

TEACHER TO TEACHER

Advice for Educators Who Want to
Write for Children
From Educators Who Already Do!



FROM THE EDITORS OF
CHILDREN'S BOOK INSIDER

Teacher to Teacher: Advice for Educators Who Want to Write for Children — From Educators Who Already Do!

From the creators of:

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Children's Book Insider, LLC
901 Columbia Rd
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Table of Contents

Foreword: Teachers Rule! by Laura Backes.....	2
How I First Got Published, and What I've Learned Over Time by Catherine DePino, Ed.D.....	3
Teaching Know-How Equals Writing Know-How.....	5
How to Use the Classroom as Your Writing Laboratory.....	19
Insider Advice on Developing Your Writing Style.....	28
Insider Advice for Your Writing Journey.....	43
Teacher Insiders Share Their Own Writing Journeys.....	51
Resources for Teachers Who Want to Write.....	69
Teacher to Teacher Contributors.....	72

Teachers Rule!

by Laura Backes

Publisher, *Children's Book Insider*

When we first conceived of this ebook, we asked for help from our Insiders. Insiders are special people—they subscribe to *Children's Book Insider*, *The Children's Writing Monthly*; they devour the continuous stream of information found on CBI's membership site, “The Children's Writing Knowledge Base”; they trade tips and advice on CBI's Facebook groups; and they offer critiques and encouragement on our Critique Exchange. But most of all, Insiders are a supportive, generous community of people drawn together by their love of children's books and their desire to write.

What we asked for, specifically, was advice from our Teacher Insiders, those members who are both educators and writers. And we anticipated a handful of responses that we'd have to flesh out with articles and tips of our own.

Boy, were we surprised.

Instead of a dozen replies, we got 87. And these weren't just two or three sentence comments—some when on for pages. But regardless of length, each response was invaluable because it came from the heart. We learned that Teacher Insiders are passionate about both their jobs: teaching and writing. They love their students. They are committed to bringing the best literature possible to children. And they are excited about sharing what they've learned with you.

We are so proud of our Teacher Insiders. Most came to us as complete writer newbies (just like you) and embarked on a new journey toward becoming a children's book author. Through the pages of *Children's Book Insider*, the articles, videos and podcasts on the Knowledge Base; and our webinars, courses and other tools, we've helped them learn to perfect their craft, navigate the world of publishing, and see their work in print. And we continue to be inspired by those Teacher Insiders who are still working toward their first published book, but have embraced the process with joy and enthusiasm. You can start following their example today.

We know you'll want to refer to the advice in this book again and again. And remember—you, as a teacher yourself, are uniquely qualified to write for children. But you don't have to walk this path alone. A community of Teacher Insiders is waiting to welcome you.

Enjoy!

How I First Got Published, and What I've Learned Over Time

by Catherine DePino, Ed.D.

For many years I worked as an English teacher and department head in an urban school district. Teaching high school proved exciting and exhilarating; I often felt that the students taught me as much as I taught them. They taught me how to question, how to marvel at the universe, and how to laugh. We were true partners in the learning process.

Days in the classroom spilled over with stimulating class discussions and debates, but I still found it hard to silence that little voice calling out to me to write. From early childhood I'd dreamed of writing. Time was at a premium because of teaching full time, raising three daughters, and taking graduate courses. However, I was determined to be a writer one day. I always believed it would happen, even though I knew it wouldn't be easy to break in with all the competition. Holding on to that dream strengthened my resolve to start writing in small doses to build up my credits so that when a book idea surfaced, I'd have something of substance to add to my bio.

Our local paper, the *Bucks County Courier Times* featured a Guest Opinion column that showcased local writers. Although the paper didn't pay writers, subscribers loved the column and often wrote to weigh in on the mostly controversial articles published. As a bonus, the *Courier* posted the author's picture and byline.

"I May be Over the Hill but I'm Not Dead Yet," my first column, drew a lot of comments, primarily from middle-aged and older women who found a new zest for life as they grew older and wanted to shout it out. Years later, last year, in fact, I published a book based on that premise called *Fire Up Your Life in Retirement: 101 Ways for Women to Reinvent Themselves*.

One year when I was on leave from my job and taking courses, I decided to branch out and write some articles, hopefully for pay. The *Christian Science Monitor* had a section that published short slice-of-life articles. When I first started writing, I found myself drawn to creative non-fiction, so I penned an article called "The Face in the Mirror," about each of my daughters spending time in front of the mirror and gaining strength and confidence, not only in their appearance, but in the women they were to become. After that, I wrote other short articles for national magazines, gradually building up my credits, so that when the day came to write a book, I could call myself a writer. Hopefully a publisher would see me that way too.

After retiring from my teaching job, I enjoyed working as a student teaching supervisor at a local university. Throughout all my teaching years and beyond, my desire to become a published writer persisted and grew stronger. Did I dare disturb the universe and come up with a book idea that a publisher would like enough to publish?

Should I write a novel, a children's book, or something that was more familiar to me because of my years spent in the classroom? I'd always enjoyed writing non-fiction, so I decided to write a proposal for a grammar book that teachers could use in the classroom. I loved exercise (which I finally found time to do in retirement), so I'd call the book *Grammar Workout*. I even envisioned the cover depicting an athlete pumping iron. With a sense of anticipation, I sent my idea to

J. Weston Walch, an educational publisher.

After a couple of weeks, the editor wrote back to tell me that although they liked my idea, they didn't need a grammar book for teachers to use in the classroom as they'd just published one. Would I be interested in writing a study guide for the works of Cynthia Voigt, a popular children's author? I could hardly contain my excitement as I told my husband and daughters that a national company wanted to publish my book. I found reading and writing about Voigt's books stimulating and rewarding, so much so that I didn't want to leave my keyboard to eat or pay the bills. When the book came out and I held it in my hands for the first time, I knew I was an author.

A year or so later, I sent a proposal for the grammar book to the same company and they accepted it. After that, I began to publish at least a book a year for many different companies. Although non-fiction and educational books gave me my start, I also loved writing children's books. Thanks to my daughter, a school counselor, who suggested that I write about bullying, my interest in the topic grew and led me to write *Cheese Breath and Stinky Feet: How to Deal with Bullies*, a fiction book for children aged 6-12. After that I published another fiction book for girls about bullying (*In Your Face, Pizza Face!*) and two more books on the topic for teachers and parents.

On the practical side, I found that educational companies do not pay as well as mainstream publishers, but writing these books can offer writers many rewards in helping students, parents, and teachers learn how to remediate problems such as bullying that many kids face today.

I also wrote two spiritual books for a religious company. These books were marketed to teenage boys and girls and involved kids writing letters to God and God writing back via the Internet. After one of the books went out of print, the company gave me back my rights and I self-published one of the books in ebook form.

Lately, I've decided to branch out and write in other genres. My first venture was the retirement book for women. I'm currently working on a book about mindfulness for kids and a book called *Help Yourself! Magical Meditations for the Mind, Body, and Spirit*. Every day I enjoy sitting down to write (that's the only hard part, you know, getting started). Once you get started, you're on your way.

Do you have a book in you? Are you ready to start your writing career? Don't wait. Whether you publish traditionally or self-publish, if you persevere, you'll be able to call yourself an author.

Here's what I've learned that helped me. Don't say you don't have time to write. Make the time. Write on weekends, early in the morning or late at night, but glue yourself to that chair, face your computer head-on—and write. If it doesn't come out the way you want it, you can fix it later. Getting started is the hard part.

Don't worry too much about rejection. If your work is your best, and you believe you have something important to say, an editor will eventually publish it. Learn everything you can about the writing process, tell a good story, whether it's fiction or non-fiction, and you'll see your name in print, either as a traditional or self-published author.

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Teacher Insiders draw upon their expertise every time they sit down to write.

As a teacher, you understand the ways in which children communicate. Use that knowledge to your advantage when giving your characters a voice. Capturing a kid's voice is a hard skill to master as a writer, but teachers have the distinct advantage of interacting with kids on a daily basis. Listen to what they say and how they say it!

Casey Anthony

Draw upon the stories of your students and the remarkable ah-ha moments in your classrooms. It's the days when things awry and chaos reigns that captures interests of readers. Capture characterization, life, and settings by painting pictures with figurative language. Finally, think about what makes your students enthralled with specific books, and capitalize on your vast knowledge bank of learning strategies. What would you have done differently with the text? What turn or twist would you have added? What alternative endings would have made the book more engaging? Then, sit down and get your story on paper...this makes your dream of writing a book and getting published become real.

Beth Hammett

As a teacher, you can see needs for a curriculum that may not be covered by texts or books at school. I wrote about a local fair in my hometown, Harrow, almost 20 years ago. I made it a predictable pattern book and it has sold well locally.

I saw another need for more local history and wrote a novel that brought in pioneer times, an early school and the underground railway which often ended on the banks of the Detroit River. The local museums liked it and sold it. I did power point presentation on the background history and that worked well, too.

I have found my niche in historical fiction and just finished a novel. It is being published by a local publisher.

Jane Buttery

In my teaching career, I followed the approach that children learn best through story. A large percentage of my time in the classroom was spent on creating meaningful stories for and with children on a huge variety of subjects. After I had finished teaching, I found that this experience translated easily into the world of writing. My most recent work has been the creation of a series of stories about Australia's Great Barrier Reef. This required an enormous amount of research on my part as I wanted the world and its creatures to be authentic. Add to this a sense of fun and a young mermaid detective and Mirabella the Mermaid Detective series was born.

Margo Gibbs



I've read dozens of children's novels, mostly at the middle grade to tween age levels. I immediately focus on dialogue. For me dialogue makes the story believable or not. Children don't talk in long compound and/or complex sentences. They write that way, but don't talk that way. And in their normal conversation, they don't string together more than a couple of sentences at a time if at all. Also, in their normal conversations, children don't use overly descriptive or colorful language when describing things. They don't use many vivid adjectives.

Me: What did you do this weekend?

Student: I rode my four-wheeler.

Me: Where did you go riding?

Student: In the woods on our property.

Me: What happened?

Student: I rode through mud puddles and got all dirty.

So pay attention to the way kids talk. Your story's dialogue will sound more true to life.

In a middle grade novel I'm working on, I used a typical math story problem that eventually leads to an important clash between my protagonist and his antagonist bully. Think about the things you teach, the topics you cover, and activities you do with your students and try to incorporate those into your story (in a meaningful way!)

Bob Pierce

Teacher Insiders have a head start.

*"It's a very ancient saying,
But a true and honest thought,
That if you become a teacher,
By your pupils you'll be taught."*

~ Anna, in *The King and I*

I've been a teacher for more than 30 years and if there's one quotation I can relate to, it's the one above. If you're a teacher and you want to become a children's writer, then, believe me, you have a head start.

My subject is English, and as a second subject I teach Personal and Social Education. Both of these have helped enormously in my writing for children and young people.

Let me tell you how. Oh, by the way, don't worry if you're not an English teacher! Many years ago education in Scotland (where I live) was influenced by a government report which stressed that, regardless of their subject or specialism, every teacher is a teacher of English. That's very true. We all have a part to play in the linguistic, aesthetic and personal development of our students.

So, let's consider why teaching is an ideal breeding ground for children's writers. Language deals with four competencies: Reading, writing, talking and listening.

All four are grist to the writer's mill and as teachers we're fortunate that these are the tools of our trade.

READING

Successful writers are always exhorting aspiring writers to read, read and read till it's coming out their ears. As teachers in schools, we have access to the children's classics, as well as the best of the latest crop. If you're an English teacher, you can pick up these books and read to your heart's content. If your subject isn't English, you can have a word with the Head of Department and/or the school librarian. I'm sure they'll be only too happy to help.

So read, read and read more! Get to grips with the techniques of children's writing and the very latest in what's influencing and entertaining the younger generation. Get to know their hopes and fears, the slang they use, the idioms that define their identity. If this was not such an important point, why would it be stressed time and again by successful writers?

WRITING

One of the most frequently asked questions from aspiring writers is how to get ideas for stories. As a teacher you couldn't be better placed for this. There's an old saying, 'There's nothing new under the sun.' Stories have been reworked by different generations for centuries. Even Shakespeare's plots weren't

original. (Honestly! If you doubt this, check it out!) You'll come across an endless source of ideas for stories throughout the school, but you must be aware and look for them.

Take the books you read to your students. Those stories could be reworked or could be used as springboards for new ideas. The Hunger Games series is a good example. It's an international, bestselling series for young people, yet the plot had already been used several times over by other authors! In English, History, Modern Studies, Social Education, Religious Education, Drama and other school subjects there are so many stories being told or written by teachers and students. No one is suggesting plagiarism, but make the most of them!

Teachers have to write reports on their students' progress, keep records, make lesson plans and communicate with parents, colleagues, and other professionals. I would encourage teachers to embrace this opportunity because it gives practice in fluent writing.

Yes, that's the much-maligned task of actually putting words on the page! Many aspiring writers whom I've spoken to say they have great ideas for stories, but the problems start when they're confronted by a blank page. They simply don't have the facility of verbal expression. As teachers we have no shortage of opportunities for developing these skills.

TALKING AND LISTENING

How can these help? Well, what better way can you think of for stimulating the imagination? Over the years I've developed a reputation as a storyteller. It's an activity I love. Many of my stories have originated from listening to stories and contributions from students and developing new stories from there. Students love collaborating in groups to produce oral, written or dramatized stories. Again, these can stimulate the teacher's imagination so that (s)he can take the process a stage further and produce new stories.

INSPIRATION

As well as helping us with the four competencies in English, teaching can be downright inspiring. By listening to our students and colleagues and empathizing with their life-stories and challenges, we can be inspired to take our writing to new heights.

Your students may even be instrumental in getting you started, as mine were.

Let me tell you about it. In my Personal and Social Education classes I was working with a colleague to produce a new course in confidence-building. As such, I was trialling new ideas in various lessons. I don't know how a certain rumor started, but one day some students asked me if I was writing a book on "that confidence stuff".

Well, no, I wasn't writing a book, I was simply producing new course material. But I answered with

an emphatic, "Yes, I am".

Here's the important point: When the students asked the question, I had no intention of ever writing a book. But when I replied that I was, I wasn't telling a lie. Instead, I had been hit by a huge "Aha!" moment. I'd researched the topic of student confidence and was preparing class lessons, why, then, couldn't I write them up in the form of a book for young people?

So I did. (Incidentally, the book was called *Smart Thinking* and it was published in many countries throughout the world. At the time of writing this, I'm in the process of producing an updated version, only I'm going down the new route of publishing on Kindle and CreateSpace.)

The success of this book inspired me to write more books on topics such as *Study Skills* and *Parenting*. The knowledge gained for my writing came mainly from my experiences in teaching. There's no doubt that your teaching experiences will have equipped you with your own particular topics to write about.

I can't over-stress how much teachers-aspiring-to-be-writers can gain from their students. Here's another example. In the confidence course mentioned above, I included many anecdotes and stories about life's challenges. The feedback from students was very positive. "We love your stories!"

Wait a minute! So they love my stories! Could I possibly have it in me to write fiction?

I gave it a go. And, to cut a long story short, the answer was yes. I've had one novel for young people published by a very respectable publisher in London, and I'm now working on two more novels (although I've not yet decided which method of publication to pursue. The Kindle/CreateSpace model is very, very seductive!)

So . . . Those are my thoughts on how and why teachers are best placed to become writers for children. We have so many opportunities staring us in the face, if we'd only open our eyes to them. If you're a teacher and you're thinking about taking up writing, I would urge you to go for it. I did and it changed my life.

You'll have your own interests and areas of expertise, your own life experiences and the experiences gleaned from the particular educational system you work in. Your situation is different from mine.

But that's the beauty of it, isn't it? There's an infinite variety of topics, ideas and inspirational moments just begging to be turned into great stories for children. Good luck with your writing - and cheers from Sunny Scotland!

Frank McGinty

Teachers can be some of the BEST children's writers because we have insight into children's minds, books, and curriculum. We know what books are needed, what kids enjoy, and what makes kids laugh! Teachers read books every day, which is one of the necessities of a great children's writer.

I fell in love with picture books as a kindergarten teacher, reading them every day. I'd scour the Scholastic Book Club brochures to see what I could order before my students! Now I'm trying to get one published.

Being a teacher gives you a foot into writing because you can also write for the educational market. Educational publishers like having teachers write lesson plans, curriculum, guided reading books, assessments, and scripts for anything from apps to nonfiction trade books. I know, because I do freelance writing for educational publishers.

Teachers can test story ideas on their students and see if they work or get a giggle. And seeing a teacher write is the best example you can give your students for their own writing.

Tina Cho

I started writing science plays because my students could not read the textbook. Textbooks are quite hard to read, so perhaps, look around and see where you can fill the void with readers theatre, trade books on much needed topics, and nonfiction in general. It is much easier to get published in nonfiction and there is a great demand. Ask your school librarian which books he/she would like and start doing research and go from there. Read lots of library books to see what's out there. Go to conferences and workshops. Join a writing critique group. Good luck!

Sharon Solomon



Write stories about books that you would like to use in your classroom as lessons or to read to your students, but are not out there. I have looked for books that might meet the criteria of my lesson, but then I have to adjust it by adding material or use it as a basis for another story. That means I write the story myself and it becomes a big project.

Publishers are always asking for stories that are needed but not out there for whatever reason. You need to establish how this fits a gap and also need to write the story well.

Michelle Dragalin

Teacher Insiders make the most of their writing opportunities.

Teaching is so exhausting, and many times we come home mentally and emotionally spent. But we also have an amazing opportunity that people in other professions do NOT have. We have constant exposure to amazing literature and a close-up experience with our potential audience.

I keep up with the latest picture books and novels because I want to share them with my class. They serve as mentor texts for my students and for my own writing. I'm constantly feeding my writing with children's literature that I read.

Attending teaching conferences (especially statewide and national reading conferences) can give you professional development, but it can also put you in front of the best writers for children. Published children's writers attend and speak at these conferences. It's a great way to learn about their writing process and their books.

As a teacher who reads a lot, you know what areas where the literature is lacking. It might be books that appeal to your reluctant reader or it might be a picture book biography about that person that is in your curriculum. This firsthand knowledge can give you a leg up when you are trying to figure out what to write about. I doubt my idea well will ever run dry as long as I'm in the classroom. There are so many books still needed, and I plan to write some of them. I hope you will too!

Tips for Teaching and Writing:

1) Get up early. Most of us are brain-dead by the end of the day, so getting up early means that your writing gets your fresh brain! Sometimes it's better to write groggy too--before the inner critic wakes up. I get up to write at 5:00am and write for one hour before getting ready for school. I never thought an hour would make much difference. But it does! An hour adds up over time.

2) Write on the go. I always carry a writing bag with me. Usually I carry pages needing revision or research that I can do in 10 or 15 minutes.

3) Write with your students. Share your own writing with your students. This will give you motivation to get something done. And when you are actively writing, you will become a better writing teacher too. You'll realize what really works for real writers and what doesn't, and you can help students develop good writing habits.

Marcie Flinchum Atkins

Every teacher has their own unique philosophy of teaching and learning, based on their own educational and life experiences. As an art teacher, I firmly believe that the act of creating something is not about the finished product. The learning and the engagement and the satisfaction comes from the process of doing. The best advice I give my students is the same advice I would give to any teacher willing to make the jump from teacher to children's book author.

For students:

You have permission to fail. You have permission to create the most horrible, worst, ugliest painting anyone has ever seen. But paint it. Go for it. You have nothing to lose because you have permission for it to be awful. The only thing I ask is that you give it a go.

For teachers:

You have permission to fail. You have permission to write the most horrible, worst, terrible book anyone has ever read. But write it. Go for it. You have nothing to lose.

I will be honest. My first book was terrible. The story concept was good, but the execution was off.

How many times do we tell our students to keep going? Don't give up. Math is hard, but with a little perseverance you can get it. Study a little harder and you can get a better grade on your history test. I decided to put down this first story and start another. The wonderful thing about writing this time is that I was starting fresh. I had already learned from my mistakes writing the first story. I wasn't trying as hard, and I was writing from my own life experience.

And here's the most important thing: I kept writing and I found other people who were writing.

Writing can be such a solitary endeavor, so I joined a critique group. I needed to find people who were in my proverbial boat. I would recommend a critique group to any writer who is first starting out. Become a regular member. Learn everything you can from them. This is the best thing that I could have done for myself.

I read the stories to my students. This is a great thing to do. You know why? They love you. You will get all sorts of positive feedback! They will think it is the most wonderful story they have ever heard. But listen to their comments and questions. Underneath all of the gushing, there will be real honest feedback from the very people who will be reading and enjoying these stories.

So. Don't be afraid to write a terrible book. I give you permission for it to be the most awful horrible, ridiculous book anyone has ever written.

And here's something to think about. Just like the student who has permission in my class to paint an awful picture - it won't be awful. Because you gave it a shot and took off the pressure of getting started, you'll probably have something that's not half bad.

Alison Potoma

Just do it! Teachers have a leg up in the writing world. Grammar is a necessity when writing. We engage in meeting multiple personalities year after year. Take note and save them for future characters. Begin with a great critique group that can motivate you. In the end, it's all worth it. Just write.

Maria Ashworth

Whatever your area of expertise in the field of education, you can draw on that as you write. Science and history teachers will have their finger on the pulse of curriculum requirements as they write non-fiction picture or middle grade books. Preschool and early grade teachers can use their powers of observation, translating the hilarious situations that arise in the classroom into quirky stories.

Teachers rarely think of themselves as salespeople. However, they ARE selling something: EDUCATION. If you can succeed in helping your students to learn something, you can succeed in marketing and promoting your book.

As a teacher, you are already adept at speaking, reading and writing. This is a big plus! There are many online and in-person classes and workshops that will help teach you how to translate your facility for the language into the ability to write winning stories for children.

I wish you all the best of good luck in your adventure. If you have a love for children and a million (or one) great ideas for a story, hop on the writing-for-children train, and welcome aboard!

Vivian Kirkfield

I am a recently retired, seventh grade Spanish teacher. I also substitute taught for K-12 students, for several years. I have taught for over 20 years. I definitely feel that teaching skills can easily transfer over into that of a children's author. I have read to my students often, bilingual children's books in Spanish and English, in order to enhance literacy in both languages. I did this by reading in different voices and using different expressions. Your daily experiences can be utilized into writings for children. Sometimes I even sang to them, using silly memory tricks to help them learn material easier.

Sharon Blumberg

Teacher Insiders follow the same advice they give their students.

Here are my best tips:

1) You've chewed over the information, lived it and breathed it for a few weeks, and studied it from every angle in order to bring it down to your students' level. Now write about it!!

I've literally written children's books based on deep philosophical lessons that I've taught, because when you strip a concept to its core, even a child can get it.

To illustrate: I taught a unit on being able to utilize the resources on planet Earth for a Godly purpose. I demonstrated to my students how planet Earth is the most conducive place to be able to do good deeds. Based on that, I created a children's book called *If I Went to the Moon*.

2) Look for niche markets. That's right. Start off looking for the small publishers that you will have a higher chance of scoring a contract with, because a niche market narrows down what you will write about and how likely it is to be accepted. For example, I combined my experience teaching Judaica Studies with looking for a publisher that specialized in publishing Jewish themed books.

In addition, I've found that by building relationships with editors from small companies, there is even a higher chance of having another manuscript accepted.

3) Use your own advice! I found that years of encouraging my students to take the plunge, and be unafraid to go out of their comfort zone, helped me do the same. Hearing my own words ringing in my ears helped me tremendously, as I reminded myself that hard work and effort was sure to pay off.

4) Have compassion for your students! For every submission that has gotten accepted, I have had one or more rejected. I have to add that this has made me a more compassionate teacher, as I have tasted the feeling of rejection. It made me identify with my struggling students!

Sara Blau



When I taught writing to my fourth and sixth graders, I told them to keep a writer's notebook. They would use this for their writing exercises, our lessons on good writing, brainstorming lists, etc. I also kept a writer's notebook for this purpose. When it was writing time in class, I would also write, modeling the importance of writing time.

When it came time for me to take my writing seriously outside the classroom, I asked myself, 'Why aren't I using my writer's notebooks the way I've taught my students to?' I've been brainstorming lists of ideas to write about. I've been taking notes on workshops I've taken and SCBWI conferences I've been to. I've completed exercises during online classes and from writers' blogs. I have everything I need right here in my notebooks.

So in the last year and a half, my days have been spent learning my craft in writing fiction and non-fiction picture books as well as drafting my story ideas. Being a life-long learner makes the journey of becoming a children's book author a natural fit for me. I loved teaching because of the spontaneity of each day writing is like that, too. Each day brings new possibility. And there's never an end to what can be learned.

Ann Magee

I believe that teaching skills which have proved successful in the classroom can shed much light on writing for children. Earning a MA in education, my focus centered on learning channels. I was fascinated in learning how to reach each student through their individual learning channel. All children can learn, but an educator must determine first- how individual children learn. The three learning methods are: Auditory. Visual and Kinetic. The auditory learner grasps material best by listening, while the visual learner needs use of charts, graphs, and notes. Kinetic youngsters are geared toward coordinating activities that accompany stories.

During my forty years of successful teaching, I succeeded where others failed in meeting student's needs and these three various approaches which enable pupils to grasp material and increase learning ability, understandably, can be motivators for readers.

Auditory learners benefit from CD's as they follow along in a book. Visual learners respond well to many colorful illustrations and kinetic responders will gravitate to books with hands on activities for simple science topics.

Special interests geared toward youngsters include animals, humor, family, and non fiction which can be based on familiar settings or personified characters.

I have witnessed reactions from children when reading books they love. I've always exposed students to all story genres, and, inadvertently, they've always found their niche.

Annette Kochera

Teacher Insiders know how to mix learning and fun.

One of the unexpected joys in writing *Believing In Horses* came from my brother, Eddy Ormond. A career educator, Eddy developed a keen interest in my book from the start and stayed involved during the writing process. Even as a non-horse person, he accompanied me on my research visits to barns, horse rescues, and even a live horse auction. My brother provided valuable input to me, as a writer, from spending years with fourth and fifth graders, knowing what they would like and maybe not like. It was a wonderful journey for both of us that I thought would end at the book's publication. But I was wrong.

I have read many middle grade and young adult novels and frequently wondered, "Do these kids ever go to school?" Besides that fact, I felt compelled to have a teacher in my novel passionate about his profession and making a difference in the lives of children. Fortunately, I had a model teacher, Eddy, who is reflected as the Mr. Edwards teacher character in *Believing In Horses*.

I visited Eddy's school for years and watched the lights go on in kids' eyes when he taught them. I loved the respect he showed each student and the way he knew how to mix learning and fun. I was very proud of him when the principal, other teachers, parents, and kids, told me how wonderful he was and how he had changed lives. Teachers in every form of school impact young minds so much, and I've been amazed at how many adults have told me that Mr. Edwards reminded them of a favorite teacher in their past. But, "memorializing" my brother as the teacher in my book still didn't conclude our sibling writing journey. When reading the book's final manuscript, Eddy wrote: "The wide margins begged the retired teacher side of me to resurface and fill them with annotations. By the second sentence I had underlined the word 'cope' and noted a Social Studies activity to coordinate with the second paragraph!"

And so began the development of the companion Discussion Guides and Activities for *Believing In Horses*, originally only available on the book's website. Teachers and homeschoolers raved about the exercises and asked when they would be available in print. We listened, and published *Teacher's Tack for Believing In Horses*, a comprehensive 76-page teacher's guide to help make any teacher's job easier (and more fun!) in working with students and the book. Additionally, my brother visited schools with me, presenting a lively talk show format about the book, reading, and writing, engaging the kids every time.

Mr. Edwards (aka Eddy) has brought his fun learning style to the web, in print, and in person, and is still changing lives! We presented at the State of Maryland International Reading Association Council Conference about the value of an educator and an author working together. For instance, Eddy created a funny improvisational activity based on a true situation he faced during one of our research trips when a retired jockey handed him a giant Thoroughbred horse

and told him to put it in its stall (remember the non-horse part I mentioned?). I shared with the audience that I didn't even know what the 6 + 1 writing traits were, but my brother could point out examples throughout the book. And mostly, we discussed how working together and figuring out ways to get the important lessons across in a fun and interactive manner provided a more meaningful and memorable experience. I've been very fortunate to have a talented, caring teacher as my partner on this creative ride, and I believe it has made a big difference.

Valerie Ormond

One of the most important benefits of teaching, for writers, is that teachers get to know children in a way most other adults don't. They realize children live in a very self-centered world. They are out for experiences that bring them pleasure. They don't want to be taught a lesson by what they read. If they do learn something that helps them face situations in their lives, that's a side benefit. I

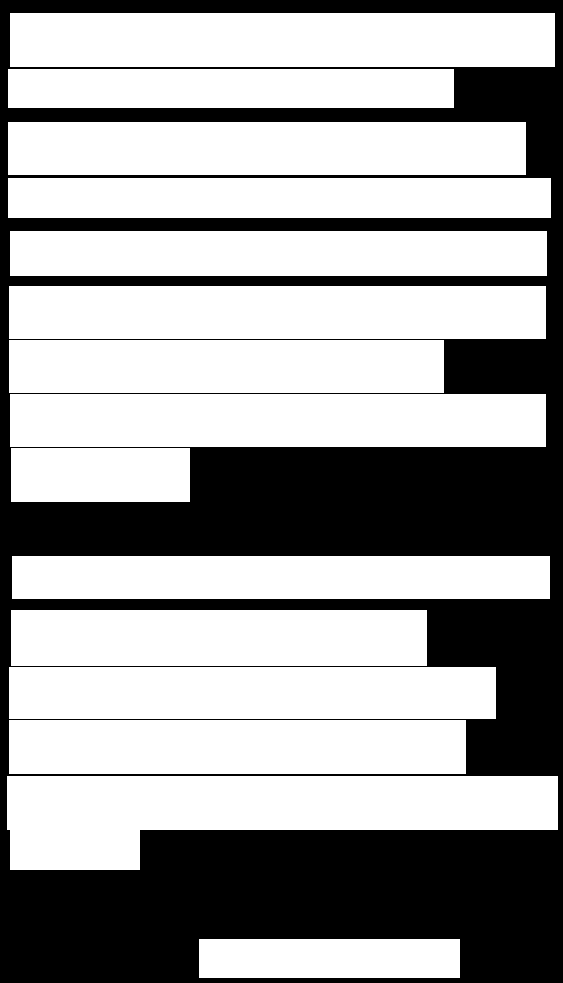
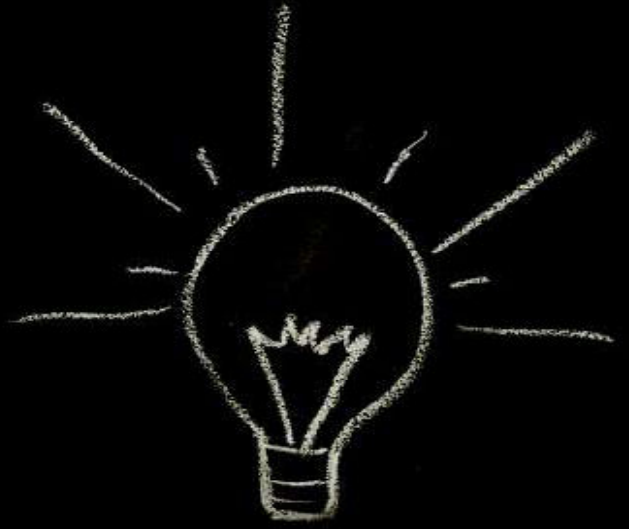
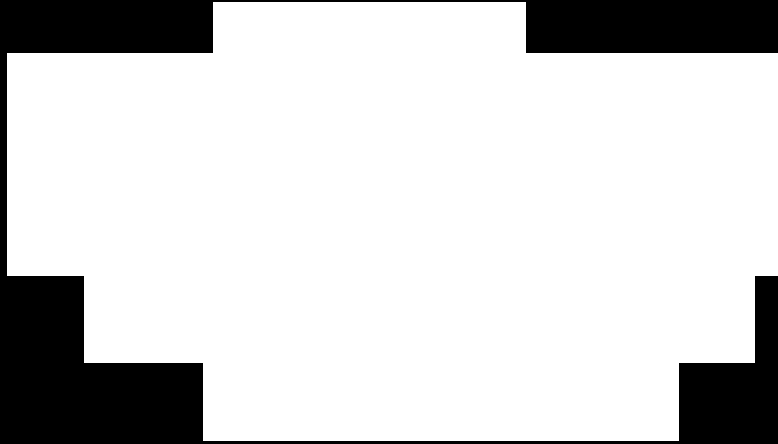
All teachers know they're too busy while teaching to think about possible story lines which may occur during the day. But teachers can absorb the way children speak, act, and react, and use that to make their stories more realistic. They can even model their story characters after actual students. That's one way to make characters seem authentic.

Teachers are probably more aware that most other adults that children don't like to be treated in a condescending way. That should help them avoid talking down to children in their stories. Teachers know they can use big words in context to help children understand them.

Perhaps the most important skill teachers have is their ability to love every child that comes into their classroom. That helps them write stories that appeal to children at many levels and do it showing respect for them.

While teaching is a great background for writing for children, the actual process of writing requires skills different from those needed for teaching. All writers need to attend conferences, read how-to manuals and many books published for the age level for which they want to write, and be ready to learn from successful authors and editors. Then they have to sit down and actually put words on paper.

Marilyn Kratz



Teacher Insiders take notes!

If you are like me, my best ideas come when I am surrounded by my target audience--the kids! Their play and conflict inspire plot lines. Their conversation gives me snatches of dialogue and even story titles. The books they check out from the library reveal the passions that consume them, even at a young age. Yet, as a former teacher and now a library technician in an elementary school, I know how fleeting these thoughts can be--they are barely formed in my head, and then I'm on to the next important duty or lesson. How to capture them in time?

I began to carry a very small notebook that could fit easily into a pocket. You probably know the type--there is a small pen that fits into the structure of the notebook, so when the notebook is closed, the pen must go back in its place in order to keep the notebook shut. Voila! No lost pen! No excuse for not taking a second or two to jot down the image, title, plot note, character trait, etc.

What has worked for me is to always keep it on my person, use it exclusively for thoughts about writing, and keep each entry very short. I use yellow pads of lined paper to flesh out ideas later. My favorite notebook of this sort was a gift from a writing friend, and the picture of the owl on the cover kept me motivated to keep collecting ideas for my middle grade series about a great horned owl. This writing friend (owl presents notwithstanding) is the secret to my success! Perhaps, like me, you need someone to ask how your story is progressing, someone who wants to read the next chapter or yet another revision of your latest picture book manuscript, and maybe even someone who prays for you and the long, sometimes doubt-filled writing journey. Chances are pretty good that once someone asks you what you are writing in that cute little notebook, you'll find you're not the only teacher in your school who wants to be a writer!

Sonja Anderson

Use your insider information. You've read many children's books. You know the type of books that appeal to children. You know how to use appropriate language for the grade level you're writing for.

Read your drafts to your class and observe their reactions. Did they squirm? Have questions? Laugh in the right places?

Charline Profiri

Draw upon the children's interests, use these as a springboard to develop your writing. Use the children as an audience for your writing and their feedback: are they intrigued, excited, wanting more?

Deepi Weisz

So many ways in the classroom everyday provide wonderful opportunities to gather information about children--things they say, do, make, write, or just their mannerisms through facial expressions or voice fluctuations.

You have to pay attention to those wonderful details. Write down what you can when they occur and try and use them in your own writing. Just like a visual artist uses a still life or other person to draw from, a teacher can observe and write wonderfully powerful details of the moment with exciting words.

And please don't just use the classroom. Observe on the playground, lunch room etc. Students make great subjects to make your own work come alive with rich detail. Sometimes the teaching moments can force a person to just be wearing the teaching hat, but by learning to switch that hat gives aspiring writers not only some potential good notes to write from later but provides a great role model for kids to see the teacher be successful! I like using index cards in my pocket or stacked on my desk neatly so I remember to write notes. The cards are sturdy enough to stack back up later then after use. Also, by thinking of all senses through observing provides lots of rich stuff to work from later. Sometimes, I write down ahead of time -- seeing, hearing, touching, speaking and tasting; then, I add the observed descriptions after each one. So many ways.

Katherine Heller

Utilize your network of children, parents, librarians and other teachers when developing book ideas or gaining access to resources. How-to books can help you hone your craft or draft a query, but also don't forget to pay attention to what kids love, how best to reach them, and where the gaps are in the market. You have insights from the front lines and that's an advantage.

Miranda Paul

I keep a running list of names that strike me as unusual or uncommon. Over the 44 years I've taught, there has been a gazillion names I've seen and had to learn. This list of names makes it easier to select names for characters in my book. It also jogs my memory about the personality traits of some of these students.

I also keep a notebook specifically for jotting down phrases, odd comments, or ideas that pop into my head while I am teaching. Kids DO say the most amazing things! By the way, do this on your time, not theirs!

My students know that I write stories, they often beg to be read bits and pieces of what I am currently writing. I write down reactions and suggestions they may have in reaction to what they have heard. Currently, my fourth and fifth graders HATED the ending of a chapter book I am finishing. I wrote down everything they said and the suggestions (some of the endings were wild!) the students offered to me. I will attempt to incorporate their ideas into a new ending. After all, I write books kids want to read.

I do not write using my first name. I chose a male first name, because boys do not usually select books written by girls. Why? I asked my students and Max gave the best answer: A girl author might be writing about princesses or unicorns, who knows!

Sandra Eyman

You can do both--teach and write children's books!

There are so many tidbits and insights you can get for writing children's book from the children in your class and constantly around you! If you start to take note of the funny little things students say or how they talk you can come up with lots of ideas. I am pretty sure you have some ideas for stories already! Editors love friendship stories, stories about school, as well as funny kid stories. Being a teacher you have some advantage because you are more familiar with reading and vocabulary levels than someone coming from a different field. Plus, you probably have seen relationships between students and are familiar with what is trending now (with word choice, toys, topics of conversation, difficulties with certain school subjects, how kids use technology). Often times you will also know what kinds of jokes kids would understand or if something would be over their head. You might have ideas to make your books aligned with curriculum (making your books sell head over heels above a standard children's book).

Lucy Ravitch

Teacher Insiders build their books from what they already know.

Write about what you know. Most teachers have lots of experience responding to the needs and feelings of students in the age group they teach. Use that knowledge in what you write.

Lesson plans can be a great source of inspiration for a book. If you are writing non-fiction, you will have many facts before you and a great place to start your in-depth research. If you are writing fiction, topics and styles of writing that children enjoy will be very apparent from the students in your classroom.

I have found writing about what I know, am passionate about, or what interests me allows me to write a book that interests others.

Dr. Barbara Elizabeth Brown

You already know the books your students love. What is it about those books that make them beg to read the book one more time? You also know the books your students avoid reading--what is it about those books that drives the student to close the book? Write your stories with your students in mind, as if they were right there reading the book.

Mary Rudzinski

I found that the day to day happenings that students (and my own children) went through led to story ideas. Use things that happen in the classroom for ideas for writing. Just remember to change the names to protect the innocent (or guilty).

Teachers have the organizational skills that are needed to persist in writing. Use them to start and keep a writing schedule.

You also can use the personalities of students in your classroom plus those of your own children to form characters in stories.

Take notes on happenings and personalities in your classroom for use in your writing. Teachers have close, day to day, contact with children, so they have the raw material right there in front of them.

Elizabeth Westra

So, you're a teacher who wants to write for children? Excellent! Do you teach the same age population you want to write for? Even better! Your students provide a wealth of story ideas. Whether you teach kindergarten, high school, or somewhere in between, your classroom is full of exciting adventures waiting to be penned.

Do you have a wiggly child? A great “first lost tooth” tale? A student filled with angst who overcame a challenging situation? All are building blocks for your books. I've turned my most bouncy student into a “Fidget Bear”, a hesitant child stars in “First Grade Fears” and for my kindergartener who was obsessed with garbage trucks, I wrote *Buster, The Little Garbage Truck*, a picture book that was picked up by Sleeping Bear Press and released in Spring 2015.

Look around your classroom, listen as your students chatter, observe what they wear, how they walk: it's all great material for your writing. And don't forget to model what you're doing with your students. How did you come up with that great story idea, develop your characters and setting, tackle a problem through to its solution? Talk about how you chose just the right words. Once I started writing, my teaching of writing improved dramatically. Great side-benefit!

So what are you waiting for? Grab your pencil, laptop, or crayon and get started.

Marcia Berneger



Teachers are with their students over an extended period of time and learn the many experiences of their lives. The lives of these students present real events that can be the basis of storylines--as non-fiction or fiction. The experiences of several students can be woven into a single character or brought together in several conflicting characters. Teachers have the training, experience, insight and compassion to search for and often find solutions for their students' problems. Depending upon the level of a writer's audience, some topics can be quite intense.

Wm. Lloyd McCraney

I feel that children respond best to books that relate to their lives. Often times, I pick up a book meant for preschool or kindergarten and it is long and wordy, the children lose interest. Young children want books that let them be involved and also be heard. They want to be able to contribute to the book, because at four and five years of age, the world is all about them. Most of the time, when I read a story, the children can't wait to respond. They love to use the pictures to help them make decisions, so illustrations are very important when making a children's book. It is good for the author to write something where children can feel empathy, or relate to the main character's problem. For example: making a new friend, being new to school, getting lost, etc. I find that characters don't have to be real or imaginary. It could be a young boy or a dinosaur going to his first day of school, and the children can relate. I also get the best results in story time if the book flows well; if it rhymes or is read in couplets or rhyming phrases, that also helps with some key standards that young children must learn. Oftentimes, I let them fill in the rhyming word to see if they can figure it out based on the story. Ex: The monkey fell out of bed...he landed on his _____. If the children know the word should rhyme, they are quick to yell out, Head! It keeps them involved and part of the story.

My favorite stories have hidden lessons: Robert Munsch's *The Paper Bag Princess* is a great example of how to learn a lesson without being preachy. Kids make the learning transition without even knowing it!

Jessica Tornese

Seize the moment. Tomorrow is a new day. Each day is a discovery as we enter into a child's world. From a child's point of view/voice, we see, hear, smell, touch and taste the day and so a book journal comes in handy. We stop, look, listen and write/record a child's thoughts and feelings. Each smile or pout, creased eyebrows, tears or laughter, a happy or angry face or a question could start a title, a plot, or a character for a magazine story, a poem, an essay, a chapter book, a novel, a picture book or even a stage and a screenplay. As teachers wanting and dreaming to write, we see objects and children in the classrooms as tools and subjects to write. All it takes is an inspiration, motivation, a commitment and a passion.

Alicia Minor

Teacher Insiders keep their eyes open for ideas.

Teaching skills can open the door to a delicious menu of children's stories! We might find a story in the life of one of our students or in something that happened with a particular child in the classroom one day. Keeping a record of events that occur throughout the day logged as writing ideas is a great way to find a new story idea when needed.

As a newly retired kindergarten teacher from public education, I have been organizing my class pictures. Within each class there are several children I have learned valuable lessons from that might easily translate to heartwarming children's books. Another option is writing stories to fill resource or classroom management needs. My CD of early learning songs, *It's a Nice Day for Ducks* was written as a result of needing specific resources not available to me. I wrote and co-wrote the songs with the intention of creating them into sing-a-long books for children (still to come!). For instance, 'Dinosaur Rock' is a lively toe-tapper that teaches fact or fiction as well as types of dinosaurs. 'Rainbow' teaches the colors of the rainbow (all seven!) and 'I Will Listen' was written in class one day when nothing I did except sing and clap was able to get students' attention.

As for the delicious menu of stories? There's no better place to be than in a classroom if you want to find cute appetizers, warm sides, character building main courses, or whimsical desserts that children of all ages can learn from.

Start logging your classroom events and happy writing!

Nancy Ellington

Students are so inspiring; they make us laugh, worry, get angry and even challenge us. School is full of diverse experiences. Jot down the ones that move you while those emotions are fresh. Keeping a journal is an excellent way to obtain topics to write about. It'll help you make your characters more real, too. You won't write about your students, of course. Teachers have available so much information about students and families that others don't have; yet remember that it's confidential. But that's what writing is all about. You start from something real that touched you and built from it something new. You can, also, start a character journal; fill it with descriptions, personality traits, tidbits of what make student laugh or worry. It'll be useful in the creation of your characters. Remember, you want to preserve details, experiences, emotions, pieces of this rich and colorful world: no names, no personal details, no identifying moments. Those I'm sure you'll guard in your heart.

Zoraida Rivera

I do know that it is hard to find time to write, when there's so much that has to be done for your students. But do it. As you're with children, there will be times when an idea for a story will pop into your head. Write it down or record it. You can look at it later and see if the idea develops. But don't throw it away. I have a folder full of ideas that I love going through; and it's so much fun developing one of them into a story. When you write your story, put it aside for a week or so. Then pick it up and read it aloud. You will be able to hear where you need to change it. All stories need to be rewritten again and again.

I had a multi-age K-2 class and I wrote poems and stories for my students, to go along with the units we were doing. I would divide the story into as many pages as I had students, usually between 25-30, and each student would illustrate their page. We put it together as a book and the students would read it. Listening to them and looking at the pictures gave me a lot of clues as to what I needed to do to improve the story. I would also ask them to give me ideas to make the story better. They were good critique groups.

Jennifer Reynolds

My number one tip for teachers is listen to and observe your students. No matter what age level you teach, watch your students' reactions to the books that they read and that you read to them. Find out exactly what tickles their funny bone, makes them examine their own ideas, or draws them into another world. This can be done by effective questioning and just plain old watching them read and peering over their shoulder at the text. Then take the next step and record it in a journal. From my own experience, recording these observations as they happen is the most effective. So much goes on during a school day, it is difficult to remember these fleeting moments at the end of the day. You will be creating a resource that will spark your imagination and help you connect with kids in your own writing.

Tip two is to learn from your students' writing. Reading student writing was an ongoing education about writing for me. I learned not only what students had yet to understand about writing, but also about problems in my own writing. It is easier to see where the writing of others is lacking than it is to see our own mistakes. Is the writing specific enough? Are there areas of confusion? Does the reader have questions that are not being answered in the writing? All of these were present in my student's writing, and often in mine as well. Applying what I saw in student writing to my own writing helped me find areas to improve.

Carol Nelson



Teacher Insiders find their niche.

The prospect of starting a writing career can be daunting. Where do you begin? As with anything else, it's best to determine what your strengths are and then play to them.

What subjects are you good at? Math? Science? Sports? What intrigues you? Art? Music? History? What genres do you usually read? Mysteries? Westerns? Historical Fiction?

Let's say math is one of your strengths and you like reading biographies. You might try writing about an influential mathematician. If you lean toward historical fiction you could write about that same character, but also create a story that pulls in historical events of significance that were happening during that time period or in that part of the world.

Experiment with different genres. Finding your niche will involve trial and error. You will make some mistakes along the way, but that's okay. Those dead ends will only serve to narrow down the choices of the road you are supposed to take.

As you begin experimenting, you will also begin to unearth your own unique writing style. I've published memoirs and fictional stories for the adult magazine market as well as picture books for the younger set. What I've discovered about my own personal writing style is that no matter what genre I find myself in, a bit of whimsy will usually find a way to sneak into my prose. The more writing projects I've undertaken, the more my own personal voice, my unique way of saying things, has started to shine through.

Another thing to consider when deciding upon a topic to approach, is any need you are aware of that may be present in the current marketplace. Was there certain information that was hard to come by when you were teaching? A character, time period or place that was difficult to research due to lack of available information? Perhaps that is the topic you should be writing about.

Ultimately, finding your niche is like finding the right outfit to wear. You may have to try a few things on before finding something that fits.

Melody Lorbeer

Try to think like the age group you are writing for. When writing puppet scripts for my book Bible Fun for Preschoolers, I wrote as if I was a preschooler with the problems of fear and rebellion. This gave birth to such skits as, Petey and the Dog, Don't Be Afraid of the Storm, and many others. Fear and Rebellion are general topics that all ages could benefit from; however, with preteens; popularity, self-image, peer pressure, etc. would be appropriate topics to cover.

Janet DeVriendt

I was an elementary Media Director (librarian) for 9 years. In that position I learned where the weaknesses are in children's literature, the areas that students are seeking and the population sectors that are underrepresented. I read 20-30 books each weekend, I followed blogs, I read reviews and constantly kept abreast of award winning books; not just Caldecott and Newbery, but the obscure awards like Corretta Scott King, Orbis Pictus, Scott O'Dell, and Henry Bergh Children's Book Award. I was the co-chair of our state's children's book awards (Indian Paintbrush) featuring local Wyoming authors and themes.

I want to write books that empower children and I would love to instill the love of books into as many children's lives as I possibly can. Children's literature was my lifesaver as a child, it was my comfort blanket, my warm hug. Books made me laugh and cry...I want to be able to write and have that profound effect on children. I want to make sure that all children have access to books; a very lofty goal, but heartfelt.

Lisa Smith



READ! READ! READ! the kind of books you want to write, whether it be picture books, chapter books, novels, or non-fiction. Although, I'm currently working on a middle grade novel, my passion is writing picture books. So, for picture books, provide lots of action and variety so the illustrator can have fun too. Use word play to tickle a youngster's imagination and repetition for child participation when being read to aloud. Talk to a children's librarian to find out what interests the different age levels. But, make sure it's a topic that you're passionate about or want to learn more about yourself. Do your research so all factual information is accurate. Write to educate, but remember to have a pleasing story that a child will want to hear over and over. Most of all, **HAVE FUN WRITING!**

Barbara Cairns

Being an ex-primary teacher certainly added a list of positives for me when I plunged into the world of writing for children, full-time. I understood child development, I had a few years of child observation under my belt ... I saw what interested different age levels, what made them laugh, cry or angry, how they coped at their individual levels with learning to read and write. I also found out you can't expect a bunch of kids to sit still while you rabbit on about things that don't interest them. Exactly what you need to remember when you write a book for children.

So, some advice for teachers who want to be writers ... be a child at heart; listen, watch and be sensitive to what it means to be a child; learn as much as you can about how to write for children; read ferociously and gleefully; write every day (just for fun); and join a network of fellow children's writers.

If you're still in the workforce you'll have the joyful task of recognizing possibilities for story ideas unfolding before your eyes and ears every school day. Carry a notebook in your pocket! And then ask, "What if.....?"

Nowadays, I visit schools and libraries as a published author. I love it ... all the fun of being with enthusiastic kids and talking about books, writing and reading - with no program planning or admin woes!

So go for it, teacher! And enjoy the ride.

Sheryl Gwyther

First, find a genre you are interested in and an age group you would like to work for. Observe your students in the classroom more closely. Try to identify what they love--not like--LOVE to read and ask them why. Take some time to group what they love to read into themes. Find some quiet time and ask yourself whether any of these themes would be areas you would love, yes LOVE, to use to write your books. Even if there may be lots of books written on those themes, your unique view of it would be your contribution to the realm of writing for young people. If you are not moved to love these themes, use what your students love to brainstorm and find other themes which have not been given much attention. Once you find those you love, get a pretty-looking notebook or diary and write the list of themes you would like to work on. Finally, find a very good writing course to pursue. If you love writing enough, you will ensure that you complete the writing course. Perhaps this course will allow you to explore some of the themes you listed in your diary or notebook.

Remember, you have to love writing. Always try to ensure that what you write is genuine and carries the anointing of healing, courage and encouragement for young people. Try to let your work help young people to connect to their human side; to see the reality yet pleasures of life in the stories you write.

Sermantha Louisy

Teacher Insiders embrace the process.

1. If you feel the call, do it!
2. Keep your options open.
3. The market for writers is vast; everyone is writing a book!
4. Search your school library and discuss with the media specialist. What are the needs in a school library? (Here are a few: sports, math, writing skills, journalism, yearbook staff, learning disabilities, photography, history and community on a primary level, etc. There are plenty of alphabet books!)
5. Outline your book or manuscript.
6. If you're illustrating a picture book, create a storyboard (32 pages).
7. Research your topic; don't rely on your own knowledge base.
8. Write from a child's view; think about the personalities of your students.
9. What is serious business for the level that you are writing for? What is humorous for this level?
10. Once you write a book or manuscript, reread, reread, and reread! Don't be satisfied with the original work.

Doris Murdoch

Remember mnemonics? Those tricks to help students remember facts? 'I before e, except after c', for example. Well, rhymes and other word play can also help you think of memorable titles. Ones I've sold include *The Noon Raccoon* and *Earthquake Mistakes*. Or you can try alliteration, which I've used with *A Loon Alone* and *A Moose's Morning*. If you're struggling with writer's block, sometimes thinking of an interesting title can inspire a plot. Even non-poets can find inspiration in a rhyming dictionary. I use *The Complete Rhyming Dictionary*, edited by Clement Wood, revised by Ronald Bogus.

Ever brought in something as a lesson 'hook' to help your class pay attention? Try to start the book or story with something dramatic. Think of *Charlotte's Web*, which begins with Fern asking where her father is going with an ax.

Authors of picture books should help the illustrator as much as possible. If part of your story has two characters talking, try thinking of something interesting they can be doing as they speak. Flipping pancakes? Riding a dinosaur? Flipping pancakes into a dinosaur's mouth?

When you edit, read out loud. Act out the parts as much as you can. You'll catch more mistakes and awkward word usage that way.

Pamela Love

Ten Tips for Teachers Who Want to Become Writers

We became teachers because we wanted to share the same gift of knowledge that was gifted to us. Writing is no different, except the message is unlimited, the subject matter inexhaustible and the audience potentially unfathomable! Such possibility could give us freedom, or it could freak us out! So, here are 10 tips to help my fellow teachers get started and hopefully stay calm:

1. **Practice:** Every musician practices daily, football players practice, you need to practice. The more you write the better you will become. A good writer develops his craft and in the process usually finds his or her voice.
2. **What to Write:** I believe the old adage 'write what you know' is always the best place to start. Equally important is to work on something that you are strongly interested in. If it doesn't hold your interest-it won't hold the reader's either.
3. **Your 'Brand':** If you are serious about publication and making sales you need to make sure that your book or article is unique enough to stand out from the others. Try to focus on some knowledge or experience you already possess that most other people don't have-but might be interested in reading about.
4. **Persistence:** Be persistent, but pace yourself. Even though you want to have 5 published books for sale already, this is going to take time. Be kind to yourself. There is much advice out there on how to write, publish, market etc. and while guides can be helpful, they can also add to your anxiety. Many guide books give overwhelming lists of 'to do' before you can even get started. I suggest that you refer to these books on occasion but remember that you have to start where you are and go where your journey leads you. If you are under too much pressure you won't be able to write at all.
5. **Self-Pressure:** Give yourself the freedom to express yourself. Everything you write doesn't have to become your next publication. If it happens to turn out good-then take it from there. Don't edit while you write, and have someone you trust critique your work.
6. **Resources:** Your best resources will be fellow writers, writer's critique groups and connecting with online resources (such as Children's Book Insider.)
7. **Rest:** Not only should you get some rest yourself, but also allow your manuscript to rest (at times) during the process. Don't look at it for a few days or a period of time while you work on something else. When you come back to it you can look at it more objectively (as a reader might) and can edit accordingly.
8. **Competition:** Watch out for the urge to compete with other writers on who has the most publications or awards etc. You are the only one who can tell your story, your way. Encourage each other! In time you will build your audience if you don't give up!

9. **Enjoy The Journey:** Seeing your dream come true may take longer than you think, and be harder than you expected, but it will be worth it in the long run. But don't be surprised if the best part isn't holding that shiny new book with your name on it. Sometimes the best part is being caught up in the writing of your story, when the words are flowing and the journey is still unfolding!

10. **Dream:** Most of all, remember that if this is your dream you will find the resources you need to make this a reality. If you are a teacher you are already flexible, adaptable, compassionate, creative and infinitely resourceful! I believe those are the characteristics of a writer as well! If you stay at it and give it your heart like you did in your classroom, your readers (like your students) will come back to say 'thank you', as well.

April Whit

The number one thing about writing for children is to write! So, whatever it takes to have time at home to write, do it. Maybe before the family gets up for the day? Maybe once the family is down for the night? Maybe at lunchtime? Writing is the first and most important skill you need, and the way to learn it and practice it, is to write. It doesn't matter if you use a computer, a pad and pencil, with Dragon software, or a combo of these or any other way.

That said, writing doesn't come first for you. You may have a family, or a job, or any number of things. Make a list of them. Now number them in importance to you, and remember, writing does NOT come first. But it's pretty important. Once you have that in order, then you can begin to plan for your writing, and that includes research. I found it easy to use a day calendar that is divided into parts. Compartmentalize what you do, including your writing. Learn to write in compartments of 15 minutes, 30 minutes, 45 minutes, or an hour. Whatever fits you and your schedule. Put X-es in the parts you did not do. Check in the parts you did do. Make adjustments as the days pass. Don't beat yourself up if you have missed your writing time. Or anything else. Just put it down again the next day and see what happens. Oh, and one last thing, turn off the TV! If you write, you don't need ANY TV. Lastly, remember that writing is only the beginning. Editing is the end-all activity of writing! Edit, edit and edit again! Don't fall in love with your writing. Slash it if it doesn't fit! And have fun every day—both with writing and without.

Kathleen Pacheco

Start examining your writing style by putting together your personal Bio. It will be a place to start writing about a topic you know well. If you can satisfy your own requirement for good writing in this regard, then go on to set up your website. This will be fuel for public consumption and an opportunity for feedback on your text. With those two necessary accomplishments done, you will have a sense as to whether a writing coach is in your immediate plan of action but do look for local writer's groups to join as well as online opportunities to learn. Keep a set of 3x5 cards on you. You never know where your next inspiration will come from. The cards make it easy to categorize.

Sandra Taylor

Mentor books for children must become mentor books for you, the teacher/aspiring writer. Read and re-read these texts. Look at beginnings, endings. Observe how the author has created characters and plot. What characters did you enjoy the most? What problems did the characters solve? Whose voice do you hear? What made you laugh?

When you teach a skill to the children through these books, do the exercise yourself. Be sure you are writing along with the children. Keep a writer's notebook and share with the children.

Beverley Baird Langill

Teachers have worlds of information to share in books and articles. Although you might want to start by writing a book, I suggest you learn the publishing industry by creating relationships with publishers by writing and submitting articles to magazines. Purchase a few writers market guides. Learn what publishers are looking for and how to submit your work. The market guides have samples of cover letters and manuscript submission formats. Follow writer guidelines for each publishing house. Use the standard formats. Failure to do these simple things will signal to editors that you are a beginner.

Sue Tornai

Teacher Insiders connect with their readers.

I suggest not being too grandiose in planning the topic of your book. It is easy to see all of the possibilities but it is difficult to put all of those possibilities into words and make them into a story. Instead of thinking globally, think locally. By that I mean smaller. Take a small piece of your larger thought and build on that. You can control the story and the characters much better. You can develop inter-relationships between the characters as well as create meaningful dialogue when you can concentrate on a well thought-out plot that doesn't have too many layers. When you come to the end of the story stop writing. It sounds easy, but it's not. This is the time to begin editing. Read the word editing as recreating. Once you have all of the thoughts on paper it is time to rebuild your work. There are words or ideas that might not belong—change them. You are not forced to keep them. How will they sound to the child? You are writing for him, not for you. Sure you like the sound, but children might not understand them. Your satisfaction comes from writing a story that is appreciated by others, not only by you.

Elliot Yaro

Want to learn how to craft stories and non-fiction that connects directly with children? Come join the Insiders! For over 25 years, *Children's Book Insider*, *The Children's Writing Monthly* has taught aspiring authors how to hone their writing skills, submit to publishers or self-publish, and market their work to kids, teachers and parents. Members get the monthly electronic newsletter, plus access to the Children's Writing Knowledge Base, a treasure-trove of articles, podcasts and videos on all aspects of publishing children's books. The Knowledge Base is added to monthly, so you'll never run out of advice and tips to help you on your writing journey.

Teacher Insiders know that CBI is key to helping them succeed. Come join us today! Go to <http://writeforkids.org/come-join-the-insiders/> to get started.



children's book insider

I write picture books and wanted to have my books full of educational information. What teacher wouldn't? So I looked for a way to weave the facts through in a lighthearted text. Seeing my readers laugh as they listen or read, warms my heart, and makes the journey even better.

Ellen Fischer

Draw on your passions and strengths. My background in zoology helped me enter the Education market through writing non-fiction books about animals on a work-for-hire basis. My training also gives me a head start in researching animal-related topics and coming up with fresh ideas.

Julie Murphy

Every story has a problem and a resolution. Every teacher has a memory bank filled with problems and solutions that worked and those that didn't. When a problem presents itself in the classroom or school setting, teachers usually ask, "What if?" Whether it's instructional or behavioral, teachers look for solutions, brainstorm ideas thinking in If this happens...then... scenarios. And teachers often guide students in finding their own solutions. That's what we want to do with the characters we create. The "story" is about how the character tries, fails, and someone or something changes forcing a resolution.

Think about a problem you or a student faced. Fast forward to the end. Who or what changed? Was the resolution meaningful? Why would a reader care what happened to your character and how it happened?

Whether a story is funny, serious, or heartwarming teaching experience can provide a writer with variety of themes, plots, and characters to choose from that will lead to some pretty satisfying endings.

Keila Dawson

Connecting To Your Reader: Knowing who they are, what they like and what makes them laugh, cry and be surprised.

I think the best advice I've received throughout all the courses, workshops and webinars I've taken is to know the genre for which you want to write, and to write as if you're talking directly to your reader. As a retired teacher I wish I had begun mining information from my students earlier. I had always known I wanted to be a writer, but unfortunately I didn't listen to those who said, write what you know. Instead I began with what I liked to read, romance at the time. If someone had told me I was sitting on a goldmine when I taught junior high I would have done a few things differently. In this article I hope to encourage teachers to carry a notebook and begin recording little nuggets of information for future stories.

All teachers know when we teach children to make connections, they become better readers. The converse of this is true as well. By connecting to the age group we wish to write for we become better writers.

Observation: Find time to spend with students. Hallways and playgrounds are perfect places to watch how students act, talk, and play. Make notes on facial expressions, eye color, clothing and even the way hair falls or acts in dampness. You will learn the interests of different age groups, and their speaking techniques, patterns and their mannerisms that go with speech. {You may learn things you don't want to know as well but may lead to very good story lines.} Many famous characters are based [but changed] on real people. The playground, libraries, and social gatherings are all places where you can observe the likenesses and differences between children. You will begin to see what makes each of them unique.

Digging for Information: When pre-reading stories and novels, notice the writing technique the author uses to convey the story. Take notes on interesting or unique ways they begin and end their story. Are they following a technique you've seen other author's use or are they changing it up? Writing Style and Voice are key to good story telling.

Word Choice: In every story there are specific words that the author thoughtfully chose in order to evoke a response from the reader. Begin jotting these down, taking notes on context, setting, plot development and theme relationships. Keep in mind that each age group has its own jargon they find engaging enough to stick with and read until the end. It's your job to observe and listen for these little gems. Word choice is extremely important and totally dependent on the genre. For example, if your novel is YA fantasy, the expressions, phrases and word choices you make will be different than if you're writing YA mystery or even YA historical. Make notes on this as well. I like to make a spreadsheet so I can categorize my words around general themes. Remember that words are grouped by age appropriate vocabulary. See www.tor.com for more on this topic. As well, teachers use Dolch Sight Word lists for each grade level. These prove helpful when writing for struggling readers and are easily found online. The

best word choices are specific. One word will be vague and nondescript while another will be vivid and descriptive. Consider if someone writes with a ballpoint pen, quill, felt-tip pen, fountain or rollerball type of pen. How would the story change with each pen type if water got on the paper? Also word connotation is important, if your character is writing with a quill, you are being specific about the era in which he lives. The same with felt tip pens. They were not around before the sixties. Also felt tip pens tend to bleed on certain types of paper and this could have consequences for your character[s].

Keep in mind connotation and musicality of words. Learn what works and what doesn't.

Emotional Commotion: When making charts for your classroom or during those mini-lesson teaching moments, begin to ask students to record how the character was feeling at the time of an incident. This practice helps your inner writer begin to connect to the many feelings that run amok in short stories and novels. Authors want to elicit emotional responses from readers. As an author you want to know all about emotional connections. One book I use to are *The Emotion Thesaurus: A Writer's Guide to Character Expression* by Angela Ackerman & Becca Puglisi

Character Traits: Knowing the age of your characters leads to a study of that age group. It is a must to know what each age acts like. A great resource is *Writer's Guide to Character Traits* by Linda N. Edelstein, PH.D. But as a teacher you have a perfect job to watch kids all day long. Keep a notebook handy and record all sorts of things about characters. But especially note; appearance and mannerisms. You'll be glad you did. You can even record odd expressions they use. All this information will go a long way when you begin your book.

Trial by Fire: Why not write a little book, use a program like iAuthor, and present it to your class. Ask them for suggestions on how to improve it. Use it as a teaching tool to get input on what works and what doesn't. You'll be surprised how much little one's can tell you about what they like and don't like. Soon you'll be rewriting and publishing. I wish you success.

Susan Moran



Write from your own experiences and from things that touch your heart. I like to catch the reader's emotions in my writing. Read lots of good children's literature to give yourself a solid foundation of the keys to good writing and read-alouds.

I always wrote with my classes....LIVE! I'd give a writing assignment, and I'd immediately write a story myself in front of the class (1st grade through 4th). I'd have them help me edit it, correct punctuation, give advice on where I needed to build the story or delete from it, and I'd let them help me end the story (usually in groups so they'd have different endings). I let them critique me: Did I stay on topic? Was there a beginning that would draw you in? What did the story make you think about? All of these things were teaching skills I used to help kids learn to write, but in the process, I learned more about my own writing.

I like to integrate historical events/famous people/famous places into my children's stories. For instance, I wrote a story about my grandchild who was bored, so I told her some stories of the young Amelia Earhart who got interested in flying airplanes after some play experiences in her childhood. This relates the history to the reader as he/she is drawn into the story.

I've always used lots of music, beats/rhythms in writing my stories. They are memorable and help you connect to stories.

In trying to teach children to use their reading comprehension skills, I try to write stories that ask questions, have open-ended endings, and don't supply the whole story implicitly. This helps them learn to ask questions before they read the book, make predictions, anticipate, infer, come to conclusions, work through cause/effect, build and dig for vocabulary, etc. I want to write children's stories that they must DIG INTO using their thinking skills.

Connie Garrett

Try not to talk down to your audience. The kids will acknowledge that and like the book better.

Respect your audience. Refrain from giving advice or preaching to them, hoping to put across a message. Incorporate it into your story by the example of one of the characters.

Use your research skills to help you with your story, esp. if it is historical fiction or nonfiction, but even with little stories. Have your facts straight.

For nonfiction or historical fiction, recall which phase of history or which animal or other person or place your students found fascinating and want(ed) to learn more about.

Remember your own days as a child. What appealed to you? Write about things that made you curious or made you happy or made you laugh.

Jennie Wittenbach

It is imperative that potential and current children's authors understand the new U.S. Core Curriculum Standards. Familiarizing yourself with what educators are required to do will help you in writing to a particular audience. I would advise you to do two things: download your state standards and the national ones as well. In particular, pay attention to the Language Arts standards. If you are writing historical fiction get the Social Studies standards. If you are working on a book that concerns art then get those. AVOID writing directly to the standards! It will come across as canned and boring. Remember that these new standards emphasize critical thinking skills so learn to provide clues or hints that students can research. For example, if you say that Lucy's grandfather was a Tuskegee Airman, you deny the reader the chance to think this statement through. Better you say "Lucy knew her grandfather had trained in Alabama during WWII and flew for the 99th Fighter Squadron. Their motto was Spit Fire." Teachers will have their students determine that he was a Tuskegee Airman and served in Italy during the war. The standards tend towards analysis and critical thinking. The adage, "show, don't tell" really applies now.

Another smart move might be for you to create a study guide to go with your book. As a teacher, you know how much you appreciate student materials that are ready to duplicate and pass out. Imagine being able to tell an editor that you are working on a chapter-by-chapter study guide (vocabulary, questions, etc.) to go with your book.

One last thought, at every conference I attend I hear a repeating theme: there aren't enough books for children of other cultures. Not enough main characters who are Hispanic, Asian, Black, Cambodian, etc. and not enough books about the particular problems they face growing up. This is a wide open field!

Terry Cook

Young children like repetition, colorful illustrations, less script, also like rhyme/rhythm in text. Write what you know! Lots of things happen in school settings that could be put into story format. Young boys are often reluctant readers, so need enticing topics to read, sometimes something as simple as a dog story, or wildlife story that they can relate to. Advanced young readers should be challenged in vocabulary and information so that they learn new skills.

Sharon Lawrence

Remember WHO you are!

For starters, you are at the coalface. You know the kids, their foibles, fears, speech patterns, body language, fads, loves, hates and what tickles their funny bones. Add to this the fact that you not only know the curriculum, but you know all the changes and revisions before anyone else. These things give you a phenomenal advantage over the writer who comes from almost any other field. It is all at your fingertips! Others have to research!

Note everything!

Take notes on what you observe about 'kid behavior'. Record funny comments, phrases, incidents, interactions that come your way in the classroom and playground. These notes will come in handy in shaping authentic "kid speak" and in generating story ideas in any kid-driven picture book, chapter book, or novel.

Chum up to your School Librarian

Why? If you have a fabulous idea for a book, the librarian will soon let you know what your competition is on the bookshelf, if there are already books out on the market that are very similar. You certainly don't want to go to all that work to write a book and find out you have just reinvented the wheel!

If your book requires research, guess who is able to give you the best tips as to where to look! The librarian! Librarians are up to date with all the best databases, search engines etc.

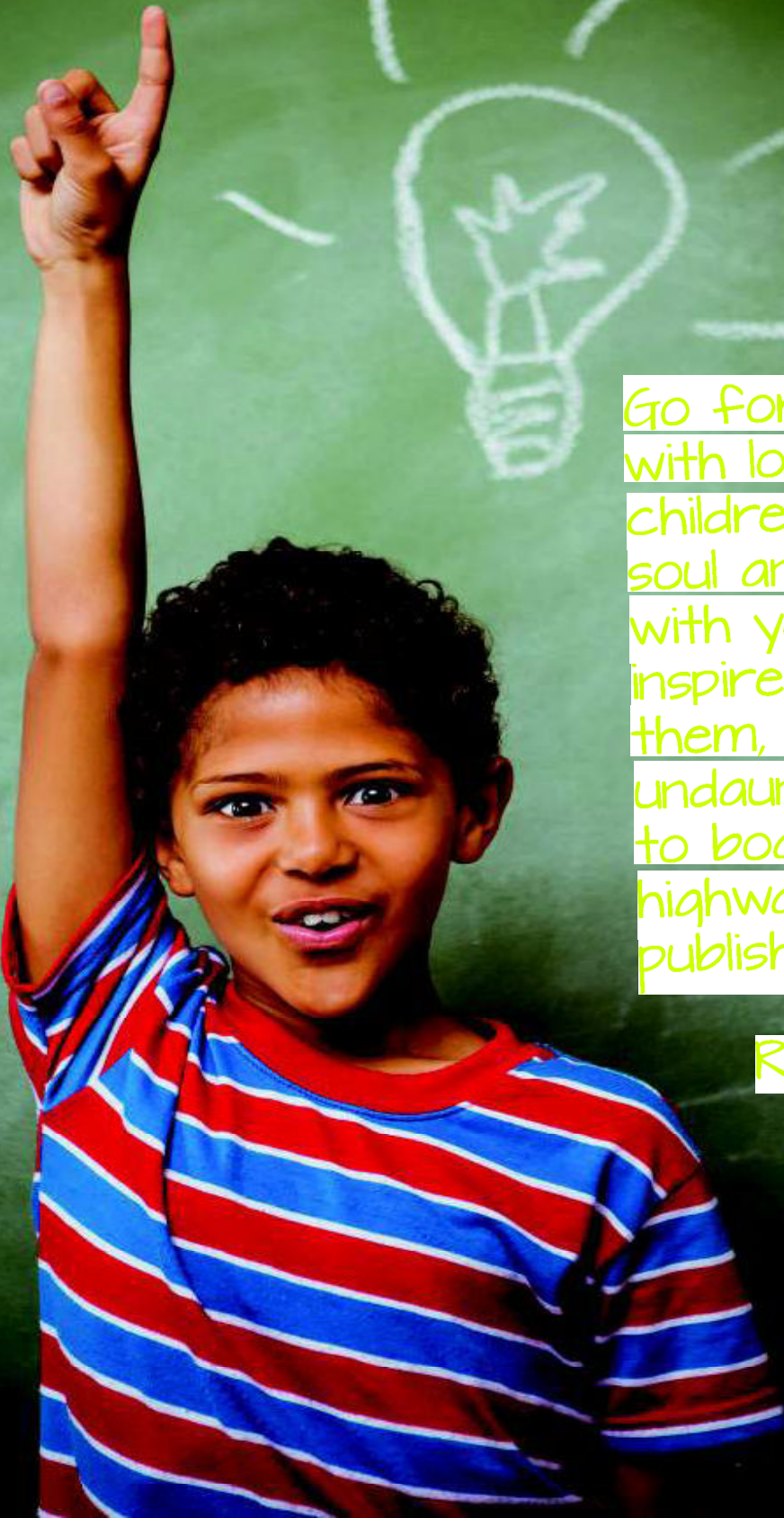
I've written my first masterpiece! What now?

Get someone who has never seen your story to give it an edit. As a writer, you are so overexposed to your own work that you go into author auto-pilot and you just DON'T see typos and other oopses after the umpteenth read.

By now you should be feeling positively in overload! Go make a start, pen to paper, fingers to keyboard, doesn't matter. Don't procrastinate, DO IT!

J.R. Poulter

Insider Advice for Your Writing Journey



Go forth! Armed with love for children in your soul and fueled with yearning to inspire and warm them, take bold undaunted steps to board the highway of publishing!

Ruth Harper

I spent 20 years in the classroom with middle grade kids. Teaching them to write short stories, daily sessions of reading out loud, and my own imagination brought me to the decision to write stories that they would enjoy. It's a journey I knew nothing about four years ago. I had many misconceptions and it took me this long to do things the right way. Here are the roadblocks to avoid that will hopefully bring you success in your journey.

1. **DOING THINGS TOO QUICKLY.** I wrote my first story in about three months and thought by the next year I'd be seeing it on the bookshelf. That was the teacher coming out in me; always meeting that next deadline or getting to the next meeting on time. Get it done and check it off. Well, relax. Sit back and write your story. Let it sit for a month. Read it again for first revisions. Let it sit for another month. Revise again. Next get a few people to critique your story. Preferably not teaching mates or family, they'll be too nice. Revise again and again and again.

2. **DON'T THINK YOU KNOW HOW TO WRITE A NOVEL.** Take a class, get to reading the many fine blogs out there, or check out the great books available that will teach you how, and of course join Children's Book Insider and SCBWI (Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators).

3. **LEARN TO ACCEPT CRITICISM.** You should be ready for this one because as a teacher you are constantly under the radar by students, parents, and administrators. Your writing will be no different. Take each piece of advice and let it simmer for a few days. No one wants you to fail. The people I have met and worked with only served to make me a better writer.

4. **DON'T STOP READING.** In fact read more, especially in your chosen genre. You'll learn many things about plot and character development from the many gifted children's authors active today.

5. **IT'S NOT A VACATION.** Yes, you may have more free time away from grading papers, piling up in-service credits, or planning curriculum, but be prepared for that time to be filled with writing, revising, reading, and networking. Also, after living in the teaching world you may have a hard time adjusting to the fact that writing is a solitary endeavor. You'll be alone with your thoughts 90% of the time. What will push you forward is your love of writing and connecting with an age group you are no longer with each day. My entire professional adult life has been spent teaching, mentoring, and now writing to the MG group. These days I teach teachers, consult, and focus on my goal to become a great writer for this age group. It's the hardest job I've ever had!

I review MG books and offer writing tips on my blog at *Always in the Middle* (<http://www.gpattridge.com>)

Greg Pattridge

Teacher Insiders network and connect with other writers.

I always loved books and then worked in my hometown's children's library in high school and was determined to write books for kids some day. As a first grade teacher, my favorite time of the day was definitely story time! It took me several years to gain the confidence and make the time to finally go after my dream to create my own books.

Some of the best advice I can give you is to take advantage of any professional development opportunities you can. Become an expert in an area and you can then share that information at conferences yourself. This helps to build a platform for you and allows you to market your books when you do get published. The other great thing about attending conferences, is the exposition halls! You get a chance to see what new books are popular and talk to the people at the booths about what YOU write. I received two of my book contracts from two different publishers this way. Many of the big conferences have some of their staff from acquisitions working the booths. It is wonderful when you can talk face to face with these people and they can see your passion for what you write.

It is also great to get involved with organizations such as the National Association for Gifted Children, the American Library Association, the International Reading Association, and all of their local counterparts. This allows you an insider scoop on what is out there, what the needs are, and of course networking opportunities.

Another great way to learn more about your writing is to share it with others. Get a writing partner or critique group that you meet with regularly and share your work. You can help each other with parts that may not stick out to you, but are confusing to someone taking a fresh look at them. This is a very important part of your writing process if you want to get further with your revisions.

Lastly, never give up. It is a tough path to publication, if that is your goal. I have a stack of rejection letters I share at my presentations and Dr. Seuss had a stack of them too. You have to glean what positive feedback you can from them and use them to improve. One editor's taste may be completely different than another editor.

Keep at it and write from your heart. Some day, if you learn enough and are determined enough, you will find a home for your story.

Shannon Anderson

Writing from the Classroom

More than writers with 9 to 5 jobs, teachers are pressed for time. Teaching is not a day job that one leaves behind. Making time to write is essential but difficult for teachers who bring home papers to correct and lessons to plan. When I was teaching full-time, I was too tired after school to do more than eat dinner, read, and go to bed. In order to write, I had to rise early, into a clean day.

Make time to write.

My own best time for inspiration continues to be after morning meditation. Before the rush of the day begins, I make time to sit in silence. Ideas, whole poems and stories percolate up through the quieter mind. I keep a spiral notebook next to my meditation spot to scribble my notes.

Keep a journal. Make quick notes.

Many interactions in the classroom provided the beginnings of story for me. I kept a clipboard with Post-It notes for each child. Here I made notes of things to remember, whether it was an accomplishment, a weakness, or a comment from the child. These anecdotal notes were for student evaluations, but they helped my writing memory also.

Take time to nail down ideas. Writing a quick phrase can capture those elusive, but important thoughts that can be the basis of a story. For a while, I used a digital recorder during my commute to school.

Join a writing group.

Most of the work I have published began as first drafts in my Sunday afternoon writing group. I recommend the writing groups led by trained leaders who use the Amherst Writers and Artists (AWA) method. The AWA method provides a safe writing environment for inexperienced and experienced writers. A list of AWA writing groups is available on the website: www.amherstwriters.com

Send out your work: to contests, magazines, or any forum that fits the genre.

For too many years, I was afraid to submit my writing. Once I got past the first few submission and rejection challenges, I was desensitized. When I won a children's poetry contest, my confidence expanded.

Kim Ellis

Follow your passion! Whatever your interest and/or forte, explore it to the fullest. And then, blog or journal about it faithfully. Soon, you will have material for a book.

Also, read in the genre you want to write. If it's picture books, ask your school librarian, classroom teacher or students which books they are drawn to most. If it's romance novels, check out a number from your local library. If it's magazine articles on a topic, read those publications that relate to your passion. Every teacher has an area of expertise or interest that can be expanded in some way for readers.

Jarmila Del Boccio

As an educator who's contemplating on embarking on the journey of writing for children, the first thing you need to do is ask yourself why do I want to do this and why do I need to do this? New writers who ask me to look at a manuscript rarely have thought about it. Defining your mission and vision is very important. Is this a hobby? Is this a story you need to tell for personal healing? Is this a career move?

Regardless of your answer, one of the first moves a writer needs to make is to get involved with reputable organizations like Children's Book Insider (CBI) and/or take classes and workshops on the genre you feel passionate about. These will help you to connect with quality writers and writing instructors. Our children deserve the best.

Finding a critique group that gives you clear honest feedback about your writing is another must. Feedback is a significant part of growing your craft. Equally as important is to understand the publishing industry. Similar to education, there are many avenues for options for publishing from self-publishing to trade industry publishing. Know the publishing industry is constantly changing.

Writing for children takes dedication. The commitment you have to your students in the classroom continues with every word that you place on the page, every word counts. Remembering what you know about child development, children's needs and limits should be based on their developmental level.

Many skills from being an educator translate directly into writing for children. Time management, organizational skills, knowledge of curriculum, the ability to assess and change plans in the drop of a hat, listening and watching children, and knowing children's developmental needs as well as what they love and dislike are assets you bring to the writing table.

When you weave all these bits and pieces into your writing journey, there is one last thing that you must do. You must come from your heart.

Diane Kress Hower

Teacher Insiders fit writing into their lives.

My best advice is to learn about the publishing world and the craft of writing. I have taught Language Arts for 20 years and am an English major, but learning about writing fiction for children is a different world.

The writers in my critique group have helped me grow more than I could have just writing on my own. They shared their experiences with the publishing world and have helped me better understand the structures and techniques of storytelling. Their honest feedback has made my works-in-progress stronger. I've also learned valuable lessons about what makes useful feedback and have used that in my classes. A big takeaway is the difference between line-editing and true revision. When peer editing, my students (and sometime I've been guilty too) gravitate towards line-editing, pointing out the mechanical issues of a story or essay. Revision should be focused on the big picture ideas. Does the story make sense, does it start in the right place, are there places where the pacing drags and, if so, what can be changed to improve that? These sorts of questions are much harder and require deeper thinking, something we definitely want our students to learn.

Another suggestion is to write with your students. One way I do this is through the NaNoWriMo Young Writers Program. NaNoWriMo stands for National Novel Writing Month. The goal is to write a novel in 30 days from November 1st to 30th. For adults, "winning" means meeting a word count goal of 50,000. Students are allowed to set individual goals. I teach fifth grade and give my students a minimum goal of 4,000 words, which is very doable. I dedicate class time daily in November to writing and I write with my students. I tell my students my goal and put stickers for myself on the NaNoWriMo chart along with them as I meet my percentage milestones (10%, 20%, etc.). The first year I did this, I failed and only made it to 8,000 words. This was actually a great lesson for me and my students. I thought about why I didn't meet my goal and shared my reasons with them. Next year I worked harder, not only for myself but for my students. I "won" NaNoWriMo 2013 with 50,457 words! They were amazed that I had written that much and saw that I had transformed my previous failure into a motivation to succeed. I am still working on revisions of that manuscript, but I recently pitched it to an agent at a conference and got a request for three chapters. I'm already planning ideas for NaNoWriMo with my students this year.

Learning to become a writer will make you appreciate the depth of work that goes into the books we use with students every day. I have a greater understanding of the drafting and revision process and have been able to share with my middle school students first hand information on what it is like to try to become published. I've had many students encourage me and I know that I have inspired some of them to reach for their dreams of becoming writers.

Lisa Stringfellow

Who Are You? This is perhaps more directed to the teacher who wants to illustrate and write, but also to one who writes alone. I do both. I illustrated the well-known 'The Kissing Hand', and 'Sassafras' many years ago. Since then, I have done many, many school talks and demos, and my heart swells each time I see all those faces and get to talk to them! What a joy! As a teacher, you have a foundational knowledge, patience, and understanding that writing for kids requires. After all, your own very core is molded by those little sponges. Now it's time to begin a different type of inspiration and teaching. You've got a big advantage (besides juicy classroom anecdotes!).

A Few Books Don't Make a Living. A fellow author, Kathleen Pelley, said that when asked by audiences what advice she would offer for new authors, she says, "Marry well". Many other sources say, "Don't quit your day job". After teaching K-8th Grade Art Classes (where I wrote an accredited and core unit-integrated classical style fine art curriculum), and subsequent office jobs to support my family, I am finally able to return to my love 20 years later. Now that my kids are grown I am illustrating another book for a publisher, and have also written and illustrated my own (I have a publisher interested). My dream never faded, though agonizing, and I never gave up. I just had to learn like crazy until the right time popped it's head up.

Are You Serious? This must be a love, a long-lasting passion that you purposefully nurture, not an idea that you'll be rich and famous. Royalties can be very small: as low as 3.5% of the net book sale. I didn't get royalties. For you, this is not discouraging, but rather a reality-check to help you look for your own motivations. Deep down. You must feel in your gut that you were made for it, not simply to try something new, or to get famous, or rich. Ask, "Why do I REALLY want to do this?" And DO join a local critique group where you can encourage and learn from others in person.

Don't Do This. I can't tell you the numbers of folks who have asked me to illustrate their story! I try really hard not to roll my eyes, or snap a cocky reply. But my eyes uncontrollably glaze over. Please don't do that to artists! Do your homework. Only publishers connect stories with artists. When young I made the terrible mistake of offering to illustrate for a writer, it cost me millions, and many years of pain and resentment. I'm not kidding. From the beginning I got slathered with promises and more promises of riches and royalties (no down payment/advance, either), but eventually got written out of the book contract altogether. The publisher forced the author to pay me something for my year's work. A hard lesson learned. Now I return determined, armed, and much smarter. So if you know someone that's a really good artist, that's too bad. Don't insult them. Besides, publishers won't take a book already illustrated (it took my author 1.5 years of submissions to find one after it was illustrated). Those get to the trash bin fastest. Go about it the right way. And always get a contract first, making sure to have it reviewed before you sign.

Can You Really Write or Illustrate? It's easier for artists to get book deals than authors, as most folks think they can write, but you may not know that picture books take 3-4 times longer to write than YA or adult novels. That's what the pros say, not me. If you're a good artist who writes well,

though (or learning), you're in luck, you get a free pass to "Go" with many publishers and agents. Your books will have more coherence and unity. Some publishers may prefer you don't have an agent, either. Most Caldecott winners/nominees both wrote and illustrated, and get instant coveted spots in the front of bookstores. But beware—I've known really good fine artists who thought they could create a book, which turned out awful. Planning story images is a whole different set of skills. You should get Uri Shulevitz's book *Writing With Pictures*, and take some of Will Terry's online courses for artists on the topic, they're life-changers! After his class on creative composition for picture books recently, I threw out an entire book dummy that took me many months!

Go Forth! Armed with love for children in your soul and fueled with yearning to inspire and warm them, take bold undaunted steps to board the highway of publishing! Take deep drinks of patience and foresight. Let the wind of opposition make you more determined. Search for tools and experience to help you stay balanced. Bring along friends for good company, laughs, honest critiques, and wine or beer...and don't ever give up! Ever.

Ruth Harper

Best advice: You can do both, now. Teaching can suck up every drop of mental, emotional, and physical energy you have if you allow it to. Gift yourself a half hour each day to write. Lock yourself away and let go.

Teaching skills that translate to writing:

- 1) You are a planning expert! Decide what you want to accomplish and plan backwards. What is it going to take to accomplish your goal?
- 2) Task analysis. What are your strengths? What are your weaknesses? What do you need to learn next?

Other advice:

- 1) Seek the best to help you attain to the best.
- 2) Collaboration--a support group with common goals can encourage and stimulate creative thought.

Patricia Lausche

Teacher Insiders Share Their Own Writing Journeys



Keep in mind that you
are a storehouse of
knowledge. Be
confident in who you
are and how much you
have to offer.

Margaret Collier

To make sure that I write every day, I give myself "homework", just as I give my students work to do in the comfort of their homes. However, my homework is more fun: to write at least one page of a story or play before I go to bed. This keeps me responsible in my writing life, just as homework keeps my students responsible in their school lives.

Throughout the school day, I observe my students as much as possible. I take note of their dialogue, their conflicts, and their interests. These observations help me to authenticate the voices and actions of my young fictional characters.

Also, whenever I assign students to write an essay, article, memoir, poem, short story, monologue, skit, or play, I model the activity with my own writing sample. This keeps my creative mind from growing dormant and stale. On multiple occasions, I have found that my writing samples are the beginnings of something special. Who knew that school prompts could actually 'prompt' me to generate my own exciting story ideas and characters?

In addition, since my students are the target audience for the stories I write, I often test out drafts of my original poems, plays, and stories in my English, Creative Writing, and/or Drama classes. Kids are honest about what they like with regards to my work, and they are extremely honest about what they don't like! I welcome their feedback because it really helps me gauge what's working and what I still need to tweak. I have changed plot points, dialogue, and sometimes entire story endings after listening to student opinions.

My only caution to aspiring teacher-writers: don't take student criticism personally. See their candid responses as helpful tools and use them to strengthen and propel—hinder—your work.

Evan Baughman

I wasn't having much success getting the children's books I have been writing published, and I was not wealthy enough to self-publish. I submitted a column to my daily local newspaper because as a retired teacher, mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother, I had seen too many parents floundering in knowing how to help their children learn. Originally, my column appeared in the Living section as getting your children Ready to Learn. It has now been moved to the School section as Supporting Super Students which is also my website at <http://betrite.Wordpress.com>. There have been many positive comments, and I have developed a loyal readership among parents, grandparents, and kid-caregivers. I continue to build my platform, giving talks to community and school groups. My column continues to be published every Friday. I also work to build my blog. This is a very satisfying project for a retired teacher.

Supporting Super Students is just beginning to be recognized. I write daily and submit stories, essays, poems to magazines and contests. As a retired teacher and widow, I have time to write and improve my writing.

Bette Mroz

Being a private art teacher, my approach may be a bit different than those teachers in the classroom. However, we're both affecting children's lives. With years of observing the different ways children absorb information, then use it, I discovered that when I weaved into my teaching a bit of imagination and a large amount of humor surrounding whatever we were endeavoring to draw or paint, the student would light up! So, when I teach I'm generally bringing into the dialog fun reasons why the flowers we're drawing are "overlapping" (an art term), because they're all buddies! (pardon the pun). The sunlight only shines on this side of the tree, and fairies don't like the sun, so you'll find them on the opposite side of the tree where it's "shaded"! They become engaged in the process on a deeper level. Now, they think about the 'why' some things are drawn a certain way versus another.

This prompted me to write my first in a series of art instruction books for children, *Ms. Wood's Wild Art Adventures--The Rainforest*, which combine simple storytelling with rich, colorful illustrations and art tutorials. Written in first person, I'm talking to the reader and pointing out specific things to look at and watch out for, asking the reader questions and commenting on what's happening while we're on the adventure within the book. Throughout the story we decide to stop and draw or paint what we see by following the tutorials included. I also weaved through the story specific art terms, plus I included numerous master artists' drawings or paintings of the same thing we drew or painted in the tutorials, which help the student understand the value in the differences of art styles.

I had no experience in writing, nor use of proper grammar, (still don't, but I'm learning! ha!), so I had my work edited numerous times to be sure it met a certain standard as well. By introducing curiosity, fun problem solving and art tutorials within the storyline, my hope is that the child discovers within themselves a new-found confidence and fearlessness that comes from being equipped with evolving knowledge and abilities.

Jan Wood Harris

OLLI (Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes) may be one of those 'hidden gems', something that many people don't know about but can be very beneficial or prove to be a very pleasant experience. For me, a class assignment at an OLLI led to a book contract!

I hope there's an OLLI near you so you can take advantage of this great learning opportunity. And if you're not 50 yet, well it's something to look forward to! (Getting older does have a few benefits!) Good luck!

Ruth Wacker

Teacher Insiders bring the world to their readers.

For teachers who are interested now in publishing, please keep in mind that you are a storehouse of knowledge. You may have more resourceful ways of getting the message out than others in your area of expertise so be confident in who you are and how much you have to offer.

I am in the process of self publishing books through Xlibris about the cities and countries in our world that I have been fortunate enough to visit. I am gearing my books to those who may termed reluctant readers. Historical and cultural geography are not always a student's favorite subject. By using my art history knowledge and my actual travel experiences, photos and purchased artifacts I strove to make my subject area interesting while I was teaching. I may be retired but it is still important to motivate students to read and learn about the world they live in since with each passing day it is getting smaller. I wrote journals about every trip I went on, making illustrations, collecting brochures and postcards and taking pictures and I encouraged my students both here and in some of the countries that I have visited to do the same if they were interested in writing books of a similar nature. Writing about what you know gives you an energy and a passion to learn more. By writing a book on a level that students can understand they too will have an incentive to read more and learn more.

I started in 2009 and have budgeted accordingly, sharing the cost of some of the books with my cover illustrator. She is writing other types of children's books now and has been picked up by a publishing company. The Internet is your friend!! Depending on what you want to write check out publishing on the Internet and you can see for yourself that there is a plethora of different types of publishers you can contact. All publishers have their own criteria and guidelines. Nothing ventured, nothing gained.

If you are still teaching, please check out all of the awards and grants offered to teachers each year, many paying all expenses to travel to other countries or to participate in fantastic workshops and seminars here in the United States. Some of this information comes to the county you are teaching, while other sources are on the Internet. Once again, check it out!!

Teachers need to be as well educated as possible no matter what you teach. Every day you can be garnering experiences with other cultures and processes that can be valuable in your life. If we want our students to be open-minded and accepting of learning, we need to be also. Once you turn your experiences into some type of writing you are sharing all of that knowledge with anyone who wants to learn.

Margaret Collier

Before I retired from teaching kindergarten I tried my hand at writing and was published in *The Mailbox*, *The Idea Magazine for Teachers*. Feeling proud of that accomplishment I started writing children's stories and submitting them to publishers. Unfortunately I received rejection after rejection and realized I knew nothing about the publishing industry, writing cover letters, submitting manuscripts—even the most basic: proper manuscript format.

I may have been a teacher, but I realized I needed to go back to school. My first step was a correspondence course with the Institute of Children's Literature. The second step was joining SCBWI: Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators. I attended conferences where I met editors, agents, other aspiring writers and published writers.

In addition, I started two critique groups in my own community. We meet two times a month and bring our latest work for critique and to learn from each other.

I subscribe to magazines that deal with writing of all genres. I continually take writing courses at my local university.

Most importantly: I WRITE AND SUBMIT!!!

I have found so many people in my groups afraid to submit a manuscript for fear of rejection. So I tell them that their manuscript is already rejected—by them!! Go figure.

Submission, rejection, submission, rejection -- hey, I raised teenagers, I can handle rejection. And you better not be afraid of it or you'll never get published.

To stimulate creativity I like to enter contests. One of my adult short stories won a contest held by *Writer's Digest* and was published in their *Show Us Your Shorts* book. A few of my children's stories have been given an honorable mention, but not published. That keeps me focused and enthusiastic.

I go anywhere to be published and I'm not one of those writers that want to control the entire process. I supply the text and let the publishing company pick the illustrator.

I found an e-publisher called Knowonder. Two of my stories were published on their website.

The day the email came from *Ladybug*, a nationally known children's magazine, accepting one of my stories I whooped with joy. One acceptance makes all those rejections worthwhile.

My novel, *Only Losers Cry*, was published by Tate Publishing. And, yes, I had to put money up front even though they do not consider themselves self-publishers. I did this because I knew that getting my book published by a traditional company would take years. I believed in myself and my book. In addition, the trend of the time was to pick up contemporary novels to balance all the

dystopian novels flooding bookstores. I learned a lot about marketing a book with this experience. Just because a book is published doesn't make it a runaway best seller. An author needs to promote, promote, promote!!!

Today, I am finding e-publishing taking a great way to go, especially for picture books. MeeGenius is looking for authors and I took advantage of their call and published *Jacob's 100th Day of School Surprise*. Instead of the usual one to two year wait with traditional companies, it took six months from acceptance to publication. How cool is that!!!

If you want to write and publish your book, my advice is to learn all you can about writing and the publishing industry. When it gets overwhelming for me I remember my mantra: One letter, one word, one page, one chapter at a time.

Susan Westley

I am retired now but have taught in all the elementary grades for 30+ years. For all that time, I absolutely loved what I did and looked forward to going into school each and every day. My favorite part of the day, in the early grades, was Read Aloud when I would call the class to the carpet and I would read them a picture book or continued reading in a chapter book. I sat in my special rocking chair as the class came forward. I loved how the children sat criss cross applesauce all around, in front of me, with happy expectant looks on their faces, waiting for me to begin. Over the years, I read aloud thousands of books, some just for fun, and some that integrated with our curriculum. Sometimes reading a book would generate an idea for a writing exercise and that in turn would become the child's very own book.

During all my teaching time, I kept a journal of ideas, some generated from books I read, others from happenings in the classroom. My thought was that one day, I would write and publish my own children's story in a picture book from one of those ideas. During this time, I also raised three children to be kind, caring adults, who also loved books. Throughout the years, they gave me many ideas for stories, and those ideas also went into my journal.

So when I retired three years ago, I had many, many ideas for books. My first attempt was a family story about a little red tricycle's journey through the years, given as a birthday present to my son, forgotten and then found and restored, and presented to his daughter 40 years later. I also wrote a story about a cement sentinel frog, sitting in a garden, watching children play and coming alive in the night time. These are both ideas I had and I have yet to begin using the ideas that I wrote down over all my teaching years, but they are there, waiting for me to begin.....and I will!! Good luck to all the other Teacher-Authors out there, our time will come!!!!

Bonnie Chiantera

Teacher Insiders challenge themselves.

I would love to encourage other teachers to write their own books. Teachers are more likely than most people to have important things to share with children, and now it's even possible for them to publish their books on the Internet. That's what I did. Well, actually, my husband helped me upload my book to CreateSpace, though I think I could have done it myself if I had needed to.

What has helped me the most with my writing is finding the right characters to unleash my passion and creativity. I've found that characters must speak to you about everything you care about, your interests, experiences, and your curiosity. When you find them you will notice that the whole world will open up for you to explore. You will not have to worry about getting bored while you think of possible plots for your stories.

I wrote several stories over the years with the thought of maybe getting something published. I went through many years of wanting to write but not knowing what to write. I pondered a lot over this and went through much frustration. I even considered giving up the idea of writing several times.

Then one day out of the blue, the name Gemstone Elves popped into my mind. Right away, I felt excitement, looked it up on Google, and saw there was nothing else with that name. It wasn't long before Beryl and Jasper began talking to me and the journey began. Now there are three books about the Gemstone Elves, one published and two on the way. And what's more surprising is that the other stories I wrote years earlier nicely fit into the books about the Elves.

So, I would tell teachers to follow their hearts, listen to their inner voice, and find the right characters, or maybe let the characters find them.

Another bit of advice I'd like to give my fellow teachers, if they are going to self-publish, is don't be afraid to draw your own illustrations. I'm not a professional artist, but I did my own illustrations at first because we couldn't afford to hire an artist. I had a vision about the way I wanted the scenes to look, and I had some excellent books about drawing to study. After all, I'm trying to please children, and children love pictures.

Then later, I realized that another reason for me as a teacher to do my own drawings is that I can show that I'm willing to try to learn, and that might inspire children to do their own drawings, too. When I was a substitute teacher, I did a lot of drawing activities with my classes because the children became so focused, quiet, and busy. They loved it. It's a great idea to get

your students excited about drawing.

Some of the resources I used are *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*, by Betty Edwards, and *Drawing With Children: A Creative Method for Adult Beginners, Too*, by Mona Brookes. As far as what art materials to use, I found that watercolor pencils and watercolor paper are good to begin with.

This free on-line drawing course by James McMullen: <http://jamesmcmullan.com/LineX-Line/LinebyLine.htm>, was sent to me by Mark G. Mitchell of the How to Be a Children's Illustrator blog, <http://howtobeachildrensbookillustrator.wordpress.com/about/courses/>.

If you sign up for Mark's blog, you will get interesting emails about art and access to free online classes.

By the way, I'm now taking Mark's online course, "Make Your Splashes, Make Your Marks", and I'm learning a lot. Maybe Volume II will show some improvement. I'm hoping!

Patricia Elizabeth Bennett

My best advice for a current teacher who is interested in writing children's books is this: The best thing I did for myself was to take a creative writing course at a local college. There is so much to learn about becoming a published author. Sitting at your desk writing your heart out is only part of the journey. When you take a course, you are connected to people who want the same things, and you can establish your own professional critique group--which is a must. No matter how many A's you got in grammar, spelling and sentence structure, you'll need fresh eyes to proof manuscripts, edit dialogue and add depth to your plot and characters. You can help each other with marketing and technological problems as well. Again, hook up with fellow writers whenever possible and reap in the benefits: Education, Enthusiasm and Encouragement...then write, write, write.

Laurel Sheridan

I was only a substitute teacher in several New York schools, teaching every subject for over 30 years. But, I did get a good sense of what was required for social studies in New York and, as I have a strong interest in the Revolutionary period, thought this knowledge would be helpful in my writing for young readers. I also interviewed current social studies teachers. I wrote the first story about a local hero. This was purchased by Mohawk Valley USA in Amsterdam, N.Y. and they asked for more. The magazine had never published anything for young readers and only published 4 issues a year. I finally sold 7 more stories until the magazine stopped publication. I then offered the group for publication to North Country Books, Utica, N.Y. The manuscript was too short for a book so I researched 8 more incidents and battles set in New York State in that era. North Country Books purchased it and still has it in its catalog.

My book, *New York Patriots*, is in some bookstores, such as Barnes and Noble, where I was asked to do a book signing. It is also on Amazon.com where it has had good reviews. I have also had signings at The Farmers' Museum, Cooperstown, N.Y. and the Herkimer Homestead in Little Falls, N.Y. as well as several local signings. I have been asked to speak to several groups including Rotary Club, school and D.A.R. groups.

I believe my teaching experience helped in knowing what type of story would appeal to the middle reader group and in having access to the exact events taught in classes. I felt it would be good to fictionalize the true events to reinforce the sometimes cut and dried facts taught. I have since written historical fiction about Polly Cooper, an Oneida who brought corn to Washington's starving troops and another set in New York City during the British occupation, when a spy system was being started. These have just been submitted to publishers for consideration.

Dorothy Blackman

Don't dislike small beginnings and don't be drowned out by thousands of professional piano teachers. I've had the opportunity to teach children for over 20 years. In the beginning, I started with a few students and rapidly an avalanche of 58 hungry learners were at my door. I've stayed in my niche, affirming how unique each child is. Seeing them transformed has been an amazing experience. Investing in a relationship with each one has guaranteed a special response to see them all blossom. I think it is the same with writing from my heart. On this journey, I'm learning from professional coaches and investing time in creating story characters. One day I hope to see my children's book in the hands of a child. That will be sweet music to my ears!

Diana Rogers

To be a teacher is a wonderful calling in life. Embrace it! But to be a writer is also a wonderful calling in life. Some people may be one or the other, and some of us are blessed to be both. I'd like to share part of my journey to help inspire you to live your dream. And then I'll share several practical tips to help you get there.

As a child, I always wanted to be a teacher or a writer. When I graduated from college with my writing degree, I was excited! I had learned what I wanted to learn, despite knowing that it was very impractical and that I would probably never make a living as a writer. It was time to go get a job in an office! But after two years, I was no longer happy. I felt lost. Like I did at age four when my parents got divorced and I was left standing in the driveway with the dust flying up all around me as my mom drove away in her car. It was the moment right after she read me a story as we sat on the steps. It was the only time I ever remember her reading to me as a child. I felt called to become a teacher, even though I didn't know why. So, I embarked on the 6-and-half-year journey and became an elementary teacher.

My student teaching mentor said my strength and passion was in writing. I tucked that away in my mind as I applied for teaching jobs while I also substituted. After one summer teaching position and 18 interviews, I finally landed my first position. Teaching reading in middle school! But it was only a part-time 4-month position. After a couple more positions, I started to doubt myself. Would I ever be a full-time teacher with a classroom to call my own? One day, my sister asked me to read something she had written. I was so impressed with her writing that I pulled out all my old stories, poems, and ideas. I started thinking about writing again.

A year later, I was tired of looking for a teaching job and getting substitute pay. I had started my own writing blog and had several stories in several different stages of completion. I found a critique group and kept looking for jobs. At this point, I was ready for any job, even if it was sadly enough not in teaching. The turning point was when I got 2 job offers at the same time. One in an office and one at a school. The teaching job was in an elementary school, teaching language arts. What a dream! What an honor! Even though it was only a part-time position, it was going to last for 7 months, nearly a whole school year! Choosing which job to take was the hardest decision I ever had to make in my life. I ended up turning down the teaching offer because the office job paid more money per hour, it was 40 hours a week, and had the potential to last longer than just to the end of the school year. Financially, I couldn't make the teaching job work. Ultimately, it all worked out in the end because now I have an agent championing my books for me, and I have my own business designing websites for other authors.

So how do you know what's right for you? Is it selling your books to augment your teaching career? Your lifelong dream of getting published, and now that you're retired you finally have the time? A major career change in your pursuit of becoming a career author? No matter your path, the journey is the same. You must do what you feel called to do. And when the stars line up, you'll know. If writing is your passion, then roll up your sleeves and dig in. It may not be pretty

sometimes, but then again, neither is teaching. Nobody ever said getting what you want out of life was easy, but working hard for it sure makes it worth it. You probably tell your students that all the time!

Rule #1: There are no hard and fast rules, except to always be respectful.

Rule #2: Write. You can't be a writer if you don't write.

Rule #3: Believe in yourself. If you don't believe in yourself, nobody else will either.

Tip #1: **KNOW YOUR MARKET.** You have the advantage over other beginners if you write for the age group that you teach. You probably already know the things they like, their interests, what makes them tick, and what they like to read. Do you genuinely like the children of that age group? Or are you trying to get away from them? Do you feel like your books will offer something different and unique to them, in which they can relate to on their own level?

Tip #2: **KNOW YOUR GOAL.** Do you have this one book inside you aching to get out? Do you want to continue being a teacher and have a nice retirement? Do you have more ideas inside you than you have time to work on? Do you want to give up teaching to pursue your lifelong dream of becoming a career author? Do you have another way to support yourself while you focus on your writing? Knowing exactly what you want will help you know what goals to set to you can reach your dreams, whether it be one book or 101 books.

Tip #3: **READ LOTS OF BOOKS.** If you have a read-aloud segment as part of your daily routine, you have yet another advantage. Reading lots of books is what helps you learn, especially when you read them aloud. Reading helps you learn, kind of by osmosis. You'll learn what you like and what you don't like. You'll learn the style and subject matter of different genres. You'll learn how use the conventions you likely already teach, such as character, setting, dialogue, plot, conflict, tension, and more, including grammar. There's no such thing as a writer who is not also a prolific reader.

Tip #4: **WRITE WHAT YOU LIKE TO READ.** Writing what you love trumps writing just what you know. Content is sometimes not as important as passion. If you write what you love, it's likely something you already know, or something you want to know better. Passion helps you get through the tough parts of writing. It helps keep you motivated to keep at it.

Tip #5: **GET A CRITIQUE GROUP.** Teaching Language Arts to kids does not automatically make you a good writer. However, it probably makes you a great critique partner, for sure. So there's one more trick in your bag on your way to stardom. Having family and friends and even your students compliment you on your work does not necessarily make you a good writer. You have to have a marketable idea, write it well, and be able to revise it multiple times. A good critique group will help you discover your strengths and weaknesses.

They'll help you learn that writing is really all about rewriting. James A. Michener says it best, "I'm not a very good writer, but I'm an excellent rewriter."

Tip #6: LEARN THE CRAFT. As a teacher, you are likely a step ahead other beginner writers, but take it a step further and study the books you read. That is the best way to learn the craft. Attend classes and writing courses. Read books on the craft of writing. Follow writing blogs. Write and study as much as you can, especially during summers and holidays. If you write picture books, you can visit my blog and sign up for my newsletter to receive a free template to help you study (and write) picture books. Plus you'll get a bonus freebie too!

Tip #7: LEARN THE BUSINESS OF WRITING. There are books out there that talk about this, but a more fun approach is to simply immerse yourself in the world of writing. It's kind of like teaching. Once you immerse yourself in the classroom, you'll learn way more than just reading and talking about it. Join SCBWI and attend a few conferences. It will inform and inspire you and you'll make new friends too. Author Melinda Haynes says, "Forget all the rules. Forget about being published. Write for yourself and celebrate writing." Learn all you can, write all you can, and the publishing will take care of itself.

Tip #8: BECOME MORE EFFICIENT. You can manage your time better by killing two birds with one stone, as the cliché goes. Teach your students how to study books and you'll learn right alongside them. Another trick includes throwing out the red pen. Blocking your inner editor will help you write more deeply, more freely, and produce uninhibited passion in your writing. Once you have that first draft down, or your "sloppy copy", then you can go back and revise, resee, rewrite it. Over and over and over again.

Just because you teach writing to kids doesn't mean you should quit to try your own hand at writing. But it does mean you probably have what it takes. Passion for children, for books, for words, for literature, for learning. A passion for bringing literature closer to readers, to help the world become a better place, one reader at a time, and one book at a time.

Christie Wild



When I taught 4th grade, I used picture books to enhance curriculum on a daily basis. But I did not plan on becoming an author. Writing chose me! Near the end of my career, writing fell into my lap like an outer body experience and I never turned back. It was the best way to transition to touching lives in a new way—through my stories. But it was not an easy transition. Writing is hard! You experience lots of rejection. This was very different than receiving adoring looks from students (We won't discuss those hateful glances when punishment was administered). You wait many months, sometimes years, before you hear from a publisher or until your book is illustrated and ready for the world. This is unlike the immediacy of remediation in a classroom. But I wouldn't change it for anything. I am one of the lucky ones. I didn't get turned off when I got my first few rejections, though I was sure at the time I knew what I was doing. Goodness, I had so many picture books in my classroom, read so many over the years! But there is much to learn, and if you are willing to do the homework, and read all you can about writing, and study where to send out your work in a book such as the *Children's Writer's & Illustrator's Market*, then you are ready for this wonderful journey.

First and foremost, you must join SCBWI and become involved in a critique group. I would not be a published author if I hadn't taken that step. Then you must revise and revise and revise. Listen and learn. You have the perfect environment to search for stories, make observations about student's movements and chatter.

Is there a need you see? My first published book, *Where Am I Sleeping Tonight? A Story of Divorce*, Boulden Publishing 2008, was inspired by children's pain I felt when they went through a divorce in the family. This particular story about shared custody was actually taken from a former student's schedule.

Targeting the right publisher has been imperative in my acquisitions. My third book came out in January 2015, and shortly after that my first e-book for a digital library. The stories were polished and perfected after conferences and workshops and critique partner input. I did not give up even though in my twelve years of writing I now have about sixty stories and over 1,000 rejections. If you have the perseverance, patience, and passion, pursue this incredible dream.

My books allow me to do classroom visits and Skype visits to remain connected to teaching. You know the vocabulary and language and reading skills covered. You have the perfect day job to become a writer. You will need this job, as unless you are J.K. Rowling, you will not make much money in this profession. But you can touch lives with one book at a time. I have sold more books than the number of students I taught in my 35 years as an elementary school teacher. And that's pretty sweet!

Carol Ekster

In Mundelein, Illinois, about twenty years ago, I prepared the science center of my preschool classroom for the day's experiment. Kevin, my student, checked out the setup and decided he knew how to conduct the experiment and what the conclusion would be. "Teacher, I know your experiment. This sponge (he pointed to the long skinny natural sponge) holds more water than those two." Kevin was correct. I asked Kevin's mother if I might use his statement when I got around to writing a book. She consented, but I never seriously thought I'd write one.

Four years ago in Las Cruces, New Mexico, I sat across my desk from Ami, a friend and fellow special education Inclusion/Resource teacher. We had some rare downtime near the day's end, our paperwork completed for the week. Ami peered at me across the desk. "I think I'll write a book." I surprised myself by saying, "Okay, I'll help." In under an hour we came up with characters and at least ten scenarios. Over the next year, we made progress on several short stories for children.

Life changed.

I moved from New Mexico to Arizona and Ami altered her family status by becoming a parent to her firstborn, a beautiful baby girl. Our children's stories were put on indefinite hold.

I join the West Valley Writer's Workshop in the Phoenix area. This led to joining one, then two critique groups.

The critique groups kept me writing. I didn't want to attend meetings empty-handed with nothing to read for critique. By this time, I'd begun writing parts of a parenting manuscript: adolescence first, then working backwards to infants and toddlers. I studied child growth and development in graduate school, and I am a mom, so writing on the topic of parenting made sense.

I find the following helpful:

Keep copies of student projects you especially enjoyed. They may provide useful information for your stories. Names and details must be changed unless permission has been granted.

Find a comfortable writing space. I tried different areas of the house and finally found the room where I work best. Everyone knows to leave mom alone when she's writing.

Make time for writing. To say that teaching is time-consuming is putting it mildly. When I was writing and teaching I found scheduling time to write difficult. I sectioned off time on the weekends and one to two hours per day during the week, depending on the teaching load and inspiration.

Write what you know and enjoy. Writing from experience gives a rich, full-bodied read. Use research to add details, enhancing the story

If the writer creates a story and others say, "bad idea, no one will ever publish it", don't listen to them. Write what needs to be written, according to the writer's heart.

Take notes in a paper or online journal about humorous and not so humorous stories that happen in the classroom and with your own children at home. These stories make great vignettes. My children, adults now, have given me permission to use snippets from their lives in my books.

Read aloud what has been written. I am always surprised at the multitude of errors I catch by reading my work out loud.

Consider membership in a writer's organization. Writing is solitary work, but if you want to get your stories out to the public it is necessary to make connections in the writing and publishing world. The website <http://www.bookmarket.com/writers.htm> has a good list of organizations for writers and editors. The site is a work in progress.

Join critique groups. They are invaluable. For me, it's like attending graduate school for free. Every group will be different. I like the in-person groups to get to know the other writers on a more personal level. Every week brings new writing in many genres. I am in awe of the growth in the critique member's writing. Some days I go home wondering how I'm going to implement the changes suggested by group members, but it's all for a good cause: polished writing.

Check out meetup.com. A plethora of groups on the site cover a variety of interests: writing is one. Say, for example, a writer wants to work on a Sci-Fi fantasy book. Sci-Fi groups are available on MeetUp. Learn more about the topic at the meetings, and use knowledge gained for book material if you choose. The possibilities are limited only by imagination and time.

Consider a writer's website. An inexpensive, user friendly option is WordPress, <http://www.wordpress.org>, which is what I use. New themes are frequently added.

Start a blog. People want to know about the writer and what he or she is doing. Blogging provides the writer with an opportunity to communicate directly to and develop a personal relationship with the reader.

What began as an offhand comment to a parent of a preschool student twenty years ago became the inspiration for my first book, *Parenting: A Work in Progress*, published in the Fall of 2014. Sometimes it's good to do the scary thing and offer yourself up to the thoughts of other readers.

Take a deep breath and jump right in.

Ellen Buikema

Teacher Insiders are called to write.

Treasures of the trade are the words which come to mind as I embark on writing this article. As educators who aspire to be published authors, we all have acquired a storehouse of treasures which can be shared through our writing. Several years ago, I clipped out of the newspaper a Family Circle cartoon. In the cartoon's illustration were two children. One child was holding a present and the other child was making the statement which went something like this, "Today is called the present because it is a gift for us to open each day." I saved that cartoon and several times over my teaching career, I had the opportunity to peak the interests of my students and coworkers by challenging them to be aware of their time, talents and experiences which could be considered gifts or treasures.

In my classroom, I often used a small treasure box to introduce object lessons. I liked to describe a special object hidden in the treasure chest to see if my students could guess its identity. One time, I had not placed anything in the box. The students were allowed to make predictions and ask questions about what could be hidden. When one child finally realized there was nothing in the box, I led the children into a discussion about what are the best gifts in life. The children amazed me with their level of discussion. I recorded their responses under the title, Treasures. Their responses included: time, friends, family, ideas, hope, kindness and love.

One time, I used a treasure chest to hide shells of various sizes and shapes. As a special educator, I wanted my students, several who were intellectually challenged and nonverbal, to be able to observe and feel the shells and notice their similarities or differences. I could see the excitement in my students' eyes when I opened the treasure chest for them to see the various shells. They enthusiastically tried to match the shells by color as I showed them examples. They also touched the shells and made valiant attempts to sort the shells by size and shape. What a treasured time of discovery!

Treasures of the trade can be found in remembering those teachable moments over the course of your career, those special times when your students' eyes lit up and the excitement was alive.

Before beginning your journey as a writer, take some time to mine the reasons you chose teaching as a profession or trade and why you now want to be an author. Try to think back to the first time you realized teaching was what you wanted to do with your life. I remember being in sixth grade. After I had spent several weeks helping younger deaf children, who attended separate classes on the first floor of my elementary school in Cincinnati, Ohio, I realized I loved teaching these students and seeing their expressions of joy when I

helped them learn something new. After this experience, I remember declaring to my family that I wanted to be a teacher.

When I have asked educators to share why they became teachers I have heard several responses. Many have testified they felt called to teach and it was definitely not for financial gain. Several realized they had special talents and could help guide others with similar talents to be the best they could be. Some shared they had acquired skills or knowledge which they wanted to pass on to the next generation. Often teachers I interviewed mentioned the importance of having a work schedule which allowed them to be with their own children during the summer and also be with them during the fall, winter and spring breaks during the school year.

What were your reasons to become a teacher? Did you sense a special purpose in those early days of anticipation and planning? Why did you persevere through so many years of college training and student teaching? Try to recall your hopes and dreams . . . your vision. As you think back, you may remember your feelings of invigoration, excitement, and drive which helped you to stay on course. Begin a writing journal, possibly entitled, "Treasures of the Trade", to jot down your memories and your goals as you embark on this path to become an author.

Next, as you prepare to explore this new trade, writing, respond in your journal to the question, "What is my purpose or the reason I want to be a writer, a published author?"

As an educator, you have a wealth of experience to build upon. Value the treasures you have acquired which will help you to be a great writer. Over the course of your career, you have learned to plan and manage your day otherwise you could not have been a successful teacher. You have learned how to do research and to collaborate on projects. You know how to use technology for various purposes. You have learned to work with people of all ages and have had to improve your patience in accepting and listening to people who differ in opinions from you. You have developed strong character. You know how to evaluate your audience and address their needs. You are able to create lessons which challenge your students to think and to want to be lifelong learners. You love a good story and have shared many stories with your students. You know how to edit and to correct writing and you have had experience having your work edited. You are a people person or you most likely would not have been an educator. You have had experiences which no one else has had. You will become a great writer as you discover your unique voice and build on the experiences you know. In your journal, list the treasured experiences you have had which will be valuable to your growth as a writer.

The best teachers I have known over the years are the ones who have had high standards of

expectation while still nurturing a safe environment for learning. Strong teachers encourage their students to think and to try, not being afraid to take risks or make a mistake. We all, over the course of our careers, have probably shared with our students stories of people who took risks, who asked questions, who failed but then succeeded after many attempts. Great teachers inspire students to persevere through challenges. What have you learned from great teachers?

My personal best teachers also made learning fun. They knew how to use objects and real life meaningful examples to teach lessons, taking into consideration my learning style. They were creative, using art and music to reinforce the acquisition of skills. They provided hands-on activities, challenging me to use all of my senses. They modeled love and passed on the love of learning. They traded their enthusiasm with me.

Most excellent educators and writers try to learn something new everyday and are willing to share what they have learned. As an author, writing will be your craft or avenue for trading your treasures. Writing will become easy as you focus on those treasures you and only you have to share. List what you are learning and those treasures you are ready to share.

Enjoy the process of mining and the joy of giving. This present day is the best time to begin!

Brenda Flowers

Teacher Insiders are a supportive community of writers and educators.

Teacher Insiders have a passion for what they do, and a commitment to creating extraordinary literature for children and teens.

Teacher Insiders are simply the best!

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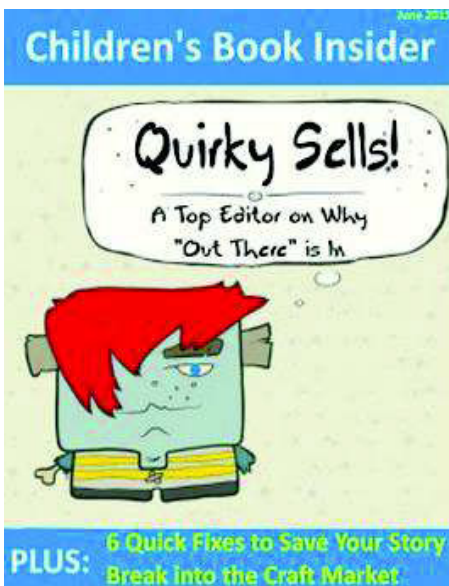
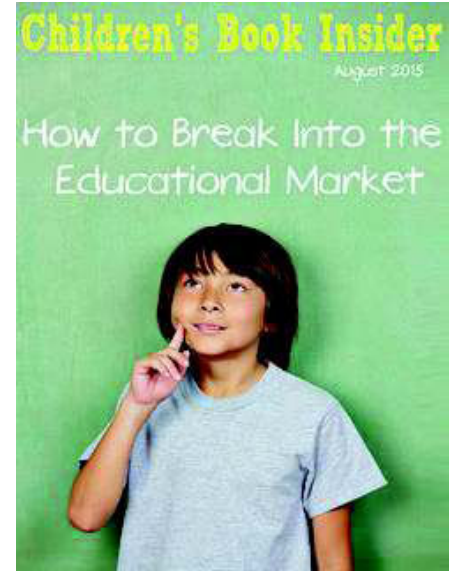
Children's Book Insider, The Children's Writing Monthly

For over 25 years, we've been the undisputed "go to" authority on writing and publishing children's books. We've taught thousands of people how to become published children's authors.

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<http://writeforkids.org/come-join-the-insiders/>

Other Resources

Books:

Children's Writer's & Illustrator's Market, published annually by Writer's Digest Books.

Creating Characters Kids Will Love by Elaine Marie Alphin

Blockbuster Plots by Martha Alderson

Hooked by Les Edgerton

Writing Down the Bones: Freeing the Writer Within by Natalie Goldberg

Writing Irresistible KidLit by Mary Kole

Websites:

KidLit TV, <http://kidlit.tv>. Interviews with children's book authors, illustrators, and industry experts.

Teachers Write blog, <http://www.katemessner.com/teachers-write>

KidLit 411, <http://kidlit411.com>. Weekly round-up of publishing news.

PiBoIdMo, <http://taralazar.com/piboidmo>. Picture Book Idea Month, held each November.

12 Picture Books, 12 Months (12 x 12 Challenge), <http://12x12challenge.com>

Katie Davis' website full of book marketing tools: <http://katiedavis.com>. You can also subscribe to her podcast series, "Brain Burps about Books".

Organizations:

The Institute of Children's Literature offers college level courses (and college credits) with one-on-one instruction from industry professionals. Take their free aptitude test and see if you're ready to learn to write for children and teenagers. Go to <http://www.institutechildrens-lit.com>.

Society of Children's Book Writers & Illustrators (SCBWI), <http://www.scbwi.org>. National organization of people writing and illustrating children's books.

We are grateful to all our Teacher Insiders who contributed to this book. Be sure to read their books, visit their websites, connect with them on Facebook, and tell them how much you appreciate their advice.

Contributors are listed in alphabetical order by last name. All URLs are hyperlinks and can be clicked on directly from this ebook.

Anderson, Shannon (Teacher; Published traditionally) Shannon Anderson taught first grade, is currently a literacy coach and adjunct professor, and also writes children's books. She lives in Indiana with her husband, two daughters, cat, dog, turtle, and two snails. Her first books, *I Am Not a Pirate* and *Nicken Chuggets* are available through Tate Publishing. *Maggot Man* is available through Royal Fireworks Press. You can visit her website at: <http://www.shannonisteaching.com> or her Facebook page at <http://www.facebook.com/authorshannonanderson>. Follow her on twitter @shannonteaches.

Anderson, Sonja (Retired/Former Teacher; Published traditionally) is the author of a middle grade novel called *Bon Voyage, Sophie Topfeather!* (Sunpenny Publishing). Her picture book manuscript, *Luna Crane, Papa Plane*, was a MeeGenius Author Challenge Finalist for 2014 and is going to be published as an illustrated, interactive e-book. Short stories and articles have been published in *Cup of Comfort*, *Children's Writer*, and *Young Salvationist*. Visit her website at <http://www.sonjaandersonbooks.com>.

Anthony, Casey (Teacher; Unpublished) Casey is a current college student majoring in Early Childhood and Special Education. Despite her age, she has a wealth of experience teaching in elementary and preschool settings as well as experience teaching elementary school in Mexico. She is on her way to publishing her first children's book and hopes to maintain a lifelong balance of teaching and writing.

Ashworth, Maria (Retired/Former Teacher; Unpublished) is passionate about writing everything from picture books to adult fiction. In 2012, her picture book manuscript, *Step One, Step Two, Step Three and Four*, was a finalist in the National Association of Elementary School Principals Writing Contest. In 2013, her middle-grade manuscript novel, *Sushi Kitty*, was nominated for the Joan Lowery Nixon Award, and also became a top five finalist in the National Association of Elementary School Principals Writing Contest. Her short story, *A Rose By Any Other Name*, placed top five in the Tom Howard/John H. Reid contest with *WinningWriters.com*. Her current projects can be found at <http://mariaashworth.com> and twitter, @maria_ashworth, along with other social media.

Atkins, Marcie Flinchum (Teacher; Published traditionally) Marcie Flinchum Atkins holds a M.A. and M.F.A., both in Children's Literature, from Hollins University. Marcie has taught elementary school for 17 years and is an active member of SCBWI and Julie Hedlund's 12x12. She's written for *Children's Writer*, *Appleseeds Magazine*, *StarrMatica*, *SRA/McGraw-Hill*, *Interactive Achievement*, *DIYMFA*, and *SCBWI Bulletin*. She blogs about making time to write and using mentor texts to teach writing at <http://www.marcieatkins.com> and has a newsletter just for teachers at her site. She's a contributing blogger to the *Grog Blog* (<http://groggorg.blogspot.com/>) and a writing coach for <http://www.Kidsarewriters.com>.

Baughfman, Evan (Teacher; Published traditionally) Evan Baughfman is a middle school teacher who has had various written works published or performed., including *R.O.M.3.O.* and *Julia* (*PLAYS Magazine*), *Bad for Your Teeth* (self-published), and *Twisted Tales* from Edgar Allen Poe Middle School (self-published). You are cordially invited to contact Evan at evanbaughfman@gmail.com and/or view examples of his work at <http://www.evanbaughfman.com>

Bennett, Patricia Elizabeth Bennett (Retired/former Teacher; Self-published / Published an ebook or app) Patricia is a retired Early Childhood teacher living in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina. She received a BA degree from UNC at Chapel Hill and an MA Ed from Western Carolina. Her book *Tales of the Gemstone Elves Volume 1: Beryl's Journey* can be found at <http://www.GemstoneElves.com>

Berneger, Marcia (Retired/Former Teacher; Published traditionally) Marcia has been writing children's stories for over ten years. Her picture book *Buster, the Little Garbage Truck*, was published by *Sleeping Bear Press*. Her writing credits include articles in *Boys' Life* and *Highlights* magazines, and a children's story in *The Healing Touch/Alzheimer's* anthology. Her manuscript, *D.C.* and *the Case of the Missing Silver*, was a

first runner-up for the Barbara Karlin Grant. In addition, Marcia is a book reviewer for Jewish Book World, a reviewer and editor for <http://www.myshef.com> and a member of SCBWI. You can find out more about her on her website <http://www.marciaberneger.com>

Blackman, Dorothy (Retired/Former Teacher; Published traditionally) Dorothy grew up in the Boston MA area but has lived in upstate New York for 56 years. She has been the Director of the Edmeston Free Library for 33 years. Her book *New York Patriots: A New York State Adventure* was published by North Country Books. You can find Dorothy on Facebook.

Blau, Sara (Teacher; Published traditionally) Sara Blau is a teacher and Extracurricular Director of Beth Rivkah High School. She is the author of several Jewish-themed picture books from Judaica Press, as well a contributor to TheJewishwoman.org. Her books can be found on Amazon.com.

Blumberg, Sharon (Retired/Former Teacher; Published traditionally) Sharon had written columns and blogs for The National Writing for Children Center, primarily book reviews and columns based upon activities she did and/or discussed with students in the classroom. She also contributed nonfiction articles for children and short stories to Guardian Angel Ezine for Kids.

Brown, Dr. Barbara Elizabeth (Retired/Former Teacher; Published traditionally/Self Published) Elizabeth Brown was a teacher/librarian. Elizabeth has presented hundreds of story times and book talks to children of all ages. She has shared workshops with parents, teachers, and librarians, educating them in the skilled art of reading books aloud to young children. Elizabeth holds a doctorate degree in education and master's degrees in library science and pastoral ministries. Her website and blog are found at: <https://www.elizabethbrownchildrensbooks.com/>
Her books can be found here: <http://www.junglewagonpress.com/>

Buikema, Ellen (Retired/former Teacher; Self-published) Ellen Buikema, writer, speaker and educator, received a M.Ed. from the University of Illinois at Chicago. Retired from teaching, she lives with her husband and two dogs in Arizona. Ellen has published poetry and short stories, as well as her book *Parenting: A Work in Progress*. Learn more about her at <http://www.ellenbuikema.com>

Buttery, Jane BATTERY (Retired/Former Teacher; Published traditionally/Self Published/Published an ebook or app) Jane has always enjoyed writing and got her first degree in Honours History in the UK and the second a B. Ed. She has written four picture books, one early chapter novel, one for Grade 4-5 and two historical novels. She has also produced two adult books and written many life stories for people she knows. Jane lives in Harrow Ontario. Visit her blog *Living Life with Joy* at <http://janebuttery.com/>

Cairns, Barbara (Retired/Former Teacher; Published traditionally) Barbara grew up in CT, then lived and worked in Seattle, WA; Labrador, Canada; Bamberg, Germany and the Canal Zone, Panama. She's written articles and stories for newspapers and magazines and has been published in Ginn & Co. 4th Grade Readers and Language Manuals for teachers. She self-published *Cracker Cow: A Narrative of Florida History*, which is now in its second printing. Her *Gatsby's Grand Adventures* picture book series (published by Guardian Angel Publishing) features Gatsby the art gallery cat who explores famous paintings at night. She's currently working on a middle grade novel set in Florida during the Civil War and also an adult novel set on the Maine coast. You can see her work at <http://www.crackercow.com> and <http://www.barbaracairnsbooks.com>

Chiantera, Bonnie (Retired/Former Teacher; Unpublished) Bonnie taught for 30+ years in elementary school, and especially loved teaching the lower grades, beginning in Connecticut and completing her career in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. She considers herself an Educator-Author and has begun her second career as a Children's Picture Book Author. She now lives full time on Cape Cod, Massachusetts, and family visits during the summer are full of ideas for children's books.

Cho, Tina (Teacher; Published traditionally) Tina is an author of 25 guided reading books from Lakeshore Learning and Compass Media. A coloring book, *God Is So Good*, from Warner Press was published in 2013. *The Girl's Guide to Manners* was published by Legacy Press Kids in 2014, and she has two more nonfiction books forthcoming. She is a former elementary teacher who currently home schools her two children. <http://www.tinamcho.com/>

Collier, Margaret Collier (Retired/former Teacher; Self-published) Margaret's website can be seen at <http://www.geographywithmrsc.com> She has published several books in her *Dear Diana: Travel with Me*

To... series. She has accomplished many personal goals and now hopes to spend time traveling and continuing to write.

Cook, Terry (Teacher; Published traditionally) Terry received her B.S. in Special Education, K-12 but has taught every grade level including Drop-Out Prevention. She received a Master's degree from the Savannah College of Art & Design. She was a former Middle School Teacher of the Year, a Disney Teacher-ffic winner and a 1st All-Team USA-Today recipient. Her two picture books, *A Moose at the Bus Stop* and *Emma McKenna's Ice Cream Dilemma.*, were published by Guardian Angel Publishing. She is working on a project for Scholastic Books. You can find her at <http://www.terrycookcreateskidsbooks.com> or on Facebook. She would be pleased to hear from you.

Dawson, Keila (Retired/Former Teacher; Published traditionally) Keila is a former school teacher, school administrator and educational consultant turned author. As a New Orleans native, and family historian, she enjoys writing and sharing about her Louisiana culture. As a repatriated expatriate nomad who's also lived and worked in the Philippines, Japan, Egypt, and six US cities in five states she also enjoys writing and sharing about her third culture experiences. Her debut picture book, *The King Cake Baby*, was published by Pelican Publishing in the spring of 2015. Her website is <http://www.keiladawson.com>

Del Boccio, Jarmila (Retired/Former Teacher) Jarmila is a freelance writer for women and children whose passion is to make Scripture and history come alive for her readers. Her website is: <http://4ambassadorsof-christ.blogspot.com>

DePino, Catherine (Retired/Former Teacher; Published traditionally/Self Published) Catherine DePino has published 14 books about bullying, grammar/writing, prayer, and women's issues. Her background includes a BS in English and Spanish education, a master's in English education, and a doctorate in Curriculum Theory and Development and Educational Administration from Temple University. The author worked for many years as a teacher, department head, and disciplinarian in the Philadelphia School District. After this, she worked at Temple as an adjunct assistant professor and student teaching supervisor. Catherine has also written articles for national magazines. For many years she served on the board of The Philadelphia Writers' Conference. She holds membership in the Association of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators. Visit her website at <http://www.catherinedepino.com>.

DeVriendt, Janet M. (Retired/former Teacher; Self-published) Janet DeVriendt was a middle school Language Arts teacher and also an elementary reading teacher; focusing on Reading Recovery (a program teaching one-on-one for struggling first graders) for the last 12 years of teaching. She also taught 4-year-olds in the preschool ministry at her church for 12 years and the book, *Bible Fun for Preschoolers*, was produced out of the puppet skits, Bible story dramas, and costumed characters used during that time period. The book is available on Amazon.com by name and also on Facebook under His Book Business.

Dragalin, Michelle (Teacher; Published traditionally) Michelle Dragalin has been teaching for 27 years. She has a BS in elementary education, BA in special education and M.Ed in Curriculum and Instruction. She is married with two grown children. Visit her blog at <https://michelledragalin50.wordpress.com/about/>

Ekster, Carol (Retired/Former Teacher; Published traditionally) Carol Gordon Ekster was a passionate elementary school teacher for 35 years. Her first published book was, *Where Am I Sleeping Tonight?-A Story of Divorce* (Boulden Publishing, 2008). It was an About.com Readers' Choice 2012 finalist for Best Children's Book for Single Parents. 'The Library Is The Perfect Place' was in Library Sparks magazine, 2010. A picture book, *Ruth The Sleuth and The Messy Room*, was on Character Publishing's debut list, 2011 and was awarded the Children's Literary Classics Seal of Approval. Her newest picture book, *Before I Sleep: I Say Thank You*, came out in January 2015 with Pauline Books & Media. Her first e-book, *Hip Hopping Books*, will be out with Schoolwide Inc.'s digital library, winter 2015. Find out more at <http://www.carolgordonekster.com>. [Twitter@cekster](https://twitter.com/cekster)

Ellington, Nancy (Teacher; Self-published) Nancy Ellington has been an early childhood educator for 22 years. She is an education instructor for the University of Phoenix Online and serves on UOP's College of Education's Faculty Council. She holds a Bachelor of Science Degree in Elementary Education, a Master of Arts Degree in Elementary Education Curriculum & Instruction, and earned National Board Certification as an Early Childhood Generalist. She's presented teacher workshops at local, state, and national levels and has co-written, recorded, and published *It's a Nice Day for Ducks*, a collection of children's early learning songs. Nancy authors two blogs: <http://www.teacherviewtoday.com> and <http://www.singasonglearning.com>

Ellis, Kim (Retired/Former Teacher; Published traditionally) Retired since 2011, Kim continues in education as a Teacher Consultant with the Hudson Valley Writing Project. Her work has appeared in Cricket Magazine, High Five Children's Magazine, Hudson Valley Parent Magazine, The English Record, Chronogram, and Crossroads, a union newsletter. She won first prize for children's poetry from Children's Writer e-magazine and was a finalist in Amherst Writers Poetry Contest. Her writing includes fiction, non-fiction, and poetry for children, professional articles, memoir, humor, and interviews.

Eyman, Sandra (Retired/Former Teacher; Unpublished). Sandra writes under the name Simeon Eyman. She is a retired Vocational teacher with a Master's Degree in Education who went back into the elementary classroom after three months of retirement. During her 44 years of teaching, she has taught all ages of students from elementary through college. She has also worked as a Cooperative Extension Agent at two major universities (the Ohio State University and the University of Idaho), and taught from small town to Indian Reservation to Appalachia to inter-city urban. She enjoys writing, reading, jewelry-making and her family.

Fischer, Ellen (Retired/Former Teacher; Published traditionally) Ellen grew up in St. Louis, Missouri graduating from Washington University with a BS in Speech and Hearing. She started teaching hearing impaired and special need children, then went on to teach ESL, and finally elementary and middle school. Upon retirement, she decided to look to her bucket list and tackle writing for children. Find all her picture books on Amazon here: <http://bit.ly/EllenFischer>

Flowers, Brenda (Retired/Former Teacher; Unpublished) Brenda Flowers is a recently retired special educator, with over thirty-five years of teaching experience. She loves to write articles, poems, stories, essays and devotional pieces to encourage and inspire readers to grow in character. She also hopes to bring joy and knowledge to children and adults by sharing what she has learned through her experiences. Brenda and her husband, Eric, celebrated their 37th wedding anniversary in June of 20145 They are blessed with a son, daughter-in-law, daughter and two grandsons.

Garrett, Connie (Retired/Former Teacher; Unpublished) Connie is a retired teacher (1st-4th grade, special education, deaf and hearing impaired, vision impaired/blind; speech language pathologist). She has also been a member of a cadre of trainers who train other teachers and mentor them in their classrooms. She's been a speaker for teacher training for 25 years. Connie has been writing children's stories for many years, but has never published one. She usually give them as gifts for the people she loves.

Gibbs, Margo (Retired/former Teacher; Self-published) Margo is half of a mother-daughter writing team from the Sunshine Coast in Queensland, Australia. She's been creating stories with her daughter Emma, ever since she was very little. They both love reading, exploring the magical natural world around them, and secretly wishing that they were mermaids. Mirabella the Mermaid Detective is their first eBook: <http://www.mermaiddetective.com>. Facebook: Mirabella the Mermaid Detective.

Gwyther, Sheryl (Retired/Former Teacher; Published traditionally) Sheryl is an Australian children's writer, living in Brisbane, Queensland. She used to teach kids from 5-9 years of age in a school from a low-socioeconomic area. Her published work includes a novel set on a dinosaur fossil dig in the Australian outback called Secrets of Eromanga; four chapter books, school plays and many short stories. Her work-in-progress, an historical adventure set in Australia's Great Depression, won a RA/ARA SCBWI Work-in-Progress award in 2013, and is now being reviewed by publishers. Sheryl is an Assistant Regional Advisor for SCBWI Australia E/New Zealand. Visit her website at <http://www.sherylgwyther.net>

Hammett, Beth (Teacher; Published traditionally) Two-time Teacher of the Year, Regional Middle School Teacher of the Year, and Instructor of the Year, Beth loves teaching students to embrace reading and writing. She is a former National Writing Project site co-director and presents nationally on 21st Century Learners, adaptive learning, and flipped classrooms. Beth resides on the Texas Gulf Coast with her husband, Mike, and enjoys playing with her grandchildren when not reading and writing. You can find Beth's young adult novel, Natalie, Diary of a Senior Year, which focuses on student-adult abuse of power relationships, at <http://bit.ly/BethHammett>. Beth's active learning and emotional intelligence teaching products can be found at <http://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Store/Beth-Hammett-The-Educator-Helper>

Harper, Ruth (Retired/Former Teacher; Published traditionally) Ruth E. Harper is the illustrator of #1 NY Times best seller The Kissing Hand, and Sassafras. The Kissing Hand is now deemed a 'classic' and is a

back-to-school favorite in its second generation of readers. Ruth has worked as a graphic artist/designer in several advertising agencies, and as a K-8 art teacher. Her love is to paint detailed nature in bright and vivid colors, showing it's welcoming solace and softness, and share that with children. Her passion has always been to write and paint the many stories she has pictured and drafted. She is working on two books currently. Ruth is a member of the Society for Children's Books Writers and Illustrators, and a Signature Member of the Colorado Watercolor Society. Her website is <http://www.rutheharper.com>. She's on Facebook at www.facebook.com/rutheharper.artist

Harris, Jan Wood (Teacher; Self-published/Published an eBook or app) Jan has been teaching fine art to children for over 20 years. She teaches primarily private lessons, through numerous Charter schools, and also after school programs and summer programs held at a junior college. Her art instruction book, Ms. Wood's Wild Art Adventures--The Rainforest, can be seen at <http://www.janwoodharrisart.com>. A second book in the series, set in Japan, is coming soon. Also visit her Facebook page: How to draw with Ms. Wood's Wild Art Adventures <https://www.facebook.com/MsWoodsWildArt>

Heller, Katherine (Teacher; Unpublished) Katherine is currently an Art Teacher at a public school. She loves to write and draw and has done so since childhood along the Fox River in northern Wisconsin. She is currently working on a book. She lives with "my sweetheart", Buck, and her black Spaniel/ Poodle dog called Tushia. Visit her on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/katherine.heller.353>

Hower, Diane Kress (Teacher; Published traditionally) An educator of twenty years, Diane serves as the local area event coordinator for the Western Slope of Colorado for the Rocky Mt. Chapter of SCBWI. She loves writing, kids, animals, and the outdoors. They keep her young at heart. See her books at <http://www.dkhower.com>, See her photographs at <http://www.frolickingfrogphotography.com>

Kirkfield, Vivian (Retired/former Teacher; Self-published) Vivian Kirkfield believes that with a positive self-image and a love of books, every child can achieve a life of balance, happiness and meaning. Her award-winning parent-teacher resource, Show Me How! Build Your Child's Self-Esteem Through Reading, Crafting and Cooking, (<http://bit.ly/VivianKirkfield>) helps spread the message that spending time with children is one of the most important tasks of parenthood. Kirkfield, a former kindergarten and Head Start teacher, is on a mission: to write picture books that will have kids asking their parents, 'Please read that one again!' She's an active member of SCBWI and participates in so many challenges, critique groups and writing prompts, her hubby wonders if her fingers will become glued to the computer keyboard. You can connect with her on her blog, Picture Books Help Kids Soar, t <http://viviankirkfield.com/>

Kochera, Annette Kochera (Retired/Former Teacher; Published traditionally) Annette has an MA in ED from Mount St. Joseph in Cincinnati, and taught at the Elementary Level for forty years. Awards include: Feature Teacher, A+ Teacher, and Head Teacher. She earned a diploma from The Institute of Children's Literature, holds membership in SCBWI, and hosts a monthly critique group. In 2011 she received an Honorable Mention for her story The Perfect House at the Writing Success Conference, held in PA. She has been published in Highlights and Reminisce magazines.

Kratz, Marilyn (Retired/Former Teacher; Published traditionally) In her almost 50 year career as a freelance writer, Marilyn has had about 675 children's magazine (and general interest publications) stories, poems, and articles published in such magazines as those in the Highlights for Children, Cricket, and National Wildlife Federation groups, as well as many church school publications. She has published three children's books and two general interest books . She taught elementary school for 31 years and is a member of SCBWI.

Langill, Beverley Baird (Retired/Former Teacher; Unpublished) After 35 years of teaching at the elementary level, Beverley is pursuing her interests in writing and art. She joined CBI, SCWBI, and CANSCAIP. She has been taking writing courses and attended a retreat. But most importantly, she is writing and connecting with other writers. <http://beverleyabaird.wordpress.com>

Lausche, Patricia (Retired/Former Teacher; Unpublished) Patricia recently retired after 27 years teaching in the elementary school. In 1999 she took a class in writing from Claire Rudolph Murphy at a local university. Her secret desire to write broke forth and she has been writing since (not published yet, but working on a number of stories).

Lawrence, Sharon (Retired/former Teacher; Self-published) Sharon writes non-fiction for all age groups. With her late husband she ran a private sanctuary where they raised and released injured and orphaned wild-

life, specializing in wolf rehab. They were also instrumental in bringing the Michigan Pack to Haliburton County, to begin the Haliburton Wolf Centre. Sharon learned a great deal working with her husband (a field biologist and author), taking research notes, photographs, and experiencing firsthand how to care for injured animals. She continues to write short stories from her sanctuary notebook, and to update several of the late R.D. Lawrence books. *Secret Go the Wolves* and *The Ghost Walker* are in ebook format. <http://www.cry-wild.com>

Lorbeer, Melody (Retired/former Teacher; Published an eBook or app) Melody Delgado Lorbeer holds a Bachelor's Degree from Florida State University. She taught elementary-school music for a number of years and has worked in both Massachusetts and Florida. She is a classically trained vocalist and has performed in various venues along the east coast as well as overseas. She also writes as M.D. Laurel. You can view two of her picture books, *Ten Roaring Dinosaurs* and *We Love Dancing*, at <http://www.Meegenius.com>. She can be reached at: <https://twitter.com/mdlaurel>

Louisy, Sermantha (Teacher; Unpublished) Sermantha is a high school teacher of Social Studies. She has been teaching for over twenty years and has been fortunate to teach both boys and girls and adults. She has a BA in History and Political Science, and has completed courses in Children's Fiction and Adult Fiction. She enjoys writing for children and young people in the 10-18 age group. Her aim as a writer focuses both on writing Christian fiction and traditional fiction for children and young people. She can be found on Facebook at [sermanthalouisy](https://www.facebook.com/sermanthalouisy)

Love, Pamela (Retired/Former Teacher; Published traditionally/ Published an eBook or app) Pamela worked as a teacher and in marketing before becoming an author in 1995. Her goal was to create the stories she wanted to read as a child. Down East Books published her picture books *A Loon Alone*, *A Cub Explores*, *A Moose's Morning*, and *Lighthouse Seeds*. Scholastic Children's Press published her easy reader, *Two Feet Up, Two Feet Down*. Her stories, poems, and plays for older children have appeared in such magazines as *Cricket*, *Highlights for Children*, and *Jack and Jill*. Her middle grade fantasy adventure novel, *The Pegasus Potential*, is available through Amazon (<http://bit.ly/PegasusPotential>) and Smashwords. See her Goodreads page here: https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/661197.Pamela_Love

Magee, Ann (Retired/Former Teacher; Unpublished) Ann taught for six years as an elementary school teacher before staying home to raise her children for 12 years. She began writing for children seriously in January 2013 by joining Julie Hedlund's 12 x 12 Challenge. Since then she's taken many online writing classes and attended a writing retreat. Her other interests include photography, art, scrapbooking, cooking, poetry, and all things Irish. One interesting thing about Ann is that she has an identical twin sister and her husband has an identical twin brother. <https://www.facebook.com/ann.magee>

McCraney, Wm. Lloyd (Retired/Former Teacher; Unpublished) had over half a century of human services in the Baltimore, Maryland, area, briefly as a social worker with delinquent boys and their families, then as a state certified special education teacher of emotionally and/or intellectually challenged boys. Most of his career was teaching at the college/university level as a psychology professor specializing first in criminal psychology, but later (and mostly) in teacher education. In May 2013, he retired completely after twenty-six years as adjunct professor of psychology with Towson University. His education includes the following degrees: B.A., American University, M.L.A., C.A.S.E., The Johns Hopkins University, J.D., and University of Baltimore School of Law.

McGinty, Frank (Teacher; Published traditionally/Self-published/Published an eBook or app) Frank has an Honors degree in Literature and Psychology, with post-graduate diplomas in Secondary Education and Learning Support. He's taught in high schools for many years. His writing includes 'Help' books for parents and teens, and kids' fiction for ages 4 to 16. As a teacher, he knows that the most influential teachers -- for better or worse -- are parents. His books focus on training kids to appreciate themselves, their parents and others, whilst helping them to relax, have fun, not take life too seriously... and still have strong values. <http://www.frankmcginty.com>

Minor, Alicia (Retired/former Teacher; Self-published) Alicia was born and raised in the Philippines, where she got her Bachelor's degree in Journalism. She came to Florida in 1986 on a fiancée visa, got married, and adopted a baby from China in 1998. She cherishes the eight years of service with the space program as a Technical Data Assistant. The eight years of assisting preschool teachers in Florida USA was a rewarding experience. Her first picture book, *Me and My Hot Dog Pillow*, is on Amazon at <http://bit.ly/AliciaMinor>.

Moran, Susan Moran (Retired/former Teacher; Self-published) Susan lives in Nova Scotia and has been writing for fifteen years. She's had a memoir included in an anthology, *Thirteen Ways from Sunday*. Writing is her passion. She writes with joy every day.

Mroz, Bette (Retired/former Teacher) writes a "Supporting Super Students" weekly column for her local newspaper, and runs a website with the same name at <http://www.betrite.Wordpress.com>. She has developed a loyal readership among parents, grandparents, and kid-caregivers. She continues to build her platform, giving talks to community and school groups. She writes daily and submits stories, essays, poems to magazines and contests.

Murdoch, Doris (Retired/former Teacher; Published traditionally/Self-published/Published an eBook or app) Doris was a teacher and media specialist in the public schools of Florida for 34 years. Her writing goal is to write and publish a book every year of retirement. She writes in the picture book and religion genres. <http://bit.ly/DorisMurdoch>

Murphy, Julie (Teacher; Published traditionally) Julie Murphy is a trained Zoologist and Zookeeper. She writes for children and teaches junior grades at an urban farm. Julie has written numerous nonfiction children's books about animals and the environment, and is a passionate advocate for education, conservation and sustainability. Her web site: <http://members.optusnet.com.au/~julieamurphy/> Her Amazon author page: <http://bit.ly/JulieMurphy>

Nelson, Carol (Retired/Former Teacher; Unpublished) Carol Gwin Nelson was a classroom teacher for 16 years at various grade levels ranging from preschool through high school. She earned her National Board Teacher Certification while teaching English at a small rural high school. After participating in the local National Writing Project's Summer Institute, she also provided professional development to teachers of all grade levels focusing on reading, and writing. Since retiring from the classroom, Carol devotes her time to her family's farming operation and her writing. Her most recent publication credits include an article in *English Journal* and *Phoenix* magazine.

Ohman-Rodriguez, Jennifer (Retired/Former Teacher; Published traditionally) Jennifer Ohman-Rodriguez, M.Ed. worked in the early care and education field for twenty years. She taught in a variety of settings including childcare, traditional preschool, Head Start, and at the college level. In 1993 she received a Master of Education degree from the Erikson Institute for Advanced Studies in Child Development in Chicago, Illinois. Besides teaching, she directed a preschool program, worked as a teacher trainer, developed an inclusive arts program for preschool-age children all in Wisconsin. She was also the co-creator and first coordinator for Quality through Accreditation, an early care and education quality enhancement program based in the Illinois and Iowa Quad Cities. Jennifer currently works as a writer. Her published work is found in magazines and curriculum. Visit her on LinkedIn to learn more about her work. <http://www.linkedin.com/pub/-jennifer-ohman-rodriguez/11/4a4/b98>

Ormond, Valerie (Teacher; Published traditionally) Valerie Ormond is the award-winning author of *Believing in Horses* and *Believing In Horses, Too*, young adult fiction novels about a young girl learning to believe in herself and her causes. A Navy veteran, she is also the founder and Chief Executive Officer of Veteran Writing Services, LLC, providing writing, editing, and consulting services. Her brother, Edward Ormond, is a career educator and author of *Teacher's Tack for Believing in Horses*. He is currently in his second year of teaching children English, Drama, and Social Studies in Shenzhen, China. <http://www.believinginhorses.com> <http://bit.ly/ValereOrmondAmazon>

Pacheco, Kathleen (Retired/Former Teacher; Unpublished) Substitute teaching was Kathleen's beginning, and then she received her first contract for Special Education. Working with and loving Special Ed kids for about 20 years in many of the categories, she then switched to being a Transition Coordinator for the next 10 years. She acted as a counselor to Special Education children in middle school and high school. She retired to part time teaching in the evenings to ESL students, all adults. All of her work with children stays with her as she now writes for them.

Patridge, Greg (Retired/Former Teacher; Unpublished) Greg has spent his entire professional adult life teaching, mentoring, and now writing to the MG group. These days he teaches teachers, consults, and focuses on his goal to become a great writer for this age group, which is the hardest job he's ever had. He reviews MG books and offers writing tips on his blog at ALWAYS in the MIDDLE (<http://www.gpatridge.com>)

Paul, Miranda (Retired/Former Teacher; Published traditionally) Miranda Paul is a former educator who got the call from an editor while teaching (the editor had to leave a voicemail). She's the author of four picture books from imprints of Lerner, Macmillan, and Penguin Random House. In addition to writing, Miranda runs a website called <http://www.RateYourStory.org>, which helps writers determine if their work might be ready to submit to editors and agents. She misses teaching, but doesn't miss having to wake up before the sun (or stay up after midnight) to get her writing done. Read more at <http://www.mirandapaul.com>

Pierce, Bob (Retired/Former Teacher; Unpublished) Bob was a classroom teacher for 33 years covering everything from special ed. to the regular classroom: 1st grade to 9th. He also spent two more years as a special ed. consultant while working on his master's degree. He has a Facebook page: <http://www.facebook.com/BobPierce>. He's had several stories and essays in an anthology published by a local writer's group, as well as several essays published in a special edition of the local newspaper.

Potoma, Alison (Teacher; Self-published) Alison is an art-music-drama teacher and a school librarian. Her first chapter book series, *The Smith Family Secret* was released in October of 2013 through Amazon Self-Publishing. She attended Syracuse University, where she received her B.F.A. in Acting. Alison continued on to Boston to receive her M.A. in Theatre Education from Emerson College. There she was awarded the 2004 Presidents Award for her commitment to writing and producing new plays. After a decade of teaching and inspired by the novels of her great great grandfather, Manuel Zeno Gandia, author of *La Charca*, Alison made the jump from playwright to author. Alison lives in Derry, NH with her husky dog, Koda. She is a member of SCBWI and a regular contributor to the Writers' Rumpus, a blog for Authors and Illustrators wild about kid lit. <http://www.alisonpotoma.com> Amazon Author Page: <http://www.amazon.com/Alison-Potoma/e/B00G0PH02U>

Poulter, J.R. (J.R. McRae) (Retired/Former Teacher; Published traditionally) J. R. Poulter has over 20 books published for children and education in the UK, USA and Australia, including multi-award winner, *Mending Lucille*, and 11 digital books in the USA and Europe. She has written reviews and articles (*Magpies*, *WQ Magazine*, *The Courier Mail*, *Queensland Country Life* etc.) and regularly contributes to SLQ Summer Reading Club. Under J. R. McRae, she has a soon to be released novella, *Free Passage*, and short stories. An award winning poet, her work has appeared in multiple journals and anthologies. Websites: <http://www.jenniferpoulter.weebly.com/> http://www.jrmcrae_subversive.weebly.com

Profiri, Charline (Retired/Former Teacher; Published traditionally) Charline Profiri began writing for children after 15 years as a K-3 teacher. She sold stories to *Highlights for Children* and *Pockets* before signing her first book contract. *Counting Little Geckos* is a board book that has sold 53,000+ copies. Eight years later a picture book, *Guess Who's in the Desert*, was published. Her website, <http://www.cprofiri.com>, has free teaching guides for her books.

Ravitch, Lucy (Retired/former Teacher; Self-published) Lucy Ravitch writes picture books and novelty books that are math-related. She is the Secretary of Children's Book Writers of Los Angeles and author of the *Kids Menu Books* series (<http://www.kidsmenubooks.com>) and has a teacher blog at <http://www.kidsmathteacher.com> where she shares hands-on elementary math activities and writes about her adventures as a children's author.

Reynolds, Jennifer (Retired/former Teacher; Published an eBook or app) Jennifer is from England originally and now lives near Seattle, WA. She has an MEd. and has taught in a K-2 multiage classroom. She completed 'Writing for Children' at the University of Washington, and is a member of SCBWI. She loves interacting with other children's book writers. She has had a poem and three picture book stories published in e-zine magazines. Website: <http://www.workingonwords.com>

Rivera, Zoraida (Retired/former Teacher) Zoraida Rivera Morales worked as a teacher and counselor for more than 25 years. She has published poetry, articles and stories in textbooks and magazines. Although she is a children's writer, some of her writings for adults have been published in newspapers and anthologies. She is revising her fantasy novel, *Princess Ada and the Kingdom of the Small Beings*, written in Spanish, and working on another fantasy novel. Some of her writing in Spanish can be found at <http://www.losbloguitos.com> Learn more about her and her work at <http://www.pinterest.com>

Rogers, Diana (Teacher; Unpublished) Diana is a piano teacher, a former music teacher for a kindergarten class and a book reviewer. She is passionate about music education and children's literature. She has four

wonderful grandsons and a granddaughter who love a good story. Her website is <http://LadyDpiano.com>
Find her on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/ladyd.piano>

Rudzinski, Mary (Retired/Former Teacher; Unpublished) Mary is a former primary grade teacher who has taught all ages up through high school and taught long enough to know nothing replaces a great book!

Rust, Jackie (Teacher; Unpublished) Jackie belongs to an advanced writers' critique group, where five members have published picture books. She's also taken writing classes. The Minnesota State Arts Board selected her unpublished picture book for their Art of Recovery exhibit. She was a pre-school teacher and now tutors children with reading and writing difficulties. She feeds the exhibitionist in her by performing volunteer story times at schools and using puppets that match the books.

Sheridan, Laurel (Retired/Former Teacher; Published traditionally) Laurel is a former teacher who has been published in several children's magazines, including Ladybug, Spider, Kids Ark and Knowonder. Her middle grade book, Ryan's Unkeepable Catch, is available on Amazon at <http://bit.ly/LaurelSheridan>. She loves to help fellow writers and give advice to parents looking for good literature for their kids. She is a member of SCBWI and CBI. See her blog at www.LaurelSheridan.com

Smith, Lisa (Teacher; Unpublished) Lisa is currently a District Technology Facilitator in a K-12 district, Community Technology Educator and Professional Development Presenter. She was an Elementary Librarian for 9 years, which taught her invaluable information about children's literature. She is working on learning how to write and publish books that empower children and have a profound effect on them. Find out more about Lisa at <http://www.123techs4me.com> and <http://Re.Vu/LisaSmith>

Solomon, Sharon (Retired/Former Teacher; Published traditionally) Sharon Solomon is a retired reading specialist and author of: Primary Science Readers Theatre (Pieces of Learning), A Walk with Grandpa (Raven Tree), How a Lemonade Lid Changed My Summer (Solstice), and three picture book biographies from Pelican: Cathy Williams Buffalo Soldier, Christopher Newport Jamestown Explorer and Lewis Tewanima Born to Run. You can learn more about Sharon on her website <http://www.sharonsbooks.net>

Stringfellow, Lisa (Teacher; Unpublished) Lisa is also a teacher who has taught Language Arts and technology for 20 years. Being around children all day has taught her to be patient, creative, flexible, and have an abundant sense of humor. You can visit her teaching portfolio at <http://www.lstringfellow.com/> to learn more about her classroom. She is active in the Midsouth Regional Chapter of SCBWI. Visit her writer website at <http://www.lisastringfellow.com/>

Strong, Cynda (Teacher; Published traditionally) Cynda is a high school English teacher and published author. She has written several Christian devotions, two children's books, and articles and poetry for magazines. She loves to write and encourage others to write and hone their skills. She believes editing can also be fun. Her website is <http://www.CyndaStrong.com>

Taylor, Sandra (Retired/former Teacher; Self-published) Sandra Anderson-Taylor is a renaissance woman. Born in Richmond Virginia, Sandra has lived through many eras of change, most notably the Civil Rights Movement of the 60's and 70's. Sandra holds degrees in Science, Education and a DBA in Global Marketing. After working many years as an educator in universities around the world, Sandra is Executive Director of the N. America division of The Global Outreach for Humanity. In that capacity, she is capable of creating opportunity in emerging markets, globally, which includes at home here in America. Her efforts are appreciated and encouraged by the many awards that she has. She leaves as a legacy, three children who are well accomplished in their own right.

Tornai, Sue (Retired/Former Teacher; Published traditionally) Sue Tornai lives with her husband, John, and dog, Maggie, in Northern California. Many of her stories and articles have been published in magazines and anthologies. Her most rewarding experience was writing fourteen Bible stories for Spark Story Bible. Visit her website at <http://www.suetornai.com>

Tornese, Jessica (Teacher; Published traditionally/Self-published/Published an eBook or app) Jessica Tornese is an Amazon bestselling author and was voted Solstice Publishing's 2012 Author of the Year. Her debut novel, Linked Through Time, was inspired by her hometown, Baudette, MN. She graduated from high school there and continued her education at Minnesota State University Moorhead where she earned a

degree in education. Her young adult Linked trilogy is available at <http://bit.ly/Tornese>. Check out more of Jessica's books at her website and blog <http://www.jessicatornese.com>

Wacker, Ruth (Retired/Former Teacher; Published traditionally) Ruth Wacker's class assignment at an OLLI eventually landed her a book contract. Timmy Triangle in Square Park is a Level H easy reader published by Reading Reading Books. Find out more about Ruth at <http://www.ruthwacker.com>

Weisz, Deepi (Retired/Former Teacher; Published traditionally) Deepi has been a classroom teacher (French as a Second Language and French Immersion) for over 25 years. She has also been a consultant/Program Implementation Resource Teacher for the Peel District School Board with French as a Second Language responsibilities, providing support and professional development for teachers at the school and Board level. She has also served as an elementary school administrator and is currently retired.

Westley, Susan (Retired/former Teacher; Published traditionally/Self-published/Published an eBook or app) Susan Westley is a retired kindergarten teacher and children's author. She holds a B.S. degree in Child Development from Florida State University and an M.A. degree in Early Childhood Education from the University of Miami. Her publishing credits include *Only Losers Cry* (middle grade novel), *Jacob's 100th Of School Surprise* (picture ebook), articles in several magazines, and an Honorable Mention in the Writer's Digest Writing Competition, Children's/Young Adult Fiction Category, 2011, for *Ducks in a Row* and *Drew's Secret*. See her Amazon Author Page at <http://bit.ly/SusanWestley>

Whitt, April (Teacher; Published traditionally/Self-published) April M. Whitt was born in West Palm Beach Florida. She worked for years as an English teacher and Creative Writing Instructor and currently works with kids who have special needs. She is the creator of the Romeo Riley chapter book series and author of children's books. She is also known for her many disguises and for being in two places at the same time. Visit her website at <http://www.romeorileytheseries.com>

Wild, Christie (Retired/Former Teacher; Unpublished) Christie Wright Wild is a children's writer and web designer. The former teacher founded Write the Next Book Web Designs (<http://www.WriteTheNext-Book.com>), where she is passionate about bringing literature closer to readers. Her degrees include a Bachelor of Arts in Literature with a concentration in Creative Writing, Licensure in Elementary Teaching, and a graduate-level Certificate in Web Development. She loves working with debut authors and enjoys the challenge of taking existing websites to the next level. She hosts the quarterly Lucky Clover Picture Book Contest on her Write Wild blog (<http://www.christiewrightwild.blogspot.com>) where the winner is NOT chosen randomly. Christie can't wait to do school visits, where she knows her practical experience in teaching will definitely come in handy!

Westra, Elizabeth (Retired/Former Teacher; Published traditionally) Elizabeth is a retired teacher of middle school English who now writes for children. She's the author of an easy reader, *Alexander and the Stallion*, an article ("Why me God?") in the *Encounters with God* anthology, and has also had several pieces published in children's magazines. See her book on Amazon at <http://bit.ly/Westra>

Wittenbach, Jennie (Retired/former Teacher; Self-published) Jennie is a long-time member of CBI and active in her critique group. She taught elementary classes for 30 years and then taught reading development for ten years at her local San Antonio community college for those who had not passed the college entrance exam. She has a master's degree in education with reading certification. See her picture book, *Little Stories for Little Folks*, at <http://bit.ly/Wittenbach>.

Yaro, Elliot (Retired/former Teacher; Self-published/Published an eBook or app) Elliot is a former teacher of Physical and Special Education. He later worked with the County Sheriff's office as a child abuse investigator. He always liked to write and with the advent of self-publishing got to see himself in print. Today he writes for both children and adults. You can find some of his work on Amazon.com and Barnes and Nobel under E.S. Yaro. Visit his author page at <http://www.esyaroauthor.weebly.com>

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