FREE WEBINAR/WORKSHOP WITH MIRA REISBERG AND SHARISMAR RODRIGUEZ (HOUGHTON MIFFLIN HARCOURT)

“USING CULTURAL REFERENCES FOR WRITERS AND ILLUSTRATORS”

September 9, 2017

Nuggets of Information from the Webinar

Compiled by Melissa Stoller

We will be: learning from classic literature, fine art, current events, and popular culture...we’ll see how this will help in our own work!

Sharismar: in writing, you can bring characters to life from your pure imagination. You can also use cultural references to help you around become inspired. . . you can obtain “greatness” by looking at those who came before you and learning from your experience . . . the great masters in painting, writing, etc. Look at the body of work of these masters to influence your work.

We can all learn from the body of work of these masters…they all found solutions to challenges…in their artistic techniques, why not learn from them…and we can be inspired to write stories….i.e. who was that girl with the pearl earring?

Now we’ll take a **mini time-travel trip** through art history … starting with:

ANCIENT EGYPT – they used the successful technique of storytelling through painting…very mathematical and organized and the frescoes have a strong sense of clarity…all concepts we can apply to our PB writing.

Symmetry and duality…explore light/dark, day/night, male/female…this applies to PB concepts as well

For example…*Mummy Cat* by Marcus Ewert – cats are so important in PBs…and children identify with animals b/c kids can identify with animals as opposed to identifying with human characters that may or may not look like them.

Influenced by Ancient Egyptian art and the frescoes…

Fast forward to IMPRESSIONISM in the 19th Century – focused on the study of light, the quality of light, how it changed their environment, painted outdoors, brushstrokes are very loose…extraordinary play of light…

Can be applied to PBs to show the passing of time or passing of a season…

For example – *Grandfather’s Journey* by Allen Say…his family’s cross culture experience…his art is more finished than the Impressionists but his handling of light and how he visions the foliage and the water…you can feel the boat floating over the water…

Next, 20th Century DADA – art can be anything and anything can be art…if you are feeling timid about your work…gain courage from DADA! They reject logic and reason…and the aesthetics of a capitalist society...Duchamp for example…what is art? Anything can be art.

Also, use of collage and mixed media…that’s a great way to get your feet wet as an illustrator…mixed media and collage…no rules…you don’t need to be exact…great way to start.

For example, *Mimi’s Dada Catifesto* – by Shelley Jackson (on the cover is an homage to Duchamp’s Mona Lisa…)

In books, kids love to find new things in every read of the PB…lots of details…bringing a high level concept to children without diluting the concept…

20th Century SURREALISM – derived from DADA…doesn’t follow logical reason…take mundane objects and create creatures…freeness…different techniques…a certain absurdity is present…placing objects in unexpected places…

For example - *Willy the Dreamer* and *Through the Magic Mirror* by Anthony Browne…influenced by Magritte…lots of art and objects that kids will enjoy discovering as they read the story…

Finally – NEO-EXPRESSIONISM AND POP ART – Keith Haring (1970’s and 1980’s) – addressed intense topics…birth, death, war, etc. Very bold and colorful…

For example – *It’s OKAY to Make Mistakes* by Todd Parr – influenced by Haring’s aesthetics and also he looks at important topics and brings them to a level digestible for kids…

BIOGRAPHIES – look at artists’ lives and get to know them better…most artists have fascinating lives and have overcome a lot in their time period – they are often ahead of their time – look at the art of other people and gain so much by understanding their back stories…

Mira – if you can drive, you can draw!!

First Drawing Exercise – a free-style self-portrait with your eyes closed!

Mira – to be children’s book creator – play and be silly!

A Prize – A copy of *Maybe Something Beautiful* by Campoy/Howell – the winner is Patricia Saunders! Congratulations, Patricia!

Popular culture….deals with how we connect on a high level…in their time, Shakespeare and Dickens were pop culture…today they are high culture...

today…pop culture like reality TV, other TV shows, movies or books….writers can adapt for kids…writing and illustrating classics using contemporary language and making them fun….

*Aesop’s Fables* are great for retellings....

Adapting songs is another pop culture source of inspiration…

Public Domain songs like Wheels on the Bus are fair game for PBs!

look at [PDinfo.com](http://pdinfo.com) to learn more about public domain songs that you might might to explore

Edgar Allan Poe’s stories very adaptable...

Project Gutenberg…[Guttenberg.org](http://guttenberg.org) another great resource about public domain

Also Sherlock Holmes cultural references...inspired lots of children’s books

Alfred Hitchcock - plays a major role and source of inspiration…*A Hitch at the Fairmont* MG novel…by Jim Averbeck…comic book/film noir inspired sources…

Also all these subjects provide inspiration for possible KidLit bios

Comics - longtime inspiration for books, graphic novels, tv, movies, etc.

*Mr. Particular*….cartoon and graphic novel conventions are being used...

Tara Lazar, Penny Parker Klosterman, Just Funk…just when you thought all these fairy tales rehashes are finished….here are three authors that are fabulous...

Yuri Morales (former course participant and now course contributor) - she always reinvents herself…using cartooning conventions…we will see behind the scenes in her studio

A good illustrator can extend the words and take the writer/story places not even contemplated

Books touching on Immigration, Katrina, Migrant’s Tale….

Mira says wait for books on the eclipse, and recent hurricanes….

The point of this webinar and workshop….to show through examples how to appropriate and learn from everything citing….fine art and literature, pop culture, social media, media in general, current affairs…and connect with the emotion that is underneath…based on what has come before or what is current….

From Mira - you don’t need an art background to be an artist!!!

Mira and Sharismar - will train us to look at sources to steal legally, appropriate or be inspired by - keep the essence while updating the cultural references to make sure they are fresh and original…parents and editors will appreciate that!

An incentive to join the course….first two people to commit with get their choice of a critique:

Carol Coven Granic… and Margaux Kent is second

Yay Carol and Margueux! Carol with Mira and Margaux with Sharismar! Congratulations!!!

Second drawing exercise using the downloadable handout:

In the top rectangle: name a pop culture figure and write a few characteristics

In the left column …first person, second or third person…a brief intro about your character…turn them into an animal or a kid….

In the right column…you can hold it horizontally or vertically…draft your figure…you can start with a stick figure…then draw on the outsides of the figure and add in detail…

add whatever details you want....

To fully understand public domain, look at all of the Sherlock Holmes shows on TV since Sherlock passed into the public domain.

Another prize - Mustache Baby goes to Paula - congrats!!!

Thanks for a great webinar!!

Sign up for the course here:

<http://bit.ly/KidsBookArt>

I’ll see you there!!