

AWP Conference 2023

**Event Title: Crafting Voice in YA Fiction**

Thurs, March 8, 2023

10:35-11:50am

Event Outline

**Event Category:** Children's and Young Adult

**Event Description:** What is YA literature and how is the voice different from an adult novel? Or from a children's or middle-grade novel? In this session, four diverse YA novelists will discuss how they constructed the voice of their stories. We will discuss characterization, POV, language, and other craft considerations in constructing the voice of the YA novel. We'll talk about pitfalls to avoid. We will also address how a YA audience is different from other genres.

In recent years, YA literature has exploded in both popularity and prestige. The genre tackles themes that the publishing industry deems "edgier" and more "real" than the adult lit world. Our panel of diverse YA writers explore themes of immigration (illegal or otherwise), cultural identity, belonging, "wokeness," racism, violence, and others; using the POV and voice of adolescent narrators to shed light on these topics and call for change and social justice.

**Event Organizer & Moderator: Patricia Park**

Patricia Park is the author of the debut YA novel, *Imposter Syndrome & Other Confessions of Alejandra Kim*, and the award-winning adult novel, *Re Jane*, a *Jane Eyre* retelling. She's written for the New York Times, New Yorker, Guardian, and others. She is a professor of creative writing at American University.

**Event Participants:**

**Jennifer De Leon** is author of the YA novel *Don't Ask Me Where I'm From* (Simon & Schuster, 2020), which was a Junior Library Guild selection, and the Juniper Award winning essay collection *White Space: Essays on Culture, Race, & Writing* (UMass Press). Her next YA novel, *Borderless*, releases in April 2023. She is an Associate Professor of Creative Writing at Framingham State University, outside of Boston.

**Erika L. Sánchez** is a Mexican American poet, novelist, and essayist. Her poetry collection, *Lessons on Expulsion* was a finalist for the PEN America Open Book Award. Her young adult novel, *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* was a New York Times bestseller and a National Book Awards finalist. *Crying in the Bathroom*, a memoir, is her most recent book.

Welcome to our panel! A few reminders before we begin: • For those needing or wishing to follow along to a written text, please let the moderator of the panel, (identify moderator), know, and a printed copy will be delivered to you. • Please make sure that spaces marked for wheelchairs remain clear of chairs or other barriers. • Treat service animals as working animals and do not attempt to distract or pet them. • Be aware of those with chemical sensitivities and refrain from wearing scented products. • Please be aware that your fellow attendees may have invisible disabilities. Do not question anyone's use of an accommodation while at the conference, including for chairs reserved for those with disabilities

-Intros: PP gives short intro re why she came up with this panel. PP will also read aloud bios.

### **Questions:**

-Elevator pitches! What's the quick elevator pitch for your YA novel? Repeat the title for the audience, please.

-First things first: what IS the YA voice? How would you describe it? And how is the experience of reading a YA novel different from an adult novel about a teen?

-We each write both YA and adult fiction and nonfiction. What are the craft choices you make in writing one vs the other? What is the tone you are trying to convey in one vs the other?

-Each author will read aloud the opening paragraph/or paragraph of their choosing of their YA books to the audience. Then, they will perform a close reading of their work—sharing the craft decisions of each line.

-So we're all university professors of creative writing as well. We're in an interesting time because academia is beginning to see the literary merits of the YA genre. More programs are

supporting it. I, for one, am piloting our YA program in both our undergrad CW curriculum and our MFA Program at American U. Do any of your students come in wanting to read and/or write YA? What kinds of stories, themes, topics are you seeing in the classroom? How do you support them? What's your pedagogical approach?

-What are the stakes in your YA work and the works you love to read? How are the stakes different in YA vs adult fiction?

-What are some exercises and writing prompts you do with your students? for yourself?

-A YA editor at Kirkus once asked me this in an interview, so i'm going to repurpose her question: "How do you respond to the tired critique that so-called 'diverse books' have 'too much going on'?"

(Our books tackle grief and loss of a family member, deportation, racism, bullying, economic hardship, love, friendship...)

-In case you haven't noticed, there's a lot of snobbery in the literary field. What do you say to naysayers of YA? Why should YA books matter?

11:35am:

-15min Audience Q&A