

# Let's Chicago Just Writers Write! Association Conference

FRIDAY, MARCH 21, 2025

6:00 - 9:00 PM

**REGISTRATION/WELCOME COCKTAIL PARTY/LET'S JUST READ!**  
Tip Top Tap, Warwick Allerton Hotel  
Join us for food, drink and fellowship, and our live lit event Let's Just Read! hosted by Shawn Shiflett

SATURDAY, MARCH 22, 2025

8:00 - 9:15 AM

**REGISTRATION/CONTINENTAL BREAKFAST, 3rd Floor, Buckingham Room (Breakfast included in conference fee)**

9:30 - 10:30 AM

**Welcome to the Conference - Samantha Hoffman, Conference Director**  
**Keynote Speech: Alex Kotlowitz**

## SESSION 1

## SESSION 2

## MASTER CLASSES

10:45 - 11:45 AM

**Leticia Gomez - How to Pitch an Agent**  
Pitching your manuscript face-to-face to a publishing professional can paralyze aspiring authors from travelling further down the road to publication. In her informative yet light-hearted presentation Leticia Gomez will give you time-tested advice and practical tips on what you can do before, during, and after a live pitch session for the best possible outcome based on her nearly twenty years of experience in the book publishing world.

**Cyrus Webb - Social Media Made Easy**  
Simplify your social media presence by pinpointing the platforms that are worth your time. Maintain a presence without stressing out. In this presentation you'll learn how to develop a personalized approach and make social media your friend.

**Rachel DeWoskin - Writing Wonder: Why Asking (Not Answering) Makes Writing Move and Matter**

12:00 - 1:30 PM

**LUNCH in the Buckingham Room (Included in conference fee)**

1:45 - 2:45 PM

**Natalie Serber - Present & Past: Using Backstory to Enhance the Present Story**  
We strive to write stories with complex characters, ripe with revelations and universal truths that come with living. Sometimes moving forward requires moving backward. In order to understand where a character is going, we need to understand where they've been, the life they've lived. In this presentation we will discuss when to include backstory, and specific tools for how to bring in the past without interrupting the present dramatic action.

**Eric Charles May - Scene and Non-Scene Forms in Fiction and Nonfiction**  
Prose writing is the interplay between scenes - moment-by-moment story episodes using dialogue and active character action - and prose forms such as narrative descriptions, summaries of story actions, back story, etc. In this presentation you'll review examples of how this interplay of scene and non-scene forms can be put to effective use.

**Christina Clancy - Ditching Formulas: Exploring New Ways to Tell Stories**

3:00 - 4:00 PM

**Curtis Crisler - How Bits and Pieces of Your Mind Always Make a Poem**  
We've all poets. Some of us know it and some of us don't. Poetry can help you in your storytelling, whether you write fiction, nonfiction or memoir. This interactive workshop will help you create poetry which will help you create story.

**Dipika Mukherjee - Using Dialogue to Develop Characters**  
Whether you are writing a novel or a short story, this mini-class will show you how to use conversation as a powerful tool for deepening characterization, creating conflict, and heightening tension. We will discuss how to layer subtext and use unspoken tension to pull your readers deeper into the story, and we will delve into the mechanics of pacing and dialogue tags to make your dialogue feel dynamic and charged with emotion. Participants will have the time to engage in some prompt-based writing.

**Ben Tanzer - Crafting Place: A Novel Writing Cafe**

4:15 - 5:15 PM

**Agent Panel Discussion, Moderator: Rick Kaempfer**  
Andy Ross, Andy Ross Agency, Doug Grad, Doug Grad Agency; Vicky Weber, Creative Media Agency

**Rachel DeWoskin - Truth and Beauty: How We Tell Our Truest Stories**  
This conversation investigates the relationship between truth and art, including the overlaps between journalistic and artistic truth. How do we write memoir and creative non-fiction that tells truths that are accurate and also philosophically and emotionally true? Together, we will consider the relationship between truth and beauty in the interest of telling a compelling story.

**Curtis Crisler - How Poetry Improves Your Storytelling**

6:00 PM

**DINNER in the Tip Top Tap (Included in conference fee)**  
**LET'S JUST CHAT! with Stuart Dybek, interviewed by Shawn Shiflett**

SUNDAY, MARCH 23, 2025

## SESSION 1

## SESSION 2

## MASTER CLASSES

9:45 - 10:45 AM

**Fiction Panel - From Life to Fiction: The Journey of First Novels**  
**Rita Dragonette, Samantha Hoffman, Jeremy T. Wilson - Randy Richardson, moderator**  
Many first novels are rooted in the autobiographical, drawing inspiration from the writer's own life and experiences. In this discussion the panelists and moderator share how they transformed personal stories into compelling fiction, exploring the motivations, challenges, and creative processes behind the leap from real life to the world of imagination.

**Alison Hammer - AI as a Writing Tool: But Not for Writing**  
This interactive presentation takes on the fear of AI by offering a fresh perspective: AI as a tool, not a replacement. You'll learn the basics of how to write the best prompts to get AI to work for you, helping with things like brainstorming, research, character development, setting, inspiration and more.

**Natalie Serber - I Know You So Well: Building Character in Fiction and Memoir**

11:00 AM - 12:00 PM

**Jeremy T Wilson - Take me on a Rollercoaster: Making Your Story Irresistible**  
Whether I'm reading fiction submissions for the online literary magazine *TriQuarterly*, or the first pages of a novel, I long for that initial promise that I'm about to go on a ride; how that promise is fulfilled (or not), and an element of the unexpected. In this interactive session we will read stories and excerpts to discover how we might apply these lessons to our own work.

**Christina Clancy - Radical Revision**  
Sometimes writers tell stories the same way, in the same style, and with the same voice. Often, we're so comfortable with our storytelling voice that we can lose sight of what our story is really about. How can we break loose and revise in order to get at something new and important, or discover new ways of telling? This intensive workshop will provide you with exercises intended to move you out of your comfort zone, shake your story loose, and help you rethink how you can tell it.

**Tina Schwartz - Slicing & Dicing: Multiple Revenue Streams as an Author**

12:00 - 1:15 PM

**LUNCH in the Buckingham Room (Included in conference fee)**

1:30 - 2:30 PM

**Ben Tanzer - Becoming Unstuck, Step by Step**  
Writing is hard, books are work, and sometimes we get stuck. Why does that happen in the first place and how do we get ourselves out of it? This highly interactive presentation explores our emotions, memories, self-awareness, self-care, and structure...because it all plays a role in the process. There will be tips and sharing, and writing prompts too, because what could be better than that? Besides not being stuck, of course.

**Dana Kaye - Your Author Brand: A Step-by-Step Guide to Identifying, Creating, and Launching Your Unique Author Brand**  
Most readers want a guarantee that the next book they pick up will be worth their time and money, so they go for established names, books that are getting tons of media attention, or the current award winners. How does a new or midlist author get attention and build an audience in a crowded marketplace? This workshop will show you how to identify your unique author brand, create a memorable tagline, and establish your name recognition in the marketplace.

2:45 - 4:00 PM

**Speaker, Ann Garvin**  
**Starting from Scratch - Novice to Bestseller: Tips, Tools and Practicalities**  
Ann Garvin, best-selling author, popular teacher/speaker, creator of Tall Poppy Writers, will talk about her journey from being a PhD, teaching Exercise Physiology and Health Psychology, to becoming a USA TODAY and #1 Amazon Charts bestselling author of six novels.  
Not just inspirational but a lesson on the arc of a protagonist  
**Farewell. See You Next Year!**