

Children's Book Insider

The Newsletter for Children's Writers

At Presstime:

Social Studies Magazine Accepting Submissions for Ages 6-9

Appleseeds is nonfiction social studies magazine for children ages 6-10 (primarily in grades 3 & 4). Looking for articles that are lively, age-appropriate, and exhibit an original approach to the theme. Scientific and historical accuracy is extremely important. Authors are urged to use primary sources and up-to-date resources for their research. Feature articles (150-600 words) include nonfiction, interviews, and how-to. Other departments include Fun Stuff (games or activities relating to the theme); Reading Corner (literature piece, 300-600 words); By the Numbers (math activities relating to the theme); Where in the World (map activities); Your Turn (theme-related opportunities for children to take action, 150 words); Experts in Action (short profile of professional in field related to theme, 150-250 words); The Artist's Eye (fine or folk art relating to theme); From the Source (age-appropriate primary source material, 150-300 words). Pays approximately \$50 per 150 words. *Appleseeds* purchases all rights to material.

All material must be closely related to the theme of the issue. Send a query with a brief description of your idea, a list of sources you plan to use, your intended word length, and any unique angle or hook that will appeal to kids and their teachers and parents. Include copies of published writing samples if you have not yet written for *Appleseeds*. Email query to Susan Buckley at susanbuckleynyc@gmail.com. After the deadline for query proposals has passed, the editors will review the suggestions and assign articles. This may take several months. Writers are encouraged to study recent *Appleseeds* back issues for content and style. For more information, go to www.cobblestonepub.com/magazine/APP/

Upcoming themes with query deadlines: Go Green with John Muir (Apr 2011 issue): A focus on the life and contributions of John Muir and how they affect the environmental movement today (query deadline: 6/15/10). All About Horses (May/June 2011): Stories of horses, riders, and racing, both now and in the past (deadline: 7/15/10). Let's Play (Jul/Aug 2011): Games and players around the world, including who creates them, who plays them, and how—from board games to team sports (deadline: 9/1/10).

Independent Press Accepting Picture Books, YA, and Teacher Resources

Absey & Co. is an independent press that publishes children's and young adult fiction, poetry, teacher resource books (especially those dealing with language arts), and adult fiction. Recent titles include *Stealing a Million Kisses* by Jennifer Skaggs, photos by Lesa Scott (board book); *Regular Lu* by Robin Nelson (picture book); *Adrift: Lost in Life, Marooned at Sea* by Greg Raver-Lampman (young adult fiction); *The Craft of Children's Writing* by Judith Newman. Submit a brief cover letter, a chapter-by-chapter outline (for nonfiction) or synopsis (fiction), an author's information sheet (please focus on relevant qualifications and previous publishing experience), two or three sample chapters or whole manuscript if a picture book, a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Prefers exclusive submissions. Send to Edward Wilson, Editor-in-Chief, Absey & Co., Inc., 23011 Northcrest, Spring, Texas 77389. Response time for manuscripts is six to nine months. For more titles, go to www.absey.biz

Last Chance for a Summer Bootcamp

Children's Authors' Bootcamp of the Rockies, June 26-27 at the Hampton Inn Denver West/Golden, near Denver, CO, offers the perfect chance for beginning and intermediate writers to spend a weekend honing their craft. 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: This will be the last Bootcamp offered this summer!

Inside cbi:

At Presstime....1

CBI Challenge,
Module 14: Making
the Most of a Writers'
Conference....3

Special Report:
Strategies for
Breaking into the
Christian Market....4

From the Editor....6

Creating Picture
Books for Older
Readers....7

How to Write Poetry
for Magazines....8

June 2010

At Presstime: *Eleventh Annual New Voices Award Underway*

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 New Voices Award from Lee & Low Books is given for a children's fiction or nonfiction picture book by a writer of color. The contest is open to writers of color who are residents of the United States and who have not previously published a children's picture book. Manuscripts should address the needs of children of color by providing stories with which they can identify and relate, and which promote a greater understanding of one another. Submissions may be either fiction, nonfiction or poetry for ages 5-12. Folklore and animal stories will not be considered. Manuscripts should be no more than 1500 words in length, typed double-spaced, and should be accompanied by a cover letter that includes the author's name and contact information, a brief biographical note, relevant cultural and ethnic information, how the author heard about the award, and publishing history, if any. Up to two manuscripts may be submitted, but each manuscript should be submitted separately. Address to Lee & Low Books, 95 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016. Attn: New Voices Award. Books previously published in any form are not eligible, nor are manuscripts previously submitted to Lee & Low Books.

Deadline for submissions is September 30, 2010. Manuscripts may not be submitted to other publishers while under consideration for the award. The winner will be announced by December 31, 2010. The prize is a cash grant of \$1000 and a standard publishing contract for basic advance and royalties. An Honor Award winner will receive a cash grant of \$500. For more information, go to www.leeandlow.com and click on "Creators." Past winners include *Sixteen Years in Sixteen Seconds: The Sammy Lee Story* by Paula Yoo (biography of first Asian American to win and Olympic gold medal); *A Fly in a Bowl of Milk* by Pamela M. Tuck (based on her father's experiences of desegregation in North Carolina in the 1960s), and *Long Twelve Miles Long* by Glenda Armand Sheppard (about young Frederick Douglass).

Three Agents Accepting Submissions

Jennifer Mattson, Associate Agent at the Andrea Brown Literary Agency, is particularly looking for author-illustrators at this time, and loves picture books that are story time-ready stories (no one-joke tales or mood pieces) that resonate with universal childhood experiences and concerns. Fables and folktales aren't for her. For the older set, she is drawn to richly imagined fantasies that depart from old-hat heroic quests (alternate realities, magical realism, and steam-punk are all styles/premises to have recently caught her notice). She has a special interest in dystopian fiction for middle graders and in sprawling, atmospheric tales with Dickensian twists and satisfying puzzles. But as much as high-concept novels pique her interest, the most mind-blowing premise can't hide a flat narrative that rarely reaches for unexpected descriptions, fully fleshed characterizations, or a zinging narrative voice. Submissions should be sent to jmatt@andrebrownlit.com following the guidelines found on the Andrea Brown Literary Agency web site, www.andrebrownlit.com.

Suzie Townsend of Fine Print Literary Management represents everything from children's books (chapter books to YA, both fiction and nonfiction) to adult fiction (speculative, fantasy, urban fantasy, science fiction, and romance, especially paranormal). Interested in strong characters and voice driven stories that will keep her up at night. She also gravitates towards strong female protagonists, complex plot lines with underlying political, moral, or philosophical issues, and stories which break out of the typical tropes of their genre. She is not seeking screenplays, poetry or picture books. Query via email with a query letter and the first 5-10 pages of the manuscript pasted into the body of the email. Send to suzie@fineprintlit.com. Also see her blog at <http://confessionsofawanderingheart.blogspot.com>

Bree Martin is a new Associate Agent at Martin Literary Management, representing middle grade and young adult fiction and graphic novels. Send a query letter describing the project to Bree@MartinLiteraryManagement.com. Asks for a two-week exclusive submission of queries; will respond in 2-3 weeks. For more information, go to www.martinliterarymanagement.com/bree-ogden.htm

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*.

The CBI Challenge: Module 14

Making the Most of a Writers' Conference

by Jane McBride Choate

After researching writers' conferences, you've chosen the right one for you. Chances are you've spent several hundred to several thousand dollars to attend the event. How do you make the most of it?

Look the part, act the part. Look professional, no matter what time of day it is or where you are going. You never know when you might run into an editor of the publishing house you want to sell to or the agent you've targeted. Publishing houses want writers who can sell in appearances and online, even in their back cover photo. Publishing is driven by profits. You want to look like a person who understands this. Be prepared and look professional from the moment you enter the conference until you return home and can once more dress in your sweats.

Be extroverted. Talk to everyone. Make friends. Don't waste this opportunity by being a wallflower. Even if you are shy by nature, reach out to others. Do you see someone else who appears alone or uncomfortable? Strike up a conversation with him or her and try to put them at ease. You learn something from everyone, whether a *New York Times* bestselling author, an agent, or a conference first-timer. One conversation could change your career.

Don't sell yourself unless someone asks you to. When you're chatting with others, be interested in them. Don't bring up your book unless you're asked. Talk about your work at the appropriate time, such as an editor or agent appointment. An agent or editor who likes your personality will ask about your work.

Keep your name tag on. Have your name tag on and have your business cards close at hand. If you get to meet with an editor to pitch your book, ask if you can give her your business card with the title of the book on it. This provides an extra assurance that she will remember you and your book.

Eat there, stay there. Conference hotels are frequently expensive, and some authors opt to stay at less expensive hotels and commute to the conference. But if at all possible, arrange to stay at the hotel where the conference is held. Valuable contacts are often made outside the workshops in those

chance encounters in the elevators, the coffee shop, the lobby.

Take advantage of everything. Attend all the workshops you can manage. Are you a first-timer? Make sure you attend the orientation for newcomers. This is a great opportunity to meet other newbies.

Believe in yourself. Be positive and upbeat. This is not the time for weak words or weak mannerisms. Sit up straight, smile, and be approachable. It is easy to get in the mindset that the editor or agent is the one holding all the cards. This can make us act less professional than we should. Develop a "can-do" attitude. If you have an affirmation, repeat it to yourself.

Be overprepared. What if you pitch something to an editor or agent and he/she doesn't like it? Take inventory of the projects you have and prepare pitches on all of them, just in case. Jot your notes down on cards and have them ready to pull out.

Turn your weaknesses into strengths. Just as in other job interviews, editors and agents frequently like to ask what your biggest weaknesses are. Make them into positives. Are you a perfectionist, a tendency that can make you late turning in a manuscript? Turn this trait on its head and emphasize that you polish every manuscript until it is the very best writing of which you are capable.

Follow up afterward. You've attended the conference, met with an editor, and pitched your story. The editor gave you a card and invited you to submit your work. While life can inevitably get in the way of following up in a timely manner, do your best to submit within three months of meeting the editor. Publishers' needs change, editors move to new companies, and submission deadlines for conference attendees pass. Don't miss the opportunity to send requested work to an editor, and remind her of your prior meeting while it's still fresh in her mind.

Come dressed for success. Come prepared. Come committed to learning all that you can. And then enjoy the conference and reap the benefits.

For 13 months now in the CBI Challenge, you've been working on your book. This month, we'll explore what it means to start thinking of yourself as a *writer*, whether or not you're published. Writers take their work seriously; it's a business as well as a craft. And this business side is an important facet of long-term success.

One essential component of becoming a published author is attending writers' conferences. Conferences get you away from the keyboard and into the company of other writers. You'll make contacts, learn valuable industry insights, and come away with renewed energy and passion for what you do. If you've got a finished manuscript, you may have the chance to pitch it to an agent or editor. If you're still writing, you'll have the opportunity to attend lectures that teach you how to improve your book.

To find writing conferences, consult ShawGuides (www.shawguides.com), check out the Conferences & Workshops section in *Children's Writer's & Illustrator's Market*; Google "children's writing conferences", or go to the Society of Children's Book Writers & Illustrators at www.scbwi.org.



www.CBIclubhouse.com

Subscribers: Visit the CBI Challenge, Module 14 section to find free and low-cost ways of living the writer's life.

Jane McBride Choate is an author and CBI Contributing Editor.

Strategies for Breaking

Writing children's books for the Christian market can be a very rewarding experience. My very first book contract was for a book of Sunday School crafts with Rainbow Books. Throughout my writing career, I have published over 30 books for children or children's workers with Christian publishers such as Tyndale House, Barbour, Standard Publishing, and Concordia Publishing House. Each of these books has brought countless joys to me as a children's author as well as a profound sense of personal fulfillment in my journey as a Christian writer. If you feel your heartstrings being tugged at the idea of writing Christian books for children, too, you can learn more about today's market in this special report and how to experience breakthrough. Familiarize yourself with the subtle nuances of this niche market so that you can take your next step forward toward success.

Most Christian children's book publishers require authors to write with a biblical worldview. This is also known as writing with a Christian worldview. This means that every concept in these children's books must be presented in such a way that they support the truths taught in the Bible. In other words, in this market authors write children's books from the Bible's "point of view." For example, you can have a character in a young adult novel say she believes in vampires and werewolves, but you can't have a character who IS a vampire or werewolf. This is because according to the Bible, God created animals and people as distinct identities who can't intermix. According to the Bible, people are created in the image of God.

When writing for this market, it's also important to be aware of denominational beliefs and how they affect Christian children's books. Some publishers publish books that teach children denominational beliefs. Other publishers publish books that present principles of faith without delving into denominational differences. I recommend using a measure of caution if you are considering writing a children's book for a publishing house that supports a denomination whose beliefs you do not agree with. Even if you do not write anything in your manuscript that conflicts with your own beliefs, an editor may add text or the illustrator may create art that actually does create a conflict. For instance, if you believe in adult baptism, the artwork in your children's story could show an infant being baptized. You probably wouldn't know about this until your book was published. How would you feel after your book came out? Would you feel comfortable sharing it with your family and friends? Could you hold a book signing for your

book at your own church?

Most Christian publishers want values-based stories. This means they want stories to "teach" important values such as godliness, truthfulness, and faithfulness. These stories might seem too didactic for publishers in the general market, yet these stories still should not sound "preachy." To create this delicate balance in your own stories, let your main characters discover values through their own journey (teach) rather than learn these values from their pastor, parent, or Sunday school teacher (preach).

An important skill to learn when writing Christian children's books is how to present adult concepts at a child's level of understanding. Our exciting and very rewarding challenge is to discover ways to teach concepts such as salvation, repentance, mercy, grace, and Christ's sacrificial death and resurrection from the grave all in a way that stays true to the meaning of the concept yet that a very young child can understand. One of the best methods I recommend for learning this skill is to create a notebook of published passages that present various key biblical concepts in kid-appropriate language. Gather portions of your favorite examples and write them in your notebook. Refer to your notebook often while you work.

There are various kinds of children's books published in the Christian market and you will benefit most from using a different strategy for each if you want to break into publication.

Baby Books

If you want to write baby books, look for the publisher's contact information on similar books. Baby books in the Christian market are mostly published by packagers, so you may have to contact the packager listed on the back of the book. Submit your resume along with a writing sample and a cover letter asking if they are open to acquiring new authors. (Note: Packagers create series for publishers, coming up with the concept, hiring the authors and illustrators, and producing the books under the publisher's name.)

Picture Books, Children's Bibles, and Bible Story Books

The picture book market is basically a "name market" in the Christian bookstore. This means that most publishers want to publish picture books written by a famous Christian speaker or pastor because that's what sells well in the bookstore. If you want to write picture books as a ghostwriter for this market, contact various publishers with your resume, writing samples, and a cover letter asking if they are interested in acquiring ghostwriters for the big name authors they feature in

into the Christian Market

by Nancy I. Sanders

their catalog.

Some denominations are publishing picture books, Bibles, and Bible story books through their own small presses. If you belong to a denomination with its own small press, check to see if it is open to unsolicited picture book submissions.

Some Christian publishers require picture books, children's Bibles, and Bible story books be submitted through agents. Yet few Christian agents want to represent children's authors because there isn't a lot of money in this niche market. You can look for an agent for potential representation by making a list of current published Christian children's book authors. Search online for the name of these authors' agents and contact them for potential representation as well.

Middle Grade and Young Adult Novels

Middle grade and young adult novels have been a better opportunity for Christian children's writers to experience breakthrough in publication. These books are cheaper to produce than illustrated books so stand a better chance at making a profit even in a tough economy. Some publishers accept unsolicited manuscripts. Others state that they are serviced by the Writer's Edge (a fee-based, manuscript screening service for Christian publishers) or work with agents. If your target publisher requires agent submissions, search online for the name of their authors' agents and contact these agents for potential representation.

Activity Books and Craft Books

Most Christian publishers offer work-for-hire contracts with a flat fee for activity books and craft books. However, these same publishers are usually very open to working with new or even inexperienced writers. Writing these types of books can be a great way to get your foot in the door in this market, especially with publishers who publish both work-for-hire products along with royalty based contracts for picture books on up through young adult novels. Try landing a contract to write an activity or craft book and then when that project is finished, ask your editor if there might be interest in your picture book.

Nonfiction: Devotionals, Prayer Journals, Self-help, Group Study Books, and Issues Books

I hear success stories of authors who land contracts to write nonfiction for today's Christian children's book market. Start by going to your local Christian bookstore and finding a nonfiction book where you say, "I think I could write a book like this." Look online through that publisher's catalog and brainstorm ideas for topics that would fit well into this publisher's nonfiction product

line. If they accept queries, query the publisher and pitch three to five potential ideas to the editor. When writing nonfiction, try to land a contract first to write your book so that you're earning income while you write. Nonfiction publishers tend to work this way with their authors, and it will benefit your career if you learn how this process works and how to tap into it. (To discover more about how to land contracts before you write children's books, read my book *Yes! You Can Learn How to Write Children's Books, Get Them Published, and Build a Successful Writing Career*.)

Books for Sunday School Teachers, Christian School Teachers, Children's Church Leaders, and Youth Group Leaders

Even in this day of poor economics and low sales, teachers and youth leaders always need new material, so Christian publishers try to produce new products each year to meet this demand. If you have experience working with children in the church or at a Christian school, try writing for this market. Doors might fling wide open with a variety of opportunities to get published, even if you're new as a writer.

To help find information about publishers in the Christian children's book market, an essential tool is Sally Stuart's *Christian Writers' Market Guide*. Sally also maintains a very informative blog with current publishing news at <http://stuartmarket.blogspot.com>.

A significant number of publishers, however, do not want to receive huge volumes of unsolicited manuscripts and therefore do not want their information to be included in market guides. These are generally small, independent publishing lines that are operated by megachurches or private ministries. Part of what I call a "hidden world of publishers," they usually do not require authors to have agents, and continue to publish material they plan to sell to their congregations or supporters even in times when traditional publishers might be cutting back. If you belong to a church or follow a ministry that publishes its own line of books for children, contact their offices and talk with them about the possibility of writing for them. I have known children's authors who experience success by following this route.

Whichever steps you take along your journey to write for this market, however, it can give you some of the most rewarding experiences in your writing career. The words you write can make a profound difference in the hearts and lives of young readers.

Beef Up Your Resume

Make Christian book editors take a serious look at your submission. How? Build your resume by writing for the no-pay/low-pay market. You can start today! Look for opportunities in these places:

- ◆ Children's page in your church's newsletter or website
- ◆ Sunday School take-home papers listed in Stuart's market guide
- ◆ Children's bulletins
- ◆ Small Christian children's magazines
- ◆ Children's material needed by local churches
- ◆ Web content for online Christian sites for kids
- ◆ Activities, crafts, and kid-friendly recipes in newsletters or e-zines for Christian parents or homeschooling families
- ◆ Vacation Bible School programs
- ◆ Sunday School curriculum



www.CBIclubhouse.com

Subscribers: Listen to a podcast with Nancy Sanders to get more tips on writing for the Christian market.

Nancy I. Sanders is the bestselling and award-winning author of over 80 books including *Anyone Can Get Published—You Can, Too! A Practical Strategy for the Christian Who Writes*. She maintains an inspirational photoblog for Christian writers at www.scribes7.wordpress.com. Visit her website at www.nancyisanders.com.

From the Editor

Dear Reader:

If you've been working the CBI Challenge for the past 13 months, or even whizzed through the 13 modules in five or six months, chances are right about now you've hit a wall. You've discovered what every writer knows who sticks with a manuscript beyond that initial flash of inspiration: writing is hard. To be more accurate, writing well is hard. Anyone can throw words on a page. But to make those words into something that burrows into the heart of a reader you'll never meet—that takes considerable effort.

This is the point that separates the writers from the wannabes. Here is where you'll learn if writing is something you're meant to do, or if you just thought it would be cool to see your name on a book. There's nothing wrong with the latter; we've all jumped into activities we thought would satisfy some creative need, only to find we were way off base. I have half-finished knitting projects and lopsided ceramics gathering dust in closets as evidence of my own tinkering. However, if you genuinely believe in your heart you're a writer but feel like you're wading through quicksand, then you may be missing a vital ingredient in the creative process.

In a brilliant speech to Publishers Group Canada, Richard Nash, former publisher of Soft Skull Press, said that most writers suffer a sort of postpartum depression once their books finally hit the stores. That's because the actual event that marks publication isn't what ultimately makes them happy. It's the series of connections leading up to publication. It's coming up with the idea, identifying the audience, writing the text that connects with your writers' group/agent/editor/illustrator. It's getting those first glowing reviews. Writers are fueled by forging a mental and emotional bond with their readers, and getting feedback from them. Everything else is just icing on the cake.

Now, Richard Nash was talking about authors who write alternative, outspoken books for adults. These authors often don't hear much from their readers after the pub date flurry dies down. Children's authors can continue to nurture connections with their readers after their books are published via school visits, blogs and social media sites. But that initial rush of insight must happen during the writing process for their book to become a reality.

I remember the first time I felt a connection with an author. When I was five years old, my favorite book was *Green Eggs and Ham*. This was partly because it was the first book I could read completely on my own. But there's another reason: I vividly remember the day I was reading the book to myself for the umpteenth time, and I suddenly realized there was more to the story than what was printed on the page. This book was about something bigger. It was about trying new things, being open-minded, not judging people too quickly. Though my five-year-old brain couldn't completely articulate these ideas, my heart understood them. And at that moment I truly believed Dr. Seuss had shared a special secret just with me.

That kind of magic doesn't happen in an instant. It takes work. It *should* take work. But if the work for you has become a chore, maybe you haven't found your connection yet. Here are some ideas for igniting that spark that will keep you going:

Identify why you love your idea. What was it about your work-in-progress that initially excited you? Did it stir some deep emotion or relate to a strongly-held belief? Is the topic something you've always wanted to learn more about? Does it involve a subject you've spent years researching? If you have no passion for your core idea, you'll have trouble generating passion from your readers. Make sure your book is important to you on a personal level.

Get away from the computer. Follow the advice in this month's Challenge module and attend a conference. Network with other writers; hear lectures from published authors and illustrators, editors and agents; talk shop over lunch. Tap into the collective creative energy in the room. Learn what inspires those who have been writing for years. Steal some of their tricks to inspire yourself.

Join a critique group and get feedback from readers who aren't family. Savor these first connections when they're successful.

Spend time with your audience. Volunteer to read to kids at your local library, or help out in the classroom. Offer to facilitate a young adult book club. See firsthand how young readers react to the written word. You'll be newly determined to make that connection with your own book.

This month's Challenge module is all about living the writer's life. True writers—published and unpublished—make the choice to push through the difficult times and keep going. They search for a way to connect to their readers because they know that once it's found, it will remain a constant throughout the entire process.

Being a writer is more than having your name on a book. It's about creating magic. If you thrive from that magical connection, then welcome to the writer's life.

—LB

Writing Workshop

Creating Picture Books for Older Readers

by Laura Backes

Nonfiction in the picture book format has traditionally been available for readers through age 12, covering everything from biographies to history to science. But fiction picture books have always limited their audience to kids up to age 8. That's changing. Third, fourth and fifth grade teachers have discovered that picture books read out loud in their classrooms engage their students in ways textbooks can't. And many middle grade kids simply like stories illustrated with beautiful artwork.

Though these picture books often have more text than their younger counterparts (up to about 2000 words), creating them is more complicated than simply writing longer stories. Here are some other qualities of older picture books:

Stories tie in with school curriculum.

Authors should always consider how their books might be used in schools. Even though the books are fiction, work as many factual details into the book as possible so it can complement a teacher's lesson plan. *Finding Lincoln* by Ann Malaspina, illustrated by Colin Bootman, tells the story of an African American boy in Alabama in 1951, who had to get a book for a school report out of a whites-only library. Though the book focuses on the boy and the white librarian who helped him, it illustrates larger civil rights issues. Patricia Polacco's *Pink and Say* is based on the account of her great-grandfather who, as a young white Union soldier, was wounded in battle and rescued by an African American soldier, then taken to his mother's home. When they were ultimately captured by Confederate troops, their fates were very different.

The writing is more complex than in younger picture books. The audience for these older picture books (generally ages 6-10 or 8-12) have been reading on their own, and are used to seeing stories in a variety of formats. *Patrol: An American Soldier in Vietnam* by Walter Dean Myers, illustrated by Ann Grifalcon, describes a typical day in the life of a young American soldier in first-person free verse. *Almost to Freedom* by

Vaunda Micheaux Nelson, illustrated by Colin Bootman (told by a young slave girl's rag doll as they escape through the Underground Railroad) incorporates the period dialect in the first-person narration: *Come sundown, we sit 'round and listen to stories about little critters foolin' big ones and about slaves outsmartin' massas. These is the best times 'cause there's lotsa laughin' and singin'.*

These older picture books tell bigger stories than those for a younger audience. The plots have a subtext, the time frame might be longer, and the endings don't necessarily wrap up happily. In that sense, they have much in common with novels.

The books can feature abstract ideas.

The classic picture book audience is young enough to need abstract concepts presented in a very concrete way. This older audience is more sophisticated, and can contemplate open-ended ideas. Jon J. Muth's *The Three Questions: Based on a Story by Leo Tolstoy* uses Zen reasoning to answer the questions *When is the best time to do things? Who is the most important one? What is the right thing to do?* through a simple story. *Jazz* by Walter Dean Myers, illustrated by Christopher Myers, features 15 poems that show through words how different types of jazz *feel* when heard. Neither book is text-heavy, but they showcase ideas younger readers can't comprehend.

The books often contain back matter. Author's notes, glossaries, time lines, and recommended further reading give the books substance and reinforce the classroom connection.

If you think you're writing a picture book for older readers, spend some time reading several published examples before submitting your work to publishers. These books are shelved in the Juvenile Fiction section of the library, not with other picture books. Don't confuse older picture book fiction with legends and folktales (also in this section). Learn what makes these books unique, and you'll have access to a brand new audience for your work.

The Basics

How to Write Poetry for Magazines

by Suzanna E. Henshon, Ph.D.

If you write poetry for children, a good place to break into print is in children's magazines. You'll develop a publishing resume before you approach book publishers with submissions for anthologies or your own book of verse. As with any kind of writing, start by reading high-quality published examples to develop a sense of the craft.

Shel Silverstein's *Where the Sidewalk Ends* and *A Light in the Attic* are modern classics. Also check out the work of Jack Prelutsky, Mary Ann Hoberman, Karla Kuskin, Paul Fleischman and others who have received critical acclaim. Read their stand-alone poems (found in anthologies and collections) to get a sense of the structure of poetry that is not a full-length picture book.

Writing poetry requires several skills: observation, brevity, rhythm, and the ability to go beyond clichés. Poems capture a moment in time or an idea that children believe to be a universal truth. They also create a strong visual image in the reader's mind. Be sure to match the poem's content to the age of the child. Younger children are more literal, whereas middle grade and young adult readers can handle abstract ideas.

Once you've written several poems, start researching magazine markets. I studied *Ladybug*, a magazine that publishes poetry, fiction, and short stories. Because *Ladybug* is for children ages 3-6, poems are short and usually rhyme; the verses are experienced in a literal sense by a child. Poems are accompanied by vivid illustrations, and the poetry is meant to be read aloud. Most importantly, verses reflect children's experiences; the narrators sound young but are not so childish that adults lose interest.

As you craft poetry, study what is currently being published. If you want to be published in a specific magazine, get to know editors' tastes by reading it. Look at the length and content of the published poems.

In *Ladybug*, a few poems are two pages long, but most poems take up just a page—about four to eight lines. Here are some other tips:

1. **Write with images.** When you write children's poetry, it is important to think about concrete images and themes. Make your poetry accessible and visual at the same time.

2. **Write for children and adults.** Be attentive to how your poem will sound to a dual audience of children and parents. While the most important audience is children, you should also think about entertaining the adults who are reading your poems aloud.

3. **Tell a story.** These "stories", though, are not as complex as a picture book. They tend to revolve around a single incident. Think about the central event of the poem and create a narrator (preferably a young child). Consider how you can tell the story in an authentically young voice as you begin crafting your poem.

4. **Make a point.** It's not enough to join several rhyming lines together; a background story must tie the verse together, leading to an insight that children will understand and a theme that parents will appreciate.

5. **Be daring.** Use fresh language and to steer away from clichés. Take a new look at old images, sharing vivid details and memorable phrases with young readers.

6. **Read the magazine.** As you write, think about the layout of your piece within the magazine. Get an understanding of what kinds of poems have been published lately, and think about if your work will be a suitable match. Before you send your poem in, make sure you proofread and include a SASE.

Writing poetry for children is exciting and exhilarating. You'll discover that the gift of words is challenging to develop but wonderful to share. As a poet, you can give young readers lasting memories: poems that will stay in their hearts forever.

Find poetry guidelines for all the Cricket Magazine Group (fiction and nonfiction) publications can be at www.cricketmag.com/pages_content.asp?page_id=6. Other magazine markets can be found in *Children's Writer's & Illustrator's Market*, an annual guide published by Writer's Digest Books.

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