

# The Importance of Wishes

## An Interview with Author Sandra Magsamen

ELIZABETH MCCHESENEY

Children's author and illustrator Sandra Magsamen holds a beloved place in the hearts of library professionals who know the impact and power of her loving board and picture books. As the author and illustrator of more than sixty children's and adult books, Magsamen, trained as an art therapist, hopes to create books that offer people a way to reach out and connect in a meaningful and expressive way with someone in their life, and indeed she accomplishes this with her endearing new release, *I Wish Wish Wish for You*.

In fall 2021, Magsamen and the National Summer Learning Association (NSLA) partnered on the World of Wishes Campaign. NSLA is the nation's pre-eminent non-profit organization focused on the powerful impact of investing in summer learning to help close the achievement gap. At NSLA's 2021 national conference, Magsamen revealed her new book, *I Wish Wish Wish for You* (Sourcebooks, 2022) and the accompanying World of Wishes campaign. The campaign aims to empower our next generation of change makers—our children—through collecting and sharing the brilliant and beautiful wishes of children around the world for other children and for the world during the turbulent time in which we live. Magsamen and NSLA encourage libraries and other organizations serving children to participate in the campaign and lift-up the voices of all children. Magsamen and her team will gather and compile the wishes into a book to be shared with the world. Here, she talks about the power of wishes, the need to hear our children's voices, and the critical



role of NSLA, summer learning, and out-of-school learning year-round.

### Tell us about the book.

At its heart, this book is a love letter. I believe, in many ways, that my new book is not unlike many of the other books I've written in that my inspiration has always come from the feelings, ideas, and love that I have in my heart as a mother, as a sister, as a daughter. This book really represents the wishes that I personally hold for the people in my life, the children in my life, as well as a universal wish for children all over the world.

This book speaks not only from my heart, but from the heart of mothers, grandmothers, librarians, and teachers all over the world. We wish for everything and more for our children. I believe we are living in a time where we see that our children are really struggling.

Coming through and coming out of a pandemic, our children are distressed and their anxiety level is higher than



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we have seen before—certainly in my lifetime. I hope this book is comforting, healing, and a gentle reminder of all those things that we wish for our children. It's a gentle hug and a love letter to children in our lives and to children all over the world.

**Why do you think wishes matter right now for our children? And what kind of wishes has the campaign elicited from youth so far?**

We are living in a very vulnerable time. COVID has swept through our neighborhoods, communities, and the whole world. It has been a time of uncertainty, fear, and anxiety. As parents, caregivers, teachers, therapists, librarians, and human beings, we want our children to feel safe, to feel like they belong, to feel loved, and we want them to feel inspired and empowered to be all that they are meant to be. This book shares those heartfelt wishes for each and every child on this planet. When you sit down and read this book with children, my wish is that the message is comforting, reaffirming, inspiring, and goal setting.

The World of Wishes Campaign was born through conversations with librarians, teachers, and parents. We all have universal wishes for the children in our lives, but we wanted to know what were the wishes and the themes that *children* are thinking about. If children can

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begin to tell us what they desire and what they want, we can really begin to look at the themes that emerge that we might not have been so aware of.

I've asked children to write and to draw their wishes because drawing, as we know, is really a pre-verbal activity. Sometimes, what happens in the drawings are things that are not yet able to be spoken with words. So, drawing offers children a way to really express what's in their hearts.

We are seeing some of the themes that we expected like, "No more COVID," "No more sickness," "No more masks," "No more virtual school." But we are also seeing wishes like, "No more anxiety," which, for a young child to say really touches my heart.

Another theme that has emerged is wishes for the greater good, one's community and one's family. These are primarily wishes for others and not for the child themselves. So, as we gather these wishes, we are really looking to understand these silos and learn more about the state of children in our country as a result of looking at what children most desire, and we call those "wishes."

**Tell us about the campaign.**

I do take children's wishes seriously because it really is the heart of the matter. The acronym for the World of Wishes Campaign is WOW, and as I see these wishes coming in from children all over the country, I am wowed at what these kids feel and think and what they wish for.

If a child can share with us, through their drawing or their writing, what they desire most and what matters to them, we can understand what concerns them and then work together in communities, schools, and in libraries to help solve those problems and grant those wishes. I think we need to listen to children and we need to really understand where they're coming from. Children are the future, and we need to support them and help them to have the brightest future possible.

Through the campaign, we are reaching children through schools, libraries, camps, after-school programs, and city-wide initiatives like the San Francisco Human Rights



Commission. We are using the children's wishes as data points to really understand and meet children where they are.

One of the most important things that I have learned in this process is that, just in the act of identifying and expressing a wish, we each begin to make that wish come true. The minute we share that wish it has meaning, and we begin to manifest.

**You've partnered with the NSLA, and a part of the campaign will be a book to highlight children's wishes and also the significance of summer and out-of-school time learning. Why does summer matter to children and families?**

Summer learning and after-school learning matter in a huge way. I was lucky enough to hear Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona . . . propose that education doesn't end when school pauses in June and summer begins. We need to begin to think about learning in every single place that a child goes! Our children should be learning all the time and not as a mandate, but as a human right. It is a gift to expand their sense of curiosity and adventure.

After-school and summer learning experiences are key to this—they are not an “extra,” they are fundamental and are part of the heart of learning. Offering as many places and spaces for children to learn and grow is so, so important to the health and wellbeing of our children and to their futures.

The idea of what we will be doing with these wishes continues to expand and to grow. The more schools, libraries, educational programs, and communities that are helping us to gather these wishes, the bigger the vision becomes. We are looking at creating a digital platform to share wishes. We are also looking at creating video content. I love the idea of individual groups like schools, camps, libraries, and places of worship publishing their own wishes as well, using a print on demand platform. The final product or products is ongoing and evolving as the campaign continues to grow.

**You are asking children to not only write their wish but also to draw it. What do you see as the role of art in a child's life? How do you see libraries as partners for providing art?**

Art is one of the most beautiful ways children can express themselves. Art is pre-verbal, so, often, a child will be able to create an image that expresses their feelings long before they can formulate the words to say what is most important to them. I think a visual representation of what a child is wishing for is powerful and if they can bring the words to it, that adds to the power. We are looking for children to find the most organic and authentic way to express themselves and share

what is most deeply in their hearts, what they desire and what they long for.

Libraries are an integral part of every single community throughout our country and the world! I think that they have become even more so throughout this pandemic. I couldn't ask for better partners than the staff and libraries that the campaign has worked with. Librarians touch the lives of children in the most positive way—helping in literacy, helping families find the resources they need, providing a space for creation and exploration...the work librarians do is extraordinary and they really are wish granters.

**The WOW Campaign will reach children internationally. What types of themes do you think we are likely to see?**

Wishes really are an expression of what we desire, what we want and what, perhaps, may be missing. What need that needs to be filled. I can only comment on what we have seen and heard thus far and the themes that we have begun to unpack. We have seen themes of fear, anxiety, sickness and death, but also friendship, kindness, love, family, belonging, and peace.

Children are remarkable; they have a way of identifying the heart of the matter that often eludes us grown-ups. I have no doubt gathering their wishes in 2022 will help us all heal and grow.

## How Libraries Are Involved

Libraries across the country included the World of Wishes campaign into their summer learning programs in the summer of 2022. From displays of art, to programs featuring wish making, public libraries have centered the campaign to respond to the social-emotional needs of our children. And the campaign continues in the fall of 2022. Details for a free, virtual visit from Magsamen and to receive an activity kit are below.

Magsamen will speak at the 2022 NSLA National Conference in Washington, DC, October 24–26. A public library track is scheduled on Monday, October 24. For more information, visit <https://summerlearning.org/national-conference>. &

*For more information on the World of Wishes Campaign and to schedule a virtual visit with Magsamen, email [info@san-dramagsamen.com](mailto:info@san-dramagsamen.com). Visit <https://www.sourcebooks.com/i-wish-wish-wish.html> to download the free I Wish Wish Wish for You activity kit, which also includes an entry sheet where children send in their wishes to the World of Wishes Campaign.*