

Children's Book Insider

The Newsletter for Children's Writers

At Presstime:

Lee & Low Acquires New Fantasy/Science Fiction Imprint

Tu Books (formerly the independent publisher Tu Publishing) is the newest imprint of Lee & Low Books. Tu Books plans to publish fantasy and science fiction for minority children and young adults that feature diverse characters set in worlds inspired by non-Western folklore or culture.

Tu is looking specifically for stories for both middle grade (ages 8-12) and young adult (ages 12-18) readers. (No picture books, chapter books, or short stories at this time.) Only fantasy and science fiction featuring minority characters will be considered. Manuscripts should be accompanied by a cover letter that includes a brief biography of the author, including publishing history. The letter should also state if the manuscript is a simultaneous or an exclusive submission. Include a synopsis and first three chapters of the novel. Be sure to include full contact information on the cover letter and first page of the manuscript. Page numbers and your last name/title of the book should appear on subsequent pages.

Send submission by mail to Submissions Editor, Tu Books, 95 Madison Avenue, Suite 1205, New York, NY 10016. If you require confirmation of delivery, send the submission with a U.S. Postal Service Return Receipt. Submissions via email will not be accepted. Tu will respond to a submission only if they are interested in the manuscript (do not send a SASE for the manuscript's return). If you do not hear from Tu within six months, you may assume that your work does not fit their needs.

For more details, go to Tu Editorial Director Stacy Whitman's blog at www.stacylwhitman.com, or the Tu web site at www.leeandlow.com/p/tu.mhtml

Toy Company Seeks Puzzle and Activity Books

Fat Brain Toys is a developer and retailer of unique specialty toys, games and gifts. They are currently looking for puzzle and activity book submissions for preschoolers through teens. General categories include animals, architecture and engineering, art, castles, dogs, dolls and dress-up, golf, math, planes, reading and writing, and science. Study current titles at www.fatbraintoy.com before submitting any ideas (new spring titles they're publishing include the 5-book Math Busters series and *Aba-Conundrums*, both by Evelyn B. Christensen).

Email a proposal with three samples of each puzzle or activity type or an example from each level in the book (entire manuscripts may also be sent). Put in the subject line of the email "(E)—ms title." Attachments are okay. You may submit more than one manuscript, but they should be in different emails. Email to Erik Quam, Director of Product Development, at erik@fatbraintoy.com.

Fat Brain Toys will be buying some manuscripts for a flat fee and purchasing all rights, and offering some contracts with 4-6% royalties (no advances). The company is also looking for game and toy ideas.

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Reminder to all subscribers: Don't forget to check the CBI Clubhouse (www.CBIClubhouse.com) each week for new articles, videos and podcasts, as well as material related to this issue of *Children's Book Insider*.

At Presstime:

New YA Imprint Taking Submissions During April Only

Carolrhoda Books, a division of Lerner Publishing Group, is launching a new line of young adult fiction called Carolrhoda Lab. Carolrhoda Lab will publish four novels in fall 2010: *Draw the Dark* by Ilsa J. Bick; *The Absolute Value of -1* by Steve Brezenoff; *The Freak Observer* by Blythe Woolston; and a new paperback edition of *Traitor* by Gudrun Pausewang. Though Carolrhoda is currently closed to submissions, Editorial Director Andrew Karre is accepting submissions for Carolrhoda Lab **from April 1 - April 30**. Submissions must be fiction for ages 12 and up, and the novels should be complete. Interested in all genres, including realistic, paranormal, dark fantasy, and dystopian. Not interested in high fantasy or graphic novels. Email a very brief query/cover and your manuscript. Include the word "QUERY" in the subject. Please put the query in the body of the email and the completed manuscript as an attachment (Microsoft Word or RTF only). Email to **carolrhodasubmissions@lernerbooks.com**. Response could take up to six months. No paper queries or submissions, please. Anything received after April 30 will not be read. For more insight into what Andrew Karre likes to read, see his blog at **carolrhoda.blogspot.com**.

Children's Book Insider makes every effort to verify the legitimacy of small and new presses and literary agents before printing information in "At Presstime." However, authors and illustrators should always proceed with caution when approaching publishers or agents with whom they are unfamiliar, and read contracts carefully. 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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Christian Nature Magazine Seeking Submissions

Nature Friend is a monthly magazine for ages 6-14 that focuses on wild nature and astronomy. *Nature Friend* is edited to be acceptable to any fundamental creationists who believe the Genesis account of creation to be literal and absolute. Universally accepted Christian virtues (diligence, kindness, purity, thrift, good stewardship, etc.) are promoted. The material in *Nature Friend* should promote an appreciation of God's works and gifts, teach natural truths and facts, and portray traditional family units. Before submitting, authors should read the detailed content guidelines at **www.naturefriendmagazine.com** (click on "Contributor"). Current needs are science projects for ages 8-12, fiction for ages 6-8 (no talking animals), and photo essays (a natural phenomenon shown in pictures with detailed captions). Articles/stories average 400-700 words. Submit complete manuscript with SASE to Kevin D. Shank, Editor, *Nature Friend Magazine*, 4253 Woodcock Lane, Dayton, VA 22821. Pays 5 cents per word for first rights; 3 cents per word for reprints.

Children's Authors' Bootcamps for Spring and Summer 2010 are Filling Up Fast!

Three Bootcamps are currently scheduled for 2010: **Children's Authors' Bootcamp South-east**, 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.)

Upcoming Conference

The 2101 Writing and Illustrating for Young Readers Conference will be held June 14-18 in Sandy, UT. Participants can register for five full days, which include a week-long concentrated morning workshop on writing for one age group, and afternoon keynotes and lectures by authors, agents and editors. Or you can register just for the afternoon sessions. Cost is \$475 for the full-day track; \$125 for afternoons (meals and lodging not included). For more information and to see a list of workshop leaders, go to **www.foryoungreaders.com**.

Writing Workshop

How I Planned, Sold & Wrote Six Books in Six Months

by Kathryn Lay

When a writer friend told me that she'd just sold a series of children's chapter books to an educational publisher and that I should send an idea to them, I didn't hesitate. I knew I had to move fast before I panicked and changed my mind. I'd never written a series and was afraid I couldn't do it.

I already had an idea for a fiction series. I didn't have all the details organized, but I knew the series title and that the plots would all involve the weather.

I submitted a quick query introducing myself and my writing credits and a one-line blurb about my idea. The editor wrote back that it sounded very intriguing and if I could put together a proposal she'd take it to her boss.

I began my work on the proposal by making a list of six different weather events and three main characters and their teacher. I spent time delving into each character, making them different and fun. The teacher definitely had to be cool for this series too. Then I added 'extra' ideas that would be included at the end of each book that would appeal to librarians and teachers, since the publisher targeted the school market. I had to always think of the educational slant to the story.

Once I had my proposal well thought-out, I organized it into the main topic, the characters, the basic plot of each book (the hardest part of preparing my proposal, but definitely beneficial when I began writing quickly), and ideas for the end of each book.

When the contract came, after doing lots of dancing around my office, I realized I actually had to write six books. I had six months to do it, too, with deadlines coming every three or four weeks. I knew several friends who had written series books with such deadlines, but could I do it?

I didn't want to start actually writing the books until the first of the year and the holidays were behind me. But, I spent those three weeks between receiving the contract and beginning the books by reading. I checked out and bought copies of lots of chapter book series. I especially did my best to find the first book of each series to see how they set up the settings, the characters,

and the story idea.

Then it was time to begin writing. I knew my characters, my basic storyline for each book, and my school setting. But there was a lot more to each book than that.

Research

I was dealing with specific weather issues each time, as well as the safety issues kids needed to learn. So before beginning each book I spent several days researching each weather topic so that I would jump into the story with the correct knowledge and feel. By researching ahead of time, it made the writing so much easier.

Remembering

As I wrote, adding names of classmates who might appear once in each book, adult characters and their quirks, and school settings, I kept the information in my notebook for the series so I could be accurate from book to book. Even then, my editor let me know that my class of 26 kids had 18 girls and 8 boys. I went back and changed some of the kids' names to even it out just a little more.

Goals

I had publisher-set goals for each book, though they were a little flexible as long as they were all sent in by late May. But I knew that since I was also rewriting a larger children's novel I'd been working on for a year as well as magazine pieces for kids and adults, I had to give myself specific goals.

For each book I gave myself three to four weeks total time. This was separated into research, plot and setting preparation, first draft writing, rewriting, then all the back of the book material. After the first three books, I was better able to figure out which of these areas needed more time and which ones I could devote a little less time to than I originally thought.

Whether you are writing six books in six months or a large article due in four weeks, planning, preparation and goal-setting is your best bet for getting it all done.



Tornado Trouble from Wendy's Weather Warriors series by Kathryn Lay (Sept. 2010)

Kathryn Lay is the author of *Josh's Halloween Pumpkin*, a picture book, *Crown Me!*, a middle-grade novel, *The Organized Writers is a Selling Writer*, nonfiction for writers, and upcoming series Wendy's Weather Warriors (September 2010, Calico Chapter Books, ABDO Publishing). She has had over 1700 articles, essays, and stories for adults and children in magazines and anthologies and teaches online writing courses. Check out her website www.kathrynlav.com or email rlay15@aol.com

Twelve Ways to Bounce Back

You scoop up your mail and there it is—that SASE you sent out six months ago. You hold the envelope up to the light, wondering if it's an invitation to send your entire manuscript or a dreaded form rejection. Peering into the envelope from all angles gives you no clues, and you can't stand the suspense. You rip open the envelope, nearly destroying its contents.

No it can't be. Once again, a rejection slip leaves you feeling as dejected as when you got clothes instead of video games for your eighth birthday. You trudge upstairs and throw yourself across the bed. Then you allow yourself a sappy, sniveling cry. After all, you deserve it. Don't those editors realize a winning book when they see it?

After getting over the initial shock of rejection, you wonder what you can do to free yourself from that deadening disappointment, that feeling that no one appreciates your writing.

Every writer gets rejection slips and comes up with original ways to bounce back from the pain they cause. Published writers with top credentials still get them, but most have learned to put them in perspective. Of course, it still hurts to get rejected no matter how prolific a writer you are or hope to become.

Here are 12 tips to help you beat the rejection slip blues. See which ones work best for you.

1. Don't waste time feeling sorry for yourself. A rejection (especially a form one) may leave you feeling deeply disappointed. But don't let one setback define your entire writing life. The day you get a rejection you need to act on your plan to bounce back. What can you do, and where do you start?

For one thing, you can buoy yourself up by believing that you have the power to publish your work. More importantly, you must be willing to work at it. It may involve viewing what you wrote more objectively, querying different publishers, or becoming more market savvy. Make a decision to do whatever it takes, and get started now.

2. Study print and online articles

about what makes a good synopsis, proposal, and query letter. Highlight the points from the articles that you'll use in your next killer query. But don't stop there. Add your own unique touch.

The next time you write a query or proposal, use the best advice you learned to reframe what you send an editor. Also, if an editor asks for a certain format in a query, follow it strictly. Make your query letter or book proposal conform to established guidelines. Study sample synopses, queries and proposals that have led to book deals.

3. Send out at least five queries the same week you get a rejection slip. Research at least 10 new markets for your work. Rank them into the top five by considering which publishers you realistically think will give your query or proposal a serious read.

Start with small presses and don't rule out e-books. If you find a larger press that doesn't require an agent, try one of these too if you think your work is the right fit. Begin with your dream publisher and work your way down. Be encouraged by a personal response and keep that editor in mind for future projects.

4. Work on another project. Sometimes focusing on a different work or starting something new allows you time to get away from the work you're currently marketing so that you can view it more objectively. When you go back to your original work and your query, you'll view them from a new angle that may be more likely to catch an editor's eye.

5. Start your own blog. Share your expertise on an interesting subject. Join a free blog site such as Blogger.com or WordPress. Exchange ideas and gain followers. Consider an interactive blog that allows you to converse with writers and readers about your work.

Maybe you'll get an idea for a new book while you're marketing your current work. An added bonus: Editors and agents read blogs and sometimes recruit writers that way.

6. Entice an editor with a captivating title. Can you stimulate more interest in your book by dreaming up a more marketable title? Take some time to peruse titles on the bestseller

from the Rejection Slip Blues

by Catherine DePino, Ed.D.

list and in regular and online bookstores to get an idea of engaging titles for books in your genre. A title gives the editor a first impression of your book. Make it a smashing one. The editor will want to know more about your query or proposal if the title of your work proves enticing and delivers what it promises.

7. Write for your local newspaper.

Write a letter to the editor or an op-ed article. Getting your name in print will help you accumulate clips to send with your query. If you're starting out, don't pass up opportunities to work for free. It will be worth it if your writing catches a book editor's eye.

8. Write every day. While you're revising your current query or work, start writing something new. Be sure you keep writing even if it's spending time on brainstorming on paper by clustering or mind mapping or writing something as basic as plot outlines and synopses.

Try writing in a different genre. If you write nonfiction, try your hand at fiction. If you write poetry, write a personal essay. Sometimes changing genres give you new insights into your usual type of writing and will jumpstart your writing voice and style.

9. Ask fellow writers how they handle rejection. Talk honestly about your feelings about rejection and ask your writing friends to share theirs. Exchange ideas and critique each other's work, promising to speak the truth in a gentle way about each other's writing.

10. Join a writers' online discussion group. Share tips about effective queries, synopses, and proposals. Ask questions and give answers about the craft of writing. Study online postings about editors and agents. It may help you find the best house to publish your writing.

11. Be your own critic. Imagine you're the editor who's judging your work. Look at the work with a critical eye, asking the following questions: Would it fit in with what we're publishing? Does the writer's voice ring true? Does how the writer uses language cause me to shout, "I want it now"?

More importantly, does the story engage

me and prompt me to turn the page? If the work is nonfiction, ask if the writer has a platform strong enough to sell a book on this topic. After you look at your work as an editor would, would you want to strike a deal? If not, you know what you need to do to start revising your query or proposal.

12. Rethink what you wrote. If you get more than a few rejections on the same piece (maybe 10 or more), look at your work realistically and ask yourself what you can change to make it more marketable. You may also want to ask a person whom you know will be objective to read your writing (an avid reader in your genre, or an English teacher, for example). You'll know which friends and family members you can count on to give you an honest answer.

Keep this in mind as you send off your query: You don't have to be brilliant to be a published writer. But you do have to come up with an idea that people will call brilliant enough to publish because no one has ever said it quite like you have. That's what editors are looking for.

If you're willing to cut through the pain of rejection and try some of these tips, you'll advance your odds of tearing open a letter that begins: "We loved your story and want to publish it."

Dr. Catherine DePino's books for children and teachers include *Blue Cheese Breath and Stinky Feet: How to Deal with Bullies; In Your Face, Pizza Face: A Girls' Bully Busting Book; 101 Activities to Help Your Preschooler Excel in Reading, Writing, and Speaking* and *Real Life Bully Prevention for Real Kids: Strategies for Elementary and Middle School.*

You may want to read these books written by authors who understand the rejection slip blues.

- *Damn the Rejection: Full speed Ahead: The Bumpy Road to Getting Published* by Maralys Wills. The author gives practical advice about writing queries and marketing books. She epitomizes perseverance in her willingness to revise and to send out 137 query letters for one book.

- *No More Rejections: 50 Secrets to Writing a Manuscript That Sells* by Alice Orr. The author, a successful literary agent, author, and editor helps writers become mindful of their books' marketability.

- *Pushcart's Complete Rotten Reviews and Rejections: A History of Insult, A Solice to Writers* by Andre Bernard and Bill Henderson, editors. Using humor, this book encourages writers to move past rejections by reading hilarious accounts of famous authors (Kipling, Faulkner, Tony Hillerman, for example) who received many rejections before they achieved fame.

- *The First Five Pages: A Writers' Guide to Staying Out of the Rejection Pile* by Noah Lukeman. From the perspective of a literary agent, the author advises writers how to avoid rejection slips by giving specifics of what editors look for in a manuscript. The main message is for writers to figure out exactly what editors want and to deliver it.

From the Editor

Dear Reader:

When I first viewed the book trailer for Sarah Lamstein's *Big Night for Salamanders* (<http://sarahlamstein.com/trailer.html>), I was immediately reminded how vital conflict is to any picture book. It opens with a straightforward explanation of the spotted salamanders' nighttime journey from their winter burrows to a woodland pool to mate. Then the tale takes an unexpected turn when Lamstein asks, "But what if something interrupts the salamanders' path to the vernal pool?" What began as an incident quickly turns into a *story*.

Watching book trailers teaches you to pinpoint the conflict in picture books (a good source for trailers is <http://kidlitbooktrailers.ning.com>). Because trailers are designed to sell the book, they must focus on the story's hook, or what makes it unique. This almost always involves the conflict. If you view several trailers you'll see that "conflict" comes in many forms: sometimes it's dramatic, sometimes (as with *An Apple Pie for Dinner*, retold by Susan VanHecke) it's just a little problem that needs to be creatively solved.

Since the vast majority of manuscripts I've seen during my 20 years of critiquing have been picture books, I always make it a point at writing workshops to stress how crucial conflict is in stories for young kids. And invariably, I get a few raised eyebrows. Sure, someone always asks, young adult books have conflict in spades, but picture books? Shouldn't picture books make kids feel warm and safe and loved? The real world is scary enough, so why add to that fear with books?

Of course we need books that help kids feel safe and loved. Very often these are linear stories; lyrical books without a true plot that focus on a bedtime routine, the relationship between a parent and child, or that teach a concept. Since we have so many of these books already on the market, any new linear story must have a very original hook to make it publishable. A good example is *Mama's Bayou* by Dianne de Las Casas.

But most new writers I meet are creating stories with plots. Their books have a main character and a story arc with a beginning, middle and end. And the only way those books will ever be successful is if they have conflict.

I think, for some picture book writers, it's really just a problem of semantics. "Conflict" sounds so harsh and violent. It brings to mind images of people yelling and cars exploding in the background. So instead, think of it as a problem for your character to solve, a question to be answered, a mystery to figure out, or a fear to overcome. In other words, conflict is anything that prevents your protagonist from continuing on a straight path through his day (or a salamander from following his instinctual trail to the vernal pool).

Conflict allows young children to become emotionally invested in the story. It creates drama. It means we can't guess what's going to happen until we turn the page. It forces the protagonist to rise to the occasion and be a hero. Conflict turns an ordinary, ho-hum incident (*Dad got dressed for work.*) into a silly situation (*When Dad tried to get dressed for work, he found the new housekeeper had shrunk all his clothes to kid-size.*) Conflict makes books *fun*.

Look at all the picture books on the market today. How many do you think have the theme "You're special"? How many stories involve moving to a new neighborhood, getting a new baby brother or sister, making a friend, or finding one's own particular talents? General book ideas get recycled every season, but the way a plot unfolds can still be fresh if the author does two things: creates a unique character, and gives that character a unique conflict.

If you're writing a picture book right now, try to imagine what the book trailer might be. Most trailers last from 30 to 90 seconds. Does your book have a unique hook that can be highlighted quickly? Is there a dramatic moment that can be pulled out and emphasized with narration or music? If not, you need more conflict. Fiction or nonfiction, the time-tested method for adding conflict to any book is to ask "What if?":

"What if?" can be **embarrassing** (What if Sam can't make it to school on time to get one of the best roles in the Thanksgiving play and has to be an ear of corn?)

"What if?" can be **absurd** (the opening line of David Small's *Imogene's Antlers* reads: "On Thursday, when Imogene woke up, she found she had grown antlers.")

"What if?" can be **scary** (What if Rebecca loses her mom in the shopping mall?)

"What if?" can be **practical**, like Melinda Long's *Pirates Don't Change Diapers*.

"What if?" can give a nonfiction book a unique twist.

The single biggest mistake writers make when developing a picture book idea is to limit their imaginations. Don't ask "What if?" five times. Ask it 50 times. Choose a conflict that's surprising and unpredictable. Choose something that gives your book a hook, your trailer a dramatic focus, and a reason for your story to be read over and over.

—LB

The Basics

Ready, Set, Submit

by Jane McBride Choate

Your book is finished, but your job isn't done. Now is the time to check your manuscript for errors, inconsistencies, and other mistakes before you send it to editors.

Begin with the hard stuff:

1. *Show character growth.* Does your main character grow during the course of a story, or does he remain stagnant? Readers want to see the character confront his problems and, eventually, overcome them. Is your protagonist likeable? A selfish, cruel character will never gain your readers' sympathy. (Note: that does not mean he is perfect. No one likes a character who has no reason to struggle. Make your character a complex blend of good and bad, strong and weak qualities. By the same token, make the villain, if there is one in your story, a mix. A completely evil villain won't ring true.)

2. *Plotting is not for dummies.* Have you included the initial set-up, mid-point, black moment, climax, and resolution of basic plotting? Have you ratcheted up the tension throughout the book so that it reaches the height of suspense at the climax? Have you tied up the loose ends quickly and ended in a manner that is satisfying to the reader?

Advance to intermediate:

3. *Check for inconsistencies.* Did your protagonist start out with brown eyes and suddenly develop blue eyes on page 77? Did your teenage hero leave the house at 7:00 am and within an hour notice the heat from the sun of high noon? Did your season jump from fall to summer without any passage of time? Another inconsistency to watch for is that of tone. Did your book start out with a humorous tone, then switch to a dark one? That is not to say that a serious book cannot have light moments or that a lighthearted book cannot contain a sobering experience. In general, though, it is best to keep the tone consistent.

4. *Choose your words carefully.* Have you used precise nouns and strong verbs? Picking the right word can prevent overuse of adverbs and adjectives. Does your main character "work" on a math problem or does he "struggle" with it? (This is not a license, however, to go overboard with the thesau-

rus. Simple words are generally best.)

5. *Avoid repetition.* Have you used certain words over and over? What about sentence length and type? Do you overwork the standard subject-verb pattern? Are the majority of your sentences long, convoluted ones, or do they tend to be short, rapid-fire ones? Vary the type and length of your sentences, suiting them to what is happening in the story at any given moment.

6. *Be aware of clichés.* Did you fall prey to using clichés and trite phrases? Look for fresh ways of saying things. Make use of original similes and metaphors.

7. *Transitions can be tricky.* Did you move your characters clearly through time and space? Transitions need not be lengthy. A passage of time can be as simple as writing, "Two days later" A change of place can start with "Back at school"

8. *Show, don't tell.* If you've done your job with the other checkpoints, you have a leg up on this final step. Have you avoided variations of the "to be" verb? Have you used an active rather than a passive voice? Have you limited the time your characters spend thinking? Do your descriptions employ all five senses?

End with the basics:

9. *Put your best book forward.* Is your manuscript properly formatted on good quality white paper, double-spaced with generous margins? Is your name and the title of your manuscript on every page?

10. *Cleanliness counts.* Have you made sure your manuscript is free from spelling mistakes, grammar glitches, improper word usage, etc.? If you aren't certain of correct spelling and/or grammar, invest in a good style manual. Use your spell-check program but don't rely on it solely. (Even the best spell-check won't pick up on the difference between whose and who's.) Software programs are also available to point out grammar errors.

Grade your manuscript according to the above checklist and make changes where needed. Then send it off and be prepared to reap compliments from editors and readers alike.

Jane McBride Choate is an author and CBI Contributing Editor.

The CBI Challenge: Module 12

How to "Show, Don't Tell"

by Laura Backes

Another way of looking at "show, don't tell" is what I call "offering evidence." Evidence is especially important in nonfiction, because you're dealing with facts. Let's assume you're writing an article for a boys' magazine, and you open with: *As a Cub Scout, you'll have a lot of fun, learn interesting things, and acquire useful skills.*

What's wrong with the above sentence? It's too general. We have no idea what a Cub Scout does. But more importantly, you (the author) are putting a value on Scouting for the reader. Why should we believe you? Give us some evidence to back up your claims:

As a Cub Scout, you'll perform skits with your den and sing silly songs. You'll use a pocket knife to carve soap and practice tying different types of knots. You'll build a model car, a birdhouse, and a Mars Rover made from Styrofoam. You'll learn what to do in an emergency, and put together your own Emergency Preparedness Kit.

The "evidence" is simply a few specific, concrete examples of what Cub Scouting is about. If the reader thinks building, carving and tying knots are worse than a root canal, he won't believe Scouting is fun no matter how many times you tell him. But he'll still believe you know what you're talking about because you haven't made a blanket judgment without backing up your claim. Your job is to present the information; the reader's role is to form his own opinion based on the facts.

So far in the Challenge we've talked about developing your characters and the overall structure of your book. Now we'll move on to some universal writing techniques. Our first topic: Show, Don't Tell.

Let's begin with a definition. "Telling" uses abstract, general terms (*The dog was big and scary.*) "Showing" uses specific nouns and verbs and pulls from the five senses so the reader will get exactly the meaning the author intends. (*Eva felt the dog's breath on her cheek as she passed by the chain link fence, and smelled the musty odor from his matted fur. Out of the corner of her eye she saw him keep pace with her slow, deliberate steps. But when a low growl rose from the dog's throat, Eva ran.*)

Showing often uses more words than telling, but it also gives the reader more information. In the second example, we see how Eva interacts with the dog. We see the dog as she sees him, and we know exactly what "scary" means. And since showing incorporates more into the text than simple description, you get a lot of mileage from every word.

Showing Character

The way a character reacts to his circumstances or moves through his day shows us a lot about who he is. If your character chooses to miss a movie in order to help his sister with her homework, you've shown he's generous. If she adopts a stray kitten, she's an animal lover. Don't sum up your characters with adjectives (Sam is a good big brother; Kayla has a kind heart). Let their actions speak for themselves.

Many authors over-describe their characters' physical appearances. Highlight one or two traits that make them stand out. Try to work the description into the action or dialogue (*"Now your hair's purple," Julie exclaimed. "When did you make the switch from blue?"*) Secondary characters should be seen through your protagonist's eyes. Touch on what your protagonist notices about other

people rather than listing all their attributes.

By showing character, you'll also be showing plot. The situations your characters put themselves in, and what they do once they're there, create the backbone of your plot structure. Tension and drama are created by your readers seeing what the characters are doing and placing their own value judgments on the characters' choices.

Showing Setting

Ideally, the setting is revealed as your protagonist moves through it. While glancing out her bedroom window Jane may see a river flowing in the distance, and recall the previous summer when the water dried up. Alex may admire a neighbor's new car; the make and model giving the reader a clue as to what year the story takes place. If the story happens in your character's everyday world, then the details of ordinary life (clothing, housing, food, transportation) won't be considered exceptional. A 13-year-old girl growing up on a farm in the 1920s wouldn't think it disgusting to pluck a freshly-killed chicken for dinner – she'd just do it. However, if a character is plunked down in an unfamiliar setting, rather than describe every detail you need to zero in on the aspects of that setting that stand out for your protagonist.

Showing Actions

The single best way to show – without adding extra words – is to pay attention to your verbs. Specific verbs not only convey action, they can also convey emotion, state of mind, and physicality. *After school, Jake went to the store* only tells us what Jake did. But if you also want to show how Jake did it, change the verb: *Jake dashed to the store; Jake trudged to the store; Jake marched to the store; Jake stumbled to the store.* Each verb gives different clues about how Jake feels about his trip to the store, and helps us visualize the way he's moving. That's a lot of showing packed into one word.