlights"

Written and illustrated by Lorena Alvarez

A mysterious new classmate admires Sandy's fantastical dream drawings, but events twist when the girl morphs into a nightmarish figure. Can Sandy save herself with ... math? This slightly spooky graphic novel with its sumptuous colors will appeal to imaginative readers.

"New Kid"

Written and illustrated by Jerry Craft

Jordan is the new kid at a school he didn't even want to attend. He dreamed of perfecting his cartoons at art school, but his parents chose an academically-oriented school where he's one of just a few kids of color. This Coretta Scott King- and Newbery Medal-winning

graphic novel will appeal to anyone who's ever felt like an outsider.

"Clay Lab for Kids: 52 Projects to Make, Model and Mold with Air-Dry, Polymer, and Homemade Clay"

Written by Cassie Stephens

These labs with photo instructions focus on the process, not the product, and include projects such as decorative light-up lightning bugs, practical clocks and containers, quirky bobbleheads and marionettes, and more. Includes suggestions for materials, tools, techniques and recipes.

YOUNG ADULT

"From Twinkle with Love"

by Sandhya Menon

Indian-American teen Twinkle Mehra wants to be a filmmaker, but when she finally gets the chance to make a movie, her happily-ever-after isn't quite what she expected. Told through letters from Mehra to her female Hollywood director role models, this light rom-com is sure to entertain.

"Shadowshaper"

Written by Daniel José Older

It starts when a dead man's portrait weeps and fades. Enlisting the aid of a new friend, Brooklyn teen Sierra Santiago uses her artistic talent and Afro-Boricua heritage to challenge the evil forces stealing the Shadowshapers' power. This urban fantasy is a supernatural page-turner. Book 1 of the Shadowshaper Cypher series.

"In Waves"

Written and illustrated by AJ DUNGO

Grief is like the ocean; it comes in waves, sometimes gentle, sometimes crashing. An artist recounts the glorious life and shattering loss of the extraordinary girl he loved in this graphic novel that is part memoir, part surfing history. Be inspired by Kristen's life, lived to the fullest.

"Steal Like an Artist: 10 Things Nobody Told You About Being Creative"

Written by Austin Kleon

Despite the title, this tiny volume does not encourage forgery or plagiarism. Rather, it's packed with sage advice on how to honor, study and transform inspiring ideas from others to create your own style. A useful tool for creatives of all kinds, including artists, writers and performers. ■

Becoming a Stay-at-Home Family

How the pandemic helped one mom appreciate low-key days

BY NATHANIA CANTANUCCI

As a first-time stay-at-home mom, every day was a new adventure in San Francisco. My son and I could go weeks without repeating an outing. We went to museums, aquariums, library story times, playgroup meet-ups, gym classes, the Zoo ... The list goes on and on.

I stayed up to date on all the latest activities, new playgrounds and kids play space openings. We tried them all and had a blast. I prided myself on keeping us busy, and I delighted in watching him explore, learn and grow up in such a vibrant city with so much to do and see. The idea of staying home and missing an adventure was unheard of.

We moved across the country to the D.C. area after my second son was born. I couldn't wait to have daily adventures with him while my older son was in elementary school, taking advantage of all the wonderful museums and family-friendly activities the nation's capital has to offer. Just as he turned two, I finally felt settled into our new home and was ready to venture out more. Then the pandemic hit.

Staying home with my two boys day after day was a foreign concept to me. That first week in March was the longest week of my life. Each day dragged on and on. I couldn't imagine how we would keep busy at home for hours on end.

On the first day of the lockdown, we made blueberry muffins together. I felt so accomplished and proud, as I am not someone who usually bakes. I looked at the clock when we were done: 10 a.m. The days seemed to go on like this, with lots of glances at the clock, wondering how we would get through the next hour.

And yet, over the next few weeks, we somehow found a rhythm and routine. While we did some more baking and other planned activities, I mostly allowed the boys to carve out the day in their own ways. I took my cues from them. When they needed fresh air, we'd walk around our neighborhood or have trunk picnics at a nearby library parking lot. As the weather got nicer, we discovered some local trails, alternating between them every few days.



Nathania Cantanucci of Falls Church and her sons, Joseph, 8, and Calvin, 3.

Almost a year into our new lifestyle, it often crosses my mind that my second son's daily experiences are so completely different than my first's. Instead of exploring museums, the highlight of our day is often eating sandwiches in the back of my SUV. However, the smile on his face as he chases his older brother around the parking lot in between bites of PB and J

tells me all I need to know. My younger son is just as happy, smart and engaged in life as my older son was at that age.

Next year, he will be starting preschool. I think I will send him four days a week, leaving one day open to explore D.C. as I had originally hoped. On second thought, maybe we will use that time to stay home and have sandwich picnics in parking lots. ■

A close-up photograph of a dog's face, likely a Weimaraner, with brown and white fur and striking light-colored eyes. The dog is looking slightly to the left.

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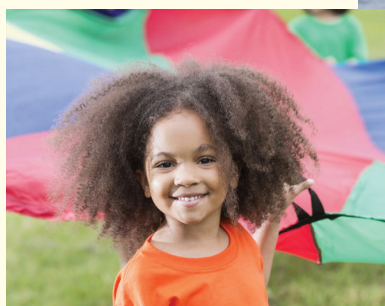
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