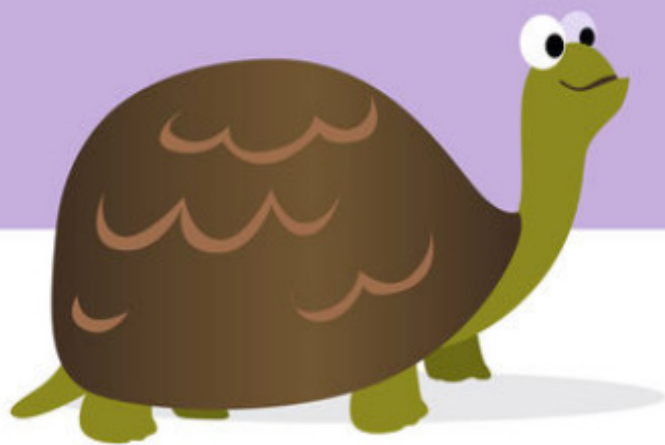


Children's Book Insider

The Children's Writing Monthly  March 2021



Craft the Perfect Ending For Your Manuscript

**ABOVE THE SLUSHPILE
SUBMISSION CODE:**

PIXEL  INK

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This issue’s contributors

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Jean Daigneau’s book, *Code Cracking for Kids*, was published by Chicago Review Press in October 2019. She’s been published in newspapers and magazines, including *Highlights* and *Fun for Kidz*, and 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.

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>

Jane McBride is the author of 38 novels (writing as Jane McBride Choate), numerous short stories and articles including pieces in 16 *Chicken Soup for the Soul* anthologies, and the CBI Managing Editor. See her Amazon Author Page at <http://bit.ly/JaneMcBrideChoate>

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

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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:

Highlights Magazine Accepting Fiction for Ages 6-12

Highlights is a general-interest magazine for children ages 6-12. Currently accepting fiction submissions only. Any other types of submissions will be declined at this time. Fiction can be targeted to any specific age group within the 6-12 range (beginning readers, independent readers, and graphic-novel format stories). Looking for an engaging plot, strong characterization, a specific setting, and lively language. Open to different genres (humor, adventure, fantasy, etc.), and diverse characters and settings. Stories for older readers should be appropriate for their younger siblings if read out loud.

Stories for beginning readers should have fewer than 475 words and should not seem babyish to older readers. Stories for independent readers should have fewer than 750 words and should be appealing to younger readers if read aloud. Graphic (comic-book format) stories should have fewer than 400 words. In addition, they might include ideas for panel breaks and basic art notes. Submit the entire manuscript through Submittable at highlights.submittable.com/submit. Buys all rights; pays upon purchase. It's essential that writers study several back issues for style and content before submitting. *Highlights* magazine can be found at most libraries and larger bookstores, or you can get sample issues here: www.highlights.com/store/products/highlights-magazine

Independent Publisher Accepting Submissions for All Ages

Charlesbridge is an independent publisher that produces high-quality, award-winning books for young people with a goal of creating lifelong readers and learners. Believes that books for children should offer accurate information, promote a positive worldview, and embrace a child's innate sense of wonder and fun. Charlesbridge publishes fiction and nonfiction board books, picture books, early readers, middle-grade fiction and nonfiction (ages 8–12), and young adult novels (ages 12+). Nonfiction tends to focus on nature, science, math, social studies, biography, history, and the arts. Currently not seeking alphabet books, coloring books, activity books or novelty books.

All manuscripts must be submitted electronically. Submit your manuscript as an attachment (Word or PDF). Manuscripts should be double spaced. Include your name, address, and contact information on your manuscript and in your email. For picture books and other manuscripts under 30 pages, send a complete manuscript. For fiction books longer than 30 manuscript pages, send a detailed plot synopsis, a chapter outline, and three chapters of text. For nonfiction books longer than thirty manuscript pages, send a detailed proposal, a chapter outline, and one to three chapters of text. For young adult novels, send a plot summary and the first three chapters of text.

Submissions of board books, picture books, early readers, and middle grade books should be emailed to childrens.submissions@charlesbridge.com. For YA novels, email ya.submissions@charlesbridge.com. If you are an author/illustrator, you can attach a PDF dummy to your submission or sample illustrations. Due to a high volume of submissions, responds within three months only to those projects Charlesbridge is interested in publishing. You can download the current Charlesbridge catalog at charlesbridge.myshopify.com/pages/download-the-catalog, or see recent titles at www.charlesbridge.com/

Agent Seeks Submissions for Picture Books Through YA

Alice Fugate joined the Joy Harris Literary Agency (www.joyharrisliterary.com/) in 2021. She is interested in children's middle grade and young adult, fiction and narrative nonfiction, and select author-illustrator (but also just author) projects in the picture book and graphic novel spaces. She's drawn to stories with a classic but fresh feel with distinctive, surprising voices from diverse and underrepresented backgrounds. In children's literature, she's partial to animal fables, fairy tale retellings, adventure stories, historical fiction, and heartfelt contemporary stories, especially if they explore the importance of place, the natural world, spirituality, and faith. She also enjoys comedies of manners, fun love stories, and stories that explore other cultures and countries, with a particular interest in seeing more stories set in Latin America. works that explore faith, religion, music, or nature. Visit her Manuscript Wish List page for more specifics of what she's looking for right now: www.manuscriptwishlist.com/mswl-post/alice-fugate/

Email a query, including a story pitch and synopsis as well as some biographical information, to **either** alice@joyharrisliterary.com or submissions@joyharrisliterary.com. For picture books, include the full manuscript in the body of the email. If you are also an illustrator either attach or provide links to the dummy or sample artwork (this also applies to graphic novels, though you don't have to include the whole manuscript in the body of the email in this case). For longer works, paste in the first chapter or first ten pages in the body of the email.

Christian Magazine Seeks Submissions for Age 8-12

Focus on the Family Clubhouse is a 32-page magazine designed to inspire, entertain and teach Christian values to children ages 8-12. The magazine has an international circulation of over 80,000.

Fiction: Looking for fresh, creative stories, especially those with children ages 8-12 as the main character. The characters should be well-developed, the story fast-paced and interesting, and the prose descriptive and engaging. While stories don't have to be explicitly Christian, they should be built on a foundation of Christian beliefs and family values. Key elements in a strong story are humor and charm. Especially looking for contemporary stories with multicultural or ethnic settings (1,800 words); fantasy or science-fiction stories, avoiding graphic descriptions of evil creatures and sorcery (1,800 words); historical fiction featuring great Christians or Christians who lived during great times (900 or 1,800 words, depending on the story); choose-your-own adventure stories (1,800-2,000 words); humor with a point (500 words).

Does not want to see stories where adults solve every problem, mystery stories (already have a regular feature); stories that deal with romantic relationships; poetry; preachy sounding stories with an overbearing moral or message.

Nonfiction: Looking for unique and interesting nonfiction, especially stories about real-life kids. Every article should have a Christian angle, though it shouldn't be overbearing. The concepts and vocabulary should be appropriate for the audience. Nonfiction should fall between 400-500 or 800-1,000 words in length.

Looking for personality features of ordinary kids doing extraordinary things; activity theme pages with 3 to 5 fun things for kids to do; short, humorous how-to articles (how to get good grades, how to be a good friend); quizzes (multiple choice or true/false) that teach a biblical concept or character trait—more along the lines of personality quizzes than factual quizzes; factual stories from a Christian worldview that talk about apologetics, biblical archeology or Christian values; short craft or recipe ideas centered around a theme or holiday; interviews with noteworthy Christians or Christians who experienced noteworthy events (athletes, actors, etc.).

Does not want Bible stories, science or educational articles without Christian insight, biographies told in an encyclopedia or textbook-style without a kid angle.

Pays between 15 and 25 cents per word, depending on the amount of editing required. Pays upon acceptance for non-exclusive rights. Reprints are not accepted. All manuscripts should be typed, double-spaced, on one side only of letter paper (8.5×11 inches). The author's name, address, phone number, email address and an approximate word count should appear on the first page of the manuscript or in the cover letter, as well as the genre of the story. Send the entire manuscript along with a self-addressed envelope with adequate postage if you want the manuscript returned. Seasonal material should be sent in at least eight months in advance. Address all submissions to: Rachel Pfeiffer, *Clubhouse* Assistant Editor, Focus on the Family, 8605 Explorer Drive, Colorado Springs, CO 80920. Responds to submissions within 12 weeks. See sample articles and purchase sample issues at www.focusonthefamily.com/clubhouse-magazine/

Agent Seeks Diverse Middle Grade/YA Fiction and Twists on Genres

Larissa Melo Pienkowski is an agent with Jill Grinberg Literary Management (jillgrinbergliterary.com/). The daughter of Brazilian and Polish immigrants, Larissa speaks Portuguese and Spanish, and is especially interested in representing diverse voices and experiences across all genres. Larissa gravitates toward books featuring a strong voice, emotional depth, and lyrical writing. In children's books, she's looking for middle grade and young adult fiction that centers around #Own-Voices experiences; dual timelines and multigenerational family sagas; enchantingly fantastical magical realism; smart, laugh-out-loud rom-coms with unique twists on tropes; contemporary retellings of non-Western folklore and mythology; vibrant middle-grade novels with strong cultural elements and heartfelt characters; light fantasy in the vein of TJ Klune's *The House in the Cerulean Sea* and Trenton Lee Stewart's *The Mysterious Benedict Society*; quirky coming-of-age stories featuring BIPOC, disabled, LGBTQ+, fat, and otherwise underrepresented protagonists; and darkly complex mother-daughter, sister-sister, and best friend relationships. She has a soft spot for novels that stretch the boundaries and limitations of genre. You can see her full wishlist here: www.manuscriptwishlist.com/mswl-post/larissa-melo-pienkowski/ Email your submission to info@jillgrinbergliterary.com and use the subject line: QUERY: [Title of Project] by [Your Name] / [Age Category/Genre] / ATTN: [Larissa Melo Pienkowski]. Paste your query letter in the body of the email and attach up to the first 50 pages of your manuscript as a .docx file. You will receive an auto-response confirming your submission was received.

Writing for the CHRISTIAN MAGAZINE MARKET

by Jane McBride

Nearly forty years ago, I sent off my first short story. It was more on a whim than from any real thought that I might sell it. To my surprise and delight, the story sold. I was being paid for writing!

The magazine that bought that story was a Christian one. You could say that I was “trending” before writing for the Christian market (or inspirational market, as it’s sometimes called) was trending.

Since then I’ve gone on to write more than 500 stories for that particular magazine, plus dozens of stories for other Christian periodicals and publications. The Christian magazine market for children and teens is bigger than you may think. While a few of these publications appear on newsstands, and more are available through the library, most readers get the magazines by subscription or as take-home Sunday School papers. Some are general interest magazines with a Christian slant to the material; others delve deeply into the teachings of particular denominations. You’ll find everything from fiction to fashion to nature to Bible stories in Christian magazines.

Why should you consider writing for the Christian market?

- If you are a believer, this is a great way to bear testament to those beliefs. Most secular markets do not want mention of deity. The Christian marketplace welcomes such testimony.
- You may find that you feel a rich satisfaction in writing inspirational stories.
- Many of the inspirational periodicals remain relatively unknown; you face less competition in having your work accepted.
- Since many of the Christian magazines have limited circulation, you can often resell your stories. (You’ll want to make certain that the magazine you’ve sold to does not buy all rights.

If it buys only first American serial rights, you are free to sell your piece elsewhere after it has been published.) Though these periodicals may not pay top dollar, reselling your work can substantially increase your income.

How do you get started?

- **First, get a handle on what’s out there.** Make the *Christian Writer’s Market Guide* your new best friend (christianwritersmarketguide.com). In it, you will learn of established publications and of new ones as well as where and how to submit, pay scale, names of editors, content requirements, and a host of other things. Also check the magazine listings in *Children’s Writer’s & Illustrator’s Market 2020* (the most recent edition) for additional inspirational markets. Finally, keyword searches will uncover lists of Christian magazines that don’t show up in market guides, such “Christian Magazines for Kids that Moms and Kids Love to Read!” (www.thinkingkids-blog.org/christian-magazines-for-kids/). Focus on the Family also needs consistent content for their magazines (store.focusonthefamily.com/magazines).
- **Keep up with other industry periodicals.** *Writer’s Digest* (<https://www.writersdigest.com/tag/writers-digest-magazine>) *The Writer* (www.writermag.com), and other magazines will occasionally feature articles, like this one, on writing for the religious market, or mention publishers looking for religious material in their market roundups.
- **Decide upon what kind of inspirational writing most suits your talents.** Are you looking for nonfiction markets? Or are you strictly interested in writing fiction? Or maybe you do both. Do you want to incorporate teachings of a particular Christian denomination into your stories or articles, or are you more comfortable with general interest magazines that happen to accept

work with Christian themes? Each periodical will have a slightly different focus, so you're going to want to customize your submission to the magazine's style and content.

- **Study several periodicals for different age groups to see which market you'd be best suited to write for.** As with children's books, magazines cater to a specific age range that affects the style and complexity of the content. Once you've narrowed down the age group, study several back issues of each magazine to understand the tone and style of the publication. Check the magazine's submission guidelines for word counts and other specifics.
- **Remember in writing for children's magazines that today's savvy kids don't want to be preached to.** They want real life stories with real life solutions. Anything that talks down to them or gives trite resolutions to complex problems will probably and rightfully be rejected.
- **Know the language that is used in referring to deity.** Some inspirational markets capitalize any reference to deity, such as "He" and "Him" when referring to God or the Lord. Others don't. Some magazines use God and the Savior or Jesus interchangeably; others are specific in the usage. Find out before you submit. Another point to check on the magazine's submission guidelines is which version of the Bible is preferred.
- **Understand the differences between various denominations.** For example, if you are writing a short story for children and intend to market it to a Catholic magazine, it helps to know the principles and practices of that faith. For example, Catholics generally baptize children as infants. Do you intend to try to sell your baptism story to a Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon) periodical? Members of that faith believe that a child should be baptized at eight-years-old, the age of accountability. In some sects, the girls and women do not wear pants. Amish stories vary in strictness of dress, use of electricity and modern conveniences depending upon the geographical setting and the policies of the bishop. Getting such things right won't ensure a sale, but getting them wrong will likely earn you a rejection.
- **Research the magazine and determine how much of it is freelance written.** Some Christian magazines, just as some secular ones, have most of their articles and stories penned by in-house staff writers, with very few, if any, slots for freelancers. By finding this out ahead of time, you won't waste your time in writing and submitting to them. Pay attention to the magazine's publication frequency. Obviously, a magazine that is put out only quarterly will need far fewer pieces than a magazine that publishes monthly or weekly. Though the weeklies may pay only a fraction of what the bigger magazines do, you can earn excellent money by turning out quality pieces every week. (Do a Google image search for "Sunday School take home papers" and you'll come up with a huge list of weekly periodicals that you can click on to go to the publishers' websites. Article 1, 2 pages. . Poke around the different sites until you find which ones are taking submissions.)
- **Check monthly or weekly themes.** Some Christian based magazines put out a theme list for the year. Pay attention to that and tailor your submissions to fit that theme.
- **Keep your eyes open for other markets that may not be listed as "Christian" or "inspirational."** Chicken Soup for the Soul, for which I've sold 18 stories, is not strictly a Christian market, but it does buy inspirational stories. These stories rely upon life experiences. Regional parenting publications may accept Christian-themed submissions around major religious holidays.

Do you have to be Christian to write for this magazine market? No. But it helps. However, you can fill gaps in your personal experience with thorough research, interviewing people of the particular Christian denomination you're writing about, and having your manuscript vetted by someone currently practicing that faith.

Writing for the inspirational market is not for everyone. If it doesn't suit you or your work doesn't fit the marketplace, don't force yourself into writing for it. On the other hand, you may find it a rich and fertile place for your work and an opportunity for you to grow as a writer and a person.

Alison Weiss

Acquisitions Editor

PIXEL+INK

interview by Lynne Marie

As an author myself, I am always on the lookout for editors who are established, accessible and tell it like it is, so I can more easily navigate this publishing world. So, I became extremely excited when former Egmont and Sky Pony Press editor Alison Weiss popped up at Pixel+Ink, where she works as acquisitions editor! She's just celebrated her first anniversary there. Congratulations to Alison!

Alison brings extensive experience and award accolades to Pixel+Ink, having edited more than 100 books—from picture book to YA and across genres. She's also an amazing resource to the KidLit community with her #AskKidLit Twitter posts in which she answers questions either in a tweet or DM. Find her on Twitter [@alioop7](#).

LYNNE MARIE: I am so thrilled to showcase you this month! I've been grateful for the questions you've answered for us all. What made you decide to be so gracious with your knowledge and experience on the Twitter platform?

ALISON WEISS: I've been blending Twitter and my work since just after Twitter was released as a social media platform. I ran Egmont's Twitter account, and it was practically my own, so I guess for me, the two have always been intrinsically linked. #AskKidLit grew out of giving personalized book recommendations via tweet and the influence of #kidlit chat and similar chat forums. I recognize that the publishing world can be opaque and really hard to navigate, and I wanted a place where people could have their questions answered while helping their fellow creatives.

LM: Since you are very active on Twitter, how important is it for your authors and illustrators to be active? Is this something you check into as you evaluate the marketability of new authors to your list? Would

you have different criteria whether this person was new or established?

AW: Social media platforms are important to get the word out about your book and, more importantly, to build a community of support for you and your work. I'm asked about stats in every acquisitions meeting, so it is something that I do check on. But it's not a make-or-break factor for me. The manuscript comes first. I think you need to enjoy the social media platforms you engage with, so if you're going to run a blog, but only update it every three years, that's not productive. If Twitter's not for you, but you adore Instagram, you should spend your time there. There's only so much of your day you can devote to social media, and that becomes even harder when you have books on deadline (when social media becomes a procrastination tool, perhaps). Find what works for you.

LM: What are your thoughts about Twitter pitch parties?

AW: I used to dip into pitch parties, but there are so many of them now, and frankly I find them a bit overwhelming. I think they can be really good for helping you hone your elevator pitch because you have so little space. If you want to participate in one, go for it! If you'd rather do normal querying, that's excellent, too.

LM: Please tell us a little bit about *Brooding YA Hero: Becoming a Character (Almost) as Awesome as Me* by Carrie DiRisio and illustrated by Linnea Gear. How did you come across this project and how and why did it become a Twitter sensation?

AW: [@BroodingYAHero](#) was a huge Twitter sensation long before I got my hands on the book proposal.



Alison Weiss...continued

I was an avid follower of the account, which I think captures the clichés and stereotypes you hate (but secretly love) about YA so geniusly. Carrie’s agent sent me a proposal for the book, and I knew I wanted to work on it. But because it was so tied to pop culture and attention can move fast, that meant we needed to get the book out as quickly as possible on a rush schedule. Carrie and I worked together to figure out exactly what form the book would take. Linnea had done some commissioned artwork for Carrie in the past, and it seemed like a perfect fit to have her do the book, as well. What we ended up with was a deliciously satirical love letter to YA publishing that captures great foundational dos and don’ts of writing. And it’s just a lot of fun.

LM: What do you feel is something our readers should take away from this story to use on their journey?

AW: I think a good takeaway from this project, and many of the projects I’ve worked on, is the importance of collaboration in publishing. It’s the back-and-forth between author and editor that often produces something greater than either could accomplish individually. But you need to be open to that feedback.

LM: Given you are so open and accessible to the Twitterverse, I was wondering what business style you adapted to your authors and illustrators? Do you feel you are as hands-on and laid back? How editorial would you consider yourself?

AW: I am a very hands-on editor. I give a lot of feedback, and probably scare authors with my edit letters. But I’m not precious about the work, either. It’s the author’s name on the book. My job is to help them find the best version of their vision.

LM: Has your interests changed since you were over at Sky Pony? If so, why? What are you currently looking for as you build this new list?

AW: I wouldn’t say that the kinds of projects I’m drawn to have changed, but the lists are very different, so where I’m focusing has changed for the moment. Pixel+Ink’s list is made up of books for readers ages 3–13, which means I’m not looking for YA right now. We’re only doing series, so while a book may be a beautiful stand-alone, if I can’t see a way to continue the journey of the characters or expand the world, it’s just not going to be a fit for us.

We’re looking for strong commercial fiction that we believe has the potential to cross to other media. My personal tastes are pretty broad and eclectic. I like reading and working on all sorts of stories.

LM: What is your goal/focus as you work with each creative? Are you trying to build a book or a career?

AW: I get very attached to my authors. I’m definitely thinking about building a relationship that’s focused on their career. That’s even more important when we’re talking about series, where we’ll be working together for multiple books.

LM: Are you looking for artists? If so, what variety of styles appeal to you?

AW: We certainly work with artists for many of our projects, and about a third of our list is graphic novels. What we’re looking for really depends on the needs of the project.

LM: Do you accept any nonfiction? If so, what are you looking for in this genre?

AW: Pixel+Ink currently does not do nonfiction.

LM: What would be a common thread that you are looking for in all submissions? How would you characterize your list?



Alison Weiss...continued

AW: I'm always looking for the great trifecta: stand-out characters, engaging plot, and a killer voice. I especially love projects that change the way I see the world—that leave me changed for having engaged with the author's or illustrator's ideas.

It's also important to me that the books I choose are books that kids will enjoy. I want them to feel seen in what they're reading. To find a refuge or escape or to have their worldview challenged. I don't believe that every book has to be for every reader, but I do think that every reader should be able to find something that speaks to them, and I hope the books I work on are contributing to that goal.

LM: How would you like your submissions formatted? Are you particular about formatting? How do you feel about page numbers? Art notes?

AW: I am particular about formatting only as it related to making an editor's or agent's job easier. 12-point standard font, like Times New Roman. Page breaks between chapters, not a ton of returns. A million times yes to page numbers. But I'm not going to reject something outright if it doesn't adhere to my formatting desires.

If you're providing art notes, I want them clearly demarcated as such. Art notes should only be used when absolutely necessary for understanding the action of the story, like if the art will be a punchline to a joke. It's important that writers who aren't illustrating their own projects remember that their work is a partnership with the illustrator. They need to leave the illustrator the space to show off their talents, as well.

LM: Is there anything upcoming that you are excited about that you can share with us?

AW: I'm really excited to be building my own list at Pixel+Ink, and I have some great upcoming books, but they aren't announced yet, so I have to keep those secret a little longer.

But I'm also very fortunate to have the chance to work on some of our amazing on-going series. For picture book fans, Sue Fliess's *Beatrice Bly's Rules for Spies: The Missing Hamster* will be out in April. It's about a little girl who puts her 007 skills to use to investigate a disappearance in her classroom.

In the chapter book space, sisters Twig and Turtle

have stolen my heart, and I think readers will be charmed by them and their tiny house problems, too.

And in middle grade, I can't wait for the world to meet the Peach family and go on one wild summer road trip with them in *The Peach Experiment: When Life Gives You Lemons, Make Peach Pie*. (Bring tissues, though.)

Alison Weiss is offering CBI subscribers an **Above the Slushpile** submission code for the month of March, 2021. She is seeking series fiction for picture books, chapter books, middle grade and graphic novels (guidelines at <https://holidayhouse.com/site/pixel-ink/?pg=contact#guidelines>). Also check out her Manuscript Wish List posting at <https://www.manuscriptwishlist.com/mswl-post/alison-weiss/> Email a query letter that briefly summarizes the series concept and the plot of the first book, and attach the entire first manuscript as a .doc or .docx file. Author/illustrators may also attach 2-3 sample .jpeg illustrations OR a dummy as a .pdf file, or include a link to an online portfolio in the query. Put "**3/2021 CBI ATS SUB: (Title) by (Author)**" in the subject line, and email to info@tbridgemediacom. Responds within four months if interested in publishing. **The code is valid through March 31, 2021.** After that, you can still submit to the same email, but without the Above the Slushpile code.

---Please Read Before You Proceed---

Before you submit your manuscript please run through the following checklist. This will ensure that editors will continue to offer us Above the Slushpile codes:

- You've studied the submission guidelines and verified that your manuscript falls within those guidelines.
- You've confirmed your work matches the interests of the editor by reading their CBI interview, and studying recent books on their list.
- Your manuscript falls within standard word counts of the particular age group for which you're writing. (If you don't know standard word counts, get our free Ultimate Children's Writing Cheat Sheet at: writeforkids.org/ultimate-cheat-sheet)
- Your work has been critiqued by a beta reader, critique partner/group, or a freelance editor.
- You have thoroughly revised and polished your manuscript.

Opening Up the World to Readers: A Look at Children's Book Translators

by Jean Daigneau

With a new year well underway, this can be a good time to expand your must-read book list with titles outside your genre favorites. This ties in to Laura Backes' suggestion for this month's column, which deviates from a specific genre, but tackles a topic I knew nothing about. Globally we are all interconnected through the arts, social media, business, medicine, and technology. With this global outreach, children's book translators are finding a niche while opening doors to cultures, religions, and lifestyles from around the world. Let's find out more.

Why Do We Need Translated Books?

According to IBISWorld, the number of books published in the U.S. will reach an estimated \$2.0 billion in 2021. But, on average, the U.S. sees under 3 percent of translated books from other countries published annually, compared to, for example, over 13 percent of Germany's published books translated from other languages.

For today's children, connections to other countries, languages, and traditions are available with a click of the finger. Children who read books translated from other cultures tend to be more empathetic, understanding, and tolerant of others. Exposure highlights our similarities as well as our differences.

According to Lisa Lucas, Executive Director of the National Book Foundation (NBF), as a nation of immigrants "we should never stop seeking connection and insight from the myriad cultures that consistently influence and inspire us." In 2018, the NBF reestablished its award for translated works of fiction or non-fiction

published in the U.S. Many of us grew up reading fairy tales based on the translated works of Hans Christian Anderson and the Brothers Grimm, as well as classics like *Pippi Longstocking* and *Heidi*, and our literary lives are certainly richer for it.

I Speak Another Language. How Hard Can Translation Be?

Children's book translators don't simply take an existing book and rework it in another language. Who knew, right? According to author and translator Lyn Miller-Lachmann, they translate "the culture as well as the language, making sure the text makes sense and finding ways to fill in context without compromising the flow of the story."

Nanette McGuinness, an opera singer as well as a translator, points out the challenges to doing just that. According to McGuinness, translating a published work requires a translator to include "the full depth of the original text's meaning—both literal and implied." McGuinness notes this includes "subtext, jokes, word play, devices such as assonance and alliteration, proverbs, slang, and cultural context." She adds that there are also the "challenges of cross-cultural mores about age-appropriate vocabulary levels, insults, cursing, etc." For instance, she explains that in English, hoping for good luck is evidenced by "crossing our fingers," but in German, the phrase is "pressing the thumbs." A young adult novel in one language might appear as middle grade in another. McGuinness, who has studied nine languages and has sung in 12, has translated over 60 books for children and adults, including books in the *Geronimo Stilton* and *The Sisters* graphic novel se-

Children's Book Translators...continued

ries and the award-winning adult novel, *Luisa: Now and Then*.

Marrying Language and Illustration

It's understandable that both translators note that poetry or verse novels can involve some of the biggest challenges. Miller-Lachmann says, "We need to know how to reword to preserve a rhyme or rhythm."

While it might seem that picture books would be simpler to translate than novels, there are many things to consider with picture books, not the least of which are often shorter texts and illustrations. By their very nature, some books in foreign languages are expressed differently. McGuinness explains that "Romance languages can be beautifully flowery, filled with long sentences and multiple clauses. Others—modern English is a prime example—prize terse, direction expression." Miller-Lachmann has had to "find equivalents for terms that don't exist in English, or develop alternatives that preserve the meaning of wordplays and rhymed poetry that aren't word-for-word translations." She notes that in the translated *Three Balls of Wool (Can Change the World)*, she had to change the characters' names "for ease of read-alouds."

Usually, the writing has to be adapted to match illustrations to tell that half of the story. But it isn't as simple as making words fit pictures. There's a certain nuance and talent to merging the two. It's a bit like being a choreographer. Different dancers come together to create that one perfect production.

Dipping Your Toes into the Translation Pool

Miller-Lachmann says that much of her work comes from editors who know of her previous translations and contact her. Translated works include *The World in a Second; Lines, Squiggles, Letters, Words*; and *The Queen of the Frogs*; which were all first published in Portugal. Her two newest authored books—*Moonwalking* and *Gringolandia*—are due out in 2021 and 2022, respectively.

Translators often receive very little recognition for their work. They often aren't credited, especially on the cover of a translated book, although McGuinness says that is slowly changing. And much translation work is paid on a work-for-hire basis. U.S. publishers are known for not paying royalties.

Like with writing, the more publication credits you have, the easier it is to find work. But where to even begin? Start by translating short stories or essays and pitching them to online sources or literary magazines. Some universities offer internships and professional organizations, like PEN America, offer prizes or awards.

As you amass credentials, add them to your website. Google literary translation websites, especially in your chosen language, which offer a wealth of information and tips. One place to start is *19 Blogs Every Translator Needs to Read*. Like with magazine writing, having sample work available can help you get your foot in the door. Once you've established a connection with publishers or editors, you can pitch book projects to them. Ultimately, you might become like Miller-Lachmann, with projects coming to you.

Bringing Your Own Work to Other Countries

If you're self-published, hiring a translator for your book project can open your work up to expanding global markets. Doing your homework to find countries where your genre will be well received and starting small with one country can help. But proceed carefully. Don't be afraid to ask for references, especially to find a translator versed in your genre. Having issues like copyrighting, final proofreading, fees, and time expectations outlined in advance can eliminate headaches later. Typically fees run from \$.08 to \$.12 per word. But be clear about whether final proofreading by a separate translator is included.

Another thing to consider when delving into translation is finding a foreign rights' agent, which Miller-Lachmann says is essential. Much like finding a literary agent, she says, "You have to convince the agent to believe in your book and to believe that it has a place

Children's Book Translators...continued

in the market.”

For traditionally published authors, be sure your contract gives you foreign rights before moving ahead. Many publishers handle translations themselves and, if so, royalty payments for those rights are usually spelled out. In that case, leave that to them.

The Final Word

Choosing to explore the world of children's book translation can be daunting. Having already lived in or spent time in another country is helpful according to Miller-Lachmann. And, of course, command of a foreign language is crucial. Google Translate is not the answer. To that end she suggests “reading the literature of that country in its original language as well as in translation.” She also suggests reaching out and joining organizations that cater to others immersed in book translation. (See list below.)

McGuinness says that besides a command of another language, “staying proficient is, itself, a moving target, particularly in genres with a good deal of slang or dialogue,” since “languages are living entities that change and evolve.” Being a translator means first, being a writer and following the mantra that you've seen here many times—read, write, repeat. “Translators are unlikely to become well known, unlike authors, illustrators,” McGuinness says, “or opera singers. In the end it's a labor of love.” But opening a window on a new culture for a child would certainly be worth it.

Organizations for Book Translators:

The American Literary Translators Association (ALTA)

Translators Association (TA) of the Society of Authors

Literary Division of the American Translators Association (ATA)

Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (now has a Translators category)

PEN America and the Authors Guild (with Translation Committees that work closely with ALTA)

Suggested reading. Most titles will be published in 2021:

Beyond the Blue Border by Dorit Linke, trans. from German by Elisabeth Lauffer

Chirri & Chirra: The Rainy Day by Colas Gutman, trans. from Japanese by David Boyd, illus. by Marc Boutavant

The Day Saida Arrived by Susana Gómez Redondo, trans. from Spanish by Lawrence Schimel, illus. by Sonja Wimmer

Every Color of Light: A Book About the Sky by Hiroshi Osada, trans. from Japanese by David Boyd, illus. by Ryoji Arai

Fossils from Lost Worlds by Damien Laverdunt, trans. from French by Daniel Hahn, illus. by H el ene Rajcak

Here the Whole Time by Vitor Martins, trans. from Portuguese by Larissa Helena

How Do Bridges Work? by Roman Belyaev, trans. from Russian by Ruth Ahmedzai Kemp

A Mother Is a House by Aurore Petit, trans. from French by Daniel Hahn

Sampling of Publishers of Children's Translated Titles:

Aurora Metro Books
Pushkin Children's Books
Enchanted Lion Books
Amazon Crossing Kids
Levine Querido
NorthSouth Books

WRITING 101:

Getting to the END

by Jane McBride

You've struggled through writing the beginning of your book. You've survived slogging through the dreaded sagging middle. You're on the home stretch and now have only to write the ending. No problem. Right?

Wrong. Writing the ending of the book has its own set of challenges. Let's talk about the elements of good endings:

Good endings make sense. The reader is left feeling, "Yes, it had to be that way. It couldn't have ended any other way." That is a huge compliment to the author, the feeling that the ending was inevitable.

Good endings evoke emotions like contentment, happiness, joy, etc. Good endings don't necessarily have to be happy endings (though those are my favorite), but good endings should leave the reader with a definite emotion. Maybe she is wiping away her tears. Maybe she is smiling through those tears. Maybe she is pumping her fist up in the air, cheering for the main character overcoming all the odds against her. Maybe our reader is doing all three of these things.

Good endings do not confuse the reader. Have you ever read a book where the ending was unclear? Perhaps you had to read such a book in school where the teacher touted it as "a book that will make you think or will make you come up with your own ending." I love books that make me think. I also love books that end a story legitimately and don't use a gimmick. In the past decades, there have been a number of television shows where an entire season or even two seasons are explained away by declaring them to be a "dream sequence." I always thought this was cheating the viewers who had invested time and energy in watching the show.

Don't pull the same trick on your readers with your book endings. Whether the book ends on a happy note or a sad one, be honest. Play fair.

Good endings bring the main character as well as the reader to a sense of completion. Related to the above, good endings give both character and reader a feeling of having finished. Unless your book ends with a cliffhanger that is designed to ensure that the reader will pick up the next book in the series, keep your endings close-ended. I am currently writing a series of books where the core characters and premise are carried throughout. Though I try to have cliffhanger scene breaks and chapter endings, I end the book with an unmistakable resolution. In other words, though the book can be read as part of the series, it can also be read alone and, what's more, it will stand alone without the reader having to read every other book in the series. That's a promise I make to my readers and to myself.

Good endings highlight how the main character has changed from the beginning of the book. If the protagonist is the same person as he or she was in the beginning, then the story falls flat. Characters should show growth in some way. It doesn't matter if this growth is shown in a three-year-old boy who learns to accept his baby sister into the household or a 13-year-old who learns to accept his older brother who has come out as gay, the growth matters. It makes the story relevant to the reader and to the character. (Yes, I think of my characters as real people.)

Good endings show the universal importance of the book. Does this mean that the book will change the world or change even one individual? No, though it would be nice if it did. By universal importance, I mean a feeling that many people can relate to. "But my story doesn't have universal

appeal or impact,” you may object. What about a picture book? What universal importance can it have? Consider the tender story of the classic picture book *Are You My Mother?* The appeal of this book comes from the need everyone has for connection. Whether it’s a child looking for his mother or a saga about generations of family withstanding horrendous world events, this appeal of connections is timeless.

Good endings make sense as a final moment of the story. Good endings aren’t just plucked out of thin air and plopped at the final pages of a story. They are organic in that they evolve from the inception of the story idea to the conclusion.

Good endings tie up loose ends. Have you ever finished reading a book and say to yourself, “Hey, what about _____?” Fill in the blank here. Was there a clue that was left unexplained, a murder that wasn’t solved, an important relationship that was left open-ended? What if a mother and her 18-year-old daughter are at odds while at the same time trying to solve the mystery of the girl’s father’s disappearance? They must try to overcome their issues as they work together. In the end, the mystery is solved when they learn that the husband/father faked his own death and planned to leave the country with the money he embezzled from his own company, but the relationship between mother and daughter remains unresolved. We are left wondering, “Did the mother and daughter finally come to some understanding with each other as they accepted that the husband/father meant to abandon them?” These kind of endings annoy a reader and, though, she, the reader, may have plunked down her hard-won cash on this book, chances are she won’t buy another of your books.

Good endings solve the external conflict first, then solve the internal conflict. There are exceptions to this, but in general, this makes for the greatest suspense in an ending. In the example above, solving the husband/father’s disappearance (external conflict) comes first. Solving the mother/daughter conflict (internal conflict) should follow. In my romantic suspense novels, I resolve the mystery or suspense before I resolve the romantic con-

flict.

Good endings have dynamite last lines. The last line matters. It’s been said that the first line of a book sells that book and that the last line sells the next book.

Good books end when they should. Occasionally, I’ve read what seems like a really good book, except that the book fails to end. It keeps on and on and on ... Well, you get the point. Inside all of that extraneous material is a great ending, but it’s lost in the shuffle because the author keeps adding more and more stuff. End the book. Period.

Good books don’t rely on coincidences to make the ending come about. Coincidences are a lazy way to write. They are an especially lazy way to end the book. Put in the work to write a great ending. Don’t cheat your readers by relying upon a coincidence. This applies throughout the book, not just the ending.

IN CONCLUSION

Writing a book’s ending should be an satisfying experience for the author just as reading it should be an satisfying experience for the reader. In it, you show the characters finding their way to the only possible ending the book could have. Satisfying is a bone-deep feeling of contentment, where the reader thinks, “Oh, that was exactly how it should have ended.”

If you missed the first two articles in this beginner series, see the **January 2021** issue for *The Essential Elements of a Story’s Beginning*, and **February 2021** for *Building Your Story’s Middle*.

IN ONE HAND AND OUT THE OTHER

Diane Worthey

Debut Children's Book Author

interview by PJ McIlvaine

The road to publication can take numerous unexpected twists and turns. Diane Worthey began playing the violin after watching a Disney movie. Later, as a teenager, her then violin teacher brought Worthey to Colorado to play with the Symphony Orchestra of Dr. Antonia Brico, a determined, passionate, pioneer female conductor in a male centered world. When Worthey rediscovered her childhood love of writing in 2016, the result became her acclaimed debut picture book and Junior Library Book Gold Guild Standard Selection, *In One Ear And Out The Other, Antonia Brico and Her Amazingly Musical Life*, illustrated by Morgana Wallace, (Penny Candy Books). Worthey teaches the violin and viola through the University of Idaho Preparatory Division and also performs in the first violin section of the Washington-Idaho Symphony. Married to an astrophysicist and mother of two, Worthey lives in Washington and Idaho, where she has a 22 acre spread which she eventually plans to make a writing and musical retreat. You can learn more about her magical musical journey at dianeworthey.blog



PJ McILVAINE: What was the first instrument you ever played?

DIANE WORTHEY: The first instrument I played was the piano. When I was 4 years old, my parents took me to see the British musical drama film, *Olivier!* Upon returning home, they heard strains of a tune called “Oom Pah Pah “ coming from downstairs, which I had figured out on the piano after seeing the movie. My parents then decided to start me in piano lessons with a wonderful teacher in Arvada, Colorado named Kay Bailey.

When I was in the 4th grade, all of the 4th graders in our school district went on a field trip to see the original Disney animated film, *Fantasia*. I fell in love with the violin after seeing the scene in the movie where shadows of violin bows dance across the screen as the Philadelphia Orchestra warms up. I went home from seeing the movie and begged my parents for violin lessons.

I studied both the piano and the violin until I became serious about the violin. I didn't have time to devote to both instruments, and I dropped piano lessons in 9th grade. I'm thankful for my piano background, as it gave me a solid musical foundation.

PM: When did your love of music and writing coalesce? Did the interests mesh naturally or was there a eureka moment?

DW: Both my love of writing and love of music began as a young child, yet I only recently rediscovered my love of writing.

My love of picture books likely started in 2nd grade when my teacher, Mrs. Wrysinski, assigned “book reports.” Students were required read a book and write about it. I loved the weekly assignment so much, I checked out a new book from the library every day and headed home to the kitchen table to read and write. I especially loved that I was expected to illustrate my text with a picture. I finished 62 book reports with illustrations that year.

In elementary school, I spent my free time practicing the piano and the violin.

Diane Worthey...continued

By middle school, I was focused solely on music. In high school I decided I wanted to major in music in college, with violin as my focus. Learning to play the violin was so demanding, I didn't have much time to think about other artistic endeavors.

Fifteen years ago, I rediscovered my childhood love of writing by publishing journal articles for string teachers in the Suzuki Association of the Americas Journal.

My desire to write books for children was inspired by a 2016 visit to my local library. I was looking for books with an artistic flair to put in my violin studio. I was horrified to discover the shelf space dedicated to the arts is extremely narrow. I set out to change this. I joined a SCWBI critique group and learned as much as I could from experienced authors. When my critique partners in my writing group began to comment on how lyrical my voice was, which I had achieved purely by using my musical intuition, I had a EUREKA! moment, where my music and writing coalesced.

The mechanics of writing and making music are very similar. In addition, authors and musicians have the same goal: to tell an engaging story. I'm enjoying discovering how the two art forms of music and writing complement each other beautifully!

PM: You have probably one of the most unique backstories concerning your debut picture book. You actually played in Antonia Brico's orchestra in Denver. How did that plant the seed for your manuscript decades later?

DW: In 1981, when I was 16, my violin teacher, Barbara Thiele, took me along with her to play in the Brico Symphony in Denver, CO. I played under Dr. Brico's baton for two years, until I graduated from high school. When I knew Dr. Brico, she was

in her 80's. She was fiery, and demanded a lot out of me. She introduced me to great orchestral repertoire, which I was lucky to be exposed to as a high school student. Yet, back then, I had absolutely no idea at all that I was playing under a legend! When I left the Brico Symphony in 1983 to study with a violinist at the University of Wyoming, I didn't give Dr. Brico another thought.

In 1985, when I was a junior in college, Judy Collins, American folk singer, came to the University of Wyoming to give a concert with our orchestra. Judy began the concert by playing the piano and talking about her former piano teacher, Antonia Brico! Antonia had groomed Judy for a career as a concert pianist. But Judy found her voice in the American folk scene of the 1960's, leaving

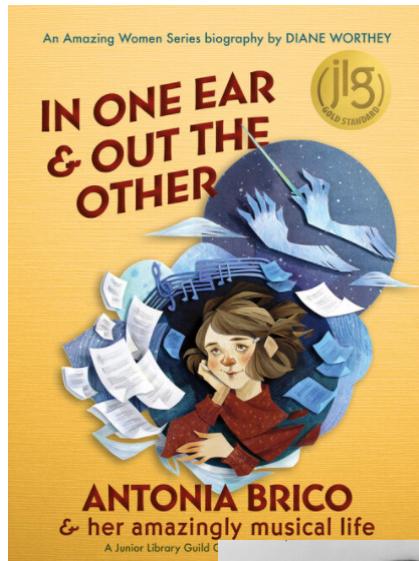
her concert piano career and Antonia Brico behind. As I sat in Judy's backup orchestra listening, Judy talked about some of Antonia's accomplishments, and spoke of her as a "great conductor." I remember thinking... "Hey! I know Dr. Brico!" Then the concert began, we played *Send In The Clowns*, and I tucked Judy's words away.

Little did I know back then, Judy Collins and Jill Godmilow had made an Academy

Award nominated film in 1974, *Antonia: A Portrait of the Woman*, a film my high school violin teacher appears in. I wouldn't discover this amazing documentary until its re-release, 32 years after playing for Judy Collins.

In 2017, I was brainstorming ideas for a manuscript. I initially thought of writing about the composer Fanny Mendelssohn, whose brother Felix rose to fame, while Fanny was overlooked. I threw the idea out to my husband, who said "What about Antonia Brico?" This was another EUREKA! moment.

From there, the universe opened up to the idea of this book. I started researching Antonia's life, immediately becoming obsessed. Memories of playing



Diane Worthey...continued

in Antonia's orchestra came flooding back. I wanted to learn everything I could about her arduous journey to become a conductor. I wished I had appreciated her more when I was young and inexperienced, playing under her baton. So really, this book is my gift to her. She deserved so much more during her lifetime.

PM: How much research was involved in writing the Brico biography? Was most of the material already in the public domain? Did you have access to private materials? Since you knew Brico personally, did you find that more challenging?

DW: Yes, I knew Antonia Brico, but only from the position of playing the violin in her orchestra. I only had brief encounters with her off the podium. Finding out details of her life story so many years after playing under her baton was extremely fascinating to me. The fact that I knew her fueled my passion to try to tell her story in a way that would do her justice.



I did not have access to private materials, but public domain sources gave me a complete picture of Antonia's life. The most thorough source I found turned out to be a 2000 University of Colorado master's thesis by Lance Christensen called "I Will Not Be Deflected From My Course." In this thesis Lance has painstakingly documented the life of Antonia through collections of programs and taped interviews held at the Denver Public Library and History Colorado.

In addition to Lance's thesis, I relied heavily on newspaper articles, archives of symphony orchestras and information on Antonia Brico found in a few college textbooks about women in classical music. Judy Collins' book, *Singing Lessons*, was helpful, and I found the documentary *Antonia: A Portrait of the Woman* by Judy Collins and Jill Godmilow (re-released in 2015) especially enlightening. The film is made up of scenes of interviews with Antonia at her house in Denver, CO. Scenes of her rehearsing her orchestra (10 years before I played in

it) are interspersed with Antonia telling of her own life story.

PM: You even got the amazing Judy Collins to give a wonderful blurb. Was that your idea or the publisher's? And how easy or difficult was to get Collins to contribute?

DW: From the start, I knew I wanted to try to get Judy Collins to blurb the book. After all, Judy was the person who told me that Antonia Brico was an important conductor! It was very difficult to get the blurb, although I sensed all along that Judy would be delighted to give it, if only I could get past her gatekeeper, who ignored my messages.

It took me nine months of trying every avenue I could think of to finally reach Judy. I just wasn't willing to give up! In a moment of desperation, I decided to try to send a message to one of her friends. I found a 1960's video of Judy Collins singing with Arlo Guthrie. I took a leap of faith. Musicians have strong bonds that some-

times last a lifetime. Could Judy and Arlo still be friends? I had never met Arlo Guthrie, but I bravely sent a Facebook message to him, explaining why I was trying to reach Judy and asking if he could help. Within minutes, he responded, saying that he sent my message to Judy, and that was the best he could do. The next day, Judy messaged me. At first I thought the message was a scam, but coming on the heels of Arlo's message, it seemed legitimate. I replied, and Judy and I exchanged a few back and forth Facebook messages. After that, Judy's manager finally talked to me, and we eventually got the blurb. This is why I thank Arlo Guthrie in my acknowledgments at the end of the book! Judy is very gracious, and I thank both Judy and Jill Godmilow for writing touching blurbs for the book. Judy's original blurb is much longer than what appears on the back of the book, and I treasure it.

PM: One of the marks of a great book is the title. Yours is so organic to the material. Was that always the title?

Diane Worthey...continued

DW: The subtitle of the book went through a few changes, but the main title was always *In One Ear And Out The Other*. While researching, I came across these words from Antonia Brico and knew I had found a perfect title.

“The professor I loved the most in the whole world said to me, ‘It won’t work...it won’t work... it won’t work. Even if you get accepted into schools, it won’t work. Nobody wants a woman conductor.’ How’s that for your ego? Pretty bad, right? Well, it just went in one ear and out the other.”

(Dr. Antonia Brico, “One Undelected Step at a Time”, lecture given April 14, 1975, A Brico Collection, CHS, Box 1, folder 14, 4-5.)

PM: Do you have a set writing routine? What was the time frame from your first draft of the book to publication? How many drafts did you do? What’s the hardest part of the writing process? Do you have any tips for striking a harmonious balance between work and writing?

DW: I need space around me for my creative juices to flow. Although I teach for a university preparatory music program, I’m fortunate to be able to set my own schedule. I schedule students 3 days a week, and leave 2 days a week for writing, or writing related tasks. When symphony season is in full swing, it is difficult to find a balance, as I am busy practicing and playing in concerts. It’s a juggling act for sure sometimes!

If, like me, your working life and your writing life compete for your time, my advice is to not be too hard on yourself. Some things need to go on the “back burner” if other work needs to take priority. Carving out “writing centered days” and “music centered days” has helped. I keep a pad of paper near my bedside and pads of paper all over the house. This helps me remember my ideas and things I want to work on. Sometimes I have to gather up all of these ideas and make sense of them later.

A writing session can mirror a musician’s practice session:

1. Review piece: Go back to a previous piece and refine it. This builds your technique.

2. Working piece: The bulk of your time is spent on your current project. Work on the hard spots first. Then reward yourself with the easy tasks.
3. Preview piece: Play around with your next project. Pinpoint places that will need what we call “bare bones practice” in music, things you’ll want to solve first before putting the whole piece together.

From first draft to publication took three years. I lost count of how many drafts I wrote before submitting the manuscript. Once the manuscript was under contract, there were only a few, word level revisions by my editor.

The hardest part of writing (and music!) for me is, I tend to be very hard on myself. I lean toward the perfectionist temperament, which isn’t healthy for any artist. I’m getting better at taking risks in my writing, and being OK with a first draft that isn’t good. Revising is key to writing and music, and I do a lot of it!

PM: What was the publishing process like for you? Did anything surprise you? Did you have any input into the artwork?

DW: I was fortunate to find the perfect publisher for this manuscript. The process of working with Penny Candy Books has been wonderful. On my first phone call with Penny Candy, Chad Reynolds and Alexis Orgera told me, “Your book is in good hands.” That turned out to be more than true! Chad and Alexis are a delight to work with. They care about their authors and illustrators deeply. We had some bumps along the way to publication. The timing of the release date ending up being in the middle of a pandemic was a big emotional toll for me, along with other obstacles we encountered on the road to publication. Chad and Alexis supported me every step of the way. They believe in the power of Antonia’s story just as much as I do. Their support made my debut book experience extremely positive, despite the sometimes challenging journey.

I was surprised that my first attempt at a book for kids was named a Junior Library Guild Gold Standard Book before publication, and also recently earned a starred review from *Booklist*! This is a testa-

Diane Worthey...continued

ment to Antonia Brico's story. I think she would be very happy to know her story is reaching children and is already getting out to a wide audience of readers. I certainly didn't expect these honors, and I'm grateful.

Penny Candy chose Morgana Wallace to illustrate the book and asked for my input. They were willing to consider other options if I wanted. When I saw Morgana's lush paper collage style, I agreed her artwork would be a good fit. I was concerned about a non-musician drawing musical scenes of players. So many things can be represented inaccurately in a musical scene. Paper collage is a bit more forgiving in that we don't expect every detail to be exactly precise. Morgana's talent in the collage style put me at ease. Even with a few inaccuracies in how the illustrations show the musicians, I see these scenes as beautiful artistic representations of a "real" experience. I'm delighted with how the artwork came out, and I especially love the cover of the book, which captures Antonia's spirit so well.

PM: Do you have an agent?

DW: I currently do not have an agent. I pitched this manuscript myself after not being able to get an agent interested in it. I would love to sign with an agent for future manuscripts!

PM: What are you currently working on? Fiction or nonfiction? Do you see music-centered books as your niche?

DW: I'm currently finishing another nonfiction picture book biography about another unknown woman who made huge contributions to the field

of classical music. We have wonderful books on the shelves for kids about Beethoven, Mozart, Handel, Vivaldi...the list of men goes on and on. I'd like to help balance the historical narrative by continuing to publish books for kids about unknown women in classical music. So, in a way, I see this as my niche, but I don't want to paint myself into a "corner." I'm open to writing about other amazing, unknown historical figures as well! I also have been experimenting with other genres.

PM: If you could play with any musician (dead or alive) who would it be?

DW: What a tough question! Ideally, I'd like to staff a symphony orchestra with all of my favorite musicians and composers throughout history. Wouldn't that be fun to show up to rehearsal and see Johannes Brahms as your conductor, or be assigned to sit next to Antonio Vivaldi for a concert?

If I were to pick a person alive today to play with in an orchestra, I'd choose Hillary Hahn, American violinist, to be my stand partner. Hillary is one of the best violinists in the world. What makes her great in my opinion is not only is she a virtuoso player, she also has a sense of fun. Hillary breaks the stereotype I dislike of classical violinists being boring and not fun to be around. Check out this video of Hillary taking on a hula hoop challenge while playing Paganini Caprice #24, an extremely difficult piece: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eOjO4ekc-JQA>

CREATING THE EMOTIONAL HOOK

by Jane McBride

Most writers have heard over and over about plot hooks, why they are important, why it's vital to start with a hook, etc. Less frequently do we hear about emotional hooks. What elements do emotional hooks contain: emotional language, feelings without labels, a protagonist whom the reader not only identifies with but roots for, and involving a feeling of nobility and selflessness.

Let's take a look at these elements in the Mini Blueprint format.

STEP 1: *Use emotional language.* What do I mean by "emotional language?" Is it the flowery language of several centuries ago where adjectives and adverbs flowed freely and frequently? No. Emotional language is figures of speech. Do not stop with metaphors and similes (remember: a little can go a long way); experiment with some lesser known literary devices.

ACTION: Take a look at your WIP (work in progress) with an eye to your language. Experiment with parallel structure and hyperbole (exaggeration). Look for places where you can emphasize a character's feelings by mixing up the expected word order of a sentence. Have you heard of anastrophe, where the normal syntax of speech is reversed, or chiasmus, where the second part of an expression is balanced against the first with the parts reversed? Don't be put off by the names of these techniques. Antimetabole is similar to chiasmus in the inversion of structure, but where antimetabole uses repetition, chiasmus does not. Let's pretend that we're writing a dystopian novel for young adults. The main character 16-year-old Tibios, known for his lyrical language, is trying to convince his girlfriend Annis that the rulers of their world are subverting all that is good. In an impassioned speech about how their culture of peace and love is being destroyed by those who have overtaken their world, he says, "You hate what you want to

love, and you love what you want to hate." Granted, you may not be using such devices frequently, but a sparing use of them can heighten your language and, therefore, the emotional hook. Reordering syntax (the order of words) can be soothing. Of course you will use these figures of speech appropriately for your work. What works in a YA novel may well not work in a picture book or young chapter book.

STEP 2: *Describe feelings without words.* Convey an emotion without saying "He was angry" or "She was sad."

ACTION: Look for places where you can emphasize a character's feelings by not stating them in words. Use her actions to show what she is feeling. Try to avoid clichés like having the MC (main character) slam a door when she's angry. Perhaps she closes the door with exquisite control, revealing that her anger is such that she has to do everything very carefully to keep from exploding. How else can you show a feeling? Have your MC do the opposite of what she is feeling or what she is saying. Is she overwhelmingly sad? Have her laugh and talk more loudly than usual, her way of masking the pain inside. Another technique is to have the MC notice something concrete that has nothing to do with his feelings but comes to represent them.

STEP 3: *Craft a protagonist with whom the reader not only identifies but also roots for because he can't help himself.* In previous articles on characterization, we've discussed drawing compelling main characters. Such characters do not need to be perfect; in fact, they shouldn't be perfect. Perfect equals boring. In addition, refrain from having the MC's life be perfect. If everything is perfect in his life, he has no reason to change. Give him a problem to solve or a goal to reach, then give him the skills to solve the problem or

Emotional Hook..continued

to reach the goal. Just as importantly, give him qualities that will have readers hoping he succeeds. Some of you may object right along now that many books have been published where the MC is hardly appealing. In fact, he may be a downright nasty person for whom there seems no redemption. There have been books, television shows, and movies where the MC is a villain, even serial killers. I can't and won't speak for that. But we are writing for children, teens, and young adults and bear a responsibility for how our words affect them. You are, of course, free to disagree.

ACTION: Take a close look at the MC of your current work and identify what makes him appealing, what makes him sympathetic, what makes him someone for whom your readers want to cheer on. Maybe our 12-year-old protagonist, Jeremy, and his family have had to go live with his grandparents because his father lost his job during the pandemic. (Families returning to live with grandparents or grandparents having to live with their grown children is not uncommon during this time of uncertainty.) The problem is that this family is not the Waltons (you'll get this reference if you're over 50). The three generations are struggling to live together. Jeremy especially is having a hard time with his grandparents who have extremely fixed ways of doing things. They don't like all the time Jeremy spends on his devices. They don't like that he wears his baseball hat in the house. In fact, they don't like quite a bit about Jeremy. For his part, Jeremy doesn't care for the way his grandparents are always asking him questions and getting on his case about the way he dresses, the way he treats his online learning so casually, the way he leaves his dishes in the sink, etc.

How are we going to make Jeremy more appealing? It turns out that Jeremy has a tender heart when it comes to animals. His grandparents' elderly dog, Gemma, needs more and more care, including making sure she gets some exercise. Jeremy takes over caring for Gemma and finds satisfaction in that. This bridges a new understanding between Jeremy and his grandparents. Jeremy becomes not only a sympathetic character but also an appealing one as he tries to navigate in this new world in which he finds himself. Ask yourself what kind of character are you asking a reader to spend 100 or 200 or more pages with. Is he worthy of the time and effort your reader will be expending?

STEP 4: *Involve something noble, work toward a higher cause.* No, I'm not talking about a knight throwing his cloak down so that a lady may step over a puddle without getting her dainty slippers wet. I'm talking about imbuing your work with higher values, whether it be a friend taking the blame for his buddy's prank at school or a brother risking his life to save his little sister when she falls into a swiftly moving river on a family camping trip. Most of us want to feel that we are part of something larger than ourselves. For a book for preschoolers, the noble action may be as simple and sweet as sharing a toy with a younger sibling.

ACTION: Read through your WIP and find a place (several, if you can) where selflessness and generosity and other noble motives can be showcased. These should not be "thrown" into the book with no regard for context or content. Instead, dig deep and find scenes where you can reveal these finer qualities. Allow your MC to rise to his noblest self. I predict that your readers will respond with appreciation.

WRAPPING UP

Can you include all of these elements in every book? Maybe. You may focus on one or two more than the others, but you can strengthen your emotional hook, and, indeed, the entire book if you use these techniques. Take them out for a test drive. You may be pleasantly surprised at the results.

 writing blueprints

Frequently we will be incorporating Mini Blueprints into CBI, which are based on the step-by-step way of learning in our full Writing Blueprints. If you're not familiar with our longer Writing Blueprints that take you through the process of writing, editing, submitting, marketing, or self-publishing your book, check out free trial editions here: <https://writingblueprints.com/p/free-trial-editions-of-our-top-blueprints>

INDEPENDENT BOOKSTORES Provide a WEALTH of INFORMATION & SUPPORT for Authors

interview by Sharon O. Blumberg

Independent bookstores often function as the heart of a community. The staff of an independent store can be an author's best friend: they know what kids are reading, they will hand-sell your book to customers, and they'll support you with well-planned in-store events. But remember, as an author, you must function as the store's partner in first providing a high-quality product, and then developing a solid marketing strategy that brings people into the store for your book. I recently spoke with Hannah Amrollahi, the Children's and Young Adult Department Manager of The Bookworm, an independent bookstore in Omaha, Nebraska, about what kids are reading, what she'd like to see published, and how authors can best work with stores on selling their books.

SHARON BLUMBERG: Please tell us a little bit about The Bookworm, and how you came to be the Children's and YA Department Manager?

HANNAH AMROLLAHI: The Bookworm has been serving Omaha and the region since 1986. With over 6,000 square feet of sales space, The Bookworm has earned a reputation for an excellent selection of children's books with a broad range of topics. In addition, we offer a friendly staff that reads and knows the books they sell. The Bookworm also offers a large and unique selection of greeting cards as well as puzzles, games, plush toys, and gifts. The Bookworm is an independent, family business, owned and managed by Phillip and Beth Black.

The Bookworm was my neighborhood bookstore as a child, and the first job for which I applied. I

didn't start as a bookseller until a few years later, in 2011. I have worked here for almost a decade now and began as manager in 2019. It has been a real joy to work in a local business that is connected to the community.

SB: What kinds of books are popular right now with kids at The Bookworm?



HA: We're seeing the national trends, an increase in activity books and diverse titles, as well as an uptick in classics. I find it inspiring that there is not a dichotomy between books we've always loved and ways people are growing their book collections and reading habits. Families reading and talking together (or reading and watching together) is such a rich way to use the increased time together. You're never too old for a read-aloud. Plus, having conversations on the phone and acting as a personal shopper for people, I find our whole staff is putting the books we love into hands of customers. I sold out of my favorite picture book of this year, *Everyone's Awake* by Colin Meloy in two days, once. The conversations we have

with customers are shorter, but so full.

SB: Why do you think these books are selling right now?

HA: Obviously this has been a tumultuous year. People are facing dangers and realities that are intense and relentless. We've stayed open continuously, and often felt like the port in a storm for people. It is such an honor for us to be the first outing for a family or individual in the last several weeks or even months. The truism that books are essential has

Independent Bookstores....continued

been highlighted. People are turning to books for individual activities (helping kids through schooling), to be bolstered by memories and past love (*Charlotte's Web* anyone?), as well as learn and open themselves to new ideas (like Jason Reynolds and Ibram Kendi provide in *Stamped*). Reading as a solo pursuit is challenged by the way our book clubs figured out how to meet online, how we greeted long-time customers to discuss their newest favorite, and how parents introduced their kids to the classics they love. Plus, we have a number of games and puzzles to get us through.

SB: Are there any types of books or subject matter in which you wish authors would cover more?

HA: I have a deep wish to have stories set in the Midwest. One of my all-time favorite scenes is a scene at Carhenge in *Wayward Son* by Rainbow Rowell. It warms my Nebraska heart. If I find books set in the Midwest, it is invariably Minnesota, Appalachia, or "any town USA." These settings, despite my happiness for Minnesotan or Appalachian neighbors, lack the detail and home-grown knowledge that would provide a mirror for Midwesterners of all kinds.

I'm not kidding. For example, in a young adult short story collection focusing on rural stories by own voices authors, Nebraska was not featured. On another note, an author sent me an email saying she was hoping we'd carry her Ingram Spark book set in Nebraska. The town was not real, the author did not appear to have any connection to the state, and the fictitious town was described as the worst place in the world, so that was rough.

I would love to see more stories set in the Midwest by authors, from here, that feel as rich as the Nebraska I find in Rowell's books.

SB: Do you carry self-published books by local authors?

HA: We do! Currently, we carry local or in some cases regional authors in the store per our consignment contract.

SB: Do you have any advice for authors who are setting up book signings or live events in your independent book store, especially post-Covid?

HA: If you are a local author, you are the marketing

department. You are your publicist. Booksellers are busting hips right now making sure our communities are provided for and safe. So respect store's decisions about when and how they will support events. This means, do not press them to connect you with schools that are in session or in-person structures. Finally, try to hitch your wagon to a group event and pitch an idea beyond your books. Just cold-emailing that you have published a book is a weak pitch. Have an idea for how it could go, what promotion you will do, if you can partner with local groups or other authors, how the books will be provided at a wholesale discount, and how they will be returned after the event. Finally, have realistic expectations about how well-attended one store is, along with your publicizing. Understand if you attract lots of people, especially for children's events, it includes kids visiting the store for the event. But it's possible they may not purchase the book, especially if you are booked for the weekly free Storytime. Otherwise, good luck!

SB: What is the best way for an author to approach you for either setting up a live event or carrying their books in your stores? Do you prefer a one-sheet with book information, a press release, a review copy, etc.?

HA: We currently only carry regional and local authors on consignment. If your books are available through Ingram or a wholesaler, it is fine to send an email or provide a reading copy. This does not make the store beholden to returning or reading this reading copy. That said, as a local author, your strength is the connection you have to the community. No one knows better than a local author how to use their city or area for a fun event. They know the rhythm of their city and can plug into its festivals, celebrations, and pre-existing library and bookstore happenings.

SB: Is there anything else you would like to add that I have not asked you?

HA: Authors, congratulations on writing your book! That is incredible! It is like climbing a mountain, running a marathon: something few have done. This book fits into your life and into the life of others. I hope you all are proud of this accomplishment.

To find out more about The Bookworm, including recommended reading and upcoming live and virtual events, go to www.bookwormomaha.com