



2026 CHILDREN'S BOOK FESTIVAL

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES



Alexandra Boiger

Alexandra grew up in Germany and a career in feature animation took her first to the UK and then to the US. The first book she illustrated was *While Mama Had a Quick Little Chat*. Since then, she has illustrated more than thirty books. She also worked on Chelsea Clinton's *She Persisted* series. These nonfiction picture books celebrate women who had the courage to speak up and show us how one person can make a significant difference. Alexandra comes from a big family. She is the youngest of seven children. She loves to hike. In her childhood, her landscape was defined by chestnut trees and pine tree forests. Today, it's defined by redwood trees and the Pacific Ocean. Nature is where she decompresses and recharges.



Bo Lu

Bo Lu is an award-winning author-illustrator who moved from bustling Taipei to suburban Kansas when she was 7, knowing just three English words: "apple," "banana," and "so-so." Before she could speak fluently, drawing became her bridge between the world she left and the one she was learning to call home. Her debut picture book, *Bao's Doll*, received an Ezra Jack Keats Illustrator Honor. Bo now knows more words, and she enjoys slurping noodle soups, exploring the Bay Area Redwoods, and dancing with her two daughters around their dad at the dinner table. When Bo wasn't creating picture books, she designed for some of the world's most innovative companies like Pinterest, Apple, Google, and IDEO.



Cátia Chien (speaker)

Cátia Chien is the 2026 Randolph Caldecott Gold Medalist for *Fireworks*, recognized for her luminous and evocative picture book art. She is also a winner of the New York Times/New York Public Library Best Illustrated award and a two-time Society of Illustrators Gold Medal recipient for Original Art. Beyond publishing, Cátia has worked as a visual development artist on animated features such as *Wish Dragon* and *The Little Prince*. Her work has been exhibited internationally, including at the Beijing National Gallery and the Bologna Children's Book Fair. She founded A Thousand Worlds, a free, evolving intersectional bookshelf of BIPOC creators' picture books curated by BIPOC leaders in the industry.



Charlotte Cheng

Charlotte Cheng has written and illustrated a variety of books some of which have been selected for the Dolly Parton Imagination Library, Children's Book Council's Favorites, and Bank Street's Best Children's Books of the Year. Charlotte has over 20 years of EdTech experience, and has written and published K-12 curriculum for influential companies including LeapFrog, Disney, and Wonder Workshop. Charlotte lives in the San Francisco Bay Area, where she enjoys playing board games and the ukulele while sampling local boba beverages. In college, she was a beatboxer and bass singer for an all female a cappella group called Counterpoint.



Cindy Derby (speaker)

Cindy Derby is an author and illustrator of many critically acclaimed books for children, including *Outside In*, written by Deborah Underwood, which received a Caldecott Honor. NPR has called her illustrations "mesmerizing," and *The New York Times* regards her work as "profound...alive...and wonderfully out of control." Cindy's books have been translated all over the world and have also been recognized with honors such as the Golden Kite Honor for Picture Book Illustration, the Crystal Kite Award, France's Philosophia Jeunesse Prize, Brazil's UNESCO Reading Chair Selection 10 Seal, and the Alpaca Award (bronze medal) in Japan's Kembuchi Picture Book Awards. She lives with her family in San Francisco. Cindy's grandmother performed at Fairyland and Cindy is excited to return with some of her grandmother's puppets!



Claire Bobrow

Claire sprouted in Memphis, by the banks of the Mississippi, skied off to college in the Green Mountains of Vermont, then scampered to San Francisco, which stole her heart for good. She has been a flower girl, a knitter, a rugby player, and a babysitter of emus. She has rowed a boat in San Francisco Bay, rafted through the Grand Canyon, hiked on a volcano, forgotten how to knit, been yelled at by museum guards (twice), and had a sea otter climb in her kayak. But mostly Claire stays home and drinks tea. The constants in her life have been books, reading, and a big imagination. So, when her daughter and son were almost grown, Claire decided to try writing.



Claudia Walker

Claudia Walker is the founder of HBCU Prep School, a family-owned multimedia education company passionate about amplifying Black history, financial literacy, and cybersecurity. She was raised in Oakland by two educators who constantly stressed the importance of education. After graduating from Spelman College in Atlanta she worked as a Wall Street analyst for a prominent investment bank. When she learned about the education crisis in her hometown, where 1 in 4 Black students weren't graduating from high school, she decided to become a public school teacher. She has since gone on to create a series of books celebrating the fullness of Black history and was invited to the White House in 2023 to talk to kids about cybersecurity.



Deborah Underwood

Deborah Underwood grew up in Walla Walla, Washington. Her dad taught math, her mom taught English, and her sister is a computer genius. (Deborah is not a computer genius.) Deborah loved reading when she was a kid. She read everywhere, including the bathtub. This was not a good idea, because she kept dropping her favorite books in the water. Now Deborah lives in Northern California. She loves all animals, especially her kitty Bella, and singing, and sitting in her garden, and eating vegan German chocolate cake. She also loves taking photos of birds and other animals. She does not like cilantro, loud noises, or vacuuming. (Bella doesn't like any of those, either.)



Fateme Makhles

Fateme is a multidisciplinary artist whose work centers on strong narrative themes. Her art blossoms through children's book illustrations, as seen in "Rostam's Picture-Day Pusteen" and "My America Blooms," as well as through performance storytelling. She enjoys weaving together her love for dancing, singing, and deep conversation to create intimate and expressive experiences. Her art lives somewhere between laughter and longing—and always close to the people and places she loves. Fateme drew her dog in her first book and many of her friends and students in my second book, along with herself, the author and her daughters. She likes to hide little details in her illustrations.



Helen Taylor

Helen Taylor writes books that inspire kids to wonder about their world in new ways. Her favorite questions are How? and Why? because the answers are endlessly fascinating. As a kid, she loved science and storytelling, but it wasn't until she grew up that she figured out how to combine the two. She started telling quirky science stories in the museum world, writing about polar bear hair plugs, catfish physicals, and other curiosities. Now, Helen writes books that make science and engineering fun and accessible for kids. Besides writing, she enjoys traveling, baking, and searching for banana slugs in the redwoods near her home in Santa Cruz.



Isabella Kung

Growing up in Hong Kong, Isabella would often make up her own stories and draw all over her textbooks — anything to make her dull concrete world more colorful! She is delighted she still does both! Her illustrations have received accolades from many institutions including the Society of Illustrators and SCBWI. Her original artwork has been exhibited at galleries in California, Spain, and Singapore. Outside the world of publishing, Isabella has taught Children's Books, illustration, and watercolor classes as well as workshops at various events and conferences. Isabella currently resides in San Francisco with her husband and two adorable cats! She enjoys a good book, dancing, trying all the foods, snorkeling, scuba diving, and traveling!



Illustoria

Illustoria is a tri-annual art and storytelling magazine celebrating visual storytelling, comics, DIY culture, art, artists, and young people. *Illustoria Magazine* was founded in 2016 by Joanne Meiyl Chan, a longtime children's book editor, kid-lit lover, and mother of two. Drawing from her collaborations with renowned artists and writers from her time at Lucasfilm/Disney Publishing Worldwide, and her deep affection for independent publishing, Joanne envisioned a new kind of magazine for kids—one that would showcase stories and art while giving readers insight into the creative process. Dozens of stunning issues (and counting) later, *Illustoria's* ethos remains: to give adults and kids a reason to slow down together and to celebrate the well-curated art and storytelling in our pages.



Jasmine Fang

Jasmine Fang is a Taiwanese American author who creates stories rooted in heart and wonder. Drawing from her multicultural background and love of the outdoors, Jasmine creates books rooted in both heart and wonder. She spent a decade in international affairs, higher education, and leadership development, bringing a global perspective to her storytelling. Jasmine currently lives in the San Francisco Bay Area with her husband, kids, and many tennis rackets. When she's not writing, you can find her on a hiking trail or baking with her kids. She once completed a sprint triathlon, entirely in breaststroke.



Jerrold Connors

Jerrold Connors is a human who likes to draw and tell stories. He was born in the United States, was raised in Indonesia and Canada, and currently makes his home in the Bay Area. He has taught STEAM in elementary schools, has made games for websites like PBSkids.org and Noggin.com, and interactive experiences for museums like The Lawrence Hall of Science and the Children's Creativity Museum. He was the 2017 James Marshall Fellow and has had an illustration featured in the *New Yorker*. Most recently, he's been livestreaming on YouTube where he connects with young creators around the world.



Joanna Ho (speaker)

Joanna is the daughter of immigrants from Taiwan and China. She has three rascally kids. Her oldest son is a LEGO masterbuilder and can tell you the name of every train or plane known to humanity. My daughter wants to be a "scientist of everything in the world" and is obsessed with butt dancing. Her youngest recently discovered his hands and can be found attempting to shove both into his mouth at the same time. She was born in St. Paul, Minnesota and has lived in Baltimore, Maryland; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Accra, Ghana; Taipei, Taiwan; the Bay Area, California. Her ideal vacation involves hiking, tents, waterfalls, mountains, spectacular views and smores.



Lisa Brown

Lisa is a *New York Times* bestselling illustrator, author and cartoonist. She has illustrated many fabulous picture books including *The Moving Book*, *The Hospital Book*, *The Airport Book*, *Mummy Cat*, *The Latke Who Couldn't Stop Screaming*, *Goldfish Ghost*, and more. Her first graphic novel, *The Phantom Twin*, and *Long Story Short*, her first collection of comics, both came out in 2020, right before the world locked down. Lisa lives in an old house on a hill in San Francisco, where she teaches in the illustration department of the California College of the Arts, and chairs the board of 826 Valencia. In her down time she drinks coffee and she swims in the San Francisco Bay even though it scares her.



Maggie Tokuda-Hall

Maggie Tokuda-Hall is an author, mediocre amateur baker, and a human being of questionable judgement. She has an MFA in creative writing from USF, and BA in art from Scripps College. She is a founding member and national leader of Authors Against Book Bans. Maggie is also an author of picture books, young adult novels and graphic novels. She lives in Oakland, California with her husband, children, and objectively perfect dog. You can often find her out and about creating illustrations of pigeons.



Maya Cameron-Gordon

Maya Cameron-Gordon is an award-winning author and filmmaker dedicated to telling authentic stories from the Bay Area. A graduate of an MFA program in film, she has spent several years honing her craft in screenwriting and directing. Maya co-founded the acclaimed vegan restaurant Vegan Mob and bougie smoothie with her husband and later authored *The Mermaid Princesses*, published by HarperCollins. The book, named Best Fantasy Children's book by the African-American Literary Awards, is currently being adapted into an animated series. Her directorial debut, *What'chu Mixed With?* has earned Best Director, Best Cinematography, and Best Actress awards at the Flores Film Festival.



Michael Genhart

Michael Genhart, PhD is the author of several award-winning picture books including: *Rainbow: A First Book of Pride*, *Accordionly: Abuelo and Opa Make Music*, *Love Is Love*, *May Your Life Be Deliciosa*, *They're So Flamboyant!* and, most recently, *Edie for Equality: Edie Windsor Stands Up for Love*. Michael is a licensed clinical psychologist in private practice in San Francisco and Mill Valley, California. He lives with his family in Marin County. He received his BA in psychology from the University of California, San Diego and his PhD in clinical and community psychology from the University of Maryland, College Park.



Michael Slack

Michael is an author and illustrator of numerous children's books and other cool stuff for kids and adults. Contemporary art, animation, and modernist design inform his style, but it is humor, playfulness, and a love of quirky characters that are the heart of his illustration. When he's not working on book projects he likes to paint, draw, and dabble in electronic music. Recently he's been enjoying making ceramic art figures.



Mike Jung

Mike Jung is the author of *The Kids in Mrs. Z's Class* as well as several novels for middle graders. He plays the ukulele, but not all that well. He has a black belt in Aikido, which he does very well. He is a founding member of #WeNeedDiverseBooks and a library professional by day. He lives in Northern California.



Monisha Bajaj

Monisha's debut picture book, *A Year of Kites*, was inspired by her lifelong love of kites as symbols of freedom and transcendence. She is a Professor of International and Multicultural Education (IME) at the University of San Francisco. She is the editor and author of several books and numerous articles on international development and education policy; peace and human rights education; migration and education; gender; race and xenophobia; and environmental justice and education.



Mychal Threets

Mychal Threets is a librarian, literary ambassador, and the library's number one fan (according to himself, admittedly). He grew up in Fairfield, right between Sacramento and San Francisco. He was raised in his local library as a home-school kid. He got his first library card at the age of five and was hooked on libraries. He got his first library job as a shelver at the library he grew up in and worked his way up to Supervising Librarian of that very same library. He is very open about his mental health. He talks about it in hopes that it'll help others in their mental health journey. He is adamant about encouraging people to believe him when he says he's happy they are here.



Natasha Tripplett

Natasha Tripplett is a Jewish-Jamaican American author, who lives in Northern California, where she writes from a tree house perched in a sycamore tree. She is the recipient of the 2024 Mirrors and Windows: Excellence in Children's Literature Golden Poppy Award for *Juneteenth Is*. Natasha bubbles with excitement over antiques, chocolate, coffee on the front porch, and cozy movie nights in front of the fireplace with her husband and four children. She served this year as Children's Fairyland's guide and instructor for the Youth Writers Workshop.



Randy Ribay

Randy Ribay writes stories for young people and the young at heart. His debut picture book, *Hold*, was just released this spring. He's the author of *Patron Saints of Nothing*; *Everything We Never Had*; *Avatar, the Last Airbender: The Reckoning of Roku*; and more. He's a two-time National Book Award nominee, a co-winner of the Michael L. Printz award, and a recipient of the Asian/Pacific American Librarians Association book award and the Boston Globe-Horn Book award. His books have appeared on the New York Times, Indie, and USA Today best-sellers lists. Born in the Philippines and raised in Michigan and Colorado, Randy currently lives in the San Francisco Bay Area with his wife, son, and cat-like dog.



Sandhya Archarya

Sandhya Acharya is a children's book author and writer. She grew up in Mumbai, India, and now lives in Santa Clara, California. She enjoys writing for children and sometimes grown-ups too. Her articles and short stories have been featured in *Washington Post*, NPR(KQED), *India Currents*, *Lost Balloon*, *Peacock Journal*, and *Aaduna* among others. She has run marathons, hosted a podcast for a non-profit, performed (and still learns!) Bharat Natyam, an Indian classical dance, is trained in Indian Classical music (carnatic), and does everything she can to enjoy the childhood of her young kids.



Sara Andrea Fajardo

When Sara first moved to the US from her native Peru, her spoken English vocabulary consisted of just one word "monkey." Thanks to a bilingual school in Salinas, California, she not only expanded her vocabulary, she was also taught to celebrate her mixed heritage. It was there she also learned the power of her words after a teacher turned one of her stories about the Easter Bunny into a play that became part of the English language curriculum. She now channels her love for people and cultures as a first grade dual immersion teacher. She lives in the San Francisco Bay Area with her husband, two kiddos and a very playful cat.



Sendy Santamaria

Sendy Santamaria is an illustrator and children's book author from San Diego, based in San Pablo, California. She holds a BFA in Illustration with distinction from California College of the Arts. She creates paintings and stories rooted in ordinary life and Mexican American culture. Raised between San Diego and Tijuana, Sendy's work is shaped by life along both sides of the border. Sendy is currently developing a picture book inspired by her love of thrift shops and works as a Design Coordinator at 826 Valencia. Something interesting about Sendy is that her name is misspelled! It was supposed to be Sandy but her mom said the hospital spelled it with an "e" and she decided to keep it!



Shruthi Rao

Shruthi adores benches, and loves capturing them on camera, but rarely sits on them! For as long as she remembers, reading has been her favorite thing to do. She's always loved writing too. She was that kid who actually enjoyed writing essays in school! She wrote her first novel when she was 11. She didn't write stories for a long time after that. In the 2000s, she rediscovered her love for writing. It helped that her daughter turned out to be a story-gobbler, and they've been laughing and thinking their way through a number of magnificent books ever since she was born. She now writes books for children of all ages, both fiction and non-fiction.



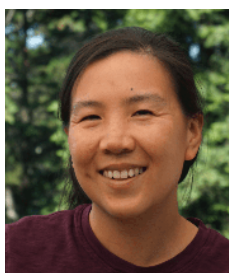
Sonali Patodia

Not born with a quill in her hand but a courageous will to take a stand, Sonali Patodia recognizes the power of storytelling and its ability to shape young minds. She felt compelled to address deep-rooted societal issues in simple yet impactful ways. Sonali has always been fascinated by cultural traditions, constantly finding creative ways to pass them along to future generations. Through her debut book, *You're Truly One of a Kind*, Sonali seeks to celebrate individuality and the beauty of diversity. She was born and raised in India, and now lives in California with her husband and daughters.



Sophie Diao

Sophie is an artist based in Oakland who creates children's books. Her most recent titles *Our Home, Our Only Home* and *A Name for Sister* released just this spring. She also makes games at Google (and previously made Google Doodles). She's worked with the Ad Council, the California Academy of Sciences, Cartoon Network, Chromosphere, Disney TV Animation, Hermès, Pixar, and more.



Steph Lau

Steph Lau is an Asian-American author-illustrator and former pastry chef from sunny California. She lives in a hilly house by the bay, with two beloved monsters, a ravenous pet rabbit, and a freezer stuffed with half-eaten ice cream. Steph works primarily in picture books and graphic novels — usually with a splash of mischief. Her author-illustrator picture book debut, *The Abominable Snow Dancer* launched in 2025 and her latest, *Medusa's Pet Rock*, will be available in Fall 2026.



Tiffany Golden

Tiffany Golden is a children's writer, illustrator, and educator who's the daughter of a storyteller and artist. As she says, "Everyone has a story. I just write mine down." She uses her work to celebrate the joy and resilience of life. She's a picture book and middle grade author discovering a new love for digital illustration. She's getting better every day! Tiffany holds a Certificate in Children's Book Illustration from Hollins University and a MFA in Creative Writing with Children's & YA Focus from Spalding University.



Kalen Chock

Kalen Chock is the illustrator of several award winning nonfiction picture books as well as a senior concept artist for Dreamworks. He is working on their latest animated feature "Forgotten Island" and also contributed to the critically acclaimed film "The Wild Robot." Outside of his studio work, Kalen is an art instructor, teaching background design, visual development, through both online courses and in-person workshops. His in-person teachings have reached students across the US, Italy, Canada, and Spain. When he is not drawing you can find him playing on the soccer pitch or hanging out with his dog.