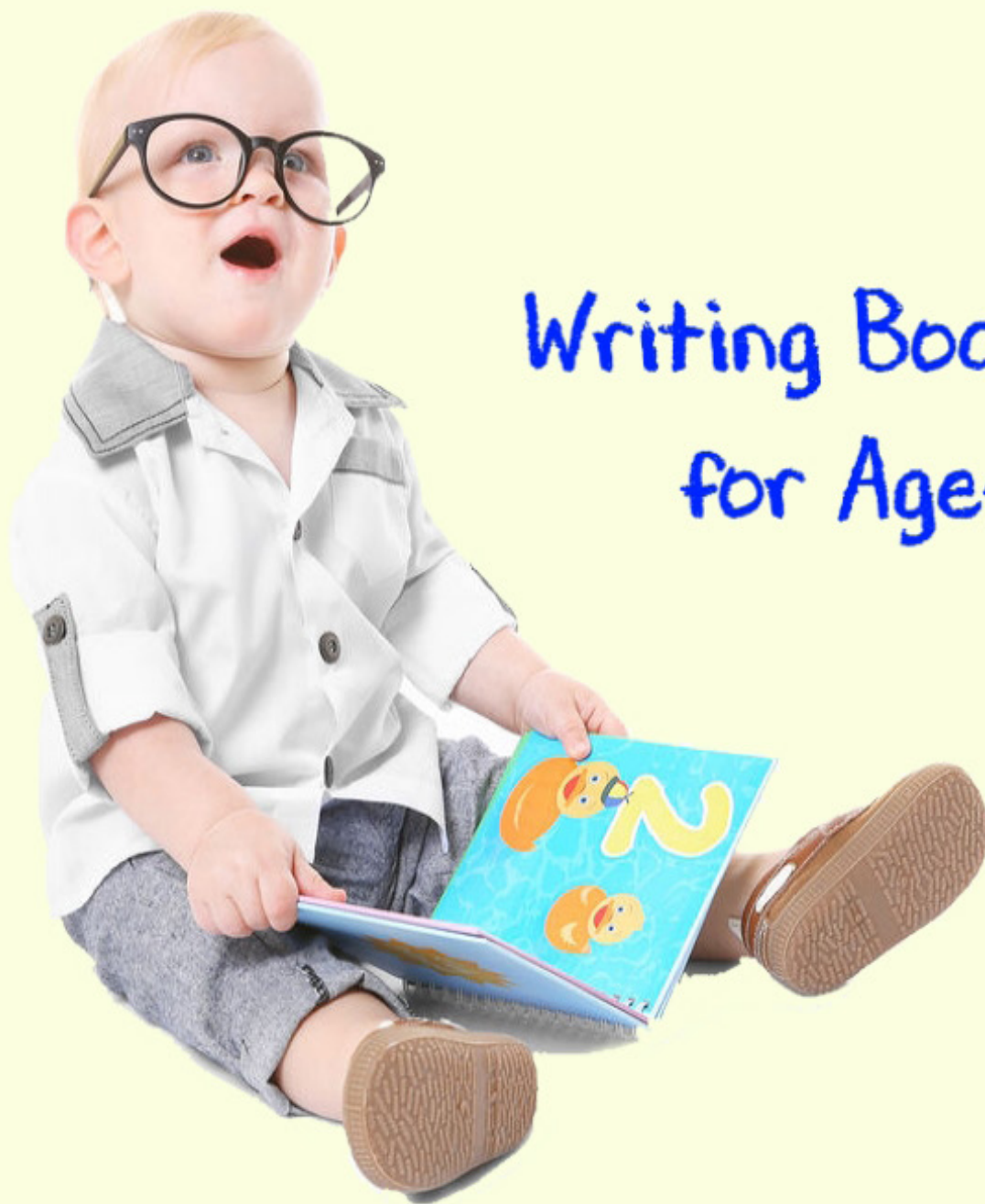


# Children's Book Insider

March 2019



Writing Board Books  
for Ages 0-3

**ABOVE THE SLUSHPILE  
SUBMISSION CODE:**

**Dunham Literary Agency**

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## This issue's contributors

**Jean Daigneau** has been published in newspapers and magazines, including *Highlights* and *Fun for Kidz*, and has sold educational testing material, craft ideas, and greeting card text. Her work has appeared in *Guide to Literary Agents* and *Children's Writers' and Illustrators' Market*. She is a former regional and assistant regional advisor for SCBWI Ohio North and currently serves on the executive board. Jean is represented by Vicki Selvaggio, Associate Agent at the Jennifer Di Chiara Literary Agency.

**Jane McBride** is the author of 36 novels, numerous short stories and articles including pieces in 16 *Chicken Soup for the Soul* anthologies, and the CBI Managing Editor. Follow her writing blog at <http://www.janemchoate.blogspot.com>

**PJ McIlvaine** is a published writer/produced screenwriter/kid lit author/blogger/journalist. In a former life she was a great baker of Europe. PJ is a co-host #PBPitch, the premiere Twitter pitch party for picture book writers and illustrators.

**Lynne Marie** is the author of *Hedgehog Goes to Kindergarten* and *Hedgehog's 100th Day of School* (Scholastic), *The Star in the Christmas Play* and *Let's Eat Around the World* (Beaming Books), *Moldilocks* and the *3 Scares* (Sterling) and more forthcoming, as well as numerous stories and articles in magazines, including *Highlights for Children*, *High Five*, *Baby Bug*, *Family Fun*, *Hopscotch*, *Turtle*, *Spider* and *Writer's Digest*. Her website is <http://www.LiterallyLynneMarie.com>

**Pat Miller** ([www.patmillerbooks.com](http://www.patmillerbooks.com)), a former teacher and school librarian, has nine young grandchildren and nine books for children. Her latest is an award-winning nonfiction picture book, *The Hole Story of the Doughnut*, (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016). She is also one of the eleven Nonfiction Ninjas ([www.nonfiction-ninjas.com](http://www.nonfiction-ninjas.com)).

Published 12 times/year by Children's Book Insider, LLC,  
901 Columbia Road, Ft. Collins, CO 80525-1838.  
970/495-0056.  
ISSN 1073-7596  
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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:

## Agent Seeks Middle Grade and Young Adult Submissions

Sarah Landis is an agent with Sterling Lord Literistic (<https://www.sll.com>). Before joining Sterling Lord Literistic in 2017, Sarah worked as an editor for fifteen years, holding roles at G.P. Putnam Son's, Hyperion Books, Harper-Collins Children's Books, and Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Books for Young Readers. Sarah is particularly drawn to middle grade fantasy and contemporary with heart, humor, adventure, and magic. In young adult fiction, she is interested in high-concept plots, big hooks, strong romance, sci-fi/fantasy, historical, mysteries & thrillers, magical realism, and emotionally compelling contemporary stories. At this time she's particularly looking for unique fantasy with a truly original magic system, middle grade fantasy like *Blackthorn Key* and *A Tangle of Knots*, and highly-illustrated middle grade that leans toward a graphic novel, like *Invisible Emmie*. All submissions must be sent through <https://www.sll.com/submissions>, and include a query letter, synopsis and the first three chapters. Responds within three months if interested.

## Literary Magazine for Ages 3-6 Seeks Fiction, Nonfiction and Poetry

*Ladybug* is literary magazine for ages 3-6, featuring original stories, poetry, nonfiction, and activities written by the world's best children's authors. When reviewing submissions, the editors look for clear and beautiful language, a sense of joy and wonder, and a genuinely childlike point of view. Before submitting, be sure to familiarize yourself with *Ladybug* (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.

Seeing fiction up to 800 words: finely crafted and imaginative contemporary stories, original retellings of folk and fairy tales, and funny pieces with human characters or anthropomorphic animals. City settings and stories that take place outside the United States are especially welcome, as well as subject matter that appeals to both boys and girls.

Poetry (up to 20 lines): generally rhythmic/rhyming; the tone may be serious or humorous. At this time actively looking for poetry that explores young children's daily lives and their emotions and imaginations. Also interested in action rhymes (energetic poems that call for physical movement).

Nonfiction (up to 400 words): simple explorations of interesting places in a young child's world (such as the library and the post office), different cultures, nature, and science. These articles can be straight nonfiction, or they may include elements of story, such as a fictional child narrator. Backup materials and photo references may be requested upon acceptance.

Activities and Games: unusual and imaginative activities, riddles, games, crafts, and songs. See [past issues](#) for models and inspiration.

Current needs for particular themes:

**A Part of It All** (submission deadline April 1, 2019): short stories, retellings of folk tales, rebus stories, poems, action rhymes, nonfiction, and songs about young children participating in their communities. Welcoming new neighbors, harvesting a shared garden, celebrating a holiday—show how small children can affect their neighborhoods across the US and abroad.

**Indigenous Stories** (submission deadline April 1, 2019): contemporary and historical fiction and nonfiction, heartfelt stories by and about indigenous peoples of North America. Special family moments, traditions continued or lost, life on or off a reservation, learning and growing up in the present or past, or an important moment in history. Provide a detailed source list or the name of the person you consulted if you are not a member of the community you're writing about.

Submit the entire manuscript through Submittable at <https://cricketmag.submittable.com/submit>. Responds in 3-6 months. Rights purchased vary, depending on whether the piece has been previously published. Pays up to 25 cents/word on stories and articles, up to \$3 per line for poetry with a \$25 minimum.

### Publisher Accepting Young Adult Romance with Fresh Twist

*Entangled Teen*, the young adult imprint of Entangled Publishing, publishes fresh, edgy, exciting young adult fiction with a romantic element for ages 14-18. The publisher utilizes both digital-first and traditional publishing models to make books available online as well as in stores. Seeking fresh voices with interesting twists on popular subgenres of romantic fiction, including Contemporary, Science Fiction, Paranormal, Fantasy, Historical, Romantic Suspense and Thrillers.

In all genres, seeking high-concept plots told from a uniquely teen point of view. Manuscripts should be 70k to 120k words in length with 16-19 year old protagonists that will appeal to young adult/New Adult crossover audiences. All stories must contain a romantic element (M/F, M/M, F/F or any romance between two people). Diverse characters are welcomed and encouraged. Submit a synopsis and the entire manuscript through Submitable at <https://entangledpublishing.com/entangled-teen-submissions/>. For current titles, go to <http://www.entangledteen.com/>

### Publisher Seeks Fiction, Nonfiction for Kids Written by Counselors & Mental Health Professionals

Magination Press® publishes picture books for ages 4-8, middle grade fiction for ages 9-13, and nonfiction and workbooks for ages 9-18. All fiction and nonfiction has a strong psychology-based element covering a broad range of topics of concern to children and teens. These include everyday situations such as starting school and the growing family, as well as more serious psychological, clinical, or medical problems, such as divorce, depression, anxiety, asthma, attention disorders, bullying, death, and more. Magination Press books feature stories that are distinguished by their psychological and emotional accuracy and complexity, and showcase the child's inner experience of the problem as well as its practical resolution. There should be no magical solutions, but a realistic working-out of the problem and an emotional coming to terms with it. The coping and resolution suggestions must also be comprehensive. Not interested in proposals that offer a single, albeit charming or clever, solution.

Most Magination Press books are written by PhD psychologists, school counselors, or mental health professionals. Many books are also written by MD physicians. Although doctorate-level credentials are not a requirement, the author should have expertise in the topic area. All picture books include a comprehensive *Note to Parents* on the subject of the book, written by a doctoral-level psychologist. When the author of the story is not a psychologist, Magination Press commissions the writing of the Note.

Before submitting a proposal to Magination Press, authors should review current titles at <https://www.apa.org/pubs/magination/index> to get a sense of what the publisher is looking for. Proposals should include a brief synopsis (specify the psychological issue or situation you are addressing in the work); along with a description of the market for your book, including what need to book fills and any other titles on the market on the same topic and how yours will be different. Also include an author resume or curriculum vitae and the complete manuscript (including a table of contents for nonfiction, and any back matter). Sample illustrations are acceptable if the author is also an illustrator. Include a self-addressed, stamped envelope if you want the submission materials returned.

The staff of Magination Press is Kristine Enderle, Director; Sarah Fell, Senior Editor, and Katherine Ten Hagen, Editor. You may address your cover letter to one of them, but all submissions should be mailed to Acquisitions, Magination Press, American Psychological Association, 750 First Street, NE, Washington, DC 20002-4242 (do not address envelope to a specific editor). Responds within six months if interested in pursuing publication. Here's an article that gives insight into Magination Press' books: <https://www.shelf-awareness.com/dedicated-issue.html?issue=38#m230>

### **Creative Nonfiction Retreat Led by Laura Backes and Two Award-Winning Authors**

*Vermont Writers Roundtable: How to Write Creative Nonfiction for Children and Teens*, is an intensive retreat held in South Londonderry, VT on July 12-14, 2019. Limited to 15 attendees with nonfiction works-in-progress, the weekend will feature several small-group critique sessions as well as informational workshops lead by **Laura Backes**, publisher of *Children's Book Insider*, and award-winning nonfiction authors Stephen Swinburne and Peter Lourie. Yolanda Scott, Editorial Director of Charlesbridge, will present a session on the editor's perspective. After a collaborative, empowering weekend, participants will leave with an action plan on how to write, revise and submit their work. Go to [www.vermontwritersroundtable.com](http://www.vermontwritersroundtable.com) for an information packet and application form. **All applications must be received by May 28, 2019.** Spots will be given to the first 15 qualified applicants, so early applications are encouraged.

# Writing Board Books for Ages 0-3

by Jean Daigneau

New research presented at the 2017 Pediatric Academic Societies Meeting, in San Francisco, will likely come as no surprise to children's writers and illustrators: that reading to children, even in infancy, impacts their language, literacy, and early reading skills when they enter preschool and kindergarten.

As I've been known to do, I'm going to digress in this column and discuss board books. Not a genre, per se, but still a viable market for writers and illustrators. Besides the importance of reading to children at an early age, when you think about how easy they are to write and illustrate—few words, few pictures, few pages—who wouldn't want to try it. Right? Let's find out!

## A Short History Lesson

Like me, many of you might not know that children's books with lift flaps and pull tabs first appeared in the early 1800s. And, in the mid-1800s, board books, along with other formats of children's books took a huge step forward, mostly due to improvements in printing technology and transportation, along with new ideas being promoted about the importance of educating children. Fast forward to the mid-1900s, when the rationing of cloth in the world wars pushed board books to the forefront, as a replacement for cloth books, particularly because they were more durable and kid friendly.

## What Makes Them Different?

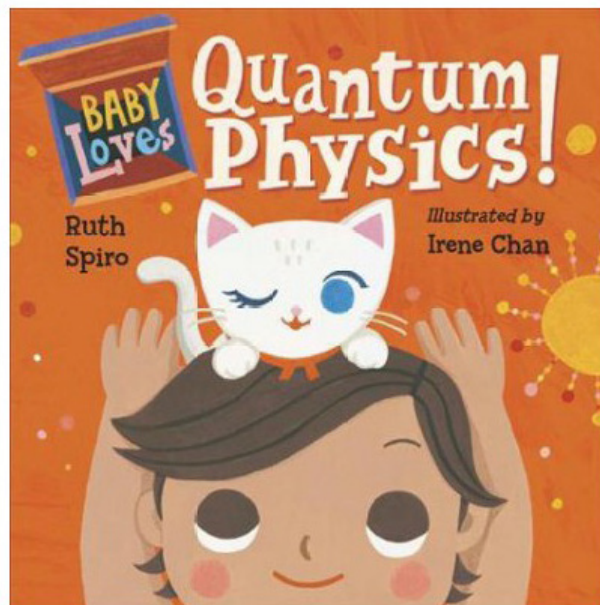
The board book audience tends to fall into the newborn

up to 3-year-old age range, or older. That means these books are meant to be drooled on, chewed on, thrown down, and otherwise abused. As Jerry Griswold, former director of the National Center for the Study of Children's Literature at San Diego State University says, "If it were a vehicle, the board book would be the tank or armored personnel carrier."

They usually feature bright colors, rhythmic or rhyming language, and fingerplay or another interactive component such as flaps, die-cuts, tabs, or pop-up features. As a writer or illustrator, it helps to keep in mind what Chronicle Books editor Ariel Richardson calls the "physicality" of the format. Richardson states that at Chronicle, "We're generally looking for a board book that has a novelty element inherent in the concept." That's exactly what Betsy Snyder, award-winning author and illustrator, gives her with books such as her *I Can* series. Interactive die-cut holes on each page and a touch and feel cover are exactly what babies love. As Snyder

notes, "Babies and toddlers explore their world in a very physical way; reading is a highly interactive experience." That's what you need to keep in mind if you want to write for a highly demanding audience with a short attention span!

Griswold contends that because of the very structure of board books, they allow for dramatic page turning. The page turn is, he says, "an action that all by itself is positively delightful to the very young and bears repeating, and bears repeating, over and over again."



### Aren't Board Book Readers All Alike?

As with any books for children, your writing needs to engage your reader. Ruth Spiro, another award-winning author, recommends that you consider “the wide developmental difference between an infant, a toddler and a preschooler....The best books will have multiple layers of interest to appeal to multiple age groups.” Snyder echoes this sentiment. “I craft my words to support and enhance the format and guide the reader through the physical components, often weaving in prompts and language that encourage interaction and feed a child’s growing vocabulary.” So, don’t think because these books have fewer pages, words, or pictures that you don’t need to do your homework.

### But Really, How Hard is it?

When considering a project for any book, Spiro keeps in mind how her idea might stand out in the marketplace and how it is different from what’s already published. Market research is an invaluable tool for writing any book. But, when you consider that many board books are spinoffs from television or other media productions, are often produced in-house or in a work-for-hire arrangement, or are reformatted from a previously published picture book or even a novel, you definitely need to know what you’re getting into before you tackle this format.

Spiro’s idea for her best-selling *Baby Loves Science* series started with an offhand comment. She and friends were discussing an article about parents’ lack of interest in purchasing picture books because they wanted something “more sophisticated” for their children. Spiro threw out the question, “What do these parents want, quantum physics for babies?” But the more she kicked around the idea, the more she liked it.

For her first four books—*Baby Loves Aerospace Engineer-*

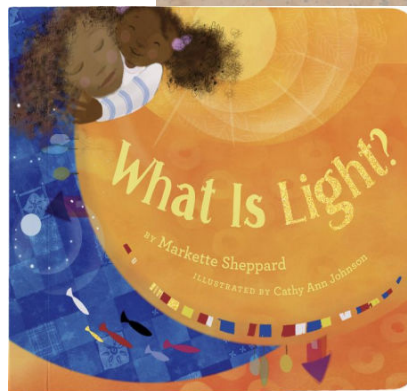
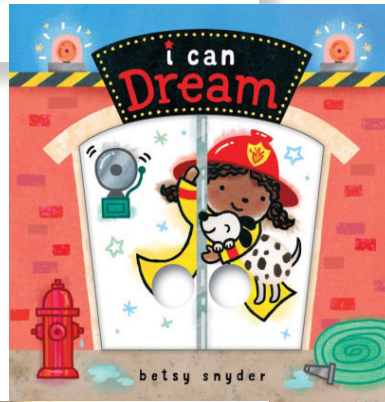
*ing!*, *Baby Loves Quarks!*, *Baby Loves Thermodynamics!*, and *Baby Loves Quantum Physics!*—Spiro spent almost a year doing research before she wrote a single word. “I knew I needed to understand the science well enough to explain it in very simple terms...I wanted to make sure the books would be accessible, too, so I read all I could about early literacy and how children acquire language to ensure the books would be age-appropriate.” Besides all of that, each of Spiro’s books is reviewed by a science expert, along with an expert in the specific field, if necessary. Then, they go through “rounds of revisions to both the text and illustrations to make sure every spread is accurate and appealing.”

Snyder brings these same ideas to the table. “Regardless of their final format or page count, books for young children all share similar challenges in their creation—like choosing the right hook, voice, writing style, and art style.... Novelty books [in particular] present unique complexities in terms of construction, safety, design, sourcing, and cost of production.

In fact, that’s one thought to remember. Board books usually cost more to produce, but typically sell for about half the price of a picture book. That means a larger print-run for a publisher in order to save money. But that means the publisher has to be sure they can sell all those books. What does this mean for you? Often, royalties are significantly lower for board book author and/or illustrators.

### The Nuts and Bolts of Submitting

As an editor, Robinson looks for books with series potential. She loves to see a blank mock-up showing the novelty element along with the submission. She believes that this process “is truly a form of editing—it means the author has thought through how the novelty elements would work, and how the interactivity would be experienced by the reader.” And, when a mock-up, or at the very least, novelty ideas are included, Robinson admits that “it means your chances of being published



Writing Board Books continued

go up if you've done some of that thinking before it hits my desk.”

In a nutshell, here is Snyder's advice for writing board books:

- Create with your reader's age in mind;
- Your cover should communicate your novelty feature [if applicable];
- Double up your novelty features when you can, like dials and sliders that can be used on both sides of the page;
- Series potential is a plus;
- If your concept is dependent on special features, submit it in the novelty category;
- Be flexible, open-minded, and solution-oriented, especially when production costs lead to changes.

With the last component, Snyder has found that often the “creative-thinking almost always reveals another effective solution—and sometimes that leads to even better ideas!” And you all know where those ideas can lead you, right? Just ask Ruth Spiro about quantum physics for babies!

### Suggested Titles:

Before you jump into writing board books, as with any children's book writing, you should read, read, and read...board books! Not only will this research pay off by helping you know what is already out there, but it will inspire you to see what works...or perhaps what doesn't...when writing for these youngest of readers.

*Llamaphones* by Janik Coat

*Peek-a-Who?* by Elsa Mroziewicz

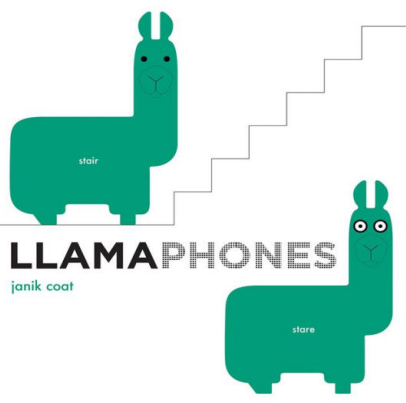
*I Can Dream* (and other *I Can* books) by Betsy Snyder

*Babies Love Science* (currently 8 titles) by Ruth Spiro

*These Colors are Bananas* by Tamara Shopsin and Jason Fulford

*What is Light?* by Markette Shephard

*Boats are Busy* by Sarah Gillingham



# LESLIE ZAMPETTI

## DUNHAM LITERARY AGENCY

interview by Lynne Marie

**T**here are many reasons that I am over-the-moon excited to introduce Leslie Zampetti to our readers. One, because she's both a friend and writing buddy, but mostly because she is a triple threat! She has over 20 years' experience as a librarian in special, public and school libraries, has been writing and critiquing for many years and after doing a stint as an intern for the Bent Agency, she is now on the other side of the desk as an agent at Dunham Literary!

**LYNNE MARIE:** First of all congratulations on becoming an agent! I am so happy that you are to open up to "above-the-slush" submissions from our readers. It's nice to see an agent with background in reading, writing, submitting and agenting. How do you feel your experience as a writer and librarian affects the way you view and do your job as Agent?

**LESLIE ZAMPETTI:** Thank you, Lynne Marie! As a former librarian, I know what children want to read and what teachers want for their classrooms. I have an eye for a good read-aloud, having done storytimes for babies through fifth graders. As a writer, I can help with brainstorming, avoiding revision pitfalls, and working with new strategies to bring out your best. In the end, it's my reading that really informs my work. Readers' advisory was my favorite part of library work, and I used to read over 300 books a year (but that has slowed since becoming an agent). So I have a broad perspective on what readers want. In the end, it's about connecting with the reader.

**LM:** At what moment did you decide to go from a writer and librarian to being an agent? As you know, I love to hear the story behind the story!

**LZ:** It's all thanks to NJ-SCBWI. I was attending a conference and ended up chatting with several other writers and an agent. When the agent left, I commented that agenting sounded like an interesting job. One of the published writers responded that if I were an agent, he'd be my client! I laughed it off, but then I started thinking. What did that writer see in me? The next year I ran into another writing friend, and she was interning for an agency. She was kind enough to give me a heads up about intern opportunities, and that set me on my path.

**LM:** Everyone's first client is important and memorable. What qualities about your first client intrigued you enough to make an offer? Since you have been agenting around a year, has what you look for in a client evolved since then? If so, how?

**LZ:** What I look for in a client has remained steady—do I love their work? Do they have more than one manuscript or idea? Are the themes they explore interesting to me? Does my vision for their manuscript and their career match with theirs? Do we communicate well? Ideally, ours is a long relationship, so we need to work well together.

**LM:** You have been attending many conferences and doing critiques. Have you picked up a new client from a conference? If so, who, and why? What are your thoughts about face-to-face critiques vs. slush pile submissions?

**LZ:** I haven't picked up a new client from a conference. Yet! In-person pitches and critiques offer the chance to get to know someone a little bit and give us the chance to discuss the manuscript. And I'm pretty chatty. I like





*Leslie Zampetti continued*

interacting with folks face to face.

**LM:** Would you consider yourself an editorial agent? If so, please describe your editing style.

**LZ:** Yes. All of us at Dunham Literary are hands-on agents. I'm not a replacement for your writing partner or critique buddy, but I work with my clients on all facets of their work, from brainstorming about new ideas to sending copy edits and proofreading prior to submission.

**LM:** What types of books did you grow up reading? How do they inform your passion for literature?

**LZ:** I learned to read when I was three, and I've never stopped. My family joked that I'd read the back of the cereal box or the dishwasher manual if there wasn't anything else around. So I did and do read widely. My passion for literature has always come from the window that books give us on experiences other than our own. Books inspire our dreams and change our relationship with the world.

**LM:** You are taking submissions of young adult, middle grade and picture books. If you had to pick one that most captured your passion, what would it be? Why? Please name some of your favorite books in that genre.

**LZ:** Middle grade! I'm still 12 in my head. As for favorites, that's like asking if I have a favorite child. Lucky for me I only have one. Books I love? From the *Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* by E. L. Konigsberg, *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott, *Harriet the Spy* by Louise FitzHugh, Sheila Turnage's *Mo & Dale* mysteries, Sydney Taylor's *All of a Kind Family* stories, *Under the Egg* by Laura Marx Fitzgerald, *The Graveyard Book* by Neil Gaiman, and the *Gaither Sisters* trilogy by Rita Williams-Garcia. I also love the authors Rebecca Stead, Karen Harrington, Tracey Baptiste, Kathi Appelt, Annabel Pitcher.... I better stop now.

**LM:** You also accept submissions from writers in the adult genre. Are you looking for clients that write in one genre, or across the genres? Why?

**LZ:** Dunham Literary believes in representing authors for their whole career, so we're a great fit for the writer who writes both. That said, I'd like to widen my client list to be more representative of what I read overall.

**LM:** You have mentioned that you are interested in novels in verse. What draws you to this type of fiction? Can you give examples of ones that you find particularly good?

**LZ:** I love the spaces in-between, the ability some writers have to conjure a whole and complete narrative in such an efficient way. Jackie Woodson, Padma Venkatraman, and Sharon Creech all are great examples. Andrea Davis Pinkney's *The Red Pencil* is wonderful, too.

**LM:** If you could choose five adjectives to describe the type of stories that speak to you, what would they be?

**LZ:** Intriguing. Vivid. Convincing. Irresistible. Wholehearted.

**LM:** Is there anything outstanding on your current wish-list that you would love to see from our subscribers?

**LZ:** Mysteries. Middle grade, young adult, and if you can write a picture book mystery, I'll take a look! I'd also like some really fun, maybe even frivolous stories. Life gets heavy for kids, too.

## ABOVE THE SLUSHPILE

Leslie Zampetti is opening up submissions in March. She is offering an Above the Slushpile code for CBI subscribers: put **#CBI 2019 - LZ** in the subject line of your email. **This submission opportunity ends March 31, 2019.** Send a query letter and the first five pages of your manuscript pasted into the body of the email. You can address the letter to Leslie Zampetti, but email to [query@dunhamlit.com](mailto:query@dunhamlit.com). Follow Leslie on Twitter at [@leslie\\_zampetti](https://twitter.com/leslie_zampetti)

Be sure to study the books published by Sterling at <https://www.sterlingpublishing.com/books/> before submitting. Note that the publisher guidelines on the website say that Sterling is not accepting submissions.

# Back Matter: Essential To Your Nonfiction Book

by Pat Miller

**D**iscerning editors and readers of children's nonfiction read from the back of the book first. Teachers and librarians teach students to read the back to check for sources, authority, and additional information. To paraphrase Duke Ellington, "It don't mean a thing if it ain't got that stuff!"

Back matter is the information provided by the author after the main text. It can make the topic of the book clearer, more relevant, or more applicable for the reader. This is where authors add crucial information that didn't fit in the main text.

If you are a writer, you will select those back matter features that fit your work. Choices include:

- Author's Note
- Afterword
- Bibliography
- Acknowledgements (where you credit the people who provided information)
- Timeline
- Family Tree
- Further Information (often seen in science subjects)
- Glossary
- Source notes
- Map
- Educational Activities
- Suggested Reading
- Index

Here are how the various

types of back matter can contribute added value to your book and extend the learning for your reader. You will be constrained by the page count, so factor that in when you are selecting the back matter.

## 1. Provide information that extends the text

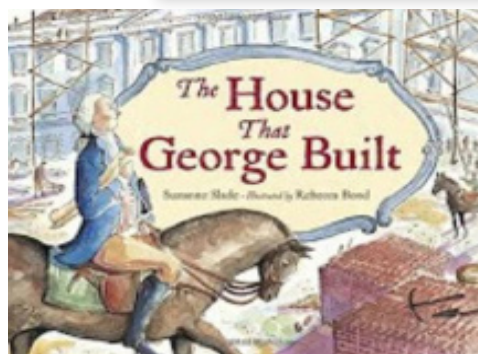
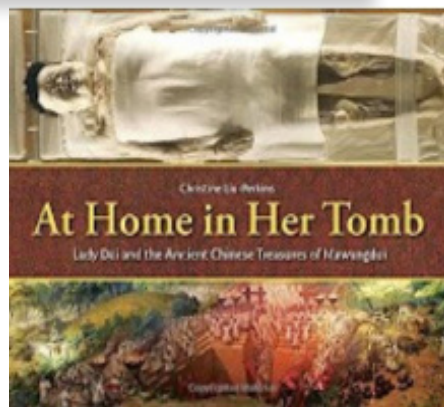
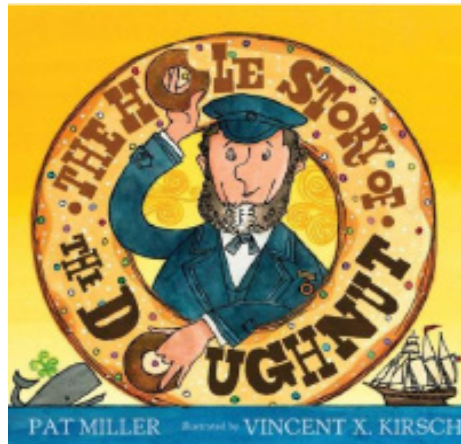
**AUTHOR'S NOTE:** For *The Hole Story of the Doughnut*, I had more than 200 pages of research about Captain Hanson Gregory. But the book's 800 words left out most of it. My author's note includes information about his registration for the Union Army, his five daughters, the challenge to his claim as inventor and its resolution, his honor from the American Baker's Association, and the replacement of his lost headstone and the ensuing celebration, all of which didn't fit the main story of the text

**TIMELINE:** The timeline in *At Home in Her Tomb: Lady Dai and the Ancient Chinese Treasures of Mawangdui* by Christine Liu-Perkins shows key events at points on a linear timeline.

The timeline in *Wangari Maathai: The Woman Who Planted Millions of Trees* by Franck Prévot is more anecdotal by year, with few specific dates.

## 2. To further explain something related to the text

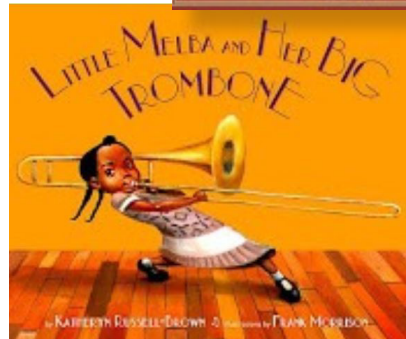
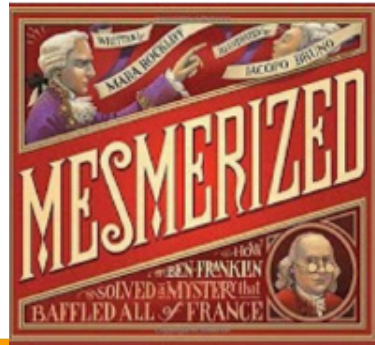
**FURTHER INFORMATION:** In *The House That George Built*, Suzanne Slade explains many of the changes to the President's House since its early days, including its



## Back Matter continued

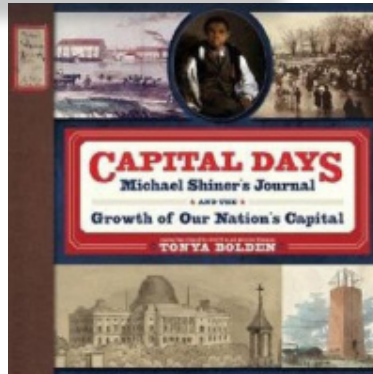
name. Teddy Roosevelt added a tennis court, and William Taft converted the stables into a four-car garage. Barack Obama planted a vegetable garden on the south lawn.

*Mesmerized: How Ben Franklin Solved a Mystery that Baffled All of France* tells how Dr. Mesmer has the French believing that he can control a mysterious force streaming from the stars and use it to compel grown men to cry, women to swoon, and children to fall down in fits. Dr. Franklin uses the scientific method to debunk Mesmer's claims, making for an embarrassing departure for the hypnotic Dr. Mesmer. This true story is followed by four pages explaining the science behind both doctors' endeavors.



**AFTERWORD:** In *Little Melba and Her Big Trombone* by Kathryn Russell-Brown gives further details about the bands and places Melba Liston played, and the honors she won—details not given in the text.

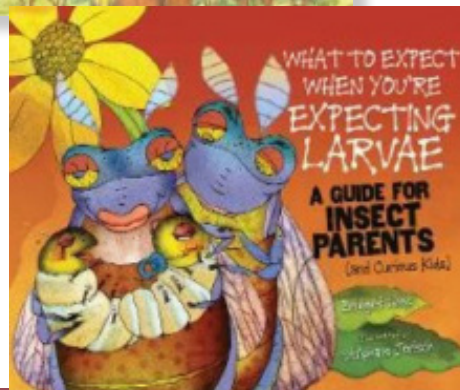
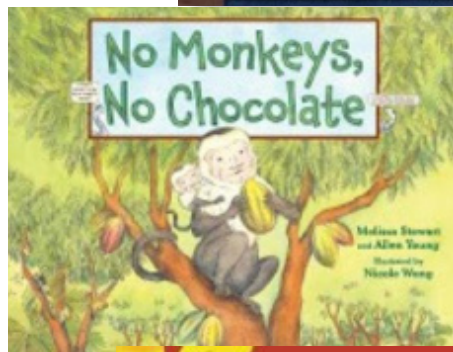
Irena Sendler saved the lives of 400 Polish children during the Holocaust. The afterword to Irena Sendler and the *Children of the Warsaw Ghetto* explains what happened to Irena and many of those children after World War II.



### 3. To explain how or where the information was obtained

**SOURCE NOTES:** These are like footnotes provided in longer works. In *The Family Romanov: Murder, Rebellion and the Fall of Imperial Russia*, Candace Fleming provides 21 pages of notes that give the source for each of the quotations included in the book.

Christine Liu-Perkins also document-



ed the quotes used in her book about Lady Dai. Footnote numbers are no longer used in children's works. Instead, the first few words of the quotation are listed by chapter and page, and then the source is listed.

### 4. To provide extra materials of help to the reader

**EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES:** In the back matter, Melissa Stewart and Allen Young provided a list of things readers can do to live in a way that decreases their impact on the natural world in *No Monkeys, No Chocolate*.

In *A Chameleon's Life* by Ellen Lawrence, students are asked to be a reptile scientist comparing a panther chameleon to a reptile of their choice. It provides sources and questions to help with the research.

**GLOSSARY:** Because *Capital Days: Michael Shiner's Journal and the Growth of Our Nation's Capital* is based on the actual writings of a freedman who worked in the Washington Navy Yard through the inauguration of eleven presidents, the words are from centuries ago. Words like *coffle*, *manumit*, and “cut up shines” are no longer used, so they are defined in a glossary.

**FURTHER READING:** If you get readers interested in your subject, they may want to read more. That's where your list of further reading and websites comes in. In *What to Expect When You're Expecting Larvae: A Guide for Insect Parents (and Curious Kids)*, Bridget Heos appends a list of six insect books on a similar reading level and four curated websites.

**INDEX:** Jonathan London's book, *Hippos Are Huge!* includes an index of 13 terms and the pages on which they can be found. This index is helpful if students need to learn the

*Back Matter continued*

hippo's weight (pages 7 and 26), for example. His index includes this helpful tip: "Look up the pages to find out about all these hippopotamus things. Don't forget to look at both kinds of words—**this kind** and **this kind**." He is reminding students not to overlook the information in the sidebars.

**MAP:** *Mountain Chef* by Annette Bay Pimentel, is the story of Tie Sing, Chinese cook to the expedition that toured Yosemite National Park, mapping the mountains and naming the peaks. A map covers the inside of the front and back flyleaves. It shows the route of the camping trip and their campsites, many mentioned in the narrative of the story. Without the map, children won't realize what an ambitious trip this was, nor the number of miles they covered.

## 5. To provide credibility for your work

How does one know the information in this book is accurate? These back matter features help to establish your credibility.

**RESOURCE LIST:** The resource list in *Irena Sendler and the Children of the Warsaw Ghetto* by Susan Goldman Rubin is extensive. Though the story has only 18 pages of text paired with full page illustrations. But Goldman's resource list includes seven books, several translated from Polish; eleven articles from magazines, newspapers, and *The Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*; two videos; the written or recorded testimony of Irena herself and other Poles; stories unpublished in English; and correspondence between the author and Polish experts. Rubin is definitely a credible author.

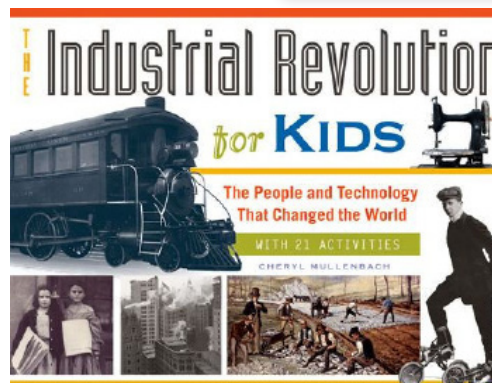
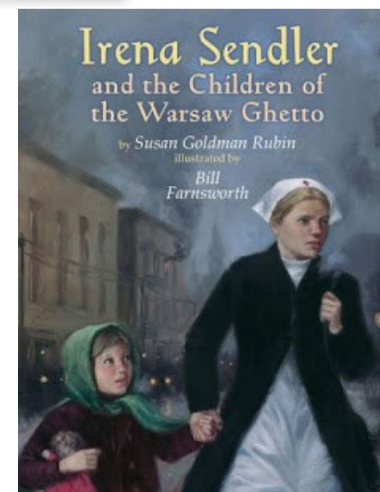
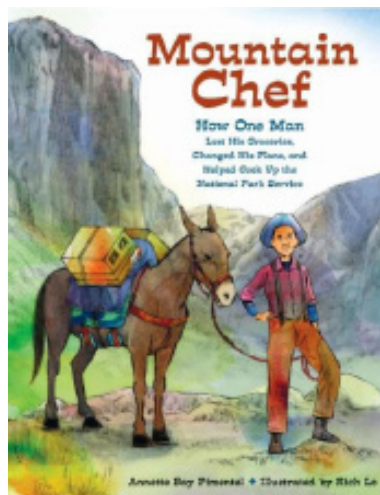
**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:** In *The Hole Story of the Doughnut*, I thank seven people in the acknowledgments, including researchers and historians at various maritime locations and libraries.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY:** My Selected Bibliography includes twelve resources. Publishers prefer primary sources. Next in importance are secondary sources from newspapers, experts, or well-respected institutions, whether in print or online.

**IMAGE CREDITS:** Cheryl Mullenbach includes a number of photographs to illustrate *The Industrial Revolution for Kids*. Sometimes this list is in the back, sometimes,

as in this case, on the copyright page. She gives credit to sources like The Library of Congress, and Shutterstock.

As a writer, the back matter will add value and information for your reader and give you additional ways to bring your subject to life. And that matters!



# Dialogue in Two Parts

by Jane McBride

Have you ever read a book where the dialogue flowed so naturally, so organically, that you weren't even aware of it? You weren't aware because you were completely engrossed in the story. You weren't thinking "Character A said this" and "Character B said this." All you could do was read as fast you were able, practically tripping over yourself in your haste to turn the pages and see what happens next.

I dream of writing dialogue like that. I think all writers do. We want our dialogue to give that sense of immediacy, of "being right there," of showing not only what the characters are saying but what they are not saying, what they are thinking, what they are feeling

Too often, though, dialogue falls flat. In searching for the right words to describe that dialogue, we turn it wooden.

Today, we're going to discuss two parts of dialogue: speech tags and revealing the relationship between the characters.

## Part 1: Speech Tags

"I won't go, Max," Sage said stubbornly with a shake of her head. "You can't make me."

"Of course you'll go," Max said loftily. "Sage, you have to. You're the birthday girl."

"So what?" she tossed back resentfully. "If I'm the birthday girl, I can do what I want, when I want."

Max turned his back on her. "Have it your way, Sage," he gritted out the words. "You always do."

Sage grabbed his arm. "Max, don't you dare turn your back on me," she said angrily. "No one does that to me," she said emphatically. "Ever."

Okay. Aside from the characters being totally unlikable and it being really terrible dialogue, what else did you notice? How about five adverbs describing how the words were said: *stubbornly*, *loftily*, *resentfully*, *angrily*, and *emphatically*. What about the four attributions where the characters insist upon addressing each other by name, even though they were the only ones in the scene?

Did I do anything right in writing that piece? Only one thing. I used the word "said" several times rather than saying "muttered," "interjected," "interrupted," or some oth-

er equally attention-drawing word. But the passage could be written completely without tags.

Let's try the dialogue again, this time without adverbs and without tags.

"I won't go." Sage stomped her Jimmy Choo clad foot on the tile floor. "You can't make me."

"Of course you'll go." Max didn't bother masking his disdain. Sage could be a royal pain sometimes. "You have to. You're the birthday girl."

"So what? If I'm the birthday girl, I can do what I want, when I want."

Max turned his back on her. "Have it your way. You always do."

Sage grabbed his arm. "Don't you dare turn your back on me. No one does that. Ever."

The dialogue is still pretty terrible, but did you hear the difference? Without the adverbs, attributions, and tags, the scene moved much more quickly.

Does this mean that you should write all dialogue without any speech tags? Of course not. Nothing is more annoying and frustrating than having to count back lines of dialogue to determine who is speaking. I've done that in some books where the author must have been seeing how long he could go without giving any tag or attribution. By the time I figured out who was speaking, I was ready to throw the book down and start reading something else.

So what am I saying here? To tag? Or not to tag?

Neither. Use tags and attributions sparingly. What else can you do to make it clear who's speaking?

**Gestures and body language.** In the above passage, the characters used several gestures:

- Sage "stomped her Jimmy Choo clad foot on the tile floor." (A little aside here: the "Jimmy Choo" detail doesn't add to the dialogue but it does reveal a bit about Sage's character—she must have the best.)
- Max "turned his back on her."
- Sage "grabbed his arm."

Each of these conveys emotion, all without using a single

*Dialogue continued*

adverb. Did you notice my verb choices: *stomped*, *turned*, *grabbed*? Strong verbs don't need modifying.

**Internal dialogue.** The passage contained only one piece of internal dialogue as Max thinks to himself “Sage could be a royal pain sometimes.” Once again, we didn't need preface such as “he thought.” We know he's thinking that.

**Part 2: Showing the Dynamic Between Speakers**

Every conversation has a purpose and reveals the relationship between the speakers, or the role each speaker occupies. One speaker may be trying to impress another person who is perceived to have more power. Some conversations are an attempt by one or both speakers to move the relationship to a different level. A conversation may demonstrate how in a friendship one character acts impulsively and the other keeps her out of trouble. Sometimes one person has information that the other person is trying to get. In other words, each participant in the conversation has an agenda. If your dialogue scene is simply two people exchanging pleasantries without either person gaining, losing or changing something by the end of the conversation, it probably shouldn't be in your book.

Let's take a look at a passage of dialogue between a brother and sister. Teenage Jake is going to a concert and his 12-year-old sister Sarah asks if she can come along.

Here's one version of their conversation:

“I'm sorry, Sarah. I know how much it means to you to go to the concert with me and my friends, but it's Matt's birthday and we agreed it would just be the guys. Another time. Okay?”

“I know you'd take me if you could.”

“Of course I would.”

“I know.”

“You're my best friend. You know that.”

Wow. Either Jake and Sarah have an exceptional relationship, or they're from another planet. Though Sarah has an agenda of wanting to go to the concert, she's so uncommitted she drops it immediately. Their relationship remains reasonable, amicable and level. As a result, the dialogue is incredibly boring and each character is a blank slate. Let's try it again:

“You're a kid and you'd ruin the concert for me and the guys. You know that. Right?”

“And you're just mean. Mean and nasty and full of yourself.”

“Good one, pizza face.”

“I can't help it that I have acne. I'm going to tell Mom what you said.”

“I don't care. You're a kid and ugly to go along with it.”

That's more like it. Now we can see that Jake really doesn't want Sarah to go, and he'll do whatever it takes to make her back off. We learn that he's willing to be a jerk to his sister, and she has no problem playing the Mom card.

Let's try it one more time, this time with some body language and internal dialogue.

Jake hitched a hip against the kitchen counter. “You're a kid and you'd ruin the concert for me and the guys. You know that. Right?” He arched his soda can over Sarah's head and into the recycling bin.

Sarah flicked drops of soda off her arm. “And you're just mean. And nasty and full of yourself.”

“Good one, pizza face.” He didn't mean to say that, but sometimes Sarah really got under his skin. Why did she have to do everything he did? It used to be cute. But not any more.

Sarah put a hand to her face. “I can't help it that I have acne. I'm going to tell Mom what you said.”

“I don't care. You're a kid and ugly to go along with it.” Jake hoped last jab would send Sarah running to her room so he could escape. Maybe he'll bring her a t-shirt from the show. That should make up for the ugly comment.

This scene still needs work, but by the third pass it clearly establishes the relationship between the characters and shows what each hopes to get out of the interaction. Each character is changed in some way by this conversation.

Let's end with some do's and don'ts of dialogue:

- Do let the dialogue stand alone whenever possible
- Do use “said” for most tags. A few other verbs are okay once in a while.
- Do use body language and internal dialogue to enhance what is being said, to reveal characterization, or to advance the story.
- Don't go crazy with synonyms for “said.” “Said” disappears. Other verbs draw attention to themselves.
- Don't try to replicate conversations exactly. Most real-life conversations have lots of “ums” and “ahs” and other unnecessary sounds.
- Don't use attributions (where characters address each other by name), except in rare occasions for emphasis.

# Debut Middle Grade Author Turned School Assignment into a Series

interview by PJ McIlvaine

To say that Elizabeth “Ellie” Sipila is just a “writer” would be like labeling Emeril Lagasse as merely a “cook”. Like a master chef, Sipila wears many hats: debut author, small press publisher, book designer, freelance editor, and more (<http://www.movetothewrite.com>). Her debut novel *Mark-Napped!*, out this month from Pelican Publishing (the first in a series for ages 7-12) began as a school assignment, leading her to pitch it in a Twitter party, which culminated in a contract. A member of the Editors Association of Canada, SCBWI, and a self-admitted lifelong student, Sipila makes her home in Canada with her husband.

**PJ McILVAINE:** You are multi-talented: not only do you write, offer a variety of freelance editing services, but you’re also the publisher of Common Deer Press. Out of these skills, which one do you enjoy the most? Do you find it easier to work on other people’s material rather than your own?

**ELIZABETH SIPILA:** In honesty, I don’t do too much editing myself anymore. My preference, as far as book publishing goes, lies heavily in the design and production end of things.

At Common Deer Press, I am the founder, designer, production manager, and managing editor. A dear friend (and long time writing buddy) of mine, Kirsten Marion, joined Common Deer in the fall of 2017 to take over the role of publisher. My strengths are making books. Kirsten’s are selling them. As such, we are a team. There is no one I would trust more.

As for writing...like many others reading this interview, I have always dabbled with writing. I blame my grandmother for this—she was a children’s librarian and always kept my brother and me stocked to the gills with books of all sorts. In school I excelled in English and some of the other arts, too. To me, becoming a writer

really wasn’t an option. It just was.

As for what I love best...do I have to choose? I love everything about books.

Working on the books of other people is a privilege I consider myself lucky to have fallen into. Writing is hard—I appreciate that from both sides of the desk. Working with another person’s art is hard too, just in a different way.



**PM:** You seem to have a special affinity for kid lit: picture books, middle grade, and young adult. Did you know early on that you wanted to be a writer? How do you juggle your own writing and also being a publisher? Do you find the lines get blurred sometimes?

**ES:** I actually started off writing dark fantasy for adults. I tend to write short though, meaning my work is often too low in the word count department, and that doesn’t really fly with adults. Still, I kept working away publishing my short stories in various literary publications here and there. As I became more and more comfortable, I discovered that I have a natural humorous tone to my voice. Eventually my voice settled, and I found myself writing for young people without even meaning to. It embraces my particular strengths, and it is what feels most natural to me.

Yes, I knew early on that I wanted to be a writer, though I had few aspirations to be a published writer. I completed my first manuscript when I was about 10 years old—a historical romance, which is a genre I know very little about! When I was in my latter years of secondary school and was able to enroll in creative writing courses, I discovered that, yeah, this writing thing really is for me. The more difficult thing to juggle is being an author and being an editor. Writing came much easier for me before

*Elizabeth Sipila continued*

I went to university to become an editor. Now, I simply cannot turn off my internal editor, and it can be quite stifling. So, for now at least, I have combined the two. *Mark-Napped!* is a silly illustrated young middle grade book—a mystery about punctuation.

Aside from what I said above about that cursed internal editor that simply will not take a break, I did find it a bit difficult going through the process of design with Pelican. As a book designer myself, I had a very clear idea of how I wanted the book to look. In fact, I had designed a few of the characters for my book, which I used in its submission package. So handing that over to someone else and having them make some decisions that I may not have made (though none of them bad!) was challenging for me. I just had to trust the art director. And I am so glad I did. The book looks incredible.

**PM:** How did you get the idea for *Mark-Napped?* How long did the first draft take? How involved were you in the illustration process? What are your hopes and/or goals for the book?

**ES:** *Mark-Napped!* was conceived as part of a school assignment when I was completing my specialization in publishing children's literature. The assignment was to think of a concept for a children's book that would fill a hole in the market. The class then voted on which ideas were the best and should be developed further (the second part of the assignment). Well, *Mark-Napped!* won, and that gave me free reign to explore the ridiculous idea of what personalities the various pieces of punctuation might have. My professor, a former children's book editor at Kids Can Press, contacted me privately and told me she really thought my concept had merit and encouraged me to develop it further outside of school. So I did.

Because it started out as a school project, for which I only had to develop a proposal and the first two or three chapters, it didn't take me long at all. Maybe two weeks? Later, when I took book design and used the concept again, that professor urged me to develop the rest of the characters and conceptualize what they might look like. That took a bit longer—the artwork. The writing

was secondary for that course, so my internal editor was quiet for that. The second half of the book was written within a matter of only one or two days. When that class was through and I was again encouraged after-hours to develop the book further, this time by my design professor, I knew I had something special.

Pelican is a great company to work with. They knew my background—it was in my proposal—so I was allowed to have quite a bit of say over the artwork. They showed me all the concepts and later the sketches for the layout and character design and asked my opinion on everything. I only had a very few suggestions to make—their art department did a great job. I am very happy with the outcome.



Like any author, I hope people read and enjoy the book! It was developed to be used in the classroom, and there is an accompanying (free!!) teachers guide. I hope it helps kids learn about punctuation in a way that is not boring, and is a bit different than your standard memory work. I am hoping kids read it by choice and not because their teacher or parent said they must. And later, when I finish

writing the next book in the series (that one's going to be about math symbols. The one after that, music notes. After that, elements from the periodic table...and who knows after that!), I hope kids are keen to find and read it too.

**PM:** I understand you don't have an agent. How easy—or difficult—was it for you to find a home for your book? And since you do have a small press, what was the impetus for looking at other publishers?

**ES:** I don't have an agent, but I do know many agents and have dealt with agents more than once. For me, because of my experience with publishing, I didn't really feel having an agent was necessary. I am very well familiar with contracts and negotiations (until Kirsten joined CDP, I did all the contract and negotiating stuff for the house). I tend to enjoy working with small presses, and many small presses don't require agents. *Mark-Napped!* was "liked" during a Twitter pitch party, meaning I pitched it two or three times, and a few agents and presses requested it. I was lucky—my book was picked



up straight away after that.

Of course, I could have published this book at CDP. But I didn't want to—mainly, though self-publishing is a whole other topic that we're not discussing here, I didn't want to self-publish it. If CDP had published it, basically that's what I would have been doing. I wanted the experience of working with another house.

**PM:** Tell me about Common Deer and how that came to be. Are you open to submissions and if so, what genres are of particular interest to you?

**ES:** Common Deer Press was officially born May 1st, 2016. However...by that date, I had already published one book (one of my own that I had sold to another house but had gotten my rights back—I did this because I wanted to do a test run on something of my own before doing it and possibly messing up on someone else's book), and had signed another. You see, I have been around in the writing scene for quite some time, and I knew a lot of writers. After completing much of my schooling, I did an internship in the children's editorial department of a large Canadian press. I read so many good manuscripts that didn't fit their mandate, and as a result, they were rejected. I wanted to open a house that would take those weird-o but so, so good manuscripts and give them a loving home. So I registered the company name, built a website, and opened the doors. Submissions began trickling in almost right away.

CDP publishes a number of genres, but we are moving more towards children's books and away from adult titles. We have several middle grade books, a couple young adult, and we have just signed our first picture book (HUZZAH!!). Middle grade tends to be the sweet spot, and we enjoy books that are a bit outside of the mainstream. We are currently closed to submissions, but we will reopen again sometime in 2019. (Check back periodically at <https://www.commondeerpress.com/copy-of-submissions> to see when Common Deer Press is again accepting submissions.)

However, we are taking submissions through our writing contest, The Uncommon Quest. We want to see really great writing paired with really intriguing stories, basically, LOL!! We don't care about an author's past—if you're unpublished, no matter. If you're writing in a genre that maybe isn't standard (as long as it's appropriate and meets our guidelines), we are cool with that. We

do have preferences for some things and not others, but being honest...I don't want to say what those preferences are. I don't want to discourage anyone. I want an author to write a story in one of the genres we may not particularly like and change our minds! (The Uncommon Quest writing competition is open to Canadian residents and non-resident Canadian citizens only. Deadline for submission is March 31, 2019. Go to <https://www.commondeerpress.com/the-uncommon-quest-for-guidelines>.)

**PM:** They say that writing is rewriting. Do you have any tips or tricks for keeping one's enthusiasm going while slogging through a first draft?

**ES:** Ha! I wish I knew! My advice would be to just write it and go back and edit later. Easier said than done! If you're a plotter, plot. If you're a pantsers, pants. If you work best in a chaotic room, go to a playground, sit on a bench, and write there. If you like quietness, set yourself up in the basement. Stephen King said the worst thing you can do is to make yourself a really pretty office with a beautiful and interesting view...because you will spend all day staring out the window and not writing. Maybe keep that in mind. Oh, and probably shutting off the wifi would help, too.

**PM:** What are you currently working on? Do you have a passion project?

**ES:** Yes... I have a few things... in addition to the next book in the *Mark-Napped!* series, I have two YAs underway and an MG. Finding time to write is my greatest challenge at present. But if there is a will, there is a way or so they say.

**PM:** Where do you see yourself five years from now, writing wise and publishing?

**ES:** After winning my Giller (the Scotiabank Giller Prize that recognizes Canadian authors), I plan to stay humble. The stables will consist of only 24 stalls, and the butler will have a small house of his own...honestly, in five years, I hope to be writing more. CDP will be in full-blown puberty, wearing dark makeup and staying out too late, but I think we are doing a good enough job raising it that it won't get itself into too much trouble. That should leave me the opportunity to continue working on...whatever it is I am working on at that time. Hopefully something good.

# ASSUMPTIONS —KICK THEM OUT!

by Jane McBride

Occasionally, writers make unwarranted assumptions in identifying characters. These assumptions may or may not be true. In the same way, these assumptions may or may not be insulting or, at the very least, unflattering. We may use these assumptions unthinkingly; I know I do. It wasn't until someone in my writers' group brought up a question about another writer's description of a woman as an "old lady," did I start re-evaluating my choice of words.

Let's look at the different assumptions we may make in a Mini Blueprint lesson:

**STEP 1:** Be aware of gender assumptions.

**ACTION:** Be open-minded about gender and professions, skills, talents, etc. Consider the following:

*A high school football player should showcase his physical prowess when he competes for a place on the first string.*

What's wrong with this statement? Sounds pretty reasonable, doesn't it? But, wait. In today's world, a high school football player may be female.

How could we rewrite this?

*High school football players should showcase their physical prowess when they compete for a place on the first string.*

While the above sentence may appear in a nonfiction book, also consider gender assumptions when you're creating your fictional characters.

**STEP 2:** Ask yourself if you are making untrue assumptions about age and limitations that are associated with it.

**ACTION:** Look at age with fresh eyes.

Take a look at this sentence: *The gray-haired librarian wore a cardigan and glasses that hung by a chain around her neck.*

What's wrong here? An older woman (not to mention a librarian!) doesn't have to be matronly. The actress Jane Fonda comes to mind. Ms. Fonda is 80 years old. I doubt anyone thinks of her as matronly or even old.

What about this sentence? *The elderly man walked rapidly despite his age.*

The phrase "despite his age" makes it seem that ordinarily we would not expect an older man to move rapidly. There are many seniors who are in excellent shape with enviable levels of fitness. They don't need or want this qualifier.

When creating characters, especially adults who are middle-aged or older, be careful not to rely on stereotypes or outdated assumptions of what age looks like. Your readers are surrounded by active, vibrant, attractive and productive adults who can inspire interesting, complex characters in your story. Besides, gray hair is now considered a fashion statement!

**STEP 3:** Look for class stereotypes in your writing.

**ACTION:** Work to banish class distinctions. Class should have no place in how we treat people; nor should it automatically be used to identify our story people. We are well into the 21st century, yet some people persist in attaching attributes to certain groups. Obviously, if it is necessary for your story's plot to identify a class, do so, but be aware of what words you use and why you are using them. I personally like the term "working class" and am proud to be identified with it. For some people, though, the term is a pejorative. If you are describing a character that way, ask yourself what is your motive in saying "His parents were of the working class." If it is important to your story, can you find another way to say "working class?" Can you use other descriptors, other details that make using the term superfluous?

Look at this sentence: *Despite coming from a family of Southern rednecks, Sam got accepted into ballet school. By the end of the first semester, he was being singled out by teachers as one of*

*Mini Blueprint continued*

*the best in his class.*

What's wrong with this? First, the term "Southern redneck" can be demeaning to Southerners and to anyone who employs a certain set of manners and/or speech patterns. On the other hand, many people enjoy being called a "redneck." If your character is among those, let him wear the name proudly. The comedian Jeff Foxworthy uses the term liberally and enthusiastically embraces his inclusion in the class. Secondly, attending ballet school is not dependent upon a class or status. It is a matter of preference and talent. Would you say, "Despite coming from the upper east side In New York City, the boy attended ballet school and excelled at the dance form?" Probably not. (Did you see where this sentence could also smack of gender assumptions?)

Whenever you use a broad term like a class distinction to describe your character, you're not doing your job as a writer. You're assuming this shorthand description will mean the same thing to your readers as it does to you, and often the label holds either positive or negative connotations that your character hasn't earned. Instead, show all the nuances of the character's background and how it helps your character, holds her back, or provides a neutral backdrop against which she can experience her own failures and successes.

**STEP 4:** Erase racism from your writing. Most of us would never use a racist term deliberately, but do we use such terms unknowingly? How many times have you read in a newspaper or online "An African American youth ...?" It doesn't matter what this person is doing; somehow, the author felt it necessary to describe the person as "African American." The mere mention of the person's race can be construed as racism, even though that is probably not what was meant. (As a side note, these headlines most often are about young men even though the person's gender isn't stated up front—another example of gender assumptions and stereotypes.)

**ACTION:** Ask yourself why you feel the need to mention a character's race. If a character's ethnicity plays a part in the story, then subtly refer to it. If you are only trying to identify a character as of a certain race because you don't want to take the time to give true insights about him/her, you need to re-think your description. And, as with all stereotypes, don't use a person's race to imply character traits or actions. In addition, be wary of using terms that iden-

tify race that are no longer accepted. For example, some people of American Indian descent (the term many now prefer over Native American) would rather be referred to by their particular tribe or pueblo, such as Cheyenne or Navajo. Here's a helpful article to understand the modern vocabulary of race: <https://www.ssc.wisc.edu/soc/racepoliticsjustice/2017/09/16/race-names/>. But also keep in mind that racial terms should be accurate to the time period of your book, and reflect the subtleties of identity within a broad racial group. When in doubt, have someone from that race read your manuscript for accuracy, even if you're questioning how you depict a minor character.

What are other labels might we unwittingly assign a character? What about sexual orientation, religious practices, or physical limitations? All of these may cause us to draw unfair conclusions if we use these labels to represent the entirety of a character, rather than creating that character from the inside out, with all the layers and complexities of a genuine human being.

## IN CONCLUSION

We all make assumptions about a myriad of things every day. Making these assumptions saves us time and energy. For example, I might see a clingy red knit dress in a store window and make the assumption, "That's not going to look good on me." But can I, with equal assurance, look at someone's mode of dress or hair or skin color and make an immediate assumption? Such an assumption might be wildly inaccurate as well as being grossly unfair.

In describing your characters, look at your motive in using certain words. Are you trying to move the story forward by listing particular attributes? Or are you simply using a shortcut to draw this character? If so, you are doing your readers a disservice. They deserve to have your best

In spite of our best efforts, mistakes occur, sometimes even when people are writing about characters of their own gender, age, class, or race. When you do the heavy lifting of finding what is unique and special about your characters, you will not only strengthen your story, you will help readers see the connections in our world, those things that bring us together, rather than those which tear us apart.

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