

Children's Book Insider

The Newsletter for Children's Writers

At Presstime: *Tenth Annual New Voices Award*

The New Voices Award from Lee & Low Books is given for a children's fiction or nonfiction picture book by a writer of color. The contest is open to writers of color who are residents of the United States and who have not previously published a children's picture book. Manuscripts should address the needs of children of color by providing stories with which they can identify and relate, and which promote a greater understanding of one another. Submissions may be either fiction, nonfiction or poetry for ages 5-12. Folklore and animal stories will not be considered. Manuscripts should be no more than 1500 words in length, typed double-spaced, and should be accompanied by a cover letter that includes the author's name and contact information, a brief biographical note, relevant cultural and ethnic information, how the author heard about the award, and publishing history, if any. Up to two manuscripts may be submitted, but each manuscript should be submitted separately. Address to Lee & Low Books, 95 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016. Attn: New Voices Award.

Deadline for submissions is September 31, 2009. Manuscripts may not be submitted to other publishers while under consideration for the award. The winner will be announced by December 31, 2009. The prize is a cash grant of \$1000 and a standard publishing contract for basic advance and royalties. An Honor Award winner will receive a cash grant of \$500. For more information, go to www.leeandlow.com and click on "Creators." Past winners include *Sixteen Years in Sixteen Seconds: The Sammy Lee Story* by Paula Yoo (biography of first Asian American to win and Olympic gold medal); *A Fly in a Bowl of Milk* by Pamela M. Tuck (based on her father's experiences of desegregation in North Carolina in the 1960's), and *Long Twelve Miles Long* by Glenda Armand Sheppard (about young Frederick Douglass).

Educational Publisher Accepting Manuscripts for Emergent Readers

Seedling Publications is a division of educational publisher Continental Press. Seedling focuses on fiction and nonfiction leveled readers and other materials that support early literacy in pre-kindergarten through second grade. Familiarity with Reading Recovery (see www.readingrecovery.org), guided reading, and other reading intervention programs is essential when writing for Seedling. Currently accepting manuscripts for the emergent reader using natural language and supportive text, which will be marketed directly to schools. Stories should be written in the 8, 12, or 16-page format only. Manuscripts should be between 25-300 words. Fiction manuscripts must feature well-developed plots with a beginning, middle and end. Nonfiction manuscripts should include accurate facts and details and should be presented in language appropriate for the student to read independently. All sentences should be complete and grammatically correct. No rhyming stories, full-length picture books, poetry, chapters books or religious material.

Submit entire manuscript by mail with a brief cover letter, and include a SASE. Manuscripts must be submitted as hard copy by conventional mail only. Illustrations are not necessary, but notes about the illustrations may be included. Send manuscript to Seedling Submissions Editor, Continental Press, 520 E. Bainbridge Street, Elizabethtown, PA 17022. For more information on Seedling products, go to www.seedlingpub.com

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May 2009

At Presstime: *Magazine for Middle Grade Boys Needs Short Fiction, Nonfiction and Activities*

Boys' Quest is published six times a year, for boys ages 6-13 (with readers ages 8-10 being the target age). Looking for material that fits the issue's theme and deals with timeless topics such as pets, nature, hobbies, science, sports, games and careers. Fiction (about 500 words) should feature lively writing from a 10-year-old boy's viewpoint, with the boy or boys directly involved in an activity that is both wholesome and unusual. Nonfiction (200-500 words) that is accompanied by clear photos with high resolution is more likely to be accepted. Also looking for puzzles, poems, cooking, carpentry projects, jokes, and riddles. Pays a minimum of five cents a word for both fiction and nonfiction, with additional payment given if the piece is accompanied by appropriate photos or art. Pays a minimum of \$10 per poem or puzzle, with variable rates offered for games, carpentry projects, etc. Buys first American and serial rights; pays upon publication. Authors can find current issues on newsstands, or view sample articles at <http://funforkidzmagazines.com/samples>

Send entire manuscript with SASE to Submissions Editor, *Boys' Quest*, PO Box 227, Bluffton, OH 45817-0227. For the current theme list, go to <http://funforkidzmagazines.com/writers> and click on "Download current open theme list".

New Small Press Seeks Manuscripts for All Ages

Soto Publishing Company is a recently-established small press focusing on the young adult and children's market. According to publisher Pedro Soto, "We have one book on the market and two more on the way (publication dates July 1st and August/September 1st). We have as our goal and within our budget six, maybe seven books for 2009. Our goal is to publish five to seven books per year in the first few years of business and increasing output afterwards. We are seeking children's manuscripts. We pay between \$250-2500 as an advance with net royalties of 25-50% (50% percent for novels, 25% for illustrated books because the illustrator splits net profits with author)." Soto also explained that he prefers to find illustrators for picture books, unless the author is also an artist. The company sends out 50-100 review copies of each book, and currently has a national wholesaler in place. "We will be adding another specifically targeting the library sector. We sell direct to bookstores, chain and independents, and will be adding fulfillment services, tied into the wholesaler, to process all orders. This is our first year in business. Due to the growing number of books, finding a national distributor will be our next milestone." Visit the company's web site at www.sotopublishingcompany.com. Authors may submit the entire manuscript with SASE to Pedro Soto, Publisher, Soto Publishing Company, PO Box 10, Dade City, FL 33526.

Short Story Contest for YA Fiction Promoting Cultural Awareness

AIM Magazine, America's Intercultural Magazine is sponsoring a short story contest for the best fiction that promotes brotherhood among people and cultures. The magazine is geared toward young adults and strives to purge racism from our culture via the written word. Contest entries should be previously unpublished fiction, 1000-4000 words. No religious material. The winner will receive \$100 and publication in the magazine. Deadline for submission is August 15; no entry fee. Submit to submissions@aimmagazine.org and type "Short Story Contest Submission" in the subject line. Submissions can also be mailed with SASE to Ruth Apilado, Associate Editor, *AIM Magazine*, PO Box 390, Milton, WA 98354-0390. See last year's winner at www.aimmagazine.org/stories.htm

Summer Conference in San Francisco Area

The Third Annual Book Passage Children's Writers & Illustrators Conference will be held June 18-21 in Corte Madera, CA (just across the Golden Gate Bridge from San Francisco). The mornings are structured with workshops focusing around one type of children's writing, and the afternoons feature panels and lectures from other authors, agents, editors and publishing experts. The cost is \$450 which includes the opening night dinner and all lunches. Optional consultations are available for an additional \$95. For details or to register, go to www.bookpassage.com and click on "Classes & Conferences," or email Kathryn Petrocelli at bpconferences@bookpassage.com.

Children's Book Insider makes every effort to verify the legitimacy of small and new presses and literary agents before printing information in "At Presstime." However, authors and illustrators should always proceed with caution when approaching publishers or agents with whom they are unfamiliar, and read contracts carefully. For a free copy of our Special Report, [How to Determine If a New or Small Press is Legitimate](#), send a SASE to CBI at the address below. You can also download this report and others from www.write4kids.com

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Book Publishing Today

Self-Publishing and You

by Mary Bowman-Kruhm

Do you long to see your name on the cover of a book? Let's say you have a computer file filled with what you consider well-edited material. Are there situations when you should self-publish?

Yes, in certain circumstances self-publishing can make sense and make money. Gary VanRiper, author and publisher, preferred to self-publish rather than face the slow process involved in working with traditional publishers. Adirondack Kids Press is preparing to celebrate its tenth year and Gary proudly reports, "To date, the Adirondack Kids®, our middle reader books, have sold nearly 100,000 copies." Fortunately, Gary says, he enjoys marketing almost as much as writing.

Impatience with the waiting game of traditional publishers is what drives many writers to self-publication. Linda Trice, author of *Kenya's Word* (Charlesbridge) told her critique group that the length of time before you hold a published book in your hands is often four years. "That's four years from the day the contract is signed by all parties—and I sent one manuscript out for five years before a publisher gave me a contract." A senior citizen in the group had a fascinating family story, but not nine years, so he decided to self-publish. "He had one book in him, that was it, and he's back to playing golf," Linda says.

Another reason to forgo the path of traditional publishing may lie in appeal to a target audience. Be honest with yourself: Does your topic have high interest for a specific group rather than a general audience? Maybe you are passionate about a cause or a hobby, want to celebrate a local historic building, or have a similar topic that makes your book salable only to a small but highly interested group. If so, your manuscript may not, as rejection letters often state, "meet the needs" of a traditional publisher.

Linda Trice also travels around the country to give workshops on how to write for publication. Two stories she told me emphasize an important point: If you decide to self-publish, include consideration of numerous options to handle the publishing process.

One attendee in a workshop of Linda's headed the parents' organization at a local school. She asked Linda if she thought Random House would be interested in a cookbook written by the parents. Linda told her about the difficulties of interesting a major

publisher in this idea and suggested she find a niche publisher. The woman found a company that printed only cookbooks used for school fund-raising. Her school successfully sold the cookbooks with recipes for the edible goodies.

To meet the needs of all varieties of customers, companies specializing in self-publishing typically offer an array of options, and a woman in one of Linda's classes was almost in tears of confusion as she read brochures from several self-publishers. All she wanted was to publish the history of her family. Linda suggested she get prices from a local office supply store. This local business could supply a cover and do the binding, and because the price per book decreased according to the size of the order, she solicited pledges from family members to purchase a certain number of copies. No problem when they saw the cover: A photo of ancestors standing in front of their covered wagon.

Writers considering self-publication often hope it will be a stepping-stone to attracting a major commercial publisher. Lev Grossman noted in a February 2, 2009, article in *Time* magazine that self-publishing has "gone from being the last resort of the desperate and talentless to something more like out-of-town tryouts for theater or the farm system in baseball." Kristen Collier, an author of both traditionally and self-published books, believes it is way to build your resume, "And if you're good and your books sell, that success can lead to a traditional publisher." I suspect, however, examples of this are widely reported only when a traditional publishing house writes a huge check to a previously self-published writer. Doubtlessly unreported are tales of dusty self-published books discovered in car trunks, closets, and garages.

Should *you* self-publish? The owner of a small publishing company in California said, "Putting together a quality, well-bound, finished book is no longer expensive. But hiring a good editor and a good designer is essential, even if you have some of the skills yourself. You need a team and fresh eyes to see what you cannot see." Linda Trice agrees, adding, "Marketing is the hardest part. If you can do that, go for it!"

These two books are essential reading for anyone considering self-publishing:

The Self-Publishing Manual: How to Write, Print and Sell Your Own Book by Dan Poynter (Dan Poynter's web site, www.parapub.com, has free resources for self-publishers), and *1001 Ways to Market Your Books for Authors and Publishers* by John Kremer

Many thanks to Linda Trice, Gary VanRiper, and Kristen Collier for sharing experiences included in this article. Please visit them online at:

www.LindaTrice.com
www.adirondackkids.com
www.kristencollier.blogspot.com



www.CBIclubhouse.com
 Subscribers: Listen to a podcast with Dr. Sherry Henig as she talks about her self-publishing experience with her company Brenner Publishing.

This fall Prometheus Books will publish a paperback edition of *The Leakeys*, Mary's nonfiction book on the first family of paleoanthropology. Follow Mary's writing process and progress at <http://marybk.blogspot.com>.

Author Hooks Readers with

When my son was ten, he dreamed of being Bruce Lee. And though he dug into biographies of martial artists and poured over books about China, you couldn't pay him to read fiction. Then a librarian recommended Jeff Stone's *The Five Ancestors* series. Matt devoured *Tiger*, the first book, and brought *Monkey*, book two of the series, along on our Mexican vacation. Three years later, after pulling his dog-eared copy of *Tiger* out of his closet, he handed it to me saying, "You'll love this. It's one of the best books I've ever read."

Set in 17th century China, this upper middle grade series revolves around five young orphans between the ages of 11 and 13 raised by warrior monks of the secret Cangzhen Temple. Each is named after an animal (Tiger, Monkey, Snake, Crane, Dragon) because each is the youngest-ever kung fu master of that animal's fighting style. One night the temple is destroyed by a former brother monk named Ying (Eagle), who is bent on revenge. The boys are the only survivors. Charged by their grandmaster before his death to uncover the secrets of their past and their connection to Ying, the boys all scatter in different directions. Five books in the series follow each boy as he tries to carry out Grandmaster's wishes, and two books focus on the moves of the series' antagonists.

Jeff Stone holds a black belt in Shaolin Do Kung Fu, and has infused the plots with detailed fight scenes and impressive ancient weaponry. He understands that his audience wants stories that unfold like their favorite martial arts movies, and has created what *School Library Journal* called "Essentially a graphic novel without the graphics." And if the books don't awaken the martial artist in each reader, Stone's author appearances will. One of the highlights of his energetic presentations is when he teaches volunteers from the audience kung fu animal poses.

Jeff Stone recently took some time out of his busy schedule to speak with **CBI**.

You credit the Big Sur Writing Workshop for giving you your start. How did it all come about?

It came about after a year of hard work! Big Sur was the springboard, sure, but a lot happened before then. If you want the whole story...

In January 2002, I decided to put my English and Journalism degrees to use and write a novel for kids. Since I'm obsessive, I attended

writers' conferences every six to eight weeks for eight months straight. I started with San Diego State University's annual event in January 2002, then went on to multiple conferences in Ohio and Indiana, ending with SCBWI's annual August gathering in Los Angeles. By then, I was officially "conferenced out" (and nearly out of spare cash and vacation time).

After much soul-searching, I decided that a workshop might be in order. [*Editor's note: Workshops feature more intensive, personal, hands-on writing instruction, whereas conferences offer larger lectures on a variety of topics, as well as the chance to network and meet editors and agents.*] Specifically, the Big Sur event sounded like a logical next step because it is an intensive, multi-day experience where you focus on your material (as opposed to focusing on general topics or other people's successes).

In late September 2002, I submitted the first few chapters of *The Five Ancestors*, Book One to the Big Sur folks, and I was accepted. The workshop was in early December, and I took the first three chapters with me. I knew that each chapter was good, but that something wasn't quite right on a larger level and I couldn't put my finger on it. The faculty and other attendees helped me sort everything out in short order (I had major point of view issues), and before I left, Laura Rennert, an agent with the Andrea Brown Literary Agency, expressed interest in reading my material.

I reworked my three chapters over the holidays and sent them to Laura in January 2003, along with a detailed outline for the rest of the book, plus outlines for six more books. She liked the potential of the first book, as well as the whole series, and I signed with her in February. She helped me shape things, and by writing every evening and all day and night on the weekends, I finished the first book in June of that year. Laura shopped the series over the summer, and by September she had a five-house auction going. I signed with Random House, and the books started hitting shelves in Spring 2005.

Did you initially envision this as a series? If so, what's important to consider when creating a series in terms of characters and story arc?

For me, it was the story arc that determined this project would be a series. The story was too big to be a single book. What happened was, I made an outline and found that it could be broken into seven core pieces, each substantial enough

Martial Arts Action in Debut Series

by Laura Backes

to carry an entire novel. From there, I thought that it would be an interesting challenge to tell each book from a different character's point of view. I soon realized, however, that this meant that I would have to create characters who were individually strong enough to carry an entire book, yet subtle enough that I could push them into a corner when it was time for others to shine. It's taken more effort than I ever imagined, but I think I've managed to pull it off.

Planning is a key consideration when creating a series, but no matter how much forethought you give things, there will always be times when you're writing a new book and you think, "Why on earth did I do that to Character A in Book Z? Now how do I resolve it in this new book?" You've just got to go with the flow, and do everything you can to make each book the best it can be, then move forward.

You advise writers to "write what you know." Clearly, you know kung fu, but how much did you know about 17th century China? How extensive was your research?

My wife is from Hong Kong, and I've traveled there with her a few times, seeking out sites of historical significance. Also, I spent 15 days crisscrossing China with a group of martial artists when I tested for my black belt at Shaolin Temple in 2005. We visited a number of temples and historical sites from the 17th century, including a famous bandit stronghold much like the one depicted in the series. Additionally, I've read numerous books and other resources about that period from both Eastern and Western authors. Getting the details right—especially the weaponry—is important to me.

Your characters have intense inner struggles, but are also almost larger-than-life in their physical abilities. While each character is a Kung Fu master, some of their feats seem superhuman. Have you drawn a line that you are careful not to cross so the characters don't become unbelievable?

Nobody flies in my books like you see in so many kung fu movies, and you won't find anybody blasting their "chi" across the room. For the most part, these are normal kids who are physically gifted and have simply practiced really really hard. Keeping it "real" is something I know my readers appreciate. I feel that it does make these particular characters more accessible and, hon-

estly, more gratifying for me to write. Overcoming obstacles is much more fun than crushing them.

This series has been a big hit with reviewers as well as readers. Are your fans made up of boys and girls? Can you pinpoint any elements that have made the books such a success?

I'd say the readership is roughly 60 percent boys and 40 percent girls, though the first three pieces of fan mail I ever received were from girls!

My readers, regardless of gender, appreciate the books because I respect the audience. I don't pull any punches, and I never talk down to them. The same is true in a martial arts school. When I teach a class, it doesn't matter if you're five years old or fifty-five. I'm going to talk to you and treat you all exactly the same. Kids pick up on that.

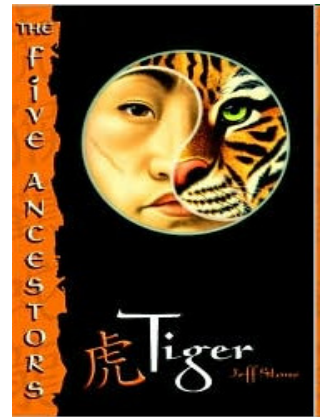
Your fifth and sixth books, Eagle and Mouse, feature the series' villains rather than heroes. So your fifth hero, Dragon, has yet to be written about. Why are you saving him for last?

It was my editor's idea. Originally, Dragon was going to be Book Five, but my editor thought it made more sense to tell his story last, and the story of the main series villain, Eagle, fifth. I gave it a shot and, as usual, my editor was right.

By the way, Mouse, the main character in Book Six, is not a villain. He does, however, follow in the shadow of another series villain, Mantis. To confuse matters further, the book called Mouse was originally going to be called Mantis, but my editor thought it made sense to change the POV on that one. It was another good call on his part. Remember what I said earlier about going with the flow?

Do you have any advice for beginning writers?

Like they say: "Read, Read, Read—Write, Write, Write". My other favorite is, "There is no such thing as writing, only rewriting." Beyond that, hit as many conferences as you can afford so that you can learn about the business (for it is a business), then find yourself a solid writing workshop or two to hone your craft. Also, don't sweat getting an agent or even a publishing deal. Securing either of those is a piece of cake. Writing a good book is the difficult part. Focus on that, and you'll be golden.



Tiger, Book One of The Five Ancestors series by Jeff Stone (Random House). Visit Jeff Stone's web site at www.readjeffstone.com



www.CBIclubhouse.com

Subscribers: Listen to a podcast with Jeff Stone as he talks more about developing interesting characters and writing a series.

From the Editor

Dear Reader:

This month begins the countdown to **CBI's** 20th anniversary in May 2010. For 19 years now we've explored numerous aspects of writing fiction and nonfiction for all age groups, looked at the business end of the author's life, and talked to a lot of interesting, smart people about how to be successful in this industry. But now we're starting something completely different. Now we have a step-by-step plan to take you from aspiring author to published professional.

You're all invited to join us for the **CBI Challenge**.

Beginning this month, one article per issue will be devoted to the Challenge. We'll start at the foundation, laying the groundwork for learning how to create books for children that will catch an editor's eye. But the article only scratches the surface. Every month on the CBI Clubhouse you'll find a special CBI Challenge section with companion material — videos, web site walkthroughs, extra articles, podcasts — plus a "challenge" assignment that ties in with that month's theme. A special message board area dedicated to the Challenge allows you to post your writing assignments, get feedback from other Fightin' Bookworms, trade tips and advice, and forge connections. Down the road we'll be adding teleseminars that link to the Challenge topic that month.

Though Jon and I are leading the Challenge, you, the Fightin' Bookworms, will make it work. We invite you to create audio or video clips for the Clubhouse with your own take on the topic that month. Start discussion threads on the message board. Form online critique groups. Trade your own writing exercises. And published authors, while you may not need to work through every month of the Challenge, we welcome your presence on the message board giving advice and insight to newbies.

If you're brand new to writing for kids, the Challenge is for you. If you're switching from adult to children's books, fiction to nonfiction, picture books to middle grade, or educational publishing to trade, the Challenge is for you. Take the Challenge if you've been revising the same manuscript for years but can't get past the slush pile. Pick up the Challenge on months when the topic — such as pacing in picture books, show don't tell, or incorporating flashbacks — is something you've been told you need to work on. Join us if you're tired of writing alone and want some friends along on the journey, to help you over the rough spots and celebrate those successes when they come.

Ready? Here we go: **The CBI Challenge #1 ... Find Your Passion.**

We're starting with a fun assignment. Your job is to discover what you love, so next month you can begin incorporating that passion into a book idea. And how will you find your passion? Read. I know this sounds almost too simple to work, but reading children's books is one of the most important steps toward becoming a published children's book writer.

"But I already know my passion," you say. "I love dogs and volunteer at the animal shelter. That's what I'll write about."

Great, but *how* are you going to write your book? Will it be a middle grade mystery about dogs disappearing from the shelter? A nonfiction easy reader that explains how to take care of an adopted dog? Or a picture book about a homeless dog who finds a family? (The latter is one of the most common picture book plots I critique. If this is your idea, find out if it's been done and start thinking about how your story can be unique.) Did you know there are several distinct categories of children's books? (See the Challenge article on the Clubhouse that explains the nuts and bolts of each age category.) Do you know which age group you want to write for? If so, start reading good books for that age. If you were unaware that children's books went beyond the picture book format, then read some easy readers, chapter books, and older novels.

Do you think your story needs to be told in first person? Read several books written from this viewpoint so you'll start incorporating the techniques into your subconscious. Interested in historical fiction? Study recent titles to see how the author worked the details of the time period into the story. Do you love picture book biographies? Check out a stack from the library and note how much of the subject's life was covered in the book, whether or not the author used dialogue, and how many details were left up to the illustrations.

As you read, you'll find yourself drawn to a particular type of book over and over. That's probably what you want to write. But I don't want you to just read, I want you to *learn how to read like a writer*. See my Challenge video at the Clubhouse that explains how to use published books as a guide for your own writing.

Sample as many books as necessary until you find your niche. Look for published books that might cover the same topic to make sure your approach is different. The Internet makes this easy: you can search sites like Amazon.com with key words that describe your idea. Also, talk to your local children's librarian. She's a terrific source for good books you'll love.

But we're going to do you one better. On the Clubhouse, we'll be compiling the Ultimate Fightin' Bookworm Reading List. I've posted some titles to get you started in the CBI Challenge section on our Clubhouse message board, but I want you to help me out. As you're reading, if you come across a book that you think is outstanding, add your comment to the Reading List post. Be sure to add the requested key words (age group; type of main character; genre such as adventure, mystery or humor; and whether it's written in first or third person). I'll incorporate your suggestions into the master list every few days. My goal is to create a reading list you can refer to over and over as you develop as a writer.

So experiment. Sample new genres. Find your passion. As you're reading, jot down any book ideas that come to mind. Next month, we'll examine those ideas and see which ones are worth writing about.

The Basics

Learned Optimism: Become a More Resilient Writer

by Carol Coven Grannick

You're a writer – committed, consistent, hard-working. But when you hit a bump – a rejection comes; writer's block stares you down; you feel overwhelmed by your critique group's suggestions – you hear whispers (or shouts) of negative self-talk. Your mood plummets. Your work pays the price.

Yet you have a colleague who experiences the very same events and says to herself, "Well, these things happen. This is a bump in the road. I've got the skill, commitment and ability to persist."

And she really means it! She may feel sad, but she bounces back quickly, while you are still struggling to get back to work.

That's because optimists and pessimists talk to themselves in very different ways, and the brain reacts accordingly, controlling mood and subsequent action. Martin Seligman (*Learned Optimism*, Free Press 1998) introduced these concepts in the early 90s in response to the epidemic of depression in young people, and the research (Barbara Fredrickson, Ph.D., *Positivity*, Crown 2009) continues to prove positivity "broadens and builds."

What does that mean? That heartfelt positive thinking – which even the hard-wired pessimist can learn – causes the brain to become more open, creative, productive, and receptive, and to discover new skills, connections, knowledge and ways of 'being'.

Doesn't that almost obligate us to learn how to change our minds?

Among other activities that create "positivity", the skill of "disputation" is essential. Disputing is a heartfelt, deliberate, intellectual challenge to pessimistic thinking with facts. As it changes negative thinking, it changes the feelings of sadness, depression, or hopelessness that leave us less resilient, and less productive, writers.

Now, our negative thoughts can be opportunities. Seligman's ABCDE technique (adapted from a cognitive therapy framework) teaches us how to craft substantial, heartfelt challenges to negative thoughts.

Grab yourself a notebook, and use one page for each negative thought:

A: Adversity: You might write, "My ms. was rejected", "My editor hates my revisions", etc. Write down *the event only*, and not your *response* to it.

B: Belief: These are the exact words you say to yourself when "A" happens. "I'm never going to be a published writer," or "This ms. is lousy." Write the words, then repeat them out loud. Listen to the words as you say them.

C: Consequences: How do you feel when you hear those 'B' words out loud? Do you have less motivation? More trouble concentrating on work? Write down the feelings and their impact on your behavior.

D: Dispute: Use *facts* to debate your beliefs (your 'B' statement). Examples: "the finest writers get requests for many revisions" or "a rejection may not be because my manuscript isn't good enough, but because I've targeted the wrong editor" or even "I am not writing at the level I'd like to, and can take some classes to improve my skills and my chances of success."

E: Energization: Repeat your 'D' statements out loud and notice how different you feel (if you don't feel differently, your dispute may not have been substantial enough; try again, and don't give up; get help if you need it to develop this skill!)

Once you get the hang of "disputing", get yourself a pack of index cards. Fredrickson discusses this technique from the Penn Resiliency Program in *Positivity*. On each card, write a common negative phrase you use. Read it aloud, then dispute it with a sentence or two – out loud and with conviction. Use the pack like flashcards, and you'll become adept at automatically disputing your negative thoughts. Fredrickson's current research indicates that our brains need only a 3:1 positive to negative ratio to change your overall framework.

Remember – change is difficult. We don't develop positivity with feathery, wispy "affirmations" or yellow smiley faces. We must work at creating substantial, fact-based challenges to the more automatic, negative thinking that depresses emotions and stifles our ability to be open, creative and productive – and therefore successful.

But since you're familiar with the practice and hard work of being a writer, that won't be the toughest thing you've ever done. And the payoff will be huge, with you revising yourself into a more resilient writer – and human being!

Carol Coven Grannick

writes short fiction, picture books and middle grade novels, as well as being a Licensed Clinical Social Worker in private practice. Her stories have appeared in *Cricket* and *Highlights for Children*. Her regular column for the Illinois SCBWI *Prairie Wind*, "Revise Yourself", can be found at www.intelligentlight.com/PrairieWind.

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Your Publishing Career

How to Get the Most Out of a Writer's Conference

by Jane McBride Choate

Where to Find Conference Listings

The "Resources" section of *Children's Writer's & Illustrator's Market*

Industry newsletters, such as CBI, or magazines like *The Writer* and *Writers Digest*

The Society of Children's Book Writers & Illustrators (www.scbwi.org, click on "Events" or "Regional Chapters")

ShawGuides: Writer's Conferences (<http://writing.shawguides.com/>, click on "Children's")

Money saving tip:

Many conferences will give free admission to volunteers who help run the event. Besides attending the conference, volunteers often are able to spend extra time with speakers (picking them up from the airport, setting up a classroom for their lecture, etc.), which can result in valuable contacts. For your best chance at landing plum volunteer duties, get in touch with the conference organizer several weeks before the event.

Contributing Editor **Jane McBride Choate** has written over 30 adult romances and hundreds of short stories for children, as well as articles on writing for CBI and *The Writer*.

The right writer's conference can instruct, inspire, and motivate. But how do you know which conference is a good fit for you?

Conferences are often targeted to a specific type of writer, or a particular stage in a writer's career. Are you a beginner, wanting to learn the basics such as characterization, plotting, pacing and dialogue? Or are you a seasoned writer, hoping to make the right contact with a particular editor and/or agent who will be in attendance? Do you do best in small groups, or do you like the energy of a conference with 2000-plus attendees? Can you travel, or would you prefer to stay local?

Once you determine the kind of conference you need, check sources (see sidebar) to find a list of upcoming events. You can also do a Google search with key words such as "children's writing" and "conference".

Most conferences sponsored by professional organizations will have complete information in a brochure, including a current schedule, costs, and registration details. These can frequently be found online. Note the conference's focus (Does it cover just writing for children, or are children's books one part of a larger event? Is it genre-oriented, such as mystery, romance or nonfiction?); list of presenters (Do they specialize in areas you want to learn about?); and attending publishers, editors and agents (Will they be taking appointments?). When factoring the cost, remember to add in travel, lodging and meals. Also, think about clothes. Some conferences have more formal evening gatherings.

Once you've pinpointed the right conference, plan how you'll spend your time. If your primary purpose is to learn, you'll want to take in as many workshops as possible. Look at the offerings beforehand so you can choose a good balance. Are you scheduling a critique with an editor or agent? Polish your manuscript well before the deadline, and think about how best to use your allotted time. But

do leave some energy for socializing at meals and the end of the day. Some of your best contacts will be made over coffee.

If your main objective is networking, meeting with other writers from your publisher, or lunching with your editor and agent, you'll spend your time differently. You'll probably want to attend workshops featuring your editor or agent as well as group critique sessions and dinners or cocktail hours.

At the conference, collect business cards. When you have a moment to spare, write a note on the back of each card as a reminder of the circumstances of the meeting how you'll follow up with that individual.

Bring along professional-looking business cards of your own. Keep them simple; you can easily design and print them yourself. Include your email and web site, if you have one, with your contact information.

Keep a notebook or journal of impressions, what you've learned, what you want to take away with you. You may think you will never forget the "seven layers of characterization" that one workshop speaker presented so well, but the details may grow fuzzy by the time you return home.

Once you've returned from the conference energized and determined to put more time and effort into your writing, go through those business cards you collected. Follow up in whatever way is most appropriate for the contact. Did you have an editor or agent request your manuscript? Follow through with that immediately. Be sure to include a cover letter, reminding her of the meeting and her request to see a particular manuscript.

Read through your notes and apply the writing tips you learned to your work while the information is still fresh. Feel good that you've taken this important step in your writing career, met some publishing professionals, and even made new friends you'll see again at next year's conference.