

## **Rob Sanders** [he/him]

Rob Sanders will be accepting applications for fiction and nonfiction picture book manuscripts but will especially be looking for outstanding nonfiction writers. He has an affinity for pieces with LGBTQ+ themes or that speak about equity, inclusion, and social justice.



**Bio:** Rob Sanders is a teacher who writes and a writer who teaches. He is known for his funny and fierce fiction and nonfiction picture books and is recognized as one of the pioneers in the arena of LGBTQIA+ literary nonfiction picture books. Rob’s nonfiction books continue to break new ground, including the first picture books about the Pride Flag, the Stonewall Uprising, a transgender Civil War soldier, a gay presidential candidate, and the first gay marriage in America. His work also continues to introduce readers to heroes of the LGBTQIA+ community—from Harvey Milk to Gilbert Baker, from Cleve Jones to Bayard Rustin, and more. His fiction explores friendship, relationships, standing up for others, and being allies. *Blood Brothers*, his first middle grade novel, written in powerful, raw verse releases in July 2022. And Rob pays it forward. He serves as co-regional advisor for SCBWI Florida and is a frequent speaker, teacher, mentor, coach, and critiquer.

Rob is represented by Rubin Pfeffer.

**Website:** [robsanderswrites.com](http://robsanderswrites.com)

**Blog:** [robsanderswrites.blogspot.com](http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com)

**Facebook:** RobSandersWrites

**Twitter:** RobSandersWrite

**Instagram:** RobSandersWrites

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

The topic wouldn’t matter to me as much as the emotions generated by the speech. No one remembers a speech. Everyone remembers what they felt during a speech. So, if I could bring a tear to your eye and a hearty laugh, I would have done my job.

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

If it's set in the UK, I'm all in. From West End in London to the setting of *All Things Great and Small* to the rough-edged town depicted in *Billy Elliot*, I'm all about the UK.

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

- a. *Wilfred Gordon McDonald Partridge* by Mem Fox and Julie Vivas
- b. *Mr. George Baker* by Amy Hest and Jon J. Muth
- c. *I Wish You More* by Amy Krouse Rosenthal and Tom Lichtenheld
- d. *Before She Was Harriet* by Lesa Cline Ransome and James E. Ransome
- e. *R-E-S-P-E-C-T: Aretha Franklin, the Queen of Soul* by Carole Boston Weatherford and Frank Morrison

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

I love breaking barriers with my books—writing about something no one else has written about, exploring a subject that hasn't been explored in picture books, packing and presenting a story in a new and different way, and helping children discover through my books heroes that might have otherwise been unknown to them. That's what I seek to do with my nonfiction picture books and that's what I'm most proud of in my body of work.

**5. What about mentoring excites you most?**

I am excited when I discover someone who is on the verge of breaking through, who has a great idea and a good manuscript and needs help packaging their story in a way that will appeal to readers. If it's an untold or under-told story I'm even more excited. If it's an untold or under-told story that deals with social justice and/or the LGBTQ+ community I'm over-the-moon excited.

**6. What are your strengths as a mentor?**

I'm a teacher. I approach everything from that perspective. I don't want to tell a mentee what to do, I don't want to fix their work for them, I want them to discover and learn how to do that for themselves. It's the old give-a-fish-or-teach-them-how-to-fish concept. I combine inspiration, questioning, mentor texts, detailed notes, and more in our work together.

**7. What is your feedback/critique style like?**

I provide detailed feedback that includes what is working for me, what is not working for me yet, and notes on plot/structure; character development; word choice, sentence structure, and language; voice; marketability; and more. I also provide extensive margin notes and next step suggestions. We will work together to decide if/when we need to Zoom together or have a phone call. I mostly communicate via email.

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

I look for mentees who read and know about picture books and who have been working on their writing craft. In addition, I like working with people who are inquisitive, flexible, and who want to grow a writing career.

**9. Who are you not the best mentor for?**

The opposite of my answer for #8!

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

I provide detailed feedback, look at manuscripts at various stages, suggest mentor texts, and help writers make discoveries on their own. We will look at a manuscript more than once and we will probably look at a variety of manuscripts. We'll work primarily through email, but may add in a Zoom session or a phone call if needed.

**11. What is your style of communication like?**

I believe in give and take. I communicate politely, clearly, specifically, and honestly. I hope that will be reciprocated. I communicate primarily via email. I'm open to also having a phone chat or Zoom session if we both agree it would be beneficial at some point in the process.

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

Honestly, I will begin with the manuscript, not the application. I look for manuscripts that move me, stories to which I feel a connection, and pieces that I think kids need to read. I am a no-frills kind of guy, so the basics in an application will mean more to me than a lot of verbiage. You could have the most creative answers in the world on your application, but if your manuscript doesn't stand out from the crowd, what's the point?

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

If you've read all my previous answers, you'll know this answer already!

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

Again, your application will mean much less to me than your writing. I'm hoping writers know the basics (and beyond) from the conferences they've attended, the books and blogs they've read, the other critiques they've received, and the previous writing they've done. This whole business is subjective, so each of us will have a different opinion about someone's writing. The ultimate and best advice is to put yourself on the page and submit your best work.

**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?**

Keep your chin up and your fingers on the keyboard!