

Children's Book Insider

The Newsletter for Children's Writers

At Presstime: *New Teen Imprint from Harlequin*

Harlequin Teen is a new teen fiction imprint from Harlequin Books to debut in fall 2009, with 14 titles slated for 2010 in all formats including ebooks. Looking for commercial, high-concept stories that feature extraordinary characters and plots set in contemporary, paranormal, fantasy, science-fiction or historical settings. All subgenres are welcome, as long as the book captures the teen experience and speaks to readers with power and authenticity. Harlequin Teen is a single-title (no series) young adult program of books 50,000-100,000 words long (about 200-400 manuscript pages). Stories may contain romance, but it's not necessary. The editor wants titles with the same depth and variety as Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* saga, Meg Cabot's *Princess Diaries* novels, Jay Asher's *Thirteen Reasons Why*, Suzanne Collins's *Hunger Games*, Scott Westerfeld's *Uglies*, and Marcus Zusak's *The Book Thief*. Authors should mail a query letter and full plot synopsis with SASE to Natashya Wilson, Senior Editor, Harlequin Teen, 233 Broadway, Ste. 1001, New York, NY 10279. ** Listen to a "Meet the Editors" podcast with Natashya Wilson about the new imprint at www.harlequin.com/store.html?cid=749. Go to Meet the Editors 18.

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New Independent Press Seeks Picture Books Associated with Charitable Causes

Earth Day Publishing is a new small press founded on Earth Day, 2009. Its first book, *The Day I Met the Nuts* by Mary Rand Hess, illustrated by Candice Hartsough McDonald, will be published in fall 2009. Earth Day Publishing's mission is to publish books that "entertain and empower readers," printed in safe, eco-friendly venues within the United States. Each book that is published will be associated with a charitable cause, and portions of the proceeds from each book will go to various organizations in an effort to help raise awareness for causes such as literacy, health, and the environment. Currently accepting manuscripts for health-related or special interest picture books. Also seeking samples from illustrators. Authors should email a query letter with a description of their story to Mary Rand Hess, Editor, at editor@earthdaypublishing.com. Illustrators should email with a link to where their work can be viewed. Earth Day pays authors with a hybrid work-for-hire contract with a bonus structure. In the future, the publisher will also offer a royalty agreement as another option. Follow the publisher's growth at www.earthdaypublishing.com.

Nominations Accepted for Award for Outstanding Nonfiction

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) has established the Orbis Pictus Award for Outstanding Nonfiction for Children, presented at the NCTE Annual Convention each year.

Nominees for the 2010 award must be published in the United States during the 2009 calendar year, and be received by the committee chair by December 31, 2009. Nominations of individual titles may come from members of NCTE or the educational community at large. Any nonfiction title of information literature which has as its central purpose the sharing of information may be nominated. This includes biography but excludes textbooks, historical fiction, folklore or poetry. Each nomination will be judged on accuracy, organization, design and style. To nominate a book published in 2009 for the 2010 Orbis Pictus Award, send a letter to Kim Ford, Orbis Pictus Committee Chair, 6617 Westminister Road, Memphis, TN 38120-3446. The letter should include the author's name, book title, publisher, copyright date, and a short description of what you liked about the book. The 2009 winner is *Amelia Earhart: The Legend of the Lost Aviator* by Shelley Tanaka, illustrated by David Craig (Abrams Books for Young Readers). Five honor books were also recognized.

July 2009

At Presstime: *Christian Magazine Accepting Submissions*

Bread for God's Children is an interdenominational Christian teaching publication published 6 times/year, for ages 6-14. Seeking nonfiction for the following columns: "Let's Chat" (children's Christian values), 500-700 words; "Teen Page" (youth Christian values), 600-800 words; "Idea Page" (games, crafts, Bible drills). Pays \$30. Also seeking well-written fiction, with the story itself getting the message across — no preaching, moralizing or neat endings. Especially wants stories that illustrate overcoming obstacles by faith and living solid, Christian lives. Looking for more submissions on healing miracles and reconciliation/restoration. Writers must have a solid knowledge of Biblical principles. Fiction is 600-800 words (ages 6-10) or 9-1500 words (ages 10-14). Pays \$40-\$50. Does not want fantasy, science fiction, or non-Christian themes. Buys first time rights; publishes a manuscript an average of six months after acceptance. Send entire manuscript with SASE to Judith M. Gibbs, Editor, *Bread for God's Children*, P.O. Box 1017, Arcadia, FL 34265-1017. For three sample copies of the magazine, send a 9 x 12 self-addressed, stamped envelope with five first-class stamps to Sample Issues, at the address above.

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. Go to www.write4kids.com/html for a free copy of our Special Report, How to Determine If a New or Small Press is Legitimate.

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Publisher Seeks Nonfiction and Learning Materials for Children and Teens

Free Spirit Publishing publishes nonfiction and learning materials for children and teens, parents, educators and counselors. Looking for strong nonfiction proposals in the following categories:

Early Childhood: Board books for ages baby–preschool and picture books for ages 4–8 that focus on social skills and getting along, early learning, self-esteem, and other topics related to positive early childhood development. **Self-Help for Kids®:** Titles for ages 8–13 on school success, social skills, bullying, character development, conflict resolution, service learning, self-esteem, and other topics related to positive social and emotional health. **Self-Help for Teens®:** Titles for ages 13 and up on life skills, conflict resolution, school success, positive decision making, family issues, character development, social action and civics education, and other topics related to positive social and emotional health. **Gifted & Talented:** Books on academic, social, and emotional development for gifted youth of all ages, as well as resources for parents, educators, and other adults who live and work with them. **Learning Differences:** Books on academic, social, and emotional development for youth with learning differences, as well as resources for parents, educators, and other adults who live and work with them. **Parenting:** Practical, pro-kid books for parents on specific issues related to youth development. No general parenting titles. **Teaching:** Practical, jargon-free materials for educators, counselors, and youth workers that focus on positive youth development, creative teaching strategies, and a wide range of social and emotional needs. Free Spirit does not publish fiction, books with animal or mythical characters, religious or New Age books, biographies, autobiographies or memoirs.

Authors may email a query letter only to acquisitions@freespirit.com. If the editor requests a proposal (or if you're sure your book is a good fit for Free Spirit), mail a cover letter briefly outlining your project, the intended audience (including age ranges), and your relevant expertise; a current résumé; a detailed chapter-by-chapter outline; at least two sample chapters (the entire manuscript for books without chapters); a market analysis with a comprehensive listing of similar titles and detailed explanation of how your project differs from available products. Send with SASE to Free Spirit Publishing, Attn: Acquisitions, 217 Fifth Avenue North, Suite 200, Minneapolis, MN 55401-1299. For current titles, go to www.freespirit.com.

Fall 2009 Bootcamp Announced...Don't Wait for 2010 to Jumpstart Your Writing Career!

Children's Authors' Bootcamp in the Mountains will be held in beautiful Boulder, CO on October 10-11, 2009, at the Best Western Boulder Inn. CBI's Laura Backes and award-winning author Linda Arms White will teach you how to write fiction for children and young adults in two fun and info-packed days. We'll cover creating characters and plots that sell; writing dialogue, description and point of view; show don't tell; editing your own work; writing cover and query letters; finding a publisher and much more. Cost for the weekend (includes lunches, snacks and handouts) is \$269. Sleeping rooms at the Best Western are \$99 for a king bed, or \$109 for two queens, and includes a continental breakfast. For more information or to register, go to www.WeMakeWriters.com.

Book Publishing Today

Jump on the Multimedia Brand-Wagon

by Jane McBride Choate

YouTube, cyber-bridges, social networking, digi-novels. What do such electronic contrivances have to do with writing? Aren't these pursuits our sworn enemy, snaring the attention and spending dollars of the potential readers we, the writers, hope to capture?

Welcome to the world of multimedia.

Like all industries facing today's recession, publishing has had to confront the problem of reduced sales as young book-buyers (and their parents) cut back on discretionary spending. Publishers and authors alike are looking for ways to boost profits. Maximizing book sales with merchandise tie-ins is certainly not new, but the creativity behind these latest projects has a new energy and reach.

It isn't enough to simply write a great book and sell it. Today, you have to brand it.

The United Kingdom-based Chorion takes properties that have roots in books and expands them into television, web sites, merchandise and more. This can have a big impact on an author's backlist sales. For example, Penguin Books for Young Readers reports that, due to Chorion's branding, backlist sales of Mr. Men and Little Miss books for the first nine months of 2008 exceeded one million. Chorion's strategy is to build a franchise.

After managing the publication of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* and originating and overseeing development of *The 39 Clues*, a book and web-based venture (www.the39clues.com), Lisa Holton left her job as president of Scholastic and launched a new business — Fourth Story Media. Publishing under the HarperCollins imprint, Fourth Story Media (FSM) produces stories and content that span multiple formats, including web sites, on-line games, books, DVDs, audio/digital downloads, and social networks.

Its first series is The Amanda Project (www.amandaproject.com), an interactive, collaborate mystery series for girls age 13 and up launching this summer. Told across a variety of media including books, a web site that features games, and a related series of blogs and satellite sites, music, and merchandise, The Amanda Project invites readers and users to participate in an unprecedented way. A social web site encourages interaction with the lead character, Amanda Valentino, and even become new characters in the mystery.

Owning all rights for the property, FSM will produce the content for The Amanda

Project with a creative team including web design agency Happy Cog, young adult authors, artists, and graphic designers. While the content is tailored to each medium, the online strand is constantly refreshed and altered by its users. These users virally market the content to other users in a virtual circle.

"I've always been interested in online," Holton told *Publishers Weekly* in a June 2008 interview. "As each new generation comes up, they interact with technology and the web in a totally different way than adults do."

The fluidity of the user experience is specifically adapted to young minds. "What we call multitasking is not, to them," Holton stresses. "They move in and out seamlessly. They can be listening to music, chatting with their friends, looking at something online, reading. They did not grow up pre-Internet. I continue to think about where books fit into their lives."

The Amanda Project invites users to create their own character profiles. Girls like to use technology to create their own stuff. They use it as a means to express themselves. Users can also design their own t-shirts, buttons, charms, notebooks, stationery, e-cards, and take quizzes.

Publishers of adult fiction are jumping on the brand-wagon as well. Dutton has contracted for a "digi-novel" by the creator of the CSI television franchise, which will send readers to a web site with companion footage relating to the plot. The book can be read traditionally from cover to cover. Those who want a more in-depth experience, though, can watch the online videos, called "cyber bridges." The goal is to bridge the gap between the existing novel reader and the YouTube Generation.

Other publishers linking books with online elements include Harlequin Books, which has teamed with Big Fish Games to create a series of games based on the Harlequin Presents line. James Patterson's popular Women's Murder Club series has paired with iPlay to produce an interactive video game.

Look for fresh and creative projects in the future as more and more publishers make the connection between books and electronic media.

Young Boys Roll with Trucktown

When Jon Scieszka and his editor at Simon & Schuster, Justin Chanda, first discussed the idea for Scieszka's preschool boys' brand, Trucktown, it included not only 52 books but games, toys, entertainment, and social networking as well. "All this stuff was really crucial to the whole concept of Trucktown," the author said. "We wanted to really think it through and not just let it happen after the fact."

Featuring such characters as Izzy Ice Cream Truck, Dump Truck Dan, Grater Kat, Wrecker Rosie, and Big Rig, Trucktown appeals to the inherent interest among small boys in all things car and truck related.

For the non-book aspects of the property, Scieszka and Chanda turned to Chorion, a brand management company specializing in literary properties that include children's characters and mystery writers.

The editors wanted to transfer the Trucktown experience as it leaps off the page and bring it to life on the Internet, in an active and interactive way. Scieszka describes the Trucktown web site (www.trucktown.com), which launched in June of 2008, as "loud and bright, with plenty of things to smash."

Next month, we'll discuss how authors can submit to multimedia publishers.



www.CBIclubhouse.com
Subscribers: Check out Laura's walkthrough of two publisher networking sites designed to promote their books and authors.

Author Connects with Readers

Melissa Thomson knew exactly what life as an author would be like. “Over the years I spent a lot of time thinking about who would come to my book parties and what stories I would tell Oprah that would make me seem deeply humble yet brilliant beyond measure,” she said. Once she got down to actually thinking about the kinds of books she’d like to create, she realized how much fun she had writing about her experiences as a second grade teacher in emails and letters to friends and family. Then one night, “Keena Ford invaded my bathroom when I was brushing my teeth. Well, really, she invaded my head. So then I started writing her story mentally while brushing my teeth each night. And my husband would say through the door, ‘Why is it taking you *twenty minutes* to brush your teeth?’ and I’d just be like, ‘I’m almost done! Sheesh!’ because it’s not like I could say, ‘I’m talking to my seven-year-old imaginary friend who visits me in the evenings.’”

Eventually, Keena moved out of Thomson’s head and onto her computer in the form of a chapter book for ages 6-9. Keena Ford is a spirited second grader who tries to please everyone and do the right thing, but she can’t help but get into trouble. *Keena Ford and the Second-Grade Mix-Up*, published by Dial in 2008, is written in first person as Keena’s journal. Thomson’s second book, *Keena Ford and the Field Trip Mix-Up*, was just released this month. A third Keena Ford book is in the works.

Thomson recently spoke with CBI about writing early chapter books.

You’ve said Keena Ford is inspired by your students. How important is it to be around real kids on a regular basis if you want to write children’s books?

As I’ve thought about when and if it will be realistic or wise for me to make the jump to fulltime writer, I have had to consider how much I need to be around real kids to write in my category. When I moved from the urban public school on which Keena’s school is based to an international independent school, I was concerned about losing Keena’s voice a little bit. But I don’t think this has been a problem, for three reasons: 1. There is nothing to identify Keena’s school as “urban” because I didn’t think of my school that way at the time, it was just, you know, my school; 2. Kids say and do funny things everywhere, regardless of their culture or race; and 3. As my husband gently pointed out, Keena is based on my students but also based on the seven-year-old in me who comes out way more than is probably acceptable for a 30-year-old woman.

What was critical for me in finding Keena’s voice was not only being around kids but also reading their writing. The last year I was a second-grade classroom teacher, I had some natural leaders in my class who loved to write and were slightly competitive about their page counts. I think Keena’s voice really presented itself clearly through reading their stories more than just being around them. I was really lucky to have a class where the cool thing was to write ten-page stories. The previous year the cool thing had been to wear a bunch of rubber bands on your arm, which was not that helpful to me as a writer but useful for rolling up posters.

As a teacher, I can’t help but observe what things are important to my students, and that knowledge informs my writing. For example, birthdays are a really big deal in the first *Keena* book, as they are for real children. I had an unfortunate confluence of events in one class where we got a new student on another student’s birthday, which meant that *all* attention shifted from the birthday girl to the new student, prompting the birthday girl to take off her birthday crown and throw it in the trash in despair.

Your books are written as Keena’s journal. And yet, because they have to be easy for the reader to follow, the sentence structure and grammar are probably more advanced than the average second grader would write. How do you keep the voice believable?

I don’t know how much of what I think makes Keena’s voice believable can be extrapolated to what makes young voices believable in general, because Keena’s voice is very specific to me. One of my friends says that Keena writes the way I talk, which makes writing easier but perhaps doesn’t reflect well on my speaking vocabulary. I gave myself some wiggle room on the vocabulary by giving Keena a dictionary and having her say that her teacher told her she is a very good writer for her age. When I teach dialogue to my older students, we learn other words for “said,” but Keena pretty much sticks to “said,” “shouted,” “told,” and a few others. For example, Keena would never say her mom “responded quizzically,” she would say her mom “said, and raised her eyebrows up very high.” Keena tends to be very transparent about the fact that she interprets emotions based on people’s facial expressions and the volume of their voices. Even though a real second grader might not write like Keena writes, I guess it’s believable because if a real second grader was telling what happened to her and a teacher wrote it down, it would sound like Keena’s journal. Again, it’s helpful for me to be around real children to pick up on the way they phrase things.

in Early Chapter Book Series

In the early draft of the first *Keena*, my agent had me rewrite a few things that were too cutesy or didn't ring true. At the end of the journal entry about Keena's visit to the coffee shop with her dad, Keena originally burped but remembered to say "Excuse me." Laura (my agent) wanted to end the entry with something that didn't so obviously position Keena as an anti-girly girl, so I changed it to Keena wiping off her milk mustache without having to be told.

I was recently reading a book about improvisational comedy that said good improv performers never try to be funny, and I think that applies to children's books. I love it when people think my books are funny, but Keena herself never tries to be funny. She is extremely earnest and sensitive. Even when Keena gets worked up about small things, I believe her and respect her point of view and try to just write down what she is "telling" me without imparting judgment.

I tell writers that they need to have conflict in their stories or there won't be any plot. How would you define "conflict" for early elementary grades?

When I started the first *Keena* book, I didn't really know anything about writing children's books. I just read a lot of them, and I knew that I taught my second-grade students to have a problem and a solution in their story, so I thought about my plot in terms of problem/solution rather than conflict. I thought about the books I loved and what the problems were in those stories. Kids have problems or conflict for all sorts of different reasons, and with Keena, her problems are often caused by her impulsiveness.

Another good thing about being a teacher is learning a million and one little ways kids can experience conflict in a school setting. For example, in the second *Keena* book, Keena has a conflict with another student based on the line order for the class. Before I was a teacher, I wouldn't have anticipated that one's position in line could be such a source of controversy. If conflict is something getting in the way of what the character wants, it can be helpful to me to define what Keena wants. What gets her all worked up? She wants her teacher to like her. She wants to have friends. She wants justice, and she gets worked up if she perceives injustice, albeit about things on a very small scale, like one person getting a sticker and another person not getting a sticker. In the great book *Walk Two Moons* by Sharon Creech, a character receives anonymous messages, and one is "In the course of a lifetime, what does it matter?" For a second grader, "it" usually matters a lot, regardless of what "it" is. This ability to put their own experiences and frustrations in perspective

is not so easy for young children. But as writers, we have to respect that, and put ourselves in our character's shoes, and believe that the small thing is important.

Do you have tips for author school visits?

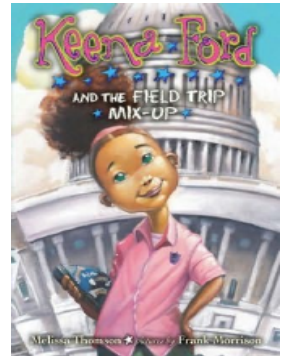
When I do school visits, I'm of the opinion that children are less excited to see me and hear what I have to say than they are to know that I see *them* and that I hear what *they* have to say. In my school presentations, I start by teaching the children hand signals to show that they agree with, disagree with, or aren't sure about something I said. I give them opportunities to use their hand signals throughout the presentation so everyone feels like they got to participate. Also, when I ask a question and a million hands shoot up in the air, after I call on someone to respond, I tell the kids to give me a thumbs-up if that was what *they* were going to say, so they know that I know they had the right answer. Like everything I do in my classroom or on a visit, those are ideas I stole from wise teachers.

This is a basic classroom management tip more than an author visit tip, but if you get an overly excited group, what often works is to make a big deal about the kids who are doing the right thing. Like, "Wow, I really like the way the third row is sitting. They are sitting up straight and their hands are in their laps. You guys look awesome." It's amazing how many straight backs and still hands you'll see after that. (Of course the key to getting kids to behave is to have a really good presentation, but even that isn't a guarantee of perfect behavior, so it helps to have some tricks in your back pocket.)

I'm in the process of refining my presentations based on what I've noticed in the ones I've done so far. For example, a few younger kids have expressed confusion about who actually makes the books and asked me if I typed and retyped every single copy. So even though I talk about the publishing process in my presentation, I've realized that it's not totally clear who makes the physical books, and I'm figuring out a better way to explain it. In terms of content, I've found that early elementary students like to hear about the story and talk about the themes like making friends and learning from your mistakes. In the upper elementary grades, most questions are about the writing and publishing process.

Any advice for aspiring writers?

I recently came across this quote on Laurie Halse Anderson's blog. It's a Faulkner quote. He said, "Don't be 'a writer.' Be writing." I love this, and I have started repeating it to myself frequently.



Keena Ford and the Field Trip Mix-Up by Melissa Thomson, illustrated by Frank Morrison (Dial Books for Young Readers)



www.CBIclubhouse.com
Subscribers: Listen to a podcast with Melissa Thomson as she talks more about tuning into the mindset of second graders.

From the Editor

Dear Reader:

It seems when kids turn 13, one word sums up their lives: melodrama. Emotions hover on the surface; every event is *huge*. Adults are idiots who don't understand them, and their classmates are constantly watching to make sure they don't do anything stupid (which includes wearing the wrong clothes to saying the wrong thing to listening to the wrong music). Oh. My. God.

As adults on the receiving end of this hysteria, we may roll our eyes or deliberately show up at Back to School Night with wet hair, just to see our child's response. But as authors, we can mine the drama for its flip side: humor.

Many books for teens feature characters who are on the edge of the abyss and facing life-or-death situations, extreme moral choices, or have been dealt a tough hand and have to somehow live with it. Their drama is achingly real. Or, a protagonist might be self-assured enough to rise above the sniping judgements of his peers. Both characters are admirable, but often not funny. Humor comes from a flawed character the reader genuinely likes, who's in a sticky situation the reader can easily imagine. Then the author turns it up a notch. The reader gets to laugh at someone who's *like* her, but from the safety of not having to actually suffer the humiliation personally.

In Denise Vega's *click here (to find out how i survived seventh grade)*, Erin Swift is not having the best start to middle school. Her big feet are the butt of jokes, she lands the role of Corn Cob in the school play, and the Cute Boy she has a crush on becomes infatuated with her best friend Jilly. But Erin's a whiz with computers, and joins the Intranet Club to become the lead designer for the school's web site. She also keeps a secret blog where she spills all her innermost thoughts and true feelings about everyone at her school. When her blog accidentally gets posted on the school web site, Erin's convinced she's going to die.

Vega's taken traditional middle school dynamics and filtered them through Erin's self-deprecating lens, which lightens up the angst of the genuinely heart-wrenching scenes (Cute Boy's attraction to Jilly, Erin overhearing girls criticizing her in the bathroom). Then Vega throws in every middle schooler's worst fear: that they'll be stripped metaphorically naked in front of their peers and revealed for who they really are. If Erin's public blog was the only drama in the book, we'd pity Erin but not really identify with her. But because of the melodrama in earlier scenes, we know that Erin's learning to laugh at herself, and she'll find a way to survive this very real problem.

Parents offer endless inspiration for melodrama. If you're looking for a good adolescent plot twist, simply ask yourself, "What the most embarrassing thing a parent could do to this character?" Your answer might give you a whole book. The opening line of Shelley Pearsall's *All Shook Up* says it all: "Looking back, I would say everything in my life changed the summer I turned thirteen and my dad turned into Elvis."

Like Vega, Pearsall keeps close to comforting upper middle grade territory but then cranks up the embarrassment. Josh is sent to live with his father in Chicago one summer when his mother has to take care of his sick grandmother. Josh hasn't seen his dad for a while, and assumes he's still the scatterbrained shoe salesman he remembered. But Dad's got a new gig as an Elvis impersonator. And what's more, when Josh's visit is extended into the fall and he starts school in Chicago, one of his classmates leaves him anonymous notes about Elvis. Josh's dwindling ability to keep his dad's identity a secret is completely shattered when Dad is invited to perform at the school's 1950s concert, and Josh must take drastic action that threatens to ruin his relationship with his father forever. Readers will certainly empathize with Josh, but also observe how he and his father learn to compromise and respect the person each has become. Josh is forced to think about someone other than himself, which (along with the fact that Dad is a terrific performer) helps deflate the social suicide of having Elvis for a dad.

For my money, one of the best beach reads you'll find this summer is *Two Parties, One Tux, and a Very Short Film About The Grapes of Wrath* by Steven Goldman. 17-year-old Mitchell is a slightly scrawny, socially inept, average student, whose best (and only real) friend tells Mitchell he's gay one day at lunch. Mitchell's junior high school year is marked by trying to talk to girls (Does his sister and her best friend count?), navigating the school hierarchy, reassessing his friendship with David, and turning in a slightly pornographic claymation film in lieu of an English paper on a book he hasn't read. Much of the humor comes from Mitchell's dry, somewhat clueless first-person voice. He's hovering outside the whirl of popularity, and so can comment on high school without having much to lose. *School Library Journal* called the book "A side-splitting slice of male adolescence, [that] turns the spotlight on the ridiculousness that is the average, contemporary American high school experience."

When I asked Goldman how he writes humor, he said, "I was just trying to capture some of the feelings I could remember from high school, and really see the world through the eyes and the running narration of a character with a particular view of the world and a particular way of expressing his feelings. One of the things I really enjoy about writing YA is that I find high school students to be funny. Frankly, I think they have better senses of humor than adults. They are willing to put themselves in situations that no one with a brain would, and yet they have the intelligence to realize that they are doing it. That risk-taking extends to language as well — they will say things that are brutally honest and horrible and therefore frequently funny."

This brutal honesty, both with each other and themselves, creates those situations bordering on melodrama. One of my favorite scenes from *Two Parties* is at prom, when Mitchell is in the bathroom thinking about his date who's abandoned him, and he accidentally pees on his white tux pants. While laughing at Mitchell's description of himself, I couldn't help but cringe at the image of him walking through the school gym with wet pants. Even as an adult, I still feel I share in Mitchell's experience. That's why writing humor for teens may be easier than you think. As Goldman said, "We never really recover from our adolescence; those years starting in middle school and continuing through high school are so formative that they we can still find them in a lot of the ways that we feel about things as an adult. I might be 45, but when I walk into a party I swear I'm still 17 and clueless about what to do next. We may leave high school, but we never really escape it."

The CBI Challenge, Module 3: Make Time to Write

The Five-Minute Writer

by Jane McBride Choate

Writers have other lives. We must schlep our children to orthodontist appointments, attend Little League games, and make sure the laundry is done. This is often in addition to holding down a fulltime job that pays the bills. So where does writing fit in?

I started writing when I had three small children. It was in the days of typewriters. I plopped an ancient portable typewriter on the kitchen table where it remained eight hours a day. Whenever I had five minutes to spare, I wrote. Those bits and pieces ended up as poems and fillers, short stories and articles. I wrote my first novel longhand in a notebook while nursing my fourth baby.

But, you may protest, I don't have any time to spare. Another complaint I've heard when I've voiced my "Five-Minute Writer" theory is that you can't accomplish anything in five minutes. I offer the following as only a few examples of what *can* be accomplished in that time. Use your imagination to come up with others.

- Go through a book of baby names to find names for the characters in your story
- Brainstorm fresh examples of body language
- Read four pages of a writing craft book
- Back up files
- Edit two hard copy pages of your WIP (work in progress)
- Do a character sketch
- Outline an article
- Write down that snippet of dialogue you overheard at the grocery store that would be perfect for your short story. (You will forget it if you don't record it.)
- Free write. Don't limit yourself, let it flow.
- Use your spellcheck and correct typos (but don't expect this to take the place of true proofreading)
- Email a query to an editor who accepts queries electronically
- Review a writing newsletter and highlight the most important points
- Write a paragraph describing the setting for a novel
- Do the "list of 20." Write down 20 things that could happen in your book.

Pressed-for-time writers multitask. One

writer friend has her time do double duty: "I write on my AlphaSmart while I'm on the treadmill. I bundle bookmarks while I'm on the phone. I take the train instead of driving so I can work. I try to combine trips out to do all my errands at once."

Another friend, also a writing teacher, suggests these four tips for making the most of your time:

- Compartmentalize your time — set specific time for email, writing sessions, research, blogging, MySpace
- Play Beat the Timer (set the time for five minutes or whatever time you have, then see how many words you can turn out)
- Reward yourself for completing projects
- Do something writing-related while you exercise, capture your great ideas in a digital recorder while you walk, listen to audio books while you jog, type on your laptop while you ride your exercise bike

Most of our lives are fragmented. We're running and going and doing and waiting. Remember the advice given to busy parents to help their children get out the door in the mornings? Fill the backpack the night before and have it ready to go.

Savvy writers keep a writer-to-go tote bag ready. Load it with a notebook, pens, highlighters, paper clips, a folder, and chocolate. Right before you leave (or the night before), print your last complete chapter and the current scene in your WIP. You may take your AlphaSmart or laptop too. If your day gives you a few fragments of time, turn that previously wasted time into productive time. The half hour you spend waiting for a child at a doctor's appointment can be used to outline a short story, or to craft a query to send to an editor you met at a writers' conference.

One of my favorite techniques for squeezing extra minutes into a day is the "bunch-and-batch" method. Bunch your emails together. Do the same with your phone calls and errands. You can "buy" yourself five, ten, or even more minutes that you can put toward your writing.

Remember, real writers don't find time to write. They make time. Make yours count.

The CBI Challenge #3: Fit Writing into Your Daily Life

You're not a writer unless you write. But creating time to write is an obstacle many beginners can't get past. So this month we're giving you several ways you can work writing into your daily schedule. On The CBI Clubhouse you'll find information on starting an idea file to hold all those random thoughts that come to you during the day, a video on moving writing up in your hierarchy of values, walk-throughs of some great writing exercise web sites, and another inspirational article from Jane Choate. And just for fun, try one of these quick exercises and share your results on the CBI Challenge message board.

Exercise #1: Think of a cherished childhood memory when you were the same age as the audience you want to write for. Set a timer for five minutes, and write out that memory in first person.

If you have 10 minutes: Do the above exercise for five minutes, then rewrite the scene in third person. Note how the voice changes when you switch viewpoints.

Exercise #2: Assuming you carry a notebook with you at all times (and you should!) the next time you're waiting somewhere, pick another person in your vicinity to be the basis for a character sketch. Using this person's appearance and mannerisms, take five minutes to jot down imagined personality traits, likes and dislikes, details of home life, and think about what may have brought him or her to this place at this time. Have fun with this!

If you have 10 minutes: Create two character sketches based on the same person, one as a story's protagonist, and one as the antagonist or villain.

For Modules 1-2 of The CBI Challenge, go to www.cbiclubhouse.com/the-cbi-challenge/

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Your Publishing Career

When to Say No, and (Sometimes) Yes

by Jane McBride Choate

Successful authors learn to say no, even when it hurts. Many writers work at home and find that they are prey to a myriad of requests. These demands come from family, friends, and the community.

One of the hardest things for me is my husband asking for the little things “since you’re going to be home all day.” Anyone can replace “husband” with mother, child, best friend. Working *from* home must be working *at* home. It takes time and patience to train loved ones to understand that you are *working* when you are at home, not on-call.

I don’t volunteer for anything. Family events – like birthdays, etc – are given priority; ditto with special events for family and friends (weddings, baby showers); but volunteering in the classroom or calling parishioners for an event – I say no. Usually I’m not asked why. I’m just polite and say, “I’m sorry, I won’t be able to help this time.” Eventually they stop asking.

Not surprisingly, the more successful the author, the more that professional demands are made upon her time and energies. In my experience, author endorsements and speaking engagements are the biggest requests. For speaking I don’t have problems saying no, especially if it involves travel. I’ve already committed to everything I intend to do for 2009 and 2010. I simply say that between my family and my deadlines, I don’t have the time. I’ve had to learn that I can’t do everything. It’s a hard lesson.

For author endorsements it’s hard to say no. I *want* to read books and offer a quote – especially for debut novels – but I have to read the book before I feel comfortable giving a quote. I want to help as much as I can, but I can’t read everything I’m sent. So I say to send it to me (unless the deadline is less than two or three weeks away) and I will try to read it by their deadline. But I rarely make promises. You have to keep your writing time

sacred. It’s the only way to keep your sanity.

I hate to turn down requests from others, but my writing has to take priority. I’m honest and say, “I’m sorry, but I don’t have any time in my immediate schedule for the next week weeks.” If it can wait, and it isn’t too brain consuming, I help out.

Sometimes it makes sense to say “yes.” In a tight market, saying “yes” to the right opportunity can open doors. Say you want to make connections with agents and editors. What can you do? Chances are you belong to a writer’s group or chapter of a professional organization. Volunteer your services at organizing a conference allows you to spend non-conference time with these people.

I belong to several writing groups. When one chapter hosted a local conference, I volunteered to pick up an editor from the airport. I didn’t plague her with requests to look at a manuscript. Instead, I talked with her of other things. When I mentioned that my husband and I had adopted a child, she confided that she was an adopted child. We discussed what that meant for the child and for the family and ended up bonding over that shared experience. She invited me to send a proposal to her. Later, when I did submit a manuscript to her, I knew she would remember me.

Though writers want to maximize their efforts and earn as much money as possible for their work, it can make sense to submit to publications that pay only in contributor copies. Saying “yes” to these opportunities can earn credits and build a resume. I have also sold stories to low-paying markets that buy only the first rights and then resold them to higher-paying markets.

Saying “no” can be balanced with saying “yes,” giving you a richer and more productive writing life. The trick is in knowing what is right for you and your career.

Jane McBride Choate is the author of numerous children's short stories, adult romance novels, and over 200 magazine pieces.