



Brian Lies is the author/illustrator of the 2019 Caldecott Honor winner *THE ROUGH PATCH*, and of *GOT TO GET TO BEAR'S!* He also created the New York Times bestselling bat series, including *BATS AT THE BEACH*, *BATS AT THE LIBRARY*, *BATS AT THE BALLGAME*, and *BATS IN THE BAND*. He's the author and/or illustrator of more than two dozen other books, including *MALCOLM AT MIDNIGHT* (by W.H. Beck, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt) and *MORE* (by I.C. Springman, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt). He has won many awards for his work, including the 2011 Bill Martin Jr. Picture Book Award (Kansas State picture book award).

Born in Princeton, New Jersey, Brian lives in eastern Massachusetts with his wife and daughter. He has loved libraries and books since he was little, and enjoys working with students in schools around the country. When he travels, he rarely misses an opportunity to explore the local library.

Brian will be accepting applications for: fiction picture books. I'm open to text-only mentoring, OR author/illustrator, and don't have a preference.

1. If you could be in any movie or tv series, what would it be and what character would you play?

I think it'd be great to play any Michael Palin role from "Monty Python's Flying Circus."

2. If you could have any supernatural power, what would it be and why?

Invisibility is tempting, because I could do things like sneak into people's houses and set Parental Block on their tvs for Fox "news," freak criminals out in the middle of committing crimes by "haunting" them, and so on. But I'm sure there are catches with supernatural powers—it'd be hard to fool family dogs unless invisibility came with being odor-free, and you'd probably get whacked with lots of things because people don't know to not swing that 2 x 4, etc. You'd have to be super-careful walking on sidewalks and crossing streets.

3. What are your five favorite picture books not written and/or illustrated by you?

- a. *Fun Projects for You and the Kids* (by David Stiles)
- b. *TUESDAY* by David Wiesner
- c. *MISS SUZY* by Miriam Young, illus. by Arnold Lobel
- d. *THE DANCING TIGER* by Doyle Malachy, illus. by Steve Johnson and Lou Fancher
- e. *THE MYSTERIES OF HARRIS BURDICK* by Chris Van Allsburg

4. What writing-related accomplishment are you most proud of and why?

A 2019 Caldecott Honor for my picture book *The Rough Patch*, which deals with loss, anger, and hope.

5. What about mentoring excites you most?

I've found that I've learned lots while mentoring—in order to explain something that you might do instinctively, you have to bring it forward into conscious thought and apply words to it.

6. What are your strengths as a mentor?

I think I've got a good ear for language, and I'm definitely a stickler for continuity, pacing and things that tear the "fabric of believability" of the words and pictures. I listen, and try to understand what the mentee is hoping to achieve, in order to help her/him/them create the strongest work possible.

7. What is your feedback/critique style like?

I try to be a "chameleon" teacher, looking at a person's strengths, hopes, and areas that could use improvement, and working from where that student is at the moment. Given there are so many different ways of storytelling, I have no interest in trying to get people to draw, paint or tell stories like me, and no set idea of what "good storytelling" looks like. I prefer back-and-forth discussion to simply firing out a critique.

8. What are the most important things you're seeking in a mentee?

I'm hoping to work with someone who is really interested in working on her/his craft. I'm open to people who are at different stages in their publishing lives—just starting out, getting ready to submit, or even published authors.

9. Who are you not the best mentor for?

I'm not the best mentor for someone who is looking primarily for affirmation. If the mentee isn't willing to accept criticism, including what may be very difficult things to hear, and isn't open to revision, there doesn't seem to be much point in pursuing the mentorship. The purpose is to help, and while I definitely point out the *good* stuff, the strengths in a project, I think most of us know where we've gotten things *right*.

10. How will you help your mentee and their stories develop?

I'm not the best social media person, and it's been ages since I've sent a query letter. So someone hoping for help there is going to be disappointed. But critiquing manuscripts and dummies, working on revisions, identifying strengths and weaknesses in words and pictures are all things I'm comfortable with. I'm assuming that we'll go back and forth with discussions about work, looking at revisions, etc. until we're content with the progress we've made.

11. What is your style of communication like?

I'm comfortable both with email and phone—though sometimes you can cover much more ground in a phone call, and it feels more collaborative because you can respond to tiny things you hear in the other person's voice—or a moment of hesitation.

12. What are you looking for in the applications you receive?

I think I'm going to be looking for a story or stories that appeal to me, as well as a sense that the Mentee is willing to accept suggestions. I'm not looking for arguments!

13. Is there anything, author-related, you wish people would ask you about? If so, what, and how would you respond?

Question: “Do you totally love everything you’ve ever published?” My answer: No! I’ve done a lot of mediocre work over the years, but everything I’ve done was the best I could manage at that time. It’s really only during the last dozen years or so that I’ve started to feel my work has mirrored my aspirations for it!

14. What advice or inspiring and/or motivational words would you like to offer up to anyone applying to be your mentee or simply reading this questionnaire?

I guess my best advice would be: keep working, keep learning, keep trying! And it’s important to be able to set things you love dearly aside, if you learn that those things may not be in the best interest of your story or your craft. Gripping onto one particular story idea when you’ve had a lot of feedback that it’s perhaps not something you should focus on (at least for now) can keep you from moving forward in your art and career.