

# The Pen AND A MENTOR

Maya Nussbaum is building a creative community where mentorship meets storytelling—and where the next great writers are finding their voices.

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MAYA NUSSBAUM



**W**hen Maya Nussbaum was in college pursuing a degree in English literature, she was struck and inspired by what she calls the “sheer force of creative, intellectual, and economic power of New York City in the midst of systemic underrepresentation and poverty.”

Nussbaum, who comes from a family devoted to education, the arts, and giving back, decided she needed to give a voice to these masses of unheard people. Her solution was swift and powerful: She established the non-profit Girls Write Now, the first writing and mentoring organization for girls, which, over the course of the last three decades, has become one of the most sophisticated and successful platforms in the arts-education field.

“It was about social justice as much as art,” Nussbaum says. “From

the start, Girls Write Now has been a communal enterprise, and my lens has been focused on how to best harness the boundless talents and imagination of our community—across the barriers of gender, race, and class.”

Girls Write Now provides one-to-one support for young writers, producing original multi-genre, multimedia work ranging from award-winning books to podcasts, films, and performances. Its mentees’ work has been picked up by the likes of the *New York Times* and *Teen Vogue*, NPR and *Newsweek*, and major publishing houses such as Penguin Random House and Simon & Schuster. Its data-informed scalable model, which merges mentorship, community, experience, and media creation, serves as a replicable pipeline of diverse talent for companies across industries.

HarperCollins recently published *On the Art of the Craft*, a guidebook on collaborative storytelling that was conceived, written, and edited by the mentees of Girls Write Now. The organization, which includes more than 3,500 mentors, mentees, and members nationwide, has a high profile, thanks to a sizeable celebrity fan base that includes notable writers.

Its 2025 gala honored A-listers Rachel Bloom, who created, wrote, and directed the rom-com TV series *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* for The CW network; Kar-



Nussbaum, Ayesha Curry, and Stephanie Gordon

dea Brown, the host of Food Network's *Delicious Miss Brown*; Winnie Holzman, who wrote the book for the Tony Award-winning Broadway musical *Wicked*; Suleika Jaouad, the author of the *New York Times* bestseller *The Book of Alchemy: A Creative Practice for an Inspired Life* and of the newspaper's column "Life, Interrupted"; Maria Pacheco, CEO of the news agency Storyful; and Dana A. Williams, a Howard University English professor and the author of the 2025 Toni Morrison biography, *Toni at Random: The Iconic Writer's Legendary Editorship*.

Continually ranked among the top organizations in the United States for driving social-emotional growth, Girls Write Now has received awards and recognition from the White House and from Melinda Gates, Gloria Steinem, and novelist Zadie Smith, as well as from a variety of companies, including HarperCollins, NBCUniversal, Estée Lauder, Adobe, and Royal Bank

of Canada. It depends upon funding from foundations, corporations, individuals, and local, state, and national governments.

"We are not just a charity you give to but a partner to grow with," Nussbaum says. "We have a rare corporate partnership model and are valued by companies across industries for sitting at the intersection of storytelling and connection, the human infrastructure every workplace is craving."

She points out that as companies face a crisis of meaning, authenticity, and belonging, her organization holds something rare: a nearly 30-year record of helping people across generations, industries, and identities show up as their whole selves, tell their stories, and lead with purpose.

Established in 1998, Girls Write Now speaks with a powerhouse of voices of various races, ages, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

"We uplift the leaders of tomorrow," Nussbaum explains. "Our community spread across the nation is loudly and proudly telling their stories every day, and we're doing our part to ensure they're heard. We also serve as a pipeline of talent into schools and industries in need of these fresh and vital perspectives to reimagine a more inclusive world where all people, no matter their backgrounds, belong."

She adds, "What we do at Girls Write Now has the potential for impact on education, mental health, even democracy."

Like the girls the group mentors, Nussbaum, too, is a storyteller. She outlines exactly what Girls Write Now means to her.

"We are:

- A thought leader in education, emphasizing flexible competencies, interpersonal caregiving skills, and agency of learning as the keys to thriving in an uncertain world.
- A national platform for vulnerable voices to explore grief, anxiety, identity, and healing through writing, spoken word, and humor—a testament to the therapeutic power of creative expression.
- A network organizer. Girls Write Now brings together NGOs, academic institutions, and corporations to share resources, align expertise and create capacities beyond those of any single organization. We are proud of our work advocating for parity in funding for girls' programs through the STARS

Citywide Girls Initiative and supporting capacity-building strategies for LitNYS, the nation's largest ecosystem of literary-arts organizations.

- An essential antidote to the loneliness, isolation, and eroding democracy caused by polarized communication. America desperately needs organizations that connect people with different perspectives across divides. That is exactly what Girls Write Now does best—mentoring between generations, bridging worlds across states, ultimately building a stronger, more unified nation through community.”

Backing Nussbaum up are the voices of the thousands of young women whom Girls Write Now has enabled not only to speak up but also to be heard loud and clear.

Take Kathryn Destin. She became a mentee a decade ago when she was 15 years old and today serves as the group's special projects coordinator, a role that allows her to continue to spread her wings by leading a variety of projects, including the Girls Write Now podcast *Speaking in First Draft*. Thanks to Girls Write Now, Destin says she's developed her skills as a writer and leader in her community, becoming the editor-in-chief of her local organizing group's zine to performing as part of a public theater group.

The organization, she says, “is a testament to the impact of investing in people like me” and serves as a “space where I can channel both my professional and creative interests.”

Alejandro Lamas-Nemec, a freshman at Bryn Mawr College who is studying English literature and political science, says that being a mentee renews her purpose.

“At Girls Write Now, we have a place where we belong,” she remarks. “Through our mentors and our peers, we have a support system. The community we create together reminds us that we are all human and that our world is worth preserving.”

Being a Girls Write Now mentee led Fiki Hunt, a recent graduate of Bates College, to her two career interests—therapy and documentary film.

“My mentor, a talented journalist and podcast producer, helped me recognize the power of sharing my story and the importance of having a safe space to tell it in,” she says.

Nussbaum, who wasn't much older than the original mentees when she established Girls Write Now, grew up and was mentored by its generous and dedicated writers. She sees Girls Write Now as one antidote to the great divide in America.

“Through our model of writing, mentoring and community, we forge relationships, empower voices, bridge divides—and advance democracy,” she says. “This is our vision for the future as our collaboratory model facilitates our growth plan to innovatively deliver on our mission.” **LM**

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Judith Curr and  
Nussbaum

