

Children's Writer®

Newsletter of Writing
and Publishing Trends

CONTENTS

VOLUME 22 NUMBER 6

Feature 4

The Passion Litmus Test:
Politics, Social Issues,
Controversies & Young
Readers



Marketing 6

The Perils & Perks of
Social Media for Writers

Time Management 8

Creative Cycles:
A Time to Write



Profession 9

The Good, the Bad,
& the Ugly of Reviews

Marketplace 10

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An Audience of Amateurs: Writing for Emerging & Reluctant Readers

By Katherine Swarts

Typical five- to seven-year-olds have something in common with a subset of middle-graders and teens: They do not yet have the tools to make them independent readers. Emerging readers and older, reluctant readers require special writing to help them acquire skills and become enthusiastic about reading. Structuring language and story for these readers is not difficult in itself, but writers must not compose boring, simple-to-read materials that send a signal they are intended for simple-minded readers.

"If you write *down* to any audience, you are not being true to that audience. Write to them," says Sheila Seifert, Editorial Director of *Thriving Family* and co-author of four middle-grade *Strive to Survive* books (David C. Cook).

Susan Blackaby, author of more than 150 educational books for emerging and reluctant readers, advises, "First, do not underestimate your audience; ability to read does not correlate to intelligence. Second, be mindful of the demands you are putting on your reader: dependent clauses, sentence fragments, and oddball punctuation can buckle a struggling reader as swiftly as high-falutin' vocabulary and jumpy chronology."

"Be aware of the reading process as you write," says Judy Cox, author of *The Secret Chicken Society* (Holiday House). "You never want to condescend to readers, but you don't want to lose them either. Think of the elegant simplicity of Arnold Lobel's *Frog and Toad* series."

Test Run

To be sure you are writing to the right level, test your work on representatives of your intended audience. "Spend time listening to kids read out loud from your manuscripts," says Marianne Hering, Book Editor at Focus on the Family Publishing. "That way, you can hear when they stumble. You can also ask questions to make sure your material is being accessed."

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In this process, kindly seek out the strugglers. "You'll be amazed at how little things throw poor readers off," says Hering. "And you'll find that longer words are easier to remember. For example, once [struggling readers] know the word *tyrannosaurus* is in the book, they won't misread it. But they will continue to stumble over (To page 2)

Emerging *when and went, his and this, was and saw.*” (Remember that all of us have a touch of dyslexia; even bestselling authors and reading addicts have had the experience of going to 4839 Main Street instead of 4389.)

“Emergent readers love repetition,” says Kathleen Hayes, Editor of *Highlights High Five*. “They quickly learn what to expect at each page turn and can soon chime in. Both emergent and reluctant readers enjoy series; *High Five* subscribers tell me their children eagerly await the next installment of ‘The Adventures of Spot’ and ‘Tex and Indi.’ Emergent readers can use what they’ve previously learned about the characters to make sense of each new story. And if reluctant readers enjoy a book or magazine feature that’s part of a series, they will be more likely to try another one because they’ve learned they can read the text.”

Give 'Em What They Want

Another important factor for emerging and reluctant readers: Use subjects and genres with high appeal. Hering suggests: “Action. Adventure. Humor. Subjects kids are already interested in.” If the emotional reward is great,

SOURCES & MARKETS

- ~ Focus on the Family Publishing: 8605 Explorer Dr., Colorado Springs, CO 80920. www.focusonthefamily.com
- ~ Highlights High Five: 807 Church St., Honesdale, PA 18431. www.highlights.com. *Highlights High Five*, for ages 2 to 6, is closed to freelancers but *Highlights for Children*, for ages 6 to 12, is very open to good writers.
- ~ Lee & Low Books: 95 Madison Ave., Suite 1205, New York, NY 10016. www.leeandlow.com
- ~ Our Little Friend, Primary Treasure: Pacific Press Publishing Association, P.O. Box 5353, Nampa, ID 83653. www.ourlittlefriend.com, www.primarytreasure.com, www.adventistbookcenter.com
- ~ Thriving Family: Focus on the Family, 8605 Explorer Dr., Colorado Springs, CO 80920. www.thrivingfamily.com

More Markets

- ~ Abdo Publishing: 8000 West 78th St., Suite 310, Edina, MN 55439. www.abdopublishing.com. Leveled readers are published under the Magic Wagon imprint.
- ~ Amicus Publishing: P.O. Box 1329, Mankato, MN 56002. www.amicuspublishing.us. Amicus Readers is a line of leveled readers, and Amicus High Interest targets grades two to six. (For example, see its *Monster Mania* set, including *Vampires*, pictured here.)
- ~ Capstone Publishers: 151 Good Counsel Dr., Mankato, MN 56001. www.capstonepub.com. The Capstone Press imprint specializes in reluctant readers.
- ~ High Noon Books: 20 Commercial Blvd., Novato, CA 94949. www.highnoonbooks.com. Specializes in struggling readers.
- ~ Pieces of Learning: 1990 Market Road, Marion, IL 62959. www.piecesoflearning.com
- ~ Shell Education: 5301 Oceanus Dr., Huntington Beach, CA 92649. www.shelleducation.com
- ~ Toon Books: 27 Greene St., New York, NY 10013. www.toon-books.com. Targets emerging readers in a “radical” way, with visuals, originality, and skill-building.

kids are willing to work hard, even at reading. When even good readers complain about boring school topics, why would struggling readers embrace materials that are difficult and dull?

“Find topics and plots that will pull a reader in from the very first page,” says Hayes. “Give them something to grab onto and they will be more likely to stay with you for the entire ride, even if it’s above their instructional reading level. Content will trump every time.”

Louise E. May, Vice President and Editorial Director of Lee & Low Books, says, “Kids like and need stories that build on their prior knowledge, that have familiar vocabulary with a few challenging words, and that they can relate to easily.”

“Focus on the reader’s experience and frame of reference,” says Blackaby. “Kids want characters they can relate to.”

Find out what kids are already reading by choice. Reluctant readers, especially, want to read about topics

that other kids are reading about, but at their own skill level.

“Find a bestseller list online,” says Hering. “Or ask a librarian or children’s bookstore sales associate.” Note that preferences can “change dramatically [by] region, school, and demographics.” Some regions are more conservative or liberal, and religious and



ethnic populations vary, as do lifestyles. Subjects of interest to a kid from a Texas ranching family may not be the same as those of a kid from South Boston. While preference variations are not generally a major issue, they are considerations in marketing plans, particularly with regional and educational titles.

Read the popular books to get a real feel for what resonates with readers. “Study other books for the age or skill group,” says May. “Look at topics, plot development, dialogue, sentence length and structure, vocabulary.”

Read about kids too. “Child-development books are a good place to find out about emotional levels of development,” says Cox, “something would-be children’s authors often overlook.”

Again, says Hayes, “Spend time around your target audience. What are they interested in? What are they talking about?” Cox agrees: “Spend a lot of time with the age group you plan to write for. Listen to them to get a feel for appropriate dialogue.”

So, What’s the Difference?

Whatever the commonalities between emerging and reluctant readers, they remain two distinct groups. “The terms *emergent readers* and *reluctant readers* are not interchangeable,” says Cox. “Emergent readers are children who are just learning to read. Reluctant readers are people who don’t choose to read, or whose lack of skills or cognitive

abilities make reading difficult.”

The dividing line is not solely age-based, or skill-based. “One key difference lies in motivation,” says May. “Emerging readers are usually eager to grow their skills. Reluctant readers are less motivated because their skills may be lagging or because they simply do not find materials interesting to read, while emerging readers tend to be interested in any story they can master—the success factor makes them eager. Another key difference lies in skills. Emerging readers are actively acquiring skills. Reluctant readers have some skills, but [these are often poor] and therefore [the kids] struggle to read and do not find it enjoyable or useful. Or reluctant readers may even have good reading

Why write for emerging or reluctant readers? “Emerging readers are interested in any story they can master . . . They are eager.” Reluctant readers deserve to “be engaged” with books.

skills, but do not find reading to be an engaging activity.”

Ability is less important than attitude as a distinguishing factor. Cox says, “Emergent readers are often excited about learning to read. Reluctant readers can have basic skills, but for one reason or another, the process of reading isn’t enjoyable. They need lots of dialogue and action and suspense, and a fair amount of white space—no long passages of narrative!”

“Reluctant readers complain about reading,” says Hering. “They fidget and try to get the tutor or teacher to change the tasks.” Where skill is a factor, such readers “are usually poor in sounding out words, and can read a paragraph and not be able to answer what the paragraph was about.”

Hayes says, “Reluctant readers are not necessarily reading below grade level, but often they become reluctant because what they are asked to read is too challenging.”

For the writer, distinguishing between types of readers is only important insofar as it helps you understand your audience. Up to third or fourth grade—even older where the issue is not skill, but interest—the only real concern is that the writer who expects reluctant readers in the audience must give special attention to making the story not merely interesting, but fascinating.

Once unskilled reluctant readers enter the late elementary years, there comes a new challenge: combining age-appropriate topics with a reading level more commonly associated with younger children, in what is frequently called *hi/lo* writing—high interest/low reading level.

Writers new to composing a story targeted to a specific reading level may wonder about reading level analysis, the software programs for analyzing manuscript readability, and the companies that created them. Experienced writers and editors are nearly unanimous: these programs can be useful, but as with automatic spell checkers, they will disappoint if expected to relieve the writer of a personal editing job.

“I [do] use software to measure the reading level” of manuscripts, says author Judy Cox, “but programs should be taken with a grain of salt. In a short passage, a single word can skew the result.”

For most projects, says Focus on the Family Publishing’s Marianne Hering, “I use the Flesch-Kincaid scale,” but “combined with my expertise. Flesch-Kincaid helps with sentence and paragraph and word length, but it does not evaluate based on vocabulary difficulty. I could have a manuscript with 17 different 9-letter words and a manuscript with the same 9-letter word appearing 17 times, and I’d get the same score for each, even though the second is obviously easier.”

Most important, no software comes close to human capacity for evaluating on the emotional level. “A program may tell a writer that some of the vocabulary is too difficult for a specific audience,” says Louise May, of Lee & Low, “or that there are too many long sentences, but a program will not help a writer create an engaging story.”

So use reading-level analysis software if you will, but do not accept the results unquestioningly. And remember that creating a salable plot or topic focus is still your responsibility.

Writers must not unconsciously imply—to a group that is usually sensitive about the issue already—that anyone whose reading skills are on a second-grade level must have an intellectual development level to match.

Unskilled Past Their Assigned Time

Interest, respect, and especially knowing the audience are key. Reluctant readers who “have educational challenges that keep them from reading at their prescribed level,” says Seifert, “need books that are at a lower reading level but have the intensity of plot appreciated by their age group.”

“Reluctant readers need more sophisticated content written at a manageable level, which may be quite low. It is a challenge, but critical, to provide them with topical and relevant materials. Age-appropriate content is the same for struggling readers as for whiz readers,” says Blackaby.

But don’t get so hung up on *readable* writing that you forget other essentials. As Aileen Andres Sox, Editor of the Christian magazine *Primary Treasure* (for ages seven to nine), succinctly puts it: “I don’t feel it is my job to teach reading skills. It is my job to teach spiritual truths.”

Ultimately, commit yourself to being an effective writer. “Strive to hit the benchmarks” of high-quality writing, says Blackaby, “even if—maybe especially *if*—restricted by specs such as ‘text must adhere to a word list.’ The voice must still be strong, the characters engaging, the setting vivid, and the plot compelling.”

Does Your Book Pass the Passion Litmus Test?

Politics, Social Issues, Controversies & Young Readers

By Judy Bradbury

As this issue of *Children's Writer* goes into production in November, the presidential election is newly over, but the pundits, and the stock market, continue to react. Today's world is a fast-changing place that ultimately belongs to the next generation. Offering young readers perspectives on the ebb and flow of politics, social issues, and controversies can be more than a bit tricky. Drawing young readers in with absorbing text that engages them to think critically about an issue, or consider alternative outlooks, takes skill, and deep insight into the subject, audience—and your reasons for writing about it.

Reaching the Reader

"The ability to break down the wall between the writer and the reader and get right to the human stuff at the core of an issue makes it easier to connect and harder for the reader to say, 'Well, this has nothing to do with me,'" reflects freelance editor Sarah Moon, who co-edited *The Letter Q: Queer Writers' Notes to Their Younger Selves* for Scholastic's Arthur A. Levine Books.

The same can be said for books offering a historical perspective. "Young readers tend to see the past as a giant overview with the same cast of characters," says Carolyn Yoder, Senior Editor at Calkins Creek Books and History Editor at *Highlights for Children*. "At Calkins Creek, we have combined biography and social issues, highlighting people and events that have not been widely covered before—unsung heroes such as Bayard Rustin, Jeannette Rankin, Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth, and Eugene "Bull" Connor. These books are about people who are passionate about social causes, people who are all about change."

In terms of novels, Noa Wheeler, Editor at Henry Holt, says, "It needs to be a story, first and foremost. If the book exists just to address an issue, it can fall flat. The novel can teach something, it can support an opinion—but the author should never lose sight of the story. In real life we experience something and we learn from it, drawing our own conclusions. A book works the same way, exposing the reader to an issue and letting him or her experience it."

Wendy Lamb, Vice President and Publishing Director of her own imprint at Random House, lists features of well-conceived and well-written books in this category. "Ideally, the political or social drama is integrated into the characters' lives seamlessly, and we get a deep understanding of the impact of the situation through the young person's eyes. The reader learns how it feels on the kid's level, such as what it's like to live in a union family in a town torn apart by a strike, or when a family member takes a public stand on an issue that attracts hostility. How does this play out at school, among friends, in the neighborhood? Or the child could be the one who feels passionately about an issue that challenges his or her family, or puts someone dear at risk. It also could be a funny story of a kid who's inspired to come up with a wacky campaign or community project that has unintentional results."

Catherine Frank, founder of Catherine Frank Editorial Services and former Executive Editor of Viking Children's Books, finds, "Books that tackle challenging sub-



jects stand out and spark attention when they offer a passionate narrative voice, a point of view presented with conviction, strong storytelling, impeccable research and fact-checking, visual elements that elevate and extend the story, and, most important, something new—whether it's a story that's never been told, facts that have never been linked together before, or a perspective that's never been considered."

Moon looks for intimacy, which she experienced in books that influenced her when she was young, like *Am I Blue? Coming Out from the Silence*. She also believes, "Brevity is key. I think short can take you pretty far. I also think that steering away from platitudes is essential. From my experience working with teenagers, I can say they have no patience for anything they think is untrue or cliché. Trying to get as much truth on the page as one can without sounding saccharine or carrying on too long is very high on my list of must-haves."

Lamb agrees. "Don't be didactic. Write deeply. The details of the social issue or controversy must come naturally through the young protagonist's eyes."

No Agendas

As most of us know, pushing an issue with tweens or teens often ends in the opposite of what you are looking to achieve. "As much as I believe an author must be passionate about her subject, it's important that the writing not feel as though it has an agenda. There's always another side to a story, and that can't be ignored in a political or social book," says Frank. "One of my favorite questions to ask an author is, 'Why this particular subject?' I think of it

MARKETS & SOURCES

- ~ **Calkins Creek:** www.boydsmillspress.com. Open to submissions on U.S. history, backed by original research and writing.
- ~ **Henry Holt:** <http://us.macmillan.com/holtyoungreaders.aspx>. Agented submissions only.
- ~ **Wendy Lamb Books:** www.randomhouse.com/kids. Send a brief cover letter, one-paragraph synopsis, and the first three chapters of a middle-grade or YA manuscript. No picture books.
- ~ **Arthur A. Levine Books:** www.arthuralevinebooks.com. This Scholastic imprint is open to queries. See guidelines online.
- ~ **Viking:** <http://us.penguin.com>. Agented authors preferred. Other children's imprints of Penguin do accept hard copy submissions. See guidelines online.

as a sort of passion litmus test. Writing a book that explores controversial territory takes an enormous amount of dedication, so an author needs to be certain he wants to commit. That question is often followed by, “Why now?”

While at Viking, Frank edited *Marching For Freedom: Walk Together Children and Don't You Grow Weary*, by Elizabeth Partridge, which she describes as “a dynamic package, a perfect combination of text and visuals, and an emotional experience that stays with you.” Sometimes, says Frank, “Inspiration strikes like lightning, as was the case with *Marching For Freedom*. The accidental discovery of a trove of haunting photographs grabbed Betsy and wouldn't let go. And the second she shared them with me, I was as hooked as she was. There was no question what the subject of the book would be, but we needed to figure out exactly what story needed to be told. Other times, an issue slowly works its way under an author's skin until it can't be ignored and has to be written.”

With historical subjects, Yoder finds, “It's hard to shed modern sensibilities and biases, so writers need to delve deep. What the author chooses to reveal and emphasize is key: Why is the author telling this particular story, why does it need to be told, how is it being told, and how does it speak to the young reader?”

Frank says, “It's important to identify the right format for your topic. Should it be narrative nonfiction? Could it be a biography? Would it work to express your views through a fictional story? Every story could be told in more than one way; it's just a question of knowing what's right for you.”

Issues Wanted

What are the social, political, or controversial subjects that these editors like to see covered?

Lamb says, “It would be great to see more books connected to politics that naturally dramatize how important it is to have a sense of civic duty, and to *vote!* In May 2013, I will publish *Vote*, by Gary Paulsen—a funny book about eighth-grade boys running for student body president. Terrific, dramatic books help kids see that they can play a role in local government and feel excited about the idea. Books about civic duty or community can bring that home to them in entertaining ways. Being online, pressure for high performance in school, and individuation in technology means that many kids don't have the same sense of community as older people do. And adults aren't setting an example as they once did because people now work such long hours and retire later in life. Adults aren't volunteering, attending town meetings, or running for local office as much as they used to. So children's books can play a key role here.”

Lamb also observes that books about ecological drama have increased, “so we might not have such a need there. Many dystopian books make readers think hard about how we must do more *now* to protect the environment.”

“Roger Sutton, the Editor in Chief of *The Horn Book*, wrote a blog post last year about how abortion is the last taboo in children's literature. I think he's largely right,” says Wheeler. “There are certainly books which have abortion as an issue (whether or not the abortion actually happens), but it remains a topic that doesn't come up much. I think this is a reflection of American discomfort with abortion and the issues surrounding it. I wouldn't necessarily be the right editor for such books, but I do think they're

TOPICS TO CONSIDER

The Gale/Cengage imprints Greenhaven Press and Lucent Books publish multiple series about social, political, and cultural issues. They include: *Opposing Viewpoints*, *Global Viewpoints*, *Social Viewpoints in Literature*, *At Issue*, and *Current Controversies*. Some of the topics covered by these series (and a potential subject list for writers of fiction or nonfiction for many other publishers) are:

abortion	climate change	labor laws & unions
ADHD/ODD	college costs	natural disasters
adoption	corporate, government, or police	oil spills
affirmative action	corruption	overmedication
age of consent	date rape	political financing
alternative prisons	democracy around the world	privacy rights
animal experimentation	DNA databases	religious discrimination
antisemitism	eating disorders	social networking
assimilation	government bailouts	stem cells
athletes as role models	guns	substance abuse
celebrity influence	immigration	terrorism
child predators	Internet crime	textbook bias
		wealth & poverty

important. I was a teenager who turned to books for everything, and I can only imagine that a teenager dealing with the idea of abortion in any way (whether it be personal, regarding a friend or parent, or just trying to decide what to think about the issue), would hope to find help in a book.”

Moon says, “I think there is more need for LGBTQ issues to be covered in children's literature, and I think there's a serious underrepresentation of books featuring children of color (without being *about* children of color), particularly in the YA market,” notes Moon.

“It's easy for the gatekeepers—the authors, publishers, and market influencers—to forget that what we as adults recall as the very recent past is in fact history for children,” Frank reflects. “It isn't always necessary to look back 50 years for inspiration, specially when your audience wasn't yet born at the turn of the twenty-first century. Understanding and relating to the young reader's perspective is crucial. For that reason, I'd love to see more books that touch on some of the issues the world has faced in just the last ten years.”

Yoder likes “to be surprised by authors' passions. Bayard Rustin, Jeannette Rankin, and Mercy Otis Warren came to me that way. I was drawn in by why the authors had to tell their stories. *ICE! The Amazing History of the Ice Business*, by Laurence Pringle, asks kids to think about the cold drinks and frozen foods they eat—the history of how ice came into homes and businesses. I think kids will say, ‘Cool! I didn't know that!’ And, perhaps they will begin to see the past as evolutionary history, that the things they take for granted came about because of struggle, passion, and courage.” Yoder also cites *Write On, Mercy! The Secret Life of Mercy Otis Warren*, by Gretchen Woelfle. It is “a biography of a Revolutionary War poet who made a difference by writing about her opinions/ideas. Young readers see the war from another angle, and see how one woman made a difference—how she explored her feelings and made them known—at a time when most women were not outspoken. There are a lot of exciting, groundbreaking books out there, books about unsung heroes and books that uncover new information or dissect individuals' motivations, and I'm very happy about that!”

The Perils & Perks of Social Media for Writers

By Christina Hamlett

Need to reach the masses with a message? Long gone are the days of town criers, over-the-fence gossip, and flyers thumbtacked to community bulletin boards. Even traditional delivery systems such as letters, newspapers, and magazines are waning, pushed aside by the popularity and expediency of social media. Today, more than 1 billion people regularly use Facebook, 4 billion view YouTube videos daily, and 100 million subscribe to networking sites such as LinkedIn, Twitter, and Google+. Websites number 400 million worldwide, and blogs, podcasts, and chat rooms on every topic imaginable are countless.

These are round-the-clock platforms, often available at little or no cost to users. Yet with so many voices all talking at once, does anyone really listen?

Image & Engagements

“Social media is a necessary part of creating a brand and building an audience but there needs to be a strategy,” advises Dana Kaye, owner of Kaye Publicity. “Too many authors simply sign up for every account and start posting. It’s much better to map out goals, identify the correct audience, and create a persona before signing up for social media accounts.” She also cautions against posting controversial topics that can alienate a large percentage of your audience. “Too much blatant self-promotion can irritate followers and cause a decrease in readership. Too much complaining is also a major turnoff.”

Author Liz Fichera warns, “Too much of a good thing can be boring! Don’t become someone else’s *white noise*. Like the person who talks too much and then gets ignored, don’t overtweet, overpost, over-anything. People don’t need or want to hear about how you spend every minute of every day unless, of course, you’re J. K. Rowling or Stephen King, and even then there are limits to a person’s patience. The best way to promote yourself using social media is to not promote yourself. Engage with people first. Direct promotion should be secondary. And, above all, don’t call people who want to engage with you *followers* unless you’re starting a cult.”

“It’s getting so if I find out an author doesn’t have a website or a Twitter account, they seem like a hermit,” says Lissa Price, international best-selling author of the YA thriller, *Starters* (Delacorte). “Now we’ve all heard about the one percent who do harm to their names by getting too political or engaging in troll wars. Just don’t do it. The



worst is when authors make catty remarks about other authors. Everyone sees through that. Always be kind and respectful. Think before tweeting.”

“Any negative engagement with your audience—be it readers, reviewers, or authors—always reflects poorly,” says Ashley Ream, author of *Losing Clementine* (William Morrow). “Almost as bad is forgetting that social media is about building relationships, not about providing an all-advertising-all-the-time channel. Just like it’s important to have a strong, authentic voice in your novels, you have to have a strong, authentic voice on social media. If you follow me, you can expect humor and an insider’s look at the writing process and the city of Los Angeles. Success comes from being known for talking about something in particular.”

James W. Lewis, Managing Partner of a small publishing company called the Pantheon Collective, believes that social media audiences like to know more about authors as individuals, not just about what they have written. “If an author is constantly posting buy-my-book comments and not engaging their audience in other ways, people will eventually grow tired of the daily sales pitches. Also, if an author is spending too much time on social media, it takes away from writing. Ultimately, an author needs to scale back on social media and focus on the next project.”

As an “author maximizer,” editor, and author, Suzanne Kingsbury reminds clients that they are stepping into the role of a public figure. “Your name and online presence are actually your brand. What do you want to stand for? Who are you appealing to? If you’re planning to appeal to retirees who bake pies, make sure you don’t have pictures of yourself on Facebook doing belly-shots in your bra at a downtown bar. Everything you put on the web must have integrity with both your books and your audience.”

Social media provides alternatives, says JP Jones (*Market Yourself: A Beginner’s Guide to Social Media and 31 Days of Marketing*): “I think it actually opens up a new facet where [authors] can explore and test new avenues of writing; i.e., it allows them creativity that may not be expressible within their books or typical genre, and gives them a chance to let their hair down. And, as with all social media, it helps authors to connect with their peers—all of whom are also squirreled away in their offices typing their latest manuscripts.”

Creative Spins

To stand out, you clearly need to do something distinctive with your social media interactions. For Patricia Bubash,



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author of *Successful Second Marriages*, the answer came in the form of Blog Talk Radio. “This seems to be a growing way of communicating on a diversity of topics. The variety of people who have interviewed me has not only been interesting but supportive, too. I’ve also been fortunate to discover the Reporter Connection website (www.reporter-connection.com). Through my answering of queries, I’ve connected to other authors who have given me ideas for resources, connecting to people to spread the word about my book.”

Kaye talks about working “with a debut author, Lynn Sheene, whose novel [*The Last Time I Saw Paris* (Berkley)] is set in Nazi-occupied Paris. Her book cover is gorgeous, so when she traveled to Paris for research, I had her take photos of her book in front of famous landmarks. Her social media followers had to guess the location for a chance to win an advance copy. We tripled her social media following in less than a month!”

Author Herman McElfresh routinely supplements his press releases with posts on his Facebook page. “Press releases aren’t normally made available to book readers or the general public. Those who visit my author page then pick up on the release and tell their friends about it. I do the same with my LinkedIn account.”

Lewis started a Facebook contest in which anyone who used the cover of one of his company’s books as their profile picture was eligible to win a \$50 gift certificate. “Twenty people entered and the book was exposed to over 10,000 Facebook members who were in no way connected to me. Many of them were curious about the book, which led to them wanting to learn more and in some cases, securing book sales prior to the contest ending.” Lewis also uses social media to find book clubs. “I’ve met with at least 20 clubs in the past two years, which has been fantastic for sales.”

“How would you spend the last 30 days of your life?” To tie in with her novel’s theme about a suicidal artist with a month left to live, Ream posed this question to prospective readers. “On each of the 30 days before publication, we used social media to ask readers a specific question about how they would use their last 30 days and awarded the winning respondent with a book gift basket.”

Price went the competition route as well. “The goal of my flash contest was to drive more readers to a blog post I had posted on League of Extraordinary Writers (www.leaguewriters.blogspot.com). I had Twitterers guess what a necklace represented. After the tweet and then a Facebook post, the contest followed in the blog comments. I sent a signed hardcover of *Starters* to the winner.”

“One of the most creative examples I’ve seen,” says Jones, “is the set-up of Twitter accounts for main characters in a series and then dialoguing with the author’s account, and vice versa; i.e., the character talking with the author about ‘scenes’ they didn’t like or how they would’ve written the book.”

Dave Mattingly, President of BlackWyrn Publishing, is another advocate of giving fictional characters an online presence. “We’ve promoted over a dozen authors via social media, blogs, videos, contests, and other online methods. Our Kindle ebook giveaway program was actively promoted by our authors, and cross-promoted into friends of friends

networks to the point that some of our titles have shot up to number one.”

To promote *Space Scrapers* and *Gaia’s Children*, author Camilla Stein held online book release events and discussions. “I also work for a publishing house that centers all of its book marketing strategies around social media, actively incorporating the Internet in PR and sales efforts. We’ve also established an online book club and are moving on with an innovative project to connect authors and audiences thru online mediums live.”

Find the Best Fit

With multiple social media platforms to choose from, how do you go about finding the most effective match for what you have to say and who you want to reach?

“Every social media outlet has different reasons for being the best,” says Kingsbury. “Are you a poet who can say a lot in a few words? Go for Twitter. Are you a social writer who gets lonely by yourself all day at your writing desk? Set up a Facebook *Like* page. And remember, it can be a Like page for anything, not just you or your books. If you’re an author—particularly a memoir or fiction writer who can write about pretty much anything—go for a blog.”

“Teens spend most of their time on Twitter and Tumblr,” Kaye points out, “so I focus on those platforms for my YA authors. The older generation is more likely to be on Facebook or read blogs. Once authors identify their audience, they can make an informed decision on where to focus their efforts.”

Price says, “An agent posted that she wouldn’t ask for pages if the writer didn’t have a site. So I felt that was the top priority of my social media choices. I taught myself Wordpress, and built my own website. Twitter is my favorite, though; it’s my daily way to communicate with authors and fans and even conduct business.”

Ella Roberts, author of the supernatural novel *The Run: London’s Secret*, is a fan of both Facebook and Twitter. “With Facebook I get to see who I’m talking to, and based on their profile information, can personalize the information about the book I share. Twitter allows me to blast excerpts and teasers out. I also co-host a television show so I use those social media profiles [there] as well, along with cross-promoting through blogging.”

Bubash has found LinkedIn to be an effective networking channel with kindred-spirit professionals. Lewis chooses social media outlets—Twitter, GoodReads, and Facebook—based on the active engagement of members, popularity, and number of target groups he can reach.

Stein says, “I make my choices based on the medium’s level of difficulty for mobile devices, its unique user outreach, and its impact on my target audience.”

McElfresh cites the importance of educating oneself on available options: “I chose mine by reading books and articles on using social media and how to make an author page with social media connections.”

Regardless of the platform you choose, Fichera advises, “Although I’ve branched out to a YouTube channel, GoodReads, and Pinterest, I always make it a point to engage and have fun first. Otherwise, social media would be like going to the dentist for a root canal every day!”

Creative Cycles: A Time to Write

By Leslie J. Wyatt

“**T**o everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven,” says Ecclesiastes. Cycles are all around us. We sleep, we wake. Summer comes, summer goes. We begin a book, we end it. So it should be no surprise that creativity has its periods of ebb and flow as well.

Those who write have touched the magic, the exhilaration, the momentum of inspiration. But they also experience other aspects of the process—self-doubt, days of drudgery, ideas peeking through but not quite ready to see the light of day. As we understand and accept our creative patterns, we can work with our emotional energies to appreciate and maximize wherever we find ourselves at the moment.

The Creative Cycle

Theories and information on this subject abound. Paul Plsek developed the concept of the *directed creativity cycle*, which he described in articles and in his book, *Creativity, Innovation, and Quality* (Irwin Professional). He sees the creative process as a combination of imagination and analysis, and offers a four-stage model in terms of a circle divided into four quadrants: preparation, imagination, development, and action.

Preparation includes the gathering of ideas by observing and analyzing the world around us, and precedes the stage most of us think of when we refer to *writing*. The second part of the cycle, labeled *imagination*, is the process of converting all preparation into a document—that magical time when ideas and inspiration begin to flow out of us. After committing our ideas to words, we enter into what Plsek calls *development*, a time of editing and enhancing. The final quadrant, *action*, includes marketing, submitting, and waiting for results.

Seen on paper, this model seems nice and tidy. Living it, however, does not feel nearly so ordered. Divisions between the stages are not crisp. We may be gathering ideas on one project while editing another, marketing a third, and longing all the while to be immersed in the free-flowing excitement of the imagination stage.

Perceptions

As writers, we can view the creative process in the form of a timeline or graph—this much time or space on the research, or writing, and this much on the selling. This trivializes certain writing activities while inflating the importance of others. That linear perspective appears to make the part of the cycle during which we commit words to paper seem the most important—the real writing, if you will. Increasing that portion of the cycle

becomes our goal, and we rarely give ourselves permission to ebb. We seek only to flow, like the ocean forever rolling shoreward, somehow never retreating in order to build the next wave. The lull after the rush of writing to a deadline feels, well—dull, empty, and even slightly scary. Could this be the time the tide does not return, we may ask ourselves, consciously or not?

But a clearer perspective teaches us that the circle of writing has no end. There is no peak from which to fall, no ever-building line to support. Each stage is vital to the next, and this leaves us free to engage fully in the one in which we happen to be. We may bask in the bright moment when an idea occurs, yet also enjoy the pleasures of editing to perfection or the excitements of marketing with equal peace.

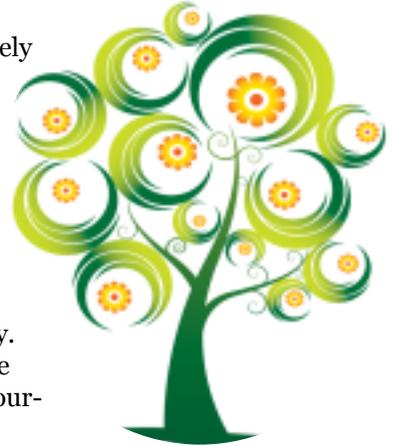
Trust Thyself

In an effort to track creative cycles, a writer friend and I used calendars, assigning different colored markers or fonts for each of our writing-related activities. Some days consisted mainly of querying, research, or taking notes. Others showed very little of those activities, and we logged our written word counts instead. Interestingly, a creative pattern roughly similar to Plsek’s model emerged as we identified individual daily, weekly, and monthly writing rhythms. These rhythms definitely coincided with other life cycles—events, travel, crisis. The larger the other cycles, the more they affected our writing cycles.

Creativity is not easily forced, but it can be enhanced when we recognize our own rhythms and give ourselves to them. Ask, “Which part of my creative cycle am I in right now?” The more comfortable we become with our own ebb and flow, the more we will be able to maximize our current season.

Maybe other aspects of life are currently overshadowing your writing cycle. Not to worry. In such times, even one small something in the writing realm—editing a manuscript, finding one market, writing a hundred words—can help keep you connected to your passion for writing. Knowing that the circle will come around again helps keep fear of writer’s block at bay.

Writing is deeper than productivity, extends beyond deadlines, and is even more than the act of committing words to paper. There is a time for every purpose, and now is the time to embrace your own creative cycle.



The Good, the Bad, & the Ugly: Dealing with Reviews

By Sue Bradford Edwards

Book reviews. When they are good, we add the link to Facebook and sing from the rooftops. When they are bad, we mope. Or we gripe. Or, on a really off day, we challenge the reviewer online.

“There is almost never anything good that comes from responding to a negative review, at least in public. So I’d encourage writers to talk to their trusted inner circle of friends and family about those stinky reviews. Fuss and fume and snark all you want in private with people you can trust not to repeat it,” says author Kelly Milner Halls. “Say nothing in public. Any back and forth about a bad review is likely to damage the writer of the book. Resist.”

Novelist Janni Lee Simner agrees. “Taking the writer of a negative review to task never ends well. . . . Even if you’re just commenting on an inaccuracy, there’s a good chance you’ll come across as upset about the review not being positive instead. There will probably be other reviews anyway. No one review holds the entire fate of your book.”

How to Cope

Because of negative reviews, some writers avoid reading all public scrutiny of their work. Others, including Simner, Halls, and Tracy Barrett, read every review they can find. Barrett says, “I read all my reviews—standard ones, Amazon, blogs, etc. I subscribe to Google Alerts, which means that I find out about most reviews of my books that are posted.”

The key to reading reviews is to keep what they say in perspective. “I read the reviews of my books because I want to be aware of what’s being said. I always hope they’ll be good, but I don’t panic when they aren’t,” says Halls. “Because I reviewed books for so many years, I am acutely aware that a review is literally one person’s opinion.”

Simner also limits how much weight she gives individual reviews. “One of the first things I realized when I began reading reviews of my YA work was that there’s no aspect of my stories that won’t be one reader’s best thing ever while ruining the work entirely for another reader,” says Simner.

For this reason, Simner does not change how she writes based on reviews. “If I try to change something one reader hated, I could lose the readers who loved that exact same thing. And it’s not clear I’ll win over the reader my book didn’t work for anyway. What readers look for in stories varies, and no one story will ever appeal to every reader.”

Simner reminds fellow writers that we are not the

reviewers’ intended audience anyway. “The primary job of a review is to help a reader decide whether they’ll enjoy reading a book,” she says. “I think it’s dangerous for writers to take reviews directly as writing advice.”

That said, there are times to take negative reviews to heart. “If enough people repeat a particular critique, I feel I have to at least consider what they’re saying,” says Barrett. “I have learned about, and worked on, issues that critics have pointed out.”

When You Want to Rant

Unfortunately, not all negative reviews hold this potential. Some are wildly inaccurate. Sometimes the reviewer clearly did not read the book. Sometimes facts are distorted or left out completely. Then there are times when the reviewer seems to have an agenda. Once you have calmed down, take another look at the negative review. “A bad review usually means the person reviewing the book didn’t like your approach or subject matter. They didn’t get you or what you were trying to do,” says Halls. “So while I respect what the reviewers have to say, good and bad, I can’t let them get to me. The kids are what matter most to me. They always will be.”

“I’m not even convinced negative reviews hurt sales,” Simner says. “I’ve seen too many cases where a reviewer dislikes a book, and other readers respond with either ‘Wow, I’m going to have to read it and see for myself!’ or ‘That thing you hate is just what I’m looking for!’” Echoing that old adage that there is no such thing as bad publicity, Simner adds, “It’s not negative reviews authors need to be afraid of. It’s that people won’t bother to talk about your book at all.”

No matter what you write—from nonfiction picture books to young adult novels—chatter is good. Even if readers are arguing about a particular point, let them work for you. The longer they talk about your book, the more publicity you get for your work.

WRITING REVIEWS

Consider writing reviews of your own, for books or other products related to young readers or education. Some potential markets are below; also check regional parenting publications for their openness to book reviews.

~ Administrator: www.scholastic.com/administrator

~ Catholic Library World: www.cathla.org

~ The Horn Book: www.hbook.com

~ Library Media Connection: www.librarymediaconnection.com

~ LibrarySparks: www.librarysparks.com

~ School Library Journal: www.slj.com

~ School Library Monthly: www.schoollibrarymonthly.com

Marketplace

JANUARY 2013



Ranger Rick Jr.

11100 Wildlife Center Dr., Reston, VA 20190.
www.nwf.org/rangerrick, www.nwf.org/Kids/Ranger-Rick-Jr.aspx

The National Wildlife Federation's *Ranger Rick*, which has been publishing for ages 7 to 14 since 1967, has been joined by *Ranger Rick Jr.*, for ages 4 to 7. The first issue premiered in December. Both are to be published 10 times a year.



The new magazine offers younger readers nature articles, fun facts about animals, humor, and activities for inside and outside. Like its counterpart, *Ranger Rick Jr.*'s 36 pages include many colorful photographs. The National Wildlife publications take fun approaches to introducing

readers to and instilling respect for the natural world. New wildlife apps are also available for kids (www.nwf.org/Kids/Kids-Apps.aspx). The website also offers a monthly educational guide, nature notebook, and resources for classroom use of the magazines.

Articles and other materials for the National Wildlife Federation are written on assignment. Send a letter by mail requesting guidelines; or, send a cover letter, résumé, and clips to request consideration for assignments. No queries or unsolicited manuscripts.

Hunger Mountain

36 College St., Montpelier, VT 05602. www.hungermtn.org

Hunger Mountain is an arts journal published at the Vermont College of Fine Arts. It is updated monthly online, and printed annually in the fall, at a length of about 200 pages. It also sponsors four writing contests, including the Katherine Paterson Prize for Young Adult and Children's Writing.

Hunger Mountain publishes children's and young adult writing, as well as writing for adults that includes fiction, poetry, creative nonfiction, interviews, reviews, and essays.

The journal accepts picture book, middle-grade, and YA submissions, up to 10,000 words. Stories should be entertaining, "polished," and depict childhood experiences creatively and appealingly. Send one submission at a time, by mail or via the online form. Subscribers may submit for free; others pay \$3 for using the submissions manager. First rights. Payment varies.

The annual Katherine Paterson Prize for Young Adult and Children's Writing accepts manuscripts in three categories: picture books, middle-grade, and YA. The prize for the overall winner is \$1,000 and publication in *Hunger Mountain*. Category winners are also published and authors receive \$100. Entry fee, \$20. The deadline is June 30. Detailed guidelines available online.

Scarlet Voyage

Box 398, 40 Industrial Road, Department F61, Berkeley Heights, NJ 07922. www.scarletvoyage.com

Enslow Publishers is launching a new young adult fiction imprint, Scarlet Voyage, which will offer trade hardcovers, paperbacks, and ebooks. Acquisitions Editor Ben Rosenthal says, "Scarlet Voyage's mission is to provide excellent fiction for young adults. We are looking for authors who can write content which appeals to teen readers' interests. We can help authors create and market fiction books that are unique, literary, and entertaining for YA readers." The imprint's first titles will be released in January 2014.

"We are seeking authors/novels with a strong and unique voice, as well as dynamic and independent young adult characters," says Rosenthal, who wants queries and manuscripts targeted at readers in grades six and up, sent via the website. He will accept submissions in all fiction subgenres, but of most interest are contemporary, dystopian, fantasy, mystery, paranormal romance, science fiction, and thrillers.

A complete manuscript is preferred. Include a résumé or list of works published; a synopsis is required. Send via the online submission form. No regular mail submissions.

For more than 30 years, Enslow Publishers has specialized in curriculum-based nonfiction for the school and library market. Its list of about 200 new titles annually includes high-interest titles for reluctant readers. Enslow accepts queries and an outline by mail.

McSweeney's McMullens

849 Valencia St., San Francisco, CA 94110.

www.mcsweeney.net

McSweeney's, known for its *Quarterly* and other "eccentric" offerings, including books, published its first four children's titles in 2012, three of them picture books. They include *Benny's Brigade*, by Arthur Bradford, and *Keep Our Secrets*, a board book by Jordan Crane.

After a catch-up period, McSweeney's is now accepting manuscript submissions. The company is very open, and admits in its guidelines to being "idiosyncratic." Send manuscripts via the submissions manager [submishmash](http://www.mcsweeney.net). Include a cover letter and a synopsis. No mail or email submissions.



Parents

375 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10017. www.parents.com

As one of the primary magazines of Meredith Corporation with a circulation of 2.2 million, *Parents* is written primarily by freelancers (70-80 percent) and is open to queries and to finding new writers.

The monthly is read by parents and expectant parents for information, advice, and encouragement in raising children up to about age 10. It includes personal experience pieces, interviews, profiles, activities, and product reviews. The tone is upbeat, and the articles fall into two main categories, those about children and those about parenting. Categories include newborn care, child development, safety, discipline, nutrition, education, behavioral issues, health, finance, fitness, relationships, travel, home, technology, culture, family activities, and human interest stories.

Articles must include advice from expert sources, information from real parents, and other research. They should also have broad interest, for a national audience. It is not interested in stories about teens, fiction, or poetry; the guidelines also discourage essays.

Query by mail with a one-page letter describing your topic, angle, and sources. Include an SASE. Responds in six weeks.

Buys first serial rights, six-months exclusive. Pays \$1.50+ a word, on acceptance. Kill fee, 25 percent. Rights vary. Payment rates vary. Pays on acceptance.

Poppy

Hachette Book Group, 237 Park Ave., New York, NY 10017. www.hachette-bookgroup.com/publishing_poppy.aspx

Changes have been taking place at Poppy, an imprint of Little, Brown Books for Young Readers that publishes original paperback series for girls. Its new Editorial Director is Farrin Jacobs, and its new Associate Editor is Mary-Kate Gaudet, both formerly at Harper-Collins.

Its series include Cecily von Ziegesar's *Gossip Girl* and Zoey Dean's *A-List*.

Little, Brown accepts submissions only from agented authors.

Carolrhoda

<http://carolrhoda.blogspot.com/>

Carolrhoda, part of the Lerner Publishing Group, updated its submission guidelines in November 2012, although the policies remain generally the same. Editorial Director Andrew Karre is not currently looking for manuscripts from unagented authors, but does so periodically and announces these searches on the Carolrhoda blog. Most authors are agented or referred, but Karre also writes: "Note that if you attended a conference where I spoke, you may submit for the time specified at the conference. Please refer to the conference in the subject line of your email."

Carolrhoda Lab is the YA fiction imprint. Carolrhoda Books publishes picture books, fiction, and nonfiction for all ages.

Adams Media

57 Littlefield St., Avon, MA 02322. www.adamsmedia.com

Adams Media is a nonfiction publisher that specializes in self-help, and also lists books on parenting, green living, cooking, health, inspiration, careers, hobbies, relationships, humor, and more, as well as some titles for children and teens. These include the *Everything Kids'* line and other activity books for kids and families, and "girls' guides" for teenagers. A recent title is *The Unofficial Hunger Games Cookbook*. One of the company's tag lines is "practical information for everyday life."

Adams Media is open to book proposals. Mail a query indicating your intended market and your background, and include a detailed table of contents and a sample chapter. No electronic submissions. Responds only if interested. Royalty.

Fairy Tales, Folklore, & Legends

Magazine markets for fairy tales, folklore, and/or legends include the following. Check each publication's submission guidelines. Some are specifically for children, and some might be of interest to young readers.

- ~ AppleSeeds, Calliope, Cobblestone, Faces: www.cobblestonepub.com
- ~ Chirp: www.owlkids.com
- ~ Cricket, Ladybug, Spider: www.cricketmag.com
- ~ Dig: www.digonsite.com
- ~ Enchanted Conversation: www.fairytalemagazine.com
- ~ Focus on the Family Clubhouse Jr.: www.clubhousejr.com
- ~ Highlights: www.highlights.com
- ~ Imagination-Café: www.imagination-cafe.com
- ~ Indian Life Newspaper: www.indianlife.org
- ~ JAKES Country: www.nwtf.org/jakes
- ~ New Fables: www.sofawolf.com
- ~ Plays: www.playsmagazine.com
- ~ Scholastic Scope: www.scholastic.com/scope
- ~ Skipping Stones: www.skippingstones.org
- ~ Stories for Children Magazine: www.storiesforchildrenmagazine.org
- ~ Storytelling Magazine: www.storynet.org

Splashdown Books

www.splashdownbooks.com

Splashdown Books is a small, independent publisher out of New Zealand, that publishes about eight YA titles a year in the genres of fantasy, science fiction, and supernatural/paranormal fiction. Its slant is Christian and inspirational without being preachy. Publisher Grace Bridges looks to form a connection first with prospective authors through Facebook, Splashdown book reviews, and other sources listed on the website before considering submissions.

Only accepts submissions of Christian-influenced fantasy, science fiction, and paranormal/supernatural. Submit brief description, author biography, and the first 500 words electronically through the website form. Royalty.

Marketplace

Teen Vogue

Condé Nast, 4 Times Square, New York, NY 10035. www.teenvogue.com



Teen Vogue is read by as many as six million teen girls ten times a year. Like its big sister, *Vogue*, it focuses largely on fashion, beauty, and health, but its articles and interviews also cover serious topics important to teenagers, including education, careers, and giving back to the community. It does not, however, place an emphasis on boys or sexuality.

About 5 percent of *Teen Vogue's* articles and 15 to 20 percent of its departments and columns are written by freelancers. Query with idea and clips to the appropriate department and editor: Health and beauty, to Eva Chen at eva_chen@teenvogue.com. Fashion, to Jane Keltner at jane_keltner@teenvogue.com. Beauty and entertainment pieces are written primarily by staff. Buys all rights. Payment, \$1 a word. Kill fee, 25 percent. Pays on acceptance.

Children's Book Press

95 Madison Ave., Suite #1205, New York, NY 10016.

www.leeandlow.com

This multicultural picture book publisher, the first of its kind in the United States, has been in business since 1975. In 2012, it became an imprint of Lee & Low Books. Both parent and imprint promote bilingualism, literacy, and education through books that give children ages 5 to 12 a sense of their own—and others'—culture, history, and language. Children's Book Press titles are about 24 or 32 pages in length, and authors generally come from the cultures about which they write. Authenticity and new voices are a high priority. Recent titles include *On My Block: Stories and Paintings by Fifteen Artists*, edited by Executive Editor Dana Goldberg; and *Going Home, Coming Home*, by Truong Tran, a story of Vietnam.

Picture book fiction, to 1,500 words; nonfiction, to 3,000 words. For picture books, mail a complete manuscript and cover letter with an author biography. Lee & Low also publishes middle-grade manuscripts, to 10,000 words; query only, with a synopsis and chapter outline. No email. Responds in six months only if interested.

Clarion Books

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 215 Park Ave. South, New York, NY 10003.
www.hmhbooks.com/kids

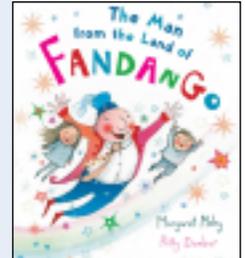
Clarion Books has been an imprint of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Children's Book Division since 1979. Its diverse list includes many award-winning books for children from birth through the teen years, and the imprint is especially known for its contemporary and historical fiction. Clarion Books is open to unsolicited manuscripts.

The Vice President and Publisher is Dinah Stevenson. Jennifer B. Greene is Senior Editor, and Jennifer Wingertzahn and Lynne Polvino both hold the position of Editor.

Clarion Books publishes toddler books, picture books, chapter books, and novels, including adventure, fantasy, folklore, fairy tales, historical, multicultural, and science fiction. In nonfiction, it offers early readers, picture books, chapter books, and middle-grade and YA on topics such as nature, science, history, holidays, biography, and multicultural issues.

Recent titles include Karen Cushman's *Will Sparrow's Road*; *The Bronte Sisters: The Brief Lives of Charlotte, Emily, and Anne*, by Catherine Reef; and *The Man from the Land of Fandango*, a picture book by Margaret Mahy.

Send complete manuscript by mail for fiction. Query with synopsis and sample chapters for nonfiction. Responds in three months only if interested. Advance; royalty.



Index

Abdo Publishing 2
Adams Media 11
Amicus Publishing 2
Calkins Creek Books 4
Capstone Publishers 2
Carolrhoda 11
Children's Book Press 12
Clarion Books 12
Enslow Publishers 10
Focus on the Family Publishing
1, 2, 3

Catherine Frank Editorial
Services 4
Highlights for Children 2, 4
Highlights High Five 2
High Noon Books 2
Henry Holt 4
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt 12
Hunger Mountain 10
Wendy Lamb Books 4
Lee & Low Books 2, 12
Lerner Publishing Group 11
Arthur A. Levine Books 4

Little, Brown Books for Young
Readers 11
McSweeney's McMullens 10
Our Little Friend 2
Pacific Press Publishing
Association 2
Parents 11
Katherine Paterson Prize for
Young Adult and Children's
Writing 10
Pieces of Learning 2
Poppy 11

Primary Treasure 2, 3
Random House 4
Ranger Rick 10
Ranger Rick Jr. 10
Scarlet Voyage 10
Scholastic 4, 9, 11
Shell Education 2
Splashdown Books 11
Teen Vogue 12
Thriving Family 1, 2
Toon Books 2
Viking 4, 5