

## Exploring the Whole Novel Workshop Experience with Faculty Alan Gratz

The Highlights Foundation Whole Novel Workshop (WNW) is an intense experience. Chances are you'll hear some things about your novel that you didn't expect. You may get a surprise or two about what's working in your story or what needs your attention. But you will also have the support of the Whole Novel Workshop community to help see you through your revisions.



**Alan Gratz**, award-winning author and WNW faculty, answers a couple of questions about his role as a trusted reader and faculty member. Also included are some comments from **Judith Robinson (JR)**, who worked with Alan last year at the Workshop. Take a look, get an insider's view into the Whole Novel Workshop, then join us in March for a week that will change your writing . . . and maybe your life!

*The Whole Novel Workshop gives a writer a critique of his or her complete manuscript by a trusted reader who is an award-winning author, editor, or agent. The writer receives an editorial letter as well as one-on-one conference time to discuss the novel in progress. What kind of information will a writer gain from this experience?*

**AG:** As one of the trusted readers on the faculty, I read each of the novels from my writers and then give them written notes a week before the conference. I give notes on the big picture first—my overall reactions to the novel, including what works and what doesn't, and where it would fit into the market. Then I get more specific. I'm a plot guy, so I give lots of notes on where I think the plot is sagging and where it's strong. Where it's sagging, I offer suggestions for how to fix things. I'll also be looking at your characters, your settings, your dialogue, your narrative voice, and giving you feedback. That, I think, is the real value of the initial Whole Novel Workshop critique: you get a new pair of eyes on your manuscript, a new perspective. Of the people I worked with last time, most of them had been working on their manuscripts for a long time. They were, as a writer friend of mine calls it, "lost in the cornfield." They needed someone on a platform up top, telling them how to get "unlost." That's what I try to do!

Once we arrive at the Highlights retreat, it's really the instructors, the participants, and their manuscripts. We go back through the critique notes to make sure I'm making sense and for you to ask follow-up questions. Then, for the rest of the week, we'll have set times to meet and discuss your revision progress, with me giving you feedback on real-time changes you make. The rest of the time, the other instructors and I are available for impromptu talks about your work, about larger questions of craft, about the publishing business, anything! We're at your disposal.

**JR:** Alan displayed great intelligence and perception in figuring out how to order and structure my scenes. It was as if he was able to hold a whole road map in his head and figure out the best route to take to get to my destination. He also seemed able to catch the intent of a story and figure out the form in which it would best be told. He was never in a hurry, and he was always willing to take the time to think and rethink an idea and

brainstorm it with me until it was right. He never lost patience with my endless questions or with the volume of work with which I presented him. And he always had the guts to tell me the truth and point out what was working and what was not.

**Can you give writers a perspective on the “feeling” of the workshop?**

**AG:** There are lots of great reasons to come to the Highlights Whole Novel Workshop. The camaraderie. The beautiful, quiet setting. The great instructors. The incredible food! It’s five full days of living and breathing the craft of writing.

But the real reason to come to the Highlights Whole Novel Workshop is to give yourself the kick in the pants you know you need. Maybe you’ve been writing a novel on the weekends for three years. Maybe you hid in a garret for three manic weeks, pounding out your manuscript all at once. However you wrote it, you know it’s not where it needs to be, and you’re asking yourself, “When will it ever be? HOW can it ever be?” That’s what the Highlights Whole Novel Workshop is for. This is the week you push ahead. The week you get over the hump. The week you get the help of experienced writers and editors and peers. The week you move *forward*.

**JR:** Alan ran beside me all week and I knew I was not running my marathon alone. He was there—pushing me intellectually and creatively to do my best work. He challenged me to keep going and press deeper and find the best plot points to create a meaningful story. He never allowed me to accept a scene that wasn’t the best it could be. He kept pressing me to find the best way to express my characters’ intents.

Revise with us. Join a group of dedicated writers and teachers who want to help you kick up the quality of your writing.

For more information about the Whole Novel Workshop, contact Jo Lloyd at 570-253-1192, e-mail [jo.lloyd@highlightsfoundation.org](mailto:jo.lloyd@highlightsfoundation.org), or visit [www.highlightsfoundation.org](http://www.highlightsfoundation.org) to request an application.

