



Thursday, Sept. 19, 2024

## LOUISIANA BOOK FESTIVAL ANNOUNCES FACULTY FOR 2024 WORDSHOPS

*Celebrated authors to give master classes for aspiring writers*

**BATON ROUGE, La.** — The Louisiana Book Festival proudly presents the faculty for the 2024 writing workshops: Johnette Downing, Andre Dubus III, Barbara Hamby and David Kirby, Chad Luibl, and Maurice Carlos Ruffin.

The faculty includes three recipients of the Louisiana Writer Award, prize-winning poets, an author whose novel was made into an Academy Award-nominated film, and a seasoned literary agent.

The half-day writing workshops, known as [WordShops](#), will be held Friday, November 1, at the State Library of Louisiana in Baton Rouge. The courses – including one on best practices for getting your book published – are designed for people who write fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. They are open to writers of all levels of experience.

“As always, this year’s WordShops faculty is a great mix of authors and those who have experience in the publishing world,” said Lieutenant Governor Billy Nungesser. “It’s a great way to make sure we continue to have a vibrant literary scene in Louisiana.”

“We’ve had some WordShops participants go on to become authors who have returned to the book festival as featured authors,” said State Librarian Meg Placke. “This year’s faculty brings a wealth of experience and knowledge that will be valuable to everyone from a novice author to one with more experience.”

The WordShops schedule includes two concurrent sessions in the morning and three in the afternoon.

- **9 a.m. – Noon**
  - The Mystery of You – Andre Dubus III
  - Supercharging Your Poetic Voice – Barbara Hamby and David Kirby
- **1 p.m. – 4 p.m.**

- From Manuscript to Marketplace – Chad Luibl
- Right for Children? The Business of Writing Picture and Board Books – Johnette Downing
- Starting and Finishing Stories – Maurice Carlos Ruffin

Full WordShop descriptions, as well as faculty biographies, can be found on the WordShops [registration page](#).

Registration for each WordShop is \$50; for anyone attending two WordShops, the cost is \$90. Space is limited. Registration payments are due by Oct. 25. After that date, registration will be accepted as space allows. To register, call (225) 219-9503 or visit the WordShops webpage.

Each of the instructors will attend the Louisiana Book Festival on Saturday, November 2.

“We appreciate that this year’s faculty members were willing to give us an extra day to share their knowledge and experience with workshop attendees,” said Jim Davis, the executive director of the Louisiana Book Festival.

For more information about the 2024 Louisiana Book Festival, visit [LouisianaBookFestival.org](https://LouisianaBookFestival.org) or follow the fest on the [Louisiana Book Festival Facebook page](#).

The [Louisiana Center for the Book](#) was established in the State Library of Louisiana in 1994. Its mission is to stimulate public interest in reading, books, literacy, and libraries and to celebrate Louisiana’s rich literary heritage. It is the official state affiliate of the Library of Congress Center for the Book.



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## 2024 Louisiana Book Festival WordShops

Friday, Nov. 1

State Library of Louisiana

701 N. Fourth St.

Baton Rouge, LA

The Mystery of You

Presented by Andre Dubus III

9 a.m. to Noon

“The word ‘essay’ comes from the French and essentially means to try or to attempt. The opposite of the word ‘remember’ is not ‘forget,’ but ‘dismember.’ And so the act of remembering, whether through the writing of a memoir or personal essay, is a reaching for the shards of one’s own past,” says author André Dubus III. “This strikes me as the most honest and humble creative approach possible, one capable of producing art with words. Come to this workshop, and I will seek to demystify for you some of those writerly tools and skills that, if they are sharp enough, and if the writer can summon enough daily faith and nerve, can penetrate the mystery of story itself, especially the story of you.”

[Andre Dubus III](#)’s nine books include the *New York Times*’ bestsellers *House of Sand and Fog*, *The Garden of Last Days*, and his memoir, *Townie*. His most recent novel, *Such Kindness*, was published in June 2023, and a collection of personal essays, *Ghost Dogs: On Killers and Kin*, was published in March 2024. He is also the editor of *Reaching Inside: 50 Acclaimed Authors on 100 Unforgettable Short Stories*, (Godine, 2023). Dubus has been a finalist for the National Book Award; has been awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship, The National Magazine Award for Fiction, and three Pushcart Prizes; and is a recipient of an American Academy of Arts and Letters Award in Literature. His books are published in over 25 languages, and he teaches at the University of Massachusetts Lowell.

**Supercharging Your Poetic Voice**  
**Presented by Barbara Hamby and David Kirby**  
**9 a.m. to Noon**

Let's begin with the basics. To be a poet, you must have the mind of a poet, which is actually the same as the mind of anyone who is original and creative. The mind of the physicist and the chef and the cinematographer are the same. Poets have the same mind they do; it just so happens that poets write poems. Got it? Okay, then let's talk about three things that are true about every poem that has ever been written. Here they are: all poems begin small, a poem is a combination of the deliberate and the accidental, and a small beginning plus lots of time results in a great poem. If these sound a little abstract, don't worry, because you'll be given lots of examples and have ample opportunity to discuss these basic elements of poetry with your instructors.

And away we go! In the second half of the workshop, we'll attack at warp speed the many ways you can make your poems bigger, stronger, louder, more impactful. Are your poems concrete and narrative or are they more elusive and imagistic? Do you use long lines or short lines? Is your poetic vocabulary plain and simple or is it

ornate and convoluted? Do you write about your own backyard or the whole wide world? How are your choices affected by the time and place in which they are written? How is the subject matter a part of the greater poetic voice? Do you write about family? Travel? Marvel characters? How are diction, syntax, line, and verse a part of your voice? How do you use repetition (assonance, alliteration, rhyme, anaphora, images, etc.)?

In this workshop we'll be using every trick in the book to help you develop your biggest, most vibrant, most powerful poetic voice.

[Barbara Hamby](#) has just finished her new book *Burn*, which is forthcoming in 2025. She is the author of seven other books of poems, most recently *Holoholo* (2021), *Bird Odyssey* (2018), and *On the Street of Divine Love: New and Selected Poems* (2014), all published by the University of Pittsburgh Press, which also published *Babel* (2004) and *All-Night Lingo Tango* (2009). Her first book, *Delirium*, won the Vassar Miller Prize, The Kate Tufts Award, and the Poetry Society of America's Norma Farber First Book Award. Her second book, *The Alphabet of Desire*, won the New York University Press Prize for Poetry and was published in 1999 by New York University Press. She was a 2010 Guggenheim fellow in Poetry, and her book of short stories, *Lester Higata's 20th Century*, won the 2010 Iowa Short Fiction Award. Her poems have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Poetry*, *American Poetry Review*, *Ploughshares*, *Yale Review*, and *The New York Times*. Born in New Orleans, she teaches at Florida State University.

[David Kirby](#) teaches at Florida State University. His latest books are *The Winter Dance Party, Poems 1983-2023* and a textbook modestly entitled *The Knowledge: Where Poems Come From and How to Write Them*. Kirby is the author of *Little Richard: The Birth of Rock 'n' Roll*, which the *Times Literary Supplement* described as "a hymn of praise to the emancipatory power of nonsense" and which was named one of Booklist's Top 10 Black History Non-Fiction Books of 2010. Entertainment Weekly has called Kirby's poetry one of "5 Reasons to Live." In 2016, Kirby received a Lifetime Achievement Award from Florida Humanities, which called him "a literary treasure of our state." He is currently on the board of Alice James Books. A native of Baton Rouge-area native, he is the recipient of the [2024 Louisiana Writer Award](#), the 25th writer chosen to receive annual recognition.

**From Manuscript to Marketplace**  
**Presented by Chad Luibl**  
**1 p.m. to 4 p.m.**

Join literary agent Chad Luibl for a presentation and workshop on the publishing playbook, following the arc of a book's journey and examining trends in the current marketplace.

Discover the entire publishing process, from the initial spark of an idea to the exhilarating day of publication.

"We'll delve into the crucial role of a literary agent, crafting compelling query letters, and navigating the acquisition process," says Chad Luibl. "Learn what to expect after your manuscript finds a home at a publishing house, including the editorial process, self-promotion strategies, and the key decisions that lead to a successful book launch. We'll define 'successful' together!"

Q&A will follow.

**Chad Luibl** is a literary agent at Janklow & Nesbit Associates, where he specializes in literary and upmarket fiction, memoir and narrative journalism, and graphic novels. He is the agent of Steve Gleason, whose memoir *A Life Impossible* was co-written with Jeff Duncan, and recently published with Knopf. Originally from Virginia, he received a BA in English at Lynchburg University before moving to Eastern Europe to teach English for several years. While in Krakow, Poland, he got his MA in European Studies at Jagiellonian University, with a focus in Comparative Literature. He went on to get his MFA in Creative Writing at Virginia Commonwealth University, where he was also a coordinator for the VCU Cabell First Novelist Award, an intern in the Literature Department at the National Endowment for the Arts, and an editor at *Blackbird* and *Broad Street* literary journals.

**Right for Children? The Business of Writing Picture and Board Books for Children**  
**Presented by Johnette Downing**  
**1 p.m. to 4 p.m.**

Have you ever wondered if you were right for writing books for children?

Children's author Johnette Downing says, "The key is to write with the wonder and curiosity of a child."

In this workshop for budding children's authors, participants will learn the necessary steps for taking their brainstorm to a book; for building relationships with illustrators, editors, art directors, publishers, and book vendors; and for creating an authentic, meaningful, and long-lasting career as an author for little ones.

Downing says, "If you keep the child at the heart of everything you do, then your book will ring true to children and will have validity in the marketplace. Energy flows where attention goes; it begins and ends with the child."

[Johnette Downing](#), the recipient of the [2017 Louisiana Writer Award](#), is the author of thirty books and twelve recordings for children. A musician, author, illustrator, and poet who has performed on five continents for nearly four decades, Johnette specializes in "singable" picture and board books, trickster tales, *pourquoi* stories, haiku poetry, and Louisiana roots music. She has received dozens of awards for her music, books, and poetry such as a National Parenting Publications Honors Award for her picture

book *Today is Monday in Louisiana*, nine Parents Choice Awards, a 59th Grammy Participation Certificate for songwriting, the Robert Spiess 2024 Memorial Haiku Award, and the Haiku Society of America's 2024 Merit Book Award for Best Haiku Anthology, among others. She has taught early childhood music in public and private schools, has given keynotes and educator workshops on how to use music in the language classroom, and holds a Bachelor of Arts Degree from Southeastern Louisiana University in Hammond, Louisiana.

**Starting and Finishing Stories**  
**Presented by Maurice Carlos Ruffin**  
**1 p.m. to 4 p.m.**

“Often, starting a story is the hardest thing to do. In this session, we'll explore tried and true techniques that will help you find a good place to begin,” promises author Maurice Carlos Ruffin.

“We'll also discuss how beginnings are related to endings. In combination, these are valuable techniques to overcome writer's block and complete your work.”

Ruffin says the workshop is for writers of all kinds of prose stories, whether novels, short stories, or memoirs.

[Maurice Carlos Ruffin](#) is the author of national bestseller, *The American Daughters*, a *New York Times* Editor's Choice published by One World Random House. He is the recipient of the [2023 Louisiana Writer Award](#) and the Black Rock Senegal Residency. He also wrote *The Ones Who Don't Say They Love You*, which was published by One World Random House in August 2021, and was the 2023 One Book One New Orleans selection. The book was a *New York Times* Editor's Choice, a finalist for the Ernest J. Gaines Award for Literary Excellence, and longlisted for the Story Prize. The book was also selected to represent Louisiana at the 2023 National Book Festival, as was *The American Daughters* this year. His first book, *We Cast a Shadow*, was a finalist for the PEN/Faulkner Award, the Dayton Literary Peace Prize, and the PEN America Open Book Prize. It was longlisted for the 2021 Dublin Literary Award, the Center for Fiction Prize, and the Aspen Words Literary Prize. The novel was also a *New York Times* Editor's Choice. His work appeared in *The New York Times*, the *LA Times*, *Oxford American*, *Garden & Gun*, *Kenyon Review*, and *Four Hundred Souls: A Community History of African America*. A New Orleans native, Ruffin is a professor of Creative Writing at Louisiana State University and the 2020-2021 John and Renee Grisham Writer-in-Residence at the University of Mississippi. Ruffin was the 2022 Grand Marshal of the Mardi Gras Krewe of House Floats and recipient of the 2022 Louisiana Board of Regents ATLAS grant.