



Welcome to Lighthouse’s first YA Fest!

Held March 16–17, the Fest celebrates and draws together the vibrant community of Denver YA writers—and when we say YA, we mean all books for tween, teen, and young adult readers! Middle Grade (MG), Young Adult (YA), and New Adult (NA) writers are all welcome.

Join us for a weekend of rich craft discussion, community events, and immersion in the business side of the YA world. Read on to learn more!



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*Classes and times are subject to change. Check lighthousewriters.org for the most up-to-date information.



Weekend Passes

Want to get the full YA Fest experience? Check out our Weekend Passes to save on craft seminars, intensives, and more!



The Gold Pass

The Gold Pass includes a two-day intensive, both business panels, two afternoon craft seminars (choose one each day), and both evening happy hour events.

\$370/\$425
MEMBER/NONMEMBER



The Silver Pass

The Silver Pass covers both afternoons of the Fest. It includes both business panels, two afternoon craft seminars (choose one each day), and both evening happy hour events.

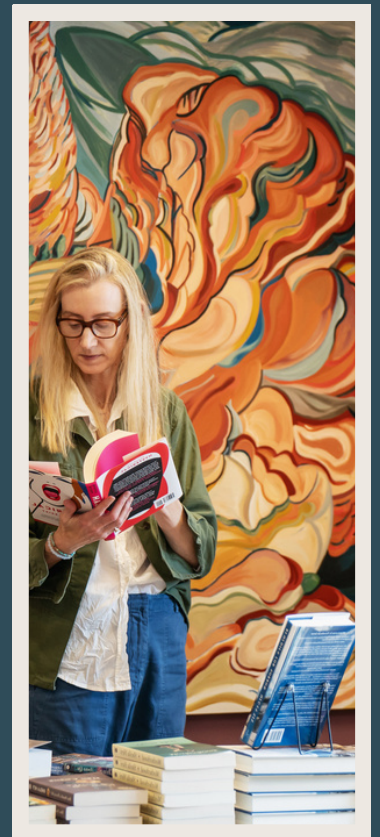
\$205/\$245
MEMBER/NONMEMBER



The Bronze Pass*

The Bronze Pass gives you access to one full day of the weekend. This includes one morning large-group craft seminar, one business panel, one afternoon craft seminar, and one evening happy hour event.

\$175/\$200
MEMBER/NONMEMBER



*Please note that the Bronze Pass can be purchased for access to either Saturday's or Sunday's events, but not a combination of both.



Craft Seminars

These two-hour sessions tackle a craft topic like worldbuilding, plot, character, or dialogue. Take a craft seminar to learn from our amazing faculty of published local YA-ers.

Morning Large-Group Seminars

9:30 to 11:30 AM | \$75/\$85 MEMBER/NONMEMBER

Saturday, March 16

Making Your YA Characters Pop with *Leslie Vedder*

In this course, we'll look at examples and discuss the ways writers differentiate characters in multi-POV works, as well as what makes a compelling voice for YA characters. We'll read examples from YA books and do writing exercises to practice utilizing strong character voice in narrative.

We'll also discuss direct dialogue. Dialogue can really make a scene pop, bring a character to life, and keep a story moving. We'll talk through different kinds of dialogue, how to use each effectively, and discuss some tips and tricks for making dialogue jump off the page.

Sunday, March 17

Writing Young Love with *Ellen O'Clover*

Romance in YA does more than make us swoon; falling in love plays a pivotal role in coming-of-age stories. Successful YA romance plots reveal characters' emotional needs, push them to be vulnerable, and create page-turning stakes that extend beyond heartache to exert real influence on the book's central plot. This craft seminar is dedicated to developing compelling YA romance and topics will include meet-cutes, propulsive romance arcs, tropes, and more.



Craft Seminars

Afternoon Seminars

2:00 to 4:00 PM | \$75/\$85 MEMBER/NONMEMBER

Saturday, March 16

Writing About Race and Identity In YA with Rachel Werner

How does one write compelling narratives specifically for a younger audience? If you're struggling to craft relatable characters and to identify solid mentor texts as a guide, this craft seminar is for you. Explore character, culture, diversity, compassion, and empathy with other kidlit and YA authors through short readings, creative writing exercises and group first-blush critique—aimed to help you incorporate authenticity and accessibility in your work by avoiding the pitfalls of appropriation, overused themes, and misalignment of literacy level.

Writing the Multiple POV MG/YA Novel with JE Thomas

Crafting a multiple-POV narrative is like weaving a tapestry using hot coals instead of yarn, particularly because MG/YA readers are looking for engaging plots, surprising twists, snappy dialogue, and relatable characters. In this class, we'll discuss how to choose which character takes center stage, how to decide which plot-line drives the core narrative, and how to select effective subplots and character arcs for each POV. We'll also read excerpts from recent multi-POV MG/YA novels and examine the authors' choices. We'll finish with a takeaway checklist you can choose to create the final cast list for your multi-POV work.

YA excerpts will be chosen from *Highly Suspicious and Unfairly Cute* by Talia Hibbert and *One of Us is Lying* by Karen M. McManus, and MG excerpts from *Slacker* by Gordon Norman and *The Red Pyramid* by Rick Riordan.

The Hundred Ideas with JC Peterson

In this generative seminar, we'll work on brainstorming new ideas by working individually and as group to come up with characters, settings, and plots. There will be plenty of time to write, and each participant should leave with at least one log-line (and maybe more!) for a new project.



Craft Seminars

Afternoon Seminars

2:00 to 4:00 PM | \$75/\$85 MEMBER/NONMEMBER

Sunday, March 17

Chop Shop: Ruthless Revision *with Kellye Crocker*

Revising a novel is hard. It requires stamina, patience, and, most of all, a brave, open heart. If you've got that—and we bet you do—we've got some tools to make revision less painful. Manageable, even. We'll focus on the big picture, exploring ways to clarify and hone your novel's vision. How are your characters, plot, and setting working to tell an engaging story only you can tell? We'll then focus on the nitty-gritty: killing darlings (and why you must) and polishing prose. Here's the secret about revision: it's where the magic happens!

Setting: The Five Senses *with Malia Maunakea*

In order to fully immerse readers in our stories, we must establish a strong setting. In this class, we'll explore developing a deeper sense of place, regardless of genre, by using all five senses. We'll look at recent debut texts through the lens of setting, and writers will leave with tools and techniques to apply to current works-in-progress. This class is designed primarily to help writers improve world building, but can be attended by anyone.

Young Readers, Big Feelings *with Mariko Turk*

To get agents, editors, and readers to fall in love with your YA novel, it needs to pack an emotional punch. But writing genuine emotion is tricky, especially since the emotional volatility of our teen years can feel hard to access. This seminar is about tapping into those big, messy feelings to create stories that speak to teen readers. We'll make sure the overall premise of your novel has built-in emotional stakes. We'll look at how to use your character's emotional journey to drive the plot of your novel. Finally, we'll discuss how to "make it worse" for your main character so that their emotional arc is rich and satisfying.



Weekend Intensives

In these two-day, smaller-group courses, you'll dive deeply into your story to explore what makes it tick, from plot to setting to characters. Two-day intensives get into the nitty gritty of craft to make your story shine.

9:30 to 11:30 AM | \$180/\$200 MEMBER/NONMEMBER

Saturday and Sunday

Plot Points Roadmap *with Jenny Elder-Moke*

In this two-day class, we'll talk three act structure, why theme is our touchpoint, how plot and character rely on each other, and identify the plot points roadmap—the five major turning points in every plot that keep your story on the right track to make it to the finish line. This session is perfect for writers who fear the plot, writers who are worried their story is just coasting on vibes, and writers who know their characters' deepest secrets and favorite breakfast items but can't figure out what they're supposed to DO. Accessible to beginning writers but still useful for advanced writers looking for more structure to their planning process.

The Art of Getting Started *with Traci L. Jones*

This two-day intensive will start with a lesson on how to begin a novel. On our first page, we offer a promise to the reader. It's with our first few words that we convince the reader to follow us. In our first chapter, we set up the bones of our stories. This course will go through the different ways we can begin our stories and what will convince our readers to keep turning the pages. We'll spend time with some writing exercises and revision before sharing the first three to five pages of our works-in-progress and workshopping them with first blush feedback to help create the best beginning for your story as possible.



Business Panels

After lunch each day, hear a panel of local authors and agents discuss the business side of writing YA.

12:30 to 1:30 PM | \$20/\$25 MEMBER/NONMEMBER

Saturday, March 16

Idea to Shelf: Publishing for Young Readers

Join authors Olivia Chadha, Ellen O'Clover, and Jan Thomas alongside agents Kristin Nelson and Paige Terlip to discuss the ins and outs of publishing for younger audiences. What's different about it from literary publishing? How do I write a query letter for an MG/YA novel? How do I find an agent who represents my genre? Come for answers to all these and more.

Sunday, March 17

MG vs. YA Smackdown!

Join authors Olivia Abtahi, Kellye Crocker, Jenny Elder-Moke and Malia Maunakea to watch the two subgenres duke it out to find who's the best!

...but really, join us for a playful battle between middle grade and young adult literature to discover their differences and similarities. Who reads each of them? What sets them apart from one another? How does the publishing industry differ between each? Come for a friendly competition and lots of rich insight.





Evening Events

Each evening we'll gather to celebrate what makes us love YA.

4:00 to 6:00 PM | \$20/\$25 MEMBER/NONMEMBER

Saturday, March 16

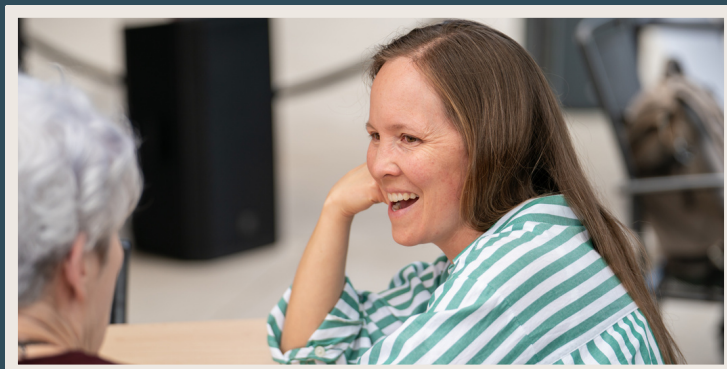
Critique Partner Speed Date + Happy Hour

Come find your next best writing buddy! With color-coded nametags to showcase your genre, go on 5-minute mini-dates to get to know your fellow YA/MG writers. Grab a drink, grab a seat, and get mingling.

Sunday, March 17

Reading and Conversation with Leslie Vedder and Jenny Elder-Moke + Happy Hour

Come enjoy a reading from Leslie Vedder and Jenny Elder-Moke, two amazing local YA writers with lots to share. Grab a drink, grab a friend, and enjoy!





	Saturday	Sunday
8:00 – 9:00 AM	Early Bird Writing Hour	Early Bird Writing Hour
9:00–11:30 AM	Two-Day Intensives (Day 1) <i>and Making YA Characters Pop*</i>	Two-Day Intensives (Day 2) <i>and Writing Young Love*</i>
11:30 AM – 12:30 PM	Lunch Break	Lunch Break
12:30 – 1:30 PM	Business Panel: <i>Idea to Shelf</i>	Business Panel: <i>Literary Smackdown</i>
1:30 – 2:00 PM	Break	Break
2:00 – 4:00 PM	Afternoon Craft Seminars	Afternoon Craft Seminars
4:00 – 6:00 PM	Happy Hour + Critique Partner Speed Date	Happy Hour + Reading and Conversation with Leslie Vedder and Jenny Elder-Moke

*Please note morning craft seminars begin at 9:30 AM.



Guests

Scroll to view our full list of instructors made up of our wonderful Lighthouse faculty and talented visiting authors from around Colorado.



Olivia Abtahi

Olivia Abtahi is a film director and writer based in Denver, Colorado. Born to an Iranian father and an Argentine mother, she is a melting pot of distinct cultures. Her debut novel, *Perfectly Parvin*, was published in 2021 by Penguin Random House Putnam Books For Young Readers, receiving the SCBWI Golden Kite Honor, and YALSA Odyssey Honor, and numerous starred reviews. Her sophomore novel, *Azar on Fire*, was published in August 2022. Her middle grade debut, *Rostam and the Red Dwarf*, is forthcoming from Simon & Schuster in 2025, along with her picture book debut from Kokila in the same year. She currently lives in Denver, Colorado, with her husband and daughter. In her spare time, she enjoys watching music videos, laughing so hard it hurts, and hunting down gluten-free pastries.

Olivia Chadha

Olivia Kaur Chadha began her writing career with a stint in Los Angeles writing comic book scripts for Michael Turner's *Fathom*. Her debut adult novel, *Balance of Fragile Things*, is a literary novel that centers on a multiethnic family (Punjabi Sikh/Latvian) who come together during a climate catastrophe. Her YA debut, *Rise Of The Red Hand: The Mechanists Series* (Erewhon Books 2021) is a sci-fi series set in a future climate ravaged South Asian landscape. Olivia has a PhD in creative writing from Binghamton University and a master's in creative writing from the University of Colorado, Boulder. Her research centers on exile, folklore and fairy tales, and the environment. She is first-generation American of Punjabi Sikh and Latvian/German descent and lives in Colorado with her family and two very odd dogs.





Guests



Kellye Crocker

Kellye Crocker writes novels for kids and teens and short nonfiction for adults. A former daily newspaper reporter, Kellye has taught writing at two universities, worked in library youth services, and as a reader for a literary agent. She holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Vermont College of Fine Arts and a Bachelor's degree from the University of Missouri School of Journalism. She's a member of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators and Lighthouse Writers Workshop. She kicked off 2017 with a one-month writing residency at Vermont Studio Center. As a kid, Kellye was a pasty bookworm whose mom forced her outside to play. Reading and writing remain Kellye's favorite things. Along with her dog and ice cream. And, of course, her family. A longtime Iowan who recently moved to Colorado, Kellye has discovered a new love: mountains.

Jenny Elder-Moke

Jenny Elder Moke is the award-winning author of children's and adult literature. She enjoys fast-paced adventures with plenty of mysteries, surprising turns, and laughs along the way. Her most recent release is *A Spark in the Cinders*. She is also the author of *Hood* and the *Curse of the Specter Queen* series.

Jenny lives in Denver, CO. She is represented by Elizabeth Bewley at Sterling Lord Literistic.





Guests



Traci L. Jones

While raising her four kids, Traci Jones was reminded of her love for writing and began working towards earning a Creative Writing Certificate at the University of Denver. One of those courses led to the writing and completion of her first book, *Standing Against the Wind*. Two more books with FSG followed in 2010 and 2011, *Finding My Place* and *Silhouetted by the Blue*. In 2018 she signed with Metamorphosis Literary Agency and is represented by agent Patty Carouthers, who is shopping her fourth and fifth manuscripts *Dead Certain* and *A Blossom Within*. She is currently working on her sixth manuscript, *Vue*.

In 2016 she joined the faculty of the Mile Hi MFA in Creative Writing program at Regis University in Denver, Colorado, where she teaches young adult fiction.

Malia Maunakea

Malia Maunakea is a Kānaka Maoli (Native Hawaiian) writer who grew up on Hawai'i Island and O'ahu before relocating to the continent for college. She writes both middle-grade fiction and nonfiction and is the author of *Lei and the Fire Goddess* (Penguin Workshop, summer 2023) and *Lightweight Backpacking for Families* (CMC Press, spring 2023). When not at her computer, she can often be found roaming the Rocky Mountains with her husband, their two children, and a rescue mutt named Peggy.





Guests



Kristin Nelson, Nelson Literary

Kristin established Nelson Literary Agency, LLC, in 2002 and over the last decade and a half of her career, she has represented over fifty *New York Times* bestselling titles and many *USA Today* bestsellers. One of her client's books, *Bird Box*, is a Netflix movie starring Sandra Bullock and Trevante Rhodes, and Hugh Howey's *Silo* series premiered in May 2023 from Apple TV+. Her goal as an agent is simple: she wants every client of hers to make a living solely from writing and 90% of her clients do just that. Those clients include Shelby Van Pelt, Jamie Ford, Marie Lu, Stacey Lee, Ally Carter, Josh Malerman, Hugh Howey, Richard Chizmar, E.R. Ramzipoor, Swati Teerdhala, and Scott Reintgen. When she is not busy selling books, Kristin plays tennis, pickle ball, and golf. She also enjoys playing bridge (where she is the youngest person in her club), and can often be found hiking in the mountains with her husband.

Ellen O'Clover

Ellen writes YA novels about finding your people, falling in love, and figuring it all out (or she's trying to, anyway). But she wrote a lot of other stuff first: she grew up in Columbus, Ohio, where she wrote piles of angsty love poems at the Thurber House Young Writers' Studio, and then moved to Baltimore where she spent four years writing grim, minimalist short stories at the Johns Hopkins University.

Since then, she's written a bunch of ads for a bunch of brands. But always, always her heart has tugged her toward YA and the types of stories she grew up reading. The ones that made her fall in love with writing in the first place. And today you can read her debut novel, *Seven Percent of Ro Devereux*, out now from HarperTeen. Her second book, *The Someday Daughter*, publishes February 20, 2024.





Guests



JC Peterson

JC grew up in Michigan, playing on railroad tracks and swimming all summer. After college (hey, MSU!) she moved to Oklahoma City and worked for several years as a journalist. She continued her slow migration west with a move to Denver, where she lives today with her husband, two young boys, and senior tabby. She might miss the lakes in Michigan, but those mountain views are hard to beat. In 2019, she was chosen as a mentee for Pitch Wars, and her spectacular mentors Carrie S. Allen and Sabrina Lotfi helped her edit and polish her novel *Being Mary Bennet*. (Was it stressful? Oh my god, yes. But so worth it.)

Today, she's represented by Amy Bishop of Dystel, Goderich & Bourret. *Being Mary Bennet* is her debut novel and released March 15, 2022 with HarperTeen.

Paige Terlip, Andrea Brown Literary

Paige Terlip represents all categories of children's books from picture books to young adult, as well as select adult fiction, including thrillers/psychological suspense, fantasy/sci-fi, horror, upmarket fiction, romance, and mysteries. Regardless of genre, she is seeking inclusive, intersectional voices and gorgeous line-level writing with emotionally compelling narratives.

Paige has worked at ABLA since 2017. She comes to agenting with a background in marketing, design, and freelance editorial. She's worked at Charlesbridge Publishing, The National Renewable Energy Laboratory, and a ranch in the Rockies. She has an MA in Children's Literature and an MFA in Writing for Children from Simmons University. If she's not reading, you'll find her practicing Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, re-watching the *Great British Baking Show*, or hiking with her Husky-Shepherd mix.





Guests



J.E. Thomas

J.E. Thomas spent her early summers stuffing grocery bags with books at the local library, reading feverishly, then repeating the process week after week. So it's not surprising that she thinks books and imagination are the best streaming service around.

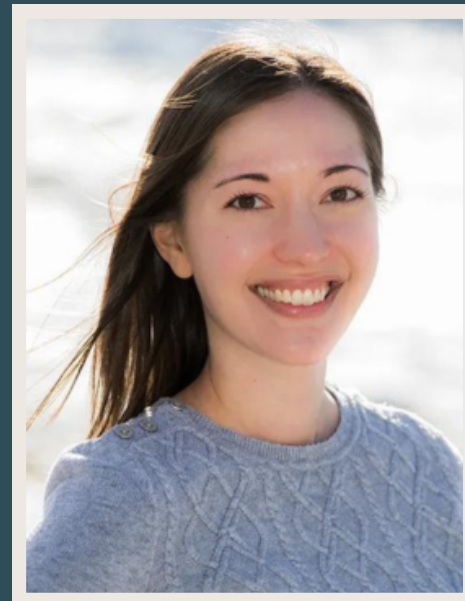
J.E. is an award-winning writer with bachelor degrees in Mass Communications and Political Science, and a master's degree in Public Communications.

Control Freaks is her first book. She's working on middle grade book #2 and her debut YA novel. Fun fact: she includes the name of at least one of her dogs in every story.

Mariko Turk

Mariko Turk grew up in Pennsylvania and graduated from the University of Pittsburgh with a BA in creative writing. She received her PhD in English from the University of Florida, with a concentration in children's literature. She lives in Colorado with her husband and daughter, where she enjoys tea, walks, and stories of all kinds.

Her debut novel, *The Other Side of Perfect*, is a YALSA Best Fiction for Young Adults 2022 pick and a Bank Street Best Children's Books of the year selection. It's available in the U.S., Australia, New Zealand, Germany, Spain, and is forthcoming in Bulgaria.





Guests



Leslie Vedder

Leslie Vedder (she/her) is a queer ace author who loves fairytale retellings with girl adventurers and heroes! She grew up on fantasy books, anime, fanfiction, and the Lord of the Rings movies, and met her true love in high school choir. She graduated from San Francisco State University with a B.A. in creative writing and currently lives in Colorado with her wife and two spoiled house cats.

When she's not reading or writing, you can find her watching anime and sci-fi shows, walking in the woods and pretending they're enchanted forests, or playing old video games. She always collects all the Skulltulas in Zelda and all the Dalmation puppies in Kingdom Hearts. Her debut YA novel *The Bone Spindle* (Penguin | Razorbill) was an indie bestseller.

Rachel Werner

Rachel Werner is the author of the picture books *Floods* (Capstone 2022), *Moving and Grooving to Fillmore's Beat* (Capstone 2023), and *The Glam World Tour* (Capstone 2024) as well as the nonfiction middle grade title *Glow & Grow: A Brown Girl's Positive Body Guide* (Free Spirit 2025). She is on faculty for Hugo House in Seattle, Lighthouse Writers Workshop in Denver, and the Loft Literary Center in Minneapolis, where she leads curricula to educate writers and content producers in marketing their work. A regular book reviewer for Shelf Awareness, she has contributed print, photography, and video content to *We Are Teachers*, Highlights Foundation, *The Spruce Eats*, *TheKitchn*, and *MotherUntitled*. She is the founder of The Little Book Project WI, a community arts initiative committed to pursuing social justice through narrative.





Contact Information



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FOR GENERAL LIGHTHOUSE INQUIRIES

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PARKING MAP

