



WRITE

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UNION OF  
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Writing for young readers

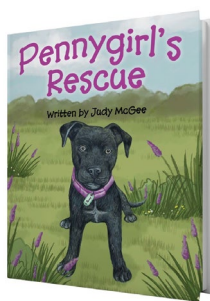
Book bans and how to  
fight them

How to market without  
social media



# Welcome to the Union

LIST CURRENT AS OF MARCH 3, 2026



**Judy McGee**, *Pennygirl's Rescue*, Book 1 in The Pennygirl's Series, Miriam Laundry Publishing, 2024.

**Lareina Abbott**, "Misi-Yehewin - Big Breath," *Inhale/Exhale: Contemporary Indigenous Storytelling*, Malahat Review, 2026.

**N.L. Blandford**, *Escaping Victoria*, self-published, 2025.

**Jessica Barrett**, *No Place Like Home: The Missing Key to Our Housing Crisis*, Penguin Random House Canada, 2026.

**Connie Boland**, *What if I Told You?*, Horseshoe Community Press, 2026.

**Cheikh Bouaziz**, *Introduction to Insurance and Risk Management*, Dar Tanouir, 2014.

**Christopher Canniff**, *Intervals of Hope*, Blue Denim Press, 2021.

**Marilyn Carr**, *If It's Shreveport, It Must Be Tuesday: Based on a True Story*, Iguana Books, 2025.



**Peter Routis**, *When The Earth Died*, Inkwell Books, 2024.

**Allan Cho**, "The Realm of Resistors and Hockey Cards," *emerge 25: The Writer's Studio Anthology*, Tidewater Press, 2025.

**Diana Morita Cole**, *Sideways: Memoir of a Misfit*, Diaspora Press, 2015.

**Nancy Daoust**, "the day after my dad died," *Dark Winter Press and Literary Magazine*, 2025.

**Michael Dargie**, *BrandJitsu™: Move Your Brand from 'Meh' to Memorable*, Dundurn Press, 2025.

**Christina Ann-Marie DiEoardo**, *If Beaver Fights Eagle: Canada and the U.S. Prepare for War Against Each Other 1920-2025*, Cobra Chicken Press, 2025.

**Jonathan Ellerby**, *Return to the Sacred*, Hay House, 2009.

**Hilary Faktor**, *Pretty Bird*, Rowan Prose Publishing, 2026 (forthcoming).

**Thomas Gajdicar**, *Grumblin Drumlin*, self-published, 2025.



**Candie Tanaka**, *Baby Drag Queen*, Orca Book Publishers, 2023.

**Sylvie Gendreau**, *La Cité des intelligences*, Éditions Céra, 2008.

**Donald Gerson**, *Think of Others*, self-published, 2026.

**Phil Gurski**, *The Fenians: Brotherhood of fools or Canada's first terrorist threat*, Double Dagger Press, 2026.

**Holly Gutwillinger**, *North of Broken & Forever Home*, Ramblings from the Little Shed Publishing, 2026.

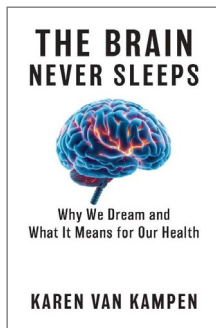
**Wiley Wei-Chiun Ho**, *The Astronaut Children of Dunbar Street: A Memoir*, Douglas & McIntyre, 2026.

**Luke Johnson**, *The Flame Upon the Mountain*, Tharnea Press, 2026.

**Yejide Kilanko**, *A Good Name*, Guernica Editions, 2021.

**Camellia Koo**, *Yaya and The Dan-Tats*, Annick Press, 2025.

**Jon-Erik Lappano**, *Tokyo Digs a Garden*, Greenwood Books, 2016.



**Karen van Kampen**, *The Brain Never Sleeps: Why We Dream and What It Means for Our Health*, Simon & Schuster, 2026.

**Jessi MacEachern**, *Cut Side Down*, Invisible Publishing, 2025.

**Laura MacGregor**, "Introduction," *Disrupted Stories and Images of Church*, Bloomsbury Press, 2026.

**Jennifer MacLean**, *An Ode to Myself: Poetry Written for Cats, by a Cat*, Prairie Soul Press, 2024.

**Kelly Madden**, *If I'd Known*, Repartee Press/Printorium Books Co, 2021.

**Élyssa Marcoux-Bissoondath**, *A Hungry Fire*, Cormorant Books, 2026 (forthcoming).

**Cynthea Masson**, *The Alchemists' Council*, ECW Press, 2016.

**John McIntosh**, *An Adventure Brewing*, Aethon Books, 2023.

**Sophia Murphy**, *Sports Superstars from Black History*, Ulysses Press for Young Readers, 2024.



**Ayla Vejdani**, *You x Me*, Generous Press, 2026.

**Vesna Nedic**, *Beli Grad*, Cigoja Stampa, 2023.

**Emily Nilsen**, *Otolith*, Goose Lane, 2017.

**Nate Nate Nainers**, *Smokin' Holy Spirits*, Galleon Books, 2026 (forthcoming).

**Lauren Kalinowski**, "Exclusion by Design," *Alberta Views*, 2025.

**Jinwoo Park**, *Oxford Soju Club*, Dundurn Press, 2025.

**Saakshi Patel**, "Lunatic" and "Dora Maar", *The Central Avenue Poetry Prize Anthology*, Central Avenue Publishing, 2024.

**Kawika Guillermo**, *Of Floating Isles: On Growing Pains and Video Games*, Arsenal Pulp Press, 2025.

**Ann Richards**, *The True Story of Vanilla: How Edmond Albius Made History*, Orca Book Publishers, 2025.

**Hadiya Roderique**, "Black in the Ivory Tower," *The Walrus*, 2020.

**Jasmine Ruff**, "24 Hours in the Lost House," *Cult Magazine*, 2025.

**Jagjit Sandhu**, *Tapsi*, Shabdlok, 2023.

**Steven Scanlan**, *How To Retire*, Island Books, 2025.

**Ann Scowcroft**, *The Truth of Houses*, Brick Books, 2011.

**Josée Sigouin**, *Our Fifth Season*, Blue Denim Press, 2025.

**Sandhya Singh**, "Subbed Out," *Devotion in the Open Air*, edited by Chyina Powell, Inked in Gray Press, 2025.

**Catherine St. Denis**, *The Killer and the Harpist*, Nightwood Editions, 2027 (forthcoming).

**Alice Switocz Goldbloom**, *Family Secrets: A Daughter's Search for Her Parents' Hidden War*, Pottersfield Press, 2026.

**Jakub Szamalek**, *Inner Space*, HarperCollins, 2025.

**Don Thompson**, *The Supermodel and the Brillo Box*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

**Mary Trafford**, "Spring Soccer," *The Fiddlehead*, 2025.

**Pujita Verma**, *Precedence*, Brick Books, 2026.

**Michelle Willms**, *Northern Girls*, Baraka Books, 2026.

**Isaac Yuen**, *Utter, Earth: Advice on Living in a More-than-Human World*, West Virginia University Press, 2024.

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# The Latest Evolution of Nonfiction for Young Readers

What it looks like and how to get on board

BY MARIA BIRMINGHAM

**L**ONELINESS, algorithms, child soldiers, and allyship — to name just a few topics. Today's Canadian nonfiction books for children are as diverse as the people around us.

Gone are the days of encyclopedia-like books crammed with facts and photos. While the traditional topics of sports, animals, and biographies persist, we're also seeing in-depth explorations of complicated themes.

I am the author of several nonfiction books for children — on topics including immortality and oddities of the human body — and even I am surprised by some of the subjects I come across, including the science of kindness, fighting misinformation, and the mystery of death.

Today's authors don't shy away from presenting readers with big ideas. Take author and activist Robin Stevenson, whose nonfiction youth titles include *Queer History A to Z: 100 Years of LGBTQ+ Activism* and *My Body My Choice: The Fight for Abortion Rights*.

She says, "As writers, I think we need to look at what questions kids might have about the world and how we can support them in exploring those questions. That might mean writing about an underrepresented issue, or it might mean approaching a more familiar subject in a new and creative way."

## **A variety of perspectives, even on a single subject**

Whatever the topic, I believe it's this creative approach that sets today's nonfiction books apart from many of those published in years past. In my own middle-grade books, including my most recent title, *Left-Handed*, I try to take a broad look at a topic. That includes delving

into history, science, pop culture, sports, and animals. For example, I explored how scientists studied left-handedness using Neanderthal skeletons. And on the lighter side, I referenced a type of parrot that's exclusively left-footed. Including different themes in one book gives readers a variety of perspectives on a single topic.

I also tend to include fast facts and sidebars in my nonfiction to make the book browsable for readers who don't read cover to cover. I'd argue that not only is there diversity in the types of nonfiction books available for today's readers but in the actual content within those books and in the ways it is presented.

Katherine Dearlove, an editor at Owlkids Books, agrees. Along with a range of information, she says nonfiction books for children should "offer insight and analysis or look at a topic in a new way, connecting to readers' lives."

## **SEL & STEM**

Contemporary nonfiction books for young readers tend to be thoughtful, and not sensational, in their approach. They often support social and emotional learning (SEL) — an approach that focusses on helping readers understand their emotions while learning to demonstrate empathy. Recently, I've had editors specifically ask me to keep SEL in mind while working on a draft. So while it's key to provide young readers with intriguing information, there's also a push to cover topics in a way that encourages kids to develop self-awareness as well as social awareness.

Besides SEL, Dearlove says a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) focus

## “Nonfiction authors have to go beyond the facts and offer their readers something intriguing.”

remains a sought-after approach in nonfiction: “Our largest markets are schools and libraries, so we like to be curriculum-friendly in addition to being interesting and informative for readers.”

Of course, the old standbys have not gone out the window. There will likely always be a place for nonfiction books about sports and animals. But many of them are also guided by the SEL and STEM approaches.

Kids can pull up information in seconds on a computer or on their phones. And AI purports to offer instant information on any topic. With so much information for the taking, nonfiction authors have to go beyond the facts and offer their readers something intriguing.

### What’s the hook?

Several years ago, while I was pitching a nonfiction book to an editor, she asked: “But what’s the hook?”

## “To write an engaging book on a familiar topic requires stepping back, reflecting, and then offering a perspective that sparks a young reader’s curiosity.”

Good question. I was laying out facts for readers — some of which they could easily find on their own — but I had no hook.

That was a lightbulb moment for me. To write an engaging book on a familiar topic requires stepping back, reflecting, and then offering a perspective that sparks a young reader’s curiosity.

Author Heather Camlot’s new book, *One Goal: How Soccer Can Help Save the Planet*, is a good example of a distinct approach to a familiar topic. Timed to coincide with the 2026 World Cup, it looks at how soccer players, clubs, and fans are helping the planet. Her hook came from a conversation with her soccer fanatic son. “We were trying to come up with a topic for a school essay,” says Camlot. “Soccer and climate change is the topic we arrived at. Then I basically swiped the idea, thinking it would make a great kids’ book!” (She adds, “My conscience is clear; we took much different approaches!”)

Camlot thought that since both soccer and climate change are familiar themes for readers, the combo would make for an interesting angle. So she pitched her idea to her editor as a picture book with a fictional storyline alongside nonfiction details. “My editor liked the idea but proposed a stronger angle,” she explains, “one that pointed out real-life issues.” The book transformed into a nonfiction middle-grade book. It’s an example of how books may morph in the early stages depending on what an editor is looking for.

### Expertise matters

Jenna Campbell is an editor with Orca Book Publishers, which has a robust nonfiction catalogue, publishing about 30 nonfiction picture books and middle-grade books annually. Recent and upcoming titles include *Stop AntiBlack Racism: 8 Ways to Act Now* by Nadia L. Hohn, illustrated by Arden Taylor, and *Why Earth Needs Engineers: Problem Solving for People and the Planet* by Helen Liang, illustrated by Victor Wong.

Campbell says she’s open to all types of nonfiction books and nothing is off-limits. “I like to think that there are no rules! The main concern [about pitching a book] is questioning whether a topic would interest and serve young readers,” she says. “The more unique a book is, the more excited and confident I am about it. That means there are no other books like it on the market.”

As an example, she references an upcoming title she’s working on. *Just a Piece of String: An Invention that Changed the World* looks at how the invention of string was revolutionary. Campbell describes the book as “mind-blowing.”

Sometimes writers can turn to their own expertise to come up with a unique nonfiction idea. Helen Liang has a background in engineering and is working on her third book inspired by her field. Besides helping with the actual concepts of her books, she says her experience also comes into play in her writing. “My engineering training taught me to approach problems step by step. That mindset carries directly into my writing.”

The world is more complex, and there are more diverse subjects than ever to cover. Writers have a role in helping readers try to make sense of it all.

As Dearlove says, “We’re in an age of information overload, constantly bombarded with opinions and chatter. [And we] aim to go beyond that info-dumping to offer thoughtful analysis about the world around us and the things that affect kids’ lives.”

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**Maria Birmingham** has been working in the children’s publishing industry for over 25 years. She has written over a dozen nonfiction books including *Left-Handed, Odd Couples, Are We There Yet?*, and *Biometrics*. She lives in Brampton, Ontario.



# Standing Together Against Book Bans in Canada

BY ROBIN STEVENSON

**T**EN years ago, I published *Pride: Celebrating Diversity & Community* — my first nonfiction children’s book about Pride celebrations. Within weeks, a school I was scheduled to speak at emailed to ask me not to discuss my newest title with their students. I had already published more than a dozen novels, and at the time, this was a huge shock. But today, events like these no longer come as a surprise. At least 10 of my books have been challenged or banned, and I’ve had school invitations rescinded and visits cancelled. In 2025, my picture book *Pride Puppy!* ended up at the U.S. Supreme Court.

And I am far from alone. Over the last four years, PEN America has tracked nearly 23,000 book bans. Book banning is escalating in Canada as well: A recent report from the Centre for Free Expression shows reports of challenges in school libraries shooting up dramatically, from 13 in 2024, to 221 in 2025. In Alberta’s schools, more than 160 titles have been banned. South of the border, book bans have been driven by far-right groups like Moms for Liberty. In our country, groups such as Action4Canada and Parents for Choice in Education are copying their playbook, stoking conservative outrage, and fuelling distrust of public schools.

While book banners speak of protecting children and advancing “parental rights,” they ignore the actual needs and rights of young readers. Book bans disproportionately target books by and about 2SLGBTQ+ and BIPOC people — and when those books disappear from shelves, young

readers lose access to stories and information that could help them better understand themselves. During a conversation about book bans at a high school visit, one student told me, “When we don’t see ourselves, we start to think, is there something wrong? Am I weird or strange? And this is really dangerous.” Another student quickly agreed, adding that the hateful anti-2SLGBTQ+ rhetoric of book banners posed a threat far greater than any book ever could. The harm caused by book banning goes beyond the loss of access to books. It sends the message that marginalized groups can be erased, that young people are incapable of choosing their own

reading material, and that censorship is acceptable.

While schools are the current target, censorship of literature for children and teens is often on the frontline of wider

movements to limit freedom of expression. In the United States, government attacks on diversity, equity, and inclusion have spread far beyond the classroom, leading to censorship in public libraries, universities, museums, arts organizations, and beyond. Canada is not immune to this growing threat.

I have heard from many educators who say they or their colleagues are afraid to share 2SLGBTQ+ books for fear of backlash. This is the climate of fear that book bans create, and it can lead to widespread silent censorship and shadow banning — limiting access to far more titles than those actually banned.

**“While book banners speak of protecting children and advancing ‘parental rights,’ they ignore the actual needs and rights of young readers.”**



“Can I borrow *Pride Puppy* please?”

### ***Pride Puppy!* at the United States Supreme Court**

Authors and illustrators can also find themselves in the crosshairs of book bans and backlash. In 2025, my book *Pride Puppy!* — an alphabet book about a family attending a Pride parade, illustrated by Julie McLaughlin — was one of several 2SLGBTQ+ picture books involved in a high-profile case before the U.S. Supreme Court. *Mahmoud v. Taylor* began as a lawsuit filed by three Maryland couples who wanted to be able to opt their children out of any classroom use of books with 2SLGBTQ+ characters or themes, on the basis of their religious beliefs. The case received widespread coverage, with right-wing media spreading misinformation and calling our book pornographic, obscene, and sexually explicit. When the case was heard by the Supreme Court, justice Neil Gorsuch made the bizarre, false, and now widely repeated claim that *Pride Puppy!* was about bondage and sex workers. As I wrote in an essay published in *Macleans* in March 2025, “Could he really believe a picture of a mom wearing a leather jacket was actually a sex worker with an interest in bondage?”

The case, and the torrent of online hate it unleashed, consumed my life for six months. At one point, I thought I

might stop writing books for children. I know some queer authors who have done so. Like librarians, teachers, and publishers, writers are not immune to self-censorship.

### **Enter Canadian Authors and Illustrators Against Book Bans**

The Supreme Court case concluded in June, with the conservative majority ruling in favour of the religious plaintiffs, in a decision likely to fuel further censorship of 2SLGBTQ+ books. Just weeks later, Alberta’s government announced its own book bans. It wasn’t unexpected, but it was nonetheless devastating to see this unprecedented escalation in Canada.

British Columbia-based writer Kari Jones and I realized Canadian authors needed more ways to respond collectively to Canadian book bans and a place to turn for resources and support when their books are challenged. In July 2025, we got the ball rolling by starting a Discord server for authors to chat about this idea — and within a few weeks, Canadian Authors and Illustrators Against Book Bans (CAIABB) was born.

CAIABB now has over 175 members, from BC to Nova Scotia. Our Discord group provides a forum for

## “We can read banned books and challenge misrepresentation, and we can call out hateful rhetoric too.”

discussion, organizing, information sharing, and mutual support: and our Instagram account shares news and updates. We’ve launched a Freedom to Read youth writing contest in partnership with Story Studio, with 10 CAIABB members judging submissions from teens across the country. We’ve released statements, shared petitions, and sent emails. And we have hosted Zoom meetings with inspiring guest speakers, including Ira Wells, President of PEN Canada; Katherine Locke, national board member for the U.S. group Authors Against Book Bans; and James Chamberlain, the former teacher involved in the precedent-setting Canadian Supreme Court book-banning case *Chamberlain v. Surrey School District*.

And we are just getting started. There are many things Canadian writers can do to fight against book bans in Canada, including taking action locally — which is where most book challenges play out. CAIABB members across the country can attend school and library meetings when books are challenged. We can raise awareness of the importance of electing school board trustees who oppose

ensorship. We can read banned books and challenge misrepresentation, and we can call out hateful rhetoric too. Defending diverse books is one way of standing with the communities they represent.

Perhaps most importantly: We can refuse to be silenced: we need to keep telling our stories and supporting each other to do so. (And yes, I am still writing for kids! *Pride Puppy Countdown* comes out in 2027!)

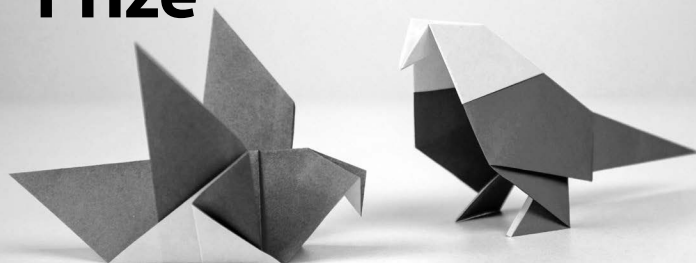
We’d love more TWUC members to join us. Visit us at [www.caiabb.ca](http://www.caiabb.ca) to sign up!

**Robin Stevenson** is the award-winning author of over 35 books for kids and teens, including the picture book *Pride Puppy*, the nonfiction book *Queer History A-Z*, and the forthcoming middle-grade novel *The Book of Jupiter*. Her next picture book, *Pride Puppy Countdown*, will come out in spring 2027. Robin’s books have won the Silver Birch Award, the Sheila A. Egoff award, and a Stonewall Honor, and been finalists for the Governor General’s Literary Awards, the Lambda Literary Awards, and many reader’s choice awards. Robin was the Book and Periodical Council of Canada’s Champion of Free Expression for 2022. In 2023, she was awarded the Lieutenant Governor’s Award for Literary Excellence. Robin is represented by Amy Tompkins at Transatlantic Literary Agency and lives on Vancouver Island.

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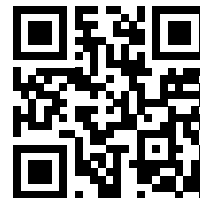
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# Forget About Followers

Marketing your books without social media

BY LIANA TANG

**H**OW many times have you been told that building a social media presence is essential to your success as a writer? Or that you need a large platform if you want any hope of having a public profile or even halfway decent sales?

The expectation is clear: build an audience, stay visible, and promote your work constantly — or risk falling behind.

This does not come naturally for many writers. They'd rather be writing than plugging their work. It's an expectation that creates pressure, especially among those debuting, that feels disconnected from what drew them to storytelling in the first place. It also feels unfair. Why should we be forced to do the marketing, particularly when publishers invest in lead titles, while others are left with barely any support?

## Views ≠ sales

I felt this pressure when my first YA book was acquired in 2022. Our publisher, Hong Kong-based Earnshaw Books, encouraged us to market on social media, while offering only occasional promotional backing and little budget of their own. So, my co-author and I turned to Instagram. One video we posted got over 500,000 views. Even with that level of exposure, it likely translated into fewer than 50 actual book sales according to our internal tracking. That's a microscopic 0.01 percent conversion rate. Essentially zero. It was disheartening. Exposure, I realized, is not the same as engagement. The experience raised a question I couldn't ignore: if visibility alone doesn't translate into readership, what actually does?

Around the same time, I noticed a different pattern. I was invited to participate in the Vancouver Arts Festival and later received a gold medal at the Independent

Publisher Book Awards (the IPPYs). That recognition led to further opportunities: additional publishing deals for various age groups with Comicker Press, collaborations, and institutional invitations for guest lecturing. None of this came from building a large online platform. I had barely 300 followers on Instagram and even fewer on TikTok. Yet these were the opportunities that actually moved my career forward.

This contrast forced me to rethink what marketing actually means in publishing. What emerged for me is one core insight: Marketing is credibility.

Credibility is what makes a reader trust a piece and decide it's worth their time. Readers and potential readers see us as credible based on signals that suggest a work is worth paying attention to. Visibility alone does not create readership. Readership emerges when a work is recognized as credible within the systems that circulate it.

## A “credibility ecosystem”

So, what signals of credibility are writers actually sending out?

- I believe they can be grouped into five categories:
- **recognition signals** — awards, grants, and prizes that provide external validation.
  - **institutional signals** — festivals, talks, and curriculum adoption that place work within formal cultural spaces.
  - **media signals** — interviews, podcasts, social media, and press coverage that amplify visibility beyond the page.
  - **market signals** — sales, pre-orders, and readership growth that indicate demand.
  - **network signals** — collaborations, partnerships, and affiliations that reflect industry relationships.

# THANK YOU!

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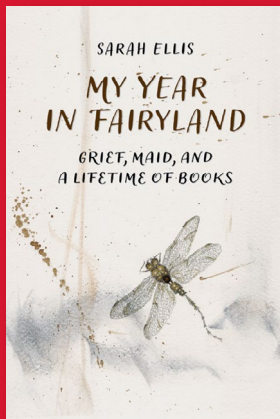
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