

Jessie Sima [they/them]

Jessie Sima will be accepting applications for: an author, author-illustrator, or illustrator of fiction picture books. No non-fiction or rhyme. Creators from marginalized communities encouraged.



Bio: Jessie Sima is an author and illustrator. They grew up in a small town in southern New Jersey and can now be found writing and drawing in a creaky house in New York State. Jessie is the creator of a stack of picture books, including NOT QUITE NARWHAL; LOVE, Z; and PERFECTLY PEGASUS. When not making books, they can be found reading graphic novels, watching spooky movies, and playing outside with dogs. Visit Jessie online at www.jessiesima.com.

1. You have two minutes to give a speech on anything! What would your topic be?

Video games: How they are an excellent stress reliever and a great source of creative inspiration.

2. If you could live in any film, tv, or book universe, what would it be?

Dinotopia!

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

I always stress out over having to pick favorites. Here are a few I love:

- WHEN AIDEN BECAME A BROTHER by Kyle Lukoff and Kaylani Juanita
- OWL AT HOME by Arnold Lobel
- A NEW KIND OF WILD by Zara González Hoang
- POKKO AND THE DRUM by Matthew Forsythe
- OOKO by Esmé Shapiro

4. What writing and/or publishing-related accomplishment are you most proud of?

I feel proudest when I get messages from readers saying that my books were meaningful to them and/or their children.

5. What about mentoring excites you most?

I'm excited to share what I've learned about the publishing process so far, and to help someone get their manuscript/dummy ready for querying. It's such an opaque industry, and I look forward to shedding light on the parts that I can.

6. What are your strengths as a mentor?

I really enjoy the editing and revision process. I think a lot about the way that text and illustrations work together in picture books. Whether you're an author-illustrator, an author, or an illustrator, this is something I will bring up a lot.

7. What is your feedback/critique style like?

I will generally start with big picture feedback – about the story, characters, themes – and then dive deeper. I like to give general feedback about things I think are/are not working, but I don't give specific solutions. I have a problem-solving approach to revision that assumes there is no one right answer. If you're an author or author-illustrator, I make a lot of suggestions for where you can cut of text and let the images do the work.

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

I'm looking for someone who is open to critique but who can communicate the things that they think are important about their work. I want to help make their work shine, but not at the expense of their unique voice and style.

9. Who are you not the best mentor for?

I'm not the best mentor for anyone who gets overly defensive about feedback and isn't open changes. I'm also not good at giving grammatical edits, and I tend to prefer shorter manuscripts. On the illustration side, I'm a digital artist and I'm not a good match for traditional media artists who are looking for help/tips on craft. (I can give layout/color/composition feedback, I just won't be able to tell you what watercolor paper is best for your book, for example.)

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

I'm happy to provide insight into the publishing process, to answer questions, to critique manuscripts/dummies/illustrations, and to help identify/develop your strongest story ideas. I can help with polishing query letters, though I will admit to not having a ton of experience in this area.

11. What is your style of communication like?

I'm open to a combination of emails and phone/video calls, and am happy to discuss what would be best with my mentee. I find emails to be best for bullet-point suggestions, and calls to be best for brainstorming and answering questions quickly. We could start by communicating once a week and see what works best from there.

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

I'm looking for a captivating story and/or illustrations, and an eagerness to make your story/illustrations the best they can be.

13. What kind of mentorship experience do you envision for you and your mentee?

It will depend on my mentee, but I hope to set a goal at the beginning of the mentorship that we will work towards together. Whether it is to develop a picture book dummy to submit to agents, to bolster your illustration portfolio, or developing multiple manuscripts – the important thing is that we tailor it to what you are looking for.

14. Any tips/advice for applicants to make their applications and/or manuscripts shine?

Try to be genuine and honest about your work and what you are looking for in a mentor. Share the work you are most excited about.

15. 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?

Getting into publishing can seem very daunting, and it can be tempting to try to change your work to fit trends or popular styles, but doing what interests you most will make you stand out. It may sound cheesy, but what makes your story or illustrations unique is YOU. Of course it's great to learn, grow and develop your work - but don't forget to stay true to yourself.