



Oradell resident Sally Isaacs cofounded nonfiction children's author conference being held this weekend

JUNE 8, 2015 LAST UPDATED: MONDAY, JUNE 8, 2015, 1:21 AM

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WHAT: 21st Century Children's Nonfiction Conference.

WHEN: Friday to Sunday.

WHERE: Manhattan College, 4513 Manhattan College Parkway, Riverdale, N.Y.

HOW MUCH: \$440 for entire conference; \$45 for one-on-one consultation; \$95 for intensive workshops; \$75 for Educator Literacy Program.

FOR MORE INFO: 21cnfc.com.

When editors, authors, illustrators and teachers get together at this weekend's three-day non-fiction children's book conference, there is no doubt the Common Core guidelines will come up more than once. At these workshops, presentations and consultations, the discussion, however, won't be about the merits of the controversial educational standards.

What the implementation of the Common Core has unquestionably done is brought non-fiction books out from the largely ignored shelves in the children's section of the library and bookstore, according to some in the publishing industry. The standards require "informational" reading and that children seek more than one book on a subject, which has meant children are reading more non-fiction books than in the past.

"Whether people embrace the Common Core or don't – one thing that Common Core actually brought to light [is] non-fiction is important," said Rutherford resident Emily Easton, executive editor for Crown Books for Young Readers at Random House, who will be speaking at the conference. "Kids actually like it and that it needs to be part of everybody's general reading. I think that's not going to go away even if Common Core does go away."

Fiction has long ruled the children's book world, in the libraries, bookstores and classrooms. Conferences for children's book authors were much the same. After one such conference focused on fiction a few years ago, non-fiction publisher and author Lionel Bender went to Sally Isaacs with an idea.

Why not create a conference just for non-fiction children's writers, he asked the Oradell resident and children's non-fiction book author. She and Bender created the 21st Century Children's Nonfiction Conference, which will hold its third year of presentations, workshops and consultations this weekend.

This conference is not just for authors; it is for everyone engaged in the world of non-fiction children's books, including illustrators, publishers, teachers and librarians.

"It brings together people who don't normally get together to talk," said Isaacs. "It's an interesting conversation between the publisher who prepares the books and the teachers who use it and the authors who are writing it. I love it that it has so many different facets woven together."

Isaacs is an author of 50 illustrated children's non-fiction books and has worked on textbooks and workbooks, consumer products for



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Highlights for Children, assessment materials for Educational Testing Service and website content for Huntington Learning Center.

Isaacs and Bender began this conference at a critical time in publishing, with the digital revolution and educational implementation of Common Core standards across the country, according to Isaacs. These educational guidelines are creeping into the writing process, Isaacs admitted.

"If you're writing a good book, you're writing a good book — the Common Core questions just naturally flow out of it," she said. "But because we know teachers are looking for primary source information like letters from the time that it happened or quotes from people who were there, that does factor into it. So I will try to put that kind of material in. But I value it. I think it's a good idea."

It can take years for non-fiction books and authors to acquire a sizable fan base of young readers and a following among teachers and librarians who have spent years favoring fiction, according to Easton. Those who introduced the books to children often favored fiction, she said.

"I think for a long time, teachers, in particular, and maybe some librarians — many of them are women and they love fiction," Easton said. "This is, of course, a generalization, [but] many teachers and librarians who are women gravitate toward novels. Their favorite novels, they teach them over and over again, and there are so many kids who are not connecting with those books. Many of them are boys, but there are also girls. They love non-fiction. It took a long time to get that message to teachers."

'Positive development'

Easton said there is now recognition that non-fiction can be fun and entertaining and connects with a different group of young readers.

"That's a really positive development," she said. "I just hope that continues to grow."

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