

# Children's Book Insider

## At Presstime

### *Peachtree Open to Submissions*

Peachtree Publishers publishes general trade books for adults and children. Seeking picture books, both fiction and non-fiction (picture book age ranges are 0-4, 4-8, and 6-10), middle grade (ages 8-12) and young adult fiction (ages 11-15 or 12-16). Also publishes children's nonfiction with a Southern regional slant, some self-help books (psychology and health), and parenting books. No poetry, science fiction, fantasy, romance, horror or historical novels. View current titles on the web site ([www.peachtree-online.com](http://www.peachtree-online.com)) or send a 10 x 12 SASE with \$1.72 postage to the address below for a catalog. Submit complete manuscript for picture books, query with outline and 2-3 sample chapters for longer works. Send with author biographical information and a SASE to Helen Harris, Acquisitions Editor, Peachtree Publications, 1700 Chattahoochee Avenue, Atlanta, GA 30318-2112. Allow at least 4 months for a reply. After that time, authors may call Helen Harris on Thursday afternoons between 1:00 and 4:00 p.m. at (404) 876-8761.

Illustrators may submit 4-7 sample illustrations (tear sheets or 8 1/2 x 11 color copies) to be kept on file. Choose samples that portray your ability to depict subjects or characters in a consistent manner, and if applicable provide samples which display your abilities in various mediums, styles or techniques. Include your name, address, phone and fax numbers. Submit to Loraine Balcsik, Art Director, at the above address. If you'd like the samples returned, include a SASE with sufficient postage.

### *New Magazine Accepting Submissions*

*Fun for Kidz* is a new magazine which will be published six times a year, to begin regular publication in January 2002. It's designed to be a companion publication to *Boys' Quest* and *Hopscotch* magazines. *Fun for Kidz* is an activity magazine for boys and girls ages 6-13, with readers ages 8, 9, and 10 being the target audience. Looking for activities that deal with timeless topics such as pets, nature, hobbies, science, games, sports, careers, cooking, or other wholesome and unusual interests to the target audience. Each issue revolves around a theme. Authors can request a theme list by sending a SASE to the address below. Future themes include: helping others, pets, gardening, camping, fall fun, winter wonder, recycling, summer splash, in the mountains, indoor fun. Issues are put together several months in advance.

Articles and fiction of about 500 words that also contain an activity are needed. Also looking for puzzles, poems, recipes, carpentry projects, crafts, riddles, or any other activity that complements the theme. Articles that are accompanied by good photos are more likely to be accepted than those that require illustrations. FFK prefers to receive completed manuscripts, though query letters are also acceptable. Buys first American serial rights. Pays a minimum of \$.05 per word for articles and fiction with additional payment for accompanying photos, and a minimum of \$10 per poem or puzzle. As themes are often chosen as the result of a submission on a topic the editors haven't considered, if you don't receive a quick response to a submission it means it's being held and given serious consideration.

Submit manuscripts with SASE to The Editor, *Fun for Kidz*, PO Box 227, Bluffton, OH 45817-0227.

### Inside C.B.I.:

At Presstime....1

It Takes Gumption to Get Published....3

Special Report: New Electronic Newsletter Blows the Whistle on Censorship....4

From the Editor....6

Fictionalizing History for Young Readers....7

Try This Picture Book Editing Checklist....8

January 2002

## ◆ At Presstime

**Children's Book Insider** makes every effort to verify the legitimacy of small and new presses before printing information in "At Presstime." However, authors and illustrators should always proceed with caution when approaching publishers 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 our Web page: <http://www.write4kids.com>

Published 12 times/year by Children's Book Insider, LLC, 901 Columbia Road, Ft. Collins, CO 80525-1838. 970/495-0056. ISSN 1073-7596  
E-mail: [mail@write4kids.com](mailto:mail@write4kids.com)  
<http://www.write4kids.com>

**Subscribers: Please notify us immediately of change of address. CBI is mailed third class and will not be forwarded by the post office.**

Publisher: Laura Backes  
Managing Editor: Jon Bard  
Contributing Editors:  
Moira Allen, Mary Bowman-Kruhm, Margaret Shauers, Nancy Sondel

Subscription Price: 12 issues/\$34 (Canada: \$38 US; other countries: \$43) Single issue: \$3.25

**To receive a free CBI Collection catalog or place an order call 800/807-1916. You can also get a catalog via e-mail by sending a message to: [cbi@sendfree.com](mailto:cbi@sendfree.com)**

Text copyright © 2002 Children's Book Insider, LLC. Subscribers may reprint up to 300 words with credit to Children's Book Insider, 901 Columbia Road, Ft. Collins, CO 80525-1838.

**Barron's Seeks Manuscripts for All Ages**

Barron's Educational Series publishes fiction and nonfiction for toddlers through young adults. Many of their books fit into existing series, so authors are advised to check out the current catalog online at [www.barroneduc.com](http://www.barroneduc.com). The publisher is heavy on nonfiction, though fiction is also considered, especially if it has some educational element to the story. The general categories of children's books are: Art Books for Children (such as the Great Artists series of picture books); Birth to Toddler (board books with minimal text for very young children); Foreign Languages for Children; Picture Books (fiction and nonfiction); Young Children (easy readers such as the Get Ready, Get Set, Read! series and early chapter books); and Older Children (middle grade and young adult fiction, nonfiction, biographies, books on the arts). Send a query letter containing a synopsis of the book and information on the author's background and/or previous writing experience. Send with SASE to Wayne Barr, Acquisitions Editor, Barron's Educational Series, 250 Wireless Boulevard, Hauppauge, NY 11788.

**E-Zine Seeks Submissions**

*Wee Ones E-Magazine* is an electronic publication for children ages 3-8 and their parents. It can be found at [www.weeonesmag.com](http://www.weeonesmag.com). Seeking lively writing that entertains and educates young children. Accepting read-aloud stories of 150-500 words on most topics except religion. Also looking for nonfiction of 150-500 words on animals, arts/crafts, math, nature/environment, puzzles, science and cooking.

*Wee Ones* also needs colorful, original artwork samples for ages 3-8, and photographs for the cover of each issue and to accompany articles. Send permission from parents/guardians to use a photo of a child. Photos and artwork may be submitted either in hardcopy or as a .tif, .gif, .jpg, or .bmp file. Must be 1.5 MB or less.

A companion site, *Big Ones*, is geared toward parents and needs articles up to 700 words on parenting, education and reading. Send all manuscript submissions by email to Jennifer Reed, Editor, at [submissions@weeonesmag.com](mailto:submissions@weeonesmag.com). Artwork/photos may be mailed to *Wee Ones Magazine*, 1321 Ridge Road, Baltimore, MD 21228. Buys first electronic rights, pays \$.03 per word for articles and stories, \$5 for poems, \$3-\$20 for photos and artwork.

**Upcoming Workshops:**

**Children's Authors' Bootcamp**, the popular weekend-long fiction writing workshop led by Laura Backes, Publisher of CBI, and children's book author Linda Arms White, has set dates for this spring and summer. CAB features two full days of intensive instruction and exercises on writing fiction for children of all ages, with emphasis on character and plot development, dialogue, descriptive writing, point of view, writing strong beginnings, editing your own work and submitting manuscripts to publishers. Each Bootcamp costs \$219 for Saturday and Sunday (9:00-4:30 each day), and includes lunch and snacks. For a complete class outline and registration information (including information on booking hotel rooms), see [www.WeMakeWriters.com](http://www.WeMakeWriters.com), or contact Linda White at (970) 461-3736, or [Linda@WeMakeWriters.com](mailto:Linda@WeMakeWriters.com).

Upcoming Bootcamps: **Albuquerque, NM**, March 23-24, 2002 at the Best Western Rio Grande in the historic Old Town area. Hotel rooms for CAB participants are \$69/night. To see pictures of the hotel and get information on Albuquerque, go to [www.riograndeinn.com](http://www.riograndeinn.com)

**Jacksonville, FL**, April 21-22, 2002 at the Sea Turtle Inn in Atlantic Beach. A relaxing, beachfront setting. Hotel rooms for CAB are \$109/night with an ocean view. See [www.seaturtle.com](http://www.seaturtle.com) for photos of the location. This one will fill up fast!

**Denver, CO**, June 22-23, 2002 at the Hampton Inn & Suites in the Cherry Creek area. Minutes from Denver's most exclusive shops and the famous Tattered Cover Book Store. Hotel rooms for CAB are \$79/night.

**Gulf Shores, AL:** Springmingle '02!, the Southern Breeze SCBWI spring conference, will be held at Gulf Shores, AL, February 22-24, 2002. Speakers are author Larry Dane Brimner, illustrator Karen Stormer Brooks, and editors Alison Keehn (Barefoot Books), Paula Morrow (*Ladybug* and *Babybug* magazines), and Wendy Lamb (Wendy Lamb Books). For details and registration forms, see the web site: [www.southern-breeze.org](http://www.southern-breeze.org)

**Honesdale, PA:** The Highlights Foundation is taking applications for its Writing for Children Spring 2002 series of workshops. Each workshop will focus on a different topic and last for four days. Workshops take place from March to June, 2002. Some topics include "The Insider's Guide to Children's Publishing," "Nonfiction--It's More Than Just the Facts!," and "Writing from the Heart: Telling Your Stories on Paper." Space is limited. For registration information, contact Maggie Ewain at (570) 253-1192, [maewain@highlightsfoundation.org](mailto:maewain@highlightsfoundation.org), or send a SASE to Writing for Children Spring Workshops, Highlights Foundation, 814 Court Street, Honesdale, PA 18431.

## ◆ The Basics

## It Takes Gumption to Get Published

by Nancy Kelly Allen

Are your submissions being rejected on a regular basis? By regular, I mean each and every one. Does it seem that no editor is willing to give you a break? Do you sometimes feel that there is a conspiracy among publishing houses, a plot to keep out all new, unpublished writers? If you have answered "yes" to one or more of these questions, you are not alone. Almost every author has experienced rejection many times over.

I am speaking from experience since I, too, have received my share of rejection letters. For nine years I came close to getting a book published. Then about two years ago the unbelievable happened: by way of a phone call I was asked if a particular manuscript was available. As soon as the fog cleared and my brain reengaged, I was able to squeak out a "yes."

Throughout these past 11 years, I have come to realize some tried-and-true rules about getting published regardless of the type of writing or the intended audience.

**It Takes Gumption.** Keep writing. Write as often as possible, and try to find ways to make more time for writing. Even if your manuscript is not accepted, consider the effort an exercise in writing, practice in honing skills. Perseverance--my grandmother would call it gumption--is the key to getting published. Perseverance is studying the craft of writing, and working on the manuscript to make it as good as it can get. Perseverance is mailing the rejected manuscript to another publisher as soon as possible or even rewriting your manuscript after several rejection letters. It's beginning a new manuscript as soon as the last one is finished, staying focused on your goal, and never, ever giving up your dream.

**Take Heed from the Rejection Letters.** Rejection is never easy, especially when you have poured your heart and soul, not to mention sweat and toil, into a story only to have an editor make unflattering comments on its form or content. Most editors do not spend time making comments about a particular manuscript unless the manuscript shows promise; instead, they send form rejection letters. If suggestions are made regarding how the story can be improved, take heed. After all, editors are professionals and know the market demands. Sometimes when a story is

rejected, an editor will make positive statements about your style of writing and ask to review other manuscripts you have written. When you send the manuscripts, in a cover letter remind the editor of the request to see more of your work.

**Study the Market.** Send your work to publishers who specialize in the type of writing that matches your manuscript. There are numerous books and periodicals available listing publishers and their editorial needs. Many, like CBI, also include articles on improving writing skills. It is a waste of time and money to send a manuscript to a publisher who does not publish the type of manuscript you have written. Studying the market is a time-consuming activity, but the potential payoff is worth the effort. Visit your local library and book stores to peruse books by particular publishers to determine if your manuscript fits into their publishing niche. Smaller, regional publishers may accept a manuscript more readily than a larger publisher. Magazines and contests are potential markets. Magazine articles enhance your resume, and the very mention of a contest win strengthens the salability of the manuscript.

**Read! Read! Read!** If you are writing in a particular genre, read as many books as you can in that genre. There is simply no substitute for reading in the genre for which you are writing. Reading is a way to gain insight into the craftsmanship of writing.

Study the writing of authors who are winning awards. First, read the book for the entertainment value. Then, read the book a second or third time to acquire a grasp of how the story was written. Notice the use of voice, the manner in which the author tells the story. How was the character developed? What problems did the protagonist encounter? How were problems resolved?

Read and study other popular books geared for the same age group and genre for which you are writing. Was the theme evident? Pay particular attention to phrasing or any quality that gives the book uniqueness. Remember, a picture book uses an economy of words. Leave lengthy descriptions to novels.

**Editor's note:** This is the first of a two-part series on the basics of taking your manuscript from final revision to publication. This month, Nancy Allen talks about things writers can do while they're working on their final manuscript draft. Next month, she'll list tips for networking and putting together a strong submission package.

**Nancy Kelly Allen** is a primary school librarian whose first picture book, *Once Upon a Dime*, was published by Charlesbridge in 1999. She recently sold another picture book, *The Wireless*, which will be published by Brookfield Reader, and was awarded a grant from the Kentucky Foundation for Women to complete a picture book series. Her work has appeared in several magazines including *Book Links*, *Good Apple*, *Back Home in Kentucky*, *M Magazine* and *Kudzu*.

## New Electronic Newsletter

Judith Kreitzer has a mission: to spread the word about the censorship of children's books in schools, libraries and book stores across the country. Her vehicle is the *X-Rated Children's Books Newsletter*, a free email newsletter Judith writes every month under the name Rose Etta Stone. Each issue features a variety of regular columns, including "Bibliocide," which chronicles current or historic censorship issues from the news; reviews of controversial books and interviews with their authors (recent issues highlighted Jane Yolen, author of *Briar Rose*, and Norton Juster's *The Phantom Tollbooth*); answers to censorship-related questions from readers; news from the publishing industry and announcements of upcoming books and events of interest to writers and readers of children's books. For Judith, censorship goes beyond limiting access to books; it endangers the intellectual future of our country. "[The newsletter] is my way of sharing all I've learned," she said, "which can be encapsulated in one sentence: A nation that propagates the double standard of giving its children the right to read freely, yet denies them the freedom to read by controlling what they read, will reap what it sows when succeeding generations of intellectually-impooverished world leaders are ill-equipped to unravel the legacy of a chaotic world which we have bequeathed them."

CBI recently spoke to Judith about censorship and children's books.

*What inspired you to start your newsletter?*

I became a literary journalist (in that I only interview authors), about three years ago. At about the same time I became interested in book censorship and spent nine months researching and writing about the books (children's and adults') being banned, censored, challenged and burned. All of which, in a circuitous way, led to my writing the *X-Rated Children's Books Newsletter*.

*Have you come across any common characteristics of the books that were banned?*

There never was, nor will there ever be, a book that doesn't offend someone, somewhere, sometime. Now, of course, it's everything that's assumed to be terrorist-related. Simultaneously, and for the past two years, witches, wizards and magic have been scapegoated. References to any specific religion can offend all religions. No race, creed, color, and/or nationality is ever the flavor of the month--whichever one is written about may be the wrong one. The merest mention of sexual

orientation--especially gay and lesbian--are verboten to people who find homosexuals to "out" behind every closet door they open. Violence, which is usually alleged to be graphic and gratuitous, is always taboo, as is sex. Language is always inappropriate--a curse to some is a blessing to others.

It's not a matter of how (well or otherwise) a book is written. It's what's written. In other words, if authors use the words "Up," or "Black," or "Yes," or "Day," there will be censors who'll ban, challenge and burn those authors' books because they didn't write "Down," or "White," or "No," or "Night." Censorship of literature takes the irrefutable logic of the impossibility of pleasing everyone to irrational, paranoid, obsessive, compulsive extremes.

*Where does most of the banning take place?*

Books are primarily banned from school classrooms and libraries. Public libraries are third on the list. They're rarely banned from bookstores. Protested against, as *The Last Temptation Of Christ* was, but rarely banned. On occasion it does happen, as when *The Satanic Verses* was banned from worldwide bookstores by the Ayatollah's fatwa.

*In your opinion, should authors do any kind of self-censoring?*

Absolutely not! If writers took censors' critiques and complaints seriously pen would never again be put to paper, and never again would another book be written. What good, and to whom, would anything writers write be, if they're forced to substitute euphemisms for every other word they write? If they're not permitted to use this word, or that one, or those three, or George Carlin's seven dirty ones? And/or if they're not allowed to write the books they really want to write, about subjects they want to write about? Books about things that really matter, that they care deeply about, and are passionate about?

The result of such censorship would be tepid, substanceless books that no one would ever want to read--books that had nothing of value or interest to say. The text of all kids' books would, for example, then be the equivalent of "See Jane run. Run Jane run." The most popular teenage fiction, other than fantasy or science fiction, is that which reflects contemporary kids' issues, problems, and concerns. Books lacking this have no reality or meaning for kids--they consist of nothing with which readers can identify. To be perfectly candid, the simple fact of the matter is that books written solely for censors' approbation would omit

# Blows the Whistle on Censorship

everything going on in school, academic or otherwise; conflicts with parents, other authority figures, and siblings; social relationships with peers, friends, girl and boyfriends; puberty; sexuality; smoking; drinking; and the drug scene. Writing about these issues doesn't mean endorsing them. Authors aren't necessarily saying it's okay to use drugs or be sexually promiscuous, but simply presenting issues today's teenagers face causes books to be censored.

Trying to satisfy everyone in this vicious cycle is an exercise in futility. If writers, and readers for that matter, have to chose one group to please, it shouldn't be censors.

*In your opinion, is there ever a good reason to remove a book from a school library or classroom?*

A "good reason?" Absolutely and emphatically not. Good for whom? This addresses all of the above censorship issues. What may be offensive or disturbing to a few individual students won't be to others, or to an entire classroom or school. Therefore, the question becomes: If material is objectionable to certain students, should all students not be allowed to read it? The answer is that no one's wants and needs must be sacrificed for anyone else's. The material should remain in the classroom for those who want to exercise their right to read it. Those who don't want to read such books don't have to. That's their right.

*What would you tell parents who truly feel their kids shouldn't be reading about certain subjects in school?*

Certain subjects is another issue entirely, which has to be taken up with school authorities. If a parent feels that his/her child shouldn't be reading a certain book in class, the child can be given an alternate book or assignment than the rest of the class is reading and/or doing. However, a parent should only make that decision in regard to their own child, not for the entire class or school.

If, on the other hand, the parent believes no one in the class or school should read that book--that the book should be removed or banned--the parent has the right to challenge it. A review committee and/or school board makes the final determination, usually via a vote, concerning the book's retention or removal. Before challenging a book, parents should discuss their objections to the book with their children's teacher(s), and a school administrator to learn the rationale for the book's use in class. After which they may or may not change their mind about initiating the

entire process.

*If parents have any right to control what books are used in the classroom, does this control extend in any way to public libraries?*

Whether in the classroom, school or public library, a parent's right to control which books are accessible to children and borrowed by children begins and ends with their challenge. If parents believe the material should be removed or banned, their reasons, feelings, and wishes are examined through the process described above. Public libraries have a number of ways to restrict or limit children's access to books and material, if they decide or agree that a parental challenge is valid.

*Do you feel the publishing community pays any attention to the banning of children's books, or do they just publish what they feel are good books and not worry about how these books will be received?*

Hundreds of children's books are banned each and every year. If the publishing community worried about or paid attention to challenged, censored, and banned books there would be no need at all for any editors, publishers, or booksellers because no more books would ever be published.

Imagine a world without Harry Potter, *The Wizard Of Oz*, the Lord of the Rings books, Dr. Seuss, Shel Silverstein, the brothers Grimm, or Mother Goose. Imagine a world without *Charlotte's Web* or Winnie the Pooh! The list goes on, and on, and on. Because ironically, only the very best children's literature by the greatest children's book authors are the ones that are banned and censored.

In fact, banned, censored, challenged and burned children's books become runaway best sellers. And the runaway best sellers are the children's books that are banned, censored, challenged and burned. Likewise you know that the banned, censored, challenged, burned/best selling books are the best of the best children's literature--because those are the books that children love reading. The poorly written, unexciting books which children dislike (no, hate) reading are the very books which never come to censors' attention, and are therefore ignored by them too.

To answer your question, publishers publish good books in their own, children's, parents' and teachers' best interests. And consider this: When books they publish land on banned books lists, being on that list can actually be thought of as a seal of approval. It's like saying this is one of the very best of the best books, in the same way that thousands of adult readers trust the Oprah book club seal of approval.

To request a free email copy of the current issue of the *X-Rated Children's Books Newsletter*, or a free subscription to the newsletter, write to [JRoseEttaStone@aol.com](mailto:JRoseEttaStone@aol.com).

Readers are also encouraged to contact Judith Kreitzer at the above address if their own books have been banned or censored. Judith is always looking for children's book authors to interview on this subject.

## *From the Editor*

In every issue, we mention models of quality children's literature. Contributing editor Nancy Sondel has compiled some of our best recommendations from 2001 into the following list. This is only a small sampling of books worth studying. For more titles, see lists of Caldecott and Newbery winners at your public library.

Key: PB = picture book (fiction: ages 3-8; nonfiction: up to age 10); ER = easy reader (ages 6-9); CB = chapter book (ages 7-10); MG = middle grade (ages 8-12); YA = young adult (ages 10 and up).

**Quality Books by Celebrity Authors:** *Tell Me Again About the Night I Was Born* and *When I Was Little: A Four-Year-Old's Memoir of Her Youth* by Jamie Lee Curtis (PB); Little Bill easy readers by Bill Cosby; *Mandy* and *The Last of the Really Great Whangdoodles* by Julie Edwards, aka Julie Andrews (MG)

**Christian Publishing, Fiction:** *Clap Clap!* (under age 4) by Mary Claire Helldorfer; *A Child's Prayer* (under age 4) by Jeanne Titherington; *You Are Special* (PB ages 4-8) by Max Lucado; Laura Lee series (ER) by Alice Sullivan; *The Veritas Project: Hangman's Curse* (mystery/thriller for ages 9-12) by Frank Peretti; *Peanut Butter Friends in a Chop Suey World* (multicultural for ages 8-12) by Deb Brammer; Kingdom Tales series (fairy tales-allegories for ages 7-11) by David Mains; AstroKids series (humorous sci fi for ages 8-12) by Robert Elmer; Ruby Slippers School series (multicultural for ages 7-10) by Stacy Towle Morgan; The Cul-de-Sac Kids series (ages 7-10) by Beverly Lewis; *Forgive the River, Forgive the Sky* (ages 8-12) by Gloria Whelan; Holly's Heart series (ages 9-13) by Beverly Lewis

**Nonfiction:** *Anne Hutchinson, Religious Leader* (bio) by Beth Clark; *Joan of Arc* (PB bio) by Diane Stanley; *In God's Image* (PB ages 4-8; subtle intro to sexuality) by Janet Neff Brewer; *The Miracle of Jesus* (PB) by Tomie de Paola; *Young Jesus of Nazareth* (pb ages 8-12) by Marianna Mayer

**Fantasy:** *Lirael: Daughter of the Clayr*; *Sabriel*; *Shade's Children* and *Seventh Tower* series by Garth Nix (MG)

**Historical Fiction (Native American, Southwest):** *Walker in Time*; *Walker's Journey Home*; *Tag Against Time* (YA series) by Helen Hughes Vick; *Courage of the Stone* (MG) by Helen Hughes Vick

**Books that "Teach, Don't Preach":** Little Bear series by Kathleen Allan-Meyer (PB); *The Biggest, Best Snowman* by Margery Cuyler (PB)

**Rhyming Picture Books:** *Rock It, Sock It, Number Nine* by Bill Martin, Jr. and Michael Sampson; *Dumpy La Rue* by Elizabeth Winthrop; *The Great Show-and-Tell Disaster* by Mike Reiss; *The Magical, Mystical, Marvelous Coat* by Catherine Ann Cullen

**Creating Engaging Characters:** *Oh No, It's Robert!* by Barbara Seuling (CB); *Revenge of the Snob Squad* by Julie Anne Peters (MG)

**Poetry:** Works by Shel Silverstein, Jack Prelutsky (e.g., *Something Big Has Happened Here*), Mem Fox, Jane Yolen (e.g., *Water Music* — haiku), Arnold Adoff, Myra Cohen Livingston (*Space Songs*); *Pigericks* by Arnold Lobel; *Dogs and Dragons, Trees and Dreams* by Karla Kuskin; *All Small* (collection) by David McCord; *Miss Spider's ABC'S* by David Kirk; *Walking Talking Words* by Ivan Sherman; *Out of the Dust* (MG novel written in free verse) by Karen Hesse

**Nonfiction for Emergent Readers (kid-friendly info):** *Dinosaur Days* by Joyce Milton; *Baseball's Greatest Hitters* by S.A.Kramer; *Barry: The Bravest Saint Bernard* by Lynn Hall; *I Wonder Why I Blink and Other Questions About My Body* by Brigid Avison; *Tiger Math: Learning to Graph from a Baby Tiger* by Ann Nagda; *Explorations in Backyard Biology* by Gary Raham

**Great Beginnings--Fiction (viewpoint, setting, character, plot):** *The Borning Room* by Paul Fleischman (MG novel, first person POV); *Brian's Winter* by Gary Paulsen (YA novel, close third person POV); *Pete's a Pizza* (PB in distant third person POV); *The Golden Compass* (close third person upper MG) by Philip Pullman; *Captain Underpants and the Perilous Plot of Professor Poopypants* (CB distant third person POV) by Dav Pilkey; *The Witches* by Roald Dahl (MG); *The Cat Ate My Gymsuit* (MG) by Paula Danziger

**Nonfiction:** *At Her Majesty's Request: An African Princess in Victorian England* (action opener, MG) by Walter Dean Myers

**Setting:** *I Wonder Who Lives Upstairs* (PB mystery) by Edel Wignell

**Board Books, Concepts:** Maisy series by Lucy Cousins; *Working*; *Dressing*; *Friends*; and *Daddy and Me* by Neil Ricklen. **Stories:** *But Not the Hippopotamus* by Sandra Boynton; *Oh Where, Oh Where?* by John Prater; *Max's Birthday* by Rosemary Wells

## ◆ Writing Workshop

## Fictionalizing History for Young Readers

by Goldie Alexander

I enjoy writing about other times and places. Setting novels in the past allows the writer to indulge the imagination without having to worry whether certain colloquialisms might be old hat by the time the book is published.

My particular interest in writing history lies in bringing the past to life and comparing it with the present. In my first historical novel for young adults, *Mavis Road Medley* (Margaret Hamilton Books), two youngsters from the 1990's find themselves in the Melbourne, Australia of 1933. Using this time-travel technique allows the reader to perceive events through modern eyes.

My next historical fiction, *My Story: Surviving Sydney Cove* (2000) is set in 1790. This is one of a number of fictional diaries published by Scholastic. Like their American counterpart, this is also intended to bring Australian history to life. I was struck by the difficulties the First Fleet suffered. Conditions were appalling in 18th century English jails and hulks, on board the convict ships and the early days of New South Wales. I was particularly interested in that period of total isolation between April when the *Sirius* foundered off Norfolk Island and the coming of the Second Fleet in June.

My research took me to many different sources, in particular Watkin Tench's diaries, and Captain Phillip's letters. The language might be archaic, but the contents struck a very modern note. The talk is of 'Opened up a elderly convict's belly and found it empty.' 'Convicts refusing to share cooking pots.' 'A woman dying of over eating by consuming all her rations in one meal.' Governor Phillip had placed everyone--freeman and convict alike--on starvation rations. With too few muskets to go around, not enough fishing boats or lines, and no willingness to learn from the local 'indians', hunger prevailed.

My challenge was to get this down in a palatable form for young readers as well as to create an exciting read. In a way, it was those awful conditions that helped the story to almost write itself. Briefly: In 1790,

Sydney was a convict colony. Elizabeth Harvey was sent there for stealing clothes worth seven shillings. Her diary revealed her struggles as she coped with starvation, disease, brutal punishment, isolation and drunkenness. Lizzie talked about tackling simple domestic tasks, homesickness, looking after the doctor's sick daughter Emily, her 'sparring' friendship with Winston, and defending Simple Sam from an avenging mob. Her diary, though imaginary, was partly based on the real life story of Elizabeth Hayward, the youngest female convict shipped to Botany Bay. I perceived Lizzie as brave and curious, part of the new colony's emerging spirit.

The writing had to be simple, yet sound authentic. No way could I use the complex and melodramatic language of the 18th century. I kept sentences short and avoided contractions, such as when Lizzie said to Winston, "Excuse me, sir. That book. Is it something I can write in?" Also, because this was a diary, I had to tell the action instead of showing it. She writes entries about her surroundings, like: "Sydney Cove is full of murderers & thieves."

There's an automatic pruning in historical novels written for younger readers. Anything that doesn't move the story along must be eradicated. The historical background can only exist as an unconscious framework. The characters must live solidly in their world to make them credible. At the same time there was so much information I wanted to get across. If the reader is historically unsophisticated, the novel had to contain enough information to make sense of the story. My solution was for Lizzie to fill her brother in on everything that had happened to her since they were last together. She says, "I plan to use it (the diary) to describe my present life, and a little of how I came to be here."

When done well, historical fiction can provide the reader with a link to the past, and greater perspective on the present.

**More tips for writing historical fiction:**

Do more research than you think you'll need. You won't use it all in your story, but you'll be able to subtly drop in details that bring the setting to life.

Remember that the time period is the backdrop for the fictionalized characters and story. Don't make the time or place the main focus.

In dialogue, pick up the speech patterns of the time, but make sure modern readers can understand what the characters are saying. Unusual vernacular or dialect should be used sparingly.

Using actual events as the catalyst for your plot will lend credibility to the story and help keep the characters believable.

Give your characters conflicts that are timeless, so modern readers can relate to the story.

Goldie Alexander writes historical fiction from Middle Park, Australia.

## ◆ Writing Workshop

## Try This Picture Book Editing Checklist

by Laura Backes

Writing picture book fiction is quite possibly the hardest type of writing there is, and yet editors receive more picture book manuscripts than any other genre. To make your work stand out from the crowd, you need to do more than study how to devise a winning plot and create believable, unique characters. You need to polish your prose until it sparkles. Here's a checklist to help with the editing process:

◆ **Check the pacing.** Picture books are generally 32 pages long, which means you'll have about 28 pages of text and illustration. So break your text into 28 chunks and place each on a separate piece of paper. Staple the pages together to look like a book and read your story as you turn the pages. Notice the pacing and how the action unfolds. Does the story flow evenly, or are there several pages where nothing special happens? Does something occur on the right-hand page or each two-page spread--a rise in action, a recurring phrase, a funny moment--that makes the reader want to turn the page and see what happens next?

◆ **Note the illustration potential.** Since you've made your manuscript into a "book," think about what the illustrations might look like. Are there enough changing scenes to inspire a different illustration on each page, or at least every two-page spread? Is the story told with a lot of visual elements (actions and events the reader can see)? Are there long scenes of dialogue that go on for

more than one book page? (**Note:** Making your manuscript into a dummy book and thinking about the illustrations are for your benefit only. When you submit the manuscript to a publisher, you'd type it double-spaced without identifying where the page breaks would go. You'd also refrain from discussing any illustration ideas until the editor asks for your thoughts.)

◆ **Cut words.** If you use two words to describe a character, try to find one more exact word to do the trick. Eliminate verbal clutter--words like "big," "little," "very," "almost"--that don't add any real meaning to the sentence, and instead choose strong, active nouns and verbs. Strike any sentences or scenes that don't directly advance the plot.

◆ **Use concrete images.** Be sure to convey the story through concrete visual images the reader can see and the illustrator can draw. Describe abstract concepts such as feelings with sensory details the character (and the reader) can smell, hear, touch, see and taste.

◆ **Craft a satisfying ending.** Does your plot have an identifiable yet surprising climax in which all the action comes together and the main character solves his or her problem? Is this climax contained within one book page? After the climax, is the story resolved (wrapped up) quickly? The resolution must feel complete and satisfying for the reader, but shouldn't be drawn out. Make it a book page or less, and your readers won't hesitate to revisit your story many times over.

Children's Book Insider  
901 Columbia Road  
Ft. Collins, CO 80525-1838

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

PRSR STD  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
LEESBURG, FL  
34748  
PERMIT #1040