

# Children's Book Insider

April 2018

## How To Make a Living as a Children's Writer



**Above the Slushpile Code: Beaming Books**

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*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. All "At Presstime" listings are current at the time of initial publication. Members are urged to verify listings past the month of publication.

Dear Insider:

Has this ever happened to you?

- You bring your newly-published picture book to your local library, hoping they'll carry it, and the librarian asks you to develop a free, one-hour talk for patrons. And no, you can't sell your books at the talk, but the library may purchase two copies for their shelves.
- You spend days developing a terrific school program and setting up school visits, only to be told they'd love to have you but can't pay you.
- You're asked create an hour-long presentation about your expertise at a local writing conference, and your “payment” is that you get to attend the whole conference for free.
- You are invited to give a 45-minute talk at a book fair and sit on a Q&A panel with other authors. In return, you can sell and sign books, but you'll:
  1. have to bring the books to sell (purchasing them from your publisher at your author discount, as long as your contract allows you to resell those books for the retail price), and
  2. give the book fair a portion of your sales

If so, have you said “yes” to any of the above? Don't feel bad, we've all done it. And sometimes, especially when you're establishing yourself as an author, these opportunities can help you gain experience, get your name out there, and allow you to perfect your marketing and presenting skills. But once you've passed that “newbie” stage, you deserve to get paid for your time and experience. And you don't have to feel guilty about it.

I realize that it can be very fulfilling to do a free school visit if the school's budget is tight and you want to share your work with children. You may be passionate about speaking at an event and donating your book sales for a charitable cause. That's terrific. But this should be a choice, not an obligation. Many organizations and institutions consider donated time to be part of the children's book author's job description. And this will continue until authors and illustrators, as a group, start saying “no”.

You deserve to be compensated for all the months and years it's taken you to learn your craft and produce excellent children's books. During your paid presentations, you should unashamedly mention your books and your website, hand out business cards, and distribute flyers with your contact info. You can (yes, you CAN) ask to be paid when you write articles about your craft or speak at conferences. If you do choose to do something for free, make sure it's because you want to donate your time, not because you feel you have to.

None of these things will debase your art. All of them will make you (and everyone else) take your writing more seriously as a business. And in turn, that mindset will push you to continue to get better at what you do.

In this issue, award-winning author Laura Purdie Salas challenges the assumption that children's book creators don't have to get paid for their appearances in her interview with Kimberly Hutmacher about her new book *Making A Living Writing Books For Kids*. In fact, she challenges the entire concept that you can't actually make a living writing for kids. Also in this issue, Robin Phillips' article on writing recipes for children's magazines may give you some ideas to submit to *Highlights* for their STEAM-related activities. Once you're brainstorming in STEAM mode, take a look at the call for STEM/STEAM books for K-3 from Millbrook Press. *Spider* magazine has some interesting upcoming themes for ages 6-9 that apply to fiction and nonfiction. If you're writing YA, agent Rachel Beck at Holloway Literary is accepting submissions. And for our unpublished Insider author/illustrators, the Little, Brown Emerging Artist Award is now open and taking submissions until May 15.

We round out this issue with a writing workshop on suspense by Jane McBride, as well as a Mini Blueprint on writing in first person. Naomi Krueger of Beaming Books gives some terrific insight into what she's looking for in Lynne Marie's Editor Spotlight column, as well as an Above the Slush opportunity for Insiders. And I'm very excited about PJ McIlvaine's interview with author Michael Mahin, whose debut picture book, *Muddy: The Story of Blues Legend Muddy Waters*, was one of my favorite books of 2017.

Enjoy!

Laura Backes

# At Presstime:

## Highlights Seeks STEAM Activities

*Highlights* magazine is looking for STEAM activities for ages 6-12. STEAM is the integration of science, technology, engineering, art, and math into learning to encourage kids to think creatively about how to solve real-world problems. Especially interested in activities that put a creative spin on classic ideas. For example, what if catapults flung clothes to help kids clean their room? What use is there for an umbrella that collects water or keeps you from getting dry? How can the science-fair volcano be underground, or underwater, and what problems could “lava” spreading through different substances solve? Activities should appeal to boys and girls, and have concise, numbered directions, up to 5 steps. Please submit step-by-step photos of a well-made sample of the craft or activity. Craft materials should be inexpensive and easy to obtain. Payment: \$40 and up. Submit your STEAM activities through the Highlights Submittable form at <https://highlights.submittable.com/submit/29961/highlights-magazine>

## Magazine Seeks Fiction, Nonfiction for Ages 6-9

*Spider* is a literary magazine for newly independent readers ages 6-9. Editors seek energetic, beautifully crafted submissions with strong “kid appeal” (a quality that is often tied to high-interest elements such as humor, adventure, and suspense). Of particular interest are stories that explore themes of identity (gender expression, ability, race and ethnicity, family structure including LGBTQAI+ and single parent homes, neighborhoods, beliefs, and traditions); global cultures and languages (current needs include South American, African, and Middle Eastern countries, island nations, and Native American nations); scientific and technological exploration and innovation; magical or interplanetary landscapes; cities and metropolitan areas; real kids doing real things; weird and sometimes gross stuff; and the creative spirit.

While general submissions are accepted year-round, *Spider* is also seeking submissions on the following topics at this time:

**Over the Rainbow** (Deadline: April 15, 2018) LGBTQAI+ inclusive fiction, poetry, and non-fiction manuscripts. Warm family stories, an entire story without gender pronouns, children with different gender expressions, and gentle realistic or metaphorical coming out stories. Especially interested in matter-of-fact stories where being different isn’t the heart of the story, but part of the character’s identity.

**Inventions** (Deadline: May 15, 2018) Stories about objects or gadgets that intrigued you as a kid or that intrigue kids you know. Write about the origin of a toy, secret code or language, special technique or process, game or puzzle, school supply, musical instrument, or out-of-date technology. Interested in the gross and weird, silly and useless, and even fictional inventions. Especially welcome: works about inventions by kid inventors, women, and people of color. Please provide a source list if your submission is nonfiction.

**Mysterious Monsters** (Deadline: June 15, 2018) Interested in age-appropriate monster stories that introduce kids to old urban legends like river and lake monsters, the Chupacabra, and Big Foot as well as jumbies, trolls, poltergeists, giants, werewolves, vampires, zombies, and others.

**Our Diverse World** (Deadline: July 15, 2018) Stories about real or imaginary people with interesting hobbies, jobs, traditions, or inventions. Would like to see Black, Latinx, First Nations, East Asian, South Asian, and Middle Eastern children from first, second, or third generation families. Open to quirky, funny, heartfelt, and lesser-known stories where race, ethnicity, class, culture, and ability might intersect.

Fiction should be 300-1000 words, nonfiction 300-800 words, poetry up to 20 lines. Submit through the Cricket Media [Submittable](https://cricketmag.submittable.com/submit/17817/spider-magazine-for-ages-6-9) page at <https://cricketmag.submittable.com/submit/17817/spider-magazine-for-ages-6-9>. Please allow up to 3–6 months response time. Pays up to 25¢ per word for stories and articles; up to \$3.00 per line for poems with a \$25 minimum.



## Millbrook Press Seeks STEM Books for Grades K-3

Carol Hinz, Editorial Director of Millbrook Press and Carolrhoda Books, is currently looking for manuscripts for children in grades K-3 that focus on STEM (science, technology, engineering, or mathematics) topics and present those topics in playful or unconventional ways. The manuscripts should be able to be illustrated with photographs, though the author will not be expected to do photo research. That said, authors who are also photographers and can provide images are welcome to submit. Submissions should be a maximum of 1000 words, appropriate for a 32-page book. Also include a proposed list of back matter. To get a sense of topics and writing styles that have worked well for the imprint, study the following books (three of the four of these are picture books, but this particular call is not for books with art; the focus is solely on photographs): *Handle with Care* by Loree Griffin Burns, photos by Ellen Harasimowicz; *Water Can Be . . .* by Laura Purdie Salas; *Plants Can't Sit Still* by Rebecca E. Hirsch; *Bone by Bone* by Sara Levine.

Submit electronically to [MillbrookSubmissions@lernerbooks.com](mailto:MillbrookSubmissions@lernerbooks.com). In the body of the email, briefly describe your background/qualifications and note any previous publications; include your submission attached as a Word document (.doc or .docx). If you're submitting text and photographs together, you may submit a PDF. Put "Call for K-3 Manuscripts" in the subject line. **All submissions must be received by May 1, 2018.**

## Literary Agent Accepting Contemporary YA Submissions

Rachel Beck is an agent Holloway Literary (<https://hollowayliteraryagency.com>), representing young adult and adult fiction. She is drawn to voice-driven fiction, particularly in young adult; quirky, three-dimensional, flawed characters, including and especially secondary characters; beautiful writing; dark themes; books that explore good people in morally complicated situations; and complex, detailed plots. In young adult submissions, Rachel is interested in especially emotional/deep issue stories (no historical, fantasy, paranormal, sci-fi or middle-grade please), such as books by Jandy Nelson and Courtney Summers. She is currently looking for something that highlights the importance of a social movement, perhaps focusing on #MeToo or school shootings (read *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas as an example). Email a brief query and the first 15 pages of your manuscript pasted in the body of your email to [submissions@hollowayliteraryagency.com](mailto:submissions@hollowayliteraryagency.com). In the email subject header, write: Rachel/Title/Genre. If Rachel is interested, she'll respond with a request for more material in 4-6 weeks. Due to the number of emails she receives, she will only respond if she's interested. Follow Rachel on Twitter at [@Rachel\\_C\\_Beck](https://twitter.com/Rachel_C_Beck).

## Little, Brown Announces Second Emerging Artist Award for Unpublished Author/Illustrators

Little, Brown Books for Young Readers (LBYS) is holding the second Little, Brown Emerging Artist Award for an accomplished picture book submission that incorporates the award's mission statement: *To encourage the development of high-quality children's picture books that resonate with readers of diverse backgrounds and experiences, that in some manner draw from the rich cultural experiences of this country—whether they manifest in character, theme, setting, plot, or are derived simply from the artist's own experience of identity.* "Diversity" includes literal or metaphorical inclusion of characters of underrepresented ethnicity, religious background, gender identity, class, mental or physical disability, or any other nondominant populations.

One winner will receive: American Express gift cards totaling \$1,500; round trip travel to New York City; and a one-day mentorship with a Little, Brown Books for Young Readers' professional children's book design and editorial team, and distinguished Artist Mentor Grace Lin. The winner of the Little, Brown Emerging Artist Award will also have an opportunity for his or her submission to be reviewed by the Little, Brown Books for Young Readers editorial team for possible future publication. Each eligible submission will be selected by the judges based on criteria in the [Official Rules](#).

To be eligible for the Award, artists must be a legal resident of the United States and at least 18 years old, and cannot be previously published or currently represented by an agent. Self-published artists may enter. Submissions must consist of an original story idea for children up to 8 years old, an original take on a classic story, or nonfiction incorporating the award's mission statement; a mock-up of no more than 32 pages of text (no more than 1200 words) with sketches; and at least 6 pages of finished art. All submissions must be uploaded to <http://lbartistaward.com/submit>. **Deadline for submissions is May 15, 2018.** For more information, go to <http://lbartistaward.com/>.

# WRITING SUSPENSE: DO YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES?

by Jane McBride

**W**riting suspense or mystery is not for the faint of heart. Mayhem and maybe even murder keep not only detectives on their toes but writers as well. Why? Because writers have to be one step ahead of their young detectives and the villains they're chasing.

Though suspense and mysteries have their own special make-up, they follow the format of other books: a dynamite beginning, a sustainable middle, a black moment, and a satisfying resolution.

Let's look at these elements one at a time.

## THE BEGINNING

Of crucial importance in writing a suspense is the opening, starting with a great opening line. What makes for such a line? A great line arouses questions in the reader's mind. Questions make him want to keep reading. Examine the following examples:

**Action.** *I rappelled down the wall, the stuffed monkey in my backpack.* Who is rappelling down the wall? What wall is it? The Great Wall of China? An apartment building wall? That of a bridge? And why does the character have a stuffed monkey in his backpack? Is it a child's stuffed animal? Or a real monkey, preserved by taxidermy? Is the character stealing the monkey? Or is he retrieving it from someone who had stolen it previously? Why is the monkey so important?

**Dialogue.** *"You'll pay for what you did."* Who will pay? And what did he do? How will he pay? And who is going to make him pay?

**Hook.** *The sneaker was smeared with blood.* Immediately, the reader wants to know whose sneaker is covered with blood and why is it covered with blood. How did the blood get there? Where is the other sneaker? Most importantly, where is the person whom the sneaker belongs to?

Do you see how these openings grab the reader and engage him in the action with just a few words?

Following the opening line comes the opening paragraph, then scene, which builds scene upon scene into Chapter One. Ask yourself if each one of these provokes questions in the reader.

## Checklist for a great beginning:

- Does the first scene start with immediate danger? Readers won't care if 10-year-old Tommy wants to buy the latest electronic game. But they will care if Tommy's little sister is being held captive until Tommy delivers a special version of that game to the kidnapers.
- Are the main character's motivation and conflict revealed? Of course Tommy wants to save his sister.
- Have you stayed out of backstory? Backstory dumps are tedious. Sprinkle backstory a bit at a time throughout the book.
- Have you started on "the day that is different" or *medias res*? Some authors call this "the call for action." Tommy is called to action to save his sister.

## THE MIDDLE

Writing middles suck. There's no way around it. You can have a wonderful hook, an action-packed first five chapters, and an ending that has readers on the edge of their seats. But if you don't have a sustainable middle, you'll never get the book sold.

What do I mean by an sustainable middle? A middle needs to do more than just plop in the center of a book. It needs to keep the action going, to continue to reveal characterization, and to set up the climax, black moment, and resolution.

That's a lot to ask of a puny middle.

So how do you go about doing it?

**Know your characters.** By the time you read the middle of a book, you should know your characters inside and out. Sure, they may still have a few surprises for you, but you should understand how they're going to act and react as the mystery unfolds.

**Know your theme.** Mystery and suspense novels have themes, just as does any other genre. Is your theme "Good triumphs over evil?" Is it "Justice must be served at any

*Writing Suspense continued*

costs?” Determine what your theme is. Then make certain that you are staying true to that theme. If you fail in this area, your readers will scratch their heads in bewilderment and wonder what you were trying to say in your story.

**Know your pacing.** Have you ever watched a movie that was non-stop action? Sounds good, doesn't it? However, too much action without a break for a breath is actually poor pacing. On the other side of the equation is a movie that seems to be all introspection. Nothing happens. Good pacing needs both: action and introspection or reflection. By introspection or reflection, I don't mean that your characters are simply sitting and thinking. They are reacting to the previous action.

*Checklist for a great middle:*

- Does each scene move the story forward? Have you fallen into the trap of writing a riveting scene but it does nothing to advance the story or reveal characterization? If so, cut it.
- Have you deleted long periods of narrative? Check for chunks of narrative. You'll recognize them easily because there's no "white space."
- Did the mystery escalate? Once one thread is pulled, another thread should appear, so that the mystery continues to grow.
- Did you raise the stakes, i.e. does the threat to the protagonist grow, causing him to grow? If he is racing to save the school from being invaded by zombies, does he now have to deal with the kidnapping of his sister by the zombie leader?

**THE BLACK MOMENT**

Every book should have a black moment; however, it is even more imperative to have one in a mystery or suspense novel. The main character must believe that all is lost; more, the reader must believe it. How will the hero overcome this, the most difficult obstacle of all, and save the day? Don't be afraid to pile on troubles on your protagonist.

*Checklist for a great black moment:*

- Have you tapped into the protagonist's greatest fear and used it against him? Does he fear heights but must scale a cliffside to rescue his family from the people who have kidnapped them?
- Have you raised the stakes? Does the threat to the hero or his family or his school or his town grow?
- Have you used sensory words and literary devices (metaphors, similes, etc.) to heighten the emotion and suspense?

**THE RESOLUTION**

A satisfying resolution needs to answer the questions that have been raised throughout the book.

*Checklist for a great resolution:*

- Has the villain been revealed? Unless his identity has been known through the story, he/she should be revealed now. Have his motives been explained? Having a dastardly villain perform his dastardly deeds without clear motivation leaves readers feeling unsatisfied and unfulfilled.
- Has the main character engaged in a life-or-death struggle with the villain? This does not necessarily mean actual lives are at stake. What it does mean is that the stakes have been raised to their zenith.\*
- Have all the threads woven throughout the story been tied up? Dangling threads (unless this is a series with an overarching plot) are annoying and will turn readers off from buying your next book. Have all the questions been answered so that the reader isn't left wondering, "But what about ..."

Writing suspense is hard work. But the rewards can be great when a reader tells you, "I didn't see it coming. But then I knew it couldn't end any other way."

**Checklist for writing and placing clues in a mystery:**

- Have you crafted the clues so that they create greater confusion as the protagonist tries to solve the mystery? Each clue should be fashioned for that particular story.
- Have you subtly placed the clues in the right place at the right time? They need to be discovered, presumably by the main character, in a natural fashion. They shouldn't just "fall out of the sky and hit him on the head."
- Have you made the protagonist work to solve the clues? Your story will be more compelling if he has to struggle to put the pieces together.
- If you have included the villain's point of view, have you let clues drop while the reader is in the villain's head? These clues would not be available to the young sleuth when they are made available to the reader. Be careful with this as you don't want the reader solving the mystery a hundred or so pages before the protagonist does. The converse of this is to give the main character clues which the reader doesn't have. This is cheating the reader.
- If you have used a red herring\*, have you done it in a subtle way? Red herrings can be useful if they provide the reader with another possible solution to the mystery and distract from real clues, but they should be used sparingly.

\*The term red herring was coined in nineteenth century England as fugitives would rub a red herring across their trails to divert the bloodhounds that were in pursuit.



# Naomi Krueger



# beaming books

interview by Lynne Marie

This month, I'm bursting with excitement to feature editor Naomi Krueger and share the news of the former Sparkhouse Family's new name — and a broader focus — Beaming Books. My very own *The Star in the Christmas Play*, (October 2018) is one of the fruits of its new crop, and I am thankful to be part of a publishing team that not only promotes, but exhibits family values.

**Lynne Marie:** With its rebranding, Sparkhouse Family (a Christian children's book imprint of 1517 Media, the publishing company of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America) is becoming a publisher that is more in the mainstream as far as target market, marketing, distribution and promotion — so it's essentially branching outside the religious market, is that correct?

**Naomi Krueger:** Yes and no. We are broadening beyond publishing only faith-based books, but at least half of our list is still primarily for the Christian market. The other half is rooted in Christian values, but serves a broader audience. Here's our mission: Beaming Books seeks to publish high-quality children's books that help kids thrive in every part of who they are—emotionally, socially, and spiritually. With topics ranging from self-esteem to kindness, ethics, and faith, our books are designed to spark the imagination and equip kids and families to live full and flourishing lives, together. A huge segment of our audience is still the church and we intend to continue to provide high quality books for Christian families.

**LM:** Please explain your job responsibilities as Developmental Editor.

**NK:** We're a small publishing house, so I wear a lot of hats. I'm acquisitions editor, art director, development editor, and project manager for half of our list of books. I work directly with authors and illustrators to bring a book from proposal or manuscript submission to pub-

lication. We have an internal design team and we also work with an external design firm for some of our books, so I don't do the design part of the process.

**LM:** What motivated this change of focus and how, as developmental editor, do you plan to implement the shift? What topics might you cover now that you would not have covered before?

**NK:** It was a long time coming, and we had started shifting this direction already even before going public with the name. As you know, it can take a couple years between acquiring a book and publication. So we were already thinking about this new direction when we finalized the Fall 2018 list and even some books from Fall 2017. For example, *The Memory Box* by Joanna Rowland, illustrated by Thea Baker is a picture book about processing grief. It doesn't give a theological perspective on death or life after death, instead it gives tools for processing grief through the eyes of a young girl who is reflecting on how she will remember and honor her loved one who died. Mainly, this shift is implemented in the types of manuscripts we seek out and consider for acquisition.

**LM:** Please tell us a little bit about the Beaming Books values project on Twitter and Facebook [#TheValuesProject](#) and how it started.

**NK:** The Values Project is a year-long social media initiative spearheaded by my marketing colleagues. We provide inspirational blogs, practical ideas, family activities, book recommendations, and parenting tips from our network of seasoned parents and faith leaders each month, because we believe it takes a village to raise a good human. This month we are tackling the value of loyalty, and next month is compassion.

**LM:** What percentage of the line will be a continuation of the more religiously-focused style books and what per-





*Naomi Krueger continued*

centage will be books that focus on values? For those interested in submitting, which subset in particular do you have a greater need for?

**NK:** We're aiming for about a 50/50 mix each season. Right now, we need more values-based books, but we'd encourage people to submit both. We get a lot of faith-based submissions that aren't a good fit, so I'm always on the lookout for something fresh and compelling.

**LM:** I see from your writer's guidelines, you are accepting books across all genres (with the exception of Young Adult), from Board Books to Picture Books, Chapter Books to Middle Grade. Can you tell us a little bit about what you are looking for in each category?

**NK:** The bulk of our list is picture books, but we do some board books, and a few very select chapter books. We have the first in a series called *Owen and Eleanor Move In* by H.M. Bouwman that is debuting this month. We aren't actively seeking chapter books and middle grade novels, but if we get one that is exceptional we will consider it. In general, we're looking for books that are a fresh take on a familiar idea. We don't want to publish books that sound didactic or preachy, even the faith-based ones. They need to be well written books with a clever concept or hook, that meets a need for parents and kids. Since most of our books are illustrated, we also need to be able to imagine how the manuscript might be complemented with pictures. We've received some submissions in the past that were a good at first glance, but didn't fit well in the category (usually too wordy or too abstract).

**LM:** What are your thoughts about Historical Fiction novels? Is this something you are looking for? Or something more contemporary?

**NK:** We have never published a historical fiction novel, so it would have to be something pretty special for us to take a risk on it. We're not actively looking for novels in general, but if something exceptional comes along we would definitely consider it. Something around a specific time in church history would be most appealing to us.

**LM:** Please highlight 1-3 newer books you have edited. What made you pursue these books in particular? Any items on your wish list?

**NK:** *Adriana's Angels* by Ruth Goring, illustrated by Erika Meza — I have personal interest in refugees and how individuals and nations can respond with compassion to persecuted people. This book is about a young girl from Colombia whose family flees violence and makes a life in Chicago. God's love and compassion are expressed to this girl through two guardian angels. I loved this book for so many reasons — its focus on God's love

for the vulnerable, the beautiful text, and the fact that it was loosely based on a true story.

*Owen and Eleanor Move In* by H.M. Bouwman, illustrated by Charlie Alder — This is the first chapter book in a series for early elementary readers about two kids from two different Christian families who end up living in the same duplex. It's about the true meaning of home and family and doing the right thing. This book hit the sweet spot of being about Christians, without being preachy or didactic. I think both Christians and non-Christians will love this. It's funny and heartfelt and easily accessible for kids.

*Porcupine's Pie* by Laura Renaud, illustrated by Jennie Poh — This was the winner of the 2016 picture book writing contest. It's a sweet story about a Porcupine and her other animal friends, and how they all share with one another to make festive dishes for the upcoming fall feast. The story is really charming and has a great message about generosity.

Topics I'm interested in: peacemaking and reconciliation, major milestones in a child's life, grandparents, challenges a child might face such as bullying, divorce, fear, making new friends, etc. I'm also on the lookout for humorous books.

**LM:** Please explain what you are looking for as far as non-fiction for this imprint. Please share an example of some newly acquired titles. Any items on your wish list?

**NK:** We publish devotionals, prayer books, books about Christian history or biblical history, and activity books. A newly acquired title slated for Fall 2019 is a picture book by Ruth Goring that explores the different metaphors for God found in the Bible, with the use of handmade mosaic art. It's a really beautiful book. We also recently published a pop-up book about the life of Martin Luther, by Agostino Traini. So non-fiction needs to have a connection to faith OR some sort of deeper value for us to consider it. A generic cookbook for kids wouldn't fit with us, but a cookbook that helped teach kids about sustainability and a connection to the earth might be. I would actually love to see a cookbook proposal. Or an activity or doodle book. We're also interested in nonfiction about historical or contemporary figures who made/are making a difference in the world.

**LM:** In your experience as a faith-based publisher, what is the biggest mistake aspiring writers seem to make?

**NK:** There are two that I see a lot — one is submitting retellings of Bible stories. We have published these in the past and will continue to do so — only if they are fresh takes. In general, we're trying to move beyond retellings of Bible stories. The other big mistake is creat-

*Naomi Krueger continued*

ing a story based on a lesson that would be better suited for a Sunday school lesson or a children's devotional. We want kids to learn and explore what it means to be a person of faith on their own, through compelling stories and meaningful faith practices — not through a patronizing lecture from an adult.

**LM:** It is evident that Beaming Books strives to feature art that is modern and appealing to children. Are you currently accepting submissions from illustrators? If so, what are five words you would use to describe the type of art that you are looking for?

**NK:** We primarily work with illustration agencies, so I would recommend that illustrators find an agent first. We do have a place on Submittable for people to submit illustration samples to us, but it's not the primary way we seek out illustrators. We have found some illustrators through the illustration gallery on the SCBWI website too.

Here are five words to describe our art: Fresh. Diverse. Arty. Beautiful. Lively.

**LM:** Aside from the standard “best advice” to read books from the catalog to get a feel for what you publish, what advice do you have for someone wanting to submit a book from any of the genres to Beaming Books?

**NK:** Make sure you're 100% confident in the quality of your manuscript. Get feedback from other writers, research competitive titles and see how yours compares, and revise as needed. We rarely acquire a manuscript that needs a lot of work — it should be as polished and publication-ready as possible.

**LM:** When reading a submission, how far do you read until you can sense whether the manuscript is right for Beaming Books or not? How willing are you to work with manuscripts that you see potential in, but are not quite “there” yet?

**NK:** I can usually tell after the first few lines. If it feels trite, or the writing (or rhyme) is clumsy, I stop reading. If the main character is super whiny or unlikable, I stop reading. If the story has an adult or parent as the hero, instead of the childlike character, I usually stop reading. As I said above, we rarely acquire manuscripts that need a lot of work. It does happen, but usually it's just taking a really well-written manuscript and helping to redirect some of the ideas or tightening things here and there. We can tell if someone is a good writer or not based on the submission. If it's a good idea, but

has poor execution, it gets rejected. We also reject books that don't fit with our mission. A book about teaching the ABCs or colors or even a cute story that doesn't have a deeper connection to values, won't make the cut, even if it's really great.

**LM:** One of the ways Sparkhouse used to mine for new authors is to hold an annual picture book writing contest. Will Beaming Books continue this tradition? If so, please share information for this year's contest.

**NK:** Yes! We're going to continue to do this and we have actually renamed the contest to “Beaming Books Picture Book Writing Contest.” The past two winners of this contest haven't been published yet and will be published under the Beaming Books imprint. Look for *Porcupine's Pie* by Laura Renauld in Fall 2018 and *Antonino's Impossible Dream* by Tim McGlen in Spring 2019.

We will post the contest on our Submittable page again in the fall. Typically it runs September through November.

**LM:** Please provide your submission guidelines and submission link. Will you respond if not interested? If so, what is your approximate response time?

**NK:** We use Submittable for our submissions. Here's the link to our guidelines and the form: <https://beaming-books.submittable.com/submit> (See the special CBI Above the Slushpile Submission link below.)

We accept both agented and non-agented submissions, although usually agents contact us directly instead of at the link. For picture books, we prefer complete manuscripts. For longer form books, like chapter books, devotionals, or other formats, we will take a proposal plus sample chapters. More details are at the link.

### Above the Slushpile Submission Opportunity

Naomi Krueger has set up a special form on Submittable for CBI submissions that is only accessible with this link: <https://beamingbooks.submittable.com/submit/0b5f10e5-ab8f-438b-9131-81eae1978211/childrens-book-insider-beaming-books-submissions>

If you've opened this newsletter with Adobe Reader, you can click on the link directly. Otherwise, copy and paste the link into your internet browser.

**This special link will be good until August 1, 2018.**

# Writing Recipes for Children's Magazines

by Robin Phillips

If you think recipes are fillers in children's magazines, think again. Recipes engage kids in an activity they regularly see adults do in the kitchen, at their friends' homes, the school lunch line, and at special events. Recipes may look simple, but this brief list of ingredients and instructions makes the adult world of cooking, baking, and food preparation accessible to kids. Similar to other kids' activities, recipes introduce kids to tools and processes that mimic what adults do. Unlike crayon and construction paper crafts, however, they will continue using spatulas, mixing spoons, and whisks with eggs, salt, and flour throughout their lives.

Following the instructions in a recipe teaches kids to make a connection between their actions and the outcome. Did they stir the batter enough or is it lumpy? Did they use the suggested ingredients or make a substitution? Did they follow the listed amounts and measurements? What happened when they did not? And the most basic question of all involving food: did they like the taste? In other words, recipes teach the cause and effect relationship in a tangible way.

Instructions are also mini-lessons in logic and sequencing. For instance, spreading a bagel with cream cheese before sprinkling it with chives makes the chives stick. Kids immediately recognize the problem if they reverse the order. The chives either fall off or stick to the knife, not the bagel.

Finally, recipes give kids an opportunity and the ability to create something to share with others. Baking brownies for the friend with a broken wrist, fixing a sandwich for a tired parent, or decorating their own cake for the school bake sale all give them the satisfaction of creating a real, functional item for others.

Now that you see recipes offer more to kids than something fun to make or good to eat, how do you write a

publishable recipe? Here are several keys to developing the recipe and matching it to your target magazine.

Take a trip to your local library. Borrow a year's worth of issues of the particular magazines you want to target, find each issue's recipes, and lay them side by side. You will discover the magazine's preferences by asking the following questions and looking at your samples. Are the ingredients generally health-conscious, treats and desserts, or a mix? What is the least number of ingredients listed and what is the most? Is any of the preparation listed among the ingredients? In other words, do they use 1 c. *chopped* apples or is the chopping of the apples found in the instructions?

If you can't find the print format of a particular magazine, the next-best method is to search their website. Some will include their favorite recipes in a special section as they do in *Clubhouse Jr.* (<http://www.clubhousejr.com/recipes.aspx>).

Now check for how ingredients and the directions are labeled. While some may use those words, others opt for a different feel. Currently, *Clubhouse Jr.* uses Gather and Go while *Spider* uses What You'll Need and What to Do. The Canadian magazine *Chickadee* lists ingredients under You'll Need and the instructions under How to Make.

Notice how the recipes call for adult help. Some magazines print text in a colored box that says to ask for an adult's help with anything sharp or hot. *Humpty Dumpty* reaches children aged 2-6 and the assumption is that they are working with an adult, so it is not stated at all. Some magazines simply place "Ask an adult to..." in the instructions, if needed.

Check the maximum and minimum ingredients you find in the magazine's recipes. You will rarely see more than



eight ingredients in magazines for young children and many will have as few as three. Remember, most children want to see (and eat) the results, not spend several minutes carefully measuring tiny amounts of spices. An exception might be if a number of ingredients creates a single item that can be used several times, such as their own taco powder or soup mix.

One way to reduce the number of ingredients in a recipe is to use a pre-made mix instead of listing separate ingredients. For example, use a box of cornbread mix instead of listing flour, cornmeal, and more. Add your special twist to it – a fruit, a chopped vegetable, a unique topping – and your recipe is now brief and doable for young children.

Finally, keep ingredients to items that are readily available in most places. This isn't the place to pull out specialty foods like macadamia milk or expensive foods such as saffron. If you question an ingredient, go to a local department grocery store and check the aisles. Did you have to hunt? Could you only find it in a specialty section? Can you substitute for a more readily-available item?

Now that you've developed your recipe idea, you need to write it up. As with any children's writing, keep your audience in mind. Unlike using recipes from a cookbook, most parents and kids reading kids' magazines are looking for easy prep, a quick result, and some fun mixed in.

Cut to the action. Begin the steps in your instructions with active words such as spread, pour, measure, stir, sprinkle, assemble, mix, or tear. These work well for even young children as adults can easily demonstrate their meaning, but let the child do the action.

Make your recipe unique by playing with the name. Instead of a plain name like mango smoothie, rename it according to a theme or season: Sunshine Smoothie for summer refreshment, High Octane Juice for a car-themed party, or Winter Wakeup for a school-morning breakfast.

Play with the assembly as well. Sandwiches made to look like aliens or animals are always popular. Or, perhaps your three-ingredient trifle could be put into individual cups or baggies for a lunchbox. Call it Smashed Cake for fun!

And, finally, have your recipe submission mirror the for-

mat used in your target magazine. This makes it easier for the editor to visualize your recipe within its pages. It also shows the editor that you studied their publication and tailored your submission to them. Since the advent of email submissions, this is no longer onerous to do, so tweak your recipe every time you send it out.

Lynn Gilliam, editor of *Pockets*, had this recommendation for recipe writers that wish to submit to her:

“We don't limit the number of steps, but recipes should be able to be completed by a reader with minimal assistance, so simplicity is a plus. Our recipes are only one page, so a word limit of 225-250 usually works well. As for types of ingredients, anything that's readily available to most people is fine. The kinds of recipes we're generally looking for follow seasons, more than our magazine themes.”

So, pull open the pantry door and write a recipe for kids that gives them something that fills more than their stomachs.

# AUTHOR HITS THE RIGHT NOTES WITH PICTURE BOOK DEBUT

interview by PJ McIlvaine

**R**eading, Writing and Music. Michael Mahin (children's writer, screenwriter and wannabe rock star) meshed his muses together in his critically-lauded picture book debut *Muddy: The Story of Blues Legend Muddy Waters* (Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2017). Illustrated by Evan Turk, it was hailed by the New York Times as one of the best illustrated children's books in 2017. His next two picture books, *Stalebread Charlie and the Razy Dazy Spasm Band* (Clarion, Spring 2018), and *When Angels Sing: The Story of Music Legend Carlos Santana* (Atheneum, Summer 2018), continues in the same niche.

**PJ McIlvaine:** You have quite the eclectic background, per your bio: son of a preacher, semi-rock star, student of kung fu and Buddhism. How did that influence you to become the writer you are today?

**Michael Mahin:** I wish I were as cool as those things make me sound! Kung fu/rock star/spiritual guru has a nice ring to it! But seriously, I think there's a direct link between listening to my father's preaching (he was an amazing orator) and the way I think about writing. I'm always reading my work out loud to hear how it sounds, which it turns out is a good thing if you're a picture book author.

But I think what has probably influenced me more is the fact that I'm a lifelong reader and lover of books. This really crystallized in an AP English class I had in high school. I then studied English in college, got a Masters in it, and then a Ph.D. I mean, I didn't just love books; I wanted to make them my world. But along the way, I found myself wanting to do more than just read stories; I wanted to write them. I thought it'd be a natural transition, but it wasn't! Reading and writing are very different practices. It's taken me 10 years to figure out how different!



**PJ:** Do you feel your brand is nonfiction picture book biographies or do you plan to write in other genres as well? How much research was involved?

**MM:** As of now, my brand is nonfiction picture book biographies about musicians and that was a conscious decision, but not at the beginning. At first, I was just looking for subjects that interested me. After I sold my first book, *Stalebread Charlie and the Razy Dazy Spasm Band* (Clarion) and due out this spring, it occurred to me that focusing on music was a good idea for a number of reasons. On a purely practical level, I was thinking about how Common Core standards were driving a focus on nonfiction and I also knew that music was getting short shrift in schools these days. So, I figured here's a subject area that kids are naturally drawn to and one that educators will see as filling an informational and artistic gap. No idea if that's actually true, but it was how I was thinking.

Being a musician, I also knew I'd be passionate about the subject and able to integrate music into my readings in a way that would be engaging and fun for kids.

I'm definitely sticking with this "brand" going forward but I'm not going to be religious about it. I have three new, music-related nonfiction picture books that I'm about to start shopping, and I'm working on a few fiction picture books that involve music, but I also have a MG novel that has nothing to do with music. Now that I'm talking about it, maybe it needs to!

**PJ:** In addition to being a kid lit author, you're also a screenwriter. Do you feel your experiences and skills in that format helps in writing more kid oriented material?

**MM:** Yes, absolutely. But the funny thing is, the kids who read my books should not be allowed to see my

*Michael Mahin continued*

movies. LOL. They're scary! (My stories, not the kids.) But, screenwriting has taught me a ton about process and practice.

I'd say there are two main things that I've learned that have really helped me as a writer in general. First, the best books on structure are screenwriting books, and this is because, as the legendary screenwriter and novelist William Goldman once said, "Screenplays are structure." He was overstating the case a bit, but not enough can be said for having a good grasp of dramatic structure. If you're just starting out, I'm a real fan of Blake Snyder's *Save the Cat* books. Writers' often poo-poo structure books as being formulaic, but the key is to remember that you're not learning rules (which are set in stone), but principles (which are derived from the best practices of the best writers).

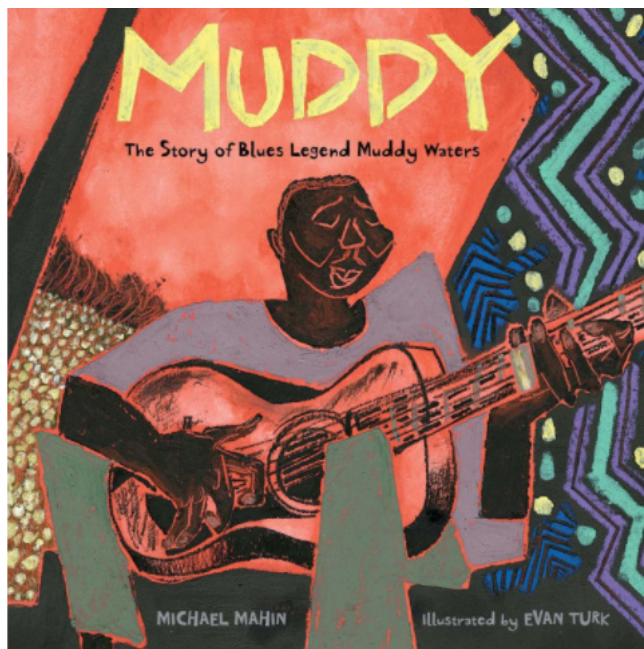
The other thing I've learned is how to externalize internal "action." Which is to say, because screenplays are meant to be performed, you don't have the luxury of internal dialogue. (In movies, voice-over is a way to cheat this, but is generally a poor storytelling choice.) In novels, internal dialogue is where a lot of emotional conflict is explored, so the trick with effective screenwriting is figuring out how to turn those inner conflicts and ideas into externalized actions and reactions. It's something that I still have trouble with, but I'm getting better at it, I think. On a basic level, screenplays (and all dramatic mediums) force you to figure out how to show, not tell. And even though it's become a cliché, it's a critical lesson for all writers.

**PJ:** From first draft to publication, how long did the process take in your debut book? Did you have input into the illustrations? Were there any surprises along the way?

**MM:** I'm always interested in hearing publication stories, but let me start by saying this—as a new or aspiring writer, it's so easy to feel like a failure when you hear how an author wrote a story in a year, and sold it immediately after that. The important thing to remember is that publishing a book takes a lot of work and a long time. Even if someone writes and sells a book quickly, you have to think about all of the time and effort that the author invested beforehand to get good enough to be able

to do that.

*Muddy* is a case in point. All in all, I wrote *Muddy* over the course of a few months, then spent about 6 months revising it for my agent at the time—so probably a year total from writing to sale. But this wasn't my first book sale. The first book I sold is one of those miracle stories you read about. I went to a SCBWI conference, casually pitched an editor in passing, and ended up selling it to one of his colleagues. A dream come true, right? Yes, and no. Because it has taken 5+ years for that book to get done. *Stalebread Charlie and the Razy Dazy Spasm Band*, which I mentioned earlier, is the first book I sold, but will actually be my second book published.



What a lesson in patience that has been! It's a good lesson, though, because what I've learned is that selling a book does not make you a writer, writing does.

For my debut *Muddy*, I did have input on the illustrations, but only after Evan had been allowed to pursue his own vision for what they would be. This is important, I think. Illustrators have to be given the space to create and interpret and make the story their own. After he'd created drafts, my editor (Reka Simonsen) very generously invited me into the process. I saw myself not as someone who had to defend my vision, but rather as just

another set of professional eyes trying to make the book as great as it could be. I think it worked!

**PJ:** How did you acquire an agent? Was it easy or difficult?

**MM:** Querying agents is always hard. I had an agent for *Muddy*, but decided to part ways after feeling like we were speaking different creative languages. To me, even after researching who you think you would like to rep you, it's a subjective crapshoot.

I'm submitting to agents now, and even with two books forthcoming and *Muddy* being selected to some prestigious "Best Books of 2017" lists, I'm still playing the waiting game. I set my sights pretty high and I know now that rejection doesn't necessarily say anything about my work, but getting a "no thank you" still sucks!



*Michael Mahin continued*

**PJ:** What is your writing routine? Do you write every day or only when inspiration strikes? Are you a pantser or a plotter?

**MM:** I'm a big fan of rituals and routines! On a basic level, they make writing easier. While I'm not making a living off of my creative writing yet, I still make it a point to write every day. To make sure I do this, I typically start my day with my creative writing. I think I write best in the morning, so I try to get a couple hours in first thing. Writing everyday is good for lots of reasons, mostly because it keeps you in the flow of whatever you're working on. I avoid news and email, since those things tend to undermine my focus, get a cup of coffee or a green tea, and get to my desk as fast as I can. I then put headphones on and listen to a movie score that will put me in the right mood, reread a bit of what I wrote the day before, and start writing. I do most of my drafting and brainstorming on yellow legal pads, and then transcribe them into Scrivener when my ideas start looking like actual stories.

As for my process, I'm a plotter. I think outlining and thinking in terms of large, structural beats gives me a sense of security and makes it easier for me to get started with a story. I tend to be a very insecure writer, and I think outlining is a way for my brain to dip its toes in the water without feeling like its going to drown in the deep end. The danger is holding too rigidly to an outline and not allowing myself to be in the moment when I'm writing. But I'm getting better that that. I think. LOL.

**PJ:** What inspires you? Do you have an ideas folder?

**MM:** Everything! Music and underdog stories are big ones for me. I actually use music quite a bit while I'm writing, to help me find a mood. I also have an obsession with books on the writing craft and books in the field of expertise studies. I love hearing how other writers write, I love looking for new ways to understand writing, and I like learning about how we learn.

I do have an ideas folder, but it is in the form of small, 3x5, spiral-bound memo pads. I probably have hundreds of them going back 20 years. I write down all sorts of random stuff. Most of it is useless, but when something starts to resonate, or I find myself riffing on a particular idea, I may pull out a yellow legal pad and start toying with it. Only after it really seems like a story does it get the computer treatment and go into a Scrivener document.

**PJ:** What are you currently working on?

**MM:** I've just finished what I think is a great story about a very famous Christmas song. I was looking for a way to

extend my "music brand" into the holidays, and over the holidays this year, I found it. The story felt like it wrote itself, and my first draft was done in a week. I'm letting it sit for a little bit to get some distance before I go in for revisions. I find this helps me be more objective. I'm also plotting out a new horror movie which I think has some real potential.

**PJ:** What do you know about the publishing/writing journey now that you wish you had known started out?

**MM:** That success is all about failure. You have to fail in order to succeed. You have to write lousy stories, and bad sentences, and tons of junk. The sooner you get comfortable with that, the faster you will find success.

**PJ:** Who is your favorite author and why? Are there any books in particular that have helped you or shaped your writing?

**MM:** I have a brother and sister, but my dad always used to say I was the favorite. Of course, he also said my brother was his favorite, and my sister was his favorite—all for different reasons. Which is to say, I have lots of favorites, all for different reasons. I love Neil Gaiman's tone and style. I love Shel Silverstein's heart and silliness. I love Thomas Pynchon's complexity. I love Stephen King's ability to make me want to read about his characters. Many books have shaped my writing, and I expect there to be many, many more.

**PJ:** Where do you see yourself five years from now?

**MM:** You want to know what is on my vision board? Other than piles of cash!? Is it ridiculous to say I'd like to be a commercial and critical success? Seriously, this is what I want, so getting there is the biggest thing on my mind right now. We often assume dreams are mysterious things, but I'm not sure that's always true. I kind of think it's a comforting fiction we tell ourselves so we don't have to put ourselves to the test.

For me to be commercially and critically successful means that I have to create material at a high level. To do that, I will need to become a better writer. To do that, I will need to write more. So, back to work it is!

# A PRIMER ON FIRST PERSON POINT-OF-VIEW

by Jane McBride

**F**irst person point-of-view is becoming increasingly popular, especially in novels for all ages. The first person POV pulls the reader in with its sense of immediacy; however, there are cons to this POV that can trip up even the most experienced and savvy writer.

The key to writing in first person is to always remember that every word must be in your character's voice, not your voice as the writer. The reader should forget that anyone other than the narrator created those words. This means you have to know your protagonist inside and out, and truly have a sense of her unique voice—the way she strings words together, her favorite phrases, her sense of humor—before you begin Chapter 1. Spend a lot of time interviewing your character and writing her answers in first person to get a handle on her worldview.

While first person POV can be a very satisfying for the reader, there are some pros and cons for the author. We'll look at the most common ones in this article, including how to maximize the pros and minimize the cons.

## Let's take a look at the cons first:

**CON 1:** Self-centeredness. The first person main character (MC) can come across as a self-centered egotist as everything is filtered through him. Authors run the risk of having a string of sentences that run something like “I did this ...” “I did that ...” “I thought this...” “My feelings were ...” “My heart bumped ...” You get the picture.

**STEP 1:** Read through your work-in-progress (WIP) aloud. Better yet, read it into a recorder, then play it back and listen, really listen, to what you've written. (This is good advice for improving any aspect of writing.) Do you have a string of sentences such as the above? Do “I's” and “my's” overwhelm the writing until you're sick of the words and, in turn, sick of the character?

**ACTION:** Rewrite several sentences, varying the structure. Sometimes a simple fix such as rearranging the order of the words can take the emphasis off “I” and “my” even when the words are still present. Rather than write “I did this ...,” start with a prepositional phrase or a clause. Look at the following:

**Before:** My chores weren't done and my dad was having a fit. I had to mow the yard before I could leave for the game.

**After:** Because my chores weren't done, my dad was having a fit. Before I could leave for the game, I had to mow the yard.

Though both sets of sentences use the same words, even using “I” and “my” twice, the second set doesn't put as much emphasis on the words.

**STEP 2:** Repeat step 1, this time with an eye to improving the reader's perception of the character. It's easy for a first person POV character to sound egocentric, narcissistic, or just plain whiny. And though you don't want your character to be perfect, neither do you want him to be someone whom the reader automatically dislikes because everything seems to be about him.

**ACTION:** Show your character doing something altruistic. You don't have to make him into a hero, but show (don't tell) his noble side. Let him sacrifice for someone else. Of course this noble action will need to be age-appropriate. What a six-year-old can sacrifice will be far different than what a 16-year-old can do. A sacrifice doesn't have to be life-altering; it can be as simple as the 16-year-old brother sitting by his 14-year-old sister in the school lunchroom when he knows he'll get ridiculed for it by his friends.

**CON 2:** Lack of information about other characters. I like knowing what other characters in a book are thinking and feeling. It is through thoughts and emotions that we truly learn about other people, whether real-life ones or literary ones. It is your job as a writer to convey those thoughts and feelings without being in other characters' POVs.

**STEP 1:** Let your MC interact and react to secondary characters in such away that we learn not only about him but about them as well.

**ACTION:** As you're developing your secondary characters, make notes about how they would show their thoughts, feelings and particular traits to someone else. Does one character chew her fingernails when nervous? Does another rely on sarcasm when embarrassed? Think about how, in real life, you get a sense of what family members and close friends are thinking without them having to tell you. Everyone has unique ways of com-

*Mini Blueprint continued*

municating nonverbally.

When secondary characters are reacting to your protagonist, show what's going on inside their heads with their body language, or some other hints that the protagonist would notice. Is your protagonist being a selfish jerk? You can't have another character think that if you're writing in first person; instead, have the other character pull away, either physically or emotionally or both to show his disdain for the protagonist's bad behavior. In real life, when we encounter someone who is rude or obnoxious, we don't usually say what we are thinking aloud. Instead, we find a reason to leave the situation and him. Likewise, if the MC does something praiseworthy, other characters will respond with warmth and approval.

Dialogue is another tool you can use to reveal what a non-viewpoint character is thinking or feeling. But don't just rely on dialogue, or you'll have that character simply listing for the reader everything that's going on inside her head.

**Now for a look at the pros:**

**PRO 1:** Immediacy. No other POV allows both the writer and the reader to have such a first-hand connection to the character. How do you get this immediacy?

**STEP 1:** From the first word, the first sentence, the first paragraph, pull the reader into the story and don't let up.

**ACTION:** Start with a breath-stopping action or a piece of dialogue. Both have the effect of causing the reader to be caught up in your words and, in turn, in the protagonist. Make this action or dialogue so riveting that the reader does not even consider putting down the book. Also make it integral to the story. A cute or clever beginning set-up is fine if it is relevant to the story. If its only purpose is to show off how cute and clever you are, try again. You don't want the readers to think "Wow, this writer is great." You want them to think, "Wow, this story is great and I can't wait to see what happens next."

**PRO 2:** Deep POV. Deep POV goes hand-in-hand with the sense of immediacy described above. Done right, first person deep POV lets the reader become the character, lets her feel what the character feels, lets her think what the character thinks, lets her respond as the character responds. With deep POV, the reader is experiencing the protagonist's worldview in every sentence.

**STEP 1:** Start page 1 in deep POV and stay there throughout the entire story.


**ACTION:** Weed out words that can take the reader from deep POV. For example, instead of saying "She thought ...," just give the thought. Other distancing phrases include I wondered, I reflected, I considered. Sure, you will

probably need to use those words on some occasions, but take out as many as you can. Another misstep which can pull the reader from deep POV is having the character think about something she wouldn't ordinarily think about. Have you ever read a book where the character is "sweeping her long, blonde hair back from her face" or some other such action? You probably have. I know I have. It pulls me from the story as I pause to ask myself why is the character thinking about pulling her "long, blonde hair back from her face." Real people don't think that way. If my hair is my face, I don't think to myself "I'm going to push my graying-blond hair back from my face." I just do it.

**STEP 2:** Don't let the thoughts and feelings of other characters creep in.

**ACTION:** Show the reactions of secondary characters through the eyes of your first person character. You can describe what secondary characters are doing but don't describe what they are thinking or feeling. The minute you dip into the minds and hearts of other characters, no matter how interesting or fun they may be, you leave deep POV and lose that connection with your reader. Deep POV is hard to write and even harder to maintain, but the results are worth it.

First person POV is not the right fit for every story. If you are writing a mystery where you alternate between the POV of the protagonist and the POV of the antagonist (person who committed the crime), it may be confusing to the reader to jump back and forth between two first person narratives unless you can skillfully capture two very different voices. If your protagonist is experiencing a traumatic event, first person may make that event too difficult for the reader to handle, depending on the age of the audience. But you may not know for sure until you experiment with writing a few chapters in first person. Practice with the technique. See how far you can go into deep POV. If you find it isn't for you, or not right for this particular story, no problem. You'll have tried something new and that's always good in upping your writing game.



Each month, we will be incorporating Mini Blueprints into CBI, which are based on the step-by-step way of learning in our full Writing Blueprints. If you're not familiar with our longer Writing Blueprints that take you through the process of writing, marketing, or self-publishing your book, go to [www.writingblueprints.com](http://www.writingblueprints.com)



# Making A Living Writing Books for Kids: An Interview with LAURA PURDIE SALAS

interview by Kimberly M. Hutmacher

**L**aura Purdie Salas is the author of more than 125 books for children, including *Meet My Family!*, *If You Were the Moon*, the *Can Be* series, and *Bookspeak!: Poems About Books*. Her books have earned starred reviews and recognition as NCTE Notable Books and Bank Street Best Books. Her latest book is not a book for children, though. It's a book for children's writers. Her talent as a children's writer is not debatable, but Laura is more than that. She is also a teacher, and in her book, *Making A Living Writing Books For Kids*, Laura shares tips and tricks on not just making money writing for children, but actually making a living writing for children. She's here today to share why she wrote this book and a few insights from its pages.

**Kimberly Hutmacher:** Laura, thank you for being here. Please share with us how this particular book came about?

**Laura Purdie Salas:** Thanks, Kimberly, for having me here! This book grew partially out of the mentoring that Lisa Bullard and I did for children's writers as Mentors for Rent. Many of our clients graduated from prestigious MFA programs. They had writing skills in spades, but submissions, marketing, and business skills? Not so much. Initially, I thought this would be a short book about the different ways children's writers can earn income (besides writing the books of our dreams). But it morphed and grew into a compendium of all the advice and information I wish someone had given me at the beginning of my career. And since I'm not shy about sharing money details or stories of failure, I thought it might help others for me to do even more of that.

**KH:** Can the advice given in this book be applied to all writers, not just children's writers specifically?

**LPS:** I've heard from several writers for adults that most of the content applies to them, too. And to other types of artists. I think about 85% would apply to any writing. The exceptions relate to school visits and to marketing to and networking with educators. Those apply almost exclusively to children's writers. But I started out as a

freelance writer for adults, and most of the business is the same no matter who your audience is.

**KH:** I believe there is something for everyone to take away from this book, but is there someone for whom this book would not be a good fit?

**LPS:** I am happy to hear that! Yep, I think it would be a terrible fit for:

- people whose primary career is online marketing who want to apply those skills to children's books (not knocking online entrepreneurs here—but that's not the focus of this book at all)
- writers who feel that trying to reach readers soils their "pure art"
- beginners who haven't written anything yet (unless they want a peek into the future)

**KH:** You begin the book discussing having the right mindset. Could

you share just one or two pieces of advice from this section?

**LPS:** Sure. The two toughest mindset issues revolve around confidence and expecting fair payment.

For confidence, my favorite tactic is one I used for many years (and still do, occasionally). I call it What Would Bonny Do? Find a role model of a professional, confident writer. Preferably someone you know in person, but if that's not possible, then someone you've heard speak or whose blog you follow is fine, too. Don't tell them they are your role model. When struggling to make a business decision, ask yourself, "What would X do?" My X was Bonny Becker. Asking myself "What would Bonny do?" gave me courage. It helped me stand up for myself (politely), ask for better terms, go after opportunities that I was uncertain of. Having a specific person in mind helped me enormously.

Expecting fair payment seems so basic. But there's this cultural expectation that children's writers don't need to



earn money. You'll do a school visit for free, right? It's for the kids. You can spend all day at our publishing fair for free, right? It's for the kids. You're not going to be greedy about reprint fees, are you? It's for the kids. This is crap (excuse my French). I learned the hard way that if I don't get paid for my work as a children's writer, I can't afford to do very much of it! And I also learned that people don't value what they don't pay for. I like to decide at the beginning of each year how many free events I can afford to do, and how I will choose which ones those are. And I always ask myself, "What will I have to say no to in order to say yes to this person?" When I visualize giving up 8 hours of writing time or a fun weekend day with my family, "no" becomes amazingly easy to say!

**KH:** You tell us that most of us will not make a living just writing trade books for children, and that we need to diversify our income streams. Could you share a little bit about how you do that?

**LPS:** First, a moment of silence to mourn the fact that we mostly won't make a living solely from trade books. Because it's what I wish I could do. And, who knows, maybe someday! Meanwhile, exploring other income streams is crucial! I know many awesome children's writers who make at least 1/3 of their income from school visits, and I'm close to that figure myself. I also do a lot of work-for-hire writing (mostly series books for educational publishers). There are other small streams, too, but those are the biggest ones for me. In *Making a Living*, I share 10 possible income streams, because I think it's necessary and also really validating for writers to find ways to earn income. Writing for the educational market gave me a lot of publishing credits and boosted my confidence as a writer enormously!

**KH:** You list 16 habits for success. I believe they are all important, but which 2 or 3 do you believe are most important when starting out?

**LPS:** Aw, man, that's hard. OK, for a working writer, I think the three most important habits are:

**Habit 1: *Write a Lot and Meet People*** – You have to produce a consistent stream of manuscripts and explore many possibilities for publishing them. Polishing one novel for 17 years won't cut it.

**Habit 2: *Write Through Chaos*** – Sometimes your personal life goes to heck. Mine, too. One of our daughters has special medical needs, and her childhood and adolescence were filled with doctors' appointments, school appointments, hospitalizations, and stress. Lots of it. But I wrote through it, even in the terrible times. As working writers, we produce writing even when we're grieving or stressed out or overwhelmed. Finding a way to make writing your happy place—your escape—is key.

**Habit 7: *Revisit Goals*** – Almost everyone makes goals. But many of us (ahem, including me) don't review and revise our goals often enough. Reminding ourselves of

what we're trying to do does magical things for keeping us on track! Every time I do this well, I think, Why am I not doing this all the time?

**KH:** You are a rock star when it comes to organization. In your book, you share multiple tools that can help all of us in this area. Could you share just a few here with our readers?

**LPS:** Thanks:>) A business plan is a fantastic annual organizational tool. It not only organizes how you plan to earn income and reach readers, but it also helps shift your mindset. It makes you take your writing career more seriously. And creating your plan is not as hard or scary as it sounds. You work out how much you need to make and who your core audience is. You break down the different ways you plan to earn the money and what your average monthly income should be. Seeing cold, hard numbers can be a great motivator!

The monthly block is another favorite tool. At the beginning of each month, I review my annual goals and my current projects. Then I choose my ONE most important writing task of the month and my ONE most important business task of the month. I choose a few secondary tasks for each category, too. But I make a die-hard commitment to the ONE task. Doing this monthly (even though my planning little soul would love to plan the whole year in advance) lets me be flexible, because you never know when an editor is going to need revisions—fast—on the picture book she's held for a year or when a plum editing assignment is going to drop in your lap. I love the monthly block. For now, anyway!

Most important is just to have a plan. Every time I start a new plan or use a new tool, I think, "This is it! I love this. I will do this forever." And I do. Until it starts not working for me. I don't know if everyone is like that, but I just want you to know that it's not important for you to organize the same way I do. It's just important to organize yourself in a way that works as well for you as my way works for me!

**KH:** I love your chapter on Networking and Promotion. Explain the difference between the two and also, for our shy introverted readers (me included), what are a few somewhat painless ways to do both of these things?

**LPS:** Thank you! As an introvert who used to hate and fear both networking and promotion, I am thrilled to hear that.

Networking is simply connecting with people with whom you share an interest. It's building relationships with people, maybe through attending conferences, joining online groups, joining organizations, or connecting on social media.

Promotion involves acting specifically to help spread the word about yourself as an author or about your books in particular. Creating bookmarks to hand out, organizing a blog tour, doing signings—these are all promotion-

al activities.

### Pain-free options for introverts:

**Networking:** Social media is SO much easier than connecting in person, and you can build authentic relationships this way, over time. For in-person events, go with someone if you can. If you can't, connect online with other attendees ahead of time through email or social media. Follow the event's or group's hashtag on Twitter to see who else is going. It's a lot easier to walk in when you're looking for friends you've met online than when you're facing a firing squad of strangers.

**Promotion:** Confession: I avoid a lot of in-person events. I just turned down a promotional opportunity that would just be too uncomfortable for me. You don't have to do book launch parties, for example. For my newest book, *Meet My Family!*, I'm doing a blog tour instead. This'll be the first time for that. You can do a lot of promotion online, through your website, blog, and social media. I just snuck in a mention of my newest picture book here for a little painless promotion, right? And for in-person events, take something beautiful to hand out to people, and, when possible, pair up with another author and promote each other. That is so much easier to do!

**KH:** Successful writers also need to have sharp business skills, and you haven't overlooked this area either. Please share a few mandatory basics.

**LPS:** Negotiate! In advance/royalty book contracts, hire a literary attorney to negotiate for you if you don't have an agent. In work-for-hire projects and speaking gigs, research what other writers have been paid and then use the What Would Bonny Do approach. Usually your Bonny will tell you to ask for more money. And—surprise—you will often get it!

Build relationships with editors over time. This takes repeated encounters—on social media, at conferences, through working together on projects, etc. But when you have editors who hope to work with you someday, you're halfway to success.

Research the market and submit your work regularly. Persistence and being a submissions beast—those two qualities have led to many book sales for me, even to closed houses (publishers who say they only accept manuscript submissions from agents) and even when I've been unagented.

Apply the 80/20 rule. Constantly try to weed out the 80% of your tasks that are not leading to success and grow the 20% that are.

Be productive and efficient. The Pomodoro method (25 minutes of very focused writing time followed by a 5-minute break) is what's been working for me the past

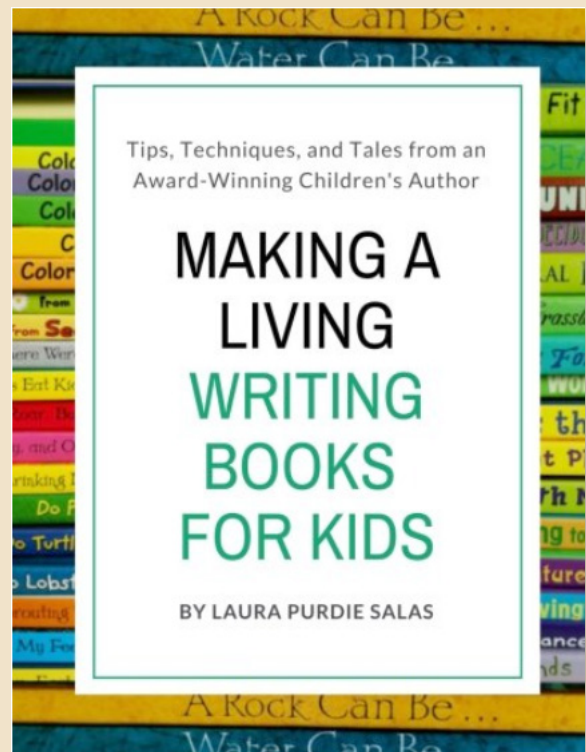
few years. Figure out what works for you.

OK, I'll stop there, but there are so many more I want to share!

**KH:** You end the book with a treasure trove of practical tips covering all areas of the writing life. Could you leave us with just one or two important tidbits?

**LPS:** Put yourself and your work out there consistently, even when you're nervous about it.

Remember that you are in charge of your own career. Envision what you dream for it. Then temper that with a reality check and take brave action every day to make your dreams (mostly) come true.



Readers, this book is 350+ pages full of practical and vital information to help each of us on our journey to actually making a living doing what we love. We've barely scratched the surface here. Laura leaves no stone unturned. If you're interested in learning more about this book and/or purchasing it, you can find it on [Amazon](https://www.amazon.com).

To learn more about Laura and all of her books, please visit <http://laurasalas.com/>.