



May 1–2, 2026 · Oshkosh, WI
Conference Program & Schedule

Friday, May 1, 2026

12:00 – 3:00 p.m.

Registration

Lobby

We have Friday night dinner reservations at various nearby restaurants — sign up in the Lobby by 3 p.m. if interested.

Breakout Sessions | 1:00 – 1:50 p.m.

How to Set a Writing Routine

Henrietta

Sarah Read

If getting started writing is the hardest part, staying on task is the second hardest. Sarah will share tips, strategies, and tools to help you build a writing routine that works for you.

A Bulletproof Beginning: Five Ways To Anchor Your Story in Urgency from Word One

Thistle

Larry Sommers

Learn how to start your story with immediate momentum. This session explores five techniques for structuring openings that create urgency and draw readers in — while using less information than you might think. Discover how strong structure and strategic restraint can make your first lines impossible to ignore.

The Art of Lyrical Writing

Hutchinson

Keenan Jones

Participants will explore the fundamentals of lyrical writing. The program emphasizes incorporating rhythm and flow, creating vivid imagery, and conveying emotional impact, allowing participants to develop a unique and compelling voice in their work.

Breakout Sessions | 2:00 – 2:50 p.m.

The Power of an Inciting Incident and Why Every Scene Needs One

Henrietta

Kate Penndorf

Discover the difference between a character's agenda and goal, and learn how an inciting incident lays the foundation for obstacles and choices. In this workshop, participants will identify or create their scene's inciting incident and map their character's "X without Y" foundation.

The Heroine's Journey: A Story Structure for Connection and Growth

Thistle

Meadoe Hora

This session introduces a story structure ideal for novels and memoirs that focus on relationships, community, and personal transformation. Participants will learn how it differs from the traditional Hero's Journey, explore the key story beats, and discover practical ways to apply this framework to their own writing.

Find and Grow Your Audience with Substack

Hutchinson

Bruce Landay

Learn how Substack functions as both an email platform and a social media site, and why growing your audience before publishing is key. This workshop will show you how to use Substack to authentically connect with readers and fellow writers, helping your content find its voice and reach the right people.

2:50 – 3:10 p.m.

Break

Breakout Sessions | 3:10 – 4:00 p.m.

How to Write a Picture Book

Henrietta

Christina Fennell

Discover the simple yet powerful structure behind great children's picture books and learn how to create rhythm — whether your story rhymes or not. This session will guide you in crafting stories that flow naturally when read aloud, keeping them engaging for children and the adults who read them, again and again.

Tighten Your Shorts

Thistle

Judy DuCharme

Short pieces can have a powerful impact — if they're crafted with intention. Whether you're working on personal essays, blog posts, articles, devotionals, or a collection of brief pieces, this session will focus on shaping your work so it connects clearly and effectively with your audience and give you the ability to edit and adapt your piece to a variety of genres.

Write a Dynamic Query Letter

Hutchinson

Barry Putt Jr.

Learn how to craft a dynamic and compelling query letter that captures attention. Participants will explore the key elements of an effective query letter, including structure, tone, and how to present their work in a way that engages agents or publishers.

4:30 p.m.	Meet in the lobby if you signed up for dinner reservations.	
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6:00 – 9:00 p.m.	Lakefly After Dark Open Mic — Oshkosh Public Library	
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Please enter via front entrance flanked by the lions; street parking available.

Saturday, May 2, 2026

8:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.	Registration	<i>Lobby</i>
9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.	Lakefly Book Fair	<i>Paul L.</i>
9:00 – 10:00 a.m.	Keynote Speaker: G. Anthony	<i>Leander Choate</i>
10:00 – 10:30 a.m.	No-Conflict Shopping at Book Fair	<i>Paul L.</i>

Breakout Sessions | 10:30 – 11:50 a.m.

The ABCs of Character Development

Henrietta

Beth Amos

Characters who are compelling and believable, who display understandable actions and justifiable emotions, are the very heart of good fiction. In this session, learn how to craft compelling, believable characters. Participants explore flaws, motivations, and emotional depth that help readers identify with a character's hopes and struggles. Using an ABC profiling guide, you can build detailed character backgrounds and choose only the traits most essential to the central story.

Ghostwriting: Crafting Voices Behind the Words

Thistle

Erick Mertz

Discover the art of writing for others while preserving their unique voice. This hands-on workshop guides participants through techniques for capturing tone, style, and personality, and turning ideas into compelling narratives. Ideal for aspiring writers, editors, and storytellers, this session explores practical strategies, ethical considerations, and insider tips to succeed as a professional ghostwriter.

Subject Expert: Medical Examiner

Hutchinson

Deputy Medical Examiner McKenzie Repinski

Ms. Repinski will present an inside look at crime scenes, medical examiner procedures, and the evolving role of support animals in this work. Learn how investigations are conducted and how a therapy dog helps staff and families during difficult moments. Meet K9 Brie, a one-year-old Goldendoodle now serving with the Winnebago County Medical Examiner's Office, and enjoy plenty of time for questions.

Author Platform Essentials

Lefevre

Celeste Anton

Gain a big-picture understanding of an author's digital platform — website, email, social media, and promotional tools — and how they work together. Learn to position your website as a central hub, and get a realistic sense of where to start and what to focus on first, so writers leave informed, encouraged, and not overwhelmed.

12:00 – 1:30 p.m.

Lunch — Pasta Buffet

Leander Choate

Breakout Sessions | 1:30 – 2:20 p.m.

Injecting Humor into Your Writing

Henrietta

Melissa Westemeier

This program explores how humor can enrich even serious writing. Through examples and short exercises, participants will practice five simple strategies to make their writing more engaging, memorable, and relatable.

Public Speaking for Writers

Thistle

Bailey Hansen

Being nervous about public speaking is normal (especially for introverted writers!) but it can also get in the way of sharing your words with the world. In this session, we will share tips and tricks about how to tell your story out loud, in front of a crowd. The brave will even get an opportunity to practice presenting!

Not Just Ink on Paper

Hutchinson

Panel Discussion — Moderated by William Gillard

There are creative writers who make exciting and satisfying careers, and never publish a book. We'll talk with professionals who write creatively for television, films, radio, video games, and other media. We'll learn about the fun and interesting ways their careers have gone and how you might find a way into these exciting worlds.

Panelists:

Greg Cebulski: Television and film producer, writer, director, editor

Al Seeger: Writer, designer, and editor for Point of Insanity Game Studio

Cole Sheldon: Writer, director, producer, and owner of False Take Films

Courtney Wright: Role-playing game content writer, ghost writer, novelist

Choose Your Path to Publication

Lefevre

David Bruns

Explore the creative and business trade-offs between traditional, small press, indie, and crowdfunding publishing. This session helps writers define what success means to them, understand the practical and artistic differences between publishing paths, and make informed decisions to align their goals with the route that fits best.

Breakout Sessions | 2:30 – 3:20 p.m.

How to Make it as an Independent Author

Henrietta

James Hamilton

Learn what to expect when self-publishing, including the key differences and nuances compared with traditional publishing. Discover what success looks like for independent authors and explore practical steps to make your book launches more effective. This session equips writers with strategies to navigate the indie publishing world confidently.

Your Story is in Your Genes: Writing Family in Fiction

Thistle

Janis Falk

Explore the rich material your family stories can provide without turning your fiction into memoir. This session shows you how to transform real-life relatives and anecdotes into compelling, original characters and narratives. Learn to mine family lore, blend personalities, and create stories that resonate with authenticity.

Set the Setting in Mystery Writing

Hutchinson

Carol Pacur

Plot, character, or setting: which matters most? All are vital, yet setting is often an afterthought. This program explores how setting shapes mystery fiction by influencing plot, revealing character, and creating atmosphere. Using literary examples and the speaker's own novels, participants will analyze effective settings and practice techniques through interactive exercises and games.

Lakefly Writing Contest Reception

Lefevre

William Gillard

Join us to celebrate the winners of this year's Lakefly Writing Contests.

Breakout Sessions | 3:30 – 4:20 p.m.

The Magic Pill for Writer's Block: How to Write When You're Not Feeling It

Henrietta

Wendy Wimmer

The past few years have been rough on creative ambition. Your muse has been bingeing reruns, and motivation feels impossible. In this session, we'll trick your brain into generating stories and poems anyway. Bring a blank notebook, and leave with at least two new starts — and a repeatable method for the next hundred blank pages.

Stanzas to Stories: Borrowing from Poetry to Write Everything Better

Thistle

Tom Cannon & William Gillard

Description coming soon.

DIY Book Covers in Canva: A Designer's Step-by-Step Guide for Authors

Hutchinson

Katie Klockow

Learn how to create a professional-looking book cover in Canva with a guided step-by-step process. Explore essential design principles for authors and discover sources for royalty-free images safe for commercial use, complete with handouts to support your creative journey.

Romance Writing

Lefevre

Nicole Reid

Description coming soon.

4:30 p.m.

Door Prizes & Farewell

Leander Choate

Thank you for joining us at Lakefly Writers Conference 2026!

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