

Children's Book Insider

The Newsletter for Children's Writers

At Presstime:

Agent Accepting Middle Grade and Young Adult Fiction

Marie Lamba is an agent with the Jennifer DeChiara Literary Agency (www.jdlit.com). She's currently looking for young adult and middle grade fiction, along with general and women's fiction and some memoir. Books that are moving and/or hilarious are especially welcome. She is not interested in picture books, science fiction, or high fantasy (though she's open to paranormal elements), category romance (though romantic elements are welcome), nonfiction, or in books that feature graphic violence. Some of her favorite books include *Some recent favorite titles on y shelf include Searching for Caleb* by Anne Tyler, *Just Listen* by Sarah Dessen, *Paper Towns* by John Green, *The Time Traveler's Wife* by Audrey Niffenegger, *Twenties Girl* by Sophia Kinsella, *The Graveyard Book* by Neil Gaiman, *Shug* by Jenny Han, and *Doing It* by Melvin Burgess. To submit, email a query to marie.jdlit@gmail.com and put "Query" in the subject line of your email. Send the first twenty pages of the manuscript in the body of your email, along with a one-paragraph bio and a one-paragraph synopsis.

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Publisher Looking for Picture Books with Historical, Regional Appeal

Twin Lights Publishers is a mid-sized press that publishes photographic journals and contemporary pictorial essays for adults that feature the unique character of an American city, region, or national park as captured by a local photographer. Their growing children's book line includes the A Kid's Guide series (picture book format guides for children to major American cities), and historical fiction picture books that pertain to a particular region of the US. Stories about the history of New England are especially wanted. Recent titles include *A Kid's Guide to San Francisco* by Sara Day, photographed by Sandra Cannon, and *Mathias Franey, Powder Monkey* by Ellen W. Leroe, illustrated by Sarah S. Brannen (historical picture book tat takes place during the Revolutionary War). Send a proposal with a synopsis of the book, sample photographs (if sending a Kid's Guide), and self-addressed, stamped envelope. Send to Submissions Department, Twin Lights Publishers, 8 Hale Street, Suite 2, Rockport, MA 01966.

Service that Allows Adults to Read Books Online to Kids Accepting Picture Books

Readeo is a company that's created a Skype-like video chat service called BookChatting. The BookChat service allows adults to read a virtual book with a child via a webcam in real time. During a BookChat, the pages of the story appear on the computer screen and each person can see, hear and talk to one another through video chat windows at the bottom of the screen. Either member of a BookChat can turn the pages of the book for a truly interactive experience. Members pay \$9.99 a month for unlimited access to books they can read to as many "guests" as they'd like. Currently, Readeo has a library of 179 picture books, and is looking to add more. According to company head Coby Neuenschwander, "We have traditionally only accepted titles from publishers. However, we're happy to look at all submissions (including those from independent authors). In order to review a title, we'd like to receive a digital submission (pdf or other common digital format)." Authors submitting directly must hold all rights to the text and illustrations, or be submitting in conjunction with the illustrator. Submit to editor Kristen Johnson at info@readeo.com. For more information about Readeo, go to www.readeo.com

December 2011

At Presstime:

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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Opportunity for Middle Grade and Young Adult Writers to Win a Critique from a Famous Author or Agent

What You Wish For was published by the Book Wish Foundation to raise money to develop libraries in Darfuri refugee camps. Aspiring authors of middle grade and young adult novels now have the chance to win a critique by one of the authors who contributed to the collection, or from that author's agent. Here's how it works: Pick one of the following stories *What You Wish For* and write an essay of no more than 500 words about how the wishes in the story relate to the Darfuri refugees in eastern Chad. Essays will be judged on style, creativity, understanding of the story, and understanding of the refugees. If you win, either the story's author or the author's literary agent (as indicated below) will provide a one-page critique of the first 50 pages of a middle grade or young adult manuscript of your choosing. You will have six months to submit your manuscript, and the agent or author will have six months from submission to provide the critique. Stories you may write about:

"The Protectionist," by Meg Cabot. Manuscript critique by Laura Langlie, literary agent for Meg Cabot.

"Pearl's Fateful Wish," by Jeanne DuPrau. Manuscript critique by Nancy Gallt, literary agent for Jeanne DuPrau.

"Nell," by Karen Hesse. Manuscript critique by Brenda Bowen, literary agent and editor of Karen Hesse's Newbery Medal winner *Out of the Dust*.

"The Lost Art of Letter Writing," by Ann M. Martin. Manuscript critique by Ann M. Martin, winner of the Newbery Honor for *A Corner of the Universe*.

"The Rules for Wishing," by Francisco X. Stork. Manuscript critique by Francisco X. Stork, winner of the Amelia Elizabeth Walden Award for *The Last Summer of the Death Warriors*.

"The Stepsister," by Cynthia Voigt. Manuscript critique by Cynthia Voigt, winner of the Newbery Medal for *Dacey's Song* and the Newbery Honor for *A Solitary Blue*.

You may submit essays about more than one story for a chance to win more than one critique. Essays and winners' manuscripts must be written in English. Deadline for submissions is February 1, 2012. For more information, go to <http://bookwish.org/contest>

Canadian Publisher Accepting Fiction for All Ages

Tradewind Books is an award-winning small publisher in Vancouver, British Columbia, that distributes its books throughout Canada and the US, as well as the UK and Australia. Categories of fiction for children include picture books, fairy tales and myths, chapter books, middle grade and young adult novels, and poetry. Many of their books have a multicultural element. Accepting unsolicited submissions from both writers and illustrators. For picture books, writers (Canadian and non-Canadian) should submit the entire manuscript. If you are a professional illustrator submitting a picture book, include the manuscript, a dummy, and a sample reproduction of the final artwork. For chapter books, middle grade and young adult fiction, submit the first three chapters, an outline and a plot summary. Accepting middle grade and YA fiction from Canadian authors **only** (illustrated chapter books can be from writers and author/illustrators outside Canada). Book-length poetry collections can be submitted in their entirety (Canadian and non-Canadian writers). Writers must show that they have read at least three Tradewind titles before submitting a manuscript. All submissions must include a self-addressed and stamped envelope (writers outside Canada should supply an International Reply Coupon). Tries to respond within three months. Do not submit more than one manuscript at a time. Submit with a cover letter listing relevant writing and publishing experience to Michael Katz, Publisher, Tradewind Books, 202-1807 Maritime Mews, Vancouver, BC, Canada V6H 3W7. For current titles, go to www.tradewindbooks.com.

Update to October At Presstime Listing

Two youth publications of the National Wildlife Turkey Federation, *JAKES* (ages 12 and under) and *Xtreme JAKES* (online magazine for ages 13-17), have been combined into one 24-page quarterly print publication called *JAKES Country*, mailed to all youth members. Submission guidelines can be found at www.nwtf.org/tv_magazines/Writers_Guidelines.html

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*. And stay tuned for lots of exciting changes coming in early 2012!

Writing Workshop

Strengthen Your Writing with Interesting Sentences

by Jane McBride Choate

A sentence should read as if its author, had he held a plough instead of a pen, could have drawn a furrow deep and straight to the end.--Henry David Thoreau

Sentences are the building blocks of paragraphs. Paragraphs are the building blocks of scenes. Scenes are the building blocks of chapters Well, you get the picture.

How do we craft interesting, attention-grabbing sentences? The trick is to vary their length, type, beginnings and endings.

Vary the length of sentences to fit the tone and topic of your story. Short, choppy sentences work best for intense action scenes, while longer sentences will slow down action, giving the reader time to catch his breath and reflect upon what is happening. Experiment with different lengths to find what works best for your scenes.

Consider the following two examples:

The wind was a slap to the face. She ignored it. She had to reach the cliff. Her brother's life depended upon it.

The river meandered like a run-on sentence, the lazy water, a smooth river of brown, taking its time in reaching the falls.

Not only did I use short sentences in the first paragraph, I also used short, hard words like *slap* to emphasize the action. In the second example, I employed a metaphor, used softer words to underscore the more languorous feel of it.

Vary the kinds of sentences. A sentence contains at least one idea and should be a complete thought. Many sentences contain several basic ideas which work together to make a complete thought. There are four main types of sentences: simple, compound, complex, and compound complex.

- A simple sentence has a simple subject and a simple predicate. It has only one independent clause and no dependent clauses: *Reynna posted a new addition to her blog.*

- A compound sentence consists of two independent clauses. The clauses may be joined by a conjunction, by punctuation,

or both: *Reynna posted a new blog entry, but she wasn't happy with what she had written.*

- A complex sentence contains one independent clause and one or more dependent clauses: *After posting a blog entry, Reynna went back and revised it.*

- A compound complex sentence contains two or more independent clauses and one or more dependent clauses: *After Reynna posted a blog entry, she went back and revised it, and then, because she was so excited, she decided to add a second posting.*

Note: Easy readers (leveled books for children ages 5-8 who are just learning to read on their own) and early chapter books (very short, plot-based novels for ages 6-9) are written in simple sentences and short compound sentences. Study the texts of several publishers' easy reader series to learn appropriate sentence structures for each reading level. Picture books, on the other hand, have more complex sentences because they're read out loud to children.

Vary your sentence beginnings and endings. Rather than always using the subject at the beginning of a sentence, try a prepositional phrase, a clause or a modifier. Changing the order of a sentence gives the reader's eye and ear a rest from the usual fare and grabs their attention.

Beginning: *With new ideas buzzing around in her head, Reynna wrote her best blog post ever.*

Ending: *Reynna wrote her best blog post ever, using metaphors and similes to bring her writing to life.*

Master the art of crafting well-written sentences. Know when to use a short, hard sentence to convey action, speed, urgency. Know when to lengthen your sentences, using clauses and modifiers, to allow the reader to take a breath.

The more you write, the more you will develop an ear for what makes good sentences, an essential part of developing your writer's voice. (Did you recognize the complex sentence?)

Let's take a current subject and examine different ways of writing sentences concerning it:

A tsunami struck Japan.

The tsunami created economic chaos.

The tsunami caused great damage.

The tsunami resulted many deaths.

The tsunami hit a nuclear plant.

The tsunami will have long-lasting effects.

The above sentences are complete thoughts and they convey ideas, but they are flat and boring because they all follow the same predictable pattern.

Use a semicolon: *The tsunami had disastrous effects; Japan's economy will take many years to recover.*

Use a participial phrase: *Having crippled Japan's economy, the tsunami will long live in the memory of the Japanese people.*

Use a series to combine three or more similar ideas: *The tsunami destroyed homes, created chaos, and took thousands of lives.*

Repeat a key word or phrase to give emphasis to an idea: *The tsunami, a destructive force, a vicious force, a killer force, will never be forgotten.*

Use a correlative conjunction to compare or contrast two ideas in a sentence: *Not only did the tsunami result in many deaths, it also left the survivors fearful for the future.*

Use an appositive, a word or phrase which renames something, to intensify a point: *A single act of nature—the tsunami of the century—changed the island nation forever.*

Jane McBride Choate is a CBI Contributing Editor.

New Picture Books from

This month, I'm happy to highlight three CBI Fightin' Bookworms who have written picture books that are recently published or soon to be released. Two are first-time authors, the other is back 11 years after her first book. Let's take a look at their terrific new offerings.

Cixi "The Dragon Empress" by Natasha Yim, illustrated by Peter Malone, published by Goosebottom Books, Sept. 2011. Picture book biography for girls ages 9-13.

♦ *With so much time between your first picture book (Otto's Rainy Day, Charlesbridge, 2000) and this one, have you noticed any substantial changes in the publishing industry?*

Publishing is still an excruciatingly slow process (hence the 11 years between books), it's still a precarious road for writers—I had a contract with Tricycle Press/Random House in between that time which was canceled when Random House closed Tricycle—and writers still have to do most of their own marketing and publicity. I guess the biggest change I've seen in the industry is that response times seem to be getting longer and longer (even if you have an agent), and more houses have closed their doors to unsolicited submissions. I think, because of the slow economy, it is tougher for writers to get their foot in the door. It isn't enough anymore to have a good story, and have it well-written; a writer has to find a unique angle or approach. Even then, the fate of a manuscript can lie merely in how marketable it is. I guess if I'm surprised by anything, it's how much the marketing department has a say in whether a manuscript is purchased or not. The publishing process with Cixi, *The Dragon Empress* is entirely different. Goosebottom Books is a unique press with quite a different approach, so it'd be like comparing apples and oranges in this respect.

♦ *How was writing a picture book biography different from writing your first book?*

The main difference in writing for an older audience is that you can use bigger words which makes it easier in some ways. So many people think it's easy to write picture books because there are so few words, but they don't realize it can be enormously difficult to tell a good story with a limited word count, and use words the picture book age group can understand without talking down to kids. Writing for an older audience can be quite freeing in this way. Goosebottom Books' goal is to introduce significant women in history in a fun, entertaining way. They chose to do it in a picture book format, which for the 9 - 13 age group can be a little tricky. Kids this age are on the cusp of teendom

and many don't want to be associated with picture books, but the books have such gorgeous illustrations, combined with beautiful photographs, and compelling stories and historical tidbits of these women that we hope girls will be drawn to them. History and biographies can be very dry and factual, and I credit my editor Amy Novesky for constantly asking me, "What is her story?" So, my tip for writing biographies is to make it personal. Cixi was the Empress of China. Under her conservative rule, China lost many costly wars to foreign nations which eventually crumbled the Qing empire and ended an imperial system that had been in place for 5,000 years. But she was also a daughter, a mother, an imperial consort to the Emperor—what was her life really like behind the cloistered walls of the Forbidden City? These personal "moments" were what I tried to capture in her biography.

♦ *Your book is part of an established series, *The Thinking Girl's Treasury of Dastardly Dames*. Any tips on submitting for a series?*

As with any submission, writers should ALWAYS, ALWAYS check the submission guidelines carefully. Goosebottom Books focuses on historical nonfiction picture books for girls 9 - 13. Their biographies are about women in history. If you submit something outside of this realm, you'll get rejected. Amazingly, they've received submissions for airplanes, full length novels, and one writer even sent in a query about her book on being a burlesque dancer in the 50s! They also don't accept full manuscripts. They prefer to see a 1,000 word writing sample from which they will choose the writers for future series. The books also have a specific narrative style, so read a few of them to [see] how they're laid out and written.

***The Pea in Peanut Butter* by Allyn M. Stotz, illustrated by Valerie Bouthuyette, published by FutureWord Publishing, May 2011 (coloring book edition pubbed Nov. 2011). For ages 3-6, this story teaches good eating habits to picky eaters.**

♦ *What's your writing process like?*

My writing process begins with a small outline of the story I intend to write which includes a small blurb to myself on what I want the story to be about and how I want it to end. With *The Pea In Peanut Butter*, I actually started with the title. I am drawn to unusual titles so my thought process is that a publisher might be more tempted to pick up a manuscript and read it if the title is catchy. Once I have a title in mind and a story outline, then I decide on my main character's name. After I have all those jotted down, the writing begins.

I go through several revision processes. I actually do a lot of editing as I go along. After I've

Three Fightin' Bookworms

written the story, I give it a day or two and go back in to revise. From there I revise as many times as it takes for me to feel comfortable sending it off to one of my critique groups, which I believe is imperative to a writer. Once I have it critiqued, I revise once again and send off to my editor. My revision process is pretty lengthy because I don't want to send anything to a publisher that has grammatical errors or other big problems.

The Pea In Peanut Butter actually took one afternoon to write it but six months to revise.

◆ *What's it like to work with a small press like FutureWord Publishing?*

FutureWord Publishing is a very small company but also very professional. It was wonderful working with them and the entire process went very smoothly. They were always available for any questions I had and were quick with their responses. They also allowed me to have some input with the illustrations, however I loved everything the illustrator did so my input was very minimal. FutureWord was also very quick to publish. My book was not supposed to actually be finished until the beginning of June, however I was making a trip back to my hometown the first week of June and had some book signings lined up so FutureWord agreed to speed up the process so that I would have books finished and ready for my signings. I could not have asked for a better experience, especially for my first time. They may have spoiled me for future publishings!

◆ *Any advice for aspiring writers?*

My best advice for anyone hoping to become an aspiring picture book writer is to do all the research you can. If I hadn't spent about a year researching everything I could get my hands on, I don't think I would be published today. If anyone wanting to be a published writer thinks that all they have to do is write a story, submit and, presto, they get published, then they are definitely in for a rude awakening. That's why reading as much about writing for children that you can is so important. And taking a course or two is also wise. And lastly, have patience not only with yourself, but with all involved in the writing process. And always remember this... you can't get published if you don't submit!

***A Warm Winter Tail* by Carrie A. Pearson, illustrated by Christina Wald, to be published by Sylvan Dell Publishing in Fall 2012. The lyrical text blends fiction and nonfiction as baby animals wonder how humans stay warm in winter.**

◆ *How do your manuscripts evolve?*

I do my best writing while running in the woods. While my senses absorb the natural world, I work through plot problems, flesh out charac-

ters, and solidify themes. When I return to my trusty computer (after a shower!), I've worked out the kinks and am ready to write. I use movement later in the process, too. I'll walk around my house reading text aloud and pay attention to cadence, rhythm, and how the words sound. I want to be sure I've chosen words I love to say and hear, particularly with picture books. If I'm working on a novel (which I am now), I begin with the scene I ended with the day before. I read it aloud, revise, and move forward painstakingly, scene by scene.

◆ *Your book is a blending of fact and fiction. How do you reconcile the two?*

The older I become, the more I believe most stories are a blend of fact and fiction! In this case, I used animal narrators with human-like qualities (definitely fictionalized), so readers could relate to them. I added facts because the biological story is the most important aspect. [As for fictionalizing animals,] I was in good hands with Sylvan Dell Publishing on this issue. They feel so strongly about staying true to fact, they contract experts to vet each book. For *A Warm Winter Tail*, we decided to delete mention of "mama" in cases where an animal would not have a mama influence (e.g., a monarch butterfly or honey bee). This reduces the "snuggle factor" of the book, but it will open discussion of animals who receive care-giving versus animals relying on natural instincts to survive.

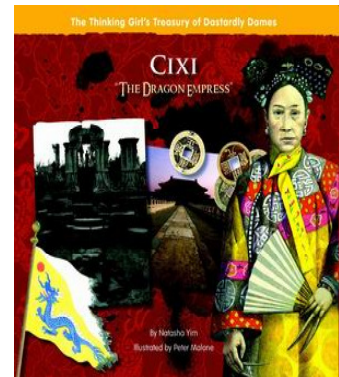
◆ *Please explain lyrical vs. rhyming text*

Lyrical writing is defined as more poetic than straight prose. It may incorporate literary devices such as assonance, alliteration, wordplay, and imagery and pays particular attention to rhythm. I originally envisioned *A Warm Winter Tail* as a cozy bedtime story with a lyrical structure. To appeal to the broad educational market, we reduced the cozy factor, but kept the lyricism. I [originally] tried writing it in prose to see how it worked, but it just wasn't right. So, I focused on tightening the rhyme and rhythm.

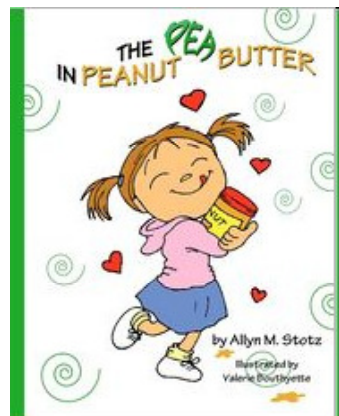
◆ *Any final tips for aspiring authors?*

READ, READ, READ picture books! Keep track of books you've read, what you like about them, and what you don't. Read web sites and blogs about writing, submitting, and marketing children's picture books. Find a critique group that works with manuscripts in your genre. Hire a reputable freelance editor in your genre to review your best work and then trust his/her judgment. At some point, you'll need to decide if writing is your hobby or your intention. Either is fine. If you make friends with the three "R's" of writing — *revisions, rejections and rewrites* — eventually the 4th "R" — *reward* — will come.

by Laura Backes



Cixi "The Dragon Empress" by Natasha Yim



The Pea in Peanut Butter by Allyn M. Stotz



A Warm Winter Tail by Carrie A. Pearson

These interviews were edited for space. Read the full interviews at www.CBIClubhouse.com

What Writers Can Control, and What We Can't

by Jane McBride Choate

No doubt about it; writers have it hard. We work like a mule to craft a wonderful book, send it out, then wait to hear back from the editor. We may start to feel persecuted because so many things in this crazy industry are out of our control.

Let's take a look at some of the things we cannot control:

If an editor and/or agent accepts a manuscript.

How long it takes that same editor and/or agent to get back to you after receiving a manuscript.

If the manuscript arrives at all given the vagaries of the postal system.

What kind of advance payment you will receive if that manuscript is accepted.

What kind of cover art your book will get.

If the editor who loved your work and bought everything you submitted for the last ten years has left the publishing house.

If the new editor who took her place will like your work.

If your agent stops returning your calls.

It looks pretty discouraging, doesn't it? Take heart. There is hope. Let's re-examine the above and see what we can do to take back some control over our careers.

If an editor and/or agent accepts a manuscript. No, you can't make an editor or agent like your work, but you can submit your best work.

How long it takes that same editor or agent to get back to you after receiving a manuscript. This one is pretty well out of our control, but you can better your chances of hearing back sooner rather than later by being certain that you follow the guidelines of submission. Have you included an SASE with your submission if you sent your manuscript by snail mail? Have you targeted publishers who are looking for books similar to yours? If the publisher asks that submissions be sent electronically, have you made sure that you sent your work in the requested format? Agents, editors, and their assistants are busy people. If you have ignored their guidelines, they may well put your submission at the bottom of the pile or, worse, just ignore it.

If the submission arrives at all given the vagaries of the postal system. Make certain that you include enough postage. Address the package legibly and send it to the right person. Include a self-addressed, stamped postcard that an assistant can simply fill in the date your manuscript was received and mail it back to you to confirm your work arrived safely.

What kind of advance payment you will receive if your manuscript is accepted. This goes back to writing the very best book you are capable of. If you have an agent, work with him or her to get the best advance.

What kind of cover art your book will get. You can have some control over this by working with the art department. When they send you an art fact sheet, take time to fill it out completely. If you have taken the time and care to establish a good relationship with your editor, she will go to bat for you to make sure your book has an eye-catching cover.

If the editor who loved your work and bought everything you submitted for the last ten years has left the publishing house. Most authors have had something like this happen. It can derail a career. What can you do? You can work to establish a good relationship with the new editor. Or you may ask your former editor if she will "take you with her" to her new publishing house (check your contract first to be sure you're not committed to your current publisher for future books).

If the new editor who took her place will like your work. Take the time to get to know the new guy on the block. Find out what his likes and dislikes are. Let him know that you are eager to continue working with the house.

If your agent stops returning your calls. If this occurs, evaluate your relationship with the agent. Chances are you have picked up hints that something was wrong but didn't want to acknowledge them. If you have given the agent every chance, start looking around for a new one.

Now let's look at some things you can control:

How many hours a day you spend writing.

How many submissions you send out.

If you choose to take a writers' workshop or an online class to improve your skill.

If you join a critique group.

If you attend a writers' conference.

If you choose to invest in yourself (purchasing quality equipment, paying the fee for conferences, classes, etc.)

If you continue to learn and work to improve your craft.

If you choose to keep writing, no matter what.

Remember, if you choose to pursue getting published, then you also choose to work within the common practices of the industry. Don't fall into the victim mentality. Take control when you can. Realize that you can't always control your career, any more than any other employee. Then start writing.

For Poets

Poetry Workshop, Part 2: The Poet's Toolbox

by Kimberly M. Hutmacher

In my first workshop installment last month, I defined different types of rhyme schemes. This month, we'll open the poet's tool box and discover the techniques you'll need to make your words sparkle and sing!

Alliteration is repetition of an initial consonant sound in two or more words of a poem. The repetition can also be internal. Here are two examples. The repetitive sounds are marked in bold.

Dainty Lady by Heidi Bee Roemer

Everyday Miss Ladybug wears her very best.

Doesn't she look **dandy** in her polka-dotted **dress**?

The Flue Blues by Kimberly M. Hutmacher

Drippy nose

Droopy eyes

Dreary yawns

Dreadful sighs.

Scratchy throat

Stuffy head

Stuck at home

Sick in bed!

We can see and hear the repetitive "D" sound in the first poem and the "D" and "S" sounds in the second.

Assonance is similar to alliteration, but instead of consonants, it's the repetitive use of vowel sounds in words. Let's take a look at an example.

The Ladybug by Kimberly M. Hutmacher

An **eensy** red bug
with **teensy** black dots
walks **weensy** black legs
on red flower pots.

Besides being fun to say, **onomatopoeia** is a wonderful tool for us to use. Onomatopoeia is the use of words or phrases that imitate sounds. This tool is especially useful when you are writing poetry or rhyming picture books for the very young. This poem, *September Leaves*, was written by one of my daughters:

Swish and sway in the trees

Dancing down in the breeze
Crackle crunch on the ground
Signs of autumn all around.

The next two tools are very similar to one another. A **simile** is a figure of speech that likens one thing to another by use of *like*, *as* or some other comparison word. The following few lines from Kristine O'Connell George's poem *Avalanche* contains a few similes:

A thousand **pin**es are sprawled
like broken toys,
snapped like toothpicks
by the crushing mass of snow

A **metaphor** is a figure of speech in which one thing is spoken of as if it were another. In this case however, we don't use the comparison words *like*, *as*, etc. We simply call something something else.

In *Perfect for a Picnic*, my metaphor compares the sun and sky to a blanket:

A baby blue sky
A bright golden sun
The perfect blanket
for afternoon fun.

Personification is a figure of speech that gives human or lifelike qualities to an object or creature. Let's take a look at two examples.

Mister Sun by J. Patrick Lewis
Mister Sun wakes up at dawn,
Puts his golden slippers on,
Climbs the summer sky at noon,
Trading places with the moon.

Wind Chime Orchestra by Kimberly M. Hutmacher
Silver legs dancing
Singing songs in the breeze
Lullabies for birdies
A symphony for trees.

When J. Patrick Lewis gave the sun the ability to put on his slippers, and I gave the wind chimes silver legs for dancing, we gave those things human qualities.

Test Your Poetry Knowledge with Practice Exercises

Alliteration and Assonance: To get the hang of using repetitive sounds, try writing a couplet beginning with your own name and use the sound it begins with repeatedly through the couplet. Here's an example:
*Tipper, the teeny tiny mouse
tidied up his tremendous house.*

Onomatopoeia: Practice onomatopoeia by coming up with sound words for thunder, rain and wind. Once you have a nice list, attempt to write a poem about a thunderstorm using words from your list.

Simile and Metaphor: Most everyone has heard the metaphors *you are the apple of my eye* and *she has a heart of stone*. You've probably also heard the simile *she is as sly as a fox*. These and other overused figures of speech have become cliché. This month, try to come up with original similes and metaphors for snow and rain. Go a step further, and use them in a poem.

Personification: For your final exercise, make a list of objects, and then brainstorm how you could give those objects human qualities. Once you have a nice list, choose one to write a poem about.

Also learn by reading some of my favorite poetry collections:
Sweet Dreams of the Wild
by Rebecca Kai Dotlich
Bow wow meow meow by Douglas Florian
Old Elm Speaks by Kristine O'Connell George.
Doodle Dandies by J. Patrick Lewis
Where the Sidewalk Ends
by Shel Silverstein

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The Basics

Is It a Magazine Story, or a Picture Book?

by Suzanna Henshon, PhD

Most writers start with an idea and then develop a plot and compelling characters. But shouldn't you also consider where your story might be published? This is especially important for short fiction for young children, which might be suitable for a magazine or a picture book. Not every story works in both formats. If you submit to the wrong venue, you'll end up with a rejection letter.

Here are a few magazine-writing tips:

Study the magazine. Each magazine reflects a specific editorial taste, tone, and audience. A story that might be suitable for *Ladybug* wouldn't work for *American Girl*. Read magazines geared toward the picture book child (up to age 8) on a regular basis, and find those that fit your writing style. You will get a sense of how many words are in specific stories and how they're formatted on the page. Magazines for very young children, such as *Ladybug*, might have stories that span two to six illustrated pages with a few lines of text per page. Many are written in a poetic format, and are too slight to fill a picture book, but are perfect for a magazine. A story in *Highlights* may only cover two pages, but has more words per page and one or two illustrations for the entire story.

Magazine stories tend to have simpler plots that unfold over a short time span, and are less reliant on the illustrations to convey the action.

Now, let's look at some considerations if you're writing a picture book.

Know the standard format. A typical picture book is 32 pages long. The text should spread equally across most pages. The plots are revealed through a series of scenes, each of which requires a new illustration. If your whole story takes place in two scenes, it's not a picture book.

Think verbally. The text must be pleasing to listen to, as these books are read out loud. Children enjoy a lyrical text. If you read

Owl Moon by Jane Yolen, you will discover that a story can be poetic and lyrical without having to rhyme. As you write your story, read it aloud. How does it sound? Is it a positive listening experience for the young child?

Think visually. Your book will be spread across 28 pages (leaving four pages for front matter). The text needs to focus on action and character development, leaving description up to the illustrator. Pace the text so the child anticipates turning the page to see what happens next. After that page-turn, the story should need a new illustration. Create a picture book dummy using a 32 page book, placing your text on each page and envisioning what the illustrations might look like. This dummy (a tool just for yourself -- don't submit it to editors) will help you develop a better understanding of the architecture of a successful book.

Some other considerations:

Dialogue: Too much dialogue in a picture book slows the action. But a magazine story can use more dialogue to show plot and character development.

Concepts: Both magazines for young children and board books teach concepts such as colors, numbers and names of animals. Board books do this with unique illustrations, magazines often do it with simple rhymes or clever texts that fit on one page.

Stories that teach a lesson: Many magazines want fiction that features certain values (eating healthy meals; good manners; specific religious teachings), and the stories exist to portray these values through the characters. Often these would be considered too didactic or narrowly focused for the picture book market, but work well in magazines.

Nonfiction: Magazine nonfiction tends to be shorter and covers a narrower slice of the topic than nonfiction picture books. Short how-to pieces, crafts, activities, puzzles and recipes are best for magazines.

Dr. Suzanna E. Henshon teaches full-time at Florida Gulf Coast University. She is the author of several books for young adults, including *Mildew on the Wall* and *Spiders on the Ceiling*.