Children's Book Insider

10 Steps to a Brilliant Book

Special Submission Opportunity: Doubleday Books

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This issue's contributors

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PJ McIlvaine is a Jill of all trades when it comes to writing: kid lit, screenwriter, journalist, blogger. She is the author of *Little Lena and the Big Table* (Big Belly Book Co., May 2019) and *Dragon Roar* (MacLaren-Cochrane, TBD). PJ is also a co-host of #PBPitch, the premiere Twitter pitch party for picture book writers and illustrators. Follow PJ's magical adventures at her website https://pjmacwriter.com

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Published 12 times/year by Children's Book Insider, LLC,
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mail@CBIClubhouse.com
http://www.writeforkids.org

ISSN 1073-7596

Publisher: Laura Backes
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Children's Book Insider, The Children's Writing Monthly is an electronic monthly newsletter that is included in the paid membership to the Children's Writing Knowledge Base (http://www.CBIClubhouse.com). The cost of membership is $49.95 per year, or $5.49 per month if billed monthly. For more information, go to http://writeforkids.org/come-join-the-insiders/

At Presstime:

Publisher Accepting Fiction, Nonfiction Submissions for Board Books Through YA

Charlesbridge publishes high-quality, award-winning fiction and nonfiction board books through young adult. The publisher believes that books for children should offer accurate information, promote a positive worldview, and embrace a child's innate sense of wonder and fun. Especially interested in new voices, new visions, and new directions in children's literature. Fiction includes lively, plot-driven stories with strong, engaging characters. Nonfiction focuses on nature, math/science, social studies, the arts, and diversity/multicultural topics. Before submitting, be sure to study Charlesbridge's current list. You can download the Fall 2019 catalog at **https://charlesbridge.myshopify.com/pages/download-the-catalog**

Charlesbridge currently accepts unsolicited manuscripts. Manuscripts should be typed and double-spaced. Illustrations are not necessary. Include your name, address, and contact information on the first page of your manuscript and in your cover letter, and list any previously published work or relevant writing experience. For picture books and books under 30 manuscript pages, send a complete manuscript. For fiction books longer than 30 manuscript pages, send a detailed plot synopsis, a chapter outline, and three chapters of text. For nonfiction books longer than 30 manuscript pages, send a detailed proposal, a chapter outline, and 1–3 chapters of text. Not actively seeking alphabet books, coloring books, activity books, or novelty books.

Please send submissions (with the exception of young adult novels) via regular postal mail. Charlesbridge does not accept submissions by email or on a computer disk. Will respond only to manuscripts of interest in 3-5 months. If you have not heard back after 5 months, you can assume your work is not right for Charlesbridge. (Do not send a self-addressed, stamped envelope as all submissions not of interest will be recycled.) Mail your work to the attention of: Submissions Editor, Charlesbridge, 85 Main Street, Watertown, MA 02472. If mailing a young adult novel submission, mark the front of the envelope YA NOVEL ENCLOSED. However, for YA novels, email submissions are preferred. Paste your cover letter, plot synopsis, chapter outline and three sample chapters into the body of an email and send to **YAsubs@charlesbridge.com**.

Publisher Seeks Fiction, Nonfiction with Self-Help Focus

Free Spirit Publishing produces books and other learning materials that are practical, positive, pro-kid, and solution focused. Free Spirit also offers sound advice with a sense of humor on relevant issues including stress management, character building, puberty, school success, self-esteem, service learning, and more. Serving kids from toddlers through teens, as well as educators, parents and caregivers, Free Spirit's series include Being the *Best Me!, Bully Free Kids, Everyday Feelings, Laugh and Learn, Kids Can Cope, Middle School Confidential,* and *Teens and the Law*, among others. For a full list of titles, go to **https://www.freespirit.com**

Looking for books (fiction and nonfiction) that can fit into an existing series that help children and teens think for themselves, overcome challenges, and make a difference in the world, as well as practical, jargon-free materials for educators, administrators, counselors, and youth workers that focus on positive youth development. Areas of particular interest include peer empathy; grief, loss, and trauma; social justice and student activism; special needs inclusion; equity, culturally-sustaining teaching practices and/or inclusive classroom design; K-3 nonfiction with humor on SEL topics; picture books featuring or about children with special needs; authors from historically under-represented perspectives. Before submitting, please study the Free Spirit list to make sure your work fits their tone and focus.
Submit a proposal for all manuscripts that include a cover letter briefly outlining your project, the intended audience, and your relevant expertise; a current résumé; a market analysis with a comprehensive list of similar titles and a detailed explanation of how your project differs from available products; a detailed chapter-by-chapter outline for longer works, or a synopsis for board and picture books; the full manuscript for picture books, or at least two sample chapters for longer works; a description of your personal promotion plan for the proposed book (including both in-person and social media outreach). Upload to Submittable: **https://freespiritpublishing.submittable.com/submit**. Allow up to 6 months for a reply.

Agent Seeks Middle Grade, Young Adult Fiction and Narrative Nonfiction

Miriam Altshuler is a literary agent with DeFiore & Company (**https://www.defliterary.com/**), which she joined after 12 years at Russell & Volkening and 21 years running her own agency. Miriam specializes in adult literary and book club fiction, narrative nonfiction, and books for children.

First and foremost, she responds to voice and stories that are character-driven. She searches for books that draw her in and give her a new perspective on a world she doesn't know, or make her think more deeply about a world she does know. Miriam seeks books with a heart and writers with wonderful storytelling abilities. For children's books, she focuses primarily on YA and middle grade, and her tastes vary broadly in those areas. It always comes back to the voice and the heart of a story for her. For all manuscript queries, please send an email to her at **querymiriam@defliterary.com**. Include a brief description of your book (with one or two sentences that identify the "heart" of the story or nonfiction topic), a brief bio, and the first chapter pasted in the body of your email.

Agent Accepting MG, YA, and Picture Books from Author-Illustrators

Allison Hellegers is an agent with Stimola Literary Studio (**https://www.stimolaliterarystudio.com**). Currently seeking middle grade and young adult fiction with for strong, real voices (#ownvoices a plus), diverse stories, gut-wrenching romance (including all LGBTQ+), coming-of-age family dynamics/drama, immersive speculative fiction, charming magical realism, quirky humor, witty psychological thrillers, and/or any book that will completely surprise her. Her sweet spot is YA/adult crossover. While she tends to be drawn to darker, more subversive issues, she also loves a feel-good escapist rom-com. And any book that plays with narrative structure and layout is a plus. Her picture book taste leans towards author-illustrator talent with contemporary appeal, humor, and heart. Paste the first 10 pages of your manuscript into the submission form at **https://www.stimolaliterarystudio.com/#/Submissions**. For author-illustrators, attach a PDF dummy or sample illustrations to the submission form at the same address.

Christian Magazine Accepting Submissions for Ages 10-14

Guide is a Christian story magazine primarily for readers ages 10-14. The 32-page, four-color publication is published weekly by the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Each issue includes three to four true stories. Each piece should include a clear spiritual element. (See sample material at **https://www.guidemagazine.org/**) Standard feature-length stories are 1000-1200 words, but they also accept shorter pieces of 450 words and up. Payment is 7-10 cents/word upon acceptance for first serial rights. Categories include:

Adventure: Allow the reader to vicariously experience the excitement of making new discoveries while seeing character-building principles in action. Strive for a sense of mystery, action, and discovery. **Personal Growth:** Stories in the personal growth category provide guidance from a Christian perspective. **Christian Humor:** Stories in this category use a lighthearted storyline that goes beyond one-liners to expose a character-building principle. Inspiration: Possible topics in this category include answers to prayer, biblical narratives, mission stories, and examples of young people living out their Christian beliefs. **Biography:** Query first to make sure the topic has not been recently covered. Documentation required. **Story Series:** Continuous stories run in 2-12 parts. The story line should maintain some degree of spirituality throughout. Query first. **Nature:** Carefully study past Guide nature stories before submitting. Include a spiritual application in the article or as a sidebar. Please query first to make sure the topic has not been recently covered. Documentation required.

Guide prefers New King James version of Bible quotes. Please indicate the version for any Bible quotes that are not from the NKJV.

Submit work online at **https://www.guidemagazine.org/storysubmission**

Counting Down to 30: Part 7
The Holy Ground

by Laura Backes

Dear Reader:

In the 2018 documentary *Won't You Be My Neighbor?*, Fred Rogers, the beloved children's television host and child psychology genius, said, "When I look at the camera, I think of talking to one person at a time. The space between the TV and that person is very holy ground."

Rogers' respect for his audience is clear in his wording; referring to the "person" instead of the "child". They were fully-formed beings in their own right, with thoughts and emotions and experiences just as valid as those of their parents.

That holy ground also exists between the printed page and the reader. Just as Mr. Rogers used his puppets to embody and express a child's fears and feelings about real-world topics like the Vietnam War, death and divorce, the best authors stand back and let their characters reach out and connect with readers one at a time. When you step into the magical place between printed page and the reader's imagination, your adult perspective is irrelevant. The only thing that matters is your heart. Your heart may look like a unicorn, or a robot, or a bunny, but it still must beat like the heart of a five-year-old. And when that happens, young children meet you in that space, and know that they are seen, respected, and understood. That's all it takes to make you a hero.

Older readers are very protective of the holy ground between themselves and the story, and they also know a grown-up is behind the words on the page. So if you're writing for middle grade or young adult readers, you have to work twice as hard to prove your worthiness. You still must disappear into your characters to earn the reader's trust, but you also have to walk the walk in real life. When you visit schools or post on social media, readers must sense that you're one of them. Award-winning author Jason Reynolds said this about his mission to make African American children and teens feel seen in his books: "I can talk directly to them in a way that I know they're going to relate to because I am them," Reynolds said, "and I still feel like them." A recent *New York Times* article noted:

> When the writer Jason Reynolds speaks to young people, he rarely starts by talking about books.
> "They've been hearing that all day, all year," he said. Instead he talks about ramen noodles, Jordan 11s, the rapper DaBaby, "whatever it takes to get them engaged."
>
> Earlier this month, when Reynolds's *Long Way Down* was selected as Baltimore's "One Book Baltimore" pick, he came to the city to field questions about the book and sign copies for hundreds of middle school students. They listened to him as he compared hip-hop to poetry — "There's a direct connection between Tupac and Langston Hughes" — and said that early rappers should've been considered "teenage geniuses."

If you expect readers to join you in the sacred space, you've got to live there yourself.

From the Editor continued

If you're having trouble finding your way into that holy ground as an author, watch *Won't You Be My Neighbor?* When creating content for his show, Rogers always started with the child viewer. What did that child need today? What was she wondering about? What was going on in his life? And then he worked backwards, providing answers to the questions children were already asking. He didn't filter the questions – it wasn't his job to tell children what they should or shouldn't be thinking about – but strived to answer with honesty, reassurance, and respect. Rogers didn't see his role as molding viewers into the people he thought they should be, but rather to honor the people they already were. When he looked into the camera and said, "I like you just the way you are," he meant it. And his viewers believed him.

As an author, your job is to create that same connection with your readers. Your book is just the doorway to that invisible, precious terrain between the text and the reader's heart. Enter on the reader's terms, and you'll be welcomed into the neighborhood.

Sincerely,

Laura Backes

10 STEPS TO A FINISHED BOOK

by Jane McBride

Beginning writers often ask how long it takes to write a book. That's not an easy question to answer, because it depends very much on the writer, the particular work, and whether or not there's a contract involved.

The yet-to-be published writer can take however long he wishes to write a book. He has no externally imposed deadline, though he may face the problem of motivating himself to write when he doesn't know if the book will ever be accepted by a publisher. Should he set a deadline for himself, great. It's always good to meet a goal.

The writer with a contract faces a different set of problems. She must meet the agreed-upon deadline in submitting the complete manuscript (or produce a good reason why she can't). When the book is contracted, she and the editor will establish a deadline. When working under a contract, I pad my deadline with a couple extra weeks, or even a month. Why? Because, after writing many books, I know that life happens. I also know that one book may come together very quickly, maybe in a matter of weeks, while another, of equal length, demands months or even a year to complete.

Some people (usually beginners or those unfamiliar with the children's market) think that a picture book or a slightly longer book for a very young child can be written in a few minutes or maybe an hour. After all, a picture book contains only a few hundred words, if that. Picture books are among the most difficult books to write and to sell. The competition is steep. Every word must be chosen with the utmost care, and the spare text must contain a complete story while still leaving room for the illustrations to add details. Picture books are frequently revised and revised and then revised again, both by the author and at the editor's request.

Let's break down the steps of writing a book in Mini Blueprint form. (Here, we are not talking about the creative process of drawing characters, coming up with a plot, writing riveting dialogue, or anything else. We are talking timelines.)

STEP 1: Realistically determine how long it will take you to write your first draft.

ACTION: Figure out how many words you can write a day. This varies greatly from author to author. Some people can write 500-1000 words a day. Others can write 5,000 words a day. Perhaps you write 1000 words per day. For a 50,000 word book, that means 50 days to write your first draft. But that doesn't mean you're ready to submit. Writing 1000 words a day does not necessarily mean you will keep all of those words. You may throw out a quarter or even more of them when you come to the revision process. I have thrown out entire chapters (usually beginning ones where I had too much backstory) and had to start over.

NOTE: If you're writing nonfiction, or fiction that requires research (such as historical fiction), build in research time before you begin to write, but assume you'll need to do additional research along the way to fill in any gaps.

STEP 2: Add in the revision process. Unless you write and revise as you go, so that each page is a polished gem before you move to the next, the revision step will take a while.

ACTION: Devise a revision process that works for you. You may first go through the book with an eye to the big picture—plot problems, inconsistencies, poorly drawn characters, etc. Or you may tackle the small things first such as grammar, punctuation, spelling, word choice and work your way up to the big things. Either way, do what works for you. There is no one right way to handle revisions.

Give yourself plenty of time for this step. You'll need to set the manuscript aside between revision passes so you can come back to it with a fresh eye. This round of revisions is done before you ever submit to an agent or editor, so you're not yet on a timeline. Too many writers rush this stage and never end up selling their work because of it. So think in weeks or months here, not days.

STEP 3: If you have a beta reader or critique partner, add in the time necessary for him/her to read your manuscript and get back to you.

ACTION: Be clear with your beta reader and/or critique partner what you are looking for. Are you looking for help with characterization? Or are you looking for comments on the book as a whole? You may want to give your critique partner a form of what you would like her to look at.

10 Steps continued

After your critique partner responds with feedback, you'll need time to review those suggestions and incorporate any you agree with into your manuscript. Again, think weeks, especially if you're writing a longer work, or if you need to do additional research to clarify or flesh out areas.

STEP 4: You don't write in a vacuum. Make time for family and friends, exercise and entertainment. Allow for possible health problems or emergencies that may arise. When my mother, followed by my father, and my sister were sick and then died, I put writing on the back shelf. Fortunately, I wasn't under deadline then. If I had been, I would have had to ask for extensions. Understand and accept that life keeps happening even if you are supposed to be writing.

ACTION: Give yourself regularly scheduled breaks. Whether you write for five hours a day/seven days a week or you write one hour a day six days of the week and take off the seventh, build in time for others and for yourself. You need the change of pace. Your family probably needs you as well. Writing full-time sounds wonderful, but you can reach a burnout stage if you don't take care of yourself. Your family may also reach burnout level if you repeatedly neglect them.

STEP 5: After polishing the manuscript, submit the book and then wait.

ACTION: If you don't already have an agent, the submission process takes up-front time researching appropriate agents or editors, and crafting your query letter or book proposal. Once your work-in-progress has been submitted, consider making notes or writing a synopsis of a new book. There's nothing that produces more nail-biting angst than waiting to hear back from an editor or agent on a manuscript. (Note: The submission process can take months, especially if you're a new author. This is normal, which is why having a new project to work on is essential.)

Once your book has sold, expect a few weeks before the contract is signed. Then your editor will read your manuscript and send her notes for revisions. This next part deals with the editing process.

STEP 6: Revise according to your editor's notes.

ACTION: Different editors handle this process in various ways. My current editor sends back notes via a tracking system on the manuscript. I address her comments and then send back the revised manuscript.

STEP 7: Revise again.

ACTION: You didn't think there was only one revision from the editor, did you? This revision will probably take in smaller points. Don't fret. You can handle this.

NOTE: If you've written a picture book that it being illustrated by someone else, you may need to revise the text after the illustrations are complete, so information isn't duplicated in the words and pictures. Some publishers will also let the author review final sketches and illustrations to fact-check the visual content of the book. Review illustrations carefully, but be mindful of the publisher's deadlines for your feedback.

STEP 8: Address copy editor's notes.

ACTION: This is your opportunity to go through your manuscript with a fine tooth comb. Spend time on this process. You want your book to be as perfect as possible.

STEP 9: Fill out the fact sheet for your book. Many publishers will have you fill out a form with information about yourself and your book as publication nears.

ACTION: Don't rush this. Fact sheets are frequently the basis of the publisher's blurb and back copy of your book. Schedule enough time to do a thorough job on this.

STEP 10: Keep up with your social media and other promotions.

ACTION: Let your editor and your agent, if you have one, know what you are doing to promote and market your book. Work to combine your efforts with theirs. That I put this step last does not mean it should come last. Share parts of your writing process with social media and other promotions throughout writing the book.

Back to our original question: *How long does it take to write a book?* It takes however long it takes. Do not enter this process assuming you'll crank out three or four books a year and make quick money. But once you've got a few manuscripts under your belt, you'll be able to streamline the writing and editing process a bit as you develop a system that works for you. The point is that the process itself should be just as rewarding as seeing your finished book on the shelves. If it is, you'll take as much time as you need to create the best book possible. And that's how you'll get a contract for your first book, and many more.

Creating an Extensive Bibliography

by Pat Miller

Recently, a writer asked the *Children's Book Insider* for help. She was preparing proposals for nonfiction magazines and discovered that the writers' guidelines ask for an extensive bibliography.

She had two questions: What is an *extensive* bibliography? In what format should the bibliography be?

Let's use the guidelines for *Click*, a Cricket Media science magazine as an example. For guidelines to hundreds of magazines, view Evelyn Christensen's online list at **http://evelynchristensen.com/mags.html**. Though Evelyn stopped updating this list in January 2019, it still contains helpful information that can be cross-checked with the magazines' websites.

In their guidelines, the editors of *Click* are specific. They request:

- A brief cover letter stating the subject and word length of the proposed article.
- A detailed one-page outline explaining the information to be presented in the article.
- An extensive bibliography of materials the author intends to use in preparing the article.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

Before you can prepare a bibliography, you need to know the age of your proposed article's audience, what you will write about, and what resources are expected/available.

The *Click* guidelines say the magazine is for ages 3 – 6, and their cover tagline is, "Opening windows for young minds". The kind of article, and bibliography, that you will propose depend on these two facts. If your article doesn't fit the age and philosophy of the magazine, the editor won't read as far as the bibliography.

The smartest kind of magazine research is to read issues of the magazine. Many public libraries carry them in print or online. You might see if yours has a program called Flipster, which contains full issues of magazines and can be accessed from home.

If the magazine is not in the library, buy a sample issue. Cricket Media sells the current issues of each of their magazines online. Click costs $6.95 for a single copy. If you truly want to write for them, subscribe to the magazine. Then donate the issues to your local library or elementary school when you finish studying each.

Click articles are about concepts in the sciences, technology, math, and history. Let's say you want to write an article about the most disgusting fish in the ocean—the hagfish. This would be appropriate for the curiosity of the age group.

The guidelines tell you they want a conversational tone with a focus on ideas rather than just facts. Humor is a plus. So, what if the article became why the hagfish is the ocean's ugly duckling. You will explain how its yucky characteristics are really pluses in the undersea world. Do your research and make the outline they require. That will lead to the next step.

WHAT CONSTITUTES AN EXTENSIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY?

Now you know your audience, your topic, and your slant. Now to find your facts and interesting details. The guidelines say: "Authors are urged to use primary sources and up-to-date scholarly works in their bibliography."

Extensive is another way of saying "enough superior sources that we know your writing will be credible and interesting." Be sure you are including some primary sources and some scholarly works.

Creating an Extensive Bibliography continued

WHAT KINDS OF RESOURCES?

Because your article will have a lighthearted, conversational tone for preschool through first grade, you might not turn to *The Encyclopedia Britannica* or *The International Journal of Animal Science.*

Instead, you might use articles from *National Geographic, The Atlantic,* or *The Smithsonian*. To see how other authors share the same information, you might want to include the latest children's books on the subject.

Maybe you could interview a fisherman (they hate hagfish) and someone from your local aquarium (they know the hagfish's talents) to get a picture of the good and the bad. You'll find all kinds of professionals at **FindAnExpertOnline.com**. When I was writing about a nautical theme, I contacted a professor of maritime science at a prestigious coastal university. He was more than delighted to answer my questions.

You might use a video from the Smithsonian Channel to give you sensory details or from the Vancouver Aquarium. The interviews and videos are considered primary sources.

WHAT CITATION STYLE SHOULD I USE?

Since *Click* did not mention a preferred style, I would assume they aren't hard-nosed about the style they want. Choose one and stick to it. Be very careful about the exact punctuation. This will show you are a professional who attends to details. There are many citation formats, but these are the three most popular:

- MLA (Modern Language Association) is used by researchers, students, and scholars in the literature and language fields.
- APA (American Psychological Association) is used for scholarly scientific papers. You won't use this one.
- The Chicago Manual of Style is most commonly used in history courses, but also in the humanities.

For a helpful chart with more information, use the Research Guides at the University of Washington Libraries, **http://guides.lib.uw.edu/research/citations/citationwhich** The site also includes citation examples for each style.

Make it easy on yourself by using a citation generator. One is **EasyBib.com**. Another is Citation Machine (**citationmachine.net**). The steps are easy, with choices of type of media and preferred style. If you don't want to pay the annual fee, you will be asked to interact with an ad. But you will end up with a reliable citation that you can cut and paste into your bibliography.

For me, it's quicker to look at examples in the style I choose. For me, that is more often *The Chicago Manual of Style* because my book publisher requested I use it, and I'm familiar with it. At **chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide/citation-guide-1.html**, you will find examples citing every kind of source you could possibly use. Even if your citation style is different from the one the magazine will eventually use, it will contain all the information needed and look professional.

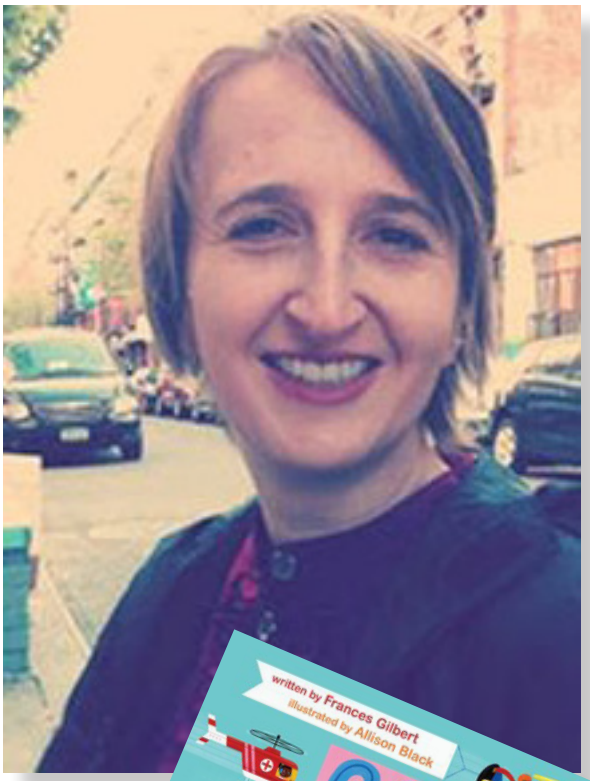
The bibliography is an important piece of your proposal. By all means, you want children to have the most accurate information. But just as important is how well you follow the other guidelines for substance, approach, and audience appeal.

Frances Gilbert

Editor-in-Chief Doubleday Books for Young Readers/Random House Children's Books

interview by Lynne Marie

Frances Gilbert is Editor-in-Chief of Doubleday Books for Young Readers/Random House Children's Books and a published author whose picture book *Go, Girls, Go!* comes out with Beach Lane Books/Simon & Schuster on November 5th. Notably, Frances has become quite a presence on the Twitter scene as **@GoGirlsGoBooks**, often sharing valuable tips or industry information, appearing as a live guest at Twitter chats, participating in pitch parties and more.



LYNNE MARIE: First, I want to say Happy Book Birthday to *Go, Girls, Go!* What are you doing to celebrate? Do you have promotional events planned? Please share some ideas of ways authors might celebrate their book releases, especially ones that would make their editors happy.

FRANCES GILBERT: I throw a breakfast party each year on the morning of the New York City Marathon, as the race goes by my apartment. We drink mimosas and eat bagels on the terrace and watch everyone run by. This year, it's two days before my book publishes, so I'm making it a combo marathon party/book launch. The only main difference is that I'll be bullying my friends into pulling out their phones and ordering a copy of my book while I'm pouring them a drink.

In truth, book release parties are more a thing of the past. Publishers very rarely host them. They're a fun excuse to have friends gather to celebrate your book, but there are much more effective ways of getting the word out. Engaging in social media is very important. One of the books on my Doubleday list this fall is *A Is for Audra: Broadway's Leading Ladies from A-Z.* The author (**@Johnny_Allman**) has connected on Twitter and Instagram with his followers, who are huge theatre fans. Every time he posts about the book we see the pre-orders rise dramatically. It's fascinating to watch. What's key, though, is that his connection with his followers is genuine. They have a true shared passion, so it's not as if he's just showing up everyone now and then to crow about his book. He's got relationships, and that's much more meaningful.

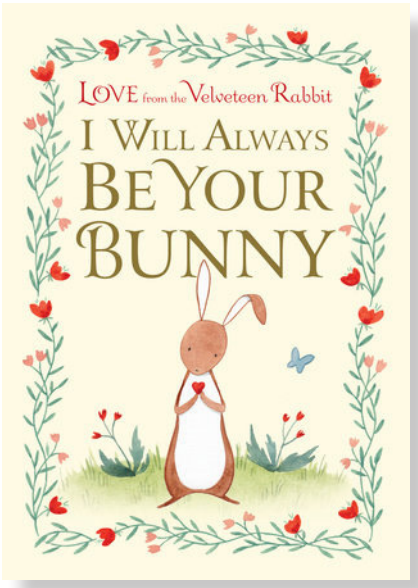
LM: I was particularly moved by your willingness to help others and make their journey to publication as honest and well-paved as possible. Please share what inspired you to dive into the world of Twitter.

FG: I set up **@GoGirlsGoBooks** for the reasons I listed above, and what I tell authors all the time: It's important to have a strong online presence to talk about your book. I started following children's writers and noticed that aspiring authors would quite often ask questions about picture books or would pass along information that was simply wrong. I started popping up every

Frances Gilbert continued

now and then to offer advice or correct some misinformation and people started asking me more questions. Then I started to participate in Twitter pitches, where I requested a few manuscripts to review for Doubleday, and Justin Colon's #pbchat, where I met some nice people who I've continued to have a connection with. I was impressed (though not surprised) to see how kind and supportive the picture book community is.

LM: Please share the inspiration behind your book *Go, Girls, Go!* Did knowledge and information acquired as an editor inform your decision to cultivate this particular book idea? If so, what role did it play?



FG: The book started after a conversation at work about which gender and picture books. This is something we talk about constantly, as we want to make sure all children feel seen and represented. I mentioned this conversation to a friend of mine who's not in publishing and he asked me what I thought a cars and trucks book for girls would look like. I was intrigued by that and wanted to find out, so I wrote it. I never intended to try to get it published.

LM: How did you go about finding "the door in" to that story? What tips do you have for writers about finding the door in?

FG: The phrase "Go, girls, go!" popped into my head as soon as my friend suggested the topic. I wrote it the next morning. I find that once I have a key line or an idea for a title, the rest comes quite quickly. For me, finding that "door" is incredibly random. I have a gift book I wrote coming out in December that's based on the theme of eternal love from *The Velveteen Rabbit.* It's called *I Will Always Be Your Bunny.* I'd wanted to write that story for about five years but had no idea how. Then one day on the subway home, the phrase "I will always be your bunny" popped into my head and I realized I had the title and refrain for my story. So, my main tip for getting started is to let your imagination be free and giving yourself time to daydream. If you try to force it, your reader can tell.

LM: How do you feel about art notes as an author? As an editor? Did you include art notes in *Go, Girls, Go!?*

FG: Yes, I included art notes, because the text is concept-driven and has scenes throughout that are pretty much all noisy vehicle sounds, like "Whirr!" and "Hoot!" I wanted to make sure my intention came across so I included notes as to what I imagined happening. It's odd to me how much anxiety there is online about whether to include art notes. I even read one person offering (incorrect) advice on precisely how many were appropriate. Honestly, it's baffling how much people fuss about it. No editor cares if you include art notes, I promise you. Include as many as you need. What we don't want to read are manuscripts that confuse us because we have no idea what is going on. I'm likely going to spend two minutes tops reading a manuscript that's submitted. If I have to fight my way through it, I'm simply going to reject it.

LM: Similarly, what are your thoughts on paginated manuscripts from the POV as an author, and as an editor? If suggested page turns are acceptable, where do you suggest starting the manuscript and why? What page would you suggest ending the manuscript on?

FG: I feel similarly about page numbers as I do about art notes: If you want to paginate your story, go ahead. No one will care one way or another. I'm not going to pay attention to your pagination anyway, unless I acquire the book, and then I'm going to paginate it myself. Do try to at least indicate page breaks, however, if the humor or tension of your story is dependent on dramatic page turns. Be sure that's clear, otherwise your reader might miss it. But, even then, don't get too hung up about it. And you might try paginating your story simply as an exercise, just to make sure you've thought about how it will work as a visual object, because that's what a picture book is.

PS: If you're new to pagination and want to try, start here with this basic map: Page 1 of a 32-page self-ended picture book (where the endpapers are part of the same printed book block, not additional, separate endpapers) is the pasted-down side of the first endpaper. Pages 2-3 are the endpapers. Pages 4-5 are the copyright and title page. Your story starts on pages 6-7. The last page of the story is page 29 (or page 28 if you prefer to end on a single left-hand page). Pages 30-31 are the back endpapers, and page 32 is the

pasted-down back endpaper, glued to the back board of the cover. If your book is 40-pages self-ended, your story ends on pages 36-37, back endpapers are pages 38-39, and the pasted-down end page is page 40.

LM: You focus on picture book and board book manuscripts for your imprint. About how many of each do you acquire per year? What is the first thing you consider when you start reading a picture book or board book?

FG: It varies, but I tend to acquire about 10-12 new picture book manuscripts a year and about 6-8 original board books. The rest of my list is either paperback or board book conversions from hardcovers, and coeditions, which are foreign books that I acquire to be published in North America. Because my list at Doubleday is relatively small, I just hold out for that intangible special something. A story has to grab me, and that can happen for a number of reasons: Because it's hilarious, because it's a new idea, because it's beautiful, because it's important, and/or because I feel strongly it will sell a lot of copies. Editors are very personal in our selections, because we usually have to spend a couple of years with the book before it publishes. We have to feel passionately about a project, and that can be very subjective. That's why I don't feel too bad when I reject a good work that simply didn't feel right for my list—because I know it will find the right home somewhere else.

LM: I understand that you don't quite have a "wishlist" because you are very open as far as that and will know what you want when you see something that touches you, but are there any helpful hints as to how to generally grab your attention?

FG: It's important that you start strong. Your first line, your first page, these have to turn heads. One of the main reasons I reject manuscripts is because they feel all over the place right from the start. Overly-chatty and uninspired dialogue, contrived set-ups, or just plain ordinary writing. I usually don't bother reading past the opening lines in those cases. I really need to feel wowed if I'm going to keep going, because so does the person who might one day think about buying your book.

LM: Can you give some examples of books that have done this for you?

FG: I published Annie Silvestro's *Bunny's Book Club* a couple of years ago. Her opening line isn't flashy. It's simply "Bunny loved books." But those three words got my imagination going: Who is Bunny? Why does he love books? And of course I love books too, so the subject was intriguing. I also knew instantly I wanted to publish Dev Petty's *I Don't Want to Be a Frog* because the tone of her frog's character was set from page one: sassy, hilarious, stubborn. I loved him right away.

LM: Please share something fun about you have experienced or learned while working with author Tammi Sauer.

FG: I found Tammi's first book, *Cowboy Camp*, in the slush pile. (This was back when writers mailed big brown envelopes with their manuscripts inside.) And I published her second and third books, *Chicken Dance* and *Bawk and Roll*. That was earlier in my career, and Tammi's writing taught me so much about comic timing, because even though she was new to publishing, she was flawless at it. And I also saw how incredibly hard Tammi worked to promote her books and create a career for herself, visiting just about every school and library in Oklahoma, Kansas, and Texas. She is unstoppable. I was excited to work with Tammi again a bunch of years later, when I published Wordy Birdy and its sequel at Doubleday, and she and I have a new book in the works. I can't express my admiration for how effortlessly good she is at this.

LM: What techniques do you recommend to help make a manuscript active and engaging?

FG: It's often said of picture books that every word counts, and that's my best answer to this question. When I edit my own work, I take a look at every single word over and over again and work on every sentence until it reads as well as I can possibly make it. Even the tiny words, everything. Your sentences have to sing. I can instantly tell when a writer has just dashed something off and hasn't thought about the craft of writing a great sentence, and I don't read past the first sentence in those cases. So, to keep your reader engaged, make sure you're ruthless with yourself, and don't let a manuscript go out on submission until you think it's perfect.

LM: What is a recent book you wish you would have acquired? What made that book stand out for you?

FG: I have lots of book envy over Raúl the Third's *¡Vamos! Let's Go to the Market*. I love his art. It's just so cool and fresh, and the book feels like a little graphic novel. It's billed by the publisher as a Mexican-American take on Richard Scarry's Busytown, which is such a great angle. Had I opened that up on submission

Frances Gilbert continued

I would have seen instantly how special it is. That's what we're all looking for.

LM: What would your top three pieces of advice be to writers aspiring to write a successful picture book text?

FG: 1.) Don't set up a contrived plot just because you think a story has to have a problem that needs to be solved. We see way too many of these and they feel formulaic. 2.) Don't overwork your stories too much. It's good to get critiques, but important not to lose sight of the heart of the work. I can spot it instantly when a story has been overly-written. 3.) Don't listen to people who tell you there are rules you must follow (such as what page your plot needs to be resolved on, or how many art notes to include). The only rule you need to follow is that you have to be a great storyteller.

LM: What is it that you look for in a Twitter pitch?

FG: A succinct and instantly arresting summary, and a topic or angle that feels new.

LM: What pitch did you submit to sell *Go, Girls, Go*!?

FG: I put together a visual and well-researched package that I knew I'd love to get with a submission, with thoughts on how the book could be positioned in the marketplace, who the audience is, how it could be spun off into other books, and what my inspiration in writing it was. I wanted to make it easy for the editor to instantly see how the book could work on her list, and for her to be able to use my info in her own pitch at her acquisitions meeting.

LM: You've attended a few pitch parties by this time as **@GoGirlsGoBooks**. Have you ever picked up a manuscript as a result of one? What do you find to be the pros and cons of relying on this method to sell your manuscript?

FG: I have! I can't tell you about it yet as we haven't announced it, but I found a manuscript via a Twitter pitch earlier this summer. The pros for authors is that it's a rare chance to get your idea looked at by people who normally don't review unagented manuscripts. It democratizes the process a bit. I don't see any downside to it. I think more editors and agents should participate. I found a great book that way.

This month's **Above the Slushpile** submission opportunity is a bit different. Generally, Doubleday only reviews agented submissions. However, Frances Gilbert is willing to accept pitches from CBI subscribers for the month of November. These pitches will be collected and sent to her for review. **All pitches must be received by 5 pm Pacific Time on Saturday, November 30**. Please note that Frances will only respond to those pitches that she wishes to see the manuscripts for. If you don't hear anything back by **December 20, 2019** you can assume your pitch was not selected for a manuscript request.

Instructions for submission: Pitches should be limited to board books and picture books. Each submission should consist of the author's name, email contact info, the title of the work, and a pitch of **140 characters or less** (as with a Twitter pitch). Send pitches to **Shellie@writeforkids.org** and put **CBI FRANCES GILBERT THANKSGIVING PITCH FEST** in the Subject line. Pitches will be compiled and sent to Frances Gilbert on December 1.

To write a compelling pitch or logline, identify your main character, the conflict, and what's unique about your story. This information should be combined in a way that underlines the emotional impact of the book's conflict. For example: On a day out with Daddy, Trixie loses beloved Knuffle Bunny at the laundromat, but can't tell Daddy because she hasn't learned to talk yet. (139 characters. Based on *Knuffle Bunny: A Cautionary Tale* by Mo Willems)

DIALOGUE EXERCISES

by Jane McBride

Writing dialogue can be fun. It can also be frustrating as you try to capture the voices of your various characters. Below are some exercises which I have both taught and participated in over the years.

Exercise: Read with an eye and an ear to dialogue. If you come across a particularly great passage of dialogue, go back and analyze it, asking yourself why it works. Then do this with a page from your work-in-progress. How does your writing stack up?

Exercise: Write a page with no narrative at all. Writing a scene entirely in dialogue is a great way to hone your skills. Start with writing a page of dialogue with no speech tags (identifying the speaker with words like "Sam said," "she asked," "Marci whispered"). Save that as Version1, then create a new version of the same page of dialogue and add a few speech tags to make it clear who is speaking. Save this page as Version 2. Then take the same page and delete any adverbs, such as:

She said *softly*.

He muttered *incoherently*.

She asked *gently*.

Save this as Version 3.

Compare your three versions of the same dialogue. Did leaving out the speech tags and adverbs pick up the pace of your writing? Was it hard to keep track of the speakers without any speech tags? Will your audience need more information to follow the conversation? (Picture books, which are read out loud, need more speech tags than young adult novels. You can compare your use of speech tags to published books for the same audience to judge if you've used enough.) What about the adverbs? If the dialogue itself is powerful enough, an adverb modifying the speech tag will dilute its power. A judicious use of adverbs can enhance your writing, but too many will spoil it.

Exercise: Spend an hour or two with little children and listen to how they interact with each other. Do the same with a group of teens. Make certain to eavesdrop shamelessly. (Tip: Volunteer at your local elementary school or library, or spend time in sitting on benches in parks, playgrounds, the mall, or wherever your target audience hangs out.) Listening to real-life dialogue is one of the best ways to inject life into your own dialogue. Remember, though, you don't want to duplicate dialogue exactly as it is said. You want to give the flavor of real dialogue without all the "ums" and "buts" and "uhs." As one writer friend puts it, leave out all the boring stuff.

Exercise: If possible, copy down verbatim a conversation between two children or teens. Then go back and use what you know about writing good dialogue and make the scene more riveting. Take out the off-the-subject remarks about weather and the whole "How are you?" conversations. Get down to the meat of the exchange. Then incorporate that dialogue into a scene, turning the real children into fictional characters. The written conversation should reveal plot points, or elements of character, or create some sort of tension (shifting the balance of power between the characters, giving one character information she didn't have, setting up an unexpected plot twist, etc.) Play with this sample dialogue to create different scene dynamics, then use what you've learned in your own work-in-progress. (Note: Dialogue in picture books tends to last for no more than one or two book spreads at most, and should lend itself to illustrations that can incorporate some action or changing details to create movement on the page. The exception would be entire books written in dialogue, such as Jon Klassen's *I Want My Hat Back*. But dialogue-only picture books require a great amount of skill and practice to pull off.)

Dialogue Exercises continued

Exercise: Keep idioms, accents, etc. to a minimum. I have a talented writer friend who writes beautiful Irish-set historical romances. She comes from a large Irish family where the language is spoken frequently. She uses this background to inject the flavor of Ireland into her writing. What's the problem, then? She uses too much flavor. Readers in her critique group (she's not yet published) get bogged down in all the language and can't keep up interest in the story because they're too busy trying to translate what she's saying. Accents, foreign words, idioms are like cayenne pepper: a little goes a long way. The same goes for characters in a specialized field. If the main character in your YA novel is taking an engineering class, a few references to his chosen field of study will do. Don't get carried away with jargon.

If you are writing a story with characters who speak with a thick accent—albeit Southern, Western, Irish, whatever—make certain that the dialogue doesn't get in the way of the story. Go through dialogue scenes in your work-in-progress and highlight all the idioms, foreign words, or irregular spellings that indicate an accent. Now see how many you can delete and still give the impression of how that character speaks. Know that your readers will fill in the rest in their heads.

Exercise: Check your punctuation. Punctuation in dialogue can trip up even the most experienced writer. Though punctuation is not the most important thing in writing, if you submit something with poor punctuation to an editor or agent or contest judge, you will immediately be considered an amateur.

Which of these two samples of dialogue is right?

"You slammed into me on purpose," Sam said as he picked himself up off the floor.

"You slammed into me on purpose", Sam said as he picked himself up off the floor.

I hope you chose the first example. Remember: punctuation goes inside the quotation marks.

What if the character is asking a question? Where does the question mark go?

"Why don't you show your father your report card?" Mom asked Tanya.

"Why don't you show your father your report card"? Mom asked Tanya.

Once again, I hope you picked the first one. Did you notice the question mark outside the quotation marks in the second example?

Read the two examples of dialogue below and pick the right one.

"I need to go home." Sherri picked up her backpack and slung it over one shoulder.

"I need to go home," Sherri said and picked up her backpack and slung it over one shoulder.

Did you pick both of them? Congratulations! You're right. If I were picking between the two, I would probably choose the first because it eliminates a speech tag (Sherri said). But both sentences are correct.

Now look at the following two examples and pick the right one.

"This has been fun, but I need to go home," Sherri smiled and picked up her backpack and slung it over one shoulder.

"This has been fun, but I need to go home." Sherri smiled, picked up her backpack and slung it over one shoulder.

From a punctuation standpoint, both are right, but from a writing standpoint, the first is problematic. Characters do not smile, smirk, frown, roar, growl, or sneer their remarks. This problem can be solved by ending the sentence with a period and then starting a new sentence with the action as in the second example above. Also, you'll notice the comma instead of "and" in the second sentence, creating a series of actions instead of having Sherri do three things at once.

Go through your work-in-progress and look—really look—at your punctuation. Correct those instances where you have missed the mark. Invest in a good grammar book.

Dialogue Exercises continued

Exercise: Make each character's voice different. Have you ever read a story where all the characters sound alike? Do all the teenagers in your YA book sound like clones of each other? Do all the small children in your easy-reader book use the same idioms and words? If so, you need to punch up the dialogue with distinct voices. Ideally, each voice will be so individual that the reader will immediately know who is speaking. (A caveat here: it still helps to have a few tags just so the reader knows who's saying what. It's frustrating to have to go back and count passages of dialogue to know who is speaking. And remember that picture books are read out loud, so more speech tags are necessary for the child listening to keep track, unless the two speakers have very distinct voices.)

Write a page of dialogue where you intentionally exaggerate two characters' voices. You probably won't use these exaggerations in a story, but it helps to know what features of a character's speech you can make stand out. Then go back and make the differences more subtle.

Exercise: Read your dialogue aloud. What sounds good on paper or on screen may not sound good when voiced aloud. Maybe you'll want to read into a recording app on your phone. Warning: your voice will sound much different than you think it does.
Ask a family member or friend to help you. Each of you take the part of a character and read a page of dialogue aloud. Listen to how it sounds. Is it stilted? Or does it flow?

Exercise: Leave out the fancy speech tags. Sure, characters can shout, scream, whisper, murmur, bellow dialogue, but plain old said and ask work just fine in most cases. If the dialogue itself, or the speaker's body language, implies a tone of voice, the speech tag can be less descriptive. Keep the more colorful speech tags in reserve for emphasis only.

Look at your work-in-progress and see if you've fallen victim to the lure of using as many different speech tags as you can come up with. An occasional whisper or murmur is all right, but you won't go wrong sticking to the basics.

TANIA DEL RIO

AUTHOR, COMIC ARTIST AND WRITER

interview by PJ McIlvaine

Tania Del Rio didn't think that comic book illustration was a viable career path. She loved comics and loved to draw, but in a male dominated field, opportunities for female animators/illustrators were few and few between. Then fate intervened. Her manga entry was selected to run in a rising star manga anthology, and that break opened up doors that led to Archie Comics engaging her for the popular comic book remake of *Sabrina The Teenage Witch*; other clients include Marvel and Dark Horse. Happy to be in the kid lit space, Del Rio is also the author of the acclaimed middle grade Victorian mystery series *Warren the 13th* (Quirk Books, the third book in the series out in March 2020) with illustrations by her art school buddy and long time friend Will Staehle). Del Rio makes her home in Los Angeles. You can learn more about her at http://taniadelrio.blogspot.com/.

PJ MCILVAINE: From comic book artist to middle grade author—that's quite a leap. Or is it? How did you get involved in the comic book industry, no small feat for a woman in a world where the majority of artists are male. Were you into comics as a child? What was your big break in that field and how did that lead to other opportunities? You've done work for Marvel and other companies; do you find that work as rewarding and fulfilling as working on your own material?

TANIA DEL RIO: Actually, I would say that the leap from comics to middle grade isn't as big as one might think—especially since a lot of my comics work was aimed at a similar age group, and the *Warren the 13th* series is very heavily illustrated, to the point where it almost resembles a graphic novel. (On that note, I think it's a great crossover book for reluctant readers who are most comfortable reading comics.)

As for getting my start in comics, I think nowadays it's far more common to see women in the industry, but when I got my start back in 2003, it certainly felt like more of a challenge. I grew up reading everything from *X-Men* to *Sonic the Hedgehog* to *Elf Quest,* but never really thought comics was a realistic career choice for someone like myself. I got lucky, however. I entered a comic competition held by the manga publisher, Tokyopop, and although I didn't win, I gained the notice of Archie Comics. They hired me to revamp the *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* series, and that's what led me into my first career! Almost all of my work has involved licensed characters, rather than my own creations. Even *Warren the 13th* is a character originally created by the illustrator Will Staehle. However, I do find it both rewarding and fulfilling. It's an honor to be trusted with a well-known brand and to be given the freedom to add my own touch.

PM: Where did the inspiration for the *Warren the 13th* series come from? How long did each book take? When the book first sold, did you have the other books mapped out? And it's interesting that you're the author but not the artist—was that by design?

TDR: As I mentioned, *Warren the 13th* was created by the illustrator Will Staehle. We actually went to art school together, and began collaborating on Warren almost 20 years ago! I even wrote an early draft of a Warren novel that never saw the light of day. Although I'm an artist too, Will's creepy gothic designs were exactly the right look for the Warren concept. We finally pitched it to Quirk Books, and sold a two-book series, which was eventually extended into a trilogy. Given how many years Warren has been a part of our lives we definitely have enough ideas to fill many more books, but the trilogy stands on its own as is.

PM: What is the difference—or is there—between manga, animation, comic books, and graphic novels? Do you have a preference?

Tania Del Rio continued

TDR: I don't have a preference—I love 'em all! I think people have some disagreement about the specific differences, but my opinion is that they're all basically the same thing. Except for animation, as it's a completely different medium. But animation still shares similarities to comics, especially in the storyboarding phase.

As for the others, I think manga is just comics, but in western culture it's come to denote a specific style of comic that either is from Japan or is inspired by Japanese art. Graphic novels are just really long comics that tell a complete story.

PM: What is your writing and illustration routine like? Do the words come first or the pictures? Do you enjoy writing more or illustrating?

TDR: In general, writing always comes first for me. I see the story as a necessary backbone for the illustrations. I usually just write at home on my couch, with my two dogs to distract me! I use Word for comic scripts, but Scrivener for novels. When illustrating, I used to sketch things out with pencil on paper, but now I work almost entirely digitally. I use Clip Studio Paint for everything from digital pencils to inks to lettering, to colors. It's a fantastic program that's made for comics. I love all parts of the creative process, but writing is still my favorite, as frustrating as it can be at times! I think I like it more because I find it more challenging that drawing.

PM: Do you see yourself branching out into other genres? What are you currently working on now? Is there a comic book or character you wish you had created or worked on?

TDR: I'm really happy writing for a middle grade audience, so I think that's where I'll stay for now. There's a certain whimsy in middle grade that I think YA and adult literature lack, although I do have drafts of a couple YA projects that I work on from time to time. I'm currently focusing on a middle grade fantasy that is best described as Latinx Sailor Moon meets Rick Riordan. As for characters or concepts I wish I had worked on… *Star Wars*, in general, is high on my bucket list! I feel lucky I got to work on some *Sonic the Hedgehog* stories since that was one of my favorite comics growing up.

PM: Do you have any tips or advice for aspiring artists? How important was getting a BFA in animation to your overall career path?

TDR: If I'm being completely honest, it didn't help me one bit. Art school was a fun experience and I got to develop my skills, but not one employer has ever asked for my credentials. What matters at the end of the day is a strong portfolio. So if someone is looking to break in as a comic artist, the best thing you can do is make comics. If you want to be a writer, then write. It's that simple. Practice doing what you want to do, and make sure you have finished projects to show. A lot of aspiring comic artists I've met in the past have had cool pin-up pages and character designs, but lacked pages that show sequential art. It's so important to have a body of work that shows that you can complete an entire project from start to finish.

PM: Who have been your greatest influences, writing and illustration wise? Where do you see yourself five years from now in your career trajectory?

TDR: One of my biggest influences is Wendy Pini. It was her work that showed me that being a female comic creator was possible. I've also been very influenced by the movies and art of Hayao Miyazaki, as well as Disney animation. In writing, my main influence has been Roald Dahl. In five years, I'd like to still be writing for children, hopefully with another series under my belt!

PM: If you were trapped on a deserted island and could pick one comic book character to rescue you, who would it, be and why?

TDR: I'd have to go with Wonder Woman! Not only would she be an inspiring hero, she probably also has some good survival skills for the island!

USE LIBRARY DATABASES TO RESEARCH AND TARGET YOUR MAGAZINE SUBMISSIONS

by Regina Montana and Randi Lynn Mrvos

You've got a great idea for a children's magazine article. So, you research the topic, write the piece, edit it, and submit it. But several months later, a rejection arrives with a note that says the magazine has already published a similar piece.

One way to avoid this is to use the catalogue of published magazine articles in your library database, including EBSCO, a provider of specialized collections of information. In these databases, you can look into what's been published on your topic (which is also useful when gathering sources for research), read the text of the published articles, and decide how your piece will be different. And, when you're gathering a list of potential magazines for your submission, you can see if any of them have recently published similar articles.

The cool thing is, magazine writers can use these free databases from home during the different phases of the writing process! Using the library research collection at home is just like going to the library and using their computers. The only difference is at the library there may be extra databases (like those on ancestry) from which to choose.

First, let's look at the database called EBSCO. EBSCO stands for Elton B. Stephens Company. If a library subscribes to an EBSCO resource, then all affiliated patrons have access to that resource.

Once a publication is licensed for inclusion in an EBSCO resource, there is usually a brief waiting period before the content is available on that product. Every publication has a different frequency, and product updates vary from multiple times per day to weekly to monthly, depending on the publications available within the database. Therefore, you can check EBSCO before you write your article and then once again before you submit it to your target publications, but it's also a good idea to page through the last 3 issues of the magazine as well to make sure your topic wasn't recently covered.

Using EBSCOhost

If you have a library card and your library subscribes to EBSCOhost, you will be able to log into the database at home. How do you know if your library has EBSCOhost?

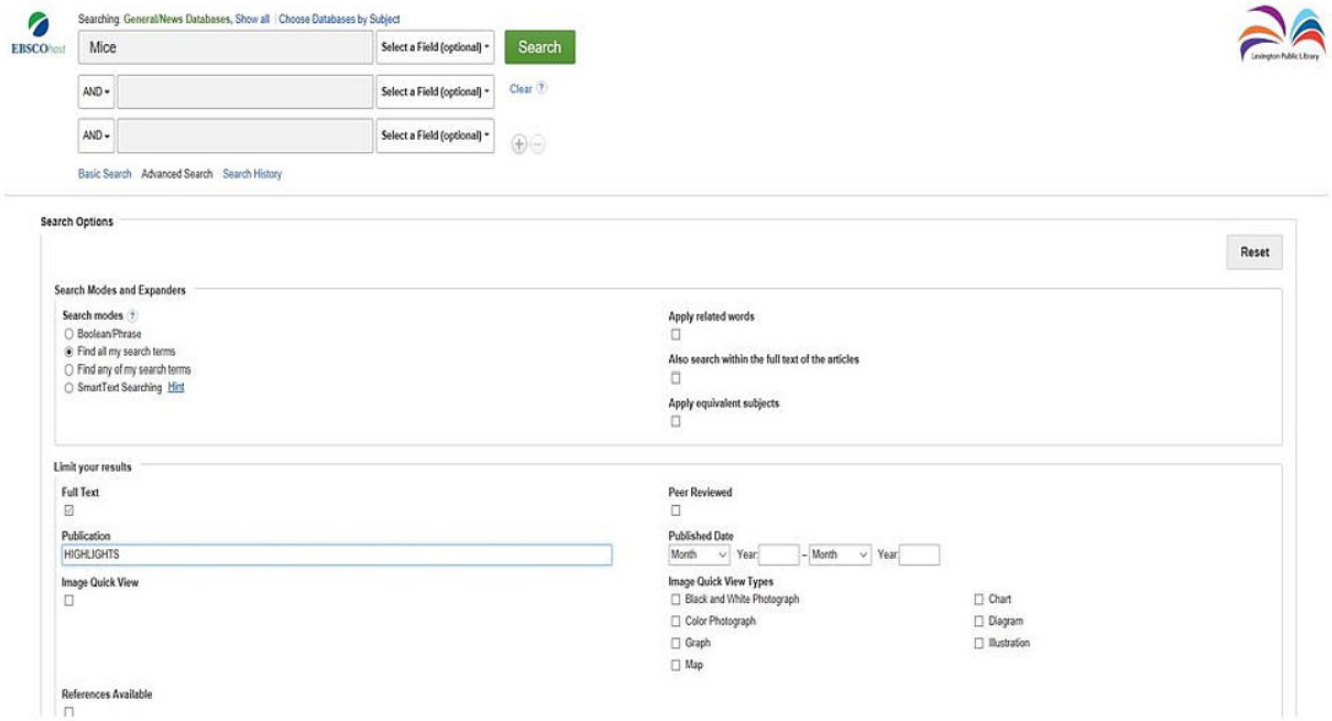
1. Log into your county or city library's website. For example: **www.westchesterlibraries.org**

2. Find the Research tab on the homepage and click on it.

3. Under Research click on Magazines, Newspapers and Journals. There will be a large list of databases. Look for any databases with the word EBSCO in the title. Some library databases have a house icon which means you can access these databases from home. Any without the house icon will have to be accessed at the library.

To check on a topic that you'd like to write about, click on the EBSCO database called General/News Databases. Now you come to a page where you can search for books, journals and more. Click on Advanced Search under the search bar at the top of the screen which will bring you to a page where you can enter your subject and publication. The screenshot on the next page should look like this on your home computer:

Library Databases continued



Let's say you want to see if *Highlights* has published an article on mice. Simply type 'mice' in the search field. Next, scroll down to publication field and type in *Highlights*. Then scroll to the bottom of the page and hit Search.

The database will bring up all of the articles *Highlights* has published on mice, starting from the most current and going to the earliest archived published articles, sometimes retrieving articles as far as the 1990s. When using EBSCO, use a general topic search as opposed to a specific topic. If you specifically search for 'singing mice,' no results will show up. If you search for 'mice,' all kinds of articles show up, including the *Highlights* article, "The Song of the Mouse."

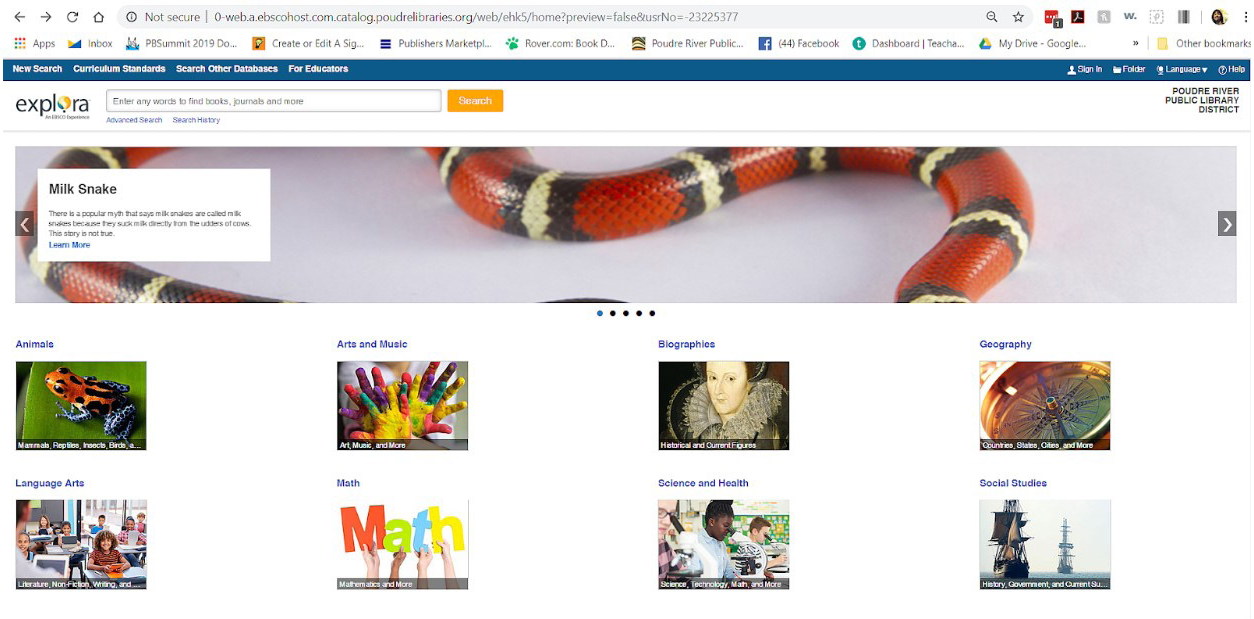
Just like the local library research databases, you can use EBSCOhost to discover if your topic has been published by your target magazine and you can find resources to help you research your topic. If you want to find information on your subject from every source, then simply search for a topic and leave the publication field blank. This will bring up journals, books, and magazines that contain information on your topic for adults and children. You can refine the search to just information written for children by picking a reading level in the search fields.

Too much information? Refine EBSCO Using Explora

Your library must subscribe to at least one EBSCO database in order to carry Explora. Within Explora are more targeted databases. Those most useful to writers for children are **Explora for Primary School, Explora for Middle School,** and **Explora for Secondary School.** These collections have a compilation of sources written by adults for a specific reading level. For instance, in the Primary School database you may find publications like *Ranger Rick* that would provide information for your research when writing a piece intended for a young audience. And, if you are inclined to submit to *Ranger Rick* or other magazines within this collection, you can study articles to figure out how to make yours different.

On the next page is a screenshot of the home page of Explora for Primary School. You can type your topic into the search bar at the top, or search within a specific category. You'll also be able to refine your search by publication type and date of publication.

Library Databases continued



Using Other Databases

When you log into your library's home page, click on the Research tab and then Magazines, Journals and Newspapers, you should be able to scroll down and see many other databases available to you. Your library will probably also have local databases with regional information. Some will be part of EBSCO, others not, but all will have similar search fields.

Try searching with different variations of your keywords so you don't miss anything. Use filters on the search windows to narrow down the search to a particular time period, content type, or reading level (if available).

Should you have difficulty finding a library database collection, speak with a librarian. She will be able to point you in the direction that will meet your needs—whether it's finding out if your target magazine has published your topic or if it's locating more sources for research. Be sure that your library card is up to date because you may need to enter the number to enter a collection.

Library databases are an invaluable research tool for all writers, but are particularly useful for magazine writers who need up-to-the-minute information. Spending some time upfront perusing databases can save you a lot of time during the submission process, and help you ensure that your content is as fresh, original, and accurate as possible.

More tips for submitting magazine articles:

Follow the publication's guidelines
Study published articles of the targeted magazine
Refer to the Chicago Manual of Style for formatting a bibliography
Keep within the word count as specified in the submission guidelines
Google "expert on (fill in your topic)" to find a qualified person who can review your article
Refer to this YouTube video to get started using EBSCO: https://youtu.be/BpH-dtloO-E

For more on writing and submitting magazine articles, check out the **FREE** sample edition of **Magazine Writing Blueprint** at: https://writingblueprints.com/p/magazine-blueprint-trial