



# 11th Annual Broadleaf Writers Conference



September 19-20, 2026

Decatur Library





# SATURDAY

September 19, 2026



## Registration and Check-in

8:00-9:00

- Attendees register and receive conference materials

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## Introduction and Welcome

9:00-9:25

- Broadleaf Founder and Executive Director Zachary Steele and Conference Chair Shay Rodricks

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## Indie Publishing Room A

9:30-10:30

- Panelists: Milton Davis, Bradley Sides, Crystal Wilkins  
Moderator: Kim Poovey

Independent publishing is a great way to get your book into the world. Panel members will discuss the ins and outs of indie publishing as well as the benefits. Learn different approaches to everything from distribution to formatting and more.

## Plot Twists and Character Arcs Room B

- Panelists: H.D. Hunter, Lo Patrick, Michael Wehunt  
Moderator: Piper Huguley

When selecting a story, readers expect resolution and satisfaction with the main character's story arc. However, what makes them stay with your story, and makes you a go-to author, are clever plot twists. A good, shocking twist will push readers to engage in that most valuable marketing tactic: word of mouth. Join us for a panel that will share information on how to create character arcs and plot twists that will make your story go viral in an attention-divided world.





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## American Gothic Room A

10:45-11:45

- Panelists: Andy Davidson, Robert Gwaltney, Holly McClure, Michael Wehunt  
Moderator: Crystal O'Leary-Davidson

The Gothic can be Romantic and it can be terrifying, but once it crossed the Atlantic from England to America, the Gothic left the Castle and seeped into the American landscape and cities. This panel explores the tropes and the slippery nature of the American Gothic. You know The Gothic when you see it, but how do we define it, and how can you add the shadows of Gothic Horror to your own work.

## Workshop: Story Beats and Why They Matter Room B

- Presenter: Zachary Steele

From the inciting incident to the finale, story beats are the foundation that makes your story work. Author, editor, and Broadleaf founder Zachary Steele walks you through each element, why they are important, and offers examples of popular works to show them in action.

## One-on-One Pitch Sessions Room C



- One-on-one pitch sessions, located on the 4th floor.

Check out our list of agents and editors [here](#).



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## How to Craft a Mystery Room A

12:00-1:00



Panelists: Benji Carr, Van Jensen, Lo Patrick, Kristine Rudolph  
Moderator: Eliot Parker

What keeps readers turning pages late into the night? A well-built mystery combines tension, character, pacing, and carefully planted clues that reward attentive readers. Panelists will explore the essential elements of constructing an effective mystery story—from the initial crime or central question to the satisfying final reveal.

## Content Bootcamp: A Writer's Marketing Workshop



Presenter: Odessa Blaine

Everyone knows they should be marketing, but no one wants to actually do it. The constant need for content is exhausting. Plus, you'd rather be writing, mowing the dishes, or vacuuming the cat. The interactive workshop will help you create content while practicing content brainstorming skills. You'll leave with material to use and know how to use it!

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## Lunch

1:00-2:15



It's time for a break! But you don't have to eat alone. Sit and enjoy your meal with our speakers or fellow attendees. Make friends, find mentors, form writing groups, and embrace the power and importance of a writing community!





# SATURDAY

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## Writing YA for Right Now (Not for the Teen You Used to Be)

2:15-3:15

Room A

- Panelists: H.D. Hunter, D.C. Phillips, Kristine Rudolph  
Moderator: Crystal Wilkins

Today's teen readers expect stories that reflect their reality—shaped by social media, evolving identity language, and emotional awareness. This panel explores how to write YA that feels authentic to now, not a nostalgic version of adolescence.

## Down the Rabbit Hole: The Art and Science of Research

Room B

- Panelists: Jeff Clemmons, Felicia Feaster, Holly McClure, Chika Unigwe  
Moderator: Lorraine Lai

Research brings authenticity to writing and builds reader trust. Panel members will pull back the curtain on this process from when and how, and, crucially, when to stop. We dive into finding credible sources, organizing findings, and how to weave facts into your narrative without losing momentum or prose.

## One-on-One Pitch Sessions

Room C

- One-on-one pitch sessions, located on the 4th floor.

Check out our list of agents and editors [here](#).





# SATURDAY

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## First Pages Critique Room A

3:30-4:45

- Panelists: Lindsey Aduskevich, Kelly Bergh, Kate McMullen, Haley Warrington  
Moderator: Carmen Slaughter

The [first page](#) is an introduction to your story and to your writing. To catch the eye of an agent or an editor, your first page needs to be on point. Join our literary agents and editors as they listen to and critique your first pages. Which pages will tantalize and intrigue? Gain invaluable insights from their gentle feedback. [Follow this link for more info.](#)

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# SUNDAY

September 20, 2026



## Welcome Back

9:00-9:15

- Conference Chair, Shay Rodricks
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## Successful Query Letters and How to Write Them

Room A

9:15-10:15

- Panelists: Lindsey Aduskevich, Kelly Bergh, Kate McMullen, Haley Warrington  
Moderator: Carmen Slaughter

Your proposal or manuscript is written. Now you need someone to read it. What are the key components to an impressive query letter? What is the proper structure and format? Attendees will have an opportunity to connect with agents and gain tools to successfully complete the querying process.

## Workshop: Recipe for Writing

Room B

- Presenter: Kim Poovey

Writing is not a “one size fits all” endeavor. Recipe for Writing will guide you in creating a writing environment for optimal creative output. Attendees will learn how to choose the perfect ingredients for their writing style. Additionally, we will discuss coping with imposter syndrome, setting attainable goals, and choosing the publishing path best suited to your work.





# SUNDAY

September 20, 2026



## Knowing the Rules to Break Them: What's

10:30-11:30

### Expected

Room A

- Panelists: Piper Huguley, Van Jensen, Bradley Sides, Michael Wehunt  
Moderator: Jeff Clemmons

Knowing the rules that writers can bend or break can lead to better storytelling. Sentence fragments create rhythm, emphasis, and voice. Conjunctions at the start of sentences can add rhythm, pacing, and emphasis. Run-on sentences contribute to stream of consciousness styles. And dialogue demands to be written as it would be spoken. But what rules can you not break? In narration? In dialogue? What is your publisher's house style? Or if you are self-publishing, who edits your work? Join our panel for a look at the nuances of writing and how to intentionally break the rules without looking careless or nescient.

## Writing Nonfiction: Truth, Voice, and Craft

Room B

- Panelists: Holly McClure, Felicia Feaster, Ann Hite, Crystal O'leary-Davidson  
Moderator: Robert Gwaltney

From memoir to biography, nonfiction demands factual integrity and compelling storytelling. This panel brings together experienced writers to explore how truth is shaped on the page—through voice, structure, research, and ethical responsibility. Panelists will discuss the challenges of writing about real people and events, balancing accuracy with artistry, and finding a narrative thread that keeps readers engaged.





**SUNDAY**



September 20, 2026

## One-on-One Mentoring Sessions & Ten-page Critiques

Room C

- One-on-one mentoring sessions and Ten-page critiques, located on the 4th floor.

Check out our list of mentors [here](#).

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## The F Word: Fantasy, Fairytales, and Folklore

Room A

11:45-12:45

- Panelists: Bill Bridges, Milton Davis, H.D. Hunter, Van Jensen  
Moderator: Shay Rodricks

Fantasy, Fairytales, and Folklore—the F words lure in readers to mystical and magical realms. In this panel, we will discuss the importance of fantasy worlds, incorporating fairytales and folklore into your storytelling, and all the magical niches in between.

## Workshop: Writing & Art

Room B

- Presenter: Dawn Major

Inspiration may come from the lyrics of a song, a captivating image of a photo or painting, a piece of jewelry, pottery, a simple seashell, a secret family recipe, or even a quilt passed down from generation to generation. A single object, a verse, or an image may drive your next plot or may serve as a symbol. Discover how to tap into those narrative sources of inspiration and create rich storytelling experiences for your readers.





# SUNDAY

September 20, 2026



## One-on-One Mentoring Sessions Room C

- One-on-one mentoring sessions, located on the 4th floor.  
Check out our list of mentors [here](#).
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## Lunch

12:45-2:00

- It's time for a break! But you don't have to eat alone. Sit and enjoy your meal with our speakers or fellow attendees. Make friends, find mentors, form writing groups, and embrace the power and importance of a writing community!
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## Brace Yourself Room A

2:00-3:00

- Panelists: Felicia Feaster, Lo Patrick, Kim Poovey, Chika Unigwe  
Moderator: Ann Hite

Attendees will learn how to design engaging plots, develop believable suspects, construct layered motives, and balance misdirection with fairness. Panelists will also examine techniques for building suspense, managing point of view, pacing revelations, and crafting twists that feel both surprising and inevitable.





**SUNDAY**



September 20, 2026

## **Crazy Little Thing Called Mental Health** Room B

- Panelists: Dawn Major, Bradley Sides, Crystal Wilkins  
Moderator: Benji Carr

There is a way to write effectively and honestly about psychological issues and mental health diagnoses that more effectively represents your book as full of rich complex characters. So how do you best pay your characters and yourself respect when crafting a story where everyone is coping with different issues? How can we craft the best stories and be mindful about mentality without making ourselves utterly mental? This panel will address the best ways that new work will avoid old stigmas to help your audience feel compassion and connection.

## **Not Yet is Not Never** Room A

**3:15-4:30**

- Panelists: Milton Davis, Shay Rodricks, Kristine Rudolph, Chika Unigwe  
Moderator: Odessa Blaine

The Art of the “No”. It's never fun to get a rejection, but there are ways to gracefully accept it and turn it into a win. Our panelists will share their experiences with disappointment, how they handled it, and what they learned from it.



## **Farewell**

**4:30**

- Founder and Executive Director, Zachary Steele
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