

CHILDREN'S BOOK INSIDER

AUGUST 2018



PLUS!

**ABOVE THE SLUSHPILE CODE:
MARTIN LITERARY AGENCY**

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Published 12 times/year by Children's Book Insider, LLC,
901 Columbia Road, Ft. Collins, CO 80525-1838.
970/495-0056.
ISSN 1073-7596
mail@CBIClubhouse.com
<http://www.writeforkids.org>

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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/>

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Children's Book Insider makes every effort to verify the legitimacy of small and new presses and literary agents before printing information in "At Presstime." However, authors and illustrators should always proceed with caution when approaching publishers or agents with whom they are unfamiliar, and read contracts carefully. All "At Presstime" listings are current at the time of initial publication. Members are urged to verify listings past the month of publication.

At Presstime:

Editor Seeks Young Adult Fiction Submissions

Ashley Hearn, an editor with Page Street Publishing, is seeking young adult fiction high concept stories with a unique twist and an unforgettable voice. She's especially interested in fantasy, paranormal, horror, magical realism, quirky contemporary, character-driven contemporary, romance, and historicals—with a special affinity for atmospheric stories that offer a strong sense of place and time. In all genres, she's actively seeking inclusive stories and diverse voices. In particular, some of her most sought-after premises/settings include: diverse magic girl squads; fantasy with truly epic world building and cleverly-crafted magic systems; contemporary fantasy or urban fantasy where the stakes aren't cosmic and the setting feels like a character; Midwestern or New England gothic novels; a Black **#ownvoices** southern gothic novel; diverse paranormal and urban fantasy; stories featuring Muslim characters in every genre; sweet romantic comedies with diverse characters; LGBTQIA+ sports stories; historical retellings and historical fantasy—particularly overlooked or underrepresented stories in history.

Submissions should be emailed to yasubmissions@pagestreetpublishing.com. State the title of your manuscript in the subject line of your email. Include a query with the first three chapters of your manuscript in the body of your email.

Nonfiction Magazine Accepting Queries for Elementary School Readers

Ask is a nonfiction magazine for children 7–10 years old who are curious about science and the world they live in. Each edition of *Ask* is built around a central theme on some question or concept in the natural, physical, or social sciences, technology, mathematics, history, or the arts. *Ask* articles should read as engaging nonfiction, accessible and appealing to newly independent readers (grades 2–5), but also interesting to any general adult reader. They should tell a good story, with an emphasis on ideas rather than just facts. Humor as a teaching strategy is encouraged,

Writers should stretch the boundaries of topic themes and come up with interesting perspectives and unexpected connections. (Sample copies are available for viewing at the [Cricket Media Store](#), where you can also purchase a current issue.) Issues are also available at many local libraries.

Queries that relate to upcoming themes (see theme list below) are being accepted for feature articles (1200–1600 words, with sidebars), photo essays (400–600 words), humor pieces (200–400 words), short profiles of people, inventions, events or the arts (200–400 words), and theme-appropriate experiments. Queries should give an overview of the proposed article, including scope and treatment, resources, and a draft opening paragraph. Writers new to *Ask* should also provide a resume and two writing samples, including at least 200 words of unedited copy on any nonfiction topic. Story pitches should be submitted at <https://cricketmag.submittable.com/submit>, using the form for *Ask*. Rights purchased vary, with option of authors retaining copyright.

Upcoming themes: **May/June 2019: Living Rock** (How have living organisms shaped the geology of the Earth?), query deadline September 1, 2018; **July/August 2019: World of Soccer** (What is the science behind a great soccer match?), query deadline October 1, 2018; **September 2019: Whole Cloth** (How did humans develop cloth, and how can we improve it?), query deadline December 15, 2018; **October 2019: Deep Dark Ocean** (What lives in the deepest parts of the ocean? How can we find out? How has life adapted to survive there?), query deadline February 1, 2019; **November/December 2019: Surprising Saturn** (What do we know about Saturn, and how can we find out more?), query deadline March 15, 2019.

Publisher Seeks Unusual Middle Grade/YA Fiction and Nonfiction

Quirk Books publishes unconventional titles for middle grade, young adult and adult readers. Looking for well-written novels with off-the-wall editorial premises, playful nonfiction book proposals, and innovative concepts. Open to any idea that is smart, original, cool, and fun. Recent titles include *Nick and Tesla's Solar-Powered Showdown: A Mystery with Sun-Powered Gadgets You Can Build Yourself* by Steve Hockensmith, "Science Bob" Pflugfelder (middle grade fiction); *Kid Artists: True Tales of Childhood from Creative Legends* by David Stabler, *Doogie Horner* (humorous biography, ages 8-13); *The League of Regrettable Sidekicks* by Jon Morris (humorous graphic novel, ages 10 and up); *Girl Squads: 20 Female Friendships that Changed History* by Sam Maggs (nonfiction, ages 10 and up), *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children* by Ransom Riggs (middle grade fantasy). For more titles go to <https://www.quirkbooks.com/>

Email a one-page query letter describing your book. Two sample chapters may be pasted into the body of the email. Address your email to the appropriate editor (send to only one editor, please):

Rick Chillot (Senior Editor, rick@quirkbooks.com) is interested in fiction and nonfiction that intersects with pop culture, sci-fi, comics and superheroes, comedy, and/or weirdness. Especially likes projects with potential for a prominent visual or graphic component. Graphic novel pitches welcome.

Blair Thornburgh (Senior Editor, blair@quirkbooks.com) is interested in high-concept fiction and nonfiction for teens with a humorous, geeky, and/or feminist bent. In YA fiction, she's seeking manuscripts with a strong, preferably comedic voice and a fresh premise (no dystopias, please). In nonfiction, she's looking for projects involving women and feminism, geeky stuff and pop culture. She is actively seeking authors from diverse backgrounds.

Rebecca Gyllenhaal (Editorial Assistant, rebecca@quirkbooks.com) is on the lookout for high-concept, genre-bending fiction and nonfiction for middle-graders, but is open to good proposals in any category. She also loves fiction that features an unusual setting (e.g., a museum. A tiny house. A cruise ship. An escape room). She is particularly on the lookout for weird or spooky fiction and projects with a visual component (think *Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark* or *The Doll People*). She is actively seeking diverse authors and pitches.

Agent Accepting Submissions for All Ages

Jennifer Rofé is a senior agent at Andrea Brown Literary (<https://www.andreabrownlit.com>) representing projects ranging from picture books to YA. Middle grade is her soft spot and she's open to all genres in this category. In YA, Jennifer is drawn to stories that shed a unique light on the adolescent experience; funny, wistful, or cringe-worthy romance; and fantasy and urban fantasy with exceptionally developed worlds. In picture books, she likes funny, character-driven projects; beautifully imagined and written stories; and milestone moments with a twist. Overall, she seeks rich characters, masterful writing, distinct voices and perspectives, and stories that transport the reader. Jennifer especially enjoys representing illustrators and author-illustrators, and is always seeking new illustrators with strong, artistic voices.

Email a query letter with a short description of your work, previous publishing credits (if any) and the manuscript's publisher submission history if previously submitted. For picture books, paste the full manuscript into the email below the query. For longer fiction paste the first 10 pages into the email after the query letter. Nonfiction should include a proposal and sample chapter pasted below the query. Illustrators send 2-3 samples in jpeg format and a link to an online portfolio. Author/illustrators send a full dummy (in pdf format) that includes 1-2 color samples and a link to your online portfolio. For graphic novels send 2-3 sample page spreads in jpg or pdf format, summary/synopsis pasted below query, and link to website/online portfolio. Put "Query" in the subject line, and email to jennifer@andreabrownlit.com. Responds within 6 weeks if interested.

Create a Linear Story That Stands the Test of Time

by Laura Backes

Whether they realize it or not, many beginning picture book writers are working on linear stories. Linear stories (sometimes called incident stories) don't have a traditional plot arc. Rather, linear stories tend to be a series of sequential incidents related in a simple cause-and-effect manner, or some other pattern. Each incident has the same weight as the one before. Often there is a logical beginning and ending point (the bunny saying goodnight to everything in his room in Margaret Wise Brown's *Goodnight Moon*) or the story circles around on itself (the last page echoes the first in *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie* by Laura Joffe Numeroff). But probably the most prevalent quality of a linear story is that the main character rarely changes in any substantial way from the beginning of the book to the end.

Some linear stories masquerade as plots. For example, a character might have a pressing question, and asks a series of other characters until he finds his answer. The "linear" here applies to the repetitive pattern of the text, which can get predictable if you're not careful.

Linear stories tend to work best for the youngest audience. Many toddler books are linear, and work well for the developmental level of kids up to age 4. Check out read-ertotz.blogspot.com for a terrific introduction to toddler books. But the traditional picture book audience (ages 4-8) often find linear stories too calm and predictable. They want more tension in their books. Linear stories can satisfy this age if the text and illustrations deliver that tension as a surprise, a big payoff to a joke, or a touching emotional resolution that we don't see coming.

The biggest strike against linear stories (often making them hard to sell) is that they tend to be ordinary. Most authors write about bedtime, the parent/child bond, visiting grandparents, a day at the beach/zoo/park, making a friend or taking care of a pet. Great topics, as evidenced by how many of these books we've already got on the shelves. Unless you're a famous illustrator (or a celebrity author), don't write about everyday events.

The good news is that many linear stories are timeless, appealing to generations of kids. So, is there hope for your linear story? Yes, if you eschew the ordinary and embrace the tactics of these successful authors:

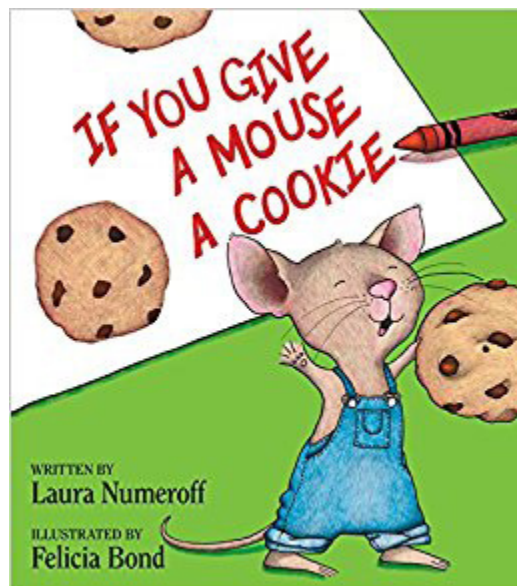
GIVE YOUR STORY A HOOK

There's a reason *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie* (first published in 1985) has blossomed into a 16-book franchise and become so firmly rooted in our kid-lit culture that it was mentioned in two *Peanuts* cartoon strips: it's got a hook. Anyone can explain the book's unique concept in one sentence. The joke is that we end up on the last page at exactly where we started on page 1, which is endlessly funny to a three-year-old. But the hook is more than a circular story that never ends. It's the absurdity of the action on each page: *If you give a mouse a cookie, he's going to ask for a glass of milk. When you give him the milk, he'll probably ask you for a straw.* The mouse is acting like a child, and the actual boy in the pictures accommodates without question. So where's the tension? The mouse's requests get bigger, along with the mess he makes, and the illustrations show glimpses of Mom working in the garden through the windows, moving closer to the

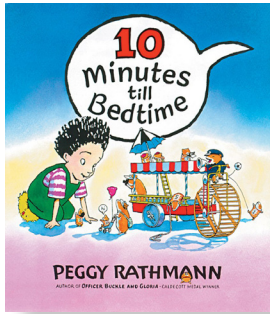
house. We know, at some point, she's coming through that door.

So while the text of the linear story might not have a traditional plot (a problem for the protagonist to solve), the sub-text often does. Here, the boy (identified as "you" in the text, allowing readers to put themselves right in his shoes), must clean up the evidence of his demanding guest before Mom finds out.

Creating a linear text that leaves enough room for a tension-filled sub-text in the illustrations is key to creating a book that stands the test of time. A strong hook, and action that lends itself to numerous possibilities, is a good start.



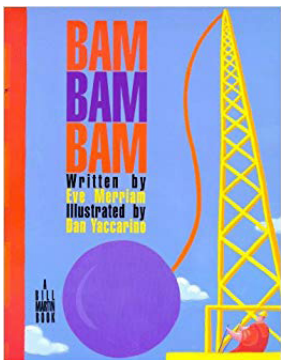
Linear Stories continued



Another classic example is Peggy Rathmann's *10 Minutes Till Bedtime* (1998), which is short on text and long on story, with most of the action being conveyed through detail-packed illustrations. The book begins with a boy's father announcing, "Ten minutes till bedtime!" from behind his newspaper. Through the window the boy and his pet hamster see a hamster family (with kids numbered 1 to

10) approaching the house. "All aboard!" shouts the boy's hamster, as the boy opens the front door and the hamster tourists board a tiny trolley. The boy doesn't know that his hamster has advertised on the internet (www.hamstertours.com) for a "10-Minute Bedtime Tour," and more tourists are on the way. As Dad calls his countdown from ten ("Nine minutes till bedtime!") the hamsters take part in the bedtime routine, including bath, story, and goodnight kiss. The countdown from clueless Dad creates some tension, and the hoards of hamsters frolicking in the illustrations provide visual subplots. Even if you're not a talented illustrator like Rathmann, a text that combines an everyday event with silly extenuating circumstances will give your illustrator plenty to work with.

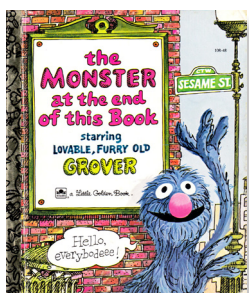
GET YOUR READER'S BLOOD PUMPING



Kids like to feel a story, and linear books are no exception. But, again, think outside the box. Eve Merriam's *Bam Bam Bam*, illustrated by Dan Yaccarino (1998), is a rhyming story about a crew demolishing a building and then erecting a skyscraper. What four-year-old can resist a line like, "SLAM, SLAM, SLAM goes the steel wrecking ball."? Kids have the opportunity to throw themselves into storytime with words

like BAM, POW and ZOWIE, and Yaccarino's bright, geometric illustrations wield the power of a sledgehammer.

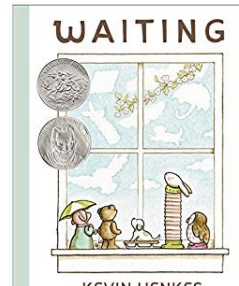
INVOLVE THE READER



The Monster at the End of This Book by Jon Stone, illustrated by Michael Smollin, was first published in 1971 by Little Golden Books and stars Sesame Street's lovable, clueless Grover. It was one of the first children's books to feature a television character, and it's still one of the best. This humorous linear story of

Grover begging the reader not to turn the pages because there's a monster at the end of the book has been a childhood touchstone for three generations.

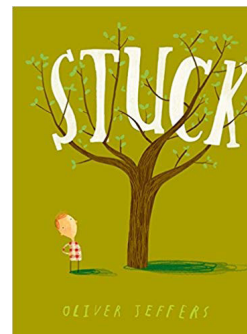
Many linear stories, like other picture books, have gotten



more sophisticated, but still have a timeless appeal that will endure for years to come. Kevin Henkes' *Waiting* (2015) is a quiet book that's deceptively simple at first glance. Five toys sit happily on a windowsill, waiting for something amazing to happen. The owl is waiting for the moon. The pig is waiting for the rain. The bear is waiting for the wind. The puppy is waiting for the snow. And the rabbit is just looking

out the window because he likes to wait. What will happen? This book acknowledges how the very act of waiting is a big part of a preschooler's life, and presents the reader (and the toys) with a joyful reward for their patience. What makes this book stand is that it brilliantly depicts the outward expression of something that happens inside our heads. *Waiting* is, at its core, about finding happiness in the art of patiently "being".

Stuck by Oliver Jeffers (2011) is an upside down take on



"There Was an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly." Floyd's kite gets stuck in a tree, so he throws his favorite shoe at it to knock it down. When that shoe gets stuck, Floyd throws his other one (you can probably guess where this is going). Floyd tosses more objects, animals and even people up into the tree in a futile attempt to knock down his kite. While this may sound like a typical picture book plot (Floyd has a problem, and he's making several

attempts to solve it, with the stakes being raised each time), its repetitive action, the steady pace and even tone of the writing, and the fact that Floyd doesn't change as a character at the end of the story (see the surprise, subversive, understated ending) make it a modern take on the linear format.

While linear stories look easy to write, they actually require a strong hook, a unique voice or tone to the writing, and a reason for the child to beg for repeated readings. If you're writing a linear story, don't settle for your first idea. Keep brainstorming until you've hit on an out-of-the-box concept that speaks to young children who will fall in love with your book, and then pass it on to their own children years later.

UNBLOCK YOUR BLOCK WITH ACTION

by Jane McBride

Writer's block happens to many working writers who sometimes hit the wall and can't write. Anything. In the past, when I've reached such a point, I've handled it in immature, ineffective, inelegant, and sometimes self-destructive ways, including sulking, pouting, throwing things, eating copious amounts of chocolate (adding unwanted inches to my waistline and hips), and vowing never to write again. All that these behaviors accomplished was to delay the inevitable, which is to sit down and start again even when each word felt like it was being dredged from the bottom of my soul.

Now, when I feel writer's block looming over me, much like an impending migraine headache, I take steps to forestall it.

STEP 1: *Imagine.* Picture yourself writing regularly, showing up to work like the professional you are, sitting your butt down in your chair, and writing.

ACTION: Visualize yourself writing steadily and producing page after page of beautiful prose. Be specific. Paint yourself sitting at your desk (or wherever you write), wearing your comfy clothes—or maybe you are “dressed for success” in business-type clothes. You are listening to your favorite music and are in the zone. You easily write 2000 words (put in your ideal goal here) a day. Not only are you producing, but you are producing great words. You have it all together, and it shows

STEP 2: *Imagine again.* This time let your imagination take place in your story. Imagine scene after scene unfolding. Allow the story to unreel much as a movie would. You are the producer, the director, the writer, the creative mastermind so let your imagination go wild.

ACTION: Don't censor yourself. This is your story after all. See your characters acting out their roles, complete with dialogue and action. If you feel so moved, write the

dialogue down. Or record it into your device. Take notes whatever way you want. The important thing is that you are seeing your story as it happens. Think of this as brainstorming with yourself.

STEP 3: *Get pumped.* Be excited. Find some affirmations and repeat them until you believe them. You can't move without momentum, and you can't generate momentum if you're feeling passive, disheartened, or drained.

Now that you have visualized yourself as a professional writer doing what professional writers do—writing—and you have imagined your story unfolding and taken notes, it is time for you to do the fun stuff: write!

ACTION: *Move.* Don't sit around and wait for your fairy godmother to wave her magic wand and make the block disappear on its own. Get up and get moving. Once you're moving, keep moving. Physical exercise can help here. Sweat out the toxins caused by whatever was blocking you, then use that momentum to sit down and write. Write anything. Write nonsense. Write in a genre you've never tried before. If you normally write nonfiction, try your hand at a fiction project. When I got stumped in working on a romance, I tried a hard-hitting counter-terrorism book. I wrote more than 100,000 words before admitting that writing rough language and torture scenes were not my forte. (This did not surprise my husband or my writer friends.) But it got me over the hump, and I was ready to return to writing inspirational romance.

Write the story that's been nagging you for the last five years, the one you promised yourself that you would write if you ever had the chance. Write a chapter in your memoir. Write a ridiculous poem with silly rhymes. Write a play for your children or your grandchildren to act out. The only thing that matters is that you're writing. Once you're writing, that momentum will keep you going. If you feel like it, switch to the project where you got stumped and power through it. If you can't go back to it

Unblock Your Block continued

yet, continue on with one of the projects you just started. (You do have more than one, don't you?)

STEP 4: *Crank up the generator.* Generate new ideas for your story. If that still proves impossible, generate ideas for new projects. I'm not suggesting you abandon your original project, but maybe you need to find other avenues for your creativity. You may discover that you can work on a couple of projects at once. Writers are pretty evenly divided over this issue. Is it better to stick to one project, finish it, before moving on to another? Or is it helpful to have two or more projects going on at the same time? I'm firmly in the second camp. When I get stuck on one thing, I move to another. That way I'm still being productive.

ACTION: Make a list of things you want to include in your book. Write them down. Now see how you can incorporate them into your manuscript. Do you have to shift other parts of the story to make room for these new ideas? That can be a good thing. It may break loose the roadblock that was keeping you from writing. While you're making lists, make one of other things you'd like to write about. Do you want to write about telling a young child about death in a picture book? Do you want to write an epic fantasy? Do you want to write a YA mystery? Write them down. Consider keeping a notebook about each project. Go old-school with notebook dividers and colored tabs. When you run across a picture that reminds you of the main character, put it in the notebook. If you have an idea for dialogue, include that as well. You are stockpiling ideas to prevent further blocks in the future. In the meantime, you can continue on with your WIP (work-in-progress).


STEP 5: *Motivate yourself.* Return to your WIP and remember why you started writing it in the first place. What motivated you to pick this subject? Why was it important? Find that nugget of truth you wanted to expose and open yourself up to new paths of exploration. Has your focus shifted and your original idea no longer seems to work? Or have you lost your way?

ACTION: Go back to the beginning of your manuscript. Chances are the seeds of the reason you started writing it are planted there in the first chapter, maybe even the first page or first paragraph. Re-discover that excitement for the project. Read further into the manuscript. Did you go off course somewhere along the way? Often, that is the cause for writer's block, when you strayed from your original idea. If you discover that you did indeed veer from your premise, get back on track. That may mean throwing out pages, even chapters of work. Don't get disheartened. Save them in another file. They may prove the basis for another book somewhere down the road.

WRAPPING UP

Real writers write. They write through writer's blocks, over blocks, under blocks, and in between blocks. If you're stumped, give yourself a day or two (no more) to find out why, then start writing. It doesn't matter if what you write is trash. It doesn't matter if you have to throw it out eventually. It doesn't matter because you are writing again. Don't stop. Ever.

If you've hit a wall with your work-in-progress, step back and remind yourself what inspired you to start writing it in the first place. Pull out a blank sheet of paper and think back to the moment you first got the idea for this work. Where were you? Describe the setting. What triggered this idea? How did it make you feel? Why did this idea seem better than other ideas you've had? Freewrite for at least five minutes, jotting down whatever comes into your head. Refer to this paper often as you get back to your project.



writing blueprints

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

Adria Goetz



interview by Lynne Marie

We are happy to feature Adria Goetz of Martin Literary Management with her diverse literary interests. In addition to graduating from the Columbia Publishing Course in New York City, in 2016, she graduated from University of Washington, with a degree in English with a creative writing emphasis and worked for two years for the Pierce County Library System. She also worked for three years as an intern and assistant at Martin Literary Management.

LYNNE MARIE: One of the questions that's on every blooming writer's mind is: Which came first, the editor or the agent? Please share your thoughts on whether you feel a writer should submit first to agents, or editors and why.

ADRIA GOETZ: In my opinion, you'll typically avoid a lot of first-time mistakes if you have an agent in your corner, both with contract negotiations and negotiating the financial side of things, but also with presenting the work in a salable way. We typically are very familiar with common editorial pet peeves and know how to frame a project in a way that will get it to an acquisitions meeting!

LM: Are you open to reviewing manuscripts from authors who have a current offer on the table? What are your thoughts about this?

AG: Absolutely! I think this can be a great way to catch an agent's eye. If you already have an offer on the table, I recommend alerting the agents who have your work on their desk. But also make sure to be transparent and indicate whether you'd like to loop them in and have

them negotiate the deal for you.

LM: As indicated by your studies, you've been working toward a publishing-related job for a while. What inspired you to choose literary agent?

AG: In high school, I took a career aptitude test that recommended I become an acquisitions editor for a publishing house. That seems oddly specific, doesn't it? I was of course thrilled to receive a result like this, because I was very intent on working in the publishing industry. In college, I applied for every publishing internship I could find, and when I landed with a local literary agency, that was it for me. In my first few weeks there I was able to edit creative work, watch the excitement and drama of a book auction, and witness how uniquely special it is to be in a position where your day job is making people's dreams come true. And the whole working-from-home-while-cuddled-up-with-a-cat element didn't hurt.

LM: You are unique as an agent in that you represent both traditional picture books, middle grade and young adult (in addition to lifestyle books and quirky gift books) AND you also represent Christian Living titles and everything else "under the Christian umbrella." How would you describe your clients — do they write all or some Christian? Do you have clients that don't write Christian books? If a writer were to query you, what would you want to see first from them?

AG: I represent books for both the general market and the Christian market. Some of my clients write for both markets, but most are for one or the other. Sometimes I'll pitch a project with Christian themes to the gener-



al market, because concepts like love and kindness and grace are universal ideas that defy the boundaries of any one religion. If a writer is interested in writing for both markets, I like knowing that up front. Being able to pitch a project to both markets opens up the door to many more possibilities for both the agent and the author.

LM: For those who are not familiar with exactly what the terms mean, please define “Lifestyle Books” and quirky gift books. Can you give us an example of these books that you have taken on?

AG: One of the gift books I’m most proud of is called *The Compendium of Magical Beasts* by Dr. Veronica Wiggerht-Blackwater, aka my real life friend Melissa Brinks, and illustrated by the incomparable Lily Jones. It’s a book that explores the anatomy of magical creatures, and has stunning anatomical diagrams to go along with the written content. It covers everything from mermaid reproduction to the biological logistics of werewolf transformation. I typically refer to it as a coffee table book, because it’s so gorgeous and visually appealing, and the writing is snarky and voicey, that it’s a book you want to show off on your coffee table. It’s the type of book that everyone will want to buy for their fantasy nerd friend. Since that is mostly what my friend group is, I’m buying a copy for pretty much every one of my friends this Christmas.

LM: I see you are owned by two cats, Maple and Mulberry. What are your thoughts about animal protagonists? How do you feel about dogs?

AG: I’m not as into animal protagonists for longer works of fiction, like middle grade or young adult, unless it really wows me, but I’m more open to them in picture books. (That said, I’m currently representing a great series of early chapter books from the perspective of various support dogs! Can’t share the details on that one quite yet though.) I once sat on a panel at a publishing conference where I said, “I’m not really a dog person” and the entire room booed me, so I’ve learned my lesson about publicly talking about dogs. I do *like* dogs. Especially fluffy ones. But the commitment of them terrifies me. You have to take them for a walk *every single day*? I’ll eventually get a dog when I have kids and they ask for one so I can earn some Cool Mom Points.

LM: Which genre in particular do you have more of a

need for at this time?

AG: I’m looking for more YA in general, particularly fun, lighthearted stories that show diverse characters thriving. *When Dimple Met Rishi* comes to mind.

LM: You did not mention nonfiction or chapter books. Are these something that you would be willing to take a look at? Or something you are not interested in? If so — any certain topics or themes that might appeal to you?

AG: I’m definitely open to taking a look at nonfiction and chapter books! I’m particularly interested in nonfiction picture books. I like “pop science” books that explore unique phenomena in nature or quirky animals/insects. I’m forever looking for a book about glow worm caves.

LM: Because values and faith are important to you, please expound upon the type of characters that you want to see in stories that you consider. What, in particular, should authors avoid when submitting to you?

AG: There is room for all sorts of characters on my list! There is no room for hatred or bigotry though.

LM: Please share a little about the process your mind goes through when deciding whether or not to offer representation to an author. How many pieces do you request to see before deciding? Do you offer one-book or career representation? If you see something that strikes you, will you ask to see more from that author?

AG: As an agency value, we always want to be in it for the long haul with writers, so for picture book writers I typically need to see five solid manuscripts before signing with them. For MG and YA, I just need to see one, and hear about some of their other concepts or WIPs. Sometimes I see a concept I like and I’ll ask to see more of their work and I evaluate from there. Sometimes the concept will be just okay, but I’ll like the sentence-level writing and I’ll ask to see more of their work just because I liked the way their work read.

LM: Also because values is an important focus for Christian writers, do you consider the author’s “presence” on social media and their following as a factor in determining viability? Do you think an author should have a website prior to getting a contract?

Adria Goetz continued

AG: Social media is a great tool, but it's only ever a dealbreaker when it comes to Christian Living titles, when having that platform is crucial. I always check out a writer on Twitter before signing them though: not to see how many followers they have, but just to make sure they don't have a Confederate flag Twitter banner or something. I think it's a great idea to have a website prior to querying if you can. It doesn't need to be fancy! Just somewhere I can find you. You can worry about making it fancy later on.

LM: I see you share your Manuscript Wish List from time to time. Is there anything outstanding on your current Wish List that you can share with our readers?

AG: My mission statement says that: *I look for books that delight readers, that help inspire wonder and imagination, that foster deep empathy and compassion for our fellow human beings, that provide rich character representation of marginalized people groups, that take the reader on an adventure, that raise goosebumps, that uncover fascinating stories from history's footnotes, that explore issues of faith and how to apply Christ's teachings to our own life, that celebrate women and the female experience, that ask nitty gritty questions and don't settle for easy answers, that make people disappointed when they have to close the book and go to bed, and books that add a touch of magic to readers' lives.* I'm particularly looking to build up my author/illustrator clients, as well as my YA list. But I'm always looking for more MG and YA. My list is leaning more toward speculative right now, but I'd love to balance it out with more voicey contemporary realistic stories, especially ones featuring a diverse cast of characters.

Readers can also check out: www.adriagoetz.com for an extensive list of what I am looking for and not looking for.

LM: Please share your submission guidelines.

AG: Picture book queries must include the query, text of the manuscript pasted in the body of the email. For larger works of fiction, please include the first chapter of your manuscript attached as a Word doc or PDF. Also, please attach a detailed synopsis or overview if you have one prepared. For non-fiction queries, please include a query letter and the proposal attached as a Word doc or PDF.

All queries should include your email address and a link to your Twitter account, if you have one.

Above the Slushpile

Adria is offering a special **Above the Slushpile** submission opportunity to CBI readers. Please follow her submission guidelines from this interview and send to:

Adria@MartinLit.com with "Query CBI - AG Martin Literary Submission" in the subject line.

Since there is no deadline for this offer, please take the time to revise your work extensively before submitting.

Working with Your Local Bookstore

by Jane McBride

We live in a digital world of pressing a button to order anything, including books. Does that mean traditional bookstores are obsolete? Of course not. Bookstore owners/managers can be an author's friend and advocate in the community, but we, as writers, need to do our part in fostering that relationship.

How can we build a relationship with bookstore owners/managers? How can we work with them, especially in arranging book signings? What are the writer's responsibilities and what belong to the bookstore? I've culled the following tips from my own experiences in working with bookstores and those of writer friends.

WHAT AUTHORS CAN DO

Patronize the store. If you want to build a relationship with a bookstore owner/manager, shop at the store. Let the manager and employees get to recognize you and your name. Learn their names as well and then use them.

Introduce yourself as a writer whether or not you are published. You are a writer, whatever your publishing status. Let the manager know if you've completed a manuscript. (After all, you've done with very few people have managed to do—written an entire manuscript.) Talk about the genre you write. Ask the manager what she notices is selling and what is not. Ask her what remains on the shelves and what flies off.

Work to build a relationship with the store's employees and introduce yourself to them. They can help you in many ways, including when you have a book signing. Be courteous and polite and acknowledge that they are doing you a favor. People remember good manners, just as they remember when someone is impolite or rude.

Keep the manager and clerks informed about your new releases, contest wins, awards, etc. Bookstore owners want to support local writers. Help them help you by keeping them current on what's happening with your writing.

Donate autographed copies to the store. This is crucial. Bookstores, especially independent ones, operate on a slim budget. Having the author donate copies of her latest books is a big plus. It is also free advertising for you. If the store already has your book in stock, be sure to stop by and autograph them.

Ask if the store would be willing to display bookmarks and promo material. Be respectful of counter space and use only that which is allotted to you.

If you want to do a book signing at the store, approach the manager in plenty of time. Don't wait until your book is out to start preparing for a signing. Get your promotional materials in order. Ask what the manager would like you to do and when you should do it. Set up a schedule; be considerate of her time. Bookstore managers are incredibly busy people and have thousands of books to order, stock, and shelf. Make certain that she knows your book's release date. Before the signing, ask the manager if your books have arrived. At my last signing, my books had not arrived. It turned out that they hadn't even been ordered. My husband rushed home to bring my author copies to sell.

Have a professionally-prepared press release and other information at the ready should the store owner ask you for them. Prepare several copies. Don't skimp on the quality of the printing and paper. This represents you. Some authors dress up for the event, such as wearing period costume for a historical book.

Dress up the table where you'll be doing your signing. A vase of fresh flowers or a bowl of candy is always welcome. If possible, have a friend sit with you.

Working with Your Local Bookstore continued

A two hour signing can seem like forever if you are alone.

Following a signing, send a thank-you note or at least an email or text thanking the store owner for her help. A hand-written note is so rare these days that it stands out. (A bonus: it also helps keep your name in the owner's mind.)

FROM THE BOOKSTORE OWNER'S PERSPECTIVE

For a different viewpoint, I went to bookstore owner Trisha Taylor, owner and general manager of Cornerstone Christian Supply, Cheyenne, WY. Trisha was gracious enough to answer my questions regarding book signings in the following interview:

Jane McBride: What can an author do to make a book signing successful?

Tisha Taylor: Help the bookstore with promotion of the book signing. Keep us informed of your release date.

JM: What makes you want to work with a writer? What stands out in your mind about certain authors that makes you want to work with them again?

TT: My two favorite authors encourage the customers to patronize the store and explain how essential an independent bookstore is to serve a community and encourage customers to shop local. I don't expect this from authors, but it touches my heart when they do this. (My extra thank you to them has been gift certificates for them to provide gifts for their family from our bookstore inventory.) These authors are so exceptional; when they notice a customer not being helped immediately (payroll is a big expense to me — I often run with only one staff member present), the authors help the customer find ideas if what the customer is looking for is familiar to them. None of this is "expected," but it means so much to us as a bookstore with a big heart but a thin budget.

JM: How do you see your role as owner/manager in setting up a signing?

TT: I try to make sure we are clear on the terms, the time, and provide a table, chair, bottled water and provide any promotional items the author or their publisher provides to us in advance. If the author is published

by a large publishing house, it is a huge help when the author helps us to get additional discount on purchase of the book(s) and free freight returns, if possible. Of course, then we pass the extra discount on to our customers. People are so cost conscious nowadays, a bargain helps. Conversely, it is very difficult when we have to pre-guess on quantity to order and especially when we have the expense of return shipping on unsold copies.

It's a little difficult to swallow when customers want to use their in-store coupons toward paying for an author-signing book, but I don't have the heart to tell them no, nor have I said that to the author either [to reduce their cut on the sales - it's 40% to the store, and 60% to the author]. I try to be very honest on what happens.

JM: What if the author is indie-published? How does that change things?

TT: No problem. That is actually easier to work with, because then the authors bring their own supply of books to the book signing. That means no expensive return shipping.

The other thing that is really important is for the author to leave us with several copies of their book(s) "on consignment." That makes it so I don't have to worry about ordering extra, and everyone is happy.

Picture Book Author

BARRY WITTENSTEIN

Brings Nonfiction and Historical Fiction to Life

interview by PJ McIlvaine

A child of the sixties, Barry Wittenstein (www.onedogwoof.com) followed his muse wherever it led him. He knew he was a creative soul, but in what form and shape, took him decades to hone. But now he's an honest-to-God, certified published and praised "picture book writer", and yes, all without a literary agent. His debut picture book *Waiting for Pumpsie* (Charlesbridge 2017), an inspirational story of a young African-American Boston Red Sox fan when the team integrated in 1959, was a 2017 Junior Library Guild Selection. His second published picture book, *The Boo Boos That Changed The World* (Charlesbridge, 2018), takes a fun and engaging look at the inventors of the ubiquitous Band Aid. On deck is *A Place To Land*, a nonfiction picture book about Martin Luther King and his legendary "I Have A Dream" speech (Neil Porter/Holiday House, October 2019), historical fiction book *Oscar's American Dream* (Schwartz & Wade, 2020), and *Sonny's Bridge*, a nonfiction picture book about jazz great Sonny Rollins (Charlesbridge, 2019). A die-hard New Yorker, Wittenstein makes his home in the Bronx and roots for the New York Mets.



PJ McIlvaine: Your background, to say the least, is quite eclectic: songwriter, bartender, taxi driver, writer, poet, and substitute teacher. How did those disciplines help you to become an acclaimed nonfiction picture book author?

Barry Wittenstein: Well, I like to think of myself as somewhat eclectic. Or somewhat very eclectic. Or sometimes, extremely somewhat definitely eclectic. But being "acclaimed"? Fughetaboutit.

My experience in writing poetry and music & lyrics helps. Oh, and of course, substituting in NYC elemen-

tary schools. I learned a lot about both kids and myself. Reminded me how much I like little human beings, and how we share a common sense of humor.

PM: Growing up in the sixties, how has that influenced your writing?

BW: The non-traditional thinking that permeated the era really resonated with me. It was a decade of taking chances, of pushing the edge of the envelope. It spoke to me. So, when it was time to go to college and get a job, I went for a liberal arts background. I knew I was a creative person but didn't know where I would end up. I think a liberal arts background is something that's underrated. It taught me how to be an outside-the-box thinker. The downside was that I've had the typical, struggling artist type jobs that didn't pay well. Next time around, I'll have some sort of backup gig that will allow me to have a few dollars in the bank. Honestly, I was afraid that if I got too comfortable in a straight job, I would never be able to get out of it.

PM: With your first book, *Waiting for Pumpsie*, how long did it take from the initial first draft to option/sale to publication?

BW: About three years. I wrote it, hired a couple of freelance editors who guided me, sent it around to editors, and nothing. I could not believe nobody wanted it. Charlesbridge even rejected it at first. It kinda made me laugh, since the story takes place in Boston and Charlesbridge is in Watertown. I sent back a note expressing my surprise. I kept pitching it to editors and agents. One agent wanted to sign it along with another manuscript.

Barry Wittenstein continued

I was this close to signing with that agent when Karen Boss, an editor at Charlesbridge, contacted me saying she was interested. It's been a great partnership.

PM: You will, at this writing, have two nonfiction books published by Charlesbridge and others are under contract. How did the initial contact come about? Do you propose ideas to your editor there or completed works? What is the editorial process like? Do you get input about the illustrations?

BW: My only two published books (you want to rethink the “acclaimed” compliment?) are with Charlesbridge. I have another under contract with them, as well as one with Neal Porter at Holiday House, and Anne Schwartz at Schwartz & Wade. All are nonfiction.

Now that I have a bit of a track record, I usually send a query listing my credentials, asking if I may submit to them. Most of the time it's “yes.” Though I met Neal Porter at an SCBWI Conference in LA in 2016.

I do not pitch ideas. I pitch complete manuscripts. And in terms of illustrator input, Charlesbridge has been great in asking my opinions and listening to my feedback.

PM: Do you have an agent?

BW: I do not. Not that I won't in the future. At this point, I'm getting stories published...and no agent is banging down my door to represent me.

PM: You seem to have a particular affinity for books with sports themes and/or subjects. Did you love sports as a kid? Were you an athlete?

BW: I did love sports as a kid. Athlete? Does Little League count? But Pumpsie is my only book that uses sports as a backdrop.

PM: Do you have a writing routine? Do you belong to a critique group? Are you a panster or a plotter?

BW: No routine. No critique group. I definitely don't plot. I just go for it. I get an idea, do some research, try to come up with an angle, and dive in. Then, when I have a version on paper, I rewrite, rewrite, rewrite. It is interesting that some stories take a long time to come to fruition; others just pop out, pretty complete. Right now, I'm pitching a sports story that I began five years ago. I could never nail the form. Recently I've adopted a free verse

style, and this story works very well with that treatment.

PM: Where do you get your ideas? What makes you choose one idea over another? When do you know when a manuscript is done?

BW: Like any writer, ideas come from anywhere and everywhere. TV, Twitter, overheard conversations, memories, and more. Little lightbulbs going off above my head all day long. I never know when a manuscript is done. When it's published, I guess. I can go to sleep at night thinking a piece is finished, then wake up and want to make a zillion edits. At some point, you just have to send it out. I've heard stories of manuscripts arriving in agents or editor's office 99 percent complete. I usually end up closer to 75 percent.

PM: What or who inspires you in your writing? Favorite author or book?

BW: I love finding nonfiction stories of people who are not well known, especially to elementary school kids. The challenge is to be able to make those stories accessible to children. The challenge inspires me, too. Favorite authors are too many to list. Everything from poets Bill Knott and Lawrence Ferlinghetti, to David Sadaris, Jon Scieszka, and on and on.

PM: What are you currently working on? Do you work on one thing at a time or do you juggle multiple projects? Do you see yourself expanding into other genres?

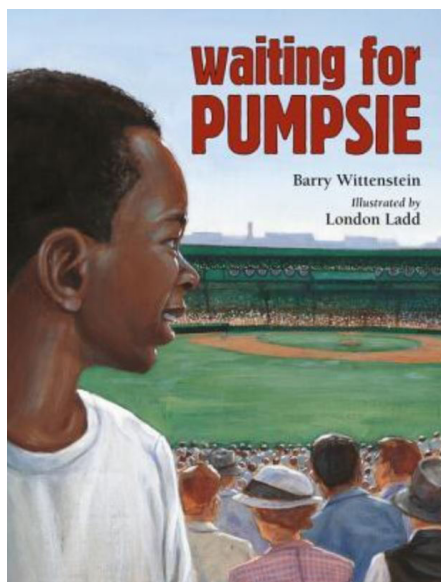
BW: I like to work on a few things at a time. Usually in different stages of completion. I can't reveal the subjects I'm working on! I kind of pride myself on finding unique stories. I love to write in my queries that the subject of what I'm submitting has never been addressed in picture book format.

PM: If you were stuck on a deserted island, what three books would you bring with you?

BW: That's actually one of my biggest fears. So, I've done a bit of research, and purchased a few books that I always carry with me.

1. *What to Do If You're Stuck on a Deserted Island*
2. *Who Moved My Compass? Volume 1*
3. *Loser's Guide to Getting Stuck on a Deserted Island*

Because you never know.



VILLAINS



by Jane McBride

Many writers don't understand the difference between an antagonist and a villain. An antagonist is someone who actively opposes the protagonist. Other terms for antagonist can be opponent, adversary, or rival. But a villain is someone whose evil actions or motives are important to the story's plot. If your middle grade protagonist is competing against a classmate in the district spelling bee, the classmate is an opponent. If that same classmate got ahold of the protagonist's study guide and altered the spelling of many of the words before the competition, she's a villain. It's all about the intent.

Many types of genre fiction, such as fantasy, science fiction and mysteries, often have villains. But contemporary fiction can contain villains as well. And while a story's villain may be the primary antagonist, that's not always the case. Some characters, such as a bully, may complicate your protagonist's life but aren't necessarily the main obstacle standing in his way to solving a bigger problem that makes up the backbone of your plot. Or, in a mystery, your young sleuth may be racing to solve the case before another sleuth (the antagonist--a rival) gets all the credit. But the perpetrator of the crime may be a villain.

Villains need to be crafted with as much care as do heroes. Cardboard, single dimensional villains will not suffice for today's sophisticated readers. Just as readers want heroes they can relate to, they also want villains who are real.

Does this mean a hero and a villain cannot be larger than life? Not at all. Just be sure that you are drawing your heroes and villains with real traits.

Okay, so what are the traits of a believable villain?

He must have a motive. Without a plausible and compelling reason to commit a crime, a villain won't ring true. He needs to strive for a goal, even if that goal is evil. Make his goal believable for his age. A six-year-old boy won't have a reason to steal a test and frame his friend. A sixteen-year-old boy, however, could know how to steal a test from a computer and then frame his friend for the theft.

She must believe in her motive. A villain who is pure evil doesn't need to believe her motives are just – she can simply act out of greed without a second thought. But if the villain has a reason for her actions, and the reason connects to some problem the villain must solve in her own life, then she's no longer a one-note character.

He must have the skills to commit the crime. In the above example, a boy who is computer illiterate probably doesn't have the skill to steal a test from a teacher's computer.

He must be a match to the hero. A stupid villain will not challenge the hero and, in fact, makes the hero appear stupid as well. Likewise, the villain should be a physical match to the hero. (In some books, especially fantasy and science fiction, the hero may have to acquire the physical skills to take on the villain, but this is part of the hero's growth. Also, the hero may develop other skills that compensate for a lack of physical strength.)

She must be multidimensional. Few people are 100% flawed, just as few are 100% perfect. Give your villain a redeeming quality. Perhaps she has a soft spot

Villains continued

for animals. Even if she is chasing down your hero, she avoids running over a stray dog in the road. Once again, give her a reason why she has this quality. Did she have a dog as a child and her parents made her get rid of it?

He must have the opportunity to commit his crimes or evil actions. If your villain is a teenager who steals from the homes of his wealthy friends' parents during the day, give him a reason why he isn't in school. Or change the time when he is committing the robberies.

His reasons for acting as he does must be appropriate for your targeted age group. Understand how your audience sees the world and how they might define "evil." Children in the early elementary grades are very conscious of rules, and have a strong sense of injustice if the rules are broken. So if you are writing a chapter book for ages 7-10, your villain (who, in this example, is also the antagonist) might be stealing food from classmate's lunch boxes. This is a crime second and third graders would find particularly offensive, especially if the protagonist was looking forward to her special birthday cupcake her mom had packed for her lunch. So our third grade protagonist decides to solve the series of thefts. She discovers that a schoolmate is homeless and is stealing the food to take back to his parents and little sister. In this case, the villain becomes a sympathetic character, which can happen in a story where you've given him a real reason for acting as he does.

Villains can be challenging to write well. Give them as much as attention as you do your main character. Understand what makes them tick. Every character needs a reason to be in your story. If you're creating a villain, make sure his or her intent—whether it's evil, selfish, or just deliberately breaking a rule—is an integral and necessary part of the plot.

More tips on creating villains from Hilari Bell, author of middle grade and young adult fiction (www.hilaribell.com)

A credible villain can be motivated by anything from simple greed to self-preservation, from patriotism to revenge, from religious fervor to ambition to romantic love. In short, anything that can motivate any normal person can also motivate your villain. And if your villain does nothing worse than he has to in order to achieve his goals, he becomes even more believable. One of the best villains I've encountered was the bad guy in the first *National Treasure* movie. When he was stealing the Declaration of Independence, this villain armed his men with stun guns...because murder is a much more serious charge than robbery, and there was no reason to kill anybody. He was also smart enough that beating him was a real challenge.

Finally, a note on villains and POV. A number of novels I've read lately spend a lot of time in the villain's point of view. This may be another prejudice on my part, or I may be influenced by the fact that I write mostly YA fiction where limited viewpoints are more common—but for me as a reader, time spent in the villain's point of view is wasted because I don't bond with them. The author shouldn't even want me to bond with them! I'm reading a book because I want to hang out with the hero, and being in the villain's head is usually boring at best, and icky at worst. It can also be a sign of lazy writing, because it takes more work to reveal the plot through the hero's eyes than to simply drop in on the villain and have him tell the reader all about it. Some writers reveal the villain's plot in an effort to create suspense despite a slow beginning—the hero doesn't know it yet, but evil lurks... This too is easier, but it doesn't work nearly as well as starting the story in the right place, and letting the reader experience the hero's shock and dismay as he slowly realizes that all these horrible happenings aren't mere chance. That there's a villain on the loose.