EVENT TITLE: This is Not a Love Story: Writing Young Adult Novels that Don’t Center Romance

EVENT DESCRIPTION: The discovery of love and sex is only one aspect of teens’ lived experiences. Five young adult novelists discuss the issues at the heart of their characters’ stories—from dealing with loss and illness to navigating worlds full of racism, systemic poverty, and how they harness their own power for change. We’ll examine both the opportunities and challenges of crafting narratives that are not driven by romantic tension, and explore the many forms of love that are equally deserving of celebration.

EVENT CATEGORY: Children’s and Young Adult Literature

EVENT MODERATOR:
Natalia Sylvester is the author of the novels Chasing the Sun and Everyone Knows You Go Home, which won an International Latino Book Award. Her debut YA novel, Running, is forthcoming in May 2020. Sylvester's work has appeared in Bustle, Catapult, Latina magazine, Electric Literature, and McSweeney's Publishing. Twitter/IG: @NataliaSylv.

EVENT PARTICIPANTS:
Bethany C Morrow is a recovering expatriate, and author of Mem, A Song Below Water, and served as editor and contributor for Take The Mic: Fictional Stories of Everyday Resistance.

Guadalupe García McCall is the author of four award-winning, YA novels. She is the recipient of the prestigious Pura Belpré Author Award, a Westchester Young Adult Fiction Award, the Tomás Rivera Mexican-American Children’s Book Award. She teaches English at George Fox University in Newberg, OR.

Mark Oshiro is the Hugo-nominated writer of the online Mark Does Stuff universe (Mark Reads and Mark Watches), where they analyze book and TV series. Anger is a Gift is their debut YA novel. It was honored with the 2019 Schneider Family Book Award for Best Teen Book and is a 31st Annual Lammy Awards finalist.

Lance Rubin is the author of Crying Laughing, Denton Little’s Deathdate (winner of the ILA Award for Best YA Novel), and Denton Little’s Still Not Dead. He’s also the co-writer, along with Joe Iconis and Jason SweetTooth Williams, of the musical Broadway Bounty Hunter.

OPENING REMARKS & HOUSEKEEPING ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Hello, and welcome to This is Not a Love Story: Writing Young Adult Novels that Don’t Center Romance. Thank you all for being here.

This panel came about as a result of a conversation I had with my editor when we initially discussed edits for my debut YA novel. It’s about a 15-year-old girl whose father runs for
president, and how his campaign ends up setting in motion a political and personal awakening for her. At point during our conversation, my editor asked if I’d ever considered introducing a love interest for my protagonist, Mari. She didn’t want me to add one if it’s not something I’d envisioned…but essentially, she wasn’t opposed to it since most YA novels today do have some sort of love interest in the story. However, one of things I’d set out to do in writing this book was to tell a story that was not centered around romance, because it seemed to me that it was getting harder and harder to find books that reflected other aspects, issues, and conflicts in teens lives.

Creating young adult literature that is more inclusive requires we embrace the full richness of adolescence. This panel aims to show how expanding upon a narrative means letting go of default assumptions—about romance, sexuality, race, socio-economic status, health, and young people’s passions and interests—to more authentically provide a mirror for teens who are encountering nuanced experiences that go beyond love and heartache.

To get us started, if you could each introduce yourself and give a brief overview of your books, what they’re about, and what are the core experiences that you set out to explore in your characters’ lives.

[Participants, please insert any opening remarks here]

Moderator Qs:

1. Did you set out to write a story that didn’t center romance, or is this something that came about organically?
2. Did this present any challenges? Opportunities?
3. Did you ever get pushback from a publishing standpoint?
4. The characters in each of our novels are navigating things like mental health, grief, racism, systemic poverty, and privilege…and yet so many different aspects of their lives often intersect. Did their central conflicts ever intersect with that of love—either in a traditional, romantic sense or in other ways like self-love? Can you talk about these characters’ journeys and how they evolved throughout the writing process?

5. This is just a starting point. Please add any others you’d like to discuss!