

15TH ANNUAL

KANSAS BOOK FESTIVAL



Author Presentations • Book Signings • Book Sales •
Children's Activities • Entertainment • Food Trucks •
Free Admission • Open to the Public



KANSAS
BOOK FESTIVAL

September 26th, 2026
9 AM - 4 PM

WASHBURN
UNIVERSITY



KANSAS BOOK FESTIVAL

2026 PANEL SCHEDULE



Washburn
Library



All presentations occur in the Washburn Library, inside the Plass Learning Resource Center, where books can be purchased all day.

9 AM

Poets in Public

Room 118

Huascar Medina, former Kansas poet laureate, and Linzi Garcia, Publicist and Poetry Editor of Meadowlark Books, dive into the role of poet as public figure, and how their external roles have influenced their internal work.

Moderator: Melissa Fite Johnson

Daring Detectives

Room 119

Find out what makes a kid a great investigator in middle-grade mysteries from Angela Cervantes (*The Mystery of the Stolen World Cup Trophy*) and Alex Ott (*The Wish Ring Cipher*).

Moderator: TSCPL Youth Librarian Rain Schultz-Pruner

Women on a Mission

Room 221

Elyssa Gavin (*Junko's Climb*) and Lindsay Metcalf (*Footprint*) compare notes on researching the real lives of two remarkable women, and how their stories were shaped for young readers: one illustrated, one in verse.

Moderator: Historical Novelist Jillian Forsberg

"If I Was a Man Then I'd Be The Man" Room 120

Join hosts Sonja Czarnecki and Dr. Vanessa Eicher for a special live edition of their podcast *In Walks A Woman*, featuring a conversation with Margaret Kelly (*A Gun of Her Own*) and Misty Heggeness (*Swiftynomics*) on how 21st century women—with the help of firepower and Taylor Swift—are finding unexpected sources of agency.

10 AM

Childhoods of Creativity and Courage Room 221

Picture book authors Giselle Anatol and Jenn Bailey share from books about legendary African American author Zora Neale Hurston (born 1891) and famous French pantomimist Marcel Marceau (born 1923).

Moderator: Children's Librarian Alice Reinert

If Trees Could Talk Room 118

Anthropologist firefighter Jordan Thomas (*When It All Burns*) warns why forest fires keep intensifying, while environmental author John Price (*Goethe's Oak*) honors a single oak that stood in the Buchenwald Camp during the holocaust.

Moderator: Dr. Melinda Adams, KU Professor

Kiss, Merry, Killed Room 119

In Megan Bannen's *The Undercutting of Rosie and Adam*, Sarah Henning's *Such a Witch*, and Amanda Sellet's *Flirting with Murder*, love and death go hand in hand.

Moderator: LPL Youth Librarian Margo Moore

Creepy Small Towns Room 120

Explore the mysteries of the small towns of Alex Grecian's *Rose of Jericho* and Chase Dearing's *This New Dark*, where weird is normal, the dead don't die, and evil forces lurk around the corner.

Moderator: Max Wirestone, Director of the Tonganoxie Library

11 AM

The Love of Sport Room 118

Chelan David (Stories from the Phog) and Tim Bascom (The Boundless Game) talk about KU basketball, growing interest in American soccer, and the international appeal of both sports.

Moderator: Bulgarian author and athlete Ivo Ivanov

What a Ride Room 221

Join Washburn graduate, now Stanford writing teacher Shannon Pufahl, and her former creative writing professor Tom Averill, for a discussion of her novel *On Swift Horses* and the process that brought it to film.

(*On Swift Horses* is now streaming on Netflix.)

Rewriting the Rules Room 120

Daniel Atkinson (The Rediscovery of George 'Nash' Walker: The Price of Black Stardom in Jim Crow America) and Debra Goodrich (From the Reservation to Washington: The Rise of Charles Curtis) tell the stories of men of color who navigated the complications of the public eye post Civil War.

Moderator: Dr. Bruce Mactavish, WU Professor

The Art of Romance (18+) Room 119

Ever been curious about how romance writers build the heat? Hear it from the experts: Lisa Rayne (*Never Cross a Highlander*), Adib Khorram (*It Had to Be Him*), and bestselling writing partners Julie Murphy + Sierra Simone (*The Fundamentals of Being a Good Girl*).

Moderator: TSCPL Program Services Coordinator Autumn Friedli



Exhibitors

Exhibitor tents are in the parking lot next to the .

- Regional publishers such as the University Press of Kansas, Flint Hills Publishing, Meadowlark Press, and Nebraska University Press.
- Independent authors in history, horror, romance, and more.
- Nonprofits such as the State Library of Kansas and The Kansas Authors Club.

Food

Today's Barbecue
Pineapple Dream

La Creperie
(Food trucks are located near exhibitor area.)

Coffee

Study Grounds
(Main entrance of library building.)

Local
Performance
Stage



- 9 AM Suzuki Strings
- 10 AM Jed Zeppelin
- 11 AM Kansas Kids Book Parade ft. Zydeco Tougeau
- 12 PM Sally and the Hurts
- 1 - 4 PM Youth Performers
- Kansas Authors Club Youth Awards

Storytime
and
Crafts



Storytime
Washburn Library Commons

- 9:15 AM Elyssa Gavin
- 10:15 AM Jenn Bailey
- 12:15 PM Giselle Anatol
- 2:15 PM Jennifer Wong
- 3:15 PM Jane Kurtz

WIBW Children's Activities Tent

- 9 AM - 11 AM Topeka & Shawnee County Public Library
- 11 AM - 1 PM Mulvane Art Lab
- 1 PM - 3 PM Lawrence Public Library

FEATURED SPEAKERS



Laura Moriarty Julie Murphy & Sierra Simone



Tessa Gratton Ben Lerner



Angela Cervantes Jordan Thomas



Gary Jackson Devin Elle Kurtz

Where are you from? Visit the Information Booth or follow this QR code for a chance to win local prizes!



KEYNOTE 12PM

Ben Lerner on *Transcription* | Bradbury Thompson Alumni Center

Ben Lerner, our keynote speaker, is a poet, novelist, critic, and native of Topeka. The recipient of fellowships from the Fulbright, Guggenheim, and MacArthur Foundations, Lerner's work has been a finalist for the National Book Award for Poetry, the National Book Critics Circle Award in fiction, and the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. His latest work, *Transcription*, is named a Best Book of the Year by *The New York Times*.

Moderator: Washburn Professor of English Eric McHenry



1 PM

Sunlight Finds You

Room 119

Renowned novelist Laura Moriarty talks about writing novels, including her latest, a love story set in mid-century Florida.

Moderator: Kim Gronniger



The Bakery Dragon Room 118

The Emporia State University Teachers College presents Devin Elle Kurtz, winner of the Bill Martin, Jr. Picture Book Award for *The Bakery Dragon*, in which a tiny fire-breather learns the value of sharing.



Making the Turn

Room 221

Kansas Poet Laureate Emerita Wyatt Townley shares the panel stage with artist Hong Chun Zhang, her collaborator for *Making the Turn*, exploring the poetry of life's turning points.

Moderator: Sarah Stepp, Academic Curator at the Mulvane Art Museum

From Cynicism to Citizenship

Room 120

Lindsey Cormack (*How to Raise a Citizen*) and Matt Beat aka YouTuber "Mr. Beat" (*The Power of Our Supreme Court*) sit down with Kansas Supreme Court Chief Justice Eric Rosen to share wisdom and hopes for the next generation of civic leaders.

2 PM

Connecting the Dottes Room 221

Wyandotte County is often disparaged, and Kansas City, Kansas, has even been called "the armpit of Kansas City." But authors Phyllis Becker, Kathy Allen, and Pat Lawson, find much to appreciate in their fellow Dottedwellers.

Family Research and Remembrance Room 120

Two Western Kansas writers, Dennis Garcia (*Las Madres: Latinas in the Heartland Who Led Their Family to Success*) and Melanie Bonner Thomas (*The Old Man of the Fossil Beds*) tell the journeys of family members, showing us the importance of ties to family history and to place.

Finding a Home

Room 119

Daniel Miyares (*How to Say Goodbye in Cuban*) and Jane Kurtz (*Oh Give Me a Home*) speak about the true stories behind their cross-continental journeys for young readers, and the friends (and selves) found along the way.

Moderator: KSU Associate Professor of Children's Literature Anuja Madan

Editors Tell the Truth

Room 118

Jeff Shotts, Executive Editor of Graywolf Press, and Alec Loganbill, editor for Plainspoken Books, the nonfiction imprint of the University Press of Kansas, talk about what they're looking for from writers, and the importance of Midwestern creative nonfiction in a post-truth world.

3 PM

The Anti-Narrative

Room 120

The rules of narrative are meant to be broken. Poets Denise Low (*House of Grace*), Gary Jackson (*small lives*), and Jennifer Maritza McCauley (*Neon Steel*) speak on what drew them to hybrid forms of storytelling.

Moderator: KPR's Kaye McIntyre



Burn It Down!

Room 119

Novelists Tessa Gratton (*The Moon Heresies* trilogy) and Becca Coffindaffer (*The Bloody and the Damned*) discuss love, magic, and the fight against the rotten systems at the heart of their latest epic fantasies.

The Big Short

Room 221

Andrew Farkas (*Movies Are Fine for a Bright Boy Like You: Fictions*) and Nicholas Claro (*Sedgwick County*) discuss the expansive possibilities of the short story.

Moderator: Cote Smith, Novelist and Washburn English Lecturer

Why UPK: University Press of Kansas Celebrates 80 Years

Room 118

University Press of Kansas Director Kelly Chrisman-Jacques explores what makes a small, independent press like UPK special—and resilient—in an ever-changing world. Featuring Bill Kurtis (*Whirlwind*), Chelan David (*Stories from the Phog*), Tai Edwards (*Lyda Conley and the Fight to Preserve Huron Indian Cemetery*), Clay Wirestone (*Opinionated*), and Thomas Fox Averill and Leslie VanHoltzen, co-editors of *Kansas Matters: Twenty-First-Century Writers on the Sunflower State*.

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