

Children's Book Insider

January 2019

WRITING CONFERENCES 101:



**Your Guide to Learning,
Connecting & Having
a Blast in 2019!**

ABOVE THE SLUSHPILE
SUBMISSION CODE:

Corvisiero
Literary

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At Presstime:

Publisher Accepting Literary, Timeless Fiction/Nonfiction for All Ages

Eerdmans Books for Young Readers publishes picture books, middle reader and young adult fiction and nonfiction. Seeks manuscripts that are honest, wise, and hopeful; but they also publish stories with unique storylines, characters, or good humor. Stories that celebrate diversity, stories of historical significance, and stories that relate to contemporary social issues are of special interest at this time. Fiction tends to have a timeless, literary feel. Also publishes fiction and nonfiction with Christian themes. They currently publish 12 to 18 books a year. Writers are strongly encouraged to review Eerdmans books in their catalog (<https://www.eerdmans.com/Catalogs/Young-Readers-Catalog.aspx>) or at <https://www.eerdmans.com/YoungReaders/> before submitting.

Eerdmans Books for Young Readers accepts unsolicited hardcopy submissions, but responds only to submissions they are interested in publishing. Submissions do not have to be exclusive, but you should mention in the cover letter if it is also being submitted to other publishers. If you have not heard from back after four months, you may assume that your submission does not fit the needs of their list.

For picture book submissions, include the full manuscript. Except in the case of author-illustrators, prefers that submissions not include artwork. For novel submissions, you may submit the full manuscript, or a query that includes a synopsis and at least three chapters of the manuscript. Be sure to include your contact information (including address, email, and phone number) on your cover letter. If you would like confirmation that your materials have been received, please include a self-addressed, stamped postcard with your submission. Submit to: Acquisitions Editor, Eerdmans Books for Young Readers, 4035 Park East Court SE, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49546.

Magazine For Ages 6-14 Seeks Informative, Engaging Queries

National Geographic Kids is a general-interest nonfiction magazine for 6- to 14-year-olds published ten times a year. The magazine's mission is to find fresh ways to entertain children while educating and exciting them about their world. Material in *Nat Geo Kids* covers a broad range of topics, including natural history, science, geography, history, and human interest. For the magazine's departments, they are looking for animal anecdotes and cool vacation ideas. You can get a sense of the magazine's style and tone on their website: <https://kids.nationalgeographic.com/>

All geography, archaeology, paleontology, and history article ideas must answer the question, "What's fun about that?" Science and technology ideas must answer the questions, "How does this directly affect a kid's life?" and "What's in it for a 10-year-old?" Natural history ideas must be tightly focused and exciting. For example: Don't pitch a general feature about cheetahs. Do pitch a piece on how a cheetah's physical attributes make it the ultimate hunting machine. For the Amazing Animals department, looking for animal pieces that tell about unusual abilities, animal heroes, friendships, or silly situations.

Send a query letter (about 250 words) that outlines your idea in the following way: It should include a headline that suggests what the article is about, a deck that amplifies the headline (a short sentence that follows the main headline and summarizes the article), a strong lead or hook statement, and a paragraph that clearly sets out the premise and approach of the piece. The query should represent the style in which the piece will be written. Also mention which area of the magazine your story fits into. Include any clips that show a fun sense of style and tone, as well as a listing of previous publishing credits, if any. Study recent issues of *Nat Geo Kids* (available at most libraries) to be sure that your idea has not already been covered within the last three years. Submit by mail to National Geographic Kids, 1145 17th St. NW, Washington, DC 20036 and address to the appropriate editor, or email your query to the appropriate editor (no attachments): Features/Departments: Kay Boatner, Senior Editor, Kay.Boatner@natgeo.com; Games/Comics: Allyson Shaw, Associate Editor, Allyson.Shaw@natgeo.com

Publisher Seeks Christian-Themed Fiction and Nonfiction

WorthyKids, the children's imprint of Worthy Publishing Group, publishes Christian-themed fiction and nonfiction board books, novelty books, and picture books for children ages birth to 8. Subjects include inspiration/faith, patriotism, and holidays, particularly Easter and Christmas; relationships and values; and general fiction. Board book manuscripts should be no longer than 250 words. Picture book manuscripts should be no longer than 800 words. For current titles, go to <http://worthypublishing.com/product-category/worthy-kids-ideals/>.

Send complete manuscripts only with a cover letter listing previous publications, relevant qualifications or background, and a brief synopsis of the manuscript. All submissions should be sent by mail—no electronic submissions will be accepted. Be sure to include your name, address, phone number and email on every page of the manuscript. Mail to *WorthyKids*, Attn: SUBMISSIONS, 6100 Tower Circle, Suite 210 Franklin, TN 37067. Responds only if interested in pursuing publication of material.

Worthy also publishes *Ideals Christmas* and *Ideals Easter*, a magazine-inspired large-format paperback published twice a year at Christmas and Easter and available for purchase through retail stores such as Barnes & Noble, Amazon, Christian Book Distributors, and others. Looking for poetry (metered verse and free verse) that is optimistic and nostalgic. No more than 5 poems per submission. Also seeking nonfiction of 600-1000 words (editors are looking for cheerful nostalgic articles, upbeat personal experience essays, humor, and inspirational articles. No political or social concerns.) No more than 2 selections per submission. Material is primarily aimed at adults but should be appropriate to read aloud to children or be read by older children. Study some back issues before submitting—they can be found on Amazon or in libraries. Mail your submission to Worthy Publishing, Attn: IDEALS SUBMISSION EDITOR, 6100 Tower Circle, Suite 210 Franklin, TN 37067.

Leapfrog Press Fiction Contest for Middle Grade and Young Adult Books

Leapfrog Press, a small, independent publisher focused on discovering new talent and books that are overlooked by the big houses, is accepting submissions for its 2019 Leapfrog Fiction Contest. Adult, young adult (YA) and middle grade (MG) novels, novellas, and short story collections are accepted. Minimum word count: 22,000. Individual stories in a collection may have been previously published in journals. Books that have been self-published will be considered "unpublished" if fewer than about 200 copies were printed. Looking for literary fiction and mainstream fiction. Genre fiction is accepted (especially science fiction), but the story is more important than the genre.

All manuscripts will be reviewed by at least two Leapfrog editors, and those that go to the second round of judging may be read by editors at other small presses as well.

The Award consists of a **First Prize** publication contract offer from Leapfrog Press, with an advance payment, and one or two critiques of the manuscript from contest judges, permanent listing on the Leapfrog Press contest page as a contest finalist, along with short author bio and description of the book. A **Finalist Prize** consists of \$150 and one or two critiques of the manuscript from contest judges, permanent listing on the Leapfrog Press contest page as a contest finalist, along with short author bio and description of the book. One **Semi-Finalist** receives their choice of a free Leapfrog book and permanent listing on the website. An **Honorable Mention** gets listing on the Leapfrog Press website.

Entrants can submit as many manuscripts as they'd like. Each is submitted separately through Submittable at <https://leapfrogpress.submittable.com/submit> and requires a \$3 entry fee (the Contest link will be on Submittable on January 15, 2019). Entrants may submit their manuscripts to other contests as well as agents and editors while under consideration for the Award. Manuscripts must be received between January 15, 2019 and May 1, 2019. For more information, go to <http://www.leapfrogpress.com/contest.htm>

Using Lists in Your Work

by Candice Ransom

Last month, as he does every December, Ralphie trekked to Toyland to beg for a Red Ryder BB gun. Jean Shepherd, author of *In God We Trust, All Others Pay Cash*, on which the movie *A Christmas Story* is based, describes Toyland: “Over the serpentine line roared a great sea of sound: tinkling bells, recorded carols, the hum and clatter of electric trains, whistles tooting, mechanical cows mooing, cash registers jingling, and from far off in the faint distance the ‘ho-ho-ho-ing’ of jolly old Saint Nick.”

Shepherd sets the scene with an orchestra of noise. The device he employs to excellent effect is the humble list.

We’re all list-makers: grocery lists, to-do lists, and, yes, wish lists. Social media feeds buzz with “Best Of” and “Top Ten” lists. Yet how often do we use lists in our work? When I teach writing, one of my mantras is “The List Is Your Friend.”

Lists assist in many ways. They can launch a new project, catalog a fictional world, serve as a story opener, show character development, portray character, and organize scenes.

Lists as Story-Starters:

Ray Bradbury kept long lists of nouns to use as story prompts. He’d pick a noun and begin a prose poem that often became a story. Or he’d walk over to his desk and put down any word. Then he’d “bring on an assortment of characters to weigh the word and show me its meaning in my own life.” Hours later, he’d have a new story.

We can’t all be Ray Bradbury, but we can certainly list words, any words, when we’re searching for a new idea, or stuck on our current project. Bradbury admitted, “These lists were the provocations that caused my better stuff to surface. I was feeling my way toward something honest, hidden under the trapdoor on the top of my skull.”

The simple act of list-making enables us to close dis-

tractions and focus, allows us to ease into the day’s work. A single word leads to other words. Let the word series take you down the story path instead of trying to force a story out of an idea. Ideas are wonderful, but sometimes getting them moving is like trying to start an old car on a frigid winter morning.

Lists of Names:

Writers are word collectors. Author John Dufresne has a ninety-five-page, single-spaced list of words he plans to use in his stories. I keep lists of active verbs to prevent me from falling back on passive language.

A binder near my desk contains lists of character names, nicknames, names of cats and dogs, and place names from various sources: baby names books, old telephone books (great for last names), eavesdropping, flat-out stealing (most of my pet names), and, for place names, topographical maps.

Maps and atlases are a wealth of names of mountains, rivers, creeks, villages, crossroads, and corners. A basket holds state atlases, vintage road maps, and my father-in-law’s fifty-year hoard of National Geographic maps.

Lists as a Writing Tool:

Begin a book with a list? Jean Fritz did in *And Then What Happened, Paul Revere?*

In 1735 there were in Boston 42 streets, 36 lanes, 22 alleys, 1,000 brick houses, 2,000 wooden houses, 12 churches, 4 schools, 418 horses (at the last count), and so many dogs that a law was passed prohibiting people from having dogs that were more than 10 inches high. But it was difficult to keep dogs from growing more than 10 inches, and few people cared to part with their 11- and 12-inch dogs, so they paid little attention to the law. In any case there were too many dogs to count.

Using Lists in Your Work continued

Fritz's brilliant first paragraph uses a list to establish time period and setting, and grabs readers from the get-go.

Lists can show character development. The protagonist in Jacqueline Kelly's *The Evolution of Calpurnia Tate* compiles nature observations. Calpurnia's grandfather isn't impressed with her skimpy entries: "a hummingbird, some other birds (?); rabbits, a few; cats, some; insects, various." After spending time in the field, Calpurnia's lists become more specific: "5:15 a.m., clear and fine, winds from the south; 8 rabbits (7 cottontail, 1 jack)." The reader is aware of Calpurnia's growing interest in science.

A list is useful in describing character. In *Ramona and Her Father*, author Beverly Cleary slows down the always-rambunctious Ramona Quimby:

"Maybe Daddy will take us to the Whopperburger for supper for payday," she said. A soft, juicy hamburger spiced with relish, French fries crisp on the outside and mealy on the inside, a little paper cup of cole slaw at the Whopperburger Restaurant were Ramona's favorite payday treat. Eating close together in a booth made Ramona feel snug and cozy.

The list lets us see Ramona in a quiet moment. Readers identify with the safe, intimate feeling of comfort food eaten at a familiar place.

How many items are too many? If they are carefully curated and arranged thoughtfully, long lists will work. The following description comes from E.B. White. You'll know the book:

Here, in a small clearing hidden by young alders and wild raspberry bushes, was an astonishing pile of old bottles and empty tin cans and dirty rags and bits of metal and broken bottles and broken hinges and broken springs and dead batteries and last month's magazines and old discarded dishmops and tattered overalls and rusty spikes and leaky pails and forgotten stoppers and useless junk of all kinds, including a wrong-size crank for a broken ice-cream freezer.

White's word choices include similar sounds—short "o" in "bottles" and "dishmops" and "forgotten stoppers; short "a" in "raspberry," "rags," "batteries,"

"last," "magazines," and "tattered." The repetition of "broken" ties in with the "k" in "spikes," "leaky," and "crank." The downhill rush of things levels off with a single, specific item. Sheer poetry.

Getting Busy with Lists:

While writing this article, I needed to heed my own advice. I've been struggling with the main character in my current WIP. Each time I think I have her pinned down, she skitters out of reach.

I listed what's in her backpack:

Purple binder
Math textbook with one bent corner from angrily shoving it under her bed
Panda-shaped hand sanitizer
Gel pens, extras in turquoise
Granola bar
Sculpey in a baggie

Wait a minute! Sculpey? The unexpected item led me to ask my character better questions. What's in your character's backpack? What treasures does he keep in a cigar box?

Lists can help flesh out scenes. Look out the window and make a list. Items might include: sheep, fence, field, road, geese, apples, maple tree, the skeletal elements. Set in motion, the scene might read like this:

The sheep heard the crickets, and they felt so uneasy they broke a hole in the pasture fence and wandered up into the field across the road. The gander discovered the hole and led his family through, and they walked to the orchard and ate all the apples that were lying on the ground. The little maple tree in the swamp heard the cricket song and turned bright red with anxiety.

Yep, that book again. We can all benefit from emulating E.B. White's list-making mastery. Just remember: The List Is Our Friend.

Marisa Corvisiero, Founder, Corvisiero Literary

interview by Lynne Marie

Marisa Corvisiero is both the founder and Senior Agent of Corvisiero Literary. She has significant experience as a literary agent and as an attorney in New York City. She draws on her experience as a speaker, author, literary consultant and practicing attorney.

LYNNE MARIE: Can you tell me a little bit about the services you offer as a Literary Consultant?

MARISA CORVISIERO:

Agenting is very time consuming so we limit the number of clients that we represent in order to properly dedicate to our commitments to clients and try to do work on a timely basis. But because we really love to help authors, and we are in a good position to help them in a lot of different facets of publishing, we offer consulting services to authors that need assistance and that we are not able to represent. These services range from consultations to discuss and advise on story elements, marketability, platform, and mindset coaching, all the way to the other side where we provide editing services and assistance in preparing query letters, synopsis, proposals etc. On a limited basis we also advise on platform building and promotional efforts. Of course proper disclosure is always given to consulting and coaching clients to make sure that they know that agent representation is never ever contingent on these services. Everyone should be well informed on the fact that literary agents do not charge fees for any of the agenting services offered during representation. Authors that are represented by the agency do not pay any fees, as the representing agent will only earn a commission from their author if they are able to procure the author a publishing deal.



LM: What is one of the most helpful things you have learned with respect to being a literary agent from your experience as an author? As an attorney?

MC: Being a literary agent was such an organic transition for me that happened almost all by itself. I was already writing and making contacts in the industry and at some point started connecting authors and publishers when I was asked to help. It all evolved from there. Being an avid reader and writer, and knowing the market gave me invaluable knowledge and skills that help me everyday. As an attorney I also developed very active reading and analytical skills that might sometimes give me an advantage. I've been practicing law since 2000, with several legal jobs before that, and have significant contract experience. This helps in drafting contracts and negotiating deals as well. That together with my undergraduate degree in business administration and corporate experience really combine nicely and translate very well into agenting.

LM: As an agent, first and foremost you are looking for talent. What is your own personal definition of talent?

MC: Talent is mostly creativity, but it is also that certain something in the way the author tells a story that captivates, excites and educates the reader through the written word. At any level of its metamorphosis, talent is key. However, talent isn't always enough. We don't only look for creativity and skill. We also consider the author when evaluating whether we want to take the work on. It is essential that the author demonstrate their ability and willingness to dedicate the needed time to their work and their career. We consider how open the author

Marisa Corvisiero continued

is to revisions, how receptive the author is to feedback, how accessible and responsive the author is. It's also increasingly important that the author be savvy or willing to learn about the publishing industry. We even consider the author's platform and ability to convert their contacts into sales. These of course are not usually deal breakers, as the work always speaks for itself. But when an author brings all of these elements to the table, their chances of succeeding are exponentially increased. We always want to work with someone who we connect with well so that we are most efficient and productive as partners.

LM: What are other qualities that you are looking for in a prospective client?

MC: In addition to the qualities and abilities mentioned above, we strongly value authors that are approachable, cooperative, work well with others, have varied skill sets and add other talents to the mix. I personally really like to work with authors that embrace a growth mindset and love a good sense of humor.

LM: In your agency, you are the only one that represents picture books. What percentage of your clients write picture books? Which is your primary focus (middle grade, young adult, new adult and/or adult fiction/nonfiction)?

MC: I am currently the only agent representing picture books, but we have some talented agents in the making that will soon add them to their lists. I think that right now about 20% of my clients write picture books. That number can quickly shift if I make just a few acquisitions, as I don't take on a large number of projects at once. I love books and stories, so my wishlist and client list are very diversified. I tend to love picture books, middle grade and young adult stories, romance and women's fiction, thrillers, science fiction, and light fantasy or paranormal. Those are the genres I gravitate toward the most. Within each genre there are specific categories and tropes that I enjoy that further limit the projects that I take on, but I wouldn't say that I focus on any of them in particular. I just read what comes in and sign what I love and what I know I'd be great at championing.

LM: Are you willing to consider children's nonfiction? If so, geared to what age group? What exactly are you looking for in children's nonfiction?

MC: Yes, absolutely. I enjoy a lot of nonfiction and am always on the lookout for high-concept or very helpful topics that not only educate, but guide, help and inspire children. I love self-help and mindset books for kids. There are many topics that are enormously helpful and needed. And several that are not easily found. I'm currently looking for personal finance, decorating, party planning, self-help, and inspirational books. Cookbooks

for kids are popular right now too, and I really enjoy those, but they need to be a little more out-of-the-box or really conventional (helping with everyday meals). I love pictures! So those help me make decisions too.

LM: Do you accept submissions of children's chapter books? If so, why or why not? If so, please share a recent acquisition and why you took it on.

MC: I'm currently not actively acquiring chapter books. It's mostly just a personal preference.

LM: What are your top three considerations when taking on a manuscript? Why are these the most important? How do these lend to the future marketing of the book?

MC: The concept of the story, plot development and character come together for me to create a unique and special story. So the story itself is the most important thing. It needs to be unique, captivating and well-paced. Second is the voice and how the story is told. This encompasses authenticity, good character and world development, point of view, tone, etc. And third, the writing itself. A well-written manuscript is an absolute must. The manuscript needs to be edited and polished. In considering the writing I also look at vocabulary, style, sentence structure, syntax, etc.

LM: Please share one or two recent acquisitions and why you selected those projects, in particular.

MC: I recently offered representation to the author of a Christmas picture book that has an incredibly unique and interactive component that I'm excited to pitch and hopefully soon make it a must-have Christmas activity. There is also a young adult project that I just offered on, that I loved because the main character is just excellently developed. The author basically broke the mold on this one. The story is a fantasy in an alternate world that is heavy in magic and science in an exceptional high-concept plot.

LM: Have you ever participated in twitter pitch events like PBPitch and PitMad? Why, or why not?

MC: Yes! I love both contests. As a team we actively participate and even look for projects for each other. If we see something another agent might be interested in we share the link in our group chat. We make sure that we don't miss any good ones and have actually signed a few authors that we found on Twitter pitch events.

LM: Perfecting a pitch is important in gaining an agent's attention and passion. Please share a perfect pitch that grabbed you from the start, and explain why.

*Marisa Corvisiero continued***MC: CLIENT QUERY LETTER**

Hello Marisa,

I'm seeking representation for Do The Math, a new adult contemporary romance, complete at 68,000.

Kat wishes her brain had a return policy, or at least a complaint hotline. The defective organ in her skull switches numbers and letters, constantly wanders into fantasy Kat-land, and is flooded with impure thoughts about her boyfriend's nerdy best friend, Alec.

In her sophomore year at college, she's in danger of flunking out. Of all the smarties on campus, Alec is assigned as her tutor. Kat likes safe relationships, harmless fun until flavor-of-the-month gets tired of her scattered thoughts and leaves. But Alec seems to care about what's rattling between her ears. Which is so not helping those impure thoughts.

Alec has been best friends with Max since they bonded over cracked Transformers lunch boxes in first grade. While Max is known for his constant arm-candy, Alec hasn't looked at another girl since his cheating high school sweetheart. But adorable, witty Kat is more than one of Max's vapid flings, and Alec is guilty of loving his tutoring job a little too much.

Just as Kat lets go of safe and falls for Alec, he betrays her trust. Before she can forgive and dream of a future with him, she has to believe she's worth more than a pretty face and failing grade. Her decision could mean losing out on her diploma and the first guy who makes her feel she can be wanted for her brain, not in spite of it.

I have a B.S. in communications and was a journalist for years before I decided I like writing my own endings better. I'm a member of the Romance Writers of America and can be found online at meganerickson.org and [@meganerickson](https://www.instagram.com/meganerickson).

Thank you for your time and consideration. The first five pages and my synopsis are attached to this email, per your guidelines.

*Sincerely,
Megan Erickson*

The sample query letter is a letter I received from author Megan Erickson about five years ago. I can't believe it's been that long! The moment I read about Kat's brain, I was hooked. It caught my attention because it was simple, yet witty in a humorous way, which is usually difficult to accomplish. The query is short and to the point. It includes all of the information that we need about the book in an organized and interesting way. I also liked

her bio. Although a bit short, it shows that she has writing chops and is involved in the industry. The one thing about this letter that makes it stand out is that in that funny line about Kat's brain, I thought I heard the humorous voice that I later was happy to find was in fact her voice and not a fluke.

Being able to show your voice and its unique quality in a query letter no easy feat. So when we hear it, we will notice. And that's something many of us value because having a distinct voice is a wonderful tool to help the author stand out, entertain and build a fan base. There are also other elements to this story that I liked a lot. There were two well formed characters, each with their back story and internal conflicts and a clear conflict for them to overcome to be together. It fits the New Adult/romance formula perfectly.

I often use Megan's letter as a sample of what to do and how to get noticed. It's brilliant in its simplicity. After reading her story, which was everything I hoped for after reading the letter, I immediately offered her representation and we quickly received offers from Harlequin, HarperCollins and some other smaller presses. This was the beginning of a beautiful career. Megan is still a client today. We've had many deals with several top publishers in different categories within the WF/Romance genre and she is now USA Today bestselling author.

LM: What's the one thing you wish you could "teach" prospective clients, and why?

MC: I can't emphasize the importance of learning and growing enough. It's important for authors to understand that they are in the business of selling books. Regardless of the reason why they publish, their goal is to sell books. And so, they need to think like Author-Preneurs. The understanding of how things work in the industry, a continuous effort to hone their skills and get better with each book, building a platform, and embracing what I call the Write Mindset are imperative to succeeding in publishing. Being well informed and doing their research can mean the difference between a rejection and an offer. It's never too early to start learning about publishing houses and agencies, contract terms, the genre they write in, and finding ways to connect with readers. The growth and the learning never stop, and the earlier they get started the better.

(My agency hosts at least one full day Author-Preneur Workshop a year during which we teach authors the most important things they need to know to publish successfully. We invite other agencies and several publishers to take pitches do critiques and talk to authors. In 2019 we are hosting workshops in Los Angeles, CA and Red Bank, NJ)

Marisa Corvisiero continued

I also mentioned mindset. I'm a strong believer that mindset is everything and we can accomplish anything we set our minds to. The key is finding that focus on the present and quieting the noise that distracts us from our goals. By that I don't mean just getting published. I'm referring to publishing well and successfully and ultimately finding happiness and fulfillment in reaching those goals while enjoying the process. We discuss mindset in our workshops a lot. I've also recorded a tutorial with *Writer's Digest* titled *The Successful Author Mindset*, and just recorded a podcast with Dr. Melissa Koberlein of Indie-Chicks discussing how the Write Mindset leads to success in publishing (and life). I think that the episode will air in February 2019. I'll be sharing the link on social media as soon as I have it. You can follow me on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/mcorvisiero> to get the link when it's available.

LM: Is a pass from you a pass from everyone in your agency? Have you ever declined a manuscript but passed it along to an agent with a different wish list?

MC: Usually yes. A pass from any agent at Corvisiero Literary Agency is a pass from everyone, unless the agent specifically tells the author that she/he is not acquiring within that genre or category. Then it's okay to submit to someone else. If we think that it is better suited for another agent, we usually forward it directly to that agent.

LM: Please share your wish list.

MC: I seek creative stories, with well-developed plots and rich characters in unique voices.

For young adult, I am looking for Contemporary Romance, Thrillers, Adventure, Paranormal, Urban Fantasy, Science Fiction and/or any combination thereof.

For middle grade, I like very unique concepts in Fantasy, Adventure and Science Fiction.

In picture books, I love special stories that deliver a subtle, non-didactic message. Please note that illustrations are not needed.

Some topics I enjoy in particular are Christmas, time travel and space science fiction-themed stories.

In nonfiction, I enjoy out-of-the-box and high-concept spiritual, self-improvement, science and business books for all ages. Yes, that includes business books for kids. They are needed!

LM: Is there a specific subject that you would love to see

arrive into your inbox?

MC: I would love to see a realistic space travel story for MG or YA. A sort of *Lost in Space* meets *Last Days on Mars*. Heavy science that is age-appropriate is welcome. Right now fantasy and magic are huge for YA. We are all looking for unique stories told in #ownvoices. The trend today is for strong and/or quirky female leads. For the older to adult reads LGBTQ and other orientations are very popular. I however, I'm looking to the near future to fill the gap that the current trend is creating. I'm looking for books with smart well-rounded male leads that are well-balanced with the female lead or companion character. I'm looking for reads that teach partnerships and empower both sexes with a focus on their own qualities while avoiding stereotypes. I want fun, believable and unique dynamics in a high-concept plot that blows the mind or inspires readers.

ABOVE THE SLUSHPILE

Marisa Corvisiero is offering an **Above the Slush Opportunity** for CBI subscribers, under the code **1/2019 CBI – MC**, which should be in the subject line. The exclusive opportunity expires on **March 1, 2019**. For novels and longer nonfiction, she prefers a 1-2 page synopsis (double spaced) and the first 5 pages of your manuscript. Picture book submissions require the full manuscript. Your query letter should include links to your social media profiles in your email signature, and a brief description of your writing career goals.

All submissions should be uploaded to her automated database at: <http://queryme.online/MarisaCorvisiero>

No paper or faxed submissions will be reviewed. Please DO NOT query her direct agency email unless specifically requested to do so.

EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL CONFLICT THEY PLAY WELL TOGETHER

by Jane McBride

The importance of conflict is preached to writers over and over. Sometimes we hear the terms "external conflict" and "internal conflict." What is the real difference between the two? How can we use both to strengthen our stories?

Let's start with a brief look at conflict in general. Conflict consists of the seemingly insurmountable odds that keep a character from reaching his goal. It is the element in the story that make the readers breathless and compels them to keep reading. We as writers want our readers to constantly wonder, "How is the protagonist ever going to pull this off?" "This" can be anything from a baby otter who has lost his mother in a stream and is trying to find her, to a teenage girl having to save her stranded family in a snowstorm because her father has been gravely injured.

When readers pick up a book that is rich with conflict, they instinctively think, "This is going to be fun." The deeper and richer the conflict, the more fun it will be for the readers as they wonder how the main character is going to save himself, save the family, save the school, save the world. By "fun," I do not mean that the conflict will be lighthearted or humorous. The conflict should be as deep and powerful as possible. Ask yourself "What is the worst thing that could happen to the character?" When conflict is weak or absent altogether from a story, the reader thinks, "What's the point of the story?"

Conflict lives in the "but." Consider this description of a story: Twelve-year-old Tessa must protect her younger sister Heather from their abusive step-father. Tessa has remained silent about her step-father's abuse of herself, but she can't allow the step-father to do the same to ten-year-old Heather. Tessa reaches out to the girls' grandmother for the girls to come live with her during the summer while Tessa tries to figure out a more permanent solution, but the grandmother gets sick and needs to go into a nursing home, leaving that option unavailable. The best stories have both external and internal conflict. Layered together, they provide context, emotional drama, and, most importantly, a reason for the reader to keep turning the pages

Let's look at this in a Mini Blueprint format:

STEP 1: Decide upon the external conflict of your story. What is external conflict? External conflict consists of outside forces that prevent the protagonist from achieving her goal.

EXAMPLE: In the above story, the grandmother's sickness is the external conflict preventing Tessa from reaching her goal of protecting her little sister. The grandmother's illness is outside of Tessa's control. Let's take a look at another example of external conflict: Is the goal of your sixteen-year-old character Maggie to be a part of the popular group at school? What factors might prevent her from achieving this? Does she come from a family where money is tight and she is unable to buy the clothes that the popular girls wear? Does she have to come straight home after school to tend her younger brother who suffers from some developmental delays so that her single mother can work, thereby preventing Maggie from hanging out with other kids in the mall? All of these are forces outside of herself.

STEP 2: Decide upon your internal conflict.

ACTION: Make the internal conflict a result of a personality trait that prevents the main character from achieving her goal. The internal conflict is often fueled by a past experience (which happened before page 1 of the story), that affects how your character views the current situation. This inner conflict presents even greater problems for the protagonist to overcome than did the external conflict.

EXAMPLE: In the first example, what internal conflict might keep Tessa from protecting her little sister? Could it be that Tessa wants to tell their mother what is going on but is afraid that her mother won't believe her? Perhaps her mother has taken her husband's word over Tessa's in the past and Tessa has no reason to think that her mother will believe her about this much bigger prob-

Mini Blueprint continued

lem. Tessa's lack of faith in her mother and in their relationship prevents her from reaching her goal. Her fear and disillusionment hold her back from doing what she knows she must.

Can a writer use both kinds of conflict at the same time? Of course. In fact, the two conflicts are strengthened when they complement each other. Let's go back to Tessa and her goal to protect Heather. We know what the external and internal conflict are. How can they work together? Tessa is stymied by the grandmother's sickness which keeps the girls from coming to live with her for the summer (external conflict). Her lack of faith in her mother prevents her from confiding in the adult who should be protecting the girls (internal conflict). As Tessa struggles with both of these, she begins to believe that she will never be able to protect her little sister. Her sense of despair is heightened, as is the readers' empathy for her. She struggles to find another solution. In the end, Tessa confides in her grandmother (part of the external conflict). The grandmother urges Tessa to tell her mother what is going on. When Tessa does so, she is gratified to find that her mother does believe her. Tessa's mother sees that Tessa gets the necessary help.

STEP 3: Find the most satisfactory resolution to the story. Contrary to what we might think, a story, especially a full-length novel, can have more than one resolution. Until the final resolution is reached, each of these temporary resolutions should actually further the complications.

ACTION: Make the resolution integral to the story and plant the seeds for it from the beginning. Gone are the days when an author can swoop in with a wonderful happening or coincidence that will save the day. The resolution must come from qualities within the character that have always been there.

EXAMPLE: In Tessa's story, Tessa has always had the courage needed to do what is right, but it took danger to her little sister to force her to use that courage. When she does, she tells her mother about the step-father's abuse and stands up for herself and Heather. What about Maggie's story? Can she find the same kind of courage? Happily, yes. When Maggie sees the girls whom she so much wanted to impress taunt and tease her brother, she understands that she doesn't want to be a part of their group at all. She sees them for what they truly are: shallow, cruel, and narcissistic. Do you see how the two conflicts have played off each other until they become one?

WRAPPING UP:

A couple of hints in writing conflict:

- External conflict should be very clear in the first chapter.
- At least some of the internal conflict should be clear in the first two chapters. (The sooner the introduction of the conflict, the better.)
- Conflict, both external and internal, should be age-appropriate. Obviously conflict in a picture book will be different than that of a chapter book or a YA book.
- It is usually best to solve the external conflict before solving the internal one. The internal one should be more complicated and therefore more compelling.



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, editing, submitting, marketing, or self-publishing your book, go to www.writingblueprints.com

HYBRID AUTHOR DEE GARRETSON ON FINDING YOUR PATH AS A WRITER

interview by PJ McIlvaine

Dee Garretson grew up in a small town in rural Iowa, playing in the woods and writing stories. When it came time to go to college, she chose one far from home and got a prestigious degree, but her love of writing ultimately won out. Now an acclaimed hybrid author in several kidlit genres, her books have been chosen as Junior Library Guild selections, the Scholastic Book Club, and nominated for numerous state award lists. (“Hybrid” refers to authors who both self-publish and publish traditionally.) Garretson has a new young adult historical, *Allis Fair*, coming out from Swoonreads/Macmillan in January 2019, as well as another book in the *Boxcar Children* series. Now living in Ohio with her family, Garretson writes and enjoys the wild flowers in a “semi-cluttered” house. You can learn more about her passion for cats, poppies, and treasure maps at <http://dee-garretson.com>.

PJ McILVAINE: Even though you wrote stories as a kid, you didn’t set out to be a writer professionally. You got a degree in International Relations and then Landscape Horticulture. What was your impetus and/or inspiration to return to your first love?

DEE GARRETSON: When I was young, becoming an author didn’t seem to be a path open to me. I don’t know who I thought authors were, but they weren’t people like me, a girl who grew up in a small town in Iowa at a time when the career advice I got from my guidance counselor was to be a teacher or a nurse or a paralegal. I didn’t follow that advice, hence the international relations path and then the turn to landscape horticulture, but neither seemed as impossible as writing professionally. The older I got, the more I realized ordinary people could become published authors without having degrees in English or Creative Writing.

Once I started to think about it, I couldn’t walk away from the challenge.

PM: You’ve published quite a variety of books for young children, middle grade, young adult, and adult. Where do you get your ideas? How do you decide which idea goes best with what genre? Do you outline or write the story as you go?



DG: The ‘Where do you get your ideas?’ question is a hard one, because I’m not exactly sure. Sometimes I see a picture of a place or read an article (love Atlas Obscura!) and then the glimmerings of a story begin to form. The question for any story is always What if? For my YA sci-fi series, the question was: What if a young person began to learn that the history they’d been taught is not the truth at all? For the YA historical, it was: What if a sheltered girl like those characters in *Downton Abbey* was faced with a choice to put her life on the line for a greater cause or stay safe in her pampered life?

The question about matching an idea with a genre and an age group is one I struggle with. Both *All is Fair* and the first book of my sci-fi Torch World series were written as middle grade but I couldn’t find a publisher for them. The comments from editors were that the situations were too extreme/too violent/too complicated for middle grade, so I rewrote them as young adult.

I think that since my first two middle grade books were published back in 2010 and 2011, the definitions of middle grade and young adult have changed a bit. When *Wolf Storm* was published in 2011, it was listed as middle grade, though it was promoted to the 6th through 8th grade school market.

Dee Garretson continued

As the young adult market boomed and 10 and 11-year-olds began to pick up those books, middle grade seems to have been aged down a bit in recent years. I saw some recent talk on Twitter about the need for younger YA, and I'm wholeheartedly behind that!

When I first started writing, I didn't outline, but I've tried to become better at that. Unfortunately, my best ideas don't come until I'm actually writing, so I've learned to do a basic outline knowing that the story may change quite a bit as I go along.

PM: Do you have an agent? If so, was that a long process?

DG: I did have an agent for my first two books, and yes, it was a very long process to get one. Years, in fact, and not with my first book. I've had other agents since then who have negotiated contracts for me, though I've sold the books myself. I'm looking for a new agent right now, mainly because I want to make sure my future publishing goals aren't restricted by any new contract I sign in terms of noncompete clauses.

PM: You've written books for *The Boxcar Children*, an evergreen series. How did that come about?

DG: I know another writer who wrote for them and asked her about the process. I had an agent contact the publisher to tell them I was interested and then I tried out for the series by writing a chapter to see if I could match the style they were looking for.

PM: Your young adult historical *All is Fair* was inspired by the popular British show *Downton Abbey*. Since the story is set in 1918, how much research was required? Do you find that sometimes the research can take over the writing?

DG: I put in a tremendous amount of research partly because I love it. I'm

fascinated by the past and how people lived. The research does take over the writing. At a certain point I had to force myself to stop. Like other historical fiction writers, I'm obsessive about details, in terms of not only events but word usage and small details of everyday life.

PM: What comes to you first, the title, the story, or the characters? What is your writing routine like? How long does it take you to write a book from first draft to polished product?

DG: The story usually comes first and then I fit the characters to match the plot. I am definitely a plot driven writer, which is one reason my stories are thrillers/adventures/mysteries.

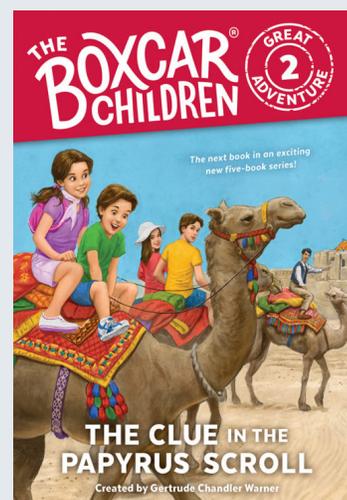
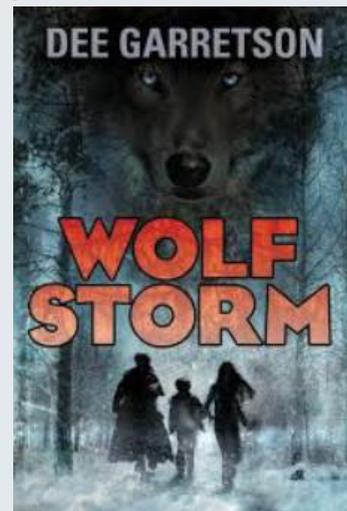
I write best in the morning, and I set myself a goal of a thousand words. I edit as I write, so that thousand words is usually more like two thousand that gets whittled down over the course of a writing session. I can't imagine how people write a whole draft and then go back and edit it later. My brain just wouldn't work that way. I have to make sure the story is working each step of the way, though of course once it's done, I go back and do much more editing after that.

My ideal amount of time to get a polished draft is six to eight months, though real life often interferes with that! *The Boxcar Children* books don't take nearly as long because they are much shorter and the characters are already established.

PM: Book trailers are becoming popular as a marketing tool, and you showcase several trailers at your website. Have you found them to be effective? Do you create them yourself?

DG: I do create my book trailers myself because in a very small way I can indulge my love of movies. Becoming a film director is another avenue I never considered growing up, and

Some of Dee's traditionally published titles:



Self-published Victorian mystery for teens and adults:



now I wish I would have known I could have pursued it, though of course that's even more of a long shot than a career in publishing. I've found my trailers effective for teachers and librarians to show their classes before I've Skyped with groups. Other than that, it's hard to get a real measure of their effectiveness. I wouldn't necessarily recommend having them made or making them yourself to other authors because it is time consuming to do them on your own and expensive to hire someone else to make them. I had fun making mine, but will have to consider the expense and time in the future before I make another one.

PM: You're a hybrid author, in that you've been traditionally published and self-published. Do you prefer one to the other and if so, why?

DG: I prefer traditional publishing particularly for the marketing support a large publisher can give, especially to get my books into schools and libraries. On the other hand, I like the freedom with smaller publishers and self-publishing to write the kind of stories I want to tell that may not fit a larger publisher. I don't multitask well, so the promotional part of self-publishing is very challenging for me. I'm trying to learn more. There are some terrific groups of self-publishers who are willing to share their marketing strategies and I'm at least reading their tips in case I pursue that more in the future.

PM: What are you working on currently? Do you juggle multiple projects?

DG: I'm writing another YA historical that's set during the Russian Revolution. Once again, I've been completely drawn into the research and having to force myself to actually write instead of getting distracted by other books I could read on the subject. Over the past three years I've juggled multiple projects but I don't want to do that in the future as much. Too much stress makes me less creative.

PM: How has the market changed since you first started? If you could go back in time, what advice would you give your younger writing self?

DG: The options have changed a lot. I'm so pleased self-publishing has grown so much and that more publishers are considering work submitted by authors as well as agents.

If I could go back in time, I'd tell my younger self not to get bogged down on trying to get my first book published. I spent four years on that and it never happened. You need to keep querying agents and publishers and

not get discouraged by rejection, but you also need to be writing new material all the time. Not only may your first book not sell, but writing new material will improve your skills. Writing is a craft that takes a tremendous amount of practice.

PM: If you could only write one more book, what would it be?

DG: Wow, what an interesting question! I keep a list of ideas, which right now has about ten possibilities. If I could choose one, without thinking about marketability or whether or not it would be picked up by a publisher, I'd write an idea I have for an epic fantasy. I am a huge *Lord of the Rings* fan and the challenge to create my own fantasy world has been a goal for a long time. Plus, I could have elves in it! Who doesn't love an elf?

If you think hybrid publishing is in your future, check out [Self-Publishing Blueprint](https://writingblueprints.com) from [WritingBlueprints.com](https://writingblueprints.com), which takes you step-by-step through the entire process of publishing and marketing your book.

10 FACTORS TO CONSIDER IN HIRING A FREELANCE EDITOR

by Jane McBride

Many, if not most, writers have shown their work to a critique partner, a beta reader, a trusted friend, someone whom they trust to provide constructive feedback. Soliciting feedback is always a good idea. A number of writers are taking this a step further and electing to work with a freelance book editor to take them to the next rung in their writing,

Could hiring a freelance editor be right for you? Let's examine some of the factors involved:

First, examine your motives in hiring an editor. Are you hiring an editor to take your writing to the next level? You want to improve your skill, plumb the depths of your talent, thereby reaching and touching more readers with your words. That's a great motive. Or are you hiring an editor because you don't want to do the hard work yourself? That's a less-than-great motive. Do you feel like you're missing the mark in your writing but don't know what to do to hit it? Are you frustrated with contests scores that say the same thing over and over? For example, "Your characters come across as flat and stereotyped?" Or, "Your plot is episodic." (I've received both of these criticisms, multiple times.)

Second, get recommendations. Seek out members of your writing community, both those you see on a regular basis and those with whom you have an online relationship. Word-of-mouth can be the best recommendation. Talk with members of your writers' or critique group. Be frank in what you're looking for and ask for the same in terms of answers. Ask those who have worked with a freelance editor what their experiences have been and if they were happy with the results.

Third, interview several editors. Let's face it, not every editor will be a good fit for you, nor you a good fit for every editor. To know what kind of editor you need, ask yourself questions. Do you respond to honest feedback delivered in a matter-of-fact tone? Or do you

prefer the same honest feedback delivered in a quiet, understanding voice? My husband prefers the first, in all areas of life. I prefer the second, both in giving and receiving feedback. Neither one of us is wrong; we are just different and, thus, so are our needs.

Fourth, give the prospective editors samples of your work. A sample doesn't need to be long. Five or ten pages will do. Compare their notes to what you think the pages need. Did the editors try to rewrite your work in their own style and their own voice? Or did they take your words and make them shine a little bit brighter? Do they limit their work to only small grammatical errors or do they delve into bigger problems like weak characterization or poor plotting? Grammar is an easy fix; major story problems, not so much. Is the editor willing to work with you to develop your distinct voice or does he want to turn you into something you are not?

Fifth, share your writing goals with the possible editors. Tell them where you want to be in a year, five years, ten years down the road with your writing. Tell them if you want to switch genres. Tell them if you want to hire an agent. Tell them about your rejections and why you think your work was rejected. Tell them if your present income doesn't meet your expectations/needs and what you want to make in the future. Tell them if you want to leave traditional publishing and start self-publishing. Tell them if you have self-published in the past and now want to publish traditionally. Be frank. Ask them how they would combine your goals in with their editing of your work.

Sixth, be honest about what you see as your writing strengths and weaknesses. Are you as yet unpublished and have entered contests, only to receive consistently low scores in plotting? Discuss this with potential editors. Or have you endured criticism because your manuscripts lack emotional depth? What if you're

10 Factors continued

published, but your career has failed to take off and you remain an “also-ran” in the publishing game? You know you are doing something right, but you still aren’t doing it well enough to entice readers to pick up your book.

Seventh, in interviewing editors, be aware of warning lights. Most freelance editors are aboveboard and are genuinely eager to help writers to take their work the next step. However, a few editors (like a few agents) can be unscrupulous and are out to take your money without providing much, if anything, in return. This is where your obtaining recommendations from other writers comes in handy. A warning light goes on when a freelance editor is paid to help you make your book better and then, wearing another hat, offers to represent you (as an agent) or to acquire your book (as a traditional editor). Be smart. Be savvy. If something feels off to you, it probably is.

Eighth, ask about turn-around. How long will it take to get back to you on three chapters? How long will it take for an entire manuscript? For those who are published, deadlines can loom with irritating persistence. What if your New York editor wants your revisions and final draft on her desk in a week? Can your freelance editor give you a speedy turn-around in order for you to meet that deadline? What if you are indie-published? Sure, you can set your own deadlines, but you have other obligations in your life around which you have to juggle your writing. You need to have confidence the editor has the ability to work on your manuscript in a timely manner.

Ninth, figure out scheduling. Can the two of you mesh your schedules? Few writers have the luxury of writing full-time. We have families, day jobs, church work, elderly parents to care for. Editors will likely have the same commitments. Can you fit your schedules to come up with quality time?

Tenth, check your wallet. Hiring a freelance editor can be expensive. This really is a matter of you-get-what-you-pay-for. If you’re going to hire an editor, I recommend hiring the best one you can afford. Perhaps you can take shortcuts on other expenses. Be honest with yourself about your finances. Talk with your spouse and family about what you can realistically spend. Know what you’re willing and able to do without to afford hiring a quality editor.

And finally, know when it’s time for you to move on. Many writers go through several agents. The same can be true for freelance editors. Do your best to part on good terms. The writing community is a tight-knit one. Chances are you and your editor may cross paths again, whether at a conference or at a workshop or some other venue. Perhaps the freelance editor you worked with five years ago has switched hats and is now an agent. What happens if your parting was anything but amicable? Burning bridges with a freelance editor can be as foolish as burning bridges with an editor at a traditional publishing house or an agent.

How to Get the Most Out of Your Freelance Editor's Time:

Always send your best work to a freelance editor. Pass it by your critique group or beta readers, let it sit, then revise again before showing it to an editor. You want the editor's time to be spent doing the deep edits that you can't do yourself, or that are beyond your own current abilities. If a freelance editor is spending all her time on beginning-level revisions (such as correcting point-of-view problems, weak verbs, or stereotypical characters), you'll be spending money on areas you could have fixed yourself.

Need help editing your work to the best of your ability? Check out **Manuscript Magic** from WritingBlueprints.com, which guides you step-by-step in editing fiction and narrative nonfiction on the story, scene and sentence levels.

The **411** on Preparing For and Getting the Most From Conferences

by Kimberly M. Hutmacher

Have you been thinking about attending a conference or maybe you've already registered for one that is coming up soon? Are you wondering how you might prepare in order to get the very most you can from the experience? Let's dive into the 411 on conferences.

Types of Conferences

There are a few different kinds of conferences, and much can be gained from both. There are conferences that are specific to writers. Writing conferences provide an opportunity to connect with other writers, editors and agents. There are usually classes/workshops covering both the craft and business sides of writing.

Writers can also benefit from attending industry conferences. These conferences cater to schools and libraries. Examples of industry conferences include the American Library Association (ALA), Book Expo America, and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). There are also regional industry conferences. I live in Illinois, and I've attended several Illinois Reading Council (IRC) conferences. Industry conferences provide an opportunity for writers to connect with schools and libraries.

Volunteering

My number one piece of advice when preparing to attend a conference is to volunteer to help. The more you're involved in the planning and follow through of a conference, the more opportunities you will have to network. Volunteering has given me the opportunity to go to dinner the night before with editors. I've been able to ask questions and find out what they are looking for. Sharing dinner with an editor is not an invitation to shove a stack of manuscripts in their faces and request feedback. However, I have had editors ask what I've been working on. I've been able to share a few brief summaries of some works-in-progress, and this has led to a few invitations to submit work later. If you're attending an industry conference and you've published a book, you might consider submitting a proposal to teach a class at the conference. Teaching provides an opportunity to specifically connect your book to classrooms and libraries. It can also be a bit of an audition and/or good practice for future school vis-

its. My state SCBWI chapter rents booth space at some of our regional conferences each year. They decorate the booth with books written by Illinois authors and pass out packets with school visit information for all of our authors and illustrators. They also allow local authors and illustrators to have signing time at the booth. If teaching a conference class isn't in your comfort zone, consider volunteering at the SCBWI booth and networking that way. One last thing for industry conferences—if you have a published book, be sure to ask if your publisher will have a booth in the exhibit hall. If so, ask them about arranging a signing time for you.

What To Bring

Besides getting involved and volunteering, you might be wondering what to pack. Here's my go-to checklist:

- Comfortable, but professional clothing and shoes. Bring clothes that can be layered, so that you can adjust. You never know. Sometimes it's super chilly, and sometimes, it feels like the furnace is on overdrive. The floors in conference centers are often concrete. I can't stress how much better of a day you'll have if you wear comfy shoes.
- An extra suitcase to bring home all the new books you'll buy. Trust me on this one.
- A list of cell phone numbers of friends/colleagues you plan to meet up with while you're at the conference. Be sure to post on social media ahead of time to inquire about who is planning to attend.
- A friend. If you can attend with a writing buddy, it can increase your comfort level and decrease anxiety.
- A few copies of your latest published book and/or a few copies of your work-in-progress. You never know who might be interested in taking a peek.
- You will most likely want to take lots of notes. Wi-fi is usually available, but also bring a notebook and pens just in case of any technical glitches.

The 411 continued

- Snacks. The food available in the conference halls can be expensive and there can also be very long lines. Come prepared with a water bottle and your own stash of healthy choices.
- Generosity. From the very beginning of my writing journey, I heard about and experienced the generosity of children's writers. Children's writers support each other. Attend signings and purchase books from other writers. Help your fellow writers to network. Introduce them to other people in the industry that you know. When I work the SCBWI booth at IRC, I brag on the school visits that my fellow authors provide.
- Your inner extrovert. I'm a natural introvert, but when I attend conferences, I make every effort to bring out my inner extrovert. I force myself to introduce myself to other writers that I admire. I try to do some homework ahead of time. I read books edited by conference editors. I let them know about books I really enjoyed. These conversations may seem awkward at first, but you will get more comfortable, and you might just find yourself having a really good time.

Conference Critiques

If you're attending a writing conference, you may get the opportunity to receive a critique by an industry professional. Sometimes the critiques are simply handed to attendees without any opportunity to meet one-on-one. Other times, you are able to actually meet in-person with the person who critiques your manuscript. If you are able to meet one-on-one, be sure to listen carefully to the comments and suggestions being made. Try not to take the critique personally. Do not get defensive. You may not agree with everything that is being said, but this person is a professional who took the time to carefully read your manuscript and offer suggestions for improvement. Be respectful. After they have gone over the critique with you, you will probably be given the opportunity to ask questions. Be sure to ask. You want to leave the critique session fully understanding all comments and suggestions. At the end of the meeting, if you are meeting with an editor or agent, you can politely ask if they would be interested in seeing a revision. You can also ask if they might be interested in seeing some of your other work. Remember that critiques are about the manuscript—not about you personally. The entire purpose is to learn how to make your story stronger. Try to go in with an open mind and enjoy the opportunity.

Following Up

The conference is over. Now what? I often make a few

new friends when I attend these things. When I get back home, I like to take a moment to shoot them an email letting them know that it was nice to meet them. If I attended one of their sessions, I let them know how much I enjoyed it. If I like their books, I let them know it. I also try to connect with them via social media. If an editor or agent has requested to see other work, I'll send it out with a note reminding them of the conference and the invitation. The biggest benefit of attending conferences is taking those conference connections and turning them into long term professional relationships/friendships.

You can find conferences by simply Googling keywords for type of writing and state. Conferences are also listed in the *Children's Writer's & Illustrator's Market* from Writer's Digest Books. Here are a few highlights:

SCBWI Conferences

<https://www.scbwi.org/annual-conferences/>

Pikes Peak Writers Conference

<https://pikespeakwriters.com/>

Wesleyan Writers Conference

<https://www.wesleyan.edu/writing/conference/>

Write-to-Publish Conference

<http://www.writetopublish.com/>

Writing & Illustrating for Young Readers Conference

<https://www.wifyr.com/>

NCTE Conference

<http://convention.ncte.org/>

ALA Conference

<https://2018.alaannual.org/>

BookExpo America

<http://www.bookexpoamerica.com/>

Note: When perusing conference listings, you'll also find links for writing workshops, which are slightly different. Conferences are great if you're new to writing or want the opportunity to meet and network with a range of authors, editors and agents, or if you want an overview of what's being published and how it's being used in schools (in the case of industry conferences such as NCTE or BookExpo). You'll also get a range of lectures on different topics. Workshops are generally longer and more expensive than conferences, and offer working sessions where writers are revising their work and getting feedback from faculty members as well as other workshop attendees. Workshops are useful if you have a manuscript that you want to revise, or if you want to go deep into learning about a narrow topic or genre.