



FOCAL Points~~



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FOCAL AUTHOR PROGRAM March 3, 2019

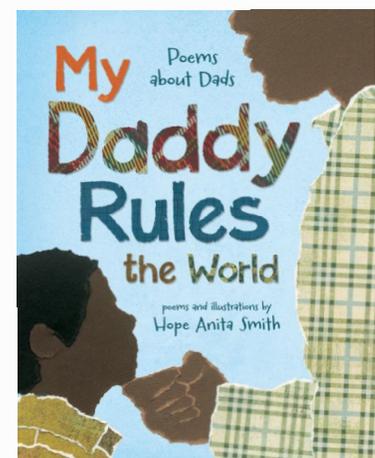
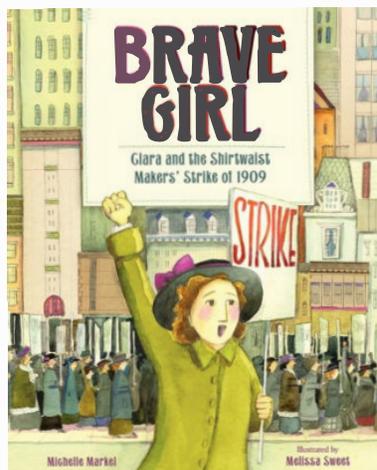
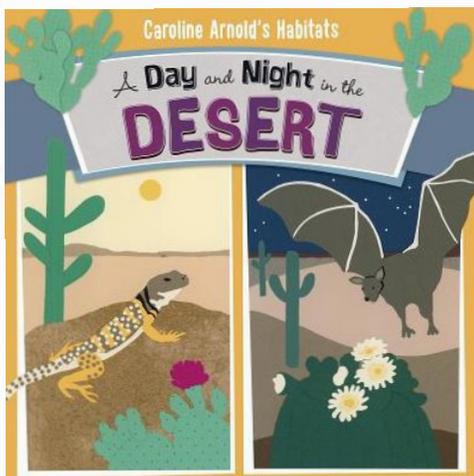
How does a book begin? Does the author start with a question (what does a koala bear eat, anyway?) a feeling (I know how you felt because of the way the door closed), or a discovery (there were women's marches in 1909 !).

FOCAL is pleased to present three local authors who will answer these questions and more at our second author program on Sunday, March 3, at 2 p.m.

Caroline Arnold is the author of more than 160 books for children. She writes both fiction and non-fiction, and recently has illustrated some of her books with striking cut paper art. Her most recent book is *Hatching Chicks in Room 6*.

Michelle Markel is the author of several acclaimed non-fiction picture books, including *The Fantastic Jungles of Henri Rousseau*, winner of the PEN Steven Kroll Picture Book Writing Award.

Hope Anita Smith is the author of *The Way an Door Closes*, and its sequel, *Keeping the Night Watch*. She is the recipient of *The Coretta Scott King/John Steptoe New Talent Award*, *The Coretta Scott King Honor*, *Lee Bennett Hopkins Honor* and a *School Library Journal Best Book of the Year*. Hope teaches innovative poetry[-writing workshops to all grade levels. She is also a professional story teller. A native of Akron, Ohio, Ms. Smith lives in California.



FOCAL AWARD by Meredith McGowan

In what may very well be the most beautiful location in Los Angeles, The Millennium Biltmore Hotel provided the setting for the 2018 FOCAL (Friends of Children and Literature) Award Luncheon. All decked out in the holiday spirit, guests arrived to Smeraldi's restaurant within the hotel to celebrate the 39th year of the awards on Saturday, December 8, 2018. It was a perfect day to honor Uma Krishnaswami's acclaimed book, *Step Up to the Plate, Maria Singh* (Tu Books, 2017) with FOCAL's highest annual award.

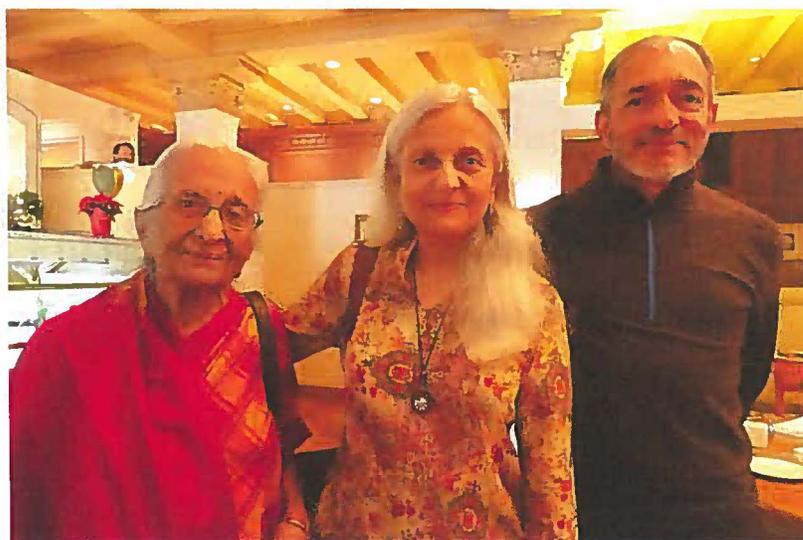
Set in the midst of World War II, *Step Up to the Plate, Maria Singh*, tells a story of a young girl with a Mexican Mother and Indian Father, who desperately wants to play softball and be a part of a team, while her parents struggle with keeping their farmland. Threads of strong family, money problems, a sense of community and friendship weave their way through this wonderful tale told in such a way that the reader can imagine what it was like in Yuba City, California in 1945.

Caroline Gill welcomed the group and invited all to feast at a delicious luncheon buffet that included crab legs and a make-your-own pasta dish! Once our appetites were satiated, our attention turned to the program. The Chair of the Essay Contest, Sandy Schuckett, introduced the three essay contest winners, two 4th graders and one 5th grader, who read their compelling works about musings of the story and the author as the guests listened intently. It was quite touching that the author hugged each essay winner after he or she read the essay aloud.

This year's Award Chair, Carol Raby, introduced Uma Krishnaswami, who was accompanied to the luncheon by her husband and her mother. She talked about the story of this book and how she couldn't shake it. She kept coming back to the idea and when she started to write, the words just poured out. In her presentation, she mentioned that she had no prior knowledge of girls' softball. That fact was a tidbit that was hard to believe, because the book was so detail-oriented with regard to softball. With her 25+ years of experience writing professionally, she delved into her youth with a memory of an old typewriter that had set her on a path to writing books.

Finally, Jesse Kingsley and Maria MacDonald presented two puppets of Maria Singh, one to the author and one to the Children's Literature Department at Central Library, where it will be proudly displayed with past award puppets for all to see. The afternoon ended with Uma signing her books, along with sharing stories and fond memories.

A very special "thank you" goes out to the FOCAL Awards Committee, the essay judges, the FOCAL Board, the Children's Literature Department at LAPL, and everyone who helped make the 2018 FOCAL Award Luncheon one for the books.



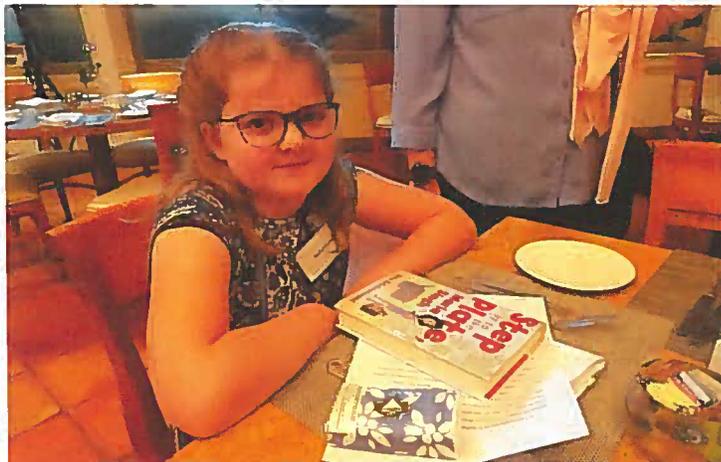
Essay:

As I was reading *Step Up To the Plate*, Maria Singh I realized that I take things for granted. For example, Papí was never allowed to vote because of the color of his skin. I also take things for granted when there are wars going on and people are dying, while I just sit here in a safe and comfortable home. Also, Papí is not allowed to own land and sell crops because he is different. Thankfully some people rise up and stand for a better way.

My favorite character was Tía Manuela. I liked her because she was a strong, independent woman. I also like that she worked at a place that launched aircraft because working for the army as a Mexican woman was unlikely. I thought it was cool that she supported Maria in every way that she could. I wish we had learned more of her story. Tía Manuela was a very thoughtful, strong and brave character.

If I were to meet Uma Krishnaswami, I would be in awe because she has written one of my favorite books. One question I would have is, where did she get her inspiration to write this wonderful book? Did someone she knows give her ideas for her characters? I also want to meet her because she wrote about experiences that I can relate to. I felt exactly like Janie did when my father died. I was on the verge of tears as I read about her. Was this book about her? I want to meet Uma Krishnaswami because I have so many questions for her, including what does she like most about being an author? I hope that I will have the opportunity to meet this author and read more of her books.

Grade 4
Rachel J Hume



Essay: Step Up to the Plate Maria Singh is my favorite book. I felt compassion for what happened to Emilio and Maria, and I admired their resilience. When Elizabeth harassed Maria and Connie about their race, they ignored her and kept playing. Also when Janie's dad died it didn't stop her from playing baseball. That's meaningful because my 7 year-old cousin died but it didn't stop me from going through life although I was sad. I think Tía Manuela motivated Maria to be resilient because in one of her postcards it said "Be brave. Don't give up no matter what happens."

The scene that stuck with me was Papi's story. Who would've thought that someone could walk all the way from Panama to Yuba City just to find that laws were unfair against people from his country? The laws declared that men from India were not allowed to marry any white women. So Papi married Mamí, who was Mexican. That meant Maria and Emilio were both biracial like Maria's best friend, Connie. Like the kids, Papi endured these unfair laws with resilience. Like Papi, my great-great-grandpa rode his bike from Seattle to San Francisco when he immigrated, only to be interned for being Japanese during World War II.

If I met the author, it would mean so much to me. After reading this book, I want to read every book by Uma Krishnaswami. If I win the contest, I might ask the author for her autograph many times. Not to mention that I will get a copy of the book that is already autographed. This book was interesting to me because my family also suffered from racism. I was so interested in the book, I just couldn't put it down.

Gr 4

Christopher T. Redekopp



Essay:

I think Step up to the Plate Maria Singh is a great book. In the book, I like that the girls wanted to play softball. I liked the character of Maria because Maria didn't give up when she was hurt. When Maria was hurt, she kept playing the game and they won. Another example of Maria's persistence was when she wanted shorts to wear for softball. Maria was able to get shorts by helping her mom with sewing. I enjoyed when there was a character named Olive because that is my name. I felt this book was very inspirational. Maria inspired me because she stood up for what she thought was right. I think that it is important to stand up for what you think is right.

There were two parts in this book that really stuck with me. The first part was when Maria was walking with Connie and Janie after church and they had found the ladybug. I thought that it was thoughtful that Maria was upset when she had accidentally killed the bug. It shows that Maria is a kind person. I also thought it was interesting when she was reading an article at school about a woman soldier who received a medal for bravery even though women soldiers weren't allowed to fight. I wondered, like Maria, if women soldiers weren't allowed to fight, what jobs could they do?

It would be very exciting for me to meet Uma Krishnaswami. One reason is because I usually read fantasy books but this book has made me want to read other realistic/historical fiction books. I enjoyed reading this book and want my mom to read it too. I would be happy if I could meet Uma Krishnaswami and tell her how much I like her book.

Gr 5
Olive Sanders



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