

Children's Book Insider

The Newsletter for Children's Writers

At Presstime:

Publisher Seeks Older Picture Books on Specific Themes

Tilbury House, Publishers publishes picture books for ages 7-12 that deal with themes of cultural diversity, nature, the environment, contemporary children working together to solve real-life issues, and stories that show character development. Wants stories that will appeal to children but also have enough educational content to be used in the classroom. Prefers books that offer possibilities for developing a separate teacher's guide (written by an educator) that will expand the focus of the book, offer additional information, and suggest learning activities and approaches. Recent titles include *Always My Brother* by Jean Reagan, illustrated by Phyllis Pollema-Cahill (death and grieving); *Bear-ly There* by Rebekah Raye (nature); *Remember Me: Tomah Joseph's Gift to Franklin Roosevelt* by Donald Soctomah and Jean Flahive (Native American biography). Send complete manuscript with cover letter and SASE (note if it is a simultaneous submission) to Karen Fisk, Associate Children's Book Editor, Tilbury House, Publishers, 103 Brunswick Avenue, Gardiner, Maine 04345. For more information, go to www.tilburyhouse.com

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Two Agents Taking Submissions from New Writers

Anna Webman is an agent with Curtis Brown, Ltd. (www.curtisbrown.com). She represents a range of young adult, middle grade, and picture book authors and illustrators. She always is on the lookout for both published and first-time authors and illustrators. Anna's ideal picture book would be a fun, character-driven, kid-centric, energetic story that kids (and their parents) won't tire of reading. She particularly is interested in voice-driven realistic fiction, with both historical and contemporary settings, and would love to find a young middle-grade series. Query Anna with a synopsis and the first ten pages of your book, the full manuscript text for a picture book pasted (no attachments) in the body of your email, or for illustrators, a link to your web site/portfolio to ajw@cbltd.com. Please note that given the volume of submissions, Anna is able only to respond to email queries if she is interested.

Mandy Hubbard is a new agent with the D4EO Literary Agency in Weston, CT. She is interested in a broad range of middle grade and young adult fiction; contemporary or historical, fantasy/paranormal or realistic. She loves books with a heavy focus on romance, as well as "issue books" with a strong voice. If your book has a high concept or a big hook, she wants to see it. If your story includes portals to fantasy worlds, wizards or dragons, it's probably not for her. Please, no chapter books, pictures books, poetry, nonfiction, or books for the adult market. Mandy began her career in publishing on the other side of the desk: as an author. Her debut novel, *Prada and Prejudice* (Razorbill/Penguin) released in June of 2009 is in its fifth printing. She has four other books under contract, divided among Harlequin, Llewellyn Flux, and Razorbill/Penguin. To submit, send a query along with the first five pages of your manuscript pasted into the body of an email to mandy@d4eo.com. For more about Mandy, go to her web site at www.mandyhubbard.com

March 2010

Agent Update

Carrie Hannigan with Russell & Volkening ("At Presstime", February 2010) has taken on enough new writers and is not accepting more queries until further notice.

At Presstime: *Magazine Seeks Fiction and Articles for Teen Girls*

Girls' Life is a bimonthly magazine for girls ages 10-15 that features articles on relationships, peer pressure, family, friends, school, health, self-esteem, and other topics of interest to tweens and young teens. Articles contain solid information and advice from primary sources. Also publishes shorter, "front of the book" regular columns on beauty/ fashion and embarrassing moments. Quizzes and stand-alone short fiction appear in each issue as well. Go to www.girlslife.com to see what's in the current issue and to get a sense of the magazine's tone. Accepting fiction (2500-3500 words); feature articles and interviews (up to 2000 words); shorter pieces for regular columns (average 700 words) and quizzes. Send an email query with synopsis of fiction, or an explanation of the focus for an article, along with a list of publishing credits (if applicable) and your name, address, phone number and email. Send queries to Katie Abbondanza, Senior Editor at katiea@girlslife.com. Authors may also query by snail mail and attached clips of published work to *Girls' Life*, 4529 Hartford Road, Baltimore, MD 21214. Send seasonal material at least five months in advance. Best chances for new writers are regular columns and quizzes. Buys all rights; pays on publication (publishes an average of three months after acceptance). For tips on writing strong queries, go to www.girlslife.com/page/Writers-Guidelines.aspx

Writer's Digest 79th Annual Writing Competition

The Writer's Digest annual competition is meant to bring attention to unpublished manuscripts. Categories include children's/young adult fiction, rhyming poetry and non-rhyming poetry. The Grand Prize winner gets \$3000 cash and a trip to New York to meet with editors or agents. The First Place winner in each category wins \$1000 and \$100 worth of Writer's Digest Books. Cash awards will also be given to second through tenth place winners in each category. For more information or to enter, go to www.writersdigest.com/annual. Entries may be submitted online. Poems are \$15 for the first entry; \$10 for each additional poem submitted in the same online session. All other entries are \$20 for the first manuscript; \$15 for each additional manuscript submitted in the same online session. Early deadline for entries is May 14, 2010. Entries emailed or postmarked between May 15 and June 1, 2010 must add \$5 per manuscript to the entry fee. No entries will be accepted after June 1. For a list of 2009 winners, go to <http://www.writersdigest.com/article/wdannual09>.

Third Bootcamp Added for 2010

Three Bootcamps are currently scheduled for 2010: **Children's Authors' Bootcamp Southeast**, April 24-25 at the Best Western Sterling Hotel & Suites in Charlotte, NC; **Children's Authors' Bootcamp Midwest**, May 1-2 at the Best Western Chicago/Hillside just outside of Chicago, IL; and **Children's Authors' Bootcamp of the Rockies**, June 26-27 at the Hampton Inn Denver West/Golden, near Denver, CO. 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. Discounts on hotel rooms are available. For more information or to register, go to www.WeMakeWriters.com. (Note: The last Bootcamp of 2010 will be in the Seattle area in October. We'll post details as they're available.)

Why Was My Manuscript Rejected? 3 Literary Agents, 3 Opinions

Three children's book literary agents, Andrea Cascardi of Transatlantic Literary Agency, Anna Olswanger of Liza Dawson Associates, and Ann Tobias of A Literary Agency for Children's Books, will hold a one-day workshop in New York City on April 25 (9:30 - 4:00) that features reading participants' manuscripts and giving feedback. The workshop promises to be lively with three, possibly different, opinions about the strength and weaknesses of each manuscript. Also includes a discussion of marketplace considerations and writing tips, and a general Q & A session. Cost is \$195 before March 25; \$225 after. For further information, go to www.3LiteraryAgents.com.

Missouri Writers Hall of Fame Tour

The 2011 Missouri Writers Hall of Fame Tour will take place from June 4-7, led by Dr. Linda Benson, professor emeritus at Missouri State University. The tour will visit 10 successful Missouri children's authors, as well as take in a Mississippi River sightseeing cruise, dining on Laclede's Landing and listening to St. Louis jazz, and a guided costumed docent tour of historic St. Charles, including a visit from children's author Vicki Berger Erwin. Cost (including motor coach transportation, three nights' lodging and most meals) ranges from \$620 (four to a room) to \$858 (single). **Fightin' Bookworms (members of the CBI Clubhouse) get a 10% discount!** For more details email David Harrison at davidharrison1@att.net.

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 <http://is.gd/9ta64> for a free copy of our Special Report, [How to Determine If a New or Small Press is Legitimate](#).

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The CBI Challenge: Module 11

Endings that Deliver

by Laura Backes

Have you ever gotten to the end of a book and thought "So what?" Did it make you want to read more by that author, or recommend the book to a friend? Satisfying endings go hand in hand with strong beginnings in framing the reader's experience. No matter how masterfully written the rest of the story, if the ending is a letdown it overshadows everything that came before.

Here's a list of qualities of endings, good and bad, that can be applied to your manuscript. Use this list twice: when you're brainstorming your ending or outlining your book, and after you've written your first draft to show where you may need to revise.

Strong endings

...are inevitable. Remember the catalyst you developed in Module 7 of the CBI Challenge? (If you missed it, go to the CBI Challenge section of the CBI Clubhouse, www.cbiclubhouse.com). The catalyst was an event or scene that got your plot going, changed your protagonist's life from ordinary to extraordinary, and raised a question in the reader's mind (*What is this character going to do about this problem?*) Your ending must answer that question. When your reader gets to the last page of your book, she should be able to trace a clear plot line that connects the catalyst to the resolution. And she should absolutely believe that the book couldn't have ended any other way.

Nonfiction endings can be inevitable as well. Narrative nonfiction, such as biographies or books centered on a person living through an historical event, are structured like fiction. Informational books lay out the facts, chapter by chapter, building toward a larger point explained in the final pages. Readers of nonfiction must come away from books and articles with a deeper understanding of the subject than they had in the opening pages.

...demonstrate how the protagonist has changed and grown. Characters who remain exactly the same from the beginning of a story to the end are not very interesting. One of the most significant ways a character can change is by learning how to solve the problem of the plot. Let your characters figure out the solutions for themselves—don't have adults or

other "wise" characters step in and do it for them. Protagonists who overcome setbacks, obstacles and sticky situations are the ones readers remember.

...create a final enduring impression. Powerful endings touch the reader emotionally and intellectually. They open up possibilities without telling the reader what to think. They continue to speak to the reader long after the book is finished.

Weak endings

...don't confuse "inevitable" with "predictable". If the ending is telegraphed in the opening scenes of the book, you've robbed your readers of any surprise. One cause of predictable endings is ordinary conflicts. If your character is faced with a very common problem, then the outcome will be easy to guess. Unusual dilemmas, with several possibilities for resolution, offer the best endings.

...fall flat. The ending should deliver the strongest emotional impact of your book. If you're afraid to allow your characters (or your readers) to get emotionally invested in the plot, then the ending will be lukewarm at best. Another mistake is prolonging the story beyond the end. Once the protagonist has resolved his problem you need to tie up any loose ends quickly and get out. Even the best plot resolutions are diluted by two extra chapters at the end.

...are vehicles for the author's agenda. Authors who feel the need to sum up a message or lesson at the end of their books have failed to convey the theme through the plot. The last impression your readers have should be of your characters, not you as the author issuing advice.

Some authors prefer to be surprised by their own endings, not planning out where their plots will go ahead of time. This is fine if you don't mind lengthy revisions. Every scene of your book needs to be leading toward a single dramatic conclusion. As the author, if you have the ending in sight from the beginning, you'll know better how to get there, and your readers will know exactly when you've arrived.

Different Endings for Different Ages

Picture books and easy readers require definitive endings in which the protagonist has clearly solved his problem or reached his goal. The end is uplifting, leaving the reader feeling good. As we move into novels for older readers, endings are less neatly tied up. In chapter books for ages 7-10, the main story problem is solved, but a sub-plot may be left hanging. However, even that sub-plot is moving in a hopeful direction. This is also true for younger middle grade novels. For older middle grade readers (ages 10-14) and young adults, the protagonist might not actually get what he initially wanted, but learns to live with something close, or perhaps a better alternative. The sub-plots can have various outcomes: some happy, some frustrating, some tragic. Others can remain unresolved. In other words, older fiction mirrors real life.



www.CBIclubhouse.com

Subscribers: Visit the CBI Challenge, Module 11 section to find this month's Challenge exercises.

Recordkeeping is Key

***Editor's Note:** As tax time approaches, many authors have questions about how to treat their writing on their tax returns, especially if they work other jobs as well. This is even more confusing if the author has yet to make any money from his or her writing. As attorney John Alan Cohan explains, your efforts at marketing your manuscript are just as important to the IRS as they are to potential publishers.*

A big area of contention with the IRS involves writers who claim deductions for their writing expenses. Most writers have a passionate interest in their writing. They love what they do, and they also want to make money, eventually. Many writers become successful after a period of years in which they struggle to survive. With the IRS, the problem is that the activity may seem to be one engaged in for pleasure or recreation. The IRS must be reminded that profits may not be immediately forthcoming in this, or any other, creative field. Many writers have to struggle in their early years, or throughout their lives. This does not mean that serious writers do not intend to profit from their activities. It only means that their lot is a difficult one.

To be a professional writer does not require that writing be your sole or even principal occupation, but it must constitute a recurring activity that you conscientiously pursue for gain. Writers who have not yet achieved sufficient commercial success to support themselves usually have a day job, and deduct expenses of the writing activity against their wages or salary. They usually work on their writing in the evenings and on weekends.

The tax deductible expenses of writers include: writing tools; computers and other office equipment and furniture; costs of developing a work; deductions related to a home office; fees paid to publishers, publicists, lawyers and accountants; advertising costs; travel expenses incurred in researching and writing a book; travel expenses to attend promotional events or writers' conferences; subscriptions; membership dues to professional organizations; photocopy costs; costs of research materials; and secretarial expenses.

Maintaining a full-time job in addition to

your writing venture is a positive factor reflecting your motivation. It shows that you are making efforts to be responsible about earning a living while devoting time to developing your writing career.

If the IRS audits you, and there is little or no income realized from your writing in recent years, the question of motive becomes acute. The IRS will want to see objective evidence that you have the honest intention of being engaged in writing for profit, or else it will deny your tax deductions.

The problem is compounded by the notorious fact that writers are extremely poor at business. Recordkeeping is usually the farthest thing from their minds. Still, the business of being a writer, like other trades, requires that you carry on the activity in a businesslike manner if you wish to take tax deductions against your other sources of income.

All taxpayers are expected to keep bank records, canceled checks, bills, credit card invoices, cash purchase receipts, and other records needed in order to prepare tax returns. Additional records that writers should maintain include the following:

1. **Records of Marketing Efforts.** Serious writers are expected to actively market their work directly with publishers, with the help of literary agents, or via self-publishing. Failure to market your writing suggests a hobby. If some publishers reject the manuscript, there should be renewed marketing efforts towards publication with others. Keep copies of correspondence and emails to show what you have done to get your work published.

2. **Self-Publishing.** If you are going to self-publish, it is important to have a plan for promoting your work. Keep a file that shows what you have done to get your work self-published and what your marketing efforts are.

3. **Seminars and Other Events.** As a writer, it is helpful to periodically attend writers' seminars and to join writers' organizations so as to improve your writing skills and keep on top of industry developments. You should keep programs of seminars you have attended, notes that you took, and memos of contacts you made and what you did to pursue leads.

4. **Travel Expenses.** If it is necessary to travel—to do research, attend seminars, make

for Writers' Tax Deductions

by *John Alan Cohan,*
Attorney at Law

presentations, promote your work, meet with representatives, and so on, keep a record of the nature of each trip, and receipts for travel expenses (transportation, car rental, hotels and meals). If you are traveling to do research, keep adequate notes to substantiate what you researched.

5. **Home Office Deduction.** There are complicated rules pertaining to the home office deduction. The deduction cannot exceed your net income from writing. The amount of the deduction is usually based on the proportion of square footage of the home office divided by the square footage of your entire residence. The deduction is available whether you own or rent.

6. **Time Log.** It is important to show that you consistently devote a significant amount of time to writing. It is helpful to keep a log or diary of your time, for this constitutes objective evidence of the amount of time spent on the activity.

Many IRS disputes end up in Tax Court. An example of this involved a writer named St. Elmo Nauman, Jr., of El Toro, California. Mr. Nauman worked full-time for the asylum office of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, and taught philosophy and religion part-time at Chapman University. He was an ordained minister with the United Church of Christ, and served as a chaplain for the U.S. Navy.

Mr. Nauman unquestionably was an experienced writer. He had worked for a publishing company developing manuscripts for publication. Also, he had published three reference works in the 1970s (*The New Dictionary of Existentialism*, *Dictionary of American Philosophy*, and *Exorcism Through the Ages*). He also wrote papers on philosophy, religion, politics and logic, but none of them were published. He submitted only one of the papers for publication, and it was not accepted.

Mr. Nauman claimed he had a sideline business as a writer, and took depreciation deductions for his personal library of 6,400 books, with a purported purchase price of \$160,000, as well as deductions for office equipment and computers.

The Tax Court held that his writing was for "mere personal enjoyment." The decision

hinged primarily on the finding that he did not maintain any books and records, that he submitted only one manuscript for publication in recent years, and that he had earned no income from his writing activity.

In addition, the court said that he did nothing to improve his chances of making money at writing, he had no business plan, and he did not even investigate the basic factors that affect profitability.

Here we see a situation where an experienced and talented writer's activity was deemed a hobby. This was mainly because of the failure to have some type of plan of making money with the writing, the absence of much by way of books and records, and the absence of sincere marketing efforts.

In the above case the taxpayer sought to depreciate the cost of his personal library. Even in situations where a writer is clearly engaged in writing as a business rather than as a hobby, deductions for the purchase of books will usually be limited to those books actually used for research in one's writing project.

The IRS will tend to view with skepticism your tax deductions unless you have evidence that you are serious about seeking to make money in this endeavor. In order to prove your intention, the best evidence is documentary evidence. It is important to demonstrate that you are diligently working to finish your writing project rather than engaging in endless "fine tuning."

John Alan Cohan is an attorney who has specialized in tax law since 1981. He is the author of several tax guides, including the book, *Turn Your Hobby Into a Business: Tax and Legal Tips* (2008). He can be reached at 310-278-0203, or via email at JohnAlanCohan@aol.com.

Other Resources

Tax Deductions A to Z for Writers, Artists, and Performers by Anne Skalka CPA (Boxed Books Inc.)

For the IRS's advice, go to www.irs.gov, click on "Businesses" on the bar at the top, and look for articles like "Five Facts About the Home Office Deduction", "A Brief Overview of Depreciation," and "Recordkeeping."

At turbotax.com, click on "Small Business Taxes", then select a category in the "Tax Advice and Help" window in the right column.

From the Editor

Dear Reader:

I often get letters from frustrated aspiring authors who feel editors aren't giving their work a fair shot. Published authors have priority, they say, regardless of the quality of their newest book. While it's true that this is a profit-generating business and if J.K. Rowling wrote a rhyming talking animal story with an "I'm special" message it would probably be on the cover of Scholastic's next catalog, I've never met an editor who turned down a terrific manuscript just because it was from a new author. Every submission has to stand out in some way. If you can't stand out with an impressive track record and built-in audience, then your work needs a strong hook.

A hook sums up the book's core idea in one sentence. A good hook has legs: it's used in your query letter, on the jacket flap, by the editor when presenting your book to her art and marketing departments, and by the sales staff pitching your book to buyers in national chain stores. As pointed out by Chuck Sambuchino on his *Guide to Literary Agents* blog (www.guidetoliteraryagents.com/blog) an excellent way to find examples of hooks is to read the descriptions of upcoming books in the Spring and Fall Children's Book Announcement issues of *Publishers Weekly* (released in February and July each year). Here are some books listed in the Spring 2010 issue:

Baseball from A to Z by Michael P. Spradlin, illus. by Macky Pamintuan, is a baseball alphabet book. (4–8)

Can You Dig It? by Robert Weinstock presents poetry about cavemen, archeology, and dinosaurs. (3–7)

Saving the Baghdad Zoo by Kelly Milner Halls and William Sumner chronicles army officer Sumner's efforts to save abandoned zoo animals in war-torn Baghdad. (8–up)

The Humblebee Hunter by Deborah Hopkinson, illus. by Jen Corace, shows how Charles Darwin's children contributed to some of his experiments. (4–8)

Shake, Rattle & Turn That Noise Down!: How Elvis Shook Up Music, Me & Mom by Mark Alan Stamaty. The author recalls the impact of Elvis Presley's music. (5–8)

Lincoln Tells a Joke: How Laughter Saved the President (and the Country) by Kathleen Krull and Paul Brewer, illus. by Stacy Innerst. This biography focuses on Lincoln's sense of humor. (5–10)

The Sixty-Eight Rooms by Marianne Malone, illus. by Greg Call, is a tale set in the miniature rooms of the Chicago Art Institute's Children's Galleries. (8–12)

Mac Slater Hunts the Cool by Tristan Bancks. An uncool kid gets tapped to be his city's "Coolhunter." (8–12)

The Incurable Children of Ashton Place by Maryrose Wood starts up a series about a governess and her charges—children who've been raised by wolves. (8–12)

Princess for Hire by Lindsey Leavitt is the first installment of a fantasy series about substitute princesses. (10–up)

Green by Laura Peyton Roberts. Lily discovers she is next in line to protect a clan of leprechauns. (10–up)

Missing in Action by Dean Hughes. During WWII, a half-Navajo boy befriends a Japanese-American boy whose father is MIA. (10–14)

Zebrafish by Peter H. Reynolds and FableVision is the story of a garage band in which only one member can play an instrument. (10–14)

In all the examples above, the one sentence description (hook) instantly shows what's unique about the book. Sure, we've got loads of dinosaur books, but presenting the creatures through poetry is different. Biographies of Lincoln line the shelves, but none have brought the president to life through his sense of humor. And I'm very intrigued by what a substitute princess' job description might be.

So what makes a strong hook?

It's specific. There's no more room for a general alphabet book, but one about baseball will find its audience. Books without a definitive hook, whether fiction or nonfiction, simply won't sell. There's nothing to make them stand out to reviewers, book buyers or librarians. If you can't describe specific qualities about your idea that make it unique, then your idea isn't developed enough.

It instantly categorizes the book for the editor. The hook for *The Sixty-Eight Rooms* immediately brings to mind elements of *The Doll People* by Ann M. Martin and Laura Godwin, and the classic *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* by E.L. Konigsburg. Those two middle grade mysteries have such wide appeal that the comparison is a good one; it's all about knowing the audience exists even before the book is published. And *The Sixty-Eight Rooms* is different enough (which the editor learns after reading the entire query letter) that it still stands apart as its own story.

It's memorable. There's a reason editors say they publish only 3% of the unsolicited submissions they receive each year. The manuscripts tend to blend together with very few standing out (and even fewer standing out because they're *good*). Give your book a reason to be remembered. Take your idea a step further, add an original twist. Make it easy for a sales rep to pitch your book to a buyer in 10 seconds, and even easier for the buyer to see why your book has to be in his store. Everyone, from the sales associates at Barnes & Noble to teachers setting up your school visits, will use the hook to ultimately get your book into the hands of kids. That's a big job for one sentence. Make yours count.

—LB

Writing Workshop

Is Your Beginning Where It Belongs?

by Nancy Sondel

In a novel's opening scene, "It's important to give the book's flavor, to set it up in a way that we're intrigued by the character and are prepared for the tension that's coming," notes Kate Harrison, senior editor at Dial Books for Young Readers. "Many writers believe they must throw us into the middle of a scene or dialogue in order to catch the reader's attention, but sometimes that can be too jarring. You don't want readers to be confused—you want them to be engaged. It's all about finding the balance."

Finding that balance may mean expanding or decreasing Chapter 1, or moving the opening sequence. Anjali Banerjee, author of several mid-grade novels, including *Seaglass Summer* (Wendy Lamb Books/Random House, May 2010), says, "Every story is different. The key is to care about the character and what's happening to him or her."

How does the writer elicit the reader's interest in a character? By giving her a distinctive voice, a quirky personality, and an emotionally engaging situation which moves swiftly to a striking moment of change. This pivotal incident (aka catalyst) interrupts everyday life as the protagonist discovers or loses something monumental, or for some reason must cross the threshold into a new world—psychologically and/or physically.

Sometimes writers set up too much. They dally in details (biographical, historical, geographic), or explain the protagonist's thought processes, instead of catapulting her toward the threshold.

Even accomplished writers struggle with beginnings. Banerjee's first three chapters of *Seaglass Summer* originally portrayed her protagonist, Poppy, at home. After several revisions, Banerjee discarded these chapters because "they felt like throat-clearing." In the final Chapter 1, Poppy travels by air to visit her uncle. The story, too, lifts off.

But the revision presented a domino effect. With Poppy on her seaside vacation, Banerjee had to weave in her "backstory" or home life—without bogging down the present story. She accomplished this "by honing in on Poppy's personality. For example, when Poppy's father asks if she has taken her cell phone to her uncle's, she thinks, 'Dad is always organized, just like

me. In my bedroom at home, I line up my animal books on the top shelf...'" Thus, the author links past and present; no momentum is lost.

In contrast, sometimes an author must add material to the beginning instead of cutting. Dori Butler, author of *The Monkey Man* series (Peachtree), says, "However, this backfired on me when I began *Yes, I Know the Monkey Man*. My first readers suggested I start earlier to give readers a better understanding of who Dad is, and of T.J.'s relationship with him, before he's hospitalized. They were absolutely right!" The published book starts with this new chapter, followed by the original Chapter 1 which has become Chapter 2.

Ask yourself the following questions to evaluate your Chapter 1 elements:

- What have I shown readers about my protagonist—based on the text itself, not what's in my mind? Make a list and add asterisks to points that are critical for readers to know *now*. Can this information be deferred until a later chapter, or sprinkled throughout the story to flesh out character and setting?

- Have I shown why the catalyst is life-altering to the protagonist; why he initially reacts as he does (and why he'd desperately try to get life back to "normal")?

- Have I set up a compelling story question that will keep readers turning pages?

- Have I included backstory or flashback? If so, is it brief enough? How does it directly impact the present moment (as it should)? Could it effectively be placed in another chapter; why or why not?

- Do my Chapter 1 "seeds" evolve throughout, driving the story to its climax and resolution?

Use the above responses to shape your Chapter 1, or to start your story before or after that chapter. Then consider Harrison's practical, fun advice: "I sometimes ask writers to think what their character would say if she were on a therapist's couch—basically, what makes the character who she is and what is the main conflict in her life. Then make sure that comes through in the opening chapter."

Cut a Chapter; Save Your Story

If your "real story" begins beyond Chapter 1, don't despair. You needn't burn all your hard-won words. Try this:

Using highlighters, draw boxes around text in chapters needing "surgery." With various colors, indicate what you want to do with the enclosed text: (a) defer it to a subsequent chapter, possibly using additional colors to indicate various destinations; (b) keep it for an unknown destination; and (c) delete it. Check revised chapters for any resulting gaps or inconsistencies.

Nancy Sondel is a YA novel writer and founding director of the **Pacific Coast Children's Writers Workshop**. The eighth annual PCCWW will be held **August 20-22** at a beachfront facility near Santa Cruz, CA. Collegial, team-taught seminar for 30 savvy and/or published writers of character-driven novels, "active observers," and teen readers and writers. Faculty: **Laura Backes**, CBI publisher, leading advanced craft sessions; **Kate Harrison** (senior editor, Dial Books/Penguin); and **Ted Malawer** (agent, Upstart Crow Literary). Weekend theme is "A Novelist's Toolkit: Architecture, Archetypes, and Arcs." Highlights: Open critique clinics are enhanced by interactive pre-workshop materials. Priority enrollment through April 20; other possible openings through July. For more info, or to teach or enroll in teen program, contact **Nancy Sondel**: www.childrenswritersworkshop.com

The Basics

Study the Market Before Submitting to Magazines

by Suzanna E. Henshon, Ph.D.

Many writers dream of publishing the Great American Novel, but have you ever considered beefing up your resumé, and gaining valuable experience, writing articles for children's magazines?

The best way to make a sale is to study a specific magazine and market your work to a particular editorial board. When I studied the December 2009 issue of *Highlights for Children*, I discovered that the longer non-fiction pieces didn't fit my image of dry children's articles. "Living with Lizards" was about a teacher's experience working in Botswana, and "Wolf Spider" was a one-page piece about a creature that most children have never seen in real life. "Sid the Kid" was about a young man's experiences in the NHL; his team won the Stanley Cup. These topics are off the beaten track, giving kids information they wouldn't get in their daily lives.

So how do you sell a nonfiction piece to a competitive market like *Highlights*?

1. **Write a high-quality piece.** First and foremost, write a good piece that is suitable in content and word length for the magazine's needs. Do a word count on an article that is similar to yours and think about whether you have photos or illustrations to submit, making the editor's job even easier.

2. **Write for an audience.** In *Highlights*, the audience is 4 to 12. When you write a long feature, you are probably writing for older readers of a magazine. So it is best to think about making the vocabulary sophisticated yet writing in such a way that younger kids still understand your piece if it's read out loud to them. If you are writing a piece about a sports hero, make sure the style is comparable to "Sid the Kid" and like pieces.

3. **Make learning fun.** When you read several published articles for children, you'll see how writers combine education and en-

tertainment. Instead of lecturing the reader or listing facts, find a fun, unusual angle to convey the information.

3. **Read the magazine.** Selling a long piece to a magazine you've read is difficult, but it's even harder to sell a long piece to a market you've never read. So why don't you read the magazine on a regular basis? Get a sense of what the editors have published during the past year, increasing your chances of being successful in this market.

4. **Write simply but clearly.** Many writers compose long, windy sentences in an effort to sound sophisticated. But some of the most powerful writing combines simple sentences and straightforward language.

5. **Go with the flow.** Follow the natural direction of the article, and don't "dumb down" the piece because you are writing for young children. Remember that Beatrix Potter used complex words in *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*; "implore" isn't a word you typically see in a children's book. *Alice in Wonderland* is filled with wordplay. So don't dumb down your piece; write for the level your reader will be at tomorrow, not for where he was yesterday.

6. **Talk to the reader.** When you look at nonfiction pieces, you'll notice a conversational tone. Readers like to be talked to—not down to. So treat your readers like an equal; don't make the cardinal sin of being condescending!

7. **Pick an age-appropriate topic.** If you read a magazine for a year, you will see what topics are appropriate for young audiences and how these topics have been covered. You will get an intuitive sense of how to write your own piece. Make your subject relevant to readers' lives and interests, and you'll have a winning article.

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