

Children's Book Insider

The Children's Writing Monthly  July 2021



Why Rejection Cannot Defeat You

**ABOVE THE SLUSHPILE
SUBMISSION CODE:**



**Gnome Road
Publishing**

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At Presstime:

Calls for Submissions for Cricket Media's Youngest Magazines

Two of Cricket Media's magazines for the youngest readers have issued special calls for submissions.

Babybug is a "look-and-listen magazine" for children ages 6 months to 3 years. It presents simple poems, stories, nonfiction, and activities that reflect the natural playfulness and curiosity of babies and toddlers. Editors look for manuscripts that are written in a few simple, concrete sentences and lend themselves to being read aloud over and over.

Babybug publishes **fiction** (up to 6 sentences) that is simple and clear and often ends with a gentle or humorous surprise; **poetry** (8 lines maximum) that explores baby's day or is whimsical; and **first concepts**, a playful take on a simple idea which could be in the form of a poem, story, activity or short nonfiction. See recent issues for examples.

Current needs: **Let's Play, deadline—August 15, 2021.** Poems, stories, finger plays, and action rhymes about little ones' favorite games. These might be baby classics like peekaboo or hide-and-seek, silly personal routines developed with family and friends, or activities with balls, puzzles, or other favorite toys. Looking for playful writing that begs to be read aloud again and again.

Fantastic Fall, deadline—August 15, 2021. Poetry, action rhymes, finger plays, and very short stories that celebrate autumn. Your work might explore trips to the orchard or rainy days spent inside, the season's special games, sights and sounds, or other appealing aspects of fall. Interested in lively writing that the very young will want to hear again and again.

Submit online through Submittable at <https://cricketmag.submittable.com/submit/17819/babybug-magazine-for-ages-6-months3-years>

Ladybug, for ages 3-6, features original stories, poetry, nonfiction, and activities. The editors look for clear and beautiful language, a sense of joy and wonder, and a genuinely childlike point of view. Of particular interest are stories that explore themes of identity (gender, race and ethnicity, neighborhoods, beliefs and traditions); citizenship and global cultures; scientific and technological exploration; and the creative spirit.

Ladybug publishes **fiction** (up to 800 words), including 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. Also interested in **rebus stories** of up to 200 words, **poetry** (up to 20 lines) that is rhythmic/rhyming, serious or humorous, and explores young children's daily lives and imaginations; **nonfiction** (up to 400 words) that are simple explorations of interesting places in a young child's world, different cultures, nature, and science. These articles can be straight nonfiction, or they may include story elements, such as a fictional child narrator. Also seeking **activities and games** (including riddles and crafts), and **songs**.

Current needs: **Exploring Our World, deadline—August 15, 2021.** Narrative nonfiction (to 800 words), nonfiction and nature writing (to 400 words), and poetry (to 20 lines) that explores the world in a compelling way. You can introduce readers to a cultural tradition you know well, or share your love of the natural world by introducing them to an intriguing animal or ecosystem. Looking for writing attuned to a young child's interests and capacity for joy and wonder. Source lists for nonfiction are appreciated.

I Can Help, deadline—August 15, 2021. Submissions about young children learning how to think through problems and help themselves and others. Show young children's creativity and determination as they work through the kid-sized difficulties that come up at home or with friends, or find ways to contribute to their communities. Looking for lively writing and memorable characters and plots.

Submit online through Submittable at <https://cricketmag.submittable.com/submit/17818/ladybug-magazine-for-ages-3-6>

Before submitting, be sure to familiarize yourself with Cricket Media magazines at the library, or view them at the [Cricket Media Store](#). Allow 3-6 months response time for submissions. Other details available at the Submittable links above.

New Literary Agency Accepting Clients

Mary Cummings has formed Great River Literary (www.greatriverliterary.com/) after 13 years as an agent with Betsy Amster Literary Enterprises. Before becoming a literary agent, Mary was Education Director at the Loft Literary Center in Minneapolis where she curated an annual festival of children's literature and selected judges for the McKnight Award from leading editors in children's publishing. She is representing fiction, literary nonfiction and poetry for children and teens, in formats ranging from board and picture books, to chapter books, middle grade and young adult fiction and nonfiction. For picture books, embed the entire text in the body of your email. If you are an author/illustrator, send a link to the dummy and sample illustrated pages (do not send attachments). For longer works, embed the first three pages. Include a bit about your project, some bio info, plus related writing or other relevant experience, including any experience you may have with children. Submit to: greatriverliterary@gmail.com. Do not send attachments—they will be deleted without being read. Responds only to queries of interest. If you haven't heard anything after six weeks, assume it's a pass. Check out this article on Mary's site that details her current wishlist for submissions: <https://www.greatriverliterary.com/articles.asp?pst=18>

Sydney Taylor Middle Grade Manuscript Competition Open to Entries

The Association of Jewish Libraries sponsors the annual Sydney Taylor Manuscript Competition. A cash award of \$1,000 will be given for the best fiction manuscript appropriate for readers ages 8-13, written by an unpublished author. Unpublished is defined as not having published any works of fiction (commercially or self-published) for young readers. The book must be a work of fiction in English with universal appeal of Jewish content for readers aged 8-13 years, both Jewish and non-Jewish. It should reveal positive aspects of Jewish life.

Each entrant may submit one manuscript (64-200 pages) not currently under consideration by a publisher or another competition. Material should be a literary work of fiction in English. The story should serve to deepen the understanding of Judaism for all children. Short stories, plays, poetry, or collections of short stories are not eligible. Manuscripts should be submitted in PDF format by uploading through the AJL website. Hard copies of the manuscript will not be accepted.

To assure impartiality, the manuscript MUST NOT include the author's NAME on it anywhere. DO include the TITLE at the top of every page of the manuscript. Each entrant will submit a cover letter and a curriculum vitae. The cover letter should include a short personal statement and a summary of the manuscript. Combine your cover letter and curriculum vitae into a single document and upload via the AJL website. The deadline for submission of manuscripts is **September 30, 2021**. Do not submit elsewhere until January 31, by which date the winner will be determined and all competitors notified. For full rules and an application, go to <https://jewishlibraries.org/sydney-taylor-manuscript-award/>

New International Imprint Seeks Fiction/Nonfiction for ages 0-7

The Quarto Group creates a wide variety of books and intellectual property products in many formats for adults, children and the whole family, that are visually appealing, information rich and stimulating. Based in London, the Quarto Group encompasses 35 imprints in the UK and the US, and distributes to over 50 countries. The newest imprint is Happy Yak, publishing preschool board books, picture books and accessible nonfiction for 0-7 year olds. Texts should have core child developmental benefits while still being entertaining. Happy Yak is always on the lookout for fresh talent, in particular for diverse voices and perspectives, and will consider unsolicited book proposals from both published and unpublished authors. Submissions should be original, topical and suitable for an international market. A typical proposal would include the following: a synopsis (an outline of the themes and features of the book, and, if relevant, an explanation of the format); a brief author or illustrator biography (including qualifications for writing the book, or a link to an online portfolio); attached pdf of sample spreads if you are an author/illustrator. Send submissions by email to: quartokidssubmissions@quarto.com For more information about Quarto and a look at their other titles, go to www.quartoknows.com/Happy-Yak

Writing Competition for MG & YA Self-Published Authors

The BookLife Prize is an annual writing competition sponsored by BookLife and *Publishers Weekly*. The Prize seeks to support independent authors and discover great written works in nine fiction categories: Romance/Erotica; Mystery/Thriller; Science Fiction/Fantasy/Horror; General Fiction; and Middle-Grade & YA Fiction. The Prize is judged by PW reviewers, editors, acclaimed authors, and publishing veterans, with a grand cash prize of \$5,000 and an author profile in *Publishers Weekly* going to the most outstanding overall finalist, and a \$1000 prize for the winner of each category. All participants receive a Critic's Report (a brief written assessment) of their work by a *Publishers Weekly* reviewer. Fiction entries in all categories listed above **must be received by August 31, 2021**. For more information, and an online entry form, go to <https://booklife.com/about-us/the-booklife-prize.html>. There is a \$99 entry fee.

SPOILER ALERT!

Satisfying Story Endings (and How to Craft Them)

by Jessica Trudel

Storytelling is an art with limitless possibilities, so it may surprise you to learn that no matter what story you tell (or how you tell it) there are only five ways that it can end. This fact applies to all types of stories (written, illustrated, orated) and all types of audiences (child, teen, adult).

In this article, I'm going to explain the five types of story endings, and introduce the Story Endings Matrix. I will also provide examples of real story endings from children's literature, picture books to young adult. As a result, a ****SPOILER ALERT**** is in effect.

Before we talk about how stories end, we first need to understand how they begin. Namely, we need to talk about story goals and story outcomes.

A story goal is the ultimate goal of the central character. Characters can have more than one goal, but the main story goal is the one with the most stakes, where the character has the most to lose. What they stand to lose has to be what the *character* finds valuable, which is often tied to the genre of the story. Death may seem like a high stakes scenario to you, and life the most important thing a character stands to lose, but if the story genre is romance and the character's name is Romeo or Juliet, that may not be the case. You cannot determine the story goal in a vacuum: always consider the genre.

The characters' success or failure at the story goal is directly tied to the story outcome. A story outcome is the effect that the central character's success or failure has on them and those around them. The outcome will be either a net positive or net negative. Why do I call it a "net positive" and not simply a "happy ending"? Because stories are nuanced, emotions are complex, and the ending will vary in how it affects each character and plot thread. Ultimately, when deciding if the outcome is positive or negative, you weigh the two against each other and determine which is greater. Put extra weight on outcomes that affect the characters you're meant to be invested in and that are tied to the story's genre.

ry outcome are intrinsically linked. They cannot and should not be inconsequential to one another. They also cannot be separated from the other elements of the story. Character development is vital to determining if the central character can and should succeed in their goal in the end. Their personality, their motivations, their skills, etc. all play a role in their ultimate success, as does the personality, motivations, and skills of the antagonist. Success or failure can't be just for the sake of it, but must make sense given all pertinent factors.

The same applies for the story outcome. World-building elements like socioeconomics, politics, and magic can all be a factor in the outcome of the story. Your character may succeed, but that doesn't mean the world needs to thank them for it. Success does not always equal a net positive and failure does not always equal a net negative. This is where the Story Endings Matrix comes in.



It's vital to remember that the story goal and the sto-

The Story Endings Matrix is a tool that helps illustrate each type of story ending. The matrix is simple: two columns and two rows, with “Story Goal” as the horizontal label and “Story Outcome” as the vertical label. The Story Goal columns are labeled “Success” and “Failure,” and the Story Outcome rows are labeled “Net Positive” and “Net Negative.” Where a Story Goal column meets a Story Outcome row, that’s a type of ending. This provides us with four types of story endings. They are:

HAPPILY EVER AFTER - Story goal SUCCESS meets NET POSITIVE outcome

DISMAL FAILURE - Story goal FAILURE meets NET NEGATIVE outcome

TRAGIC TURNABOUT - Story goal SUCCESS meets NET NEGATIVE outcome

SWEET SURPRISE - Story goal FAILURE meets NET POSITIVE outcome

But wait...what about the fifth type of ending? We’ll get to the fifth one later.

1. HAPPILY EVER AFTER

The Happily Ever After ending is the most recognizable and common type of ending in children’s literature. With this ending, the central character both achieves success and the outcome is net positive. This ending is common because it provides the highest amount of satisfaction to the highest number of readers. People like to feel positive and happy...with a few exceptions (I’m looking at you Eeyore!).

Examples of Happily Ever Afters in children’s books abound, but we’ll just cover a couple quick examples. In *How to Code a Sandcastle* (2018) by Josh Funk and Sara Palacios, the central character, Pearl, sets out to build a sandcastle with the help of her robot Pascal. She succeeds, with the overall outcome being positive for everyone involved. It doesn’t mean it was easy to do, or that Pearl didn’t experience emotional upsets along the way, but it all worked out in the end.

Happily Ever After doesn’t necessarily mean that *everybody* is happy in the end though, only that the story outcome is more positive than negative. In *Murder Most Unladylike* (2014) by Robin Stevens, two teenagers in 1930’s England establish a Detective Society at their school and attempt to solve the murder of their school teacher. They succeed, and the outcome is net positive,

but people got hurt along the way. This is why an analysis of genre is so important. Mystery generally entails someone getting hurt, and murder mysteries in particular require at least one death. You must weigh the positive against the negative (and consider the genre) when deciding what type of outcome it is.

Some outcomes, however, are negative no matter how you slice them. That’s where the next type of story ending comes in.

2. DISMAL FAILURE

The precise opposite of the Happily Ever After is the Dismal Failure. This occurs when the central character both fails in achieving the story goal and the outcome is net negative. The Dismal Failure is not very common in modern children’s literature. Generally speaking, we like to leave our young readers with a sense of hope, but that doesn’t mean Dismal Failures don’t exist. *Wenjack* (2016) by Joseph Boyden follows the journey of Chanie Wenjack, an Indigenous child who escapes the abuses of a residential school and attempts to walk home to his family. Chanie doesn’t get home (a failure of the story goal), and he doesn’t survive the journey either (a net negative outcome). The story is based on the true story of the real Chanie Wenjack who died in 1966.

A lot of people would describe an ending like *Wenjack’s* as tragic. As a general description it’s certainly true, but it’s not a tragedy in the literary sense. A true tragedy is not simply a sad ending. This is the next type of ending.

3. TRAGIC TURNABOUT

Unlike the Dismal Failure, where the character knows what’s at stake if they fail, a tragedy involves an unexpected turnabout at the end that the central character usually doesn’t see coming (even if the reader does). Usually, the character’s goal is not a noble one to begin with, but not always. In the end, the central character succeeds in achieving their goal, but the outcome is net negative.

Tragic Turnabouts are uncommon in children’s literature for similar reasons as the Dismal Failure. In classic literature, we can look to *The Giving Tree* (1964) by Shel Silverstein for an example. In the book, the boy’s goal is to take from the tree, and the tree’s goal is to give to the boy. They both succeed, but in the end, the boy and the tree are shells (and stumps) of their former selves.

NOTE: Some interpret *The Giving Tree* differently, and may even argue the ending is positive. It’s okay to dis-

Satisfying Story Endings...continued

agree! Different people can glean different takeaways from the same story. It's part of what makes reading – and storytelling – so interesting.

Tragic Turnabouts are more common in series where one book ends as a tragedy, but becomes net positive in subsequent installments. *The Hunger Games* (2008) by Suzanne Collins is a great example. The goal in the first novel is for Katniss to survive the Hunger Games, and save Peeta if she can. Katniss succeeds, but it turns out surviving with Peeta was not a great idea. Not only did she attract the ire of President Snow, but now she is linked to Peeta romantically and must pretend to love him indefinitely. Katniss is trapped, Peeta is resentful, and Panem is still under President Snow's thumb. It's a Tragic Turnabout of Shakespearean proportions.

Of course, not every failure results in this type of net negative outcome. This is the fourth type of ending.

4. SWEET SURPRISE

In the Sweet Surprise ending, the central character usually realizes that another outcome was just as good or even better than what they had first planned. This is common when, like in the Tragic Turnabout, their initial goal was not that noble or wise to begin with, but that isn't always the case.

In the picture book *Unicorn Day* (2019) by Diana Murray and Luke Flowers, the unicorn characters' goal is to have a unicorns-only day of celebration. When an imposter crashes the party, the unicorns accept the newcomer and even welcome more non-unicorns into the celebration. In the end, they don't succeed in their goal of having a unicorns-only day, but the overall ending is net positive.

Similarly, *The School for Good and Evil* (2013) by Soman Chainani follows best friends Agatha and Sophie as they are taken to the Ever and the Never respectively, two schools designed to teach their students to be good or bad (also respectively). The girls believe they have been put in the wrong schools, and each try in their own way to right the wrong, but it turns out that maybe the fates had it right all along.

So, we've covered the four types of endings on the Story Endings Matrix. What about that fifth type?

5. OPEN ENDINGS

The fifth type of story ending doesn't fall into any of the boxes on the Story Endings Matrix...it falls in the

cracks in between. This is the Open Ending. Somewhere on its way to success or failure, net positive or net negative, the story just...ends.

Not all stories resolve the main story goal or let us see how this affects the overall outcome. The author usually intends for the reader to decide how they think it would end. The open-ending is most common in literary fiction, but can happen in any character-driven story. It can also sometimes happen at the end of a book in a series, a classic cliff-hanger (the bane of every reader's existence).

We don't see open endings often in children's literature, especially for the very young. Kids generally don't like ambiguity, or at least we assume they don't. Still, open endings for little ones do exist. In *Ada Twist, Scientist* (2016) by Andrea Beaty and David Roberts, Ada sets out to discover the source of a smell, but the story ends while she's still trying to figure it out. The story is complete, however, because the story is character driven. Ultimately, Ada and her parents reach a new understanding regarding her...erm...scientific methods. Her character arc is complete, even though the success or failure of the story goal is left open for interpretation.

Open Endings may sometimes be partially resolved. For example, we may get to see the central character succeed or fail, but we don't get to see the outcome of that event on them or others around them. In *Wake of Vultures* (2015) by Lila Bowen, we get to see the hero accomplish the story goal and defeat the "big bad," but we don't get to see the outcome. The book ends on a literal cliffhanger: right after the final battle with the hero literally hanging from a cliff. Is the world better off because of the hero's success? Does the hero even survive? Guess you have to read the next book to find out.

CONCLUSION

This was a very quick overview of the five types of story endings: The Happily Ever After, the Dismal Failure, the Tragic Turnabout, the Sweet Surprise, and the Open Ending. If you'd like to read more about story goals, story outcomes, and story endings, you can find my book, SPOILER ALERT: *Satisfying Story Endings (and How to Craft Them)*, on [Kickstarter.com](https://www.kickstarter.com).

Can you think of other examples of each type of story ending? Let me know. Give me all the spoilers. Goodness knows I deserve it for spoiling some of the ones mentioned here...and in my book!

FEAR

A POWERFUL CATALYST

by Jane McBride

Are you a structured kind of person? Do you outline and/or write a lengthy synopsis before you ever start writing? Or are you a pantser, like I am, and just start writing with your only goal being that of a happy ending? Either way, your main character (MC) will be taking some kind of journey, whether or not he identifies it as such. What kind of journey the MC takes depends upon his age, your targeted readership's age, his goal, the tone of your book, and a host of other things.

What threatens your story's character? What is he most afraid of in all the world? What would he do to avoid facing this threat? Would he cheat? Would he lie? Would he run away? What would ... and what wouldn't ... he do?

All plots need tension to keep the pages turning. One of the best ways to create tension for your characters is to explore what they're afraid of, and then force them to face that fear. But to really know how your main character (MC) would act in a threatening situation, you, the author, have to know what scares her down to her toes.

Let's take a look at some common fears and how they may work in some scenarios.

Fear of speaking in public. Did you know that surveys show more people are afraid of speaking in public than they are of death?

Thirteen-year-old Sawyer wants to be class president and get his class involved in a service project for a homeless center where he volunteers every weekend. However, Sawyer has a problem. He is petrified of speaking in public. This is not just sweaty-palms-scared, but totally-terrified-out-of-his-mind scared. Candidates for president have to give a speech in front of the entire school in an assembly. Sawyer tries to find a way around this requirement. He considers backing out of the election but ultimately rejects that idea. If he can't do this, he fears he won't find the courage to do anything else in his life. Finally, he sucks it up and gives the speech. He speaks passionately about helping at the homeless center and tries to show his classmates what they can do together

as a class to help others. We want Sawyer to succeed and he does, but not in the expected way. Sawyer gets very emotional over the subject of the homeless shelter and becomes choked up while speaking. He finishes the speech and sits down, keeping his head bowed. The other two candidates give polished speeches, and he resigns himself that he'll be lucky to get one vote. But the election results surprise everyone. Sawyer wins by a large margin. It turns out that his classmates were impressed by Sawyer's passion in talking about his volunteer work.

What could Sawyer have done instead of giving the speech?

- He can withdraw his candidacy.
- He can give a "canned" speech that doesn't require him to bare his feelings.

Fear of being in the woods alone. Fourteen-year-old Jenna's family is going on a camping trip in Rocky Mountain National Park. Jenna doesn't like camping, but she goes on the yearly trip because it makes the rest of the family happy. This year, her father, who was a Marine, challenges Jenna to spend a night alone away from the family camp.

Jenna is deathly afraid of the woods at night. She has been able to tolerate the family camping trips because she is with her whole family—parents, older brother, and two younger sisters. The idea of being on her own for an entire night is terrifying. What if she encounters a bear? What if a snake finds its way into her tent? Worst of all, what if she gets lost and can't find her way back to her family?

Jenna's father knows of her fears. Though he is not cruel, he does not put up with being ruled by fear and won't allow his children to let fear dictate their lives. Yes, Jenna is truly scared of accepting this challenge, but she is even more afraid of something else. What could that be? She is afraid of disappointing her father. A no-nonsense man, her father expects his children to "white-knuckle" their way through anything. How can she say no?

FEAR: A Powerful Catalyst..continued

Jenna follows the map her father has hand-drawn for her. It takes her to an isolated clearing in the woods. There, she sets up her tent and builds a small fire. Teeth chattering, she hunkers down for the night and prepares to wait out the ordeal. In the morning, she completes the list of tasks her father has given her, except for trapping and killing a rabbit for a noon meal. Jenna returns to the family campsite with new-found confidence. That confidence gives her the courage to tell her father that she loves him but that she will no longer do things just because he thinks she should. She also tells him that she did not trap and kill a rabbit. Her father applauds her choice and tells her that this is what he's been waiting for—for Jenna to stand up for herself.

In doing this, Jenna finds that she is stronger than she ever thought. She faced her fears of spending a night in the woods; more importantly, she faced her fear of standing up to her father.

What could Jenna have done instead of accepting the challenge?

- She can refuse.
- She can run away.
- She can plead with her father to not ask this of her.

Fear of being separated from parents. This is a common fear among small children.

Four-year-old Ryan has never spent the night away from his parents. Ryan's grandparents, who live in the same town as his family, have invited Ryan to spend Saturday night with them, and then go to a restaurant for pancakes the next morning. Ryan is excited at the idea, but he is really, really scared about being away from Mommy and Daddy. What if he has a bad dream during the night? What if he wets the bed? Would Grandma and Grandpa get mad at him? What if he gets thirsty but can't find the kitchen? All of these what-ifs and more run through Ryan's mind. But Ryan really wants to go to his favorite restaurant for breakfast on Sunday and get the chocolate chip pancakes (something his mom only lets him eat on special occasions). Ryan goes to his grandparents' home and joins them in "movie night," watching a movie and eating popcorn. He has so much fun that he forgets to be scared until bedtime. As Ryan stares at shadows in the unfamiliar bedroom, he imagines they are chocolate chip pancakes, and eventually falls asleep. In the morning, he's rewarded with his favorite restaurant breakfast.

What could Ryan have to get out of spending the night at his grandparents' home?

- He can tell his parents that he's not ready to be away from home for a night.
- He can ask if he can spend the evening with his grandparents and then have his parents pick him up before bedtime and take him home.
- He can pretend he's sick and therefore can't spend the night.

Now that we've looked at some common fears, let's look at how to use fears as a catalyst for action in a story:

Make the fears age-appropriate. Four-year-old Ryan would not have encountered the fears that Sawyer and Jenna. Nor would spending the night at one's grandparents' home be frightening for the older kids.

Present the character with an even greater fear. In Jenna's case, she feared disappointing her father even more than she feared staying alone in the woods at night.

Use visceral reactions in describing the fear. It's not enough to say, "Sawyer was terrified of speaking in public." Show his sweaty palms, dry mouth, jumpy stomach, etc.

Have the character think about what happens if he doesn't do what he is most afraid of. Show him agonizing over the consequences. In Sawyer's case, he thinks about what will happen to him if he doesn't face this fear.

Make the situation eliciting the fear integral to the plot. It should not be tossed in just to show that your MC is afraid. It must be inherent in the story itself.

IN CONCLUSION

Fear is a motivating force, not just for children and teens but for all of us. Use it to strengthen your plot and your characters. Show their struggles to overcome whatever fear they harbor. And then show them conquering the fear in their own unique ways.

SANDRA SUTTER

Founder and Publisher



Gnome Road Publishing

interview by Lynne Marie

Sandra Sutter is an award-winning picture book author of *The Real Farmer in the Dell* and *Stan's Frightful Halloween* (both illustrated by Chantelle and Burgen Thorne and published by Clear Fork Publishing). This year she opened [Gnome Road Publishing](#) with the goal of producing engaging and informative books for young children by talented creatives in the kidlit community.

LYNNE MARIE: First of all, congratulations on the new path you've taken! It's so exciting to see someone make the leap from author to publisher! What made you decide to embark on this journey? What inspired the name Gnome Road Publishing?

SANDRA SUTTER: Thank you! I appreciate the opportunity to talk with you and the *Children's Book Insider's* readers about Gnome Road Publishing. Let me start with the easiest answer. Gnome Road is an actual place in the mountains of Northern Colorado. It is not so much a road as it is a short dirt path where locals have placed garden ornaments and toys in the trees and rocks along the way. It is also called Elf Lane, but as you can see, I prefer gnomes (no offense to the elves). I spent a lot of time as a child hiking, fishing, biking, and playing in that part of the mountains and equate it with beauty, happiness, and adventure.

As far as embarking on the journey, there are two parts to this answer. On a personal level, I knew rather early in my writing career that a publishing role might be right for me. By nature, I am a systems-oriented thinker (my master's degree was rooted in systems theory) and tend to focus on how different parts work together. I am also a former counselor, mediator and attorney, so I gravitate towards collaborative projects and building relationships. These are skills and interests that fit well with being a publisher.

The second part is that I have an opportunity to contribute something positive to our young readers' lives beyond my own stories. There is an infinite number of possibilities for creative and diverse content by working with other authors and illustrators. I like the challenge in finding stories with this potential while also being works that kids themselves want to read or listen to time and time again.

LM: What is your mission for your new publishing company? Will your books have a particular focus? What genres will be represented in your catalog?

SS: We have two mission statements at GRP (found on the website). The first is to our readers, and the second is to our creatives. Our books are made in the interest of benefiting all involved, not only those who enjoy the outcome of our efforts. Overall, however, I feel there is one term that conveys our focus: re-readability. We aim to publish stories that kids of all ages (even us "older" ones) want to read and reread with continued and lasting enjoyment. Within that framework, there is inherent

flexibility to publish all types of stories. Initially, however, we will primarily publish picture books and a very limited number of works for older children.

LM: List five words that describe the essence of a Gnome Road Publishing book.

SS: The first would be *treasured* in that I believe books that children choose to read many times are those they love the most. I would also describe them as *accessible*, *engaging*, *informative*, and *kid-centric*.

LM: Each book is like a stepping stone in our journey. What did you learn from writing, revising and/or publishing *The Real Farmer in the Dell* (Spork, 2019).



Sandra Sutter...continued

SS: *The Real Farmer in the Dell* was written early in my writing career. Thankfully, I received good feedback from my very first critique partners and had the good fortune of being teamed up with an amazing editor and art director, Mira Reisberg, and two talented illustrators, Chantelle and Burgen Thorne. It was a collaborative process from the beginning and Mira included me in some of the developmental steps that I might not have been able to witness or comment on in a larger publishing house.

Being that it was my debut work, I also learned foundational skills related to marketing, publicity, and promotional opportunities, although admittedly it was a bit like stumbling in the dark. I realized some steps were beyond my control as an author whether I wanted to pursue them or not. It was just as helpful to identify and learn about those as it was to work on aspects of the publishing process within my control.

LM: Likewise, what did you learn from *Stan's Frightful Halloween* (Spork, 2020)?

SS: Since I worked with the same publisher and publishing team, it essentially helped me to refine some of my existing ideas about how to go forward with GRP. Each publishing house is different, so I have had to do a lot of research independent of my own experience and knowledge base to put the structures and processes in place to lift GRP off the ground in a way that fit with my vision. Not surprisingly, my training and experience as a counselor and attorney have been just as valuable, too!

LM: Please explain for our readers how being an independent publisher differs from being a traditional publisher. I find it commendable, that from the onset, you value your authors enough to offer advances.

SS: Independent publishing can mean different things to different people. There are self-publishers and hybrid publishers who fall under the umbrella of "independent" as well as publishers who are structured according to traditional models. In this latter context, independent means free of the control and influence of a larger parent company. GRP falls into this category, which helps to explain why we offer author advances. Although

we cannot compete with the advances given at large publishing houses, being small and independent does give us some freedom and flexibility that perhaps larger houses lack, particularly with decision-making, timelines and content development. I also work closely with authors and illustrators on all aspects of the publishing process, which makes for a collaborative, team approach.

LM: As someone who has been in the business for a long time, I am always seeing the need for changes. As an independent publisher, you have some control to make these changes. What do you intend to do differently than traditional publishers?

SS: Again, I can't say being described as independent is incompatible with the word "traditional". We follow a traditional model, so we are in fact a traditional publisher. The key difference is that we don't have to answer to a parent company, board of directors, or other oversight committee. There are certainly things we can change, but there are also systemic barriers that prevent us from doing so dramatically, particularly in the picture book market. For example, lowering the cost per unit (without sacrificing quality) and gaining visibility in the marketplace are key factors that contribute to building a successful and sustainable publishing program. Unfortunately, there is not much flexibility at present in how this is accomplished. I feel, however, there are opportunities in the evolution of social media and networking, and in materials/product delivery that offer ways to develop and distribute content beyond (and in collaboration with) existing formats.

LM: During our conversation, you explained what your goals are as far as distribution and quality books. Please explain the challenges you face as an independent publisher and how you plan to overcome them and make an impact with your company. How do you hope to make Gnome Road Publishing stand out from other publishers?

SS: I think I may have answered this above to some extent. Product quality is traditionally (and currently) most likely achieved through print runs, which has much larger upfront costs than print on demand options. For any new company, this is a major concern and challenge. Given that picture books take about two years to produce and the (almost) finished prod-



Sandra Sutter...continued

uct must be delivered several months in advance to the leading trade review outlets, a publisher essentially floats that expense (as well as author and illustrator advances) until sales revenue comes in. I believe those reviews are important to visibility, along with working with a distribution partner (another expense that comes out before we get paid), so these aren't challenges to be side-stepped or "overcome." Rather, I have embraced them as part of the process. The challenge comes in finding ways to ease dependence on the traditional ways of doing things and in making products that people and organizations want to buy (and thus, continue on in the marketplace). I talked above about how our books could be described and our focus on re-readability. My goal is for GRP books to stand out for content that is driven by what children want over anyone else, including my own beliefs about what that should or might be. Obviously, I cannot take myself out of that formula, but I try to do this to the best of my ability and in collaboration with an acquisitions and editorial advisory team who share in this mission.

LM: How do you plan to support authors as far as marketing and promotion? What is expected of a Gnome Road author in this regard?

SS: All creatives come to GRP with individual strengths, so we start by looking at those strengths in context of what GRP does generally for creatives. Having a distributor, sending out for professional trade reviews, assisting in blog tours and promotional opportunities, and finding outlets for direct-to-consumer publicity and marketing are a part of the matrix from which we expect creatives to build. This could be through a strong social media presence or connections in related organizations or with buyer influencers, for example. However, at a minimum, I would expect authors to utilize or develop several tools that work for them, such as joining a collaborative book promotional group, giving interviews, obtaining reviews, and spreading the word among people both within and outside the kidlit community.

LM: What are the current needs of Gnome Road Publishing? What genres and topics are you looking for?

SS: We split GRP into three general divisions to better manage submissions and the focus of our work during certain times of the year. Authors of middle-grade through young adult works submit through Gnome Road Publishing. Authors and author-illustrators of picture books through chapter books submit through the Little Gnome Books imprint. We update our wish list on the GRP website prior to each submissions window to give an idea of what we are looking for (or not looking for) based on current projects and future needs.

We also have the Gnome Wild! imprint for what might be described as novelty or special interest items, which we hope to develop in the future. We are not focusing on it presently, but do read submissions from creatives who have ideas for it. You never know!

LM: Please share the qualities that you look for in a picture book. What is important for writers to remember when writing/submitting picture books to you?

SS: It could be distilled down to that key word again: re-readability. The question is, of course, what makes a story one that kids want to read again? Given the diverse backgrounds, needs and interests of all children, it seems that could be anything. But I feel like there are a few universal themes that occur in some of the most loved children's books. Humor, rhyme/rhythm, heart, facts, and repetition/predictability. Each book will have a unique combination of these elements, but when I look at a submission, if it effectively uses two or more of these at once, I will no doubt put it in the pile for strong consideration.

LM: How do you go about pairing artists with your authors? Do you have a stable of artists you work with, or do you accept submissions? If so, what are the particular guidelines for artists?

SS: Pairing an illustrator with an author's text is a challenge, but also one of the parts of publishing books for children that I love best. For picture books, the right combination can make a great story even more extraordinary. It is such a magical process. It also takes a lot of time. I spend hours reviewing agency websites, entering relevant Twitter and Instagram hashtags, looking through my submissions files, visiting blogs such as Kathy Temean's *Illustrator Saturday* feature, and combing through websites of artists I met when assisting in the Children's Book Academy's illustration course.

There is no official GRP stable yet, and although I am sure I will want to work with some of the same artists on additional projects, I also like new talent. We accept submissions from illustrators at any time and have specific instructions on the website.

LM: Likewise, what are you looking for in an artist? What is important for illustrators to remember when submitting postcards or portfolios to you?

SS: Each project will demand what I look for in an artist, so I think less of an individual's style and artistic expression when I look at a submission and more on whether they appear experienced enough to complete a project. I have found some portfolios don't always capture this and a visit to Instagram or a website is more helpful. Be as-

Sandra Sutter...continued

sured that I am going to look in those places anyway, so sending those links with the portfolio is always helpful. Also, I want someone who works collaboratively and is not afraid of feedback or to ask questions. Go ahead and tell me something about yourself and how you manage projects in the query so I have a better idea of how we might work together.

LM: Please share a slush pile success story for an upcoming book and tell us what drew you to that particular submission.

SS: A number of the manuscripts we acquired came through the slush pile. The ones that did not were from Twitter pitch events and a blog pitch challenge. A great example from the slush is author-illustrator Bonnie Kelson's *Nudi Gill*. It is an informational fiction story featuring a nudibranch named Gill. I never paid much attention to nudibranchs before, but Bonnie's combination of fun and colorful artwork with a spunky, interesting ocean creature interacting with the most adorable young snorkeler really drew me in. It had humor, facts, and an amazing character – and that got it to my Acquisitions Team. Likewise, author Kari Gonzalez sent *How to Hatch a Reader* not long before the last submissions window closed. She had a professional, well-written query letter with a short, humorous pitch, comp titles and a brief mention of marketing hooks. And her story didn't disappoint; it lived up to all that her query promised.

LM: How open are you to new talent? Do you consider social media platforms? What do you want to see in a query?

SS: We love new and more experienced talent alike. Having published a book before is not a requirement to be part of the GRP team of creatives. Building an author platform and/or having a related, but “wider-net” social media presence is helpful, and we do look at this before making an offer as part of a general strengths analysis. However, a good story is a good story. I would rather work with a good story and help a creative build a platform than the other way around.

For queries, the best advice is to follow the publisher's specific directions. They are there for a reason. If they say to include the rhyme scheme and meter, please do so. If you send a manuscript with a poorly articulated query (or without one), it will not be taken seriously. Do not attach files when asked to place the manuscript in the body of the email. If the directions say comp titles are desired, but not required, go the extra mile and include them.

LM: Please share a helpful tip for readers to assist them in

ascertaining if their manuscript is ready for submission.

SS: First, at the very minimum, make sure the manuscript has gone through your critique group and you have revised it based on trusted feedback. Repeat. Then repeat again. I cannot overstate the importance of critique partners.

Sandra Sutter is offering an **Above the Slushpile** submission opportunity to Children's Book Insider subscribers for July 2021. This includes submissions to the following imprints: Little Gnome Books (picture books through early middle grade), Gnome Road Books (upper middle grade and young adult), and Gnome Wild! (novelty books). Though the publisher is currently closed to submissions (except for the CBI Above the Slush opportunity), you can go to www.gnomeroadpublishing.com/submissions and see current needs for each imprint and how to submit. Email Above the Slushpile submissions to Sandra Sutter at submissions@gnomeroadpublishing.com with the code **CBI GRP July Submission** in the subject line. Submissions must be emailed by **July 31, 2021**. Due to their small size, Gnome Road Books can only respond to submissions they are interested in. If you have not heard back after 60 days, assume it is a pass.

---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-cheatsheet)
- Your work has been critiqued by a beta reader, critique partner/group, or a freelance editor.
- You have thoroughly revised and polished your manuscript.

Surviving and Thriving During

REJECTIONS

by Jane McBride

Many years ago, I belonged to a writers' group that offered an end-of-the-year prize for the member who had received the most rejections during the year. Guess what? I won.

It was a dubious honor. It was an honor I hadn't sought, but there it was. I had received so many rejections that it had become a kind of macabre joke each month when we reported our news—acceptances and rejections—in the group. My rejections included books, short stories, articles, fillers, and greeting card verses. You name it and I had tried it. And failed.

But failure wasn't going to deter me. As Dolly Parton sang in *Hard Candy Christmas*, "I won't let sorrow bring me way down."

So I kept trying.

How did I get through the dozens, hundreds, of rejections that I had racked up, and, in fact, continue to rack up? (Selling doesn't mean that the rejections stop coming, at least in my case.)

So here are my rejection survival tips:

I reminded myself that I had sold a few things. A couple of editors had thought I'd shown talent. That sustained me during the very long years of not selling anything.

I set goals for every week. The goals changed as did my writing over the years, but I continued to set them. One goal was to submit two things every week, whether they be a query, a proposal, a short story, or whatever. This allowed me to give myself a "gold star," like little children receive for completing an assignment. It's amazing what a visual reward will do

for morale.

I wrote every day (but Sundays). I saw writing as my job. I showed up every day and put in my hours.

I commiserated with friends. Not that I wished my friends bad luck with their writing, but it helped to have others who were in the same boat and experiencing similar setbacks. We cried together. (Literally.) We encouraged each other. We kept writing even when we had little reason to believe that success would ever be ours.

I joined a group within our group, The Last Mile Club, members who were close to selling, but whose elusive goal remained just out of our reach. This was in the pre-email days, so we sent a snail mail letter through the six members of our group and each wrote on it. It seems very primitive now, but those bulky letters that arrived every sixth week were a touchstone for me in the road to publication.

I invested in good tools, purchasing a computer and printer and upgrading when it became necessary. I also invested in myself, enrolling in classes and workshops and attending conferences even when I could scarcely afford it, all in an effort to improve my writing.

I came to see rejections as failing forward. Each rejection represented a step toward reaching my goal. Form rejections became personal letters with hand-written notes of encouragement. Notes on manuscripts often accompanied these rejections with ideas to strengthen conflict, beef up plot, and make the characters more appealing. Eventually, the letters held phrases such as "This won't work for us, but send us another project."

Surviving and Thriving...continued

I developed a thick skin. In a previous article, I shared one particularly scathing rejection where the editor went beyond simply sending a form letter, but seemed to take delight in saying, “This is terrible.” She then went on in listing all the ways in which my submission was terrible. Finally, she ended the letter by saying, “Good luck in finding another career.” I won’t lie: it hurt. Unbelievably so. But, after a week of pouting and vowing to give up, I started another manuscript.

I ate chocolate. And more chocolate. Eating chocolate is not a good idea to get through receiving rejections, as chocolate tends to stay on the hips far longer than it should. I’m still carrying around the effects (pounds) of eating my rejection sorrows.

I surrounded myself with positive people who were seeking the same goals I was. This meant finding a writing chapter with people who were writing in the same genre I was. Over the years, I’ve joined (and left) several groups, finally finding one whose members were unfailingly generous with their expertise and encouragement. Sometimes, I’ve had to leave groups when the atmosphere became toxic with negative comments and jealousies. Though I was sad to have to make those moves, I had to protect my most valuable asset—my refusal to give up.

I always had something “out there.” Whether it was a short story, a proposal, or a full book manuscript, I kept submitting. When one project was rejected, I had the hope that something else would be accepted. It was a numbers game. The more things I submitted, the more likely I was to earn an acceptance.

I improved my craft. I went to conferences, took classes, attended workshops, all in an effort to learn how to write. I continue to do these things, believing that no one can ever know enough. I learned that the best way to improve my craft is to practice it, which means writing.

I mentored others. Though I knew I was far from being an accomplished writer, I also knew that I could help others in some small way. I volunteered with a school program, mentoring a middle-school girl who wanted to write. I also critiqued friends’ work, offering encouragement and gentle ideas of how to

improve. In giving back, I was not only helping others; I was also helping myself as I learned techniques that worked and that didn’t.

Finally, I refused to give up. Among the writers’ group I mentioned at the first of this article, I and one other woman are the only ones who are still writing. One by one, other members moved on, giving up on their dream. I respected that, as they found other dreams to replace that of writing. That wasn’t for me, though. Despite enduring many lean years when I sold nothing, I kept trying. Writing always had and always will be my dream. That dream has been realized with 40 book sales and hundreds of short story and article sales. I share this not in an attempt to brag, as I realize I still have a long way to go. I share it because I want to encourage you, to let you know that the woman who had earned the prize for receiving the most rejections went on to sell over and over.

Rejection is, for most of us, a given in the profession we’ve chosen. But if you’re getting rejected, it means you’re sending your work out into the world. That’s the only way you’ll ultimately find your audience. So be proud of the risk you’re taking, and don’t give up. Every “no” makes you stronger, and more deserving of the eventual “yes”.

Debut Kid Lit Author

AMANDA DAVIS

and The True, Inspiring Story of the 9/11 Flag

interview by PJ McIlvaine



A tiny seed planted in fertile ground may take years to sprout, but when it does, watch out. That's how author/illustrator Amanda Davis nurtured the genesis of an idea that became her debut picture book: *30,000 Stitches: The Inspiring Story of the 9/11 Flag* (Hachette Book Group/Worthy-Kids, May 2021), with illustrations by Sally

Wern Comport. A teacher, artist, writer, and innovator, Davis took comfort in art and words after the loss of her father at a young age. Davis' poetry and illustrations appear in the Writers' Loft Poetry Anthology, *Friends and Anemones: Ocean Poems for Children* (November 2020), and her photograph titled "Icelandic Horse" was published in *The Sunlight Press* (2019). Davis was also the recipient of the 2020 Ann Whitford Paul—Writer's Digest Most Promising Picture Book Manuscript Grant. Davis presently teaches art at a public high school in Massachusetts and was selected as 2020 Secondary Art Educator of the Year. When she's not busy creating, you can find her sipping tea, petting dogs, and exploring the natural wonders of the Bay State (hopefully not all at the same time) with her partner and rescue pup, Cora. You can learn more at Davis' website with lots of downloadable material (www.amandadavisart.com/books.html).

PJ McILVAINE: What was the first thing you ever wrote? And illustrated?

AMANDA DAVIS: Oh wow, this is testing my memory, ha! I can remember writing a story about an alien in outer space when I was in elementary school that

won some kind of award. I can't remember the plot but I do remember a little drawing I did for it, too. I wish I still had it!! I also remember in middle school I won a Young at Arts Award for a painting I did of a young girl and some pigs. I never owned pigs or lived on a farm, so I don't know where that inspiration came from. I suppose it was the eternal animal lover in me. I do remember how excited I was to go to a ceremony in Boston to receive the award and see my painting on display. The painting now hangs in my mother's living room and yes, I have a photo of it below.



PM: Which do you find easier, the writing or the artwork?

AD: The first drafts of my writing tend to come a bit easier than the art. I get visions in my mind of images I want to create but the execution of those ideas is much slower. Also, just like with the writing, if I don't get those images out of my mind, they will fade. I find it easier to capture these seeds of ideas for my writing because I can type into my Notes app on my phone or even do an audio recording of my idea. With the art, it's a bit harder. I try to carry a sketchbook wherever I go in case an image comes to mind, but it takes me longer to do a quick sketch than to take a quick note. I also go in spurts. Sometimes I have lots of ideas for the art, and that is what comes first, and sometimes I have lots of ideas for the writing, and that comes first.

Amanda Davis...continued

Sometimes, too, I may have ideas for one and not the other. You never know how and when the muse will strike!!

PM: Where did the inspiration for *30,000 Stitches* come from?

AD: I first learned about the story back in 2011 when I facilitated an art lesson around the story of the flag with my art students for the tenth remembrance of 9/11. While browsing through some magazines, I came across a blurb about a torn and tattered American flag that flew over Ground Zero in the days after 9/11 and later traveled across all fifty states to be fully restored, touching many hearts and many hands along the way.

Later, it returned to New York on the tenth anniversary of 9/11 as a symbol of hope and unity. I knew I found my lesson. That year, students learned about the flag, and we created our own patchwork flag in remembrance. Years later, the story of the flag still lingered in my head, and I knew I needed to share it with more people. So, I decided to try my hand at crafting a manuscript for it.

PM: Where were you when 9/11 happened?

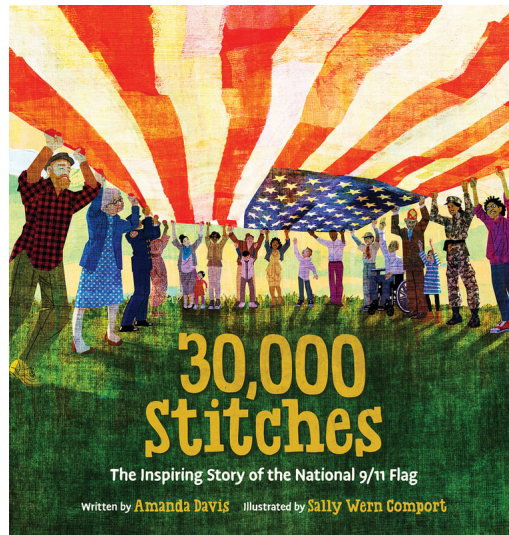
AD: I was in high school when 9/11 happened. I can remember being evacuated from the school, and being corralled onto one of the athletic fields. They had us wait there for a while until they were able to determine that it was safe to proceed back into the school. Many schools, business, etc. were nervous that there were other targets for attacks. I'm from Massachusetts and later learning that two of the planes that were involved in the attacks departed from Boston, hit home.

We were eventually dismissed from school, and I remember going home and watching the horrific images of the attacks on television. It felt surreal. I think each of us who was alive on that day can remember exactly where we were and how we felt. Since we are now at a school-age generation that wasn't alive during 9/11, I hope that *30,000 Stitches* can be an accessible way for children to learn about the events of that day and learn how if we come together and unite, we can overcome

tragedy and hate.

PM: What did the research entail?

AD: The research was in-depth and ongoing throughout the process of writing and publishing the book. I love doing research and am naturally a very curious person. I love to ask questions and seek to understand. Because of this, I often find myself down rabbit holes that once in a while lead to inspiration for new story ideas. I think staying curious is so important when it comes to creativity. You never know where the next story idea is lurking so we must keep our minds open and in a state of wonder. I also love talking to people and learning other people's stories. I have a background in journalism so it's been wonderful combining my love for interviewing people into my nonfiction children's work.



For *30,000 Stitches*, it was a delight getting to research and interview primary sources for the story. From the Ground Zero Superintendent to Flag Tour Staff, the people who I spoke to about the flag were incredible. I am honored to have spoken with such selfless, kind, and generous people whose dedication to helping America

heal after 9/11 was inspiring. To this day, they continue to give back and be of service to others, which is truly exceptional. I feel so honored and humbled that I'm able to tell the story of the flag and make it accessible to children. I continued to rely on these sources throughout the process and as mentioned, leaned on them heavily for accuracy and fact-checking of the art and text. I also wanted to make sure we had their blessing before the book entered the world. I know this isn't always required for nonfiction work but it was important to me that they were happy with the book and that it accurately and meaningfully depicted their experiences.

Now that the book is out there, I've connected with even more people who want to share their own stories and experiences with this flag. Whether it was people who stitched it or knew people who passed away on 9/11, we all have our own connection to that day and as I said, I feel honored that *30,000 Stitches* is allowing people space to reflect and heal once again.

Amanda Davis...continued

PM: How long did it take you to write it and find a home for it?

AD: From thinking about writing it to actual publication, it took about nine years. From having a first draft of the story to publication, it took about three years.

PM: What surprised you the most about the publishing process?

AD: I'm not sure I had very many surprises because I didn't know what to expect since it was my first time. I went into it with an open mind and with trust in my team. I honestly couldn't have asked for a better experience at WorthyKids. My team involved me and supported me in the process all along the way. It felt collaborative, and my editor was always there to listen to my thoughts, offer feedback, and answer any questions (I often had a lot!). I grew and learned so much from the process and am grateful for all those who believed in this book and saw my vision for it. Before going through it, I often heard that the process can be very solitary or that authors don't get a lot of input but that was not my experience. I think this goes to show that as with most things in this industry, everyone's experiences are different and every publishing house and editor has their own unique style of working.

PM: What part did you like the least?

AD: I wouldn't say I liked this the least, but a challenge has definitely been on the marketing side of things and not because I don't enjoy it but because it takes up a significant amount of time. Again, my marketing team at WorthyKids has been a huge help. Even with their support, it's been time consuming, and I've been less productive with my creative projects because of it, but I am learning and developing my skills in this area, so I consider it a win-win!

PM: Did you have any input into the artwork for the book?

AD: Yes, as mentioned above, I had input throughout the process. I was able to weigh in on illustrator selection and saw the art in various stages from sketch to final. Because it was a nonfiction story with a lot of important details, we also relied on my sources to help check not just the writing but the art for accuracy. So, they had some input, too!!

PM: What do you hope readers of the book glean from it?

AD: I wrote *30,000 Stitches* with the hope that it will empower parents and educators to talk to children about difficult events in our history and current day society. We can't shield children from all the bad in the world, but we can help them understand it and show them how to work through it. We can teach them how to cope...how to move forward...and how to unite. We can remind them of the bright spots within the darkness and of the good in humanity.

With that said, although *30,000 Stitches* was written for children, it's a story for ALL people; people of all ages, in all parts of the country, and all over the world. Because at its core, the story is about humanity and shared experiences. When I first wrote this story, I also never imagined that our world, and especially our country, would be in a similar place as it was after 9/11...torn, tattered, tired, and in need of healing. It has been a year fraught with many challenges. Despite this, I truly believe that there is still much more good in this world than bad. There are still people helping people. People loving people. And people striving for change. *30,000 Stitches* reminds us of the good of humanity. People came together to make the flag whole again and to help one another heal. Along the way, they shared their stories of pain, sorrow, suffering, and sacrifice. With each stitch, they helped heal the flag, while also helping heal each other's hearts. Right now, I think everyone's hearts (adults and children) could use some healing, and I hope that *30,000 Stitches* reminds people that there is power in our shared stories, there is power in unity and that if we reach out our hands, we can help heal our hearts.

PM: What do you consider your niche in children's books? Do you plan to write in other kid friendly genres?

AD: Currently, I'd say my niche is lyrical, sparse picture book texts. I have many informational fiction stories and a couple of new narrative nonfiction stories in the works, too. I also have a couple picture book dummies in progress that I hope to debut as author AND illustrator with. One of them is a story that is very close to my heart. I hope to one day explore writing a middle grade novel in verse or even YA.

PM: How long did it take you to find an agent and

Amanda Davis...continued

what was your query process like?

AD: I began querying back in 2017 with other picture book manuscripts and finally signed with Melissa Richeson (who is now at Storm Literary Agency) for *30,000 Stitches*. Melissa and I signed on solely for *30,000 Stitches*. At the time, she was not representing illustrators so she didn't feel comfortable representing my whole body of work, which included some illustrated manuscripts. I loved working with Melissa on editing the story. She helped me tighten up the refrains and make the story more cohesive. I also love her positivity, and encouragement. She always looks on the bright side and has a very calm demeanor, which is much appreciated in this crazy business! It's pretty amazing to have an advocate in your corner during negotiations, too! I'm now working with Jennifer Unter of The Unter Agency who represents my whole body of work. It's been a delight getting to know Jennifer and collaborating thus far. I love that she appreciates the depth in some of my more 'difficult' manuscripts and acknowledges that kids need stories that reflect a range of real-life emotions. She's knowledgeable about the industry, timely, transparent, and I appreciate that she is open to me suggesting editors to send work to as well.

PM: As a lauded high school art teacher, how has that profession helped you in your writing? Do you get story ideas from your students? Do you plan on leaving your day job at some point?

AD: Yes! The common denominator in my role as an art educator and writer-illustrator is my love for storytelling. As mentioned before, as both a teacher and writer/artist, I want to empower younger generations to share their stories and take time to listen and learn from the stories of others. We all have a story to tell. My role as an educator has given me a better appreciation for this. Getting to know my students, and seeing them be vulnerable in their own art and writing has pushed me to do the same. It is also a constant reminder that the younger generations need our stories and need to feel seen and heard through them.

As for getting story ideas from my work in the classroom, yes! *30,000 Stitches* is a great example of gaining inspiration in the classroom because that is exactly where the seed of this story first started!! You can check out the 9/11 flag project (and other projects) I've done with students [HERE!](#)

PM: What is your writing routine like? Have you experienced writer's block? What tips or tricks do you employ to help you in your writing (for example, a self-imposed deadline works for me)? How has the on-going pandemic affected your writing?

AD: I tend to write first drafts as the muse strikes. I find that when my mind is free and clear, ideas flow more freely. Most of my ideas come when I let my mind wander. Most of my mind wandering takes place through meditation, nature walks, sitting near the ocean, in the shower, or when I'm driving, ha! I have oodles of notes and phrases in my Notes app on my iPhone for those moments when ideas strike. I'm much more intentional with my revisions and schedule time to revise. Most of my ideas for revisions stem from suggestions and brainstorm sessions with my critique groups. With their feedback in mind, I often feel inspired to revise and schedule a time to do so.

When feeling blocked, I like creating just for the fun of it. I find if I get too caught up in deadlines, my creativity can become stagnant so I try to give myself permission to just play, whether that's writing a poem or doodling. As far as the pandemic, I was actually very productive creatively when it first started. I was doing doodles-a-day and getting back into watercolor painting. As I geared up for my book launch, I found it hard to maintain this balance and tried not to feel guilty for not producing as much work as I was before. I hope to get back to a more balanced production schedule soon!

PM: If you weren't a writer or artist, what would you be doing? Do you have a passion project? What are you currently working on? What book do you wish you had written and/or illustrated?

AD: Oh my! I'm someone who loves to try new things so if I wasn't writing/illustrating and teaching, I'd maybe be traveling the world with my partner and pup, or running a dog rescue on some remote farmland or singing/playing music in a band (I'd have to sharpen my skills in this area first). As I said, I have lots of other stories in the mix so stay tuned for more!!

THE ROLES AND PURPOSES OF SECONDARY CHARACTERS

by Jane McBride

I love a good secondary character. I love how he/she adds to the story and serves as a kind of foil to the main character (MC). I love that secondary characters can do or say or think things that the main character cannot. I love that they can be goofy or silly or even mean if the occasion calls for it.

Do you remember Ethel in the old TV show *I LOVE LUCY*? Of course you do. Ethel Mertz was unforgettable. First, there is her name. Listen to its syllables: Ethel Mertz. It is not the name of a MC. Then there was her contrast to Lucy. She did her best to talk Lucy out of her harebrained schemes. Ethel was the quintessential best friend who tried to support her friend in her ridiculous ideas, first by trying to convince her not to go through with them and, second, by joining in with her when it became clear she couldn't talk her out of them. Do you remember Lucy and Ethel stomping on grapes in a huge vat in Italy?

Okay, enough about Ethel. Let's move on to what purposes secondary characters can serve:

- Secondary characters (SCs) can move the plot forward when the MC cannot.
- They can highlight aspects of the MC's character which the MC cannot do for himself and provide contrast to the MC. Consider Hermione Granger in the Harry Potter series. Hermione had to study and work hard to become a witch. So intent was she on her studies that she memorized all the textbooks by heart. This was in contrast to Harry who had his powers handed to him.
- They can reveal the MC's backstory without it sounding like an information dump.
- They can act as a sounding board. They can en-

courage the MC and chastise him as well. They can be playful and fun or stern and rigid. Their roles are multiple.

So, how do you write SCs?

Understand that they are there to help illuminate the main character, often in assisting her on her quest to achieving her goals or in preventing her to do the same. Secondary characters should not be “plopped” in a book simply for the author to fill up some pages. They should have integral roles that support or hurt the MC's reaching for her goal.

Get to know your SCs in depth. Their backstory can and will influence them, and, therefore, affect the MC. Just as in creating your MC, you don't have to tell everything you know about the SC, but understanding his/her background will give greater depth to your story.

Don't let the SC overshadow the MC. This can be a real problem when your SC is a strong, memorable character. I've read friends' manuscripts where it was difficult to tell which character was the main one and which was the supporting one. Don't make your reader guess. It's great to have a strong SC, but don't let her eclipse your hero or heroine.

Be careful how you draw your SC. You may find that you want to use him/her as the protagonist in a future book. One writer friend gave her heroine's best friend a fairly obnoxious name and described her in less than flattering terms. Imagine her dismay when her editor wanted her to do a sequel featuring this character. It pays to plan ahead.

Your SC need not be a friend of contemporary age. He may be a mentor or a parent, a child or a pet. He is someone to provide a person (or animal) for the MC to share feelings with, to serve as a sounding

Secondary Characters...continued

board. People who habitually talk to themselves are boring. Anyone, even if he is a not-so-nice person, can be an SC.

In longer, more involved books for older children or teens or young adults, you may have subplots. Often a subplot revolves around an SC. Know that, just as SCs should not overshadow the protagonist, neither should their subplots overshadow that of the protagonist. Keep those elements in balance. If the subplot and SC are truly compelling and demand more time and attention, you may want to re-evaluate your book and give them their own story.

Be aware of the differences between SC and peripheral ones. Secondary characters serve important purposes in a book. Peripheral ones are those who are on the sidelines. Such a character may be a bus driver or a grandparent or a store clerk. This is not to say that these characters can't be important. They may well be. But if their presence is a fleeting one, meant only to facilitate a scene, they probably aren't true secondary characters. They may not even have a name.

What about books for younger readers? Can they have secondary characters, too? Absolutely. The character may be a parent or a sibling or a kitten. Few characters live in a vacuum. It's important to show how MCs act with and react to the others in their environments.

Now that we understand a bit more about secondary characters, let's look at some examples from the young adult series *The Hunger Games*.

Primrose Everdeen. Katniss's sister represented all that was good and innocent in the world. She lacked Katniss's strength and courage, but she had other qualities, such as being able to heal, which Katniss lacked. Prim stood in contrast to Katniss, both heroic in their own ways, but, at the same time, very distinct in their differences. Her death tore Katniss apart and tested her in ways she thought never to be tested, a good example of how an SC can continue to affect the MC even without being present.

Like Prim, **Rue** personified good and innocence.

She died early on, but her presence lived on. She represented what the total evil of Panem did to those who couldn't stand up for themselves against overwhelming depravity.

Effie Trinket. Effie was a complex character. She was not a cardboard cutout but a real person who made both good and bad choices. And then there were her outfits. She did not dress like Katniss or like anyone else; she had her own style that made her stand out.

Johanna Mason. Johanna lacked Prim's sweetness and innocence. She could be mean, even evil. In fact, she might be considered the antithesis of Prim, but readers respond to her bluntness and straightforward manner. Being a winner of the Hunger Games didn't help her, instead it caused her inner conflict and pain.

President Snow. A small, skinny man, President Snow crowns Katniss and Peeta at the ceremonies. However, Katniss knows she wants to punish her.

Cato. A villain. From District 2, Cato makes it plain that he wants to kill Katniss. Katniss has always known that she would have to fight the violence-loving Cato.

Katniss's father. He isn't named in the books, but his influence is strongly felt. Though he died when Katniss was but a little girl, it was he who had taught her how to hunt and to make a bow and arrows.

There are many more secondary characters in *The Hunger Games* series; these are only a few, showing the various roles and purposes SCs can fill.

Draw your secondary characters with the same care and attention as you would your main ones. Give them a backstory, a role to play, a reason to be in the story in the first place.