

**Círculo de poetas & Writers  
2026 Annual Conference  
Workshop Descriptions & Workshop Leader Bios**

**Saturday, August 15th, 2026  
Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History**

**Morning Sessions**

**¡Juguemos! Reclaiming Curiosity Through Movement and Story**

- **Vianney A. Gavilanes –Workshop Leader**
- **Garden Room**

Play is not something we leave behind in childhood. It is a vital part of a healthy, creative, and connected life. Rooted in the spirit of imaginative play and collective creativity, this interactive workshop invites participants into a dynamic journey from movement to language, from sensing to storytelling.

Through embodied games, playful exploration, and guided writing experiences, participants will awaken curiosity, imagination, and creative possibility while rediscovering the joy of making meaning together. Along the way, we will explore the body as a source of knowledge, creativity, and expression, using movement as a gateway into reflection, storytelling, and writing.

Whether you are new to writing or a seasoned storyteller, this workshop offers a welcoming and joyful space to play, create, connect, and write. Come ready to move, laugh, reflect, and experiment. You will leave with new writing, renewed creative energy, and a deeper appreciation for the role that play can have in nurturing our individual and collective well-being.

**Vianney A. Gavilanes** is an educator, creative facilitator, and writer with over a decade of experience leading transformational workshops across educational and community settings. She is the founder of Sentipensante Connections, an educational consulting practice that helps youth-serving organizations cultivate the potential of promising youth development professionals to create transformative youth experiences. She is also the founder and Program Director of Liberando Nuestras Voces, a creative writing and arts program for Chicana Latina adolescents that nurtures self-expression, confidence, and well-being. Her facilitation draws from arts-based research and liberatory pedagogy to engage participants in holistic, embodied experiences. Whether working with young writers or adult educators, Vianney cultivates spaces rooted in joy, play, and collective imagination.

**A Letter, a Note, a Text: Writing Epistolary Prose and Poetry**

- **Tisha Marie Reichle-Aguilera -Workshop Leader**
- **3rd Floor Gallery**

Have you ever wanted to write a letter to a stranger? –an apology note to a loved one? –a text to someone from your past? –advice to your younger or future self? Epistolary writing in poetry and prose offers the opportunity to do all of that with intimacy, realism, and immediacy. Through a series of exercises, we will create new pieces of writing. We will read examples together and examine the moves these writers make. We will share selected parts of our work-in-progress. You will leave with a bonus prompt, additional reading suggestions, and submission opportunities for when you have revised and completed your work.

Chicana Feminist and former Rodeo Queen, **Tisha Marie Reichle-Aguilera** (she/her) writes so the desert landscape of her childhood can be heard as loudly as the urban chaos of her adulthood. A former high school teacher, she earned an MFA at Antioch University Los Angeles and a PhD in Creative Writing and Literature from the University of Southern California. She has taught creative writing at Antioch Alumni Circle Mini-Residency, WWS Summer Workshop, Beyond Baroque Literary Arts Center, Loyola Marymount University, Upward Bound Summer Program, and Escuela de la Raza Unida. Her fiction has been anthologized and nominated for awards. She is the author of a YA novel, *Breaking Pattern* (Inlandia Books), which received Honorable Mention for First Book of Fiction in English from the International Latino Book Awards, and a prose chapbook, *Stories All Our Own* (Bottlecap Press). Her novel *So Far From Home* is forthcoming from University of Nevada Press. She is a Macondista and works for literary equity through Women Who Submit.

### **Weaving Our Collective Grieving & Joy as Resistance**

- **Marie Boucher-Workshop Leader**
- **3rd Floor Sculpture Garden**

In this workshop, we will have the opportunity to share some of our collective grief and explore poems that serve as containers for grief and healing (e.g., Joy Harjo, Naomi Shihab Nye, Audre Lorde, and many other contemporary voices). We will do some individual and collective writing to arrive at a collective poem, in which grief is interrupted by moments of joy (e.g., birdsong, memories, fragrance, etc.). We will lean into sensory detail from the natural world for inspiration. Allowing ourselves to feel the grief and find respite and moments of joy is part of our collective resistance in this moment. Time permitting, we will read the collective poem together during the sharing session.

**Marie Boucher** is the current Poet Laureate of Monterey County (January, 2026- December, 2027). She teaches "Creative Writing," "The Art of Storytelling," "Rhetoric & Genre" and other courses in her role as Assistant Professor & Program Head for English for Academic and Professional Purposes at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey (MIIS). She co-leads the annual International Poetry Week and monthly International Poetry Gatherings in Monterey, which meets the last Sunday of the month at the East Village Cafe from 3-5pm.

### **Parteaguas: A Tool to Writing Emotional and Meaningfully Complex Texts**

- **María Mínguez Arias and Kadiri Vaquer Fernández- Workshop Leaders**
- **1st Floor Patio (Exit through the Garden Room)**

This multilingual (English, Spanish, Spanglish) workshop takes writers on a journey to discover the raw material of their lives that fuels emotional and meaningfully complex writing for all genres: fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and even writing for the stage. Parteaguas is a strategy that María Mínguez Arias stumbled upon while writing her hybrid memoir and essay collection *Naming the Body: A Queer Woman's Restorative Mapping of the Self* (Mouthfeel Press, 2026). María Mínguez Arias will introduce writers to the tool and help them develop their own. Kadiri Vaquer Fernández will facilitate the writing exercises where the tool is put to work. Working in pairs and in groups, workshop participants will share their customized Parteaguas and their writing exercises.

**María Mínguez Arias** is a fiction and non-fiction bilingual writer, random editor, translator, and journalist. She is the author of *Naming the Body: A Queer Woman's Restorative Mapping of the Self* (Mouthfeel Press, 2026) translated from Spanish into English by Robin Myers. The original Spanish edition *Nombrar*

el cuerpo (2022) was named among the Best Queer Lit of the year in Spain. She is also the author of the Int'l Latino Book Award winning novel *Patricia sigue aquí* (2018), and co-editor of *#NiLocasNiSolás: narrativa escrita por mujeres en Estados Unidos* (2023). Mínguez Arias is co-Executive Director at intersectional feminist press Aunt Lute Books in San Francisco, California.

**Kadiri Vaquer Fernández** is a Puerto Rican poet, translator, and educator. She has published three collections of poetry: *Andamiaje*, *Ritos de pasaje*, and *Si no vuelve el verano*. She translated the anthology *Literary Works by 10 Dominican Women* edited by Kianny Antigua, and the poetry collection *All that Was Future* by Iliana Pichardo Urrutia.

### **Unearthing Silences: Writing Our Deepest Selves**

- **Rosangélica-Workshop Leader**
- **Boardroom**

Inspired by Audre Lorde's writings, this workshop is a journey of owning and voicing our truths, to use writing as a tool to challenge the fears that keep us quiet, that keep us from feeling, that keep us from being free.

Oftentimes, that which is so fiercely felt within becomes the cause of our own silence. The magnitude of strong emotions from difficult experiences—be it from political instability, family trauma, social injustice, etc.—is often a cause of fear. In our attempt to lessen that hurt or discomfort, we silence, and therefore, we lessen our capacity to express that which is also true: our joy and love. We stop living fully, and we merely survive day by day. This becomes a seed for isolation. Yet, through speaking our truths, we begin the journey of self-liberation and healing, which becomes an act of collective liberation.

This workshop will be a practice of holding the complexities and nuances of our own human existence. We will share a “war against the tyrannies of silence” as we each unearth that which is buried deep within ourselves, to live more fully and authentically.

**rosangélica** is a writer, poet, multidisciplinary artist, photographer, and graphic designer born and raised in Los Angeles, currently living in Northern California. rosangélica is a trained writing workshop leader, certified in the Amherst Writers and Artists (AWA) Method. She is fluent in English and Spanish and is passionate about creating safe and welcoming spaces for writers of all levels and walks of life. As a native Spanish speaker and bilingual writer, she believes that expressing and writing in our native tongues is essential to the way we navigate life and our writing, as they are full expressions of who we are. Through her writing and facilitation practice, she hopes to nurture a kind of freedom to BE, a freedom to break from social norms and practices, to express in more authentic ways while choosing to rewrite who we are.

**Saturday, August 15th, 2026**  
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### **Afternoon Sessions**

#### **The Transformative Power of Legacy Writing as a Journey of Identity**

- **Lara Gualarte**
- **Garden Room**

As Vamberto Freitas states, "Belonging is not a destination but a continual act of discovering and translation of who we were and who we are becoming." Let's consider how identity travels and is renewed across generations. With the pulse of inheritance, words become bridges of transformation and continuity. This workshop will explore writing our words, telling our stories, as a search for self, through language and imagination, with remembrance as an act of survival. Through group discussion and writing, this workshop aims to rebuild bridges that time has eroded, and to write dialogue between generations and geography. There will be handouts of notable poets and writers for inspiration, a writing exercise, and the sharing of work created.

Lara Gualarte is Poet Laureate Emerita of El Dorado County. Her latest book, *Soul of Black Stone*, is published by Bruma Publications. Her work examines family history, identity, culture, and the natural world. Her book of poetry, *Fourth World Woman*, was published by Finishing Line Press. *Kissing the Bee*, published by The Bitter Oleander Press, is about her California Portuguese Pioneer ancestors and follows the emigration of her family from the Azore Islands to Northern California during the late 1800's. Portuguese Literary Critic, Vamberto Freitas says of her book, "This is a poetry testifying to our perpetual search for self." She is affiliated with the Cagarro Colloquium: Azorean Diaspora Writers Project Beyond Borders Institute (PBBI), California State University Fresno, and a proud member of Escritores del Nuevo Sol. Gualarte is a teaching artist of creative writing in arts-in-corrections programs and hosts ongoing writing workshops in community spaces, including libraries and veteran groups.

#### **Secrets, Family, & the Lies We Tell Ourselves**

- **Writers of Color Santa Cruz County:** Dr. Victoria (Vicky) Bañales, Adela Najarro, Elbina Batala Rafizadeh, Vivian Vargas-**Workshop Leaders**
- **3rd Floor Sculpture Garden**

Members of Writers of Color Santa Cruz County invite you to discover what's hidden within. We will offer a variety of prompts to choose from that extract, reveal, and unearth secrets. Don't worry, we won't tell. Besides, this is about creative writing, and you can make it all up! Your secrets are safe with us. We envision one to three rounds where participants go between writing, reading, and sharing. Our goal is to make the workshop light and lively. Join us for fun, discovery, and play.

**Dr. Victoria (Vicky) Bañales** is the 2025-2027 Watsonville Poet Laureate. A Chicanx writer and educator, she is the author of the poetry collection, *The Sun Will Not Harm You by Day, Nor the Moon by Night* (Jamii Publishing, 2025), and the founder of *Journal X*, a social justice literary arts magazine, which was awarded the Superior Distinction by the National Council of Teachers of English. More at [vickybanales.com](http://vickybanales.com).

**Adela Najarro** is a poet with a social consciousness who is working on a novel. Her family emigrated from Nicaragua to San Francisco in the 1940s, with the remaining relatives settling in the Los Angeles

area after the Somoza regime fell. She serves on the Board of Directors for Círculo de Poetas and Writers. Her latest poetry collection, *Variations in Blue*, was selected as the second volume in the *Letras Latinas/Red Hen Press Collaborative Series*.

**Elbina Batala Rafizadeh** is a Filipina Igorota published poet and essayist. She draws inspiration from the images she discovers during her photography outings, from stories of mythology and spirituality rooted in her ancestry and cultural practices, and from the stories of victims of injustice seeking a voice. Her first collection of poems, *Keepers of the Malicgong Rice Terraces*, was published in 2024 by Jamii Publishing. Her website is <https://elbinabatalarafizade.com/>.

**Vivian Vargas** is a writer and photographer who grew up in the Florence barrio of South Central Los Angeles in the late 1950s and early 60s. She is the founder of The Heidelberg Writers Group (Heidelberg, Germany), and attended creative writing workshops at the University of Heidelberg and Cabrillo College. Vivian is the founder of Writers of Color - Santa Cruz County. Her stories have been published in *The Heidelberg Review* and the *Porter Gulch Review*.

### Writing from the Place "In Between"

- **Rana Issa and Nükhet Kardam—Workshop Leaders**
- **Boardroom**

We often marvel at where creativity comes from. In this workshop, we will draw on Sufism, which invites us to write from the place "in between" — the *barzakh* — a threshold between the visible world and the ineffable. How do we translate the ineffable into lived experience through poetry and prose? Through practices such as Awareness Continuum and Changing Lenses, we will deepen awareness, shift perspective, and engage our senses to access creativity and new ways of seeing. Participants will reflect, write short pieces, and share in a supportive, inclusive space that honors diverse experiences and worldviews.

**Rana Issa**, who has dedicated more than 18 years to language education at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies in Monterey, co-leads with Marie Boucher the monthly International Poetry Gatherings in Monterey since 2017. She is also the co-founder of the Global Villagers Community in Monterey, a non-profit organization that fosters cross-cultural connections, enriches community life, and creates a sense of belonging. Bringing people together through meaningful shared experiences is at the heart of Rana's work. She continues to enrich the Monterey Peninsula by organizing guest lectures, film screenings, group hikes, music and art performances, and workshops that inspire connection, learning, and cultural exchange.

Professor Emerita at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey, **Nükhet Kardam**, is an author, poet, and music enthusiast. Originally from Türkiye, where she was born and raised, she moved to North America for her graduate education in Gender Studies and Human Rights. Nükhet has researched and published three books and many articles on women's rights and cultural identities. She has recently tapped into poetry as a means to communicate her message, and her poetry comes to her in a state of silent meditation; it becomes a conversation - a conversation between the poems and herself, inspired by the Great Unknown.

## **Chismes Con Safos: Writing Liberation Through Story, Memory, and Speculative Imagination**

- **Rosanna Alvarez–Workshop Leader**
- **3rd floor Gallery**

This interactive workshop invites participants to draw from personal memory, family stories, community wisdom, and everyday chisme as sources for poetic and creative exploration. Grounded in traditions of testimonio, oral history, and culturally rooted storytelling, participants will explore how the stories we inherit—and the stories we carry within us—can become portals to imagining new possibilities for ourselves, our communities, and the worlds we wish to create.

Together, we will examine how memory, language, and lived experience hold the seeds of creative transformation. Through guided prompts, reflective writing, and community dialogue, participants will practice weaving personal narrative with speculative imagination, transforming fragments of memory, ancestral knowledge, and everyday conversations into poems, stories, and visionary narratives.

Centered in relationality, cultural affirmation, and creative courage, this workshop offers a welcoming space for writers of all backgrounds and experience levels. Participants will leave with new writing, generative prompts, and practical tools for using storytelling as a practice of cultural preservation, artistic expression, healing, and collective dreaming.

**Rosanna Alvarez** is a Chicana writer, poet, cultural strategist, and educator whose work centers storytelling, cultural memory, and community empowerment. She is the author of *Braided [Un]Be-Longing*, an International Latino Book Awards silver and bronze medal-winning collection; co-founder and editorial director of *EASTSIDE Magazine*; founder of *Ocote Libre Press*; and co-editor of *The Early Writings of Luis Valdez: El Machete's Critique of American Society*. Drawing from traditions of testimonio, oral history, Chicana feminist thought, and community storytelling, she creates participatory learning spaces where people can connect personal experience to larger questions of belonging, justice, memory, and collective futures. For more than a decade, Rosanna has facilitated writing workshops and public programs for colleges and universities, literary festivals, arts organizations, public health initiatives, and community-based storytelling projects throughout California.

## **Creating Collage & Curating Words: Combining Poetry with Zines**

- **sammy herrera–Workshop Leader**
- **1st Floor Patio (Exit through the Garden Room)**

In this workshop, participants will create a zine by repurposing old magazines to create a collage. This will be a therapeutic hands-on experience as participants will rip, cut, and glue their chosen pictures and images onto their folded paper. Once their visuals are complete, poetry will be added based on the image put together. The poem can be put together through blackout poetry from pages pulled from magazines, writing on the zine itself, or with the use of a printer/typewriter. Participants are welcome and encouraged to bring their own supplies, such as scissors, tape, and any old magazines they have lying around.

With roots from the small city of La Puente hidden somewhere in the San Gabriel Valley, **sammy herrera** is a Mexican-American educator, poet, spoken word artist, and zine queen. She has found her way back into poetry after a long hiatus, fully immersing herself in the community through open mics, workshops, and poetry slams. She writes on topics such as feminism, racism, working with children, mental health, love, and heartbreak. Sammy is more often a lover than a fighter but will tackle heavy topics with grit and grace through poetry and performances. You can find samples of her work, upcoming events, shows, and digital zines on her website: [prettypetitepoems.com](http://prettypetitepoems.com).

**Saturday, August 22nd, 2026**  
**Online via Zoom**

## **Morning Sessions**

### **Radical Re-imaginings of Our World through Poetry**

- **Chloe Gentile-Montgomery-Workshop Leader**

There is so much destruction and terror in the world right now and it is easy (and natural) to feel overwhelmed. The most powerful tool we have against our oppressor is our minds and our ability to imagine. In this workshop, we will use our imaginations to rebuild a world that is just, humanizing, and empathetic. What would this world look like? By reading examples of radical poetry created by BIPOC activists of the past and present, we will be inspired to create our own visions for a just world through poetry.

**Chloe Gentile-Montgomery** is a poet, educator, activist, and lover of her community. Her writing has been published in her self-published chapbook, *Rustlings of the Spirit*, two versions of *La Raiz* magazine, *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, and two versions *Journal X*. She is participating in local poetry readings and hosting several poetry workshops this year. Follow her on IG @chloegmpoet / check out her website [www.chloegentilemontgomery.com](http://www.chloegentilemontgomery.com) for more information and scheduling inquiries.

### **Making Strange through Poetic Destabilization**

- **Zach Hauptman-Workshop Leader**

In this generative workshop, we will explore techniques of interruption, recalibration, and nonlinearity with the help of a variety of queer writers of color whose writings navigate the often incoherent boundaries of race and gender identities. We will also draw inspiration from the games and experiments of surrealism, potential literature, and queer poetics to shape or undermine the sense of stability and certainty in our writing. This session offers writers a chance to practice harnessing the power of destabilization in their own work, affirming contradiction, revision, and unfinishedness as vital forms of knowledge and self-preservation.

**Zach Hauptman** (they/them, zi/hir) is a SF Bay Area-based librarian, storyteller, and writer. They have a Gender Studies BA from Brandeis University and an MLIS from San Jose State University. They run panels on gender, sexuality, and pop culture at Bay Area conventions, as well as designing and running live-action role-playing games with their groups Truth San Justice and Jews With Tattoos.

### **Terrifying Truths: Navigating Real Life Horrors through Dark Fiction**

- **Julie Calderón-Workshop Leader**

As we face the real-life horrors of our current political climate, global environmental crises, and gender and cultural conflicts, we are called to write through our experiences and emotions. With its focus on dark themes, the horror genre can serve as commentary and catharsis. This generative fiction writing workshop will provide a safe space to explore new ideas. Through short writing exercises and community sharing, we will speak truth to terror. All participants will receive a recommended reading and film list, and will be encouraged to share their work.

**Julie Calderón** is a Peruvian-American horror writer, school principal, and teacher born in and living in the Bay Area. An alumna of UC Berkeley with a Masters of Arts in Writing from the University of San Francisco, she has been a grant recipient from the National Endowment for the Humanities. She is a member of Horror Writers Association and Circulo de Poetas and Writers. Her current project is a novella Song of Songs. When not writing fiction or reading horror, Julie dances with Bloco Ginga Brasil alongside her daughter.

### **Sharing the Kitchen Table/Compartiendo la comida**

- **Norma Smith-Workshop Leader**

Let's write and feed each other using all our senses: taste, touch, memory/nostalgia, and all the flavors: sweet, salty, sour, bitter, complex or simple. We will consider the staples, such as rice/corn/noodle/bread/potato/taro, and how food travels. Africa (yam, coffee, peas, okra); The Americas (chilis, potatoes, tomatoes, beans, corn, squash, chocolate); Asia (rice, cane sugar, ginger, tea, soya); Southwest Asia and North Africa (wheat, honey, grapes). How many ways are there to prepare (and share) potatoes, tomatoes, and use chili to warm us? Come and consider colonization and cultural appropriation: English curry, chop suey, ham & cheese bagels. Who owns potatoes? Using an infinitely nutritive metaphor, I will share writing prompts and bring a few food and cooking-related poems and pieces of short prose.

**Norma Smith** was born in Detroit and grew up in the Central Valley of California among the fig trees and grape vines, in a race-conscious (i.e., leftist) Ashkenazi (i.e., Eastern European) Jewish family. She learned to cook from her mother and grandmother, as well as from their African American and Mexican American kitchen colleagues. She has been politically active since childhood (civil rights, solidarity, smashing white supremacy) and has identified as a writer since she learned to read. Recently, she has been offering online "Eating Poems: A Nutritive Writing Workshops." As a ward clerk, Norma used every minute of her union-contracted education leave benefit to earn a BA in Creative Writing, an MA in Education with a focus on "diversity"/equity issues, and a PhD in Ethnic & Cultural Studies.

**Saturday, August 22nd, 2026**  
**Online via Zoom**

## **Afternoon Sessions**

### **Against Humor Nothing Can Assail: Culture Clash, and Hitting the Present with the Past**

- **Nicole Henares-Workshop Leader**

Using satire, spoken word, and cultural critique, let's explore how humor can expose the contradictions, griefs, absurdities, and inherited tensions embedded in identity. Centered around Culture Clash's iconic sketch "Chicano Activist in the 1990s Meets Che," participants will examine how comedy functions not merely as entertainment, but as resistance, survival, political intervention, and emotional truth-telling. Let's transform frustration into art—using humor as shield, weapon, critique, and liberation—while creating space for contradiction, vulnerability, and laughter to coexist. Sometimes the sharpest way to face history is to laugh directly at it.

**Nicole Henares** is a writer, educator, and curriculum designer with more than 25 years of experience teaching high school English and creative writing. Her professional background includes over two decades of classroom teaching literature, writing, performance, and critical analysis, with a particular emphasis on helping students connect their personal voice to larger historical, cultural, and artistic frameworks. She holds an MFA in Writing and Consciousness, and currently serves as the Education Director for the Half Moon Bay Shakespeare Company, where she designs and writes curriculum that connects classical literature to contemporary cultural conversations.

### **Healing through Comics and Poetry**

- **Britny Cordera-Workshop Leader**

In this workshop, we'll create 4-panel comic poems that explore the therapeutic potential of poetry and drawing. Learn how to integrate self-care into your creative process and reflect on your emotions and personal journey. Before the workshop, gather plain paper, pens, pencils, and markers to draw your comic! Feel free to use any media to draw and write, from an iPad to charcoal pastels.

**Britny Cordera** (bee) is a queer, creole, nonbinary Cave Canem poet, writer, teacher, and artist based in Oklahoma City. They received their MFA from Southern Illinois University in Carbondale. Cordera's work can be found or is forthcoming from Purple Ink Press, Driftwood Press, Obsidian, Rhino, Narrative, Pank, Xavier Review, and other places. Cordera has taught workshops for the Oklahoma City Arts Council and for the public. When they are not writing poetry or teaching, they love skating and watching anime in their free time.

### **Immerse Yourself for Better Health: Embracing the Natural World in Writing**

- **Jess Saravia-Workshop Leader**

This workshop invites folks to incorporate the natural world into their ways of writing and day-to-day life. By engaging in these meditative practices that force us away from modern technology, the stress of our work as professionals/ artists/ family/ etc, and all of the political turmoil that we are witnessing, writers are able to re-ground their centers to improve physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. This practice also helps writers focus on the minute details that are usually otherwise missed: describing explicitly what

they experience. By providing suggestions on how to incorporate a world around us every day into our own worlds, writers are capable of considering how their well-being and relationship(s) to Earth Mother connect to their work.

**Jess Saravia** (she/ her/ ella) is an award-winning Two-Spirit, Xicana femme multimedia artist with lineage from Kuzkatlan y Mexico, Gabrieleno, Tongva, Comanche, Purepecha, Cahuilla and Romanian communities, and is a proud daughter of a single immigrant mother who initially sparked her love of writing and all things whimsical. She writes about and is a student of spirituality, nature, and death. Her first solo poetry collection, "Euthanasia," was released in July 2025 by Daxson Publishing, and she is currently working on the manuscript for her second book, "Revenge Words." She also serves as a community organizer with the Bay Area American Indian Two Spirits as powwow Co-Chair and Board member, LA Poet Society Fresh Friday monthly host in Eagle Rock, and host of the Saravia Salon, an end of the month, multimedia digital art show and open mic. When she is not busy organizing or writing, she holds the honor and responsibility of being a queeranderismo maestra in training, attending ceremonies and poetry events, or spending time with family and friends.

#### **The Writers' Studio: CurioCity**

- **Apeksha Harsh-Workshop Leader**

Sometimes fiction is stranger than reality – sometimes reality beats fiction to it. So, what are the possibilities of the strange and the fantastic lurking around in places we call home? Can seemingly ordinary objects be more devious than they appear? Do neighborhood creatures embark on adventures when we aren't paying close attention? Explore how writers like Shaun Tan, Satyajit Ray, David Wiesner create the ordinary out of the extraordinary before crafting your own piece of writing populated with the fantastic.

A facilitator, writer and storyteller, **Apeksha Harsh** is happiest when she combines her love for learning with the creative arts. She has worked with the Warwick Writing Programme in Schools, Writing West Midlands, YMCA and led international workshops at Círculo Summer Conference, Writing for Young People: Leaf Conference & the University of Warwick. Apeksha has been published in the Heroines Anthology & Ambit, among others, and is forthcoming in the Círculo Anthology. She was also placed in the Top 30 Poets at the All India Poetry League. As a performer, Apeksha has been featured at Australia's Word Travels' Story Week, Gaatha Mumbai International Storytelling Festival and more. Find her on Instagram @apswrites or visit her website: [www.apekshaharsh.com](http://www.apekshaharsh.com)

**Saturday, October 17th, 2026**  
**Online via Zoom**

## **Publishing Day**

### **The Intricacies of Publishing**

- **Erica Lopez-Workshop Leader**

In this workshop, you will learn about self-publishing and publishing with a small press. We will share the differences between these two types of publishing. We will share the entire process of publishing, discuss contracts and expectations, and the entire process of publishing. Regarding self-publishing, we will discuss the step-by-step process for publishing a book and take into account different platforms.

I will ask questions, and answer questions, and take them into account in the learning process.

**Erica Castro**, I am the owner of Daxson Publishing. I have published over 40 titles for different authors. I have also published for the high school that I work at, and I have published 14 books through my high school—amplifying student voices.

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### **The Dreaded Author Profile: What it is and Why you Need it**

- **Janet Rodriguez-Workshop Leader**

Most writers are ready and able to write anything, except themselves. If you had to write an author bio (or truncate an existing one), fashion a synopsis of your book, or write a proposal of a long-churning project, would you know where to begin? Come and learn, come and share, get feedback, bring a song! Bring snacks! Bring yourself! Let's do this!

This is a generative workshop, so it will involve everybody writing and sharing, unless they don't want to. Also, this is not a leader-driven time, but a communal think tank, where everyone's voice is heard.

**Janet Rodriguez** is an award-winning writer and author of the family memoir *Making an American Family: A Recipe in Five Generations* (Prickly Pear Publishing, 2022) One of her short stories was recently published in the anthology *Sacramento Noir*, edited by John Freeman (Akashic Books, 2025). Her work has also been featured in *The Rumpus*, *Pangyrus*, *Hobart*, and *American River Review*.

### **Submitting Your Work with Intention**

- **Azalea Aguilar-Workshop Leader**

Submitting with Intention is a hands-on publishing workshop designed to help writers build sustainable systems for sending their work out while staying grounded in care, clarity, and community.

Rather than approaching publishing as a one-off task, this workshop frames submission as an ongoing practice. Participants will be guided through practical publishing pointers that support organization, visibility, and long-term growth. Together, we will actively create and begin using essential submission tools, including spreadsheets, reusable templates, and drafted cover letters and bios.

By the end of the session, participants will have:

- Created spreadsheets to track works and submissions
- Drafted a reusable cover letter and author bio
- Set up or begun using a Submittable account
- Saved templates for common publishing correspondence (withdrawals, acceptances, etc.)
- Learned strategies for finding opportunities through reading, community, and social media
- Identified sustainable submission goals and next steps
- Submitted at least one piece during the workshop

This workshop is especially supportive for poets and writers seeking clarity, structure, and a more intentional relationship to the submission process.

The workshop emphasizes relationship-building as a core part of the publishing process. Participants will explore ways to connect with literary communities, identify aligned opportunities, and engage meaningfully with journals, writers, and organizations, both online and locally.

**Azalea Aguilar** is a Pushcart Prize–nominated Chicana poet, licensed clinical social worker, and psychotherapist originally from South Texas, where the scent of gulf and memories of childhood linger in her work. Her writing explores motherhood, childhood trauma, grief, survival, and the ways healing is shaped by memory, culture, and community. Drawing from both her literary practice and clinical background, Aguilar facilitates workshops and conversations that center emotional honesty, collective care, and the impact of systemic and intergenerational oppression on creative expression. Her approach to teaching and facilitation is trauma-informed, culturally grounded, and rooted in the belief that storytelling can serve as both witness and reclamation.

She was recently named one of LatinoStories.com's Top 10 Latine Debut Authors. Her debut chapbook, *Foxhole*, published by Bottlecap Press, was featured in the NYU Latinx Project's *La Treintena 2026*. Her work has appeared in journals including *Angel City Review*, *The Skinny Poetry Journal*, *The Acentos Review*, *Somos en Escrito*, and *The Mid-Atlantic Review*. She is currently at work on her first full-length manuscript exploring love, loss, lineage, and survival.