

**Stephen Briseño** he/him

**Stephen will be accepting applications for:** fiction and non-fiction picture book manuscripts. Rhyming is not his forte, so please don't send him a rhyming manuscript. He loves them, but he just can't help you all that much. He is particularly interested in seeing work from Latinx authors, but is open to writing from anyone!



**Bio:** Stephen Briseño has been a middle school English teacher for 15 years. He loves everything related to great storytelling and can usually be found at a coffee shop or outdoors in the Texas Hill Country with his wife and daughter, books in everyone's packs. A mentee in PBChat Mentorship's inaugural year, Stephen's debut picture book, *The Notebook Keeper: A Story of Kindness from the Border*, comes out June 2022 from Random House Studio.

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

As an English teacher, I could talk for a long time about how YA, MG, and picture books are FOR EVERYONE.

As a regular person, I could talk for just as long about the different types of coffee brewing methods, Steven Spielberg films, *Back to the Future*, acoustic guitars, and 90s to early 00s indie rock music.

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

Neal Shusterman is hands down my favorite YA author and the world he's created in the *Arc of Scythe* trilogy fascinates me. I don't know if I'd want to *live* in it, but I'd love to visit it like a tourist.

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

I have to pick JUST five?!?!? Ok, here goes.

- a. *King Baby* by Kate Beaton
- b. *Dandy* by Ame Dyckman, illustrated by Charles Santoso
- c. *Toasty* by Sarah Hwang
- d. *The Barnabus Project* by The Fan Brothers
- e. *Watercress* by Andrea Wang, illustrated by Jason Chin

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

I am very proud that both singing with my agent, the wonderful Natalie Lakosil, and selling my debut picture book, *The Notebook Keeper*, were both a direct result of the PB Chat mentorship! This community and the mentorship program have been integral to the writer I am today.

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

I love helping people in general but the idea of helping an author get one step closer to signing with an agent, landing a book deal, and their writing dreams coming true...I'm getting goosebumps just thinking about it!

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

I've been an English teacher for 15 years so I LOVE stories and the poetry of how they are told, know grammar, and will push you—in a kind way, of course—to make your stories the best they can possibly be. Plus, I have literally been in your shoes! I know exactly what you're going through and can totally empathize.

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

I will offer line edits, thoughts on rearranging, character arcs, and plot structure, but I mainly focus on posing big picture/theme suggestions as questions. "What if..." or "Have you considered..." are usually how I start giving feedback and I ask those two things a lot.

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

I am looking for a mentee who is willing to take risks, who sees the world in a different way, and, to borrow from a previous mentor, someone who wants to write as a career. I want to work with someone who has more than just an idea or two up their sleeve, but is in this thing for the long haul—rejections and all.

Above all, though, I'm looking to work with a creative, kind soul who loves picture books as much as I do.

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

Rhyming stories and board book manuscripts. I admire them greatly, but I'm just not the right person for them.

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

We're going to hit on it all! We'll talk about character arcs, heart, language choices/diction, how to amp up the poetic qualities of your writing, polishing query letters, and provide industry insight—and apply that when it comes to your writing to determine whether or not a story is worth pursuing. By the end, we will have worked on several of your manuscripts, met several times on Zoom, completed a few writing exercises, and gotten you ready for that showcase!

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

The main focus of our mentorship experience together will be regularly scheduled Zoom chats to discuss your manuscripts, review writing tips, and prepping for the showcase. I am also available via email/text if you have a question or an idea pops up. So many have been generous and open-handed with me in my journey and I aim to be the same way.

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

I want to see writing that spraks with energy because you've put your heart and soul into it. I want to read stories that make me see the world or an idea in a different way. I want to read stories that make me instantly picture it in my head and start dreaming up illustrators whose work would pair well with the world and characters you've created.

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

I hope that by the end you feel that you've been supported, given actionable advice to help you in your writing and with your process, and that you've come out a stronger writer in the end. And we'll both have one more writing friend to cheer on!

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

If you are a Latinx writer, I'm looking for stories that celebrate Latinx characters, cultures, and kids just being kids. Regardless though, I'm looking for work that comes from the heart and has something to say. Surprise me! So read it over, have someone else read it out loud TO YOU and see where the bumps are in your story.

**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?**

DON'T GIVE UP. No matter how many rejections you get or how downtrodden you may feel, you must keep going. This industry is not easy and nothing will just be handed to you. So learn all you can, write all you can, and be brave by putting your work out there.