



Children's Writer®

Newsletter of Writing
and Publishing Trends

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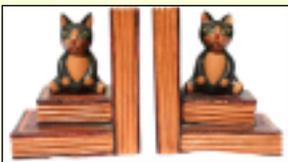


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Images in Ink



The Art of Visual Storytelling

By Katherine Swarts

Once upon a time, a *graphic novel* was a book with steamy adult content. Today, this new cousin of the comic book fills shelves for all ages. Once upon another time, a *National Geographic* pioneer feared being fired because he had only photographs to fill an issue, no text. Today, try to find a popular magazine without pictures on every spread.

No question: We now live in a world of images.

Yet, lovers of story still choose the pictures made with words over artwork or photos. "Seeing someone else's visual portrayal of what you've been imagining is often disappointing," says author Heather Gemmen Wilson. "Graphics are to imagination what robots are to humans—far less complex and satisfying than the real thing."

Joan Paquette, Associate Agent at Erin Murphy Literary Agency, says, "A picture can considerably narrow the immersion process. More than once I have been disappointed to turn a page and find an illustration; many readers prefer to keep their own mental descriptions. Isn't the world you create in your mind so much richer?"

"All-text narrative involves readers more," says author Kelly Bennett. "As a result, each story becomes intensely personal, unique to each reader."

Putting Pictures in Readers' Heads

Children's stories may first be told in a periodical with about three accompanying illustrations, then reprinted in an anthology with entirely different pictures, and in another anthology with no pictures at all. But all stories deserving of reprint are in fact *visual*. Their descriptive language evokes images in readers' heads. "One of the strengths of visual storytelling is its ability to completely submerge the reader (To page 2)

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Visual into the story,” says Paquette.

Submerge, not drown. A common rookie mistake is to start with a full history of a make-believe world, in one indigestible chunk. “A story should flow,” says Richard Mousseau, Publisher of Moose Hide Books, “not read like a technical report. Description should be woven in throughout, a little at a time.”

“Description shouldn’t be filler,” says Kallie George, Editor and contributing author at Simply Read Books. “All description should move the story forward and build character and plot.”

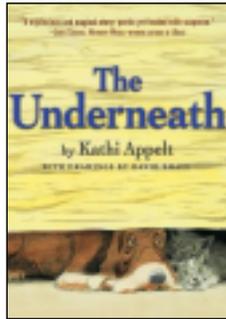
Award-winning author-illustrator Janet Wilson notes, “Generally, a writer should err on the side of too little. The average reader may not have the patience for a great deal of description.”

There is no formula for an ideal amount of description, though writers weaned on literature from a more leisurely era should read today’s works to get a feel for modern pace. “Readers today seem to want less description,” says K. S. Brooks, author of the Postcards from Mr. Pish series (Write Words Inc./Cambridge Books). “They want the story to move quickly.”

“It used to be readers could tolerate the slow pace of detailed description,” adds Wilson, whose books include the Global Warming series (Wesleyan). “Now they want action.” But, she continues, “Keep in mind that slowing the pace isn’t always a negative that readers merely tolerate; sometimes they want a breather from intense action or emotion. A slow pace can also be a setup for a big surprise.”

How Much Is Too Much?

Children’s and teen literature written in an age when more detailed description was the norm has, of course, survived into our hyperspeed age. Then there is J. K.



Rowling’s shattering of the assumption that long books will not hold a young reader’s attention. *Enough* is not a matter of word count so much as of feel. “The right amount of description will make readers feel present and riveted to the action,” says Paquette, “while too much description will weigh down the narrative and bore the reader into closing the book. Give just enough to set the scene vividly, and then stop.”

“Description is like pepper,” says Bennett, whose books include the upcoming *Vampire Baby* (Candlewick). “Too little and a story can be bland and uninteresting; too much can disrupt the reading experience [since] description slows the pace. A reader must leave the story to delve into her mental files to interpret it.” That expects just too much work from the reader.

One way to minimize a sense of overload is to make description serve multiple purposes. “The best description is never *just* description,” says Maggie Lehrman, Senior Editor at Abrams Books for Young Readers and Amulet Books. “It illuminates character, plot, tension, pacing. Description that does more than one thing is more likely to be essential to the story, and it’s also more fun to read.”

Let readers see, hear, and smell your story. “Add sensory details,” says Bennett, “and think—food! The link between food memory and emotion is strong and almost universal. Food images tap into the reader’s associations to create vivid descriptions.”



SUBMISSIONS

~ Abrams Books/Amulet Books: 115 West 18th St., New York, NY 10011. www.abramsbooks.com. Not currently accepting unsolicited fiction; is open to nonfiction manuscripts.

~ Journey Stone Creations: 3533 Danbury Road, Cincinnati, OH 45014. www.jscbooks.com. Assigns projects on a work-for-hire basis.

~ Mayhaven Publishing: P.O. Box 557, Mahomet, IL 61853. www.mayhavenpublishing.com. Accepts queries and complete manuscripts.

~ Moose Hide Books: 684 Walls Road, Sault Ste. Marie, ON P6A 5K6 Canada. www.mooshidebooks.com. Open to submissions.

~ Erin Murphy Literary Agency: 2700 Woodlands Village #300-458, Flagstaff, AZ 86001. emliterary.com. No unsolicited submissions.

~ Simply Read Books: 501-5525 West Blvd., Vancouver, BC V6M 3W6 Canada. www.simplyreadbooks.com. Open to submissions.

~ Write Words, Inc.: 2934 Old Route 50, Cambridge, MD 21613. www.writewordsinc.com. Open to submissions via email.

You Can “Show” When Characters “Tell”

Storytelling can also be made highly visual through characters’ voices. Dialogue is “a fantastic way of letting characters show their impressions in a colorful or opinionated fashion,” says Brooks. “Dialogue can take the onus off the narrator so the description is less heavy.”

“I love dialogue,” says Patricia Stirnkorb, Editor at Journey Stone Creations. “It is much more interesting to have the characters tell the story through their conversations and actions. Paragraphs and paragraphs of text with no conversation is very often the part I skim through! If a story needs more explanation, that is where a paragraph of description should come in—then go out.”

“Balance of narration, dialogue, and description changes,” says George. “Some books—for example, a fantasy set in an invented land—need more reliance on the visual.”

“There are brilliant books that use long chunks of

unattributed dialogue,” notes Lehrman, including Aidan Chambers’s *Dying to Know You* (Amulet Books), “that still feel like they take place in fully realized worlds. And there are books with much less dialogue that are still vibrant and propulsive reads. Kathi Appelt’s *The Underneath* (Atheneum Books) comes to mind.”

Imagination Rules

Inevitably today, stories for children and teens may be presented with actual visuals, and when they are, pictures and text should be in counterpoint. As Mousseau colorfully says, “Vegetable soup should have a balance of variety and not be overwhelmed by one vegetable.” That is, to have the reader’s taste satisfied by a story, description, narrative, action, and dialogue should be proportionate.

Between ever-improving digital technology and the universal fondness for images, illustrated books are on the upswing today—and not just in the form of picture

To have a reader’s taste satisfied by a story, description, narrative, action, and dialogue should be proportionate.

books. Images enrich life, advance concepts, and are an art form in themselves, but they can sometimes be a lesser choice for readers. “When there are no pictures, readers must use their own imaginations to conjure the story in their heads,” says George. “It is so important for kids to exercise their imaginations. There are so many media nowadays that allow a kid to be imaginatively lazy.”

“No matter how skilled writers are at describing, there’s always room between the words on the page and the images in a reader’s mind,” says Lehrman. “That’s part of the magic of reading: We’re given the outline, and we’re free to fill in the details.”

Details are the writer’s to give by creating a vehicle that translates images from his or her imagination to the reader’s. “Make sure that what you see in your imagination makes it to the page,” says George. “As a creative writing teacher, I’ve seen many kids who can clearly visualize a scene, but in the telling, leave out many details.”

To coax out details, immerse yourself. “Read widely,” says Paquette, “and mull over what you read. Keep practicing, keep listening to feedback, keep growing.

PICTURE THE REAL THING

While all good storytelling is visual, not all includes visuals. In the last part of the twentieth century, illustrations virtually disappeared from middle-grade novels. Now, however, things are swinging the other way: “A while ago,” says Kallie George of Simply Read Books, “kids wanted books without pictures because it made them feel older, and parents and educators pushed this too. But now there is a counter-trend. The Kate DiCamillo books all have pictures. So do the Michael Morpurgo books. And I love *Tua and the Elephant* [Chronicle Books] by R. P. Harris, illustrated by Taeun Yoo.”

Patricia Stirnkorb of Journey Stone says that “a teacher chided me” on one of the first books Stirnkorb had written. The teacher said, “Although the vocabulary and word count appear to be for third- to sixth-grade readers [the intended audience], you have way too many pictures for them to enjoy the book!” Stirnkorb’s reaction was, “What?! I still love picture books at my age! I think we need to get back to viewing a book for the pictures and art, enjoying the look and feel.”

The rise of e-readers is overcoming one longtime obstacle to heavy illustration: “Color-illustrated books require better grade paper and are much more expensive to print,” says Arline Chase, Publisher of Write Words, Inc. “The coming thing will be the illustrated children’s book for e-readers. It’s not common yet—formats present many technical problems—but it will be in another three years.”

Regardless of specific technological and cultural changes, illustrations will always have a place in publishing. “Some readers are less able to see stories,” notes George, “even if the words are visually evocative. Pictures give foundation and let [readers] focus more on the plot. Pictures also allow for a break in reading—offering something new and exciting—and, for struggling readers, can provide a much-needed impetus.”

“There are people who simply cannot visualize,” agrees Stirnkorb. “They either haven’t had enough life experiences to connect to the story, or have limited imaginations.”

“Illustrations can fill in the blanks,” says award-winning author Janet Wilson. “This allows the text to be stronger and more concise. As an illustrator, I believe in the power of art to tell a story and create emotion.”

Literary agent Joan Paquette sums up: “Many books are the richer for their [illustrated] depictions of worlds and creatures that defy imagination!”

Writing is a journey, and the best discoveries happen along the way.”

“Push yourself to find different ways to describe even familiar environments,” says Lehrman. “Consider the object or person from the point of view of the narrator. What would that narrator think is most important? Is there an image or comparison the narrator would likely bring to mind?”

Finally, *watch* the story yourself. Doris Wenzel, owner of Mayhaven Publishing, says, “See and hear the scene as you are writing it down. Then lay it aside and return to it later—and see if it holds your attention throughout. If not, cut what bores you.”

“I like to see my story like a movie in my head,” says George. Visual storytelling “will never work right if you, the writer, can’t see it in your mind’s eye.”

Top Tips for an Educational Publishing Career

By Joanne Mattern

Most people who aspire to write for children think first of trade publishing—titles from picture books to YA novels sold in bookstores. But a whole other world of publishing is open to children’s authors: books and other materials created for schools, libraries, homeschoolers, and state education departments. Classroom readers, texts, references, websites, computer games, workbooks, teacher resources, hi-lo readers, activity books, classroom magazines, and assessment tools are all part of the world of educational publishing. All require writers.

I have enjoyed a career in educational publishing for almost 20 years and have found the work to be rewarding, fascinating, and a steady source of income. Here are top tips for success, from editors and my own experience.

#1: Know the Market Range

The educational market offers more opportunities for writers than trade publishing. Materials may be used in a classroom or for homework. Passages may be needed for student assessment tests. Students may use references in groups or individually. Books are geared to struggling readers, special-needs students, English-language learners, or gifted students.

Become familiar with what teachers and librarians need. Volunteer to spend time in classrooms. Ask to see the books, workbooks, websites, and other materials used. Observe how the students learn and what they read.

Tamara Britton, Nonfiction Editorial Director at Abdo Publishing, says, “An author interested in working in educational publishing must familiarize him or herself with the audience and the market. Talk to teachers and librarians. And talk to kids. Ask them about what they like to read and why.”

Writers must be familiar with the core curriculum if they want to come up with marketable ideas. Stephanie Fitzgerald, owner of the book producer Spooky Cheetah Press, advises writers to “find as many ways as possible to tie the books back to core curriculum.”

#2: Identify Publishers and What They Need

When reviewing books and supplemental materials, be sure to take note of the publishers. Then investigate their websites and catalogues. Find social media outlets and Internet groups that link publishers, authors, and teachers. (For example, see the Scholastic website, www.scholastic.com). Read *School Library Journal*. Follow publishers on Facebook and Twitter. Sign up for their e-letters. Put yourself in the loop to stay informed on what they are publishing, what they are looking for, and what is new and exciting.

E. Russell Primm is the President and Editorial Director of the book producer Editorial Directions, which creates books for companies such as Heinemann-Raintree and Children’s Press. Primm’s best advice for breaking into the educational market: “Know the publishers, what they publish, and who they publish for.”

#3: Immerse Yourself in the Common Core

Educational publishing is driven by curriculum, which

today means the Common Core State Standards (CCSS)—an initiative adopted by 45 states that will affect the educational market for years to come. The CCSS establishes the specific skills students should possess by certain grade levels, such as responding critically to a text, identifying main ideas, or comparing sources. Educational publishers are busy coming up with projects to help students meet these goals.

“The new Common Core Standards are having an impact,” says Primm, who calls them a hot topic. They will determine what is published and used in classrooms and assessment tests.

One of their effects has been to accent nonfiction. Barbara Mitchell, Publisher of Mitchell Lane Publishers, says, “Schools are looking to beef up nonfiction, which is emphasized in the new standards. Basically, the Common Core recommends that children be exposed to nonfiction at a much earlier age, instead of reading so much fiction and then having nonfiction thrust at them in high school and college.”

Mary Rodgers, Vice President and Editor in Chief of the Lerner Publishing Group, advises writers to study the standards “to find topics that fit. With the implementation of Common Core Standards, there’s a greater emphasis on allowing narrative nonfiction to teach reading and language arts. This is a great time to be a nonfiction writer.”

#4: Learn How Educational Publishers Work

Project development works differently in educational publishing than in trade. Authors who have published in the trade market are used to coming up with an idea on their own, writing a synopsis or outline, crafting a few chapters or the whole book, then submitting to editors. This is rarely the process with school and library publishers.



MISCONCEPTIONS

We asked several editors what misconceptions about educational publishing bug them the most. Here is what they told us.

~ Michelle Bisson, formerly [Marshall Cavendish](#): “People generally think educational publishing consists of textbooks. Most are unaware of the supplemental materials that go with textbooks, and many don’t know the school and library market exists.”

~ Tamara Britton, [Abdo Publishing](#): “One of the biggest misconceptions that authors have is that it is easy to write for this market. Kind of like, ‘How hard can it be to write a 48-page book about New Hampshire for a fourth grader?’ However, vocabulary limits and space constraints make it quite challenging, as do the limited life experience and knowledge foundation of the readers.”

~ Barbara Mitchell, [Mitchell Lane](#): “Too many people think educational publishing operates like trade publishing. They are nothing alike!”

~ E. Russell Primm, [Editorial Directions](#): “That school and library books aren’t real books!”

~ Mary Rodgers, [Lerner Publishing](#): “That educational publishing is boring and formulaic, that there’s no author skill or creativity, and that topics are unappealing.”

SUBMISSIONS

Because their books are tied so closely to established standards, educational publishers create their lists based on curriculum needs, publishing books and series with ties to specific content. Britton explains, “Our list is driven mostly by nationwide curriculum standards. Our books serve the needs of educators in supporting their efforts in educating kids. So, we choose topics based on subjects that children learn in grades K through 8.”

Michelle Bisson, former Publisher of Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, encourages authors to become familiar with what educational publishers want and how they want it. “The advice I would give is the same for whatever branch of writing a novice wants to break into: Become as familiar as you can with the books of the publishers you wish would publish you. Read, read, read their books, then read their guidelines. If you’re just starting out, start small. Try to write articles for classroom magazines or start a blog.”

Lori Shein is Managing Editor of ReferencePoint Press, which publishes series nonfiction for schools and libraries. “Writing for magazines is one good way to get experience,” she says. Shein goes on to describe the qualities of good educational writing: “I look for clear thinking; logical structure; [and] a sense that the writer understands his or her topic and can communicate it in a relatively short space, in line with the series guidelines, [its] purpose, and the age of the readers. A great book has these attributes: clarity, compelling details from real life, and context or perspective to help readers understand the importance of real and often complex events or ideas.”

Mitchell stresses the need to research and learn how to approach markets. “Many publishers accept queries and résumés for authors who want to break into the market. Check out various publishers’ websites to see if they have specifications for writing for them.”

#5: Stretch into a Series

Most educational books are parts of series. Where a trade company might publish a book about ocean life, an educational company would publish the book as one in a series that also covers life in ponds, rivers, and streams.

Bisson found that people “do not study what we do and are not aware that all of our books are published in series. In trade, of course, people have specific book ideas, but in the educational market we work in series.”

Series allow educational publishers to fit their books to curriculum needs in the most complete way. A class studying famous scientists will be more interested in a set of books about a diverse group of scientists than in one book about one person. Many educational publishers ask authors to submit series ideas only, rather than single titles.

#6: Do Your Subject Research

Aspiring educational authors need to research topics as thoroughly as markets. Rodgers looks for “evidence of strong research skills—no factual mistakes—and a willingness to work within guidelines and participate in the editing process. Responsive authors are an editor’s dream.”

Mitchell agrees that research skills are key, possibly even more important than an expert background. “Sometimes we need educational and practical background or expertise. Sometimes we just need good research skills and the ability to tell a good story.”

~ **Abdo Publishing:** 8000 W. 78th Street, Suite 310, Edina, MN 55439. www.abdopublishing.com. “Because of our curriculum-driven list and specialized market, we do not accept unsolicited manuscripts or proposals. Writers who wish to be considered for assignments may submit résumés at our website. Submission information for imprints within other divisions of Abdo Group is also available.”

~ **Editorial Directions:** 1000 W. Washington, Unit 147, Chicago, IL 60607. www.editorialdirections.com. “We don’t accept submissions. We do, however, accept résumés and *unedited* writing samples.”

~ **Lerner Publishing:** 241 First Ave. North, Minneapolis, MN 55401. www.lernerbooks.com. “We no longer accept unsolicited submissions, writing samples, or query letters.”

~ **Mitchell Lane:** P.O. Box 196, Hockessin, DE 19707. www.mitchell-lane.com. “We hire authors on a work-for-hire basis only. We do not review completed manuscripts. If you are interested in writing a book for us, please send a cover letter, résumé, and brief writing sample that does not need to be returned. We will contact you if a suitable assignment becomes available.”

~ **ReferencePoint Press:** P.O. Box 27779, San Diego, CA 92198. www.referencepointpress.com. “We work by assignment only.”

~ **Rourke Educational Media:** 1701 Highway A1A, Suite 300, Vero Beach, FL 32963. www.rourkeeducationalmedia.com. “Email your current résumé and a writing sample.”

~ **Spooky Cheetah Press:** 33 Glendale Dr., Stamford, CT 06906. spookycheetah.com. “We are not accepting submissions. I have a group of writers that I work with all the time. Sometimes I’ll look around for new voices when working on a specific project. A sample would really have to knock my socks off for me to hold a name until the next project came along. That hasn’t happened yet, so I prefer not to get inundated with submissions.”

#7: Be Prepared to Wait

Publishing is always a waiting game. In the educational market authors wait to be chosen for an assignment after sending out résumés and samples. Primm looks for “a résumé that gives me a reason to believe that the submitter has the background and ability to write nonfiction for young readers, as well as writing samples that exhibit that ability.”

“When seeking new writers, I consult the résumés I have on file,” Britton explains. “I look for authors with previously published works that have been reviewed favorably in our market’s trade journals. I also look for writers who have an educational background in the topic I have available, and those with backgrounds in early childhood or elementary education or curriculum development.”

#8: Remember the Basics!

Just like trade publishers, educational publishers aim to create great books. Educational publishers want exciting narrative that grabs the reader’s attention. “To a reader, *educational* can translate into *boring*,” says Britton.

Precious McKenzie, Senior Editor at Rourke Educational Media, looks for “clear, fun text and vibrant photos. Smart, snappy writing and video game-like graphics are a must!” McKenzie “is always looking for someone who can compose clear prose and meet tight deadlines,” and displays “engaging writing” in a submission or query.

“I firmly believe that if someone is a good writer and researcher, he or she can write about anything,” says Fitzgerald. “A good writer knows what’s interesting, first of all, and can turn that information into something that is a joy to read. Writing, like many artistic talents, is a gift. The mechanics can always be fixed, but bad writing can’t.”



audience

Only Connect!

Make Young Readers Lose Themselves in Your Books

By Sue Bradford Edwards

Whether you are writing young adult fantasy or nonfiction about animals for the grade school crowd, to succeed as a writer you must connect with your reader. Fail to do this and no one, including an editor evaluating your work, will make it to the end of your manuscript.

Close to Home

Connecting with your reader does not mean assuring that every single teen or preschooler who comes across your writing will want to read your writing. After all, no book or story is right for everyone. Focus instead on a specific child you want to reach.

For some writers, the reader search is close to home. “I write for the kid and teen I was,” fantasy author Jaclyn Dolamore says. “I think a lot of kids want the same thing I wanted—a story that transports them, a story they’ve never read before, fun and heartfelt characters.”

Nonfiction author April Pulley Sayre looks closely at what she finds interesting today. “I’m basically a kid inside, with the same joy at curious, wondrous topics in science and nature,” she says. “There’s not that much difference between something with kid appeal and grownup, curious-person appeal when it comes to a topic in science.”

Sayre’s successes show that a topic does not have to be cute and cuddly to entice kids. “I’m not known for writing about popular topics. See *Vulture View*; *Stars Beneath Your Bed: The Surprising Story of Dust*; and *Rah, Rah, Radishes: A Vegetable Chant*,” Sayre says. “It’s only recently that I’ve written about some of the more charismatic species. My new books *Eat Like a Bear* and *Here Come the Humpbacks!* (Charlesbridge) are being released [in 2013], so I’ve finally written about a few fuzzy, big, well-loved animals.” Gross and offbeat topics also pull in readers.

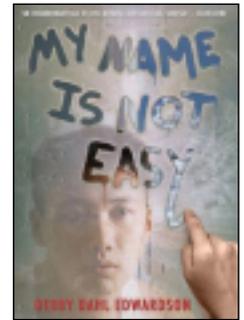
The characters you create provide a point of connection for readers. To make this connection, fiction authors develop characters who are slightly older than their readers. These characters are interested in the same things as the readers and lead lives that readers want to explore.

Nonfiction authors employ children in their narratives in

much the same way. “Once I found the story of how people in Africa trained cat-sized rats to find underground mines by smell,” says nonfiction author Ana Maria Rodriguez, who struggled to find a kid-friendly approach to the topic. “I found it when I researched the man who started the project. He had tons of mice, rats, and guinea pigs as pets when he was a boy, and learned of their excellent sense of smell.” The love of his pets provided the bridge young readers needed to make the connection. Among Rodriguez’s books are *Gray Foxes, Rattlesnakes, and Other Mysterious Animals of the Extreme Deserts* and *Edward Jenner: Conqueror of Smallpox*, both from Enslow.

What a Feeling

Love for pets, and other familiar, universal emotions, create a link whether you are writing about people similar to or very different from your reader. “You connect readers with characters very different from themselves in the same way you, as a writer, connect with characters very different from you,” says author Debby Dahl Edwardson. “You allow the reader to inhabit the character’s skin and discover what it feels like to be them.” This is how Edwardson helps readers connect with characters who live above the Arctic Circle or in a 1950s Alaskan boarding school, in titles such as the National Book Award finalist *My Name Is Not Easy* (Marshall Cavendish).



Familiar emotions help readers identify with nonfiction as well. “I wrote a book about William Penn, who many would see as a dusty old historical figure,” says author Joanne Mattern. “It turned out he had a very difficult relationship with his father, and I focused on his family problems because they made him real to me and were something I thought today’s audience could relate to.” *William Penn* was published by Chelsea House.

Brandon Miller does her best to pair emotion with quotes from her real-life historic characters. “Hand in hand with letting people speak for themselves is really

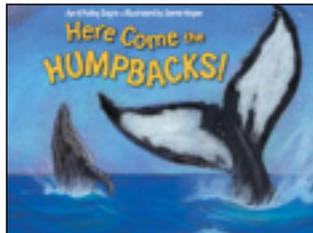


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playing up the emotions young readers can relate to—joy, fear, frustration, hope—those little nuggets of first-person history that connect with the reader. Set the scene, and let your quote finish up strong,” Miller says. “In *George Washington for Kids, His Life and Times* (Chicago Review Press) I write about Washington’s anger as he holds together his starving, ragged troops, left too long unpaid. He writes a letter to Congress, a body incapable of raising money from the states, and Washington’s pen flows with frustration: ‘I shall have learned what ingratitude is; then I shall have realized a tale which will embitter every moment of my future life!’” Every child reading this passage has been frustrated at wanting something no one can give them and, as a result, they hear Washington’s emotion loud and clear.



Working It

Finding an engaging topic and the necessary emotion will still fail if you don’t use your writing skills to tell a great story. “Focus on writing the best book you can,” says Edwardson. “Write the book that demands that you write it, and focus on doing it justice. Young readers are just like the rest of us: They want a good story. Seek out that kid inside, the one who used to get so lost inside the pages of a book that people had trouble dragging her back into the real world. Focus on telling the story the way that child wants to hear it.”

The same holds true when writing nonfiction. “Storytelling engages children, so I try to show the story behind the scientific fact,” Rodriguez says. “In my series *Animal Secrets Revealed!* (Enslow), I introduce each chapter [by] showing an intriguing or weird activity a scientist is doing. In the hagfish chapter, readers tag along with the scientist to the fish market to buy several fish heads, and they get quite a few stares! I read original research and interview scientists looking for those real actions. It’s nonfiction; nothing can be made up.”

Whether you are writing fiction or nonfiction, something has to happen. “Action, action and more action,” Rodriguez says. “Science in action captures the children’s interest. In my nonfiction articles and books, animals and people are always doing something; they tell the story.”

Action has to be woven into a larger factual web. “*Trout Are Made of Trees* (Charlesbridge) gets down to the details kids want to know—which creatures eat which, and how they survive in the stream environment,” Sayre says.

When researching these details, don’t forget to look for the offbeat. “It’s easy to get a general sense of a topic by Googling it,” says Jody Jensen Shaffer. “But the really fun information comes from scouring less well-known sources and discovering what few have read about your topic. For instance, I didn’t know you could stand in a summer wheat field and hear the wheat crack until I read about it on a wheat industry website.”

These kinds of details also bring fictional settings to life. “Start out by assuming that every setting is unfamiliar to the readers because, in a sense, it is,” Edwardson says.

“Give them enough detail to recreate your setting in their mind’s eye. No matter how commonplace your setting is, make no assumptions. No two people see a place the same way. This is your vision of it.”

Use restraint when trying to help readers connect with unfamiliar settings. “This does not mean that you engage in what I call *tourist writing*, explaining everything with a running commentary,” says Edwardson. “Find the most evocative details. Notice all the disparate little details—the sounds, the smells, the feelings—and pick those that let

your reader experience the setting the way your characters experience it. If a character is frightened, maybe the tendrils of fog look snakelike. If the same character is in love, maybe the fog looks ethereal. Put yourself into each scene, even the most familiar settings, and experience it anew.”

Dolamore adds, “One of my favorite pieces of writing advice is something like, ‘the specific is the universal.’ That is, people will identify more with a character or a setting if you make it specific, maybe a little quirky or unusual. Because everyone and every place is different. I think that also goes for writing. The more I write something specific to what I like, rather than trying to think of mass appeal, the more readers seem to like it.”

“Write about what excites you, those things that won’t let go, those things you want to read about,” says Edwardson. To connect with your reader, do not write for every child. Write for a specific child, perhaps the one you were.

HAVE FUN

One of the best ways to connect with your readers is to bring them a sense of fun. When she writes a picture book, April Pulley Sayre uses lively language. “Play with language,” she says. “My chant books, such as *Go, Go, Grapes: A Fruit Chant* (Beach Lane), do this: ‘Rah rah raspberries, go, go, grapes. Savor the flavors. Find fruity shapes.’” She does the same with other books. “I play with alliteration in lots of books, including those in prose, such as *The Bumblebee Queen* (Charlesbridge). ‘The bumblebee queen begins the spring below ground and all alone.’”

Laughter connects too. “Humor, where appropriate, is wonderful,” Brandon Miller says. “For *Good Women of a Well-Blessed Land* (Lerner) I found a newspaper quote from the late 1700s describing an *old maid* as *maggoty* and *peevish*—two words I’d never have thought to use and words that certainly struck me as amusing! In another case a man described his wife as ‘a naughty furious housewife’—very fun to include in the book. [Another was] the scene where one of George Washington’s many dogs steals a ham right off the dining table followed by a chase to retrieve dog and ham. George found this amusing and so did I!”

Humor lightens life-and-death fictional struggles. Think of comic characters such as J. K. Rowling’s Weasley twins, or the cutting one-liners of Suzanne Collins’s often intoxicated Haymitch Abernathy.

Another part of the fun is inviting your reader to get involved. “In *Polar Bears, Penguins, and Other Animals of the Extreme Cold* (Enslow), I included a hands-on activity that helps kids understand the value of blubber to polar animals,” says author Ana Maria Rodriguez. “The kids have to submerge their hand in ice-cold water with and without homemade blubber, and feel the difference.”



craft

BOOKENDS: OPENINGS & CLOSINGS



By Chris Eboch

Strong stories have distinct beginnings (introducing the main character and problem); middles (where the character tries to solve the problem); and endings (where the character succeeds or fails, and possibly learns a lesson). A story can feel especially satisfying if the end clearly echoes the beginning. When the final setting, situation, or language is similar to the opening, creating *bookends* around the middle, a story's pattern resonates.

In the opening scene of Uma Krishnaswami's *The Grand Plan to Fix Everything* (Atheneum), the narrative reads, "Two happy sighs float off the couch. . . ." Of course, something quickly intrudes on this happiness. But after a madcap adventure, the narrative concludes, "There are many kinds of sighs. The one Dini sighs now is wrapped in contentment."

Carolyn Meyer often uses a prologue and epilogue as bookends for her historical fiction. *Cleopatra Confesses* (Simon & Schuster) includes a prologue where Cleopatra hears that her enemy, Octavian, is at the gates of Alexandria. The body of the novel shows her remembering her life as she waits. In the Epilogue, Octavian has arrived, demanding her surrender.

Show the Change

While a closing bookend echoes the beginning, it should not duplicate it. A story requires change. The traveler returns with a new appreciation for his home. The girl who thought hitting a baseball was impossible knows she can succeed with hard work and determination. The boy who wanted nothing to do with the new baby appreciates his sibling. The characters have not just solved the problem; they have changed how they feel about the situation.

With bookends, the ending illustrates these changes by using a scene or language similar to, but slightly different from, the opening. If you open with a girl trying to hit a baseball, close with her at the same park, swinging at a baseball again. Try making the circumstances as similar as possible, with the same weather and other characters present, to echo the opening clearly. You might even use comparable language, with small shifts to show what has changed.

Shirley Raye Redmond's *Pup's Prairie Home* (Picture Window Books) starts with the lines, "Pup and his mom lived in a prairie dog town. Their home was a deep dark hole in the ground." Although his mother insists this is the best place for him, Pup wants a more exciting home.

He changes his mind after a close call with a hawk and ends by saying, "A deep, dark hole is the best home for a prairie dog pup like me."

Satisfying Repetition

Using bookend scenes is one form of showing rather than telling. The reader can see how things have changed, and whether or not the change has satisfied the main character. This typically suggests the theme, so you do not need to explicitly point out the lesson learned.

My story "One Froggy Night" (*Highlights*, April 2010) starts out, "I pulled back the blinds and stared into the wet night. I shivered, glad to be indoors. . . . This was a night to play games and drink hot chocolate." Dad draws the child outside, where they find dozens of frogs hopping in the rain. The narrator enjoys this outdoor adventure. The story ends,

"What a great froggy night."

Dad smiled. "I'm glad you came out."

As we walked toward home, I said, "This night just needs one thing to make it perfect."

"What's that?" asked Dad.

"Hot chocolate."

Hot chocolate now resonates, while showing that the character has learned the appeal of both exploring outside and a cozy night at home.

Bookends can work with all kinds of writing, including nonfiction. Jennifer McKerley's early reader *Amazing Armadillos* (Random House) begins and ends at the same point in the yearly cycle of the armadillo's life, but with a twist. The beginning features an adult armadillo, while the end shows her pups in the same situation in which she had started.

Illustrators can use bookends as well. In Robin Koontz's wordless picture book *Dinosaur Dream* (Putnam Juvenile), the story begins and ends with the child sleeping in bed, framing the dream adventure with dinosaurs.

Bookends are not necessary for every story, but by thinking about their possibilities, you may find a natural ending point for your story. Do not end too early, before you have had a chance to echo the beginning. And do not go on too long, traveling past the natural finish. With bookends, you can illustrate the change in the character or situation subtly but clearly, while using a repetition pattern that is especially appealing to children.

Introduce Yourself the LOI Way



By Leslie J. Wyatt

If you have ever had a brilliant idea for an article, crafted it into a killer query, and sent it off only to receive a polite “No, thank you,” then you may want to understand why an LOI (Letter of Introduction) can be a valuable marketing tool. A well-written LOI can save time and effort, and open doors a query cannot.

LOI Advantages

While a query letter proposes an angle for an article, an LOI approaches editors with your résumé and clips, apprising them of your availability for assignments. Kansas City-based freelancer Denene Brox says, “With LOIs you don’t have to come up with a specific article idea and sell it to an editor.” Brox has written for more than 30 publications, including *Heart & Soul*, *QSR*, and *Minority Nurse*.

Susan Johnston, author of *LinkedIn and Lovin’ It* (Rockable Press), and whose work also appears in print and online publications including *Bankrate.com*, the *Boston Globe*, and *U.S. News & World Report*, agrees. “The nice thing about LOIs is that you don’t need to brainstorm ideas for your target market, develop those ideas into a query, and potentially discover that the editor has just assigned your idea to someone else.”

Another advantage LOIs have over queries is time efficiency. While you still need a well-crafted letter, resume/ bio, and appropriate clips, you are spared the extra investment of idea generation and fact research.

Acceptance ratios also seem to be higher for LOIs, though again, proper targeting is key. Brox has found that LOIs work best with trade magazines. Johnston says, “Trade and custom publications . . . lend themselves to LOIs because often those publications generate story ideas in-house and assign them to freelancers, rather than soliciting freelance pitches.”

Boost Your Assignment Rate

Just as you would not send a query letter to an editor without first studying their particular needs and style, market research is essential for LOI success. Check the writers’ guidelines. If a publication states it is 80 percent freelance but articles are assigned, it may respond favorably to a letter of introduction. A publication that specifies that freelancers must query ideas will not find an LOI of much interest. Boost your rate of assignment via LOIs by targeting publications in your area of expertise.

As with queries, response times vary. Some editors will answer LOIs right away, requesting clips. Brox has found that some reply directly with assignments, while other responses came months after the LOI. Johnston’s experience lines up. She has gotten an assignment within a few hours of emailing a letter of introduction, but also has had responses come almost a year after her letter.

“Oftentimes you might not hear back from an LOI right away,” Johnston says, “so I think it’s a good idea to follow up. Also, if you get a vague response like ‘We don’t need any writers right now, but we’ll keep your information on file,’ you can always follow up a few months later, as needs can change and you want to stay on an editor’s radar.”

Template

Once you have an LOI draft you can re-use it, tweaking it for each publication. The basic elements are quite straightforward. If you are emailing your letter of introduction, a descriptive subject line is important. Examples might include your most pertinent credits, like “Freelance writer for *Highlights for Children*, *Cricket*, and more.” Or your subject line might say, “Do you need a professional children’s writer?”

Next, an effective LOI gives evidence that you have done your market research. Keep it short and specific. Mentioning an article you have enjoyed from a past issue is one alternative. Gushing about the publication is not. You also need a lead that does not beat around the bush, an inquiry as to whether the publication hires freelancers (although you should already have a good idea it does, because of your market research); and a strong list of credentials. Editors want to know what is in it for them if they say yes to you. Are you a great researcher or interviewer? What do you bring to them that they cannot live without?

If your list of clips is a bit thin, there is no need to mention that fact. “A smarter strategy is to play up any relevant experience you have to their industry,” says Brox. She sent LOIs to banking magazine editors, indicating that she had worked in banking for several years.

An effective way to wrap up your LOI is with a call to action such as “May I send you some clips?” This non-threatening request can jump-start a writing relationship. Alternately, link to your résumé and clips. It is as simple as that. So consider taking this writing tool out of your toolbox, polishing it, and seeing where an LOI will take you.

Marketplace

FEBRUARY 2013

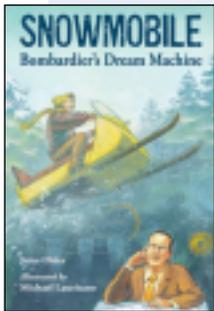


Charlesbridge

85 Main Street, Watertown, MA 02472. www.charlesbridge.com

The Charlesbridge Trade Division publishes high-quality books for children.

“We believe that books for children should offer accurate information, promote a positive world view, and embrace a child’s innate sense of wonder and fun. To this end, we continually strive to seek new voices, new visions, and new directions in children’s literature,” Editorial Assistant Karen Boss reports.



Charlesbridge publishes both picture books and transitional *bridge books* (books ranging from early readers to middle-grade chapter books). “Our nonfiction books focus on nature, science, social studies, and multicultural topics. Our fiction titles include lively, plot-driven stories with strong, engaging characters.”

The company has an exclusive submissions policy. That is, it “accepts unsolicited manuscripts submitted exclusively to us for

a period of three months. If you have not heard back from us after three months, you may assume we do not have a place for your project and submit it elsewhere. Please do not include a self-addressed stamped envelope, as we are not able to reply to every submission or return submitted work. Due to the high volume of submissions, we respond only to manuscripts of interest to us. All other manuscripts will be recycled.”

The editors ask that writers submit only one or two manuscript(s) at a time. Direct them by regular mail to the Submissions Editor, Trade Division. For picture books and shorter bridge books, send a complete manuscript. For fiction books longer than 30 manuscript pages, send a detailed plot synopsis, a chapter outline, and three chapters of text. For nonfiction books longer than 30 manuscript pages, send a detailed proposal, a chapter outline, and one to three chapters of text. Manuscripts should be typed and double-spaced. Do not submit material by email or fax. Illustrations are not necessary. For those who wish to submit illustrations, Charlesbridge’s guidelines may be found at www.charlesbridge.com/client/client_pages/illustratorguidelines.cfm.

Baseball Youth

Dugout Media, 5168 Flemingsburg Rd., P.O. Box 983, Morehead, KY 40351.

www.baseballyouth.com

For kids 7 to 13 who love baseball, this bimonthly covers everything about baseball, from youth leagues to the minors to the major leagues. *Baseball Youth* reports on events, publishes informational articles, how-tos, first-person essays, profiles, and reviews. It covers players, coaches, equipment, ballparks, and even baseball cards.

Mail, or email query with word length and availability of artwork to nathanc@dugoutmedia.com. Buys all rights. Payment rate varies.

Dimensions

1908 Association Dr., Reston, VA 20191. www.deca.org

Published quarterly by an educational association of teachers and students, DECA, *Dimensions* is a classroom publication used to prepare students for careers in the business world. It offers high school readers information and advice on entrepreneurship, leadership, college

HarperTeen Impulse

10 East 53rd Street, New York, NY 10022.

www.harpercollins.com

HarperCollins has announced a new imprint in its HarperTeen division, as the YA market continues to be exceptionally strong. HarperTeen Impulse is a digital imprint that will specialize in short fiction in the form of stories and novellas across multiple genres. Impulse offered its first titles in December, and will publish four new titles in ebook form on the first Tuesday of every month.

The imprint is open to new and established writers. HarperCollins accepts submissions through literary agents.

Impulse will rely heavily on social media, online marketing, as well as cross-promotion with print titles. HarperCollins is relying on teens’ high comfort level with technology to support digital reading of Impulse’s titles.

First titles include Sophie Jordan’s *Breathless* and Scott Westerfeld’s *Stupid Perfect World*.

admissions, job skills, service, sales, e-commerce, finance, technology, advertising, marketing, and management.

Mail or email query or send complete manuscript with author biography. Email to deca_dimensions@deca.org. Articles, 800 to 1,200 words. Departments and columns, 400 to 600 words. Buys first serial rights. Payment rates vary. Pays on publication.

Kasma

www.kasmamagazine.com

Kasma is a digital science fiction magazine that is currently open to submissions. It prefers stories 1,000 to 5,000 words, and is not closed to longer. Fantasy and other genres are not published often, but submissions of these stories are considered.

It looks for “fiction that is intelligent, with well-thought out plots and characters. Beyond this, exactly what happens in your world with your characters is up to you. We enjoy a broad range and don’t want to stifle author creativity by having elaborate expectations. Often enough, the best stories come as a surprise.”

Email stories in the body of the email to editors@kasmamagazine.com. Stories, \$25. Buys nonexclusive publishing rights or reprint rights.

Miraj Audiobooks

www.mirajaudiobooks.com/

This new company, based in Britain, is looking for stories for children ages 5 to 12. Writers should be able to provide “simple, evocative English, and portray character and plot through dialogue.” Miraj’s specialty is Islamic spoken word stories. It is looking for retold stories about the prophets (but not Jonah or Noah), the life of Muhammad, and Muslim heroes, scientists, and travelers. It is potentially interested in historical fiction.

Email a story, 2,500 to 5,000 words, and cover letter to adiba@mirajaudiobooks.com. Attach the story as a Word document and put “Submission” in the email subject line.

Alateen Talk

Al-Anon Family Group, 1600 Corporate Landing Parkway, Virginia Beach, VA 23454. www.al-anon.alateen.org/alateen-talk

Alateen Talk targets kids 6 to 18 whose lives have been affected by substance abusers. Young people may share personal experiences or offer self-help information, in articles for this quarterly. It publishes as many as 120 freelance submissions each year.

Buys all rights. No payment.

Gamesbeat

<http://venturebeat.com/about-gamesbeat/>

Gamesbeat, a part of VentureBeat, covers the gaming world and is open to contributors. It looks for “intelligent editorial content that has personality, honesty, and integrity” but is also fun and informative about “our beloved hobby.”

Interested writers may post a story, which then enters a queue for vetting. If approved, the article will be edited and added to the front page of *GamesBeat*. The editors believe “This is a place for good writers to thrive and stand out”

Good grammar, insight about gaming, and great headlines help toward acceptance. To earn income, writers may link to a Google AdSense account from *Gamesbeat*.

Publishing News

~ [Ruckus Media](#), which produces children’s products across many media, released its app for Apple devices. It currently has 100 interactive titles, ebooks, and videos.

~ [Simon & Schuster](#) is starting a self-publishing division, with Author Solutions, called [Archway Publishing](#). It will produce children’s books, and adult fiction, and nonfiction.

~ [Hachette Book Group](#) announced it is adding an imprint to its Orbit Division. [Redhook](#) will be a commercial fiction line publishing one or two titles a month beginning April 2013. The Orbit division originally was known for science fiction and fantasy and later combined with Yen Press, which published graphic novels.

Sucker Magazine

<http://suckerliterarymagazine.wordpress.com/submission-guidelines>

The mission of this online literary magazine is to showcase new, undiscovered writers for young adults. It is open to submissions in a reading period dating from February 1 to May 1.

Submissions may be short stories or novel excerpts, to 10,000 words. Protagonists must be between 14 and 20 years old. Also include a brief summary (no more than three sentences), a brief explanation of its place in a larger work if a novel excerpt, and whether and when the piece has been published elsewhere.

Email to suckerliterary@gmail.com. Writers retain all rights. No payment at the current time, though that is expected to change. The editor is willing to mentor some writers through revisions.

Warner Press

1201 East Fifth St., Anderson, IN 46012.

www.warnerpress.org

Warner Press is a Christian publisher that includes children’s picture books, and coloring books on its list. It also is known for publishing devotionals.

The 15-page coloring and activity books should have an easy-to-read style, and a biblical theme such as love or forgiveness. They are directed at either preschool, ages 2 to 5, or elementary age children. Upper elementary books include activities and puzzles. Submission deadlines are January 31 and July 31. Payment varies.

The company’s four to six picture books annually also have Christian themes. Warner is open to queries with a brief summary and your experience. Mail to Acquisitions Editor Robin Fogle.

Marketplace

Scarletta

10 South Fifth Street, Suite 1105, Minneapolis, MN 55402

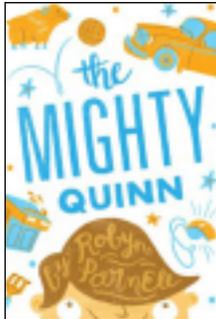
www.scarlettapress.com

Early in 2012, the small independent company Scarletta Press began focusing more closely on children's fiction, including middle-grade educational, and picture books. A year later, it has moved further in this direction and will now be known as Scarletta. It will have four imprints, including Scarletta Press, but also Scarletta Kids, Scarletta Junior, and Red Portal Press.

Scarletta will continue to publish adult titles but aims to clarify and highlight its children's books with the new imprint structure. They are published for both trade and educational markets and include fiction and nonfiction. Scarletta Junior is the new middle-grade imprint. Scarletta Kids is the picture and storybook imprint for younger children. Red Portal Press is a new self-publishing imprint, and Scarletta Press is the solely adult line.

The company will publish ten children's books this year.

The reading period extends from November 1 to March 1. Send a cover letter, synopsis, and 1 or 2 chapters, up to 30 pages. Email to info@scarlettapress.com or send by regular mail.



Piñata Books

Arte Público Press, University of Houston, 4902 Gulf Freeway, Building 19, Room 100, Houston, TX 77204. www.latinoteca.com

Piñata Books is the children's imprint of Arte Público Press, which is affiliated with the University of Houston. Piñata specializes in books for kids and teens that focus on Hispanic culture in the United States, including Cuban and Mexican American, Puerto Rican, and others. It publishes about 10 titles annually.

Picture books, middle-grade novels, YA novels, and short story collections must all have subjects, themes, characters, customs and stories representative and of interest to young Hispanic readers.

Query with sample chapters or send complete manuscript in English or Spanish. Piñata Books accepts electronic submissions through a form on the website; it accepts Word, plain text, and Rich Text files.

Shine Brightly

P.O. Box 7259, Grand Rapids, MI 49510. www.gemsgc.org

The audience of *Shine Brightly!* is girls 9 to 14. It is published by the Christian GEMS Girls Clubs. Its aim is to inspire and prepare girls to use their voices to "shine brightly" and change the world, through their faith and belief. Every year, the magazine selects a theme to focus on for its nine issues. The current theme is Think Right: Win the Fight!, to "help girls look at their thoughts and how thinking about what they think about impacts who they become."

Shine Brightly! looks for stories, articles, interviews, personal experience pieces, humor, and activities that are

original and upbeat, but offer a realistic view of living daily as a Christian. Subjects might deal with social issues, community service, friends and family, the arts, animals, fitness, and fashion. Fiction genres include inspirational, adventure, mystery, and science fiction.

Email a complete manuscript in the body of the email to shinebrightly@gemsgc.org (no attachments). Articles, 100 to 800 words. Fiction: 700 to 900 words. Buys first, second, and simultaneous rights. Articles and fiction, 3¢ to 5¢ a word, to \$35. Poetry, games, and puzzles, \$5 to \$15. Pays on publication.

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