

# STORY & PICTURES BY



Directed by: Joanna Rudnick | 86 min. | United States | 2023 | Documentary

Produced by: Joanna Rudnick, Korelan Matteson, Tim Horsburgh

## OFFICIAL SELECTION:



## **IMPORTANT LINKS**

**EPK FOLDER**

[HERE](#)

**KEY ART & IMAGES**

[HERE](#)

**VIDEO CLIPS**

[HERE](#)

**HEADSHOTS**

[HERE](#)

**POSTER**

[HERE](#)

**SOCIAL MEDIA TOOLKIT**

[HERE](#)

**WEBSITE**

[HERE](#)

**FACEBOOK**

<https://www.facebook.com/storyandpicturesbyfilm>

**INSTAGRAM**

[@storyandpicturesbyfilm](#)

**PRESS CONTACTS**

Stephanie Sunata

[storyandpicturesbyfilm@gmail.com](mailto:storyandpicturesbyfilm@gmail.com)

## LOGLINE

Let us tell you a story about the boundary pushers who shape souls and give children strange dreams. The stars of STORY & PICTURES BY are picture book creators changing the narrative for the next generation, even when their own lives are not fairytales.

## SHORT SYNOPSIS

STORY & PICTURES BY is the first feature documentary to take audiences behind the scenes to meet the boundary pushers who create children's picture books. The film follows Christian Robinson, Yuyi Morales, and Mac Barnett—the stars of the new "golden age" of kids lit— as they create experimental work that reflects the mysteries of childhood, champions the marginalized, and provides children with windows and mirrors, even when the creators' own lives are not fairy tales. Through rare archival, untapped insights, and stop-motion paper animation, we also come to understand why classics such as "Goodnight Moon," "Where the Wild Things Are," "The Very Hungry Caterpillar," "The Snowy Day," changed the art form and stand the test of time.

## LONG SYNOPSIS

STORY & PICTURES BY is the first documentary to take audiences behind the scenes of the new golden age of children's picture books—a time when all children can see characters and life experiences that mirror their own on the page and learn about those who are different; a time when creators come from diverse communities and backgrounds; and a time when instead of keeping the hard stuff out of stories for children, we put it in and provide context and counternarrative. Yet, it is also a time when the art form itself is under attack because of its immense power in shaping the worldview of children.

The film follows three rising stars in the kid's lit world - Christian Robinson, an in-demand illustrator, who is working on his most personal book to date about a child visiting their mother in prison; Yuyi Morales, a Caldecott-honor-winning artisan and self-taught bookmaker who tackles themes of migration and immigrant identity in her stories; and Mac Barnett, a New York Times best-selling author of over 50 children's books, who wrote a picture book biography of Margaret Wise Brown (*Goodnight Moon*, *Runaway Bunny*) and hosts a successful international book-club show.

We meet these creators during a turbulent time in the lives of children marked not only by the global pandemic, but also by political divisiveness, racial violence, culture wars, book banning, and the climate crisis. These times call for the voices of artists and creators, and kid's bookmakers heed the call through experimental and honest new work that draws upon their own childhoods (which were not fairytales), dives into the issues of the day, and helps all children feel seen and make sense of the changing world around them.

At a time when everything is becoming digital, we are producing more children's picture books than ever before because no other art form does what the picture book does - brings families together in a shared experience of story, instills written and visual literacy, and creates the narrative for a new generation.

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I set out to make "Story & Pictures By" because, as a parent of young children, I realized how little I understood about the power and impact of the picture books we read while snuggling up at bedtime.

I—like so many—had taken picture books for granted and grossly underestimated their significance and complexity. The more nights we read together, laughed, gasped, discussed, and pointed out easter eggs in the art, the more I came to see that these stories were shaping my children's sense of the world and even their identity. Ultimately, these books would help shape a whole generation of children. Yet, I knew virtually nothing about the people who told these stories today or in the past.



We often look at picture books as tame and simplistic. This is because, as children's book author Mac Barnett says, we don't value anything made for children. This is why so much of it is dumbed down. Because we don't value their intelligence. But this is not true of the best picture books. They are highly experimental and complicated works of literature and art. What's more is that those who make the books that stand the test of time, are actually boundary pushers that change the way we view childhood and the society around us.

In creating a character who has a massive temper tantrum and threatens to eat his mother up, Maurice Sendak moved the goal post for how children were depicted in picture books. This may not seem

subversive today, but when “Where the Wild Things” came out in 1963, it broke the mold. Sendak allows Max to express anger and to have, in Sendak’s own words, “A huge fantasy of rage.” This book was deeply threatening to some adults and was even challenged; but for its child audience, it created a new narrative where children could express their emotions, act out, and still, at the end of the day, be greeted with a warm meal and a piece of cake.

It took making a film about picture books for me to understand that children are the most marginalized and powerless among us and that they seek meaning and recognition from art, just as we do as adults. I also came to realize that the reason that content for young people is caught in the crossfire of our latest culture war is because of its immense power to create empathy for others and self acceptance. As librarian Betsy Bird says, children’s books get in our brains like nothing else. Children’s books have always reflected the culture we leave in, and bookmakers are children’s activists out on the front lines.

If you want to understand the cultural upheaval kids have experienced from the middle of 20th Century to today, picture books have recorded much of that story. It took the publication of “Snowy Day ” in 1962 for a Black child to finally appear on the cover of a picture book and be the hero of his own story. Prior to this time, children of color were often depicted as racial stereotypes in the pages of picture books. In creating Peter, a little boy living in a city, enjoying the bliss of a snow day, Ezra Jack Keats, a white Jewish storyteller, created an opening that was soon to be filled by Black creators. They went on to depict the full Black experience in their art and create windows and mirrors in an industry that had been solely lacking them.

Today, we are experiencing a new “golden age” of picture books — a time when more children than ever can see themselves recognized in their literature and meet others with very different life experiences. Things that were once taboo are gracing the pages of picture books with more frequency, depth, nuance, complexity and exposure, and as a result are more threatening to some than ever.

In order to tell the story of this new golden age, we followed three contemporary picture bookmakers Mac Barnett, Yuyi Morales and Christian Robinson from 2018-2022, a time of great change and challenge in this country. We were there as: Yuyi Morales navigated the anti-immigrant rhetoric that was the center of the politics of the day in her books “Dreamers” and “Bright Star”; Christian Robinson shared for the first time his personal story of visiting an incarcerated parent in “Milo Imagines the World” and spoke openly to a childhood audience about the importance of protest during the Black Lives Matter uprising in the wake of the killings of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd; and Mac Barnett created an online book club experience for children sheltering at home during COVID 19.

To understand the times we are living in through the eyes of children, we must do so by understanding their literature and those responsible for creating it. This is the power of “Story & Pictures By”—it’s not only the story of an art form, it’s the story of how our understanding of children and the stories that shape them have changed over time. It is not an exaggeration to say that I learned more about my children from making this film than from reading parenting books.

— Joanna Rudnick, Director/Producer

## ABOUT THE FILMMAKING TEAM

### **Director/Producer, Joanna Rudnick**

Joanna Rudnick is an Emmy-nominated director with over two decades of experience directing and producing documentaries. All of Joanna's films engage with ideas of family, the importance of the arts in society, human health and wellness, social justice, and youth issues. Joanna's first feature documentary "In the Family" (POV|PBS) took a personal look at the effect that testing positive for the breast and ovarian cancer mutation had on her and several others as well as the bioethical implications of the new medical technology. The film was broadcast in over a dozen countries, shown on Capitol Hill and used in a Supreme Court case brought by the ACLU on gene patents. Joanna directed the animated short "Brother" (Independent Lens|PBS); the Chicago Film Festival Audience Award winning short "On Beauty" (Shorts TV) and an episode of duPont award-winning "Hard Earned" (Al Jazeera America). Her producing credits include the Emmy-award winning "Robert Capa in Love and War" (PBS|BBC); "Crossfire Hurricane" (HBO); "Bill T. Jones: A Good Man" (American Masters|PBS); and "Prisoner of Her Past" (PBS). Joanna has a masters degree in Science, Health, and Environmental Journalism.

### **Producer, Korelan Matteson**

Korelan Matteson has worked as a writer, director, producer, development executive, and show-runner of non-fiction television and documentary films for two decades. Her last feature documentary, "They'll Love Me When I'm Dead", directed by Morgan Neville for Netflix, told the tale of Orson Welles's final, unfinished film and premiered at Telluride and Venice. She also produced, "Nobody Speak: Trials of The Free Press" for director Brian Knappenberger, which premiered at Sundance. Her television credits include series for Discovery, Science Channel, ABC, FX, ESPN, Travel Channel, A&E and NatGeo.

### **Producer, Tim Horsburgh**

Tim Horsburgh is currently Vice President of National Geographic Documentary Films, covering the production and distribution of films such as "The Mission," "Bobi Wine: The People's President," "Fire of Love," "The Territory," "Retrograde," "The Rescue," and "Becoming Cousteau." Between 2009-2021 he held various roles at Kartemquin Films, a period in which the organization received three Academy Award nominations, won five Emmy Awards, and was the recipient of an Institutional Peabody Award. He is the Executive Producer of Steve James' 2022 Venice Film Festival world premiere "A Compassionate Spy." He wanted to help produce "Story & Pictures By" to honor all who devote their lives to teaching and delighting children.



## STARRING

### **Christian Robinson**

Author + Illustrator Christian Robinson went from being raised by his grandmother in a crowded apartment in Los Angeles to a Caldecott honor. Grappling with mounting success and fame, he illustrates his first autobiographical children's book *Milo Imagines the World* - about a child visiting a parent in prison - while also trying to reconcile with his mom, who is homeless and living on the streets of Skid Row.

### **Yuyi Morales**

Arriving in the U.S. as a young mother who didn't speak English, Yuyi Morales discovered a new language and identity through picture books from the local library. Her breakthrough *Dreamers*, a favorite for the Caldecott Award, is a counter-narrative to the demeaning, anti-immigrant messages children see in mainstream media. For her follow-up, *Bright Star*, she returns to the U.S./Mexico border to create a love song to the fragile ecosystem of the region, at a time when it is threatened by an expanding border wall.

### **Mac Barnett**

A New York Times best-selling author of over 50 books and host of the online sensation "Mac's Book Club Show," Mac Barnett is a historian of the genre who wrote a picture book on the author of Goodnight Moon. Raised in a single-parent home, Mac's hilarious and subversive works acknowledge how kids absorb and overcome hard things every day.

## CREDITS

STORIED STUDIOS Presents

In Association With  
WORLD OF HA PRODUCTIONS  
ALBA COLLIS  
NIKA MEDIA  
BIRD STREET PRODUCTIONS  
KARTEMQUIN FILMS

A Film By JOANNA RUDNICK

STORY & PICTURES BY

Directed and Produced By  
JOANNA RUDNICK

Produced By  
KORELAN MATTESON  
TIM HORSBURGH

Executive Producers  
JENIFER WESTPHAL  
JOE PLUMMER

Executive Producers  
HALLEE ADELMAN  
SHIZUKA ASAKAWA  
KEN PELLETIER

Executive Producers  
JAMES COSTA  
BILL AND RUTH ANN HARNISCH, THE HARNISCH FOUNDATION

Executive Producers  
BRENDA ROBINSON  
MELISSA SAGE FADIM  
GORDON QUINN

Co-Executive Producers for Foothill Productions  
JAMIE WOLF and NATHALIE SEAVER

Co-Executive Producer  
SAMANTHA BERGER

Co-Executive Producer  
BE FORWARD PRODUCTIONS

Editing By  
ELI OLSON  
DAVON RAMOS

Cinematography By  
ROBIN MORTAROTTI

Music By  
WILLIAM RYAN FRITCH

Stop Motion Animation By  
PAPER BRAIN