

Children's Book Insider

The Newsletter for Children's Writers

At Presstime:

Publisher Accepting Fiction With Educational Slant, and Unique Nonfiction

Charlesbridge publishes high-quality picture books, early readers, educational picture books for ages 7-10, and longer fiction and nonfiction for middle graders (ages 8-12) and upper middle grade (ages 10-14). Nonfiction books focus on nature, science, social studies, and multicultural topics. Fiction titles include strong, engaging characters and lively, plot-driven stories that usually have some educational component (developing social skills, exploring a historical or political period, teaching math concepts, etc.) No alphabet, board, coloring or activity books. Recent titles include *Freda Plans a Picnic* by Stuart J. Murphy (picture book for ages 2-5 that teaches sequencing, part of the I See I Learn series); *Ace Lacewing, Bug Detective: The Big Swat* by David Biedrzycki (picture book mystery for ages 5-8); *A Very Improbable Story* by Edward Einhorn, illustrated by Adam Gustavson (fiction picture book for ages 7-10 that teaches improbability); *Candy Bomber: The Story of the Berlin Airlift's "Chocolate Pilot"* by Michael O. Tunnell (nonfiction for ages 9-12); *Bamboo People* by Mitali Perkins (novel for ages 11-14 narrated by two teenage boys on opposing sides of the conflict between the Burmese government and the Karenni, one of Burma's ethnic minorities). For more titles, go to www.charlesbridge.com. Send complete manuscript for picture books and short chapter books. For works longer than 30 pages, send a detailed synopsis, chapter outline, and three chapters. Charlesbridge requests **exclusive submissions** for three months. Responds only to manuscripts of interest. If you haven't heard back three months after submission, you can assume Charlesbridge is not interested in your manuscript. Send submissions to Submissions Editor, Trade Division, Charlesbridge, 85 Main Street, Watertown, MA 02472. Write "Exclusive Submission" on all envelopes and cover letters.

Charlesbridge has recently acquired **Imagine Publishing** (which is now an imprint of Charlesbridge), a publisher founded in 2009 to publish children's and adult titles on science, nature, music, art, sports, and reference. Children's books are for ages 3-12. New titles include *If You Were Raised by a Dinosaur* by Isabella Brooklyn (nonfiction for ages 6 and up, 80 pages); *The Kids' Solar Energy Book* by Tilly Spetgang and Malcolm Wells (ages 8 and up, 88 pages); *Micro Mania: A Really Close-Up Look at Bacteria, Bedbugs, & the Zillions of Other Gross Little Creatures That Live In, On, & All Around You!* by Jordan D. Brown (ages 8 and up, 80 pages). Send a proposal with a cover letter giving a brief description of the book and its purpose, an outline, introduction, sample chapter and illustration/photo samples if you're also an artist, and an analysis of the potential market for the project, including title, publisher, and date of all similar projects, with an explanation of how your proposal differs from each. Also include an author biography that includes publishing credits and credentials in the field. Proposals may be emailed (paste within body of email) to Charles G. Nurnberg at cnurnberg@imaginebks.com, or mailed with SASE to Charles G. Nurnberg, President and Publisher, Imagine Books, 25 Whitman Road, Morganville, NJ 07751. Imagine Publishing does not require exclusive submissions at the time of this printing.

Two Agents Taking on New Clients

Naomi Hackenberg is building her list at the Elaine English Literary Agency (www.elaineenglish.com). She's accepting queries for middle grade and young adult fiction. She looks for strong writing, stand-out narrative voices, and compelling characters. She's especially looking for a great YA mystery or dystopian novel. Send a query letter with a synopsis of the novel's plot and characters pasted within the body of an email to naomi@elaineenglish.com. May take up to 30 days to respond.

Amanda Luedeke has been promoted to Agent at MacGregor Literary Agency (www.macgregorliterary.com). The agency is currently only taking on new clients who have been published, but Amanda is open to queries from authors with middle grade or young adult fiction projects who have published at least one book. Send a query within the body of an email to amanda@macgregorliterary.com.

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August 2010

At Presstime: *Literary Magazine for Young Readers Taking Submissions*

Spider is a literary and activity magazine for children ages 6-9, published nine times a year by Cricket Magazine Group. Looking for fiction (realistic fiction, easy-to-read stories, humorous tales, fantasy, folk and fairy tales, science fiction, fables, myths, and historical fiction) of 300-1000 words; nonfiction (nature, animals, science, technology, environment, foreign culture, history, music, and art) of 300-800 words; poetry (serious, humorous, nonsense rhymes) up to 20 lines; recipes, crafts, puzzles, games, brainteasers, math and word activities (activities take up 1-4 magazine pages, or 100-800 words plus illustrations). A short bibliography is required for all retold folklore and nonfiction articles, and copies of research material will be required for all accepted articles. Be prepared to send other backup materials and photo references—where applicable—upon request. An exact word count should be noted on each manuscript submitted. Word count includes every word, but does not include the title of the manuscript or the author's name.

Pays up to 25 cents/word for stories and articles, up to \$3 per line for poems. Rights purchased vary (though often asks for all rights including copyright to the piece). Pays on publication. *Spider* publishes only the highest quality literary material. Reprints and simultaneous submissions are accepted (purchases second North American rights for reprints). *Spider* will also consider submissions of photography, either in the form of photo essays or as illustrations for specific nonfiction articles. Photographs should accompany the manuscript. Color photography is preferred, but black-and-white submissions will be considered depending on subject matter. Photocopies or prints may be submitted with the manuscript, but original transparencies for color or good quality black-and-white prints (preferably glossy finish) must be available upon acceptance.

It's strongly recommended that authors read several recent back issues to get a feel for the magazine (see a sample online at www.cobblestonepub.com/magazine/SDR/). Send entire manuscript with SASE to Submissions Editor, *Spider*, Carus Publishing, 70 East Lake Street, Suite 300, Chicago, IL 60601.

New Web Site Holding Short Story Contest

Short-Story-Time.com, a web site that features family-friendly read-aloud stories for children, is sponsoring a writing contest. Entries can be fiction or nonfiction of up to 2500 words for children up to age 12 (suggested themes: holiday, inspirational, embarrassing situations, humor, adventure, love, family). Entrants must be at least 18 years old and can submit as many stories as they'd like. No entry fee. All entries must be in English, original, unpublished, and not submitted or accepted elsewhere at the time of submission. Short-Story-Time reserves exclusive electronic rights to publish the submissions on the web site in print, video and audio formats credited to the author. Entrants must submit their stories electronically by filling out the form at www.short-story-time.com/short-story-writing-contest.html (scroll down to find form). Visitors to the web site can vote on the entries and are encouraged to leave comments. Online voting and comments will be taken into consideration, but winners will ultimately be decided by the webmaster's panel of judges. Deadline for entries is **September 15, 2010**. Winners will be notified by November 1, 2010.

The first place winner will receive \$100 plus a one-year membership to the CBI Clubhouse*; second place receives \$75; third place receives \$50.

*CBI donated a Clubhouse membership but is not a sponsor of the contest. If the winner is already a member, Clubhouse membership will be extended for a year.

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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Upcoming Conference

The Fall Conference of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators, MidSouth Region, will be held from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. on Saturday, Sept. 24th and 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. on Sunday, Sept. 25th in Nashville, TN. Industry agents, an art director, editors from HarperCollins and Random House and a *New York Times* bestselling author will present 20 workshops for authors and illustrators, both beginners and published. Topics range from "*The Basics for Beginning Writers*," to "*Developing Characters*," to "*Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Making a Picture Book, But Were Afraid to Ask*" to "*Surviving and Thriving in an Online World*". Conference fees range from \$65 for one day only to \$150 for both Saturday and Sunday (Saturday lunch included). SCBWI members receive a discount. For more information and an online registration form, go to www.scbwi-midsouth.org/events.htm

Writing Workshop

Creating a Winning Series

by Laura Backes

Many authors dream of getting a contract for a series. It's a sure way of establishing your presence in the market, but not every book lends itself to this format. Some series sprout organically; the author's initial book is a hit, and the editor asks for another story with the same characters or a companion book based on the same concept. This is most common with illustrated picture book and easy readers series that are more expensive to publish.

But once you get into books with chapters, you'll see series planned from the get-go. Let's look at the two types of fiction series you can write.

Open-ended Series

Open-ended series run as long as there's an audience for the books. These series may be 10, 20, or more titles long (the Magic Tree House books, Junie B. Jones series and Gossip Girl are popular examples). They're powered by the main characters, who readers get to know and want to read about over and over.

An essential component of open-ended series is a **hook**. The hook is an overall concept that holds all the books together. The hook must be an original idea that provides a jumping-off point for each book's plot, but broad enough to encompass unlimited story ideas. In 1986 Ann M. Martin launched *The Baby-Sitter's Club*, about a group of seventh-grade girls who pooled their baby-sitting experience and formed a business. The series grew to over 100 titles, a TV series and a movie. Jon Scieszka's *The Time Warp Trio* is a series of chapter books for ages 7-10 featuring three boys who get randomly transported to different time periods, past and present, via a magical book. For both these series, the hook can be explained in one or two sentences.

In middle grade and young adult series, it's important that primary characters have enough layers so they can evolve as the series unfolds. Each of the four principle girls in *The Baby-Sitter's Club* had her own unique storyline that developed over several titles. So while baby-sitting exploits served as a touchstone for the plots, Stacy's medical problems or Kristy's new stepfather gave indi-

vidual titles a beginning, middle and end. Characters need to grow and change, yet remain as interesting to readers in Book 20 as they were in Book 1. In series for younger readers, however, the characters tend to remain fairly consistent, but the plots vary greatly from book to book. Readers like to predict exactly how each character will react in new situations.

Closed Series

Closed series stories have a particular lifespan that lasts three to seven books. *Harry Potter*, *The Hunger Games*, *Twilight*, and the Gemma Doyle supernatural historical fiction trilogy by Libba Bray fall into this category. These series also have hooks, but they're more specific to the multipart story the author is telling. (This, from *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*: "After getting expelled from yet another school for yet another clash with mythological monsters only he can see, twelve-year-old Percy Jackson is taken to Camp Half-Blood, where he finally learns the truth about his unique abilities: He is a demigod, half human, half immortal. Even more stunning: His father is the Greek god Poseidon, ruler of the sea, making Percy one of the most powerful demigods alive.") The hook sets up the plot, and paves the way for a unique conflict to each volume, as well as an overall conflict to the series.

Closed series have an epic plot arc that the author plans out ahead of time. Most often these arcs star a protagonist who has been thrust into some life-changing situation that he must resolve for the well-being of himself and other characters. Science fiction and fantasy series typically have conflicts with world-shattering consequences. Each volume in the series is a significant step toward that resolution.

The main characters must also be complex enough to carry a multipart story, but the author knows from the start exactly how much each character needs to evolve. Plot twists and cliffhangers are essential to keep readers anticipating the next book, which might be months away.

Crafting a Series Proposal

First, check the publisher's author's guidelines to make sure they're accepting fiction series proposals. Then, determine if you're writing an open-ended or a closed series. The following are the most common formats for series proposals, though individual publishers may vary:

Open-ended series: Include an overview that describes the series' hook and gives a one-paragraph description of each major character. Explain if the characters will take turns being the viewpoint character of each book, or if the viewpoint will remain consistent for the whole series. If important secondary characters will appear in most stories (siblings, teachers, etc.), describe each in a few sentences.

On a separate page, write a synopsis of the plots for the first three to five books. For chapter book series, the synopsis can be a paragraph per story. For middle grade and young adult books, write 2-3 paragraphs per plot, describing the main story line and also the sub-plots.

Attach the first three chapters of the first book, and a brief cover letter introducing yourself and listing the other items in the packet. Send with a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

Closed series: Send a cover letter that gives the series title, age range, and how any books will be in the series. Then write a very brief synopsis of the series idea (think about what might appear on the jacket flap of a book that contained all the volumes of the series). Add any personal information about yourself that's relevant to writing children's books. On a separate sheet, write a detailed character description of the series protagonist, and other principle characters. Then attach a detailed plot synopsis of each book in the series (same length as synopses for open-ended series). Finally, include three chapters from the first book, and a SASE.

Alien Clones and Modern Fairy Tales

When popular Taffeta makes a deal with geeky Winslow Fromes to cheat from his test in a trade for a dance at Winterfest, she has no idea life will get so complicated. Her teacher, Mr. Dribble, discovers the truth, but gives her an “out” instead of punishment.

Suddenly, Dribble jumps in front of his desk. “How would you like a chance to do things differently?” His mustache wags and I can see his banana-colored teeth again. “A fresh start?”

What does that mean? “Like a complete do-over?”

He smiles fully so that the yellowness is now overpowering. “Yup. A complete do-over.”

I nod, thinking about him canceling out that test, letting me retake it after winter break and pretending like none of this ever happened. “Wow. That’d be amazing.” . . .

“A fresh start,” he says in a trancelike tone. “Everything will be wiped clean. You’ll be like a whole new person.”

A deep cold shoots through my veins. My body feels all tingly, as if I have the chills. My legs shake as if a tremor is rollicking under the floor, and little pinpricks of static energy roll through my arms and curl my toes.

Things Are Gonna Get Ugly is Hillary Homzie's first middle grade novel, but she's no novice at using humorous, off-the-wall concepts in fiction for kids. Her four-volume chapter book series, *Alien Clones from Outer Space*, has been adapted into an animated television series in Australia (Hillary is a creative consultant. Go to www.supportmentertainment.com/properties/alienclones.shtml to see a trailer). Hillary's many pre-author jobs include a New York City comedy sketch writer and performer for a group called Rubber Feet and Ha! Comedy Duo. She is currently the spokesperson for bedtime stories at www.sleepbetter.org (along with Betty White), and a visiting professor at Hollins University where she teaches in the graduate M.F.A./M.A. program in children's literature and writing. See a book trailer for *Things Are Gonna Get Ugly* on her web site: www.hillaryhomzie.com. Also visit Hillary's blog (<http://blog.hillaryhomzie.com>) to read her informative post, "Want to know why reluctant readers like funny books?", and learn how to use her favorite humor-writing techniques: Fish Out of Water, The Opposite of What's Expected, and The Element of Surprise.

Hillary recently spoke with me about writ-

ing humorous novels for kids.

In your Alien Clones From Outer Space series, Barton and Nancy are two human kids who have two space alien clones. Sounds like a high-concept movie deal to me! Did you sell the book on a proposal, a series, or pitch the idea?

It was all about being at the right place at the right time

Louise Williams, an editor at Aladdin who had previously been in television, has a great commercial sensibility and came up with the basic premise. Simon & Schuster then went looking for someone to create the characters and write the series. At that very moment I had sent off a humorous middle grade to Stephen Fraser, who was a senior editor at Aladdin (he's now an agent). Anyway, I got a call from Stephen when I was sitting at home in my pajamas, and he told me that he had received my manuscript and gushed, “You are SO funny!”

Then a few days later I got a phone call from Louise and she asked me if I'd like to try out for the series and, of course, I said YES! However, I had to get it done in a few days because they had agents submit like 300 writers and they had already whittled it down to a few...and well, you know the answer to how it the story ends—I got the gig!

Anyway, I couldn't have made it without brainstorming with my former sketch comedy partner Steven Arvanites, who's the head of NYCscreenwriter.com and a comedic actor who's frequently appeared on David Letterman, so I had a great support system.

Subsequently, I had the good fortune to work with several members of the fantastic Aladdin team: Louise, Stephen, Julia Richardson who's now with Houghton Mifflin and Ellen Krieger, who edited my newest book, *Things Are Gonna Get Ugly*.

Humor writing is more difficult than it looks. What advice do you have for writers to include more humor within their writing?

Consider stepping out of the picture and letting your character tell the story from their perspective and don't edit—just let all of their funny observations and perspective come out. It will be surprising what they have to say. Or consider writing in third person and using a narrator with a distinctive view on the world. How would your story sound if the narrator hated children, or was a British Butler or a Navy Seal? Lemony Snicket,

Equal High Concept Humor for Kids

by Elizabeth
Koehler-Pentacoff

N.E. Bode and John Scieszka have employed this technique with great success. When you make strong choices it helps for you, the writer, to step out of the picture and let funny truths come to life.

Also, consider making your protagonist a fish out of water because, as an outsider, your character will consistently break social conventions. For example, a bull in a china shop, an alien in the fourth grade or a frog in school. All of these ideas have been made into children's books. Or include a misbehaving younger sibling in your story. Older children often enjoy reading about the antics of younger children because they're laughing at their younger selves—the selves that didn't know the social conventions.

Humiliating your character is another technique for enhancing comedy. One strategy is to interview your character and ask them when they've been publicly humiliated. Don't be afraid to incorporate this into your book. One of the biggest dangers in blocking the natural flow of comedy is when we attempt to protect our characters from harm and embarrassment. Allow your cast of characters to get into loads of trouble and to be humiliated. Readers will laugh at these situations because they're relieved that it is not them. But at the same time, they are reading on to see how your protagonist survives the embarrassment because they want to know how to survive, too. Not just survive, but thrive.

How did Things Are Gonna Get Ugly come about? What did you learn through the process of writing it?

It started out as a writing assignment when I was in graduate school in children's literature at Hollins University, a program where I now teach. Twelve years ago, Professor J.D. Stahl asked us to write a short story based upon a fairy tale. I chose King Thrush Bird, which is about a haughty and judgmental princess who learns humility when her father, tired of her arrogance, marries her to the next beggar that knocks on the palace doors. I loved that tale and immediately began updating it so I created the story of a contemporary, judgmental 14-year-old who is magically transformed into a low-status geek, and how she learns to befriend the outcasts she had previously humiliated. I think I stayed up all night writing it, and I remember that the class applauded after I finished reading it out loud. About three years ago, the story basically jumped out of my filing cabinet and begged to become a novel. I set the book in Menlo

Park, which is small city in California, where I actually lived in eighth grade, and it's a place of with lots of congregated brain power and also wealth, which worked well for the book. Anyway, I pitched the idea to Ellen Krieger, who was intrigued, read it and bought the manuscript for the Aladdin Mix list, which is a wonderful line specifically for tweens.

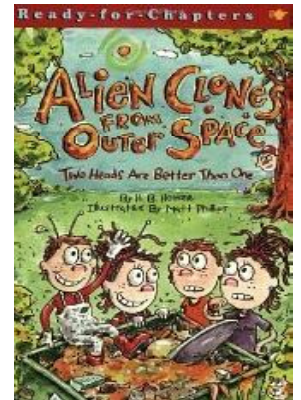
Through writing *Things Are Gonna Get Ugly*, I learned all about character. Since I had started with a short story and a high concept idea, I had to work backwards and deepen characterization. I realized that at first I didn't like Taffeta near enough. Mostly, I was a bit disgusted with her attitude and arrogance. I had to learn to like her, even love her. That came about through lots of frank talks with Taffeta. Can you tell I'm a huge fan of interviewing your characters? It's interesting to take a disagreeable character who is transformed toward the end of a novel and learn to like her pre-transformation. I discovered that, if I couldn't relate to Taffeta at the beginning of the novel, then my readers wouldn't be able to as well. Writing this book has actually made me a more empathetic person.

What is something you wish you would have known when you began writing that you know now?

When you're writing a novel, write through to the end. Do not do what I did for years, which is rewrite the first three to five chapters dozens of times and then never go forward. In the beginning you don't really know what the book is about so avoid the perfectionist habit of getting it right as you go along. Some writers, like me, love deadlines, others find deadlines constricting, so it's best to know yourself well.

Anything you'd like to add?

I'd like to say how important it has been for me to have a support system of others who believe in me. This includes family, friends, my writing group, my editors and my agent. It takes a village, seriously. But it starts me with me. I have to believe in myself first, that I am worthy, in order to attract all of these wonderful people in my life. It takes a leap of faith to go through the process of writing a book. And then once you get published there are whole new set of people out there supporting your career: booksellers, librarians, bloggers, journalists, marketing and publicity departments and book reps.



Two Heads Are Better Than One from *Alien Clones From Outer Space* by Hillary Homzie (ages 6-9, Aladdin)

Elizabeth Koehler-Pentacoff has written fiction and nonfiction for children, as well as material for writers and teachers, including *Jackson and Bud's Bumpy Ride: America's First Cross-Country Automobile Trip* (picture book, illustrated by Wes Hargis) and *The ABC's of Writing for Children*. See all of her work at www.lizbooks.com

From the Editor

Dear Reader:

One thing I notice quite a bit when I critique picture book manuscripts is that the authors forget these are interactive stories. The child being read to participates by examining every detail of the illustrations and controlling how quickly the story unfolds by turning the pages.

But what makes a child want to turn the page? Picture book stories are conveyed through a sequence of action scenes. The page breaks fall where they do for three reasons:

To build anticipation. If the child's invested in the story, he'll try to anticipate what happens after the page turns. If the author and illustrator provide a big enough payoff, the child will want the book read over and over, even if he knows what's going to happen next. A timeless classic example is *The Monster at the End of this Book* by Jon Stone, illustrated by Michael Smollin. Sesame Street's Grover keeps warning the reader not to turn the page because there's a monster at the end of the book, and gets more agitated when the reader doesn't obey. The ending is a surprise (as endings should be), made all the better because the reader can't anticipate the final scene.

To create surprise, humor, or a plot twist. In *Monster*, the reader is able to anticipate Grover's reaction after the first page-turn, and delights in being right. But some page-turns push the reader in a different direction, delivering something unexpected. This surprise can be funny, suspenseful, silly or scary. Mo Willems surprises with his character's behavior in *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus!*, having a pigeon lie, plead, and throw a preschool-sized temper tantrum. Laura Joffe Numeroff's entire *If You Give A...* series (*If You Give a Mouse a Cookie*, *If You Give a Moose a Muffin*, *If You Give a Pig a Pancake*, etc.) is built on an absurd plot twist with every turn of the page. Peggy Rathmann's *10 Minutes Till Bedtime* deftly combines anticipation (with the spare countdown text) and humor (the jam-packed illustrations) on each new spread.

To pace the action. Where the page break occurs can slow down the action or speed it up. They also build a rhythm to the text when read out loud. The page breaks in Mem Fox's *Wilfred Gordon MacDonald Partridge* give the text almost a poetic feel. Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* is a masterful work that uses page breaks to draw the reader into the world of the story, hold her there, then bring her back out. *Maxwell's Magic Mix-Up* by Linda Ashman offers a perfect example of pacing that snowballs as the action heats up with a rhyming text.

While you're writing your picture book, be sure you're reading many published examples. Pay attention to the pacing of each story and where the page breaks fall. How long does one scene last before the characters move on to another scene? (Probably no more than two pages). How long does a conversation last between two characters? (Two to four lines, on average.) If your story is static, the child can't interact with your book. She'll have to wait too long to turn the pages, and when she does, she won't be rewarded with a new plot event. When that happens, kids squirm, stop paying attention, and finally close the book.

Once you've written your story and feel the plot is in good shape, make a dummy. A book dummy's a useful tool even for authors who aren't illustrators. Most picture books are 32 pages long, with four to six pages of front and back matter (endpages, title page, copyright page, etc.) You're left with 26-28 pages for text and illustration. The text begins on a right-hand page, followed by 12-13 two-page spreads, and ends on a left-hand page. Print out your story, cut it into 26 or 28 pieces, and attach the text to blank pages. Staple the pages together along one side so you can read the story while you turn the pages, as you would in the finished book.

As you're reading, try to envision what each illustration might look like. Are they varied enough? Check the pacing and the payoff after the page-turn. Does the text provide a rise in tension before the page is turned, to build anticipation? Does the ending come as a surprise to the reader within the last two pages?

Keep revising until your story flows and the page-turns are strong. Even though your editor might decide to put some page-turns in different places, the fact that they're in your manuscript at all makes it much easier to visualize it as a book.

Of course, when you submit the manuscript you won't include the dummy (unless you're also an illustrator, in which case the dummy would be roughly illustrated). And don't designate page breaks in your manuscript. Simply type the story, double-spaced, with a typical indent at the beginning of each paragraph. The average picture book is three or four full, typed pages.

If you've done your job, the editor will see your page breaks as she's reading your work. And once the book is published, kids will have good reason to turn the pages over and over again.

LB

PS: Don't forget the page-turns if you're writing an ebook. Children still need a reason to "turn" the pages electronically, and the ebook format offers plenty of interactive possibilities via sound, animation and mouse clicks.

The CBI Challenge: Module 16

Get Feedback on Your Work

by Laura Backes

Now that we're 16 months into the CBI Challenge, let's check in and see how you're doing. If you've been working each module, by now you've learned the age groups' nuts and bolts, developed and analyzed your book idea, created your protagonist and antagonist, crafted your story's beginning and plot catalyst, strengthened the middle and conceived a powerful ending. You've also worked on sub-plots (if you're writing a novel), learned how to "show, don't tell" and chosen the best point of view for your book. You've learned about pacing and analyzed your strengths as a writer. Not everyone will hit all the steps in the same order or at the same speed, but by the time you've completed the previous 15 modules, your first draft should be well underway, if not finished and revised once or twice.

What's the next step once your manuscript is complete? Feedback. You've been immersed in your book and you can't possibly be an objective judge of your writing. You need to hand it over to trusted, competent readers and get their input (see sidebar). Then, once you've put some distance between yourself and your manuscript, you can look at it again with the eye of an editor.

Before you have your work critiqued, however, review the "Nuts & Bolts" article in Module 1 on the CBI Clubhouse, and make sure your manuscript fits into an existing category of children's book. As a new writer, you need to stay within established formats and lengths for each age group. Also, write a short synopsis of the plot of your story. Picture book synopses should be one to two sentences. Novels can go up to about five sentences. This is the main, action storyline only. Don't worry about the fine details; think about what might appear on the jacket flap of the published book.

Then hand it over to your selected readers. After they've read the manuscript and given you general impressions, ask how they might sum up your plot in one to five sentences. Do their summaries match yours? If not, examine where you went off track:

Did you write about a theme instead of a plot? If your story is very message-

driven, you may be writing about a theme. Themes are general ideas that stay inside a character's head (self-confidence, friendship, sibling rivalry, peer pressure). Plots are the outward manifestation of those ideas. Plots involve action; themes involve thoughts and emotions. If you *think* you have a plot but your reader only sees a theme, then revisit Modules 4, 7, 9 and 11.

Once you feel confident the plot is solid, ask your readers the following questions:

Did you care about the protagonist?

If not, ask for some specifics, such as whether the protagonist was likable or believable. What about the antagonist? Did your readers see the friction between the two? If not, review Modules 4, 5 and 6.

Did they have any problems with the point of view? If so, study Module 13.

Were there any areas where the story dragged? If your readers' minds wandered in the middle of the story, or they yawned at the chapter endings, you may have a pacing problem. Look at Module 8.

How long did it take your readers to get pulled into the story? If they weren't grabbed on the first page and hooked quickly, perhaps your plot catalyst needs some work. See Module 7.

How did your readers feel at the end of the story? Satisfied? Great. Wishing the story wouldn't end? Fantastic. Frustrated or let down? Then review Module 11.

If you've written an older chapter book, middle grade or young adult novel, ask your readers if the story feels substantial enough. If they use words like "slight" or "thin," then maybe your sub-plots need work. See Module 10.

Were they immersed in the world of the story, or were they constantly aware of the author? Perhaps you've done more telling than showing. Look at Module 12.

And finally, to remain motivated as a writer while you wait for feedback, recommit yourself to the writing process with Modules 3 and 14. Then weigh your readers' comments, consider if they're valid, and get started on revisions.

How to Find People to Critique Your Work

Form a writers' group.

Find other writers who are also working on children's books and critique each other's work. You can network at local conferences or classes (go to www.scbwi.org for your region's Society of Children's Book Writers & Illustrators), post an announcement at your library or local book store, or put an ad on Craigslist for other writers in your area (www.craigslist.org). If you can't find enough people locally, start an online critique group. Go to www.CBIClubhouse.com, post a notice that you're forming a critique group on the home page message board, and collect emails from interested Fightin' Bookworms. Then create a secure, online forum for sharing work at a site such as spruz.com

Ask a trusted expert. If you are close to your child's teacher or a local bookstore owner, you can ask him or her to read your work. But be aware that this is a big favor (and one the person might not be able to say no to), so only do it if you can reciprocate in some way.

Pay for a professional critique. You can pay for an experienced editor to give you a written critique of your work, such as through the CBI One-on-One Manuscript Critique service (get the info by sending an email to our autoresponder at critique@sendfree.com). But do polish your manuscript first through your own editing and by getting feedback from other writers before requesting an editorial critique. You'll get more for your money if the editor doesn't have to focus on obvious flaws you could have fixed yourself.

Your Publishing Career

The Financial Side of Public Speaking

by Jane McBride Choate

To charge or not to charge. That is the question.

Writers are frequently asked to speak. To schools, book clubs, libraries, writers' workshops. And the list goes on.

You're a writer, you protest, not a speaker. But in these recessionary times, writers, like all business persons, need to watch the bottom line. When a royalty check came in at 78 cents—yes, that was the actual amount—I realized I needed to find additional ways to increase my income.

Can you add to your income by agreeing to speak at different venues about your passion: writing? If so, you need to treat speaking engagements as you would any other part of your business plan.

Before you jump into the public arena, remember; time spent preparing a workshop or giving a speech is time taken away from writing, your primary work.

What are your goals in accepting a speaking assignment? Assess your goals in determining whether or not to accept a speaking assignment:

◆ Can you contribute to your bottom line? Writers have reported anywhere from \$35.00 for a three hour workshop to \$1500 for a one hour presentation. Some writers charge by the hour. One writer I spoke with charges \$150 per hour. The more you've published, the more you can charge.

◆ Do you hope to use it to sell books?
◆ Do you see it as a promotional tool?
◆ Do you see it as a way of giving back to other writers, schools, church groups, etc?

Answering these questions will help you decide if you want to speak to a certain group and how much you will charge.

Determine what you need. Will you ask for money to cover your expenses only or will you ask for a speaking stipend? The answer is, it depends. If you are new to the busi-

ness and trying to get your name out there, you may consider speaking for free.

A writer at the beginning of his career may well have time to spend traveling and speaking. At the same time he will probably not command the same speaking fees as a more experienced, better-known writer. It goes without saying that as a writer's career grows, so do the demands on his time.

Get it in writing. Some writers will draw up a simple contract between themselves and the groups they will be addressing. A contract will cover such things as who pays for meals, travel, lodging, when and how much the writer will be paid, what happens in case of cancellation, and arrangements for selling any books. Remember: you are a professional conducting business. Treat yourself with respect and expect the same from others.

Should you waive the fee? A writer may waive her fee if there are other perks involved. Is the conference or workshop held in a city she'd like to see? Does she have friends or family close by whom she could visit? One writer does not charge to speak to writers' groups or schools. Another, who regularly makes the *New York Times'* best-seller list, donates the speaking fee back to the group to fund scholarships to writing conferences.

Hone your skills. Do you need to boost your confidence in the art of public speaking? Check out Toastmasters (www.toastmasters.org). Toastmasters is a nonprofit organization with nearly a quarter of a million members in more than 12,500 clubs in 106 countries. There, you will learn techniques and have opportunities to practice and hone speaking skills.

Is speaking to groups worth your time and your energy? Only you, the writer and the business person, can decide what works for you, your family, your career.

Make a List, Check it Twice

Pros:

◆ Speaking to different groups can increase name recognition. (As writers are expected to take over more and more of the promotional efforts of their books, public speaking can be an effective way to accomplish that.)

◆ You can sell books at the speaking engagements.

◆ Speaking to various groups fosters good will.

◆ You can list speaking credits on your writer's resume.

◆ You can list upcoming speaking engagements on your web site.

Cons:

◆ Time spent preparing for a workshop and traveling to the same is time away from your primary vocation—writing.

◆ Some writers feel that speaking to groups is not a particularly effective promotional tool.

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