

Contributor Introductions and Setting the Context and the Problem

Jackie Arnold: So hello everyone and welcome to the 2020 Children's Literature Assembly Masterclass. I'm Jackie Arnold and Mary Kate's Sableski here from the University of Dayton.

Jackie Arnold: And the focus of this session is on having difficult conversations with children and doing that through using children's literature.

Mary-Kate Sableski: We are pleased to have with us tonight. Rachelle Savitz from Clemson University University who will provide a frame for our discussion and then we will engage in a question and answer with four authors - Ruth Behar, Ellen Hopkins, Janae Marks and Dan Santat. And we'll conclude with Lauren Aimonette- Liange from the University of Utah, who will provide some discussion points for us. So before we get started, we'd like to invite each of the authors to introduce themselves and their work. So Ruth, would you be willing to get started.

Ruth Behar: Yes. Well, it's so nice to be here. Thank you so much for including me in this panel. I'm really thrilled and I'm the author of two middle grade novels - Lucky Broken Girl about a Cuban immigrant girl in New York in the 1960s, who ends up in a terrible car accident has to be in bed for a long time, so that's Lucky Broken Girl and my more recent book is Letters From Cuba, inspired by my maternal grandmother story and it's about a Jewish girl from Poland, making her way to Cuba in the late 1930s to help her father, bring the rest of the family to Cuba, on the eve of the war.

Mary-Kate Sableski: Ellen.

Ellen Hopkins: Well, I've been doing this for a little while. I guess I'm I have 14 young adult novels inverse. I have four novels for adults. And I just had a debut novel, which would be my debut middle grade novel Closer to Nowhere, which is the book, I imagine, where will mostly be discussing right now and it's about a young boy, who comes to live with his aunt and his cousin, and he comes with a fair amount of Early Childhood trauma and the issues that that has raised for him. And now for his, his new extended family.

Ellen Hopkins: So that books been out since October, and then all I'm working on my next middle grade, which I actually in revision now so it'll be out next year, too. So, I have another one for you, then

Mary-Kate Sableski: And Janae.

Janae Marks: Hi I'm Janae Marks. I'm super excited to be here and be part of this conversation. So I am a brand new author as of this year, my debut middle grade novel *From the Desk of Zoe Washington* just came out this past January and it tells the story of 12 year old Zoe, who is really into baking. She aspires to become a pastry chef and on her 12th birthday she unexpectedly received a letter from her father who she's actually never met because he's been in prison her whole life. And she decides to write back and and getting to know them in getting to know each other back and forth letters. So he ends up finding out something pretty surprising, which is that he might be innocent of his crime. So it then becomes somewhat of a mystery. He tries to uncover the truth.

Dan Santat: I'm Dan Santat, I'm a children's book author Illustrator, most notably for picture books such as the *Adventures of equal the imaginary friend*, *Are we there yet? After the fall, how Humpty Dumpty got back up again*, *Drawn Together*. I'm currently working on some graphic novel memoirs.

Mary-Kate Sableski: Okay, thank you very much for introducing yourselves sure makes us excited to have this conversation and Rachelle if you provide us with some introductory comments.

Rachelle Savitz: Sure, let me share my screen. Sorry.

Rachelle Savitz: Okay, so a lot of this comes from a book that I was really excited to co author with Dr. Doug Fisher and Nancy Fry.

Rachelle Savitz: And a little bit of background I taught for 15 years. Prior to working at the university level. And I always worked in Title one schools and my students continuously had a lot of traumatic experiences. A lot of stress. A lot of hardships and so this is something that I'm passionate about of understanding how and why we need to talk about this in our school and how using literature is an excellent way to start normalizing the conversations around trauma.

Rachelle Savitz: And so a little bit about trauma is kind of my goal of sharing. And so there are three types of trauma. There's acute there's chronic and there there's complex

Rachelle Savitz: And so whether it's a single event or it's something that's multiple events ongoing when we talk about trauma with children. It's usually referred to as adverse childhood experiences and that's usually between birth to age 17 and so

there are four main categories that are identified four aces and that's abuse, neglect maltreatment, household challenges, mental or physical illness, however.

Rachelle Savitz: The National traumatic stress network decided to kind of elaborate a little bit on this regarding additional hardships that our students are facing and so that includes bullying it in key in includes refugee trauma, things like terrorism and violence disasters, a natural disaster. So we're seeing all kinds of the hurricanes and different reasons why children are getting displaced and move and so that all relates to trauma and hardships of our children.

Rachelle Savitz: And so part of the reason of why it's really important in my opinion of teachers, being aware of this and with our children and our students is the fact that it's actually the norm for our students to face with traumatic experiences. And so there's a few statistics here that have been provided that the National Survey of children's health

Rachelle Savitz: They interviewed and they surveyed parents from the year prior and so 33% of the parents said that their children did experience one traumatic event with 14% of these

Rachelle Savitz: Students that we're having in classrooms, having two or more. Additionally, it's really important to understand that inequities kind of relate to trauma, there is a correlation. And so when you think about

Rachelle Savitz: With my students, for instance, their parents worked four or five six different jobs throughout a week on my students, I taught predominantly high school. They were only getting about an hour of sleep and so

Rachelle Savitz: That's a hardship that they that they had to face which is can be considered a traumatic experience.

Rachelle Savitz: And so we see this disproportionately with especially Black children as well as lower income households where you have a lot more traumatic events that are occurring.

Rachelle Savitz: Even if it is unintentional. And so it's really important to understand also that there is generational trauma. So if, for instance, with my family. I'm Jewish. And so we'll hear probably more about this with

Rachelle Savitz: The books later. But my mother was actually born in a deportation camp. And so there's that generational trauma.

Rachelle Savitz: That occurs because of what her family's experience as well as secondary trauma. When you're witnessing something That somebody else has experienced and it almost becomes traumatic for you.

Rachelle Savitz: One important thing to understand is that when we're talking with people about trauma, there isn't a comparison. My trauma is not more traumatic than somebody else's

Rachelle Savitz: As well as the fact that if somebody sharing a hardship or trauma that they're going through, then that's their reality. And so we have to be very cognizant of the fact that this is a hardship or a traumatic experience for them. And that's something that we need to be aware of.

Rachelle Savitz: And so for the big reason why I feel that the teachers really need to understand how trauma impacts their students and how we can use literature to open up the conversations and normalize

Rachelle Savitz: This in our classroom and not silence or make students feel that they're experiencing something traumatic. And that's something that doesn't come into the classroom. It does come in our classroom and so trauma really influences a lot of different ways for our children and for students.

Rachelle Savitz: For instance, they have a harder time reacting and regulating their emotions which then often it leads to behavior issues or referrals.

Rachelle Savitz: Because a student just may not know how to respond. And it could be something as simple as didn't understand the directions. It could be recalling information.

Rachelle Savitz: It could just be they made a mistake and when students experienced trauma, it goes back to that fight, flight, or freeze moment and they may not be able to know exactly what to do to kind of process through that emotion. Most importantly is the last bullet, the fact that

Rachelle Savitz: Our children they they develop their sense of identity during their, their schooling years. And so when students are experiencing traumatic events and they're not able to necessarily be able to figure out how to cope with that and how to build resiliency and resilience

Rachelle Savitz: They have a lower self esteem. Often, and so they feel that they may not be capable of doing something they may give up on things. And so it's very problematic that as educators, if we're not aware of traumatic experiences.

Rachelle Savitz: That are going on with our students. We may be misunderstanding how they're responding in our classrooms.

Rachelle Savitz: And so some of the things that that we know that teachers can do and just adult role models in general as it relates to protective factors and these are things that we can do to

Rachelle Savitz: Kind of build that resistance help students be able to feel that they can succeed and get through problems.

Rachelle Savitz: And so there are three key factors with educators and it's the fact of building those caring relationships being those warm demands, getting to know our students so that they may be comfortable to come talk to us.

Rachelle Savitz: Or talk to peers in the classroom. If you have a safe classroom environment with a sense of belonging, having those high expectations still have all students but providing that scaffolding and support that's needed and lots of opportunities for participation and contribution.

Rachelle Savitz: And so these are just some strategies for increasing these protective factors that the CDC gives and it's related from whether it's at the school level, or all the way or a teacher level classroom level to the school level.

Rachelle Savitz: But really the big focus is as educators we are able to choose the type of texts that we're using in our classroom, whether it's for a whole class novel. If it's small group or literature circles.

Rachelle Savitz: Or independent reading. And so if we're providing these opportunities in this time, then we're able to build these relationships with our students.

Rachelle Savitz: And so this is something that I'm working on new research with a colleague at the citadel, Dr. Brittany Kane.

Rachelle Savitz: And we came across this to build resiliency and it's Bernards framework, it really talks about these four traits.

Rachelle Savitz: And there's 18 characteristics and you can see self efficacy. You can see identity there, you know, carrying all of these pieces that aren't supposed to be taught as skills.

Rachelle Savitz: But as teachers are working with their students or reading a novel together and the conversations that they're having you're able to start to see that a student may be tackling a more difficult problem. They're, they're planning ahead. You know, they have these goals are developing empathy. And so that's how a teacher can really start to determine if there's resiliency being built.

Rachelle Savitz: And so some things to consider when we do introduce our novels or any types of trauma sensitive practices in our classroom. It's really important to understand that what might be relevant for one student might not be relevant for all. And so, for instance, just because a character maybe maybe identifies as homeless. It doesn't mean that if we have a student our classroom that's homeless that students going to automatically relate

Rachelle Savitz: You know, we have to always think about the fact that, as students are reading, they're interpreting how they see fit. Based on their personal experiences. And so that's even more of a reason to have discussions as we read about different characters and their experiences. We need to be careful of retraumatization, this does happen.

Rachelle Savitz: Sometimes a student read something and it's very personal and we have to be able to understand, well, what do we do in that moment. You know, I always had like an out plan and I talked with my students have if they're uncomfortable or they're upset. You know what they can do, where they can go, we have to be aware of secondary trauma for our students and ourselves when we're hearing about

Rachelle Savitz: Situations from a book and then students are sharing their situations, importantly, we need to be aware of communication with our students as well as people at the school, for instance.

Rachelle Savitz: Most teachers, you have to report if abuses mentioned and so that that has to be up front and center so that it's clear to everybody that there are things that have to be reported.

Rachelle Savitz: And again, going back to the equitable instruction or inequities in our educational system. If you think about high stakes testing and tracking all of these things can lead to trauma.

Rachelle Savitz: And so it's being really understanding of the impacts of policies, as well as things that are going in our students lives. And so ultimately, why we are here of how does literature help for me. I've always been a while I wasn't always reading

teacher. I started as a music teacher, but for the most part, being a reading teacher, I really felt that by finding books. My students got lost with the characters.

Rachelle Savitz: That's why we love to read, we get lost in the story. And so it's really important that we're bringing these diverse texts in our classrooms. Because we want our students to be able to not only see themselves but also to be able to learn from others.

Rachelle Savitz: When a student reads about a character that is experiencing going to a new country which we're going to hear about and the, the situation of how do you make friends and how, how do you deal with your family, not being there with you.

Rachelle Savitz: This is something our students can read about and they can talk about. But they're also learning how to adapt and understand and problem solve and develop empathy. Through those characters eyes, and so it gives them a first look of this is what could happen, or what I could do and really be able to like converse about that this really also pushes against that single story mentality. We hear this all the time. But just because one person experienced

Rachelle Savitz: Domestic abuse in this situation, and this would occur. That's not for everybody. And that's also really important for teachers and adults, just in general to understand that nobody has the same situation when it comes to a traumatic experience.

Rachelle Savitz: We do need to be able to talk about complex social issues in our classroom. It is scary. It is uncomfortable, but as I said earlier, we don't want our students, thinking that it's something to be shameful of we want to have these relationships to know what's going on. Otherwise, they were quite a few of my students, they never would have reported to somebody else.

Rachelle Savitz: And a few of them that had attempted suicide. That may not be here today. And so, developing these relationships and having these conversations through a character's eyes.

Rachelle Savitz: That's that first step to say okay this is what's happening in the book and then you invite students. Is there any questions. Are there any connections are these relationships.

Rachelle Savitz: And that's something that Ellen talks a lot in her book about of this fact that we want to invite our students to share their testimonies And what they're experiencing and for us to bear critical witness and we can do that in such an easy way when we're talking about these complex characters and situations.

Rachelle Savitz: In the novels and so I'm really excited to hear more and hear how some of the authors answer the questions relating to their characters and trauma.

Developing Characters who Experience Trauma

Mary-Kate Sableski: Thank you so much. For that overview, Rachelle. I think that perfectly framed the conversation. And now we are really excited to hear from our authors.

Mary-Kate Sableski: So our first question for each of you is you each incorporate characters who experienced trauma in different ways in your books. Can you talk about how you develop your characters through those experiences.

Mary-Kate Sableski: And if we could for this question. Maybe just start with Ruth or Ruth I'm Sorry to put you on the spot. So if you're not feeling we just that we could maybe take turns kind of who's going first. So if that works for people. That's great. But if not, no problem.

Ruth Behar: Sure, no well thank you. Well, thank you, Rachelle, for that wonderful presentation. It was really illuminating and taught me so much. So thank you so much for that.

Ruth Behar: So I guess I'll discuss my two middle grade books because they both have to do with trauma and different ways. I'll talk more about the recent book, but the previous one lucky broken girl, which came out three years ago.

Ruth Behar: In that book. I was trying to address two forms of trauma, on the one hand, the trauma of immigration for Ruthie who has left Cuba and arrived in 1966 with her family to New York. So the trauma of leaving her home. The trauma of having to learn a new language of being put in the so

Ruth Behar: Called dumb class with, you know, the children that have issues and problems because she's an immigrant. So, so she's dealing with all of that. And she's also watching her mother and father and how they are responding to the immigrant situation in different ways. The mother.

Ruth Behar: Really misses Cuba's having a hard time adjusting Ruthie has to translate for her and help her. Her father doesn't want to look back. He just wants to look forward

Ruth Behar: So she's facing that and she's also surrounded by other immigrant children because that's very much the way New York was like when I was growing up, and I think it's still very much like that. So, so, so the immigrant trauma is the displacement, the losing of your home and finding a new home. That's kind of the first trauma. I tried to deal with in *Lucky Broken Girl*. And then the other trauma is the tentative disability that Ruthie experiences when she's in a car accident. Soon after arriving in the United States and has to be in a body cast for close to a year has to be in bed can't get up can't go anywhere.

Ruth Behar: And has to have her mother take care of her. And that's a huge trauma, she loses control over her body. And in here she is, you know, a 10 year old girl used to being independent and so on. And now, her mother has to take care of her. It's a pretty miserable situation. So, so that's. Those are the two poles of trauma in *Lucky Broken Girl* and the challenge for me was how do I address those two traumas in a truthful way, not in any way try to rose color them, but to show them and like all of their nitty gritty reality, while at the same time showing how Ruthie find some hope. And some resilience in the midst of this terrible situation that she's in and then more recently now with letters from Cuba, which just came out on August 25 and this new novel.

Ruth Behar: Again, there's the trauma of immigration young Esther has to leave Poland to help her father, who's already in Cuba. Her family has experienced poverty and anti-Semitism in Poland and she takes it upon herself and begs her father to let her be the first of all the children of the five children to go to Cuba and to help help him bring everybody else over and it's traumatic when she gets to Cuba, because she experiences, of course, the family separation.

Ruth Behar: She's so happy to be with her father, but so sad to not be with the rest of the family, and especially misses her younger sister, Malta and the letters or these letters that she's writing to her sister to tell her about her experiences in Cuba and it's traumatic because she really doesn't know what's going to happen next. I think I think another trauma is actually the trauma of waiting and the trauma of uncertainty. And in this case, Esther is in Cuba, trying to help her father, bring the family to Cuba. She doesn't know if they're going to be able to do that. She doesn't know if the family will ever be reunited.

Ruth Behar: She doesn't know exactly what's happening to them. She knows conditions are getting worse and nobody has any idea how bad it's going to be, but but it's definitely getting worse and worse and so so Esther is very worried about all this and she has to figure out how to help her family realizing that her father is a very inept business person and what they have to do is figure out how they're going to make enough money to buy the steamship tickets for the entire family and and all all of

that, the weight of all of that falls upon Esther and she fortunately finds a talent that will help her to bring everybody to Cuba but until then, and even, even after she discovers that it's it's just very painful and traumatic for her because she just doesn't know if they're ever going to be together again. So anyway, I hope that's that's a good opening summary of the story.

Mary-Kate Sableski: And really, any of you can jump in.

Ellen Hopkins: I'll go next. Since We're alphabetical at this point. So I'll go

Ellen Hopkins: Um, let's see. Well in closer to nowhere. So first of all, as far as character building I've raised now three generations of kids in my had them come through our lives and there has been some early childhood trauma in those experiences so through observation, not just them, but also of all the kids like you know, like I said, I've been doing this a while. So I talked to a lot of kids.

Ellen Hopkins: I prefer doing it real time but you know we can do it by ZOOM TOO. But, you know, I've done a lot of actual classroom work I've done, you know, lots of author visits and Kids have always shared their stories and they they trust that I'm

Ellen Hopkins: I don't have to report, which is kind of cool. In a way, because they can trust it that they can tell me stuff that I don't need to share so I have I've dealt with kids like for years and years who have had whatever kinds of trauma in their life for Cal. He has lost his mother to cancer.

Ellen Hopkins: So, um, and he misses her terribly even though she wasn't necessarily the most the best parent ever. And I think, you know, that doesn't that part of it doesn't matter so much to kids because it's still their mom, you know, and so, and he dealt with real abuse from his father.

Ellen Hopkins: Physical abuse and emotional abuse from his father, and now he's been uprooted from the life that he's known and he actually spent a few months on the street as well after his mom died, and his dad went to prison. And so he's had he's had a lot to deal with for a 12 year old kid and but he's got this huge giant heart, you know, and that's what I have. I've observed from from all these kids is they just want to be kids. They just want to be loved and their heart is

Ellen Hopkins: The hearts don't shrink. Just because they've been through. Horrible things. And so in character building, you know, you don't you especially in a middle grade level. You want to make sure that there is some humor there that there is some because we're all these facets to us, you know, If we have been hurt, we we share

funny stories or we make up big lies or whatever we do to survive and So I try to incorporate to really multi layer my character so that it's not all about just the bad stuff, but all also the good stuff that's happening now. Because, here he is now in a stable place but yet. To move be moved into a stable home after all that time before it's very difficult to accept help sometimes for these kids. And so, to really have him wanting to be embraced but pushing away as well. That to me is very real and and so I think Cal really represents

Ellen Hopkins: A child who comes from really torn up background very well because he is just this really great kid. Then there's Hannah who's his cousin who's like the like the perfect kid. She's got she's got her gymnastics schedule. She's got her dance schedule and she's all of a sudden it's traumatic as well for the child that's been in place to have somebody thrust into their lives new that kind of like throw them out of the spotlight because of his being difficult so

Ellen Hopkins: There are there are a lot of different layers to to a situation like this, and I really hope that the closer to nowhere represents that well. The next middle grade, which is called. *What about Will* deals with actual traumatic brain injury and a little brother trying to deal with his big brother's traumatic brain injury.

Ellen Hopkins: And how all of a sudden spotlight shifts again away from this this child who's solid into this other space, so A lot of research, a lot of talking to people. And I think it's really important that we understand that you can't always see the trauma right up front. Sometimes it takes a while to uncover it and so patience, which

Ellen Hopkins: You know, by the way, patience is not my best thing, but I've learned it over the years. And I think it's really important that we can do that so and I can go next.

Janae Marks: And so I think it was interesting to listen to Rachel' presentation because I think that from the distance only Washington is actually an example of that secondary trauma, where what happens the trauma that sort of just talked about in the book is Marcus, so he's father for Father's incarceration, the crime that he was tried and committed for and that happened when before. Zoe was born because her mom was actually pregnant with her when this happened and they her mom and her birth that are actually pretty young when this happened. They were only 18 so

Janae Marks: Um, so they're the ones who kind of really experienced the trauma and now like 12 years later. Zoe is sort of

Janae Marks: Kind of being thrust into what happened and trying to come to terms with what happened back then and trying to figure it all out. Um, so I could feel like I

showed the trauma in two different ways. Like, there is the relationship that we had with her mom about Marcus, you know, in the beginning when she receives this letter from Marcus. Out of nowhere. She is, you know, she knows that her mom would not want her to read it and she knows that her mom does not want her to have a relationship with him. And that's because of the trauma that she experienced at being you know pregnant 18 year olds having your boyfriend, all of a sudden be convicted for this very serious crime.

Janae Marks: And then obviously there's Marcus, who is in prison, and I don't want to spoil anything but there's that big, you know, potential of him being innocent moment so

Janae Marks: Yeah. And so, like, there's that sense of, is he does, he didn't really deserve to be there. And that's obviously very traumatic so Um, but yeah for Zoey, I think it's kind of being thrust into all of that really starting to understand that these are the things that are going on in her family and relate, you know, it's almost like her whole world is exploding to know that this person that she thought, you know, was You know, not in her life. And she had a new stepdad and she kind of was having a pretty, you know, pretty good life. Now that this person Marcus is now back into her life.

Janae Marks: Is realizing that there could really be some seriously terrible things going on. And, you know, just kind of starting to understand how terrible the system can be. And you know the the prison system and the injustice behind that. So I think

Janae Marks: It's interesting. Yeah, it's, it's more for her. I had to kind of think about how she would be saying this trauma secondhand and how it would

Janae Marks: Kind of, I guess, create, you know, because I think what Ruth was saying there is that sense of the uncertainty to that she experiences as well.

Janae Marks: When she kind of finds out that her father might actually be innocent. There's the uncertainty of well is the areas and he, you know, and a lot of that can cause a lot of inner turmoil as well. But yeah.

dansantat: You know, since I work on picture books. I don't think my themes or as complex, but they they on a surface do cover a very basic idea of trauma.

dansantat: For example, with Beekle. I think there is this I don't necessarily know for you want to call it, trauma, but there is this a perceived idea that he is being neglected.

dansantat: And so there's a lot of pressure that he puts on himself. I think the, the most notable book about trauma for for my work would be after the fall

dansantat: And that is really the question of, well, what happens to Humpty Dumpty if he was able to be put back together again. And obviously the trauma. That's inflicted is falling off of a wall and

dansantat: Kind of the mental struggle that goes through afterwards. And how did you kind of cope with that kind of anxiety. A lot of the themes in my personal work come from inspiration of my family.

dansantat: You know the adventures of Beekle with a metaphor about my son, making his first friend in school. And it's also, I mean, on a personal level. It's also the anxieties that I have about being a dad for the first time.

dansantat: Without the fall. That was a love letter to my wife, who, you know, has lived with a lifetime of anxiety and depression.

dansantat: And a lot of it was, you know, after having our first child, my wife, maybe. Gosh, two years after having our first child, not realizing that she had postpartum depression.

dansantat: It's one of those things where you're kind of dealing with so many issues and parenting that you don't really get to realize what was going on until you step back for a little bit and you

dansantat: Manage to process it. And I think, you know, in terms of developing characters. A lot of that is over time getting some distance from those sort of situations and then looking back

dansantat: And being very mindful about how you felt in that situation, but also more importantly, thinking about what other people were were feeling and being able to process their feelings, without any bias and so

dansantat: You know, with that said, I think, despite the fact that maybe my content is is for a younger audience, you know, you can still take like these basic ideas and then relate them to kids. You know, with after the fall, despite the fact that I might talk about it. Having much more complex issues about my wife.

dansantat: It can be as as basic as, you know, talking to children about overcoming you know any hardships perhaps falling off a bicycle, perhaps not being able to

dansantat: You know, get something right the first time, you know, oftentimes I hear a lot of people on social media talking about how the book is really good with, you know, dealing with grit and things like that and

dansantat: You know, I think really being able to take that personality that you are referencing from and putting it into the character so that I can be relatable to other people. I think that's the most important thing

Jackie Arnold: Dan, I hundred percent completely agree. I love when Rachelle earlier said there's no hierarchy to trauma and I think your books relate to students in so many ways. And so many levels that are important to them, regardless of what it is. So thank you very much for sharing that.

Advice to Teachers who Support Students who have Experienced or are Experiencing Trauma

Jackie Arnold: Teachers are supporting children through so many traumatic experiences and especially right now so we're super grateful about this panel while teachers are really trying to relate and support students in all kinds of contexts and needs.

Jackie Arnold: What advice might you give to teachers and to their students. And how do you see your work being used in their classrooms in their work to help those children who need it most.

dansantat: I think a lot of it has to deal with patience, I think. Patience is probably the most important thing

dansantat: Especially when like dealing with, for example, going back to my wife, you know someone's anxiety, who's had anxiety for their entire lives and not realizing that there's any other way of thinking like, you know, for example, I remember my wife telling me that

dansantat: She used to feel normal in these feelings that danger was around every corner.

dansantat: Okay and I you know I remember being very i don't know i. It was hard for me to understand the whole concept that anxiety was a foreign thing to me.

dansantat: I mean, I've done, I've dealt with my own trauma being an Asian American growing up, you know, here with certain issues. But, you know, the whole concept of just having this tension in your body, you know, without any you know

dansantat: logical explanation for it like that. That was a little bit dumbfounding to me. And it took years to kind of just comprehend what she was talking about.

dansantat: And, you know, it wasn't until I kind of sat back and just stop trying to steer her in a direction that that made things really improve and

dansantat: But it also, it also came from a place where you have to, you have to give, but you know, you also you also take a little bit. And so you hear her side. She hears your side.

dansantat: And then you kind of, you have to come from a place of love and understanding and like and you have to be very understanding that it's not an attack. It's not like you know like

dansantat: The one thing that you'll be very clear of is that you can't make it feel like that person is broken.

dansantat: Okay, you have to, you have to make it clear that, you know, there is something that could make your life better. If you try if you try a solution and so I mean, I hate to say that sometimes like with my wife like with my wife. I think the the moment where it clicked in that she she she realized that she needed help, was because it affected our marriage to a point where it was really hard to get along in the house and

dansantat: I think there was a point where I stood back and I said I need her to understand that she is harming herself and not necessarily having me tell her that

dansantat: I'm hurt from what she's saying she kind of had to realize that on her own. And so

dansantat: As a result, you know, it was, it was hard, because you know it took it took many years of kind of sitting back and just and just accepting you know these feelings from her without her really understanding what she was saying.

dansantat: But then, ultimately, it got to a point where as a byproduct of, of, you know, anxiety, sometimes obsessive compulsive disorders can come along and she was starting to

dansantat: Demonstrate those things to a point where it was just getting very serious where she would be, you know, repeating habits over and over and over again. And then that's the moment where she kind of caught it. She kind of said I need help.

dansantat: But, you know, a lot of it does come from patience and being and being willing to listen and coming from a place of love and support and not necessarily saying you have to do this, or else things will get better. You can't put that pressure on the person.

Ellen Hopkins: I'll go. Um, one thing I think it's important, remember, too, is that trauma doesn't always manifest itself. The way that you think it

Ellen Hopkins: It does. You know what I mean, it doesn't always look like what you think it's going to do. So the kid that comes from a highly abusive space.

Ellen Hopkins: You know, you might expect him to shrink into the corner. And that's not necessarily the way

Ellen Hopkins: He, he's going to deal with that stuff in his life, it may come with lashing out, it may come with bullying and may come

Ellen Hopkins: As as like with Kyle like just telling big lies and you know they're lies. But there's a reason for that, you know, it's and it's so for teachers is to understand

Ellen Hopkins: That you have to sometimes look a little deeper than what you're seeing on the surface. So for Cal and for the child in my life, which will probably talk about him a little bit who who

Ellen Hopkins: inspired him, he, he just, he just folds up, you know, and so if the kid that's in the corner folding up there's a reason for that, too, or the kid that's

Ellen Hopkins: Throwing, you know, putting the hoodie up and screaming in the corner, there's a reason for that, too. And so for teachers, it's, it's tough again comes down to like patients into understanding what you're seeing

Ellen Hopkins: And I think by reading novels like this for yourself as well as with your kids, you start to see how how these issues.

Ellen Hopkins: Appear on through the children's behavior. And I think, and you know, one of the reasons I really wanted to write this book was because of this child in my life.

Ellen Hopkins: Who could never make friends because of the way he was perceived by his classmates. Right. And so, to, to urge to be able to use this book, perhaps, to show how like

Ellen Hopkins: The kid that couldn't was so mean because of that just drove him deeper into this place of despair, instead of the other way. So to be able to give our children, give your students empathy and understanding of

Ellen Hopkins: How somebody is home life or how something that's happened or, you know, coming over to this country or whatever it is that makes them pull away that the more that we can pull them back in the better off we all are not just them, but all of us are so

Ruth Behar: I can add to that, um, yeah. I think it's a really, really good question and I think one thing is to help kids focus on the everyday and on the beauty of the everyday as well. I was thinking of this with

Ruth Behar: My character Esther and letters from Cuba, she's come from Poland to Cuba such a, you know, an incredible change of place and just things like tasting a mango, for the first time.

Ruth Behar: Just as you know is, is a great pleasure for her. She's never had anything like that, or pineapple, or just the tropical fruits and so

Ruth Behar: So for her. It's kind of discovering this whole new world. And I think if we can help kids to discover the things that are around them every day. And the beauty that is in life every day. I think that's one

Ruth Behar: One way to provide some help. And I think the other question, Dan and others are bringing up is

Ruth Behar: The idea that kids have to be able to ask for help or see that they are being given help and to kind of surrender to it when they realize they need it.

Ruth Behar: And I was thinking about this with with Lucky broken girl with the character of Ruthie who's in bed, can't get up. There's nothing she can do she she feels

Ruth Behar: Just shipwrecked, and, you know, in her bed, and she could just become totally

Ruth Behar: Depressed about it and does initially, but then people do start to offer to help her in various ways, whether it's the neighbor Cheecho, you know, bringing her art supplies and saying, oh, there's this artist named Frida Kahlo, that's very similar

Ruth Behar: To you, she's you know she was in bed for a long time, but she made beautiful art and he you know gives her paints and paper and sets up an easel so that she can make art from her bed, and so

Ruth Behar: So that kind of shows her a way to be where she is. He can't get her out of bed.

Ruth Behar: She's got to, you know, take your time and heal. But in the meantime, there's things she can do to improve her situation and to be happier and to find

Ruth Behar: You know the artist in herself and to find, you know, to find a way of expressing what she's feeling so I think

Ruth Behar: You know, the various ways in which we can get kids to express. You know what's going on inside the the terrible trauma and and and you know

Ruth Behar: Hurt feelings that may be going on with letters from Cuba, I had not too long ago a workshop with kids writing letters.

Ruth Behar: And you know, we discussed letter writing as a genre and they really enjoyed that. Because the letter form allows you to write very personally about what you're feeling

Ruth Behar: And so I think also just finding you know genres or formats, whether it's through art or through letter writing various ways to express yourself.

Ruth Behar: Can also be a way for kids to be able to discuss trauma sometimes without having to talk about it explicitly, which I think can be hard.

Ruth Behar: For a child, but if a child can make an artwork about it or can write a letter to a friend. You know, we might find that you know that trauma can be expressed in a more submerged way which sometimes is easier for young people and even for adults to express what's really going on.

Janae Marks: I feel like everybody said everything so well I don't really have much else to add, I mean, I agree with what's been said, and especially sort of what Ellen was saying about how kids don't always flat out say what they're going through. So, I think. Yeah. My advice would just be to echo that.

Janae Marks: Idea that teachers really just need to listen and pay attention to what their students are doing and think about, you know, what is the reason behind what they're doing and and it may not always be because they're a bad kid.

Janae Marks: You know, or what they're saying they might find a subtle way to show you, or tell you you know that something is wrong, without flat out saying, and so I think

Janae Marks: As best you can. I think teachers just need to really just try to listen and pay attention to their kids and their students as they can and they'll pick up on things that might need to be addressed.

Mary-Kate Sableski: I think those are all just really critical and important.

Mary-Kate Sableski: Comments and especially you know advice to teachers and also advice to a lot of the people.

Mary-Kate Sableski: Who are interested in this panel. Our teacher educators. Right, we're going to be working with teachers and preparing them to be able to respond to children in this way. So I think that was all excellent advice from each of you. So thank you very much.

Developing an Informed Voice when Composing Children's Books

Mary-Kate Sableski: Ellen, you kind of tip your hat to what our next question might be, so, and I think some of you have touched on it, but maybe we can dig a little deeper into

Mary-Kate Sableski: What resources or experiences, did you draw upon in creating an informed voice in the books that you write, we were really struck by all of your books. The lens and the voice through which they're told. And I think that makes a difference in how they reach children. So if you are willing to talk a little bit about about that. That would be great.

Ellen Hopkins: I'll go since I'm here, I'm so for me That I and I think probably a lot of you realize that I like. I came to writing for young adults through a personal story, which

was my daughter story and meth addiction and she's dealt with that addiction for 25 years now. That's a long time, but so I've had to take guardianship of for four kids, we adopted one and then to guardianship of three. I'm the oldest of the three came to us at nine years old with severe PTSD from early childhood trauma from the, you know, living in a in an addict.

Ellen Hopkins: And an addict household is never easy anyway but especially when abusive people come in and out. So he came to us with severe behavioral problems. I mean, total like daily meltdowns

Ellen Hopkins: And again he could not ever make friends at school. So he nine

Ellen Hopkins: Nine years old, fourth grade starts new school. You know, he's in the classroom screaming and PTSD right when stuff like classroom or came out of too hard. My questions came at him too hard. That's when he would like freak out and

Ellen Hopkins: And over the years. He's now 16 you know with therapy and helping and just even knowing that he was in a safe situation with rules which are good things for kids to have sometimes

Ellen Hopkins: He has come so far. I MEAN, HE DOESN'T HE HASN'T none of those behaviors anymore.

Ellen Hopkins: And he's got, like, this is a kid who like loves animals like he loves to help like he likes to help with little kids, you know, when he can. He's just a really great kid at heart, but but

Ellen Hopkins: It was so hard for him to to figure out how to deal with just stuff like real stuff. And so I lived with it and and I watched a change and I watched What love could do in a situation like that.

Ellen Hopkins: And with the situation we took him out of was a really horrific situation, but he just came so far and I just want kids to understand that the

Ellen Hopkins: With help they can they can get it first and they can get help that they need to ask for help or if the kids that don't need help.

Ellen Hopkins: Can see that maybe somebody needs help, or that they're just willing to open up their own hearts.

Ellen Hopkins: To a child who has problems, but wants friends and deserves friends and needs friends because the more of that. That's in their life, the better they get em fast and begin. So for me I just really, really.

Ellen Hopkins: I really, really hope kids can can get hold of books that will help them do that. You know, I hate to see

Ellen Hopkins: We're living in this weird situation now as you guys all know but I hate to see kids grow into like horrible bullies.

Ellen Hopkins: That go out and they just, you know, they take everything out on everybody else and I just hope that we can do something in our early childhood to help kids grow up to be There.

dansantat: I'll go next, um, like I said earlier, a lot of my. A lot of my stories are inspired by my family with my kids and my wife, but I wanted to add

dansantat: That I do like to delve deeper. I do like to hear their side of the view, it's not necessarily just me, you know, standing outside and perceiving. You know what I'm observing

dansantat: Oftentimes I do like to get in there and kind of get a better understanding of how they're feeling, but I find that if you are directly asking them these questions, they won't give you a whole answer. And so really what happens is, there has to be this voluntary.

dansantat: Offering of information that doesn't make them feel like they're ashamed and so

dansantat: You know, I've been watching you know I would listen to podcast I would listen to interviews and oddly enough, I do find that some of the most effective interviewers are people like Mark Marin

dansantat: Or Howard Stern. And the reason is that you know as vulgar as they can be. They also come from a place where they're willing to share their faults and their flaws in order to kind of just get the other person to let their guard down

dansantat: And so with that, I take that in mind, and I'll talk to my children, for example, and they'll talk about how stressed out they are about their first day of school or about how hard homework is

dansantat: And I don't ask them, Why do you feel that way, but I do tend to relate to them by saying, oh, gosh, I remember what it was like when I had a lot of homework and then I would just, I would just

dansantat: give that information willingly and just show you know my flawed side or my you know my imperfections and things like that.

dansantat: And it automatically puts them in a position of saying, well, oh, well, you're just saying that because you're my dad, but really it's a matter of coming from a space of, oh, you feel these feelings too

dansantat: You know, well let's let's start comparing notes. That's what the conversation turns into. And so a lot of the times you know when I'm talking to my kids.

dansantat: You know, it'll come from a place of oh yeah you know like I know what you mean like I did this, I did that. And, you know, look at me, I'm, I'm your father.

dansantat: You know, and I think it gives the kids a lot of comfort and willingness to share even more. And that just fleshes out my thoughts on what my preconceived notions might be just by simple observation.

Ruth Behar: Well, I'm in addition to being a writer. I'm a cultural anthropologist. So I'm very used to doing research, and especially to doing fieldwork. And I always need to know where stories are taking taking place. I'm very interested in places and

Ruth Behar: For letters from Cuba. This book was based on a lot of research in Cuba, I've gone back and forth to Cuba.

Ruth Behar: Many times over the years. I came to the US as a young girl, but I've been going back and forth. Now for about 30 years. And for this particular book that's set in a small town.

Ruth Behar: In Cuba called Agramonte it's a sugar growing town is where my mother's family lived or my maternal grandmother and the whole family lived when they first arrived, and they were the only Jewish family in this sugar growing

Ruth Behar: Town and I always found that so fascinating. So I was the kind of kid that always wanted to hear the stories of the elders.

Ruth Behar: And and I'm hoping that letters from Cuba will maybe encourage other kids to like listen to the stories, your grandparents have to tell

Ruth Behar: And I was that sort of kid like I could hear the stories over and over and over. My grandparents and how they got to Cuba and where they lived. And what Cuba was like when they first got there.

Ruth Behar: So I had all of this, you know, kind of memory of stories. I had heard growing up and then that meshed with the anthropology, where I said,

Ruth Behar: I don't just want to know the memories. I want to go see this place and experience this place where they lived so many years ago and

Ruth Behar: And so for me, you know, research and as is an essential component of research, especially of writing, especially when you're writing a historical novel historical fiction. So for me it was kind of a need for a certain kind of accuracy, like I needed to

Ruth Behar: To not just, you know, imagine Agramonte. But I went and spend some time there and talk to people and actually uncovered a lot of interesting things, particularly about the history of slavery in the region, the history of sugar.

Ruth Behar: Sugar growing in the region and conflicts in the region around sugar. So I learned a lot of things by being there and talking to people and especially

Ruth Behar: Learned a lot about myths and legends about the era of slavery and legends that had been made have been maintained into the present and also

Ruth Behar: Learned a lot about religion, and particularly Afro Cuban religion which is very strong in this particular part

Ruth Behar: Of Cuba. So for me that that field research or fieldwork, as we call it in anthropology turned out to be really, really important for this particular book. I had to go be there and see it with my own eyes and

Ruth Behar: And a lot of things that I learned you know through this kind of ethnographic work found its way into the novel. I had to, you know, blend

Ruth Behar: What I found and learned with my imagination as well because I was setting it in 1939 and imagining this young girl with her father and you know the two of them.

Ruth Behar: By themselves in the small town. So I changed. I changed a lot of things in terms of what it had would have been like my family live there. But But enough of it was real that I was able to put together. The real with the imagined and and to try to create a story where I could imagine a person like my grandmother as a younger person.

Ruth Behar: Settling in this town and what she would find in what she would find interesting and how she would become involved in the struggles of other people.

Ruth Behar: In this town. And that was kind of something else I wanted to say earlier that I think sometimes it can be somewhat healing, perhaps, to be aware that the struggles that you're engaged in

Ruth Behar: Are similar to the struggles that others are engaged in. So, you know, so she's engaged with the struggle of trying to get her family over to Cuba and you know the whole immigrant

Ruth Behar: Story that that weighs on her and how is she going to bring the family over when she knows conditions are getting worse and worse.

Ruth Behar: In Europe, but then she finds out about the struggle of the sugarcane workers in Agramonte, you know, they're suffering, too. So sometimes it's understanding. It's not comparing traumas as Michelle said but understanding that others are suffering too and that you can use. PerhaAgramonte s some of the feelings that you have to help Others. And to sort of share that empathy and understanding with others. And I think that you know that in the end is something that I'm I'm grateful to have had the years and anthropology, which I think taught me the importance of listening to other people's stories, you know, so that there's a lot that's my family story in this book.

Ruth Behar: But as I guess as an anthropologist ethically. I couldn't just make it about my family story. I felt that I had to connect it to the struggle of others as well. That's the anthropologist in me. That's kind of always looking to understand others as I tried to understand myself.

Janae Marks: And I also had to do a lot of research for my book because the traumas that Zoe and her parents experience or not ones that I've experienced personally, so I had to do a lot of research.

Janae Marks: Mainly the biggest thing I had to research was about

Janae Marks: Wrongful convictions. I read a lot about the Innocence Project, which is an organization mentioned in the book.

Janae Marks: And they help overturn these kind of convictions. So, and there's a lot of first person accounts of people who

Janae Marks: You know, the people who have been imprisoned and and then ultimately free to and also from the lawyers who have helped them. Sorry, I spent a lot of time reading those. And one of the biggest challenges of the book was coming up with

Janae Marks: Marcus's case and like thinking about, like, what would he have been convicted of and what are all the puzzle pieces that you know would have led to him.

Janae Marks: being convicted and if he was possibly in a sentence. What is, you know, what would you actually have been doing at that time, all that stuff.

Janae Marks: Took a lot of research to figure out, and I also Really it was important to me to also talk to a few people who grew up with parents in prison to make sure that I was reflecting that responsibly and uncaring manner. So I spoke to, you know,

Janae Marks: A couple of adults who grew up with parents in prison and about their experiences. I know it's a very common.

Janae Marks: Thing. And that's, I feel like a trauma of a lot of kids experience. I think one of the six I read was like one in every 26 kids have a parent in prison so Um, so yeah, I feel like in my case, you know, because it wasn't my personal story I did put a lot of myself in the book and other ways, but when it came to the traumas. I definitely made sure I did my research and, you know, wanted to be as sensitive as possible.

Jackie Arnold: I love hearing all of you in the way in which

Jackie Arnold: That love support and empathy really are themes that go across all your work, which is such an important message for teachers and our future teachers to hear

The Complexities of Incorporating Hard Topics in Children's Books

Jackie Arnold: Next year, ironically the NCT conference theme is equity justice and anti racist teaching, which we think also lines so beautifully with your work. So if you're willing. Let's come back again together next year, but in the meantime.

Jackie Arnold: Can you talk a little bit about the complexities and incorporating those important but hard themes into your work. What do you want others to know about your work.

Janae Marks: I can go first. Um, so I knew that when I was going to be writing about this topic.

Janae Marks: A kid with a parent who was possibly wrongfully convicted that racism was going to be a big part of it, especially because I also wanted the main character, Zoe to be a girl like me who looks like be

Janae Marks: You know, a black girl growing up in like a suburb. So, and, you know, again, as I was doing all that research I found that black

Janae Marks: People are seven times more likely to be wrongfully convicted of serious crimes like murder. So then white people. So it was, I knew that this had to be a big part of the conversation.

Janae Marks: But I also like didn't want the book to only be about that. So that was I think the biggest struggle. I didn't want you know this book to only be about that. I still wanted to have a lot of joy in the story.

Janae Marks: Which is why you know I have her a baker and there's a lot of stuff going on a lot of more fun moments with regards to that and there's a friendship story.

Janae Marks: So I think if I, if there's one thing I want people to take away is that you know not all black people and not all you know minorities are monolith. You know, like I get there was, I was on like a teacher book club once over the summer where I was.

You know, I was answering questions from Teachers who are who are going to be using the book in their classroom. And one of the teachers said that he was surprised that Marcus and some of the other men in the story were so nice. And I was like, That's strange. Like, I like it.

Janae Marks: It's like, why would they not be nice. I don't know. Like, I think. I don't know if it was just that he had some in his head that he sort of felt like they should fit a certain stereotype but

Janae Marks: You know, I bet you know I have lots of nice men in my family and you know I'm married to nice black man like I just feel like I feel like just you have to know that not everybody is going to be the same.

Janae Marks: And same thing with Zoe and, you know, and just I think just as you're reading these different books, not only mine, but other books, featuring kids of color, just know that they're not all the same. There's

Janae Marks: There's unique stories and that's why we need more books, you know, more books, featuring characters like these, so that you see that there are so many different storylines and so yeah i think that's that's one thing i want i want teachers and parents and readers to take away

dansantat: I'll go next.

dansantat: The waiting game, um, with, with these gosh we're in such a in such a politically divided nation right now that I, I hate to say it, I do feel like a big part of

dansantat: Getting everyone on the same page about these issues. I think it also matters very much about who's saying it. I mean, even as petty as, like, you know, just, you know, wearing PPE. For instance, you know,

dansantat: It shouldn't be. It shouldn't be a hot topic. It shouldn't be a controversial issue, but

dansantat: The fact that it can be said by one person and a person automatically resists that notion. And then it can be said by another person and everyone automatic believes in it.

dansantat: It just talks about how polarized. Everything is. And so what I find that can be a little complicated is

dansantat: You know as an Asian American, for example, working on a title like drawn together, which was written by Minh Le and you know it has to deal with, you know, an Asian grandfather and the grandson learning to communicate with one another.

dansantat: I think my first concern was and and I do find this happening with other other authors.

dansantat: My peers who are of minority percent or of color who struggle with, you know, writing books about their own voices in their own culture that there's, you know, once that book comes out there that there's a there's an audience that perceives that

dansantat: You know, in voluntarily as oh well the main characters are of this race. So it's for those people like there's there's always like this.

dansantat: There's all these hurdles that you have to have to cross. And, you know, the important thing is you know it's really

dansantat: The language of empathy about trying to understand that the issues that we discussed can happen anywhere, you know, um,

dansantat: And so when I when I try to wrestle with these things. You know, I need to try to kind of come from a place where everyone can understand and relate, but

dansantat: The, the dynamics of racism and things like that just happened, be the tool that I'm using for that example.

dansantat: Um, but really universally. You know the problem I do feel is that everyone has to be on the same page. Everyone has to communicate the same thing.

dansantat: Especially when I write for, you know, for very young children, oftentimes, you know, my books would be read, you know, read to a classroom of kids.

dansantat: By a teacher. And then, as a result, the teacher will kind of inflict their own interpretation of the book and spread the gospel of what they feel the interpretation is to these kids.

dansantat: And there are times where I could go into a classroom and I can get a completely different interpretation from a child.

dansantat: That read the book from the teacher who read the book to the child, you know, and I find that there's like this weird kind of outcomes razor kind of

dansantat: Thinking that goes into it, you know, being an adult, you know, you've lived through life you've

dansantat: Maybe become a little bit cynical about certain things and you know maybe you already have your perceived idea of what this person is trying to interpret

dansantat: And then you inject your own beliefs into that and then you spread that to the kids. Whereas with kids, you know, very innocent. You know, like, like, like, I'll take, for example, after the fall, um,

dansantat: You know, for the last three or four spreads I make it very clear that Humpty Dumpty is hatching and turning into a bird, but

dansantat: There is this 1% of teachers and librarians who come up to me and they asked me, why did they bird.

dansantat: fly through Humpty Dumpty and shattered him into 1000 pieces. And I go, I don't even know how you got to that conclusion or why you think I would write that as an ending. Like that's that's that's ludicrous, quite frankly,

dansantat: But again, as I say, sometimes, sometimes you do have to spell it out at times. I hate to say that, but also

dansantat: Really just in terms of in terms of teaching these kind of things it has to come from a place where you have to relate to other people by

dansantat: By showing the struggle and then telling them like well you know my struggle is similar to this or that, you know, or else there's just this constant wall. There's just this concept of defensiveness. That's always persistent in our culture these days.

Ellen Hopkins: Um, yes. So Closer to Nowhere. There's a very subtle discussion about privilege and about how little things that we don't even think about like maybe be able to go to this school that we want to be able to go to, or that we

Ellen Hopkins: Live in a neighborhood where you can walk safely down the street so very subtle threads in there about

Ellen Hopkins: Things that we take for granted in what what wherever we live that someone like for Cal, he, he never could even take for granted for a while he lived on the street. He had to. He had to

Ellen Hopkins: Go to the bathroom behind dumpsters. You know, and so here he moves into this this space with his cousin who's always felt very safe.

Ellen Hopkins: And she never even thought about the fact that you know it because they don't live like, you know, super high off the hog or anything, but they they live.

Ellen Hopkins: Privileged because she has always felt safe. She's always been fed. She's always been able to go to the bathroom where she needs to go to the bathroom.

Ellen Hopkins: And I think to kind of think about the subtleties of our own privilege and how we took the things we take for granted that we shouldn't always be able to take for granted. I mean, you will find that here and i think i think

Ellen Hopkins: We because and it is we were might maneuvering this very weird space. This political space where you know we all kind of feel like we have to like get our message across without, you know,

Ellen Hopkins: Hitting somebody over the head with the book we want to read, but, um, and it's it's a weird time to try to maneuver this space. But I think that we have to and as teachers, especially that is one of your jobs is to be able to

Ellen Hopkins: To introduce kids who live in a certain space to other spaces where other kids live so that we can kind of get more of this idea a more global approach to

Ellen Hopkins: To how to live. I mean you know this and also this whole idea that like you know America. And it's like, but it's a globe, you know, we live on a globe and what we do in America.

Ellen Hopkins: affects other people too right. So we have, I'm just gonna go ahead. We got climate problems. We got stuff. We had to deal with as a globe and we as Americans, we as

Ellen Hopkins: White people. We as whoever we are, need to need to maneuver on spaces, but we also need to become more accepting and more

Ellen Hopkins: To think larger in in solving problems.

Ruth Behar: Well, I was inspired to write letters from Cuba now.

Ruth Behar: Because I was thinking about the immigrant crisis on the border and was very upset about what was happening and children being separated from their families and caged and so on. And those things were

Ruth Behar: Going through my mind my mind constantly and that led me to want to tell the story about Cuba, because the reason my grandmother and so many other Jewish immigrants ended up in Cuba, rather than in the United States was because they couldn't come into the United States. There was a quota system established in 1924 that essentially closed the door. Two people immigrating from southern and eastern Europe, they couldn't come to the United States at all.

Ruth Behar: And Cuba at the time had an open door so they went to Cuba. Instead, but you know this this dawned on me, you know, many, many years ago as I thought about this history that my family were unwanted immigrants in this country. And that's what led them.

Ruth Behar: To go to Cuba instead. And so I was thinking about that. And I know my character Esther here she arrives in Cuba.

Ruth Behar: And at first. Everything seems so lovely this tropical island with the mangoes on the pineapples and so on. And then she and her father find

Ruth Behar: That Nazism has also reached Cuba. It's not as if Cuba has been spared this this vile ideology.

Ruth Behar: And and the, the owner of the sugar plantations and Senor Eduardo is is a horrible Nazi and hates Esther and her father, just because they're Jewish and

Ruth Behar: She thought she had escaped that automatic hatred that automatic other thing that she had experienced in Poland and she finds it

Ruth Behar: Right in the small town where they're living. But what happens also is that she makes friends with two kids. One of them is Chinese Cuban and he has come to Cuba to help his uncle run a grocery store in Agramonte that's based on some historical documents that I found, and then

Ruth Behar: And then there's a girl Manuella who becomes her close friend who's Afro Cuban and her grandmother was an enslaved African and the three kids together.

Ruth Behar: Decide to create an anti Nazi society in this town of Agramonte . So they come together in support of one another and then Esther comes

Ruth Behar: In support of also of the struggles of the sugarcane workers in Agramonte. So I was hoping to show that you know that people could help each other and the struggles and that one way to bring about

Ruth Behar: equity and justice and and anti racism, anti racism of all kinds, whether it's anti semitic racism or black racism.

Ruth Behar: Anti black racism that people can come together and fight and support each other's struggles, and that is something that even young people can do something about that too to make the world more just and more fair and more loving as well.

Mary-Kate Sableski: I absolutely love what you said and Rochelle typed in the chat that yes, all of this does lead us to helping students do their own research right to dig to dig

more deeply into their own life experiences and into and how they can share that with others so

Mary-Kate Sableski: Your work is just phenomenal. And those responses really get us all thinking.

What's Next for Book Creator Panelists & Conclusion Comments

Mary-Kate Sableski: So just to wrap up before we let Laura and give us some summary points.

Mary-Kate Sableski: Can you just tell us what's next, what can we look forward to from each of you just real quickly, what, what are we, what are we looking forward to

Ellen Hopkins: I'll go. I've got like i said i'm revising the next middle grade, which will be out next year. What about will. I'm also revising for a very long time. Why

Ellen Hopkins: It's been like the toughest YA written an entire life because the world just keeps changing. And it keeps changing with it and then also my next YA after that one will be. I'm going to investigate the foster system. I had a little nonprofit for a while that really helped.

Ellen Hopkins: aged out of foster kids off the street and then do safe housing and college. So I, I had a lot of conversations with kids.

Ellen Hopkins: Who've been through the system getting out trying to move beyond the system and again there that a lot of those kids also had a really hard time accepting help

Ellen Hopkins: So, and it's you know it's from never been able to trust that someone's going to be there for them. So I'm really, really going to investigate this on a deep level and

Ellen Hopkins: So yeah, two YAs middle grade and hopefully there'll be another middle grade because I actually love writing middle grade. It's really fun, maybe one day I'll do a picture book too. What about that It's not my skill set the

dansantat: Policy in social media, you know, I could. Okay. Um, I am I'm wrapping up a graphic novel that I wrote with Scholastic 10 years ago. It's called the aqua not and it's about the sea creatures that take a diving suit and then they turned it into a land walking device and hopes to explore land and find this marine reserve that they're

trying to find so that they can escape all the dangers of the ocean, but the themes actually revolve around loss because when they get to this place.

dansantat: The captain of the ship, who went down. He dies in the ship, but he's left a daughter and a brother who never got to make amends and say goodbye.

dansantat: And so you have the sea creatures in the diving suit that that the captain, you know, worked in and he just kind of

dansantat: Goes around land like a ghost and they they eventually form a friendship with the family and they make amends.

dansantat: Other than that, you're going to find a lot of graphic novels for me in the next few years. Um, I do have some picture books in the works. But, I'm, I'm having a little bit of writer's block on those. I'm currently going into gosh final line work right now for a memoir that I'm doing about when I was 13 years old and went on a three week trip to Europe before I was entering high school

dansantat: And a lot of it is about dealing with early adolescence and just not really and kind of learning to like yourself in those weird awkward years

dansantat: And it and it really came from just being coached by a busload of girls who would just kind of give me, you know, some life advice and things like that and you know there were certain things that were big events for me was the first time I ever you know fell in love and

dansantat: You know, other other things included, you know, sneaking into Wimbledon, and watching the men semifinal between John McEnroe and Stefan Edberg for three pounds.

dansantat: And then on top of that. I'm working on another memoir and that's dealing with my mom's breast cancer.

dansantat: And it was something that I was struggling with for a good two or three years. But as I've taken some distance back from it, rather than it being a story about my struggles about being an Asian American

dansantat: And living in this country. It actually is a love letter to my parents about the sacrifices that they made and the conflicts that arise from

dansantat: Me not realizing that their sacrifices and just kind of coming from a place of empathy and understanding that

dansantat: THEY SACRIFICE enough to a point where you know they've come to America and they can't fully assimilate, but they can they can bend. They can bend pretty far. And it's just, it's about me kind of coming in touch with my you know my cultural heritage and realizing that not realizing Notley not being observant of my past was something that kind of just left me as half a person

Ruth Behar: Wow. Wow, that's so fascinating. Um, well, I'm excited to say that I have a picture book.

Ruth Behar: That will be coming out in 2022. It was the hardest thing I've ever written.

Ruth Behar: To say you know, removing words is harder than adding words and I really struggled with it to get the language. Right. You know, it's like writing a long poem

Ruth Behar: I really wrote and rewrote and put a lot of energy into it and it's done the art is being done right now. I got to see the first sketches and I'm very excited.

Ruth Behar: About it and I think all the art will be done by spring of 2021 and then it'll come out in 22 so it's going to still take some time, but I'm very excited about it. It's called Tia Fortuna's new home to four tunas new home and

Ruth Behar: It's somewhat based on the story of one of my aunts, my, my father's younger sister. So, my father is a very difficult person kind of a kind of classic Cuban patriarch

Ruth Behar: And very difficult, but his sister is just the loveliest sweetest person. So I feel like in his sister. I see the sweet version of him.

Ruth Behar: So Tia Fortuna based on my Tia Fanny and and she lives in Miami Beach. This is a an older woman.

Ruth Behar: And and she has to leave her home because the building that she's lived in for many years after coming from Cuba. The building is going to be demolished to build a hotel.

Ruth Behar: And so, so it's her last day in this lovely little beach cottage where she's lived for many years and her niece little Estrella. Yeah.

Ruth Behar: He's five years old, comes to spend the last day at the beach house with with Tia Fortuna. And then, you know, more things happens so

Ruth Behar: So I had a lot of fun writing it and just kind of cooking up the story and it has a lot of Sephardic culture kind of wrapped into it and just like a very symbolic way and

Ruth Behar: Sephardic culture comes from the world of Sephardic Jews. These are Jews originally from Spain who were expelled in 1492 and went off to live and

Ruth Behar: Mostly in countries of what was then the Ottoman Empire. Now, you know, Greece and Turkey, North Africa.

Ruth Behar: And my father's family is Sephardic, so I want to honor that that side of the family. And in this story but but it's not heavy with history in any way. It's just some of the symbols.

Ruth Behar: Of the culture kind of appear like evil I bracelets and things like that kind of appear in the story, and it's had a lot of fun with that one. And I'm glad it's done now. Now the art has to happen and it's really exciting when I get sketches and

Ruth Behar: See how the artist is is envisioning the story. So that's been really wonderful. And now I'm working on a new middle grade novel. I'm actually writing it, you know, this second

Ruth Behar: It's called the story I sing to you and and it's four generations of girls in different places and different time periods, one in 1492

Ruth Behar: One in Turkey in the 1920s, one in Cuba in the 1960s and one in Miami in the 2000s, and they're all going to be connected through through a song.

Ruth Behar: So, so I'm working on that. That's the new project and I have some other things that I'm writing as well. But these, these are definitely the most, the most done. I would say are the most conceptualized

Janae Marks: All of these books sound really great. I'm very excited. So the paperback of *From the desk of Zoe Washington* comes up next month, which is pretty cool. And then in September. My second middle grade.

Janae Marks: Comes out, which is called the soft place to land. And speaking of sort of trauma personal trauma that actually sort of the idea sort of came out of that a little bit. Um, it was from

Janae Marks: Situation from when I was a teenager, but I sort of sort of aging it down for the purpose of this book. But when I was a teenager, I sort of

Janae Marks: My family's sort of had to abruptly sell my child at home and move into I moved to to an apartment with just my mom, my parents are also separating at the time, so

Janae Marks: It was a lot and I feel like listening to

Janae Marks: Rachel's presentations, realizing like oh trauma experiences, go to age 17 and like that. That makes sense. Um, so yeah, so I kind of took that experience and decided to just basically fictionalized everything else, but just that one to kind of

Janae Marks: Having to move out of your child at home that you love. So, and they get that into middle grade. And so, it also has, you know, friendship, family and a mystery element as well. So that's coming out next September and it's called a soft place to land and hopefully more to come up with that.

Jackie Arnold: I can't wait. Like, I'm excited for each and every one of your books. So thank you so much for sharing that. Lauren. Do you want to kind of bring us together.

Lauren Aimonette Liang: I think that kind of is a good is a good word, there's so much information and all of this. So it's hard to

Lauren Aimonette Liang: summarize a few points. I'm going to try and so bear with me as I try it. And first of all, thank you, Michelle. For story us off with such important information really gave a good framework to

Lauren Aimonette Liang: Have our conversation along there. And thank you to Janae and Dan and Ellen and Ruth. And thank you also to Zoe and Humpty and vehicle and Cal and Esther.

Lauren Aimonette Liang: Because the message that you brought is fantastic. And those books and so appreciative for educators and I think that

Lauren Aimonette Liang: There was one overwhelming message that came through for educators who are thinking about supporting children and youth experiencing trauma when shared literature and sharing your books that you've written and that's the message of awareness.

Lauren Aimonette Liang: And there's different steps to that. So I would say the first step I heard you talking about was step one, educators, just need to be aware

Lauren Aimonette Liang: And there's different steps to being aware. First, your awareness is the trauma is happening into many other students, both as an immediate firsthand trauma.

Lauren Aimonette Liang: But also is just generational or secondary trauma and that this may not be obvious. And the way that you think would manifest

Lauren Aimonette Liang: Ellen I really appreciated your example, the kids that I work with trauma go all different ways they hold up in the corners. Sometimes they're throwing things across the room.

Lauren Aimonette Liang: It's just really hard to know. Sometimes, the truth is, I think that teachers are really aware of that they know that their kids are experiencing lots of different things, and especially now.

Lauren Aimonette Liang: With the pandemic and the different effects that are going on from whether your state is open to kids going to school or they go to school for a week and then everybody's quarantined.

Lauren Aimonette Liang: Or what they're doing. I think teachers are aware of that. But what they may not be aware of as much is that second piece.

Lauren Aimonette Liang: Which is awareness of what awareness actually means that came really clearly across from others. All you were saying that there's this step to have sort of understanding and that's really what awareness is it's understanding the situation, understanding that trauma is complex.

Lauren Aimonette Liang: Understanding that it's multiplicity of it that the trauma is not singular. There's not one trauma. There's no hierarchy of trauma trauma is not affecting just one person.

Lauren Aimonette Liang: And really that awareness that it's hard to understand individual and that maybe it's not your role as a teacher to fully understand an individual's trauma.

Lauren Aimonette Liang: And they really more to listen and support as a process and deal with it. And I say that, mostly because there's a real push on all of us as educators and just as loving people in relationships.

Lauren Aimonette Liang: To so wants to fix things so deeply and down you brought up a good example of that.

Lauren Aimonette Liang: And we want to do it because we care so much. It's not. I want to fix this. It's just that I want to I care so much I want to take this away from you.

Lauren Aimonette Liang: And I think that will comes clearly across in your books and clearly and cross in the things that you were saying today.

Lauren Aimonette Liang: Is the truth of understanding and being aware is that understand a child needs love understand they need patience they need gentleness, as the way of understanding

Lauren Aimonette Liang: But you can't fix things. And I think that's really what's leading to that. What to do piece that you're trying to bring home to the teachers and teacher educators who are watching this

Lauren Aimonette Liang: It's the idea. This is not therapy. We're not sharing these books to try to solve a solution, but rather just opening the conversation.

Lauren Aimonette Liang: We're trying to help others to be more aware not just people who are have trauma themselves, but everyone to be aware of what's going on.

Lauren Aimonette Liang: And to work together, sort of identify the feelings are the trauma and allow that conversation to develop around it.

Lauren Aimonette Liang: So to that and, you know, to, to me at least, and listening to you into what Rachelle has written before and and some of the writing that I do around this as well. It's that using a multiple tasks so that ideally we take all of the texts that were talked about today.

Lauren Aimonette Liang: And, Dan, I think you brought *Beekle* and *After the Fall*. The most but using all those stories as well as many other stories from many diverse perspectives and that might be the key point there.

Lauren Aimonette Liang: To use them together with kids to start that conversation to see the connections to see the communion of experiences.

Lauren Aimonette Liang: But really, to see the differences, the different reactions of the individuals and the characters, the different reactions of other people to the main character.

Lauren Aimonette Liang: And in doing that, to just be very courageous. This is hard. The reason that Mary Kate and Jackie made this fantastic panel is because teachers want to help

Lauren Aimonette Liang: They see what's going on. They want to have these conversations but they really just don't know how. What's the best way to be in a conversation like that.

Lauren Aimonette Liang: You as authors were very brave to write these stories, the children that are experiencing the trauma are definitely very brave.

Lauren Aimonette Liang: Your characters are very brave the children in the classroom that are learning to support understand their peers are also being very brave. So, the job of us as teachers and teacher educators, is to

Lauren Aimonette Liang: Go down brave bring the stories, the class open up. Be open to the many reactions that happen to these stories.

Lauren Aimonette Liang: And then work together with your students and with yourself as an educator to think openly about the reactions to the story. It's not just what's happening in the stories, but how you as a group are sitting there and reacting

Lauren Aimonette Liang: And from then you just got to keep going.

Lauren Aimonette Liang: Again, again and again and you all need to keep writing these stories that thank you because it's really exciting to hear that you're writing more of them.

Lauren Aimonette Liang: And thanks for the graphic novels to Dan because a lot of kids really want to read those.

Lauren Aimonette Liang: Knowing that somebody is going to be available in paperback. So it's more accessible to many classrooms. All of these pieces. Help us as teachers and teacher educators to keep this going.

Lauren Aimonette Liang: It's very brave. It's very hard, but we can do it.

Lauren Aimonette Liang: And it's fine. I heard you say it again and again it's fine to say, I don't know what to say. I don't know what to do. But I'm going to throw the story out there and we're going to talk about it.

Lauren Aimonette Liang: So I hope that that sort of summarizing the messages that were coming across. That's what I'm hearing again and again. But I'm very brave in admitting, I don't know, maybe a different message there if you have something else to add, now would be a great time to add on to that.

Jackie Arnold: I thought that was perfect, Lauren. Thank you very much. I totally agree. They are very brave and they were very brave to come together with us tonight. I'm so terribly sorry we don't have a live audience. It breaks my heart that the NCTE group isn't here because I know they would have flocked to come and hear you talk about your work, it is so important to our teachers and our teacher educators right now.

Jackie Arnold: So we try to navigate these new worlds, so I can't wait to get all of this out and share it with as wide as an audience as possible as soon as we can. We are so very appreciative.

Mary-Kate Sableski: Thank you so much for spending your Saturday with us. It's just, it's just been a real real pleasure.

Janae Marks: Thank you so much for including including us

Ellen Hopkins: It's good to see you guys.