

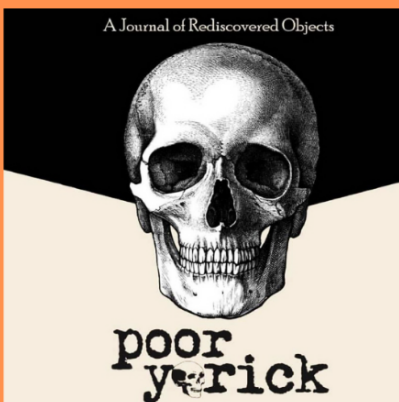


# WCSU MFA 2022 SUMMER RESIDENCY

*Where: Highlights Foundation*  
*When: August 2-7*



**WCSU** | MFA  
CREATIVE  
AND  
PROFESSIONAL  
WRITING



**Bram  
Stoker  
Festival**  
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# **WCSU MFA in Creative and Professional Writing**

## **2022 Summer Residency August 2, 2022 – August 7, 2022 Highlights Retreat Center**

### **Tuesday, August 2**

**2:00 PM** – Check-in at the Highlights Retreat Center (see confirmation email from Tara Gross for full details).

#### **2:00 – 4:00 PM – New Student Orientation**

All new students are required to attend this orientation session. We will discuss program requirements and expectations, including the Online Multi-Genre Workshop, Enrichment Projects, Internships, and an overview of the MFA Thesis process. Faculty are welcome to attend, too.

#### **5:30 PM – Appetizers and Drinks**

Join us in the main barn and back patio for light appetizers, drinks, and conversation before dinner.

#### **6:00 PM – Dinner**

Dinner is served in the main barn. Guests are welcome to eat inside, on the back patio, or any of the other outside dining areas.

#### **7:30 – 9:00 PM – Welcome Reception and Faculty Flash Reading**

MFA Coordinator Anthony D'Aries will kick off our summer residency with opening remarks. Short readings by MFA faculty to follow.

## **Wednesday, August 3**

### **8:00 AM – Breakfast**

Breakfast begins each morning at 8:00 AM in the main barn.

### **9:30-11:30 AM – “Middle Grade Magic” – Beth Vrabel (2021 Housatonic Book Award Winner in YA/MG)**

Ah, middle school, everyone’s favorite time to relive. During this workshop we’ll focus on the awkwardness, the friendships, the cafeteria politics, the first loves found within the ever-expanding world of middle schoolers. We’ll craft characters who want to fit in nearly as much as they need to stand out. We’ll discuss striking the voice, humor, and themes unique to MG lit. Further, we’ll focus on genre mechanics, including word count, revision, and research. Learn how to create a middle grade series and standalone books that will make their way into librarian and teachers’ hands for the coveted read-aloud.

### **12:00 – 1:00 PM – Lunch**

Lunch is served in the main barn. Guests are welcome to eat inside, on the back patio, or any of the other outside dining areas.

### **1:30 – 3:30 PM – “I Couldn’t Put it Down: Pacing and Storytelling” – Anne Westrick**

Often we equate pacing with page-turning as if faster were always better, but sometimes it’s the craft of slowing a scene down that causes the tension to ramp up. How do writers create dramatic tension? What are the elements of well-paced stories, and what mistakes do writers sometimes make? In this workshop we’ll analyze the pacing in two novels: *Hamnet* by Maggie O’Farrell and *The Sweetness of Water* by Nathan Harris. (Excerpts will be provided. There is no requirement to read these books in advance, but both are recommended.) Although we’ll discuss fiction, insights gleaned will help you write well, no matter your genre. Please bring 5 pages of a current work-in-progress and be ready to reflect on the way you’ve paced your work.

### **4:00 – 5:00 PM – Mentor Meetings**

Students may use this time to schedule in-person or virtual meetings with their fall mentors to begin planning their syllabi. Students are also welcome to meet with their mentors during meal times or other free time blocks.

### **7:30-9:00 PM – Faculty/Visiting Writer Readings**

MFA faculty mentor Anne Westrick and Housatonic Book Award winner Beth Vrabel will read their work. All readings will be held on the back patio behind the main barn.

### **9:00 PM - ? – Open Mic**

Faculty and students are welcome to join our nightly open mic session on the back patio after the readings.

## **Thursday, August 4**

### **8:00 AM – Breakfast**

Breakfast begins each morning at 8:00 AM in the main barn.

### **9:30 – 11:30 AM – “Sentence Craft from Draft to Draft” – Chauna Craig**

Jhumpa Lahiri claimed that to write a sentence is “to document and to develop at the same time.” More than merely conveying information in prose, sentences—strings of words, thoughtfully arranged—*become* the story. Changes to sentences are changes to character and plot, and vice versa. The form and function of sentences and our attention to them develop with every draft of a story or novel chapter. Through examples and writing exercises, we’ll consider how the seeds of sentences can generate new material in early drafts and, in revision, build narrative tension, reinforce mood and theme, and infuse prose with energy.

### **12:00 – 1:00 PM – Lunch**

Lunch is served in the main barn. Guests are welcome to eat inside, on the back patio, or any of the other outside dining areas.

### **1:30 – 3:30 PM – “Surprise, Surprise: Structure in Poetry” – Jeff Walt (2020 Housatonic Book Award Winner in Poetry)**

Poetic structure is the pattern of a poem’s turning. T.S. Eliot calls the poem’s turn “One of the most important means of poetic effect since Homer.” More than any other aspect of poetry, it is structure that reveals how poems remain whole and unified even as they move and leap. Structure’s primary concern is *the art of the turn* and often this means making *surprising* turns. In this workshop, we will grow together in an exploration of the ways poets employ structure to craft poetry. Jeff will bring many examples of structure for reading and discussion.

Ultimately, we will produce poems *in* workshop which remind and encourage us to see and to create poems that consciously maneuver.

### **4:00 – 5:00 PM – MFA Thesis Readings**

Graduating MFA students will read from their final thesis.

### **5:30 PM – Appetizers and Drinks**

Join us in the main barn and back patio for light appetizers, drinks, and conversation before dinner.

### **6:00 PM – Dinner**

Dinner is served in the main barn. Guests are welcome to eat inside, on the back patio, or any of the other outside dining areas.

**7:30-9:00 PM – Faculty/Visiting Writer Readings**

Visiting writer Chauna Craig and Housatonic Book Award winner Jeff Walt will read their work. All readings will be held on the back patio behind the main barn.

**9:00 PM - ? – Open Mic**

Faculty and students are welcome to join our nightly open mic session on the back patio after the readings.

## **Friday, August 5**

### **8:00 AM – Breakfast**

Breakfast begins each morning at 8:00 AM in the main barn.

### **9:30 – 11:30 AM – “Writing to Persuade: Secrets to Success in Professional Writing” – Jane K. Cleland**

In this workshop we’ll discuss the tools, tactics, and techniques you need to succeed as a professional writer. You’ll be able to:

- Follow the conventions of various formats, such as PowerPoint decks, proposals, reports, white papers, and websites
- Capitalize on what motivates people to act, including features vs. benefits, differentiation, and price vs. value
- Use tools to take your professional writing to the next level, for example, the Empathy Index, bullet list alignment, and the Gunning fog index

### **12:00 – 1:00 PM – Lunch**

Lunch is served in the main barn. Guests are welcome to eat inside, on the back patio, or any of the other outside dining areas.

### **1:30 – 3:30 PM – “How to ‘Write What You Know’ When You Don’t Know It...Yet: A Practical Guide to Research and Authenticity” – Matthew Quinn Martin**

That edict, *write what you know*, might be the most oft-repeated bit of writing lore (except, perhaps, for *show don’t tell*), but what does it mean, really? What does it mean for your work, and for your career?

Should you be expected to limit yourself to your own lived experience? Especially in a market-place where genres are increasingly fractalized, and questions of who is allowed to tell what story are debated in every corner of social media. Or should you be free to let your imagination run wild? Potential consequences to both your readers, and your reputation, be damned.

Or is there a middle path between these equally reactionary extremes? What territory does fiction claim in the borderlands between “truth” and “lies?” When venturing into uncharted waters, how do you sidestep pitfalls of relying on clichés and tropes (especially those that reinforce harmful stereotypes)? How do you breathe life into a civilization that has long since vanished from the earth, or one that has never existed in the first place? And how can careful research, honest self-reflection, and a healthy spirit of generosity help you on your migration into the unknown?

We'll explore these questions and many more. And present an array of tips and tricks—some tried and true, some cutting edge—to help equip you on your journey. And to help you craft your own research and authenticity plan, one that will allow you not only to survive, but to thrive, wherever you might go.

#### **4:00 – 5:00 PM – Enrichment Project Presentations**

Enrichment Projects are designed to give MFA students an opportunity to explore an avenue of learning outside of their coursework. A student might, for example, choose to learn a foreign language, start a new online publication, volunteer for a non-profit organization, or try another appropriately challenging activity. The Enrichment Project is not a writing project, but a project that will enrich the student as a professional writer.

Come hear students share their Enrichment Project experience and maybe get some inspiration for your own!

#### **5:30 PM – Appetizers and Drinks**

Join us in the main barn and back patio for light appetizers, drinks, and conversation before dinner.

#### **6:00 PM – Dinner**

Dinner is served in the main barn. Guests are welcome to eat inside, on the back patio, or any of the other outside dining areas.

#### **7:30-9:00 PM – Faculty Readings**

MFA faculty mentors Jane Cleland and Matthew Quinn Martin will read their work. All readings will be held on the back patio behind the main barn.

#### **9:00 PM - ? – Open Mic**

Faculty and students are welcome to join our nightly open mic session on the back patio after the readings.

## **Saturday, August 6**

### **8:00 AM – Breakfast**

Breakfast begins each morning at 8:00 AM in the main barn.

### **9:30 – 11:30 – “Turn the Page” – John Roche**

In this workshop, we'll explore how to end a chapter so readers keep reading. By discussing advice from writers on ending a chapter and looking at effective examples from published works, workshop participants will become familiar with various ways to end a chapter, be it in fiction, nonfiction or other genres and forms. Plenty of focus is paid to how to craft the opening lines of a story, chapter or book, but in this discussion with crime novelist and MFA faculty mentor John Roche, we'll dig deep into the idea that while an opening might hook the reader, chapter endings *have to keep them hooked*.

### **12:00 – 1:00 PM – Lunch**

Lunch is served in the main barn. Guests are welcome to eat inside, on the back patio, or any of the other outside dining areas.

### **1:30 – 3:30 PM – “Playing the Shell Game: A Multi-Genre Master Class in ‘Hermit Crab’ Writing” – Julie Marie Wade (2021 Housatonic Book Award Winner in Nonfiction)**

Poets and prosists have long borrowed non-literary forms like dictionary entries, encyclopedias, out-of-office replies, and personal ads as containers for their literary content. In 2003, in the first edition of their craft text *Tell It Slant*, creative nonfiction writers Brenda Miller and Suzanne Paola invoked the "hermit crab" as a memorable metaphor for adopted-forms literature. A vulnerable mollusk born without a shell, the hermit crab searches its environment for viable shells to inhabit—much the way writers, particularly those exploring emotionally charged content, may seek out a seemingly neutral shell to house, and help them more fully elucidate, their content. In this class, we'll consider examples of "hermit crab" poetry and prose, with many opportunities for discussion and emulation.

### **4:00 – 5:30 PM – “Writing a Ten-Minute Play: Revealing Character and Plot Through Dialogue” – Kate Katcher**

Playwrights have a unique challenge. Just about everything needs to be revealed through dialogue, action, and silence. A short play is a full-length play condensed into very few pages. Unlike a skit, there is a deeper purpose to a short play.

While many plays use a device like a narrator who breaks the fourth wall and speaks directly to the audience, this is actually the antithesis of drama. It is all exposition. What modern playwrights aspire to is getting all the necessary information delivered to the audience in a dramatic way: by having characters talk to each other. In a short play, characters need to get to the point very quickly.



In this workshop, we will discuss the need to eliminate narrative in writing plays and artful ways to include exposition in dialogue. We'll discuss examples of both good and bad exposition in plays, and try a writing prompt from Stuart Spencer's *The Playwright's Guidebook*.

### **5:30 PM – Appetizers and Drinks**

Join us in the main barn and back patio for light appetizers, drinks, and conversation before dinner.

### **6:00 PM – Dinner**

Dinner is served in the main barn. Guests are welcome to eat inside, on the back patio, or any of the other outside dining areas.

### **7:30-9:00 PM – Visiting Writer Readings**

Visiting writer Joe Okonkwo and Housatonic Book Award winner Julie Marie Wade will read their work.

### **9:00 PM - ? – Flash Fiction Contest**

The event we've all been waiting for! Our annual flash fiction contest. Students and faculty are welcome to read a short piece of fiction or creative nonfiction (750 words max). A panel of judges will select the top three pieces and award prizes beyond your wildest dreams. Come celebrate the last full day of residency!

## **Sunday, August 7**

### **8:00 AM – Breakfast**

Breakfast begins each morning at 8:00 AM in the main barn.

### **9:30 – 11:30 – “Tapping Your Inner Performer: Learn How to Bring your Reading Events to Life!” – Joe Okonkwo**

Author readings play a critical role in marketing your work, increasing book sales, and connecting with potential readers. They can also provide networking opportunities. But so often readings are a chore to sit through—because many writers lack the skills to present their work in a captivating fashion. Monotone voices, poor pacing, and weak (or no) differentiation between characters are a recipe for audience boredom! A writer has to embrace their inner performer when reading out loud.

In this interactive workshop, participants will learn basic techniques to galvanize their readings, engage audiences, and make reading events fun. Although we’ll discuss fiction, insights gleaned will help you write well, no matter your genre. Please bring 5 pages of a current work-in-progress and be ready to reflect on the way you’ve paced your work.

### **12:00 – 1:00 PM – Lunch**

Lunch is served in the main barn. Guests are welcome to eat inside, on the back patio, or any of the other outside dining areas.

**\*Check out from Highlights after lunch.**

## Residency Faculty Bios

**Jane K. Cleland** writes both fiction and nonfiction, including the long-running and multiple award-winning *Josie Prescott Antiques Mysteries* (St. Martin's & Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine) and the Agatha Award-winning bestsellers *Mastering Suspense, Structure & Plot* and *Mastering Plot Twists* (Writer's Digest Books), recommended by Dan Brown, Louise Penny, David Baldacci, and Neil Gaiman. Jane is a contributing editor for *Writer's Digest Magazine*, and the chair of the Wolfe Pack's Black Orchid Novella Award (BONA), in partnership with AHMM. She is a frequent workshop leader and guest author at writing conferences and MFA Residencies. Jane is offering free monthly workshops on the craft of writing in the "We're All in It Together" series. Details can be found at [www.janecleland.com](http://www.janecleland.com).

**Chauna Craig** is the author of the story collection *The Widow's Guide to Edible Mushrooms*, winner of the Next Generation Indie Book Award in Short Fiction and finalist for the Foreword Indies and High Plains Book Awards competitions. Her short fiction has appeared in dozens of literary journals including *Prairie Schooner*, *Sou'wester*, *Jellyfish Review*, *Green Mountains Review*, *SmokeLong Quarterly* and *Ascent*, and the Norton anthology *Flash Fiction America: Very Short Stories*. Her second book, *Wings and Other Things: Stories*, is forthcoming in fall 2022.

**Anthony D'Aries** is the author of *The Language of Men: A Memoir* (Hudson Whitman Press, 2012), which received the PEN Discovery Prize and *Foreword's* Memoir-of-the-Year Award. His work has appeared in *McSweeney's*, *Boston Magazine*, *Solstice*, *The Literary Review*, *Memoir Magazine*, *Sport Literate*, *Flash Fiction Magazine*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, and elsewhere. He was recently nominated for a Pushcart Prize and his essay, "No Man's Land," was listed as a Notable Essay in *Best American Essays 2021*. He currently directs the low-residency MFA in Creative and Professional Writing at Western Connecticut State University.

**Kate Katcher** is a playwright, actor, director, and Adjunct Professor of Theater at Western Connecticut State University. Her full-length plays include *The Little Sisters of Littleton* and *The 36<sup>th</sup> Line*, winner of the Dorothy Silver Playwriting Competition, and a finalist for the 2020 Julie Harris Award. One-acts include *Missus Dobbs*, *American*, chosen for the Rogue Theater Festival in NYC and Writers Playground at the Sharon Playhouse, *Scarsdale*, appearing in The Best Ten-Minute Plays of 2021, and *Bread*, in *Laughter is the Best Medicine: Forty-Five 5-Minute Plays in the Time of Coronavirus*, both published by Smith & Kraus. She holds a BFA from Boston University and an MFA in Creative and Professional Writing with a concentration in Playwriting from WCSU.

**Matthew Quinn Martin** is the author of the *Nightlife* series (Pocket Star/Simon & Schuster) as well as numerous works of short fiction. He is the co-writer of the feature films *Being* and *Slingshot*. He lives in the shadow of the Capital in Upstate New York, and when he isn't writing or pulling a "Bob Vila" on the house he just bought, he spends his time playing bagpipes competitively (...for real).

**Joe Okonkwo's** debut novel *Jazz Moon* won the Publishing Triangle's Edmund White Award for Debut Fiction and was a finalist for a Lambda Literary Award. His short stories have appeared in *Global City Review*, *The Piltdown Review*, *The New Engagement*, *Storychord*, *Love Stories from Africa*, and *Strength*. His story "Cleo" was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. Joe served as Prose Editor for *Newtown Literary* and he edited *Best Gay Stories 2017*. His short story collection, *Kiss the Scars on the Back of my Neck*, is available from Amble Press.

**John Roche** is an award-winning journalist, author, and faculty member in the Writing Department at Western Connecticut State University, where he earned his MFA. His crime novel, *Bronx Bound*, was published in 2015. After working full-time as a newspaper journalist for 25 years, Roche switched to teaching journalism and other writing at the undergraduate and graduate levels. He continues to regularly freelance for regional publications, and also writes flash fiction, essays, and other stuff. For this residency, don't get him started about how to write endings.

**Beth Vrabel** is author of a dozen middle grade novels, including the critically acclaimed book *To Tell You the Truth*, Cybils'-nominated *Caleb and Kit*, ILA award-winning *A Blind Guide to Stinkville*, and JLG selection *A Blind Guide to Normal*. Her series *The Newspaper Club* builds on her experience as a former journalist. She lives in Canton, Connecticut, with her family.

**Julie Marie Wade** is the author of 13 collections of poetry, prose, and hybrid forms, including *Wishbone: A Memoir in Fractures*, *Small Fires*, *Postage Due: Poems & Prose Poems*, *When I Was Straight*, *SIX*, *Just an Ordinary Woman Breathing*, and *Skirted*. With Denise Duhamel, she wrote *The Unrhymables: Collaborations in Prose*, and with Brenda Miller, *Telephone: Essays in Two Voices*. A winner of the Marie Alexander Poetry Series and the Lambda Literary Award for Lesbian Memoir, Julie teaches in the creative writing program at Florida International University and reviews regularly for *Lambda Literary Review* and *The Rumpus*.

**Jeff Walt's** chapbook, *Soot*, was awarded co-winner of the Keystone Chapbook Prize and published in 2010 by Seven Kitchens Press. He's been awarded writing residencies from The MacDowell Colony, The Djerassi Resident Artist Program, Kimmel Harding Nelson Center for the Arts, Fairhope Center for the Writing Arts, and Kalani Eco-village on the Big Island of Hawaii. His poems have appeared in journals such as *Los Angeles Review*, *Alligator Juniper*, *Cimarron Review*, *The Sun*, *The Gay & Lesbian Review*, and elsewhere. His book, *Leave Smoke*, was published in 2019 by Gival Press and was awarded Runner Up in the 2020 San Francisco Book Festival and received the 2020 Housatonic Book Award. Jeff is the Program Coordinator for the Steve Kowit Poetry Prize sponsored by the *San Diego Art & Entertainment Guild* and a Regional

Editor for the *San Diego Poetry Annual*. Also, Jeff is the Founder and Director of The Desert Rat Residency for Writers in Palm Desert, CA. [www.jeffwalt.com](http://www.jeffwalt.com)

**Anne (A. B.) Westrick** is the author of *Brotherhood* (Viking/Penguin Random House 2013), a YALSA Best Fiction for Young Adults pick, and winner of the Jefferson Cup, Housatonic, Jane Addams Honor, and NCSS Notable Trade Book Awards. Westrick has been a teacher, paralegal, literacy volunteer, administrator, and coach for teams from Odyssey of the Mind to the Reading Olympics. A graduate of Stanford University and Yale Divinity School, she holds an MFA in writing from Vermont College of Fine Arts and blogs monthly about the craft of writing. She and her family live near Richmond, VA, where she is hard at work on revisions to two new novels. <http://abwestrick.com/>

	8:00	9:30-11:30	12:00-1:00	1:30-3:30	4:00-5:00	5:30	7:30-9:00
Aug 2	Check-in at Highlights begins at 2:00 PM				New Student Orientation 2:00-4:00 pm	Dinner	Welcome Reception Faculty Flash Readings
Aug 3	Breakfast	Beth Vrael	Lunch	Anne Westrick	Mentor Meetings	Dinner	Beth Vrael and Anne Westrick
Aug 4	Breakfast	Chauna Craig	Lunch	Jeff Walt	Thesis Readings	Dinner	Chauna Craig & Jeff Walt
Aug 5	Breakfast	Jane K. Cleland	Lunch	Matt Q. Martin	Enrichment Projects	Dinner	Jane K. Cleland and Matt Q. Martin
Aug 6	Breakfast	John Roche	Lunch	Julie Marie Wade	Kate Katcher	Dinner	Joe Okonkwo and Julie Marie Wade  *Flash Fiction Contest
Aug 7	Breakfast	Joe Okonkwo	Lunch	Departures			

\*Open Mics are scheduled for each night after the faculty readings.