

Summary Report on MiPA General Meeting—November 10, 2020
About 25 Participating on Zoom

Creating Change Through Children’s Literature: Create and Market a Children’s Book with Purpose



Amy Quale, co-founder of [Wise Ink Creative Publishing](#)



Roseanne Cheng, co-founder of [Evergreen Authors](#)

Suzanne Kelly, President of MiPA introduced the MiPA Board. **Paul Nylander**, MiPA Vice President, then introduced our speakers. Roseanne Cheng was a last-minute substitute because the planned co-speaker author Ara Elizabeth, sadly, just tested positive for COVID-19. Roseanne was a wonderful speaker and we thank her for her emergency help. The theme for the evening was:

When it comes time to make decisions about how to write, edit, build, and market a children’s book, all of the choices you make should be filtered through this single question: What do I want my book to do in the world?

Introduction: Amy described how Wise Ink generally focuses on “meaningful” books and that is especially important for children’s books. That attitude is also important to selling books outside the normal channels. Roseanne emphasized that this is a particularly good time for creative people and their ability to bring joy out into the world.

Where do these ideas come from?

As an example, Amy described the book *Lolo’s Super Power*, written by Leslie Pitt, who has lived with limb loss since age six. Leslie had a goal of building a non-profit that could help children in other countries get prosthetic limbs as she had. She wrote the book to further that end, about a doll with snap-on and -off limbs. It is an emotional support to children with physical differences. The book hasn’t sold well through traditional bookstores, but the non-profit organization and the book

reinforce each other. Amy said, “If you can harness where your passion and heart are, then you can leverage that into a book that makes a difference.”

Roseanne added, “Your book is an extension of you, not the other way around.” Often children’s books are sold to the parents and read by or to the child. Check out what other children’s book authors are doing, things like Zoom storybook time readings. Ten years ago, when Roseanne was teaching, she wanted to write a book about the powerful distorting effect of advertising on students and schools. Agents loved the book, but said it wouldn’t sell because it had no drugs, sex, or vampires, etc. For her, marketing started by offering to speak in classrooms about publishing and answering student questions. Soon whole districts were asking her to speak. “My mission for that first book was to downplay the sex and drug saturation and help the students see cleaner options and care more about social issues—to spark conversations between kids and their parents.”

Amy described how critical a full understanding of the authors mission was to Wise Ink. They funnel all the production decisions through that filter. For example, if the goal is to trigger great discussions, then putting discussion questions in the book might further the mission. In this model, success isn’t measured only in how many books are sold, but in how we helped achieve the mission (or both).

Ara Elisabeth’s book *Rise and Shine and Change the World*, is a good example. Ara worried about all the darkness and division in the world several years ago and wanted to encourage children to be the light forward to the next generation. She looked at her book as a healing tool to help the children understand what was happening. She wrote a beautiful poem about how kids have the power to rise up and shine their light. The illustrations are colorful and vibrant, reinforcing the message.

Marketing Discussion

Ara already was an artist with some following, and she started a crowdfunding program with Kickstarter, as organization dedicated to bringing creative projects to light. She raised about \$22,000 which reimbursed her production costs and enabled her to print 5,000 books. She avoided most of the traditional sales channels (although it is on Amazon). Crowdfunding was a way to generate visibility and interest in the book and it worked. Her book is very visible in gift and art shops in the Twin Cities, which she visited, showing them her book

Amy also describe another book, *When Everything Was Everything*, by Saymoukda Duangphouxay Vongsay. Wise Ink likes to publish books of those who represent other cultures, as in this Minnesota-centric Lao-American story. They like books that build empathy and connection that last for generations. Roseanne especially remembered the book launch, which involved social media (Instagram) and a gathering with many food trucks. Beautiful photos from the book were posted, and the following grew organically. She received great endorsements from well-known people who opened doors to many people.

Roseanne’s second book, *Edge the Bare Garden*, was about cyber bullying and digital citizenship. It took her longer to write because she wanted to get it right. Both her books had guided reading questions to spark conversations. Due to the nature of the book, she tried to make the marketing much more personal, even though the story was not about her personally. To achieve the mission, she included lesson plans in each chapter that could be used by teachers. The gender of the main character in that book, Agnes, is never specified, which caused many debate in the classes where she talked—sometimes the kids get almost angry about this.

Another story Amy wanted to talk about was a new Dara Beevas book, about being unable to find a princess dress for her African-American-Jamaican daughter. She did research to find stories about real “African” princesses. She raised \$20,000 in a crowdfunding campaign, on the basis of her

personal connections. The series of empowering stories called, *Li'l Queens*, align well with movements about racial equity in the news today. Dara's family was at the heart of recent relief efforts in Minneapolis.

Roseanne wanted to talk about Kickstarter in general, which she called the gold standard, compared to podcasts and other methods. Understand that Kickstarter should not be considered lightly. It takes a significant effort, but it can be a game-changer. Check out previous successful campaigns and ask for help where needed. Kickstarter campaigns are best when they focus on the mission and not so much on "Please buy my book." Start the campaign with your list of "sure-bet" contributors so others can see that it is well underway and has momentum. Crowdfunding can be great because it may pay for up-front publishing costs and then the author can also receive most of the profit through direct sales. Amy recommends doing the campaign after the book is done, which then reimburses the author for production costs they have already paid. The campaign will be more successful with a real beautiful book to show (perhaps three months before the book launch). Unlike Kickstarter, Indiegogo is a platform where you don't need to meet a goal to be paid off. Many people set up tiers in Kickstarter so they can achieve partial goals and be sure to be paid. Also, consider partnering with a non-profit organization that people know to add credibility. Roseanne has a free course on her platform, evergreenauthors.com, about how to use crowdfunding.

Question and Answer Session:

Q 1: Is it better to use Kickstarter after a first book when one is more well known?

A1: Roseanne doesn't think it matters much. Having beautiful visuals is more important.

Q2: Holly asked, if book is done, what is advantage of using Kickstarter?

A2: Kickstarter does get 7% of the campaign intake. By setting up packages, people might buy more books, or a set, rather than just one. Kickstarter is very visual, so you can include pictures, music, coloring pages, stickers, and other inducements that work especially well for children's books.

Q3: Not all children's book authors are illustrators. Is that okay?

A3: Sure, there are dozens of excellent illustrators that Wise Ink uses, all over the world. We ask the author about styles they like and try to match that and other needs. Working with an agency is best and Wise Ink uses Astound, who have hundreds of excellent illustrators. Paul points out that book design and illustration are different things (one can be a great book designer but not an illustrator). Teaming up an author with a great illustrator can sometimes sell books through both contact lists.

Q4: Karen asks, "How does one market to gift stores, etc.?" How should we market in general?

A4: Evergreen Authors has a helpful template for marketing. The truth is that personal connections are key, so you have to reach out, email, phone, direct, etc. Write them a love letter. Pinterest is used by a lot of kids and teachers. Check out the how-to course about Pinterest at: <https://www.evergreenauthors.com/pinterest-workshop>. Another option is New Leaf Distributing Company, who market to gift shops, but they focus on spiritual content.

Unfortunately, shoe leather and work are key. Amazon ads used to be fairly effective, using the pictures at the bottom of the page, but it is starting to lose its value. Authors should identify their audience and ask them where they go for books. Do your research, don't just

guess. If you can, include something directly valuable to the reader, as Roseanne did with her teachers guide.

In general, find where your audience has congregated. An example Amy mentioned are two parents who wrote a book about preemie babies after their own experience in a NICU. That book sold in their hospital, and then the entire hospital system, and then to many health systems.

Q5: Victoria asked about how should sales go? Where are the averages? Am I doing well or not?

A5: Roseanne said, don't look for that number. I don't have a scale in my home. It will just make you go insane. One author she knew complained that he only sold 85 book in an afternoon at Barnes and Noble.

Traditional publishers can get books on the front shelf at bookstores, but even they don't push all books. The author still needs to do a lot of work.

It's hard now because of the pandemic. One needs to find where the audience goes online.

Q6: Suzanne said that Children's books used to be produced overseas, in places like Japan. Is that still true?

A6: Wise Ink works with many Midwest printers and they respond faster. They are mostly off-set printers. Get multiple quotes.

Q7: How do you see the future of children's books

A7: It is growing rapidly. Many have a specific agenda rather than being just for entertainment. But Wise Ink does have one called, *Mr. Poop Goes Home*. Even that has a mission of sorts.

Roseanne says teachers are becoming more open to e-books during the pandemic, including interactive ones. TeachersPayTeachers is a good resource site for teachers. Including a lesson plan with you book is valuable there.

Q8: Are curricular guidelines important?

A8: Yes, they are important, so Roseanne being credentialed helps. This is less of an issue in Arizona.

Paul thanked both speakers for their excellent talks, and Roseanne for jumping in at the last minute. He mentioned MiPA's December meeting which will include a question-and-answer session with the MiPA board, and even more importantly there will be book prizes for the best festive holiday zoom backgrounds. All the MiPA general meetings are on the second Tuesday of the month.