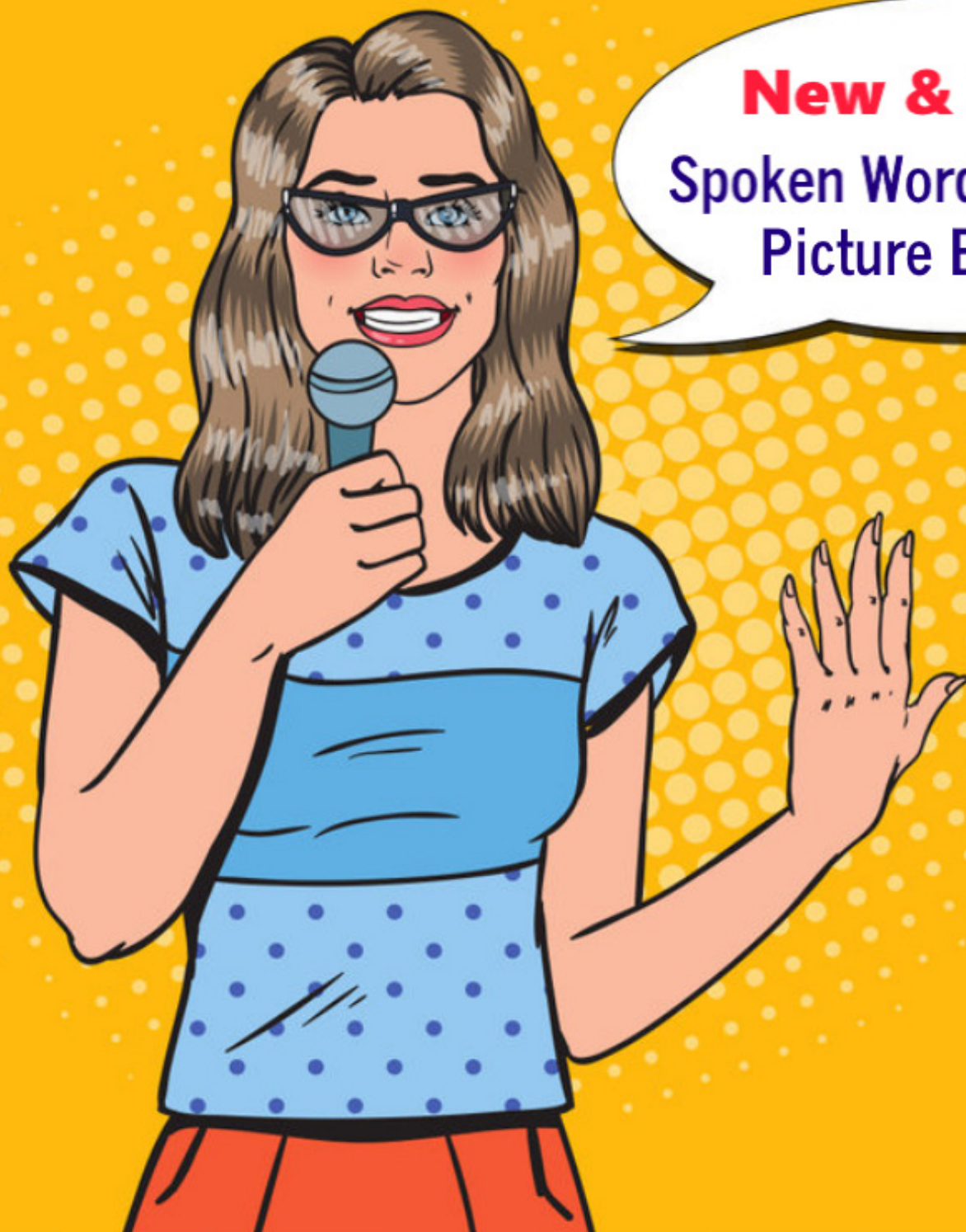


# Children's Book Insider

The Children's Writing Monthly  September 2021



**New & Hot:**

Spoken Word Poetry  
Picture Books

**ABOVE THE SLUSHPILE  
SUBMISSION CODE:**

**Great River Literary**

# Table of contents

At Presstime: New Market Listings, Conferences and Contests.....	2
Genre Spotlight: Spoken Word Poetry by Jean Daigneau.....	4
Agent Spotlight: Mary Cummings, Agent & Founder Great River Literary interview by Lynne Marie.....	6
Bonus Tip: Streamline Your Word Count with Styles by Carol Doeringer.....	9
Writing Workshop: Can a Character-Driven Author Become a Plot-Driven One? by Jane McBride.....	10
Featured Interview: The Barefoot Dreams of Alda P. Dodds interview by PJ McIlvaine.....	12
Book Publishing Today: Hybrid Publishing -- Is it right for you? by Brooke Van Sickle.....	15
Librarian Spotlight: Colleen Tierney Library Manager of Hutto Public Library in Texas interview by Sharon O. Blumberg.....	18

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

# At Presstime:

## Editor Seeks Picture Books with STEM/STEAM Themes

Jackie Kruzie, Editor at Blue Whale Press (an imprint of Clear Fork Publishing) will be open to submissions as of September 1. She is looking for picture book manuscripts (fiction and nonfiction) with STEM/STEAM themes and is open to all authors and illustrators. She's also looking for picture book biographies featuring lesser known figures. She likes fast-paced books that are fun to read aloud and educational without being didactic. Humorous books, especially those that weave in a joke or two for the adult reader, are especially appreciated, as well as texts with fun onomatopoeia that propels the story forward in a natural way. She is not the right fit for rhyming texts, novelty/board books, graphic novels, middle grade, or young adult. Please include backmatter and bibliography with all submissions. Submit online through Query Manager at [querymanager.com/query/clearforkmedia\\_bluewhalepress](https://querymanager.com/query/clearforkmedia_bluewhalepress)

## Mentorship Programs for Authors and Illustrators

**We Need Diverse Books Mentorship Program:** In 2022, We Need Diverse Books will offer 15 free, year-long mentorships for diverse authors and illustrators split among the following categories: Picture Book Text (PB), Middle Grade (MG), Young Adult (YA); and Illustration (IL). (Both fiction and nonfiction writers will enter their application by target age category). The winners will communicate with the mentor for approximately one year in a mentor/mentee custom-defined program. This mentorship period will run from January to December 2022. The writing mentorships are available to diverse writers or any writers or illustrators who have completed a full draft of a manuscript for children or teens featuring a diverse main character or diverse central subject matter. The illustration mentorship is available to any diverse illustrator who has a portfolio and several sample illustrations completed. For the WNDB definition of diversity, please go to [diversebooks.org/about-wndb/](https://diversebooks.org/about-wndb/)

Applicants may only apply for one of the four mentorship categories, so it is up to the applicant to research the available mentors and decide which category will be most suitable for their work. Read about the mentors at [diversebooks.org/our-programs/mentorships/current-mentor-and-mentee-bios/](https://diversebooks.org/our-programs/mentorships/current-mentor-and-mentee-bios/). The application period will be open from October 1-31, 2021. Submissions must not be received before 12:01 a.m. (US Eastern time zone) on October 1, and **must be received by 11:59 p.m. (US Eastern time zone) on October 31**. Applicants are encouraged to apply early in the month. You can find detailed submission guidelines and application form [diversebooks.org/our-programs/mentorships/mentorship-submission-guidelines/](https://diversebooks.org/our-programs/mentorships/mentorship-submission-guidelines/)

**Pitch Wars:** Pitch Wars is a mentoring program for MG, YA, and adult authors where published/agented authors, editors, or industry interns choose one writer each, read their entire manuscript, and offer suggestions on how to make the manuscript shine for an agent showcase. The mentor also helps edit their mentee's pitch for the contest and their query letter for submitting to agents. The mentor also helps edit their mentee's pitch for the contest and their query letter for submitting to agents. Mentors can participate solo or pair up and co-mentor. During the agent showcase, each mentee is featured on a post that includes their pitch and the first page of their manuscript. Writers send applications (query, first chapter, and synopsis with basic manuscript information) to four mentors who best fit their work. Mentors read all their applications and one mentee is chosen by each mentor or set of co-mentors. Together, the mentee and mentor spend about three months revising the manuscript and pitch.

Applicants must have a full-length, finished manuscript that is either a middle grade, young adult or new adult or adult book. Applicants should be unagented and unpublished. Mentors will be announced on September 11, 2021, and **applications accepted from September 26-September 30**. For more information and an application, go to [pitchwars.org/new-start-here/](https://pitchwars.org/new-start-here/)

We Need Diverse Books has extended the deadline for their Walter Grants of \$2000 for unpublished refugee and migrant creators until September 22, 2021. For more information, go to [https://diversebooks.org/programs/walter-grant/?mc\\_cid=586a7aebc8&mc\\_eid=46841ace6a](https://diversebooks.org/programs/walter-grant/?mc_cid=586a7aebc8&mc_eid=46841ace6a)

**Independent Publisher Seeks Literary, Timeless MG and YA**

Persea is an independent, literary publishing house founded in 1975. Persea publishes books for adults, young adults and middle grade readers in a wide range of subjects, styles, and genres, including poetry, fiction, essays, memoir, and biography. They also publish anthologies for middle school and high school classroom use. Their list focuses on contemporary issues expressed through individual experience. Most of all, they are looking for a fresh voice, a clear point of view, and a well-written work that will endure. Persea does not publish traditional genre fiction (romance, fantasy, science fiction, thrillers), self-help, textbooks, picture books or young chapter books. Their books tend to be literary and timeless, rather than high-concept mass market titles. It's important to study their list before submitting. You can see their middle grade books here: [www.perseabooks.com/middle-school](http://www.perseabooks.com/middle-school), young adult books here: [www.perseabooks.com/high-school](http://www.perseabooks.com/high-school), and books for college students here: [www.perseabooks.com/college-1](http://www.perseabooks.com/college-1)

Fiction and nonfiction queries should include a cover letter with the author background and publication history and a synopsis of the proposed work. Attach a sample chapter as a PDF or Word document. Please indicate if the work is simultaneously submitted. The query may be addressed to Karen Braziller, Editorial Director, and emailed to [editorial@perseabooks.com](mailto:editorial@perseabooks.com). Poetry submissions (for collections targeted to middle grade, high school or older) may be queried by sending an email describing your current project and your publication history, and attaching a PDF or Word document with up to twelve sample pages of your poetry. Address query to Gabriel Fried, Poetry Editor, and send to [poetry@perseabooks.com](mailto:poetry@perseabooks.com). Responds to queries of interest within three months. If you haven't heard back after that time, you can assume your work is not a good fit for Persea.

**Nonfiction Magazine for Ages 7-10 Seeks Submissions**

*Ask* is a nonfiction magazine for children 7–10 years old who are curious about science and the world they live in. Each edition of *Ask* is built around a central theme or question. The ideal *Ask* article is an engaging nonfiction story (or cartoon) that is concrete, specific, and appealing to newly independent readers (grades 3–5), but that an adult reader might also find interesting. It should tell a good story, with an emphasis on ideas and problem-solving rather than just facts. Writers are expected to stretch the boundaries of topic themes and look for interesting perspectives and unexpected connections. Welcomes writers from traditionally underrepresented communities and diverse life experiences.

Seeking feature articles (400–1200 words, with sidebars); photo essays (400–800 words); humor pieces (200–400 words); profiles/interviews of scientists, inventors, engineers, artists (200–1000 words); theme-appropriate experiments; science panel cartoons (2–6 pages)

Authors should query with an overview of the proposed article, including scope and treatment, resources, and a draft opening paragraph. For cartoons, provide a rough script, sketches for the first few panels, and one finished or a link to your finished work. Writers new to *Ask* should also provide a resume and two writing samples, including at least 200 words of unedited copy on any nonfiction topic. Authors are expected to ensure that all content is scientifically correct in both conception and detail, and drafts should include a full list of references and sources consulted. Authors wishing to write for *Ask* should consult back issues to get a sense of the tone, style, and range of articles. (Sample copies are available for viewing at <https://cricketmedia.com/childrens-magazines>. Click on “Shop Now” under *Ask* Magazine to view a sample issue. Most libraries also carry back issues).

Queries should be submitted through Submittable at <https://bit.ly/AskSubmissions>

Here are the 2022 issue themes still open for submission:

- *Islands*: Island stories, what makes islands, island animals. Pitches by: September 30 2021
- *Wild in City*: Can wild plants and animals survive in a city? Wild animals adapting to urban places; what makes a survivor; problem neighbors. Pitches by: November 30 2021
- *Facing Fear*: What are you scared of? And why? What is fear and what is it good for? Why do people fear different things? And how can we tame it? Pitches by: January 30 2022
- *Hair*: What is hair? And why isn't it blue? Stories about hair, fur, manes, tails, hairstyles, and why some mammals have less. Pitches by: February 28 2022

# SPOKEN WORD

# POETRY

by Jean Daigneau

Amanda Gorman, the youngest and first US youth poet laureate, likely impressed a lot of us with her performance at President Joe Biden's inauguration. But thinking about her poetry made me realize spoken word poetry is nothing new. During my childhood in the late 50s and early 60s, poetry slams were held as a kind of literary counterculture protest to a post-war, materialistic lifestyle complete with white picket fences and televisions. But what is spoken word and how can it be applied to writing for kids? Let's find out more.

## A Long History

In the late 50s and 60s, beatniks—members of the “beat” generation—showcased their frustration with post-war culture through music, poetry, literature, and art. While stories about Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac pushed beyond the limits of what was acceptable in my young mind, I mostly visualize it today as a lot of finger snapping, cigarette smoking, and black turtle-neck wearing. Poetry slams held open mic nights at dives, coffee houses, and bars everywhere. And anyone and everyone took to the stage. Amateur and professional alike.

Like its name, spoken word poetry is best enjoyed out loud. But as children's writers, and especially for the picture book writers among us, who doesn't want their stories read that way? And the lyrical, sometimes offbeat nature of this writing, with emphasis on specific word choices and internal rhyme, is what makes spoken word poetry so appealing. Yes, even in written books for kids.

## What Makes it Work?

Tameka Fryer Brown, who CBI editor Laura Backes interviewed for a Kidlit Social webinar (#44, available at [writeforkids.org/blog/kidlitdistancingsocial44](https://writeforkids.org/blog/kidlitdistancingsocial44)), gets much of her inspiration from music. Today her picture books include

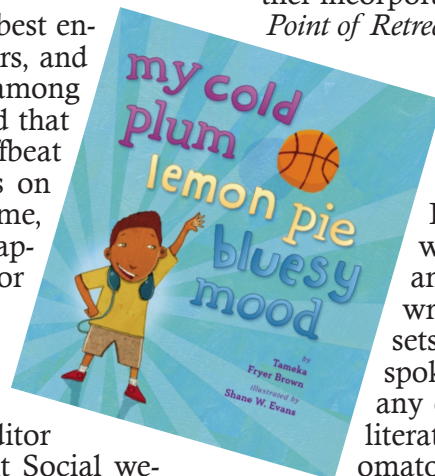
one written in traditional poetry style and two in free verse, but with the musical influence of hip-hop and jazz. She calls it “musicality.”

As with any story, books written in spoken word poetry have all the standard elements—story background and set-up (sometimes called exposition), rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. But as Brown says, “It's important in spoken word how the words tumble off the tongue.”



For her book, *My Cold Plum Lemon Pie Bluesy Mood*, she combines the emotions and moods she's portraying with colors. She uses lines like, “A purple kind of mood, cold plum eating, grape juice drinking, on the couch, bobbing to the beat kind of mood” to pair the feelings that music elicits with the hip-hop off-beat kind of verse synonymous with spoken word.

Spoken word is not just for performers and picture book writers. Two books that incorporate poetry slams and spoken word into young adult novels are *Slammed* by Colleen Hoover and *The Poet X* by Elizabeth Acevedo. Hoover's book is the first of a trilogy that further incorporates spoken word in her follow-up titles, *Point of Retreat* and *This Girl*.



## Where To Begin?

Author Avery White suggests starting with a theme you're passionate about. He calls that first opening the “gateway line.” As with most picture books, and certainly novels and most forms of writing, it's often that opening hook that sets the tone and sucks the reader in. But spoken word poetry, as much or more than any other, makes use of internal rhyme, alliteration, rhythm, word play, repetition, onomatopoeia, and enunciation. Brown calls it “free verse on steroids.” I like to think of it as spoken word with attitude.

Spoken Word Poetry...continued

Once you've got your opening, you don't have to write every sentence to spoken word perfection. Get your ideas down and then look to push your writing to the limit and beyond. Adding sensory images is one way to do that.

Tightening your writing to make every word count is another. This is where you want to flesh out your idea and then choose words that capture the mood and inflection of the story.

Simple tools, like highlighting a word in all caps or using a slightly different font to make that one particular word stand out and almost sing across the page, are easy ways to help readers verbalize your vision of the story. Sometimes the simple use of additional spacing between letters of a word can help readers understand the need to slow down the pace and draw out that pronunciation. This is one genre that allows a wide-open range of elements. So why not push it to the extremes a bit?

### The Last Crucial Element

A must-do rule for writing books using spoken word is the read aloud. While we are often advised to do that with any form of writing, spoken word is meant to be spoken. (I know, big "duh," right?) And that includes early drafts, tightened drafts, and finished drafts. Brown advises authors to "say it out loud. A lot."

The second part of the read aloud is to have someone else read it for you. This works with any writing, but can be especially helpful for finding places where the reader stumbles or where the rhythm and musicality of a story are laid bare and don't work.

While it can take a little practice for any reader to get the hang of reading with the correct inflection and pacing, having someone read that finished draft can help point out those not-quite-there lines that need additional tweaking or some clue to enunciation.

### The Final Word

If you want to know more about writing spoken word, you need to listen to spoken word.

There is no shortcut to knowing how all of those previously mentioned tried and true tools can work without hearing spoken word for yourself.

Just like listening to classical music can enhance study skills, listening, listening, and then listening some more to spoken word poetry can enhance writing skills, even if you don't write spoken word. Listening to the lyricism of spoken word will give you a firsthand feel for that tongue tumbling Brown talks about.

But another tip that might not occur to you is to read spoken word poetry as well. If you're more of a visual than an auditory person like me, reading Gorman's *The Hill We Climb* and picking it apart word by word by word, can help you see how all those wonderful elements look on the printed page.

Perhaps you might one day see how your own spoken word story looks on the printed page as well. Why not give it a try?



#### TITLES BY TAMEKA FRYER BROWN

*Brown Baby Lullaby*  
*My Cold Plum Lemon Pie Bluesy Mood*  
*Around Our Way*  
*Shirley Chisholm: Not Done Yet* (publication date fall 2022)

#### TITLES BY AMANDA GORMAN

*Change Sings, A Children's Anthem* (picture book due out September 21, 2021)  
*Call Us What We Carry* (poetry collection to be published December 2021)  
*The Hill We Climb*, with foreword by Oprah Winfrey

#### OTHER SPOKEN WORD RESOURCES & EXAMPLES

**Project Voice:** Poet educators working to integrate poetry into schools: [www.projectvoice.co](http://www.projectvoice.co)

**Gloria Umanah:** *It Is Finished*

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=PjKq18uZOBu](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PjKq18uZOBu)

**Jesse Oliver:** *Wake Up*

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=04rfgNvvXz8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=04rfgNvvXz8)

**Taylor Mali:** *What Teachers Make*

[www.ted.com/talks/taylor\\_mali\\_what\\_teachers\\_make](https://www.ted.com/talks/taylor_mali_what_teachers_make)

**Sarah Kay:** *B*

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eg-3oywyAA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eg-3oywyAA)

**Amanda Gorman:** *The Miracle of Morning*

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=XOieGJI6g4s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XOieGJI6g4s)

# MARY CUMMINGS Agent and Founder

## Great River Literary



interview by Lynne Marie

**C**ongratulations to agent Mary Cummings who has just branched out from her role as an agent with Betsy Amster Literary to now owning and operating her own agency!

**LYNNE MARIE:** Welcome, Mary! We are excited to connect with you again and share your exciting news with our readers. Members can find our previous interview with you in the September 2019 issue in the CBI archives on The CBI Clubhouse, [www.cbiclubhouse.com](http://www.cbiclubhouse.com) [Note: Only annual members can access the back issue archive under Grab Your Insider Member Perks.] This is a must-read in conjunction with this interview as there is so much to mine there that will supplement the gems you share here! But for starters, please tell us about this new endeavor.

**MARY CUMMINGS:** I loved my thirteen years with Betsy Amster, but she is at a period where she's pulling back on projects, whereas I'm growing, so it felt right to us both to make the change. Living in the middle of the country is something I like to celebrate, and, as I live in St. Paul a mile from the banks of the Mississippi River, I knew the name I wanted for the agency. Most nights I like to go down with my husband to watch the passing scene. Minnesota is known for its lakes, but I find the River to be especially evocative.

**LM:** Are there any significant changes in your procedures and/or focus now that you are running your own agency?

**MC:** Nothing significant, really. I've always been autonomous in selecting clients and projects. And my tastes haven't changed.

**LM:** With an established list such as yours and agents being particularly selective about taking on new clients these days, please share some of the qualities that should be on a writer's checklist before submitting to your agency.

**MC:** Research agencies before you submit. Yes, it involves more work. Get over it! Look carefully at each agency's submission guidelines (consider them firmer than the term might imply). Follow them. Look at agents' wish-lists and at books on their list to see if there is some commonality with your project, then cite that in your query.

**LM:** Which of the above items tends to be most lacking in the submissions you receive? Can you offer any advice on how to avoid this lack?

**MC:** Advice: do your homework. Some people do an admirable job of researching and making it clear in the query why they are approaching me in particular. But some people send what is clearly a blanket email. Typos, cute gimmicks, weird stuff

will get your query ditched immediately. Using teeny font will likely get ditched. If you send an attachment to me, your email will be deleted without being read. (This is clearly stated in the guidelines on my website, [greatriverliterary.com](http://greatriverliterary.com)).

**LM:** What process would you go through to determine the marketability of a book? What are the factors that you consider?

**MC:** My top concerns are: does it excite me? Do I love it and believe in it? Do I have a sense there is an audience for the book? Do I have confidence that the author (or author/illustrator) is professional? Then I think through a list of prospective editors. If the list



*Mary Cummings..continued*

is too small, I can't proceed. Marketing is something that is important, but doesn't happen right out of the gate.

**LM:** I love that you are so hands on and open to discussing creative ways to market and promote. In this regard, is this something that an author and/or illustrator should consider even before they submit? Why or why not?

**MC:** It's one of a number of factors, I'd say. The author (or author/illustrator) should think about what is important to them in their work and in their dealings with an agent.

**LM:** Can you share any stories about book(s) that you acquired where it was evident that the author had really done their marketing homework? Are you willing to work with an author after the fact on this, or do you feel this is something that should be focused on up front?

**MC:** It helps a lot in a query if it includes comp titles, including what is similar or dissimilar about them as compared to the project. Publication dates matter, too. If nothing comparable has been published since 1989, that could be compelling. If the book could be an important classroom resource, please include grade level and curriculum data.

**LM:** Is there anything you have seen too much of in your inbox lately? Too little of?

**MC:** Still too many: monster under the bed; grandpa is losing it; different but good; rhyming couplets without language variation; dog stories; YA world in chaos. I'd like more character-focused picture books. Even though I see some beautifully written narratives, when they lack specific characters and clear story, it's a tougher sell. I'd like more realistic middle grade novels, especially contemporary. I love historical MG but need to hear about potential use in the classroom. I'd like more stories about our connections with the natural world, especially forests and mountains. Underrepresented voices are needed. In that category I'd particularly like to see a novel about living in poverty. And, living in St. Paul, I eagerly await a picture book or novel featuring Sunisa Lee and her Olympic triumph's impact on her life and on the aspirations of all Hmong girls.

**LM:** What are your thoughts about writing to trends?

Thumbs up or thumbs down? Do you feel trends cycle back?

**MC:** It's important to be aware of what's being published in the category in which you hope to be published. Don't duplicate what's new, but think about how you fit into the zeitgeist. Many elements of good storymaking don't change.

**LM:** Should you take on a client in your new agency, what would be a typical example of your representation style? Do you only work on one project at a time? Are you an editorial agent? Do you keep the client posted with all updates? Are you likely to give up on a project you took on after a certain number of submission rounds, or do you keep at it?

**MC:** I almost always work on one project at a time. It can take away from both my focus, and the potential for the author, to do multiples. I am indeed an editorial agent (see articles on [greatriverliterary.com](http://greatriverliterary.com) for examples). I send clients editor comments (declines) about every six weeks. If an editor is intrigued but would like changes I'm in touch quickly. And, of course, if there is an offer, I get in touch right away. No project has infinite possibilities, but some have more prospects than others simply by nature of their subject matter, targeted age group, etc.

**LM:** What are your thoughts about quick responses to any R & Rs (Revise and Resubmit) that you may request? What advice do you have to those who get these types of requests?

**MC:** A prompt acknowledgement, with thanks, is a good idea. But I want to be sure that time is taken for the editorial comments to be really considered: felt as well as thought about. Time should also be used to loop in critique partners, teachers, etc. so that the creator has insights from peers and trusted others. Of course, some people naturally are inclined to revise quickly while others are slower and more measured. Months would normally be too long, but a couple of days too short. If it's re an author/illustrator I'd expect a longer timeline. My advice would be to not rush it, but to alert your agent or editor if you anticipate taking more than around three weeks.

**LM:** How important is social media to you when considering a client to take on? What do you feel is the benefit of having an active presence on social media? What types of social media would you look at?



Mary Cummings..continued

**MC:** The type of project matters. A client with a non-fiction project who has a strong platform is a real plus. An active social media presence is more and more important with certain publishers – but many do not place great value on it. For me, a good website really counts. I do like to see evidence that a creator is able and willing to get their book attention. Social media plays a role here, but some more feet on the ground, face to face encounters and imaginative outreach also really have an impact. (Take a look at what Elizabeth Verdick has done for her Small Walt books: article on [greatriverliterary.com](http://greatriverliterary.com)).

**LM:** You tend to like lyrical picture books. Please share your definition of lyrical, as well as some examples of books similar to the lyrical style you are drawn to.

**MC:** I do, but I like humor and other things, too. There are lots of humor books on my list. As someone once said: “It’s all in the writing.” Lyrical: song-like, beautiful, gorgeously written. Of course I love all the books on my list, but I’m going to single out in this context Rachel Tawil Kenyon’s *You Know How to Love* (Philomel). As for books I did not rep: Deborah Marcero’s *In a Jar*. Susan Marie Swanson/Beth Krommes *The House in the Night* (HMH). *The Silver Button* Bob Graham (Candlewick). *Naamah and the Ark at Night* by Susan Campbell Bartoletti/Holly Meade (Candlewick). And, not to entirely leave out novels: Peter Brown’s *The Wild Robot*. Susan Williams’ *Wind Rider*. Janet S. Anderson’s *Going Through the Gate*. Three of my very favorites.

**LM:** Please share what you consider to be your “best advice” to writers.

**MC:** Hmm. Write. Think. Polish. Share. Be frustrated. Be joyous. Sit. Write. Polish. Share.

**LM:** In general, what do you feel about the level of submissions in your in-box? Is the work polished? Are writers submitting too early? Share something a writer might do to make certain their work is submission-ready.

**MC:** It’s really all over the map, but at least a few times a week something comes in with real promise. It may have been revised before submitting, but almost always could use more polishing. Advice: don’t submit right away. Live with the manuscript. Let it evolve. Take in what others offer for enhancing your

work. Be sure you’ve read it aloud to spot possible clunky or unclear areas. Even better: have someone else read it aloud.

**LM:** How can our readers submit to you? Do you respond to submissions? If so, generally how long does it take?

**MC:** See submission guidelines at [greatriverliterary.com/contact.asp](http://greatriverliterary.com/contact.asp). If I am interested, I respond, but with the volume I receive it isn’t feasible to respond unless there may be a fit. However, for the CBI September opportunity, I will give at least a brief response in the following month.

Mary Cummings is offering an **Above the Slushpile** opportunity for CBI subscribers. Learn more about Mary at [www.greatriverliterary.com](http://www.greatriverliterary.com) and see what she’s looking for in greater detail. Please include the code “**CBI – MC**” in your subject line to take advantage of this exclusive opportunity. Please only submit polished, targeted work, and limit your submission to **one** manuscript with the above code. **This opportunity expires on September 30, 2021.**

### ---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](http://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.

## Submission Secret: Streamline Your Word Count with Styles

by Carol Doeringer

[Editor's note: Whether an agent or editor asks for a sample chapter or an entire manuscript, your formatting and word count needs to be clean and accurate. Read on for CBI subscriber Carol Doeringer's fix for giving your submission an accurate word count.]

Your work-in-process has a title, text, and maybe some art notes and back matter. Perhaps you insert information you'll delete before submitting—like notes-to-self or spread numbers for watching page turns in a picture book. All these elements can confound keeping tabs on word count. But if you format your text using Word's style gallery, getting that count is simple.

The first step is creating a custom style.

- Write a line of story text and format it for a manuscript (double space, indent first line, 12-point—you know the drill).
- Highlight the formatted text.
- Move your pointer to the style gallery, located in Word's home tab. Click on the 'more' icon (□) at the bottom of the styles scroll bar.
- Click on **Create a Style**.
- Type *Story* (or whatever you like) to name the new style; click OK.

*Story* now appears in the style gallery.

Then as you write, apply the *Story* style to text you'll want in your word count.

- Click to place your cursor inside a paragraph.
- Move your pointer to the style gallery and click on *Story*.

You can also select multiple paragraphs before clicking to apply the *Story* style. The text will now be included in your story word count, and it's formatted to your specifications, too.

For non-story text like art notes or back matter,

you can create corresponding styles. Or simply use Word's *Normal* style. Just be sure those elements are not formatted as *Story*.

Now check your word count:

- Click to park your cursor in any *Story*-formatted paragraph. Don't highlight—click just once.
- Move your pointer to *Story* in the style gallery.
- Right-click to reveal a menu. Then move your pointer and click on **Select all instance(s)**.

Voila! You'll see all your story paragraphs are highlighted, and their total word count is now shown at the bottom of the document window.

It's a good idea to scroll through your document to make sure that all your story text—and nothing else—is highlighted. If you missed a story paragraph or applied *Story* to something else, like an art note, use the style gallery to apply another style. Then check your story word count again.

If you have sidebars, their formatting may differ from your story text. Give them their own style in the gallery and you can count words as above. Then manually add the sidebar count to your story count.

Once you've formatted styles to your liking, you can repurpose your document for new versions of your manuscript with a simple "save as".

There are other ways to create and use styles, and you can customize the order they appear in the gallery. Those maneuvers can be complicated, and they're not always the same for all versions of Word.

The best strategy is to search for help on answers.microsoft.com. If you'd like to learn more about creating styles, here's a link to a Microsoft article: <https://bit.ly/createdocumentstyle>. The article's instructions are for recent Word versions, and it's possible the process may differ if you use a Mac. So be prepared to search for instructions that meet your needs.

# CAN A CHARACTER-DRIVEN AUTHOR BECOME A PLOT-DRIVEN ONE?

by Jane McBride

I normally approach a new book with character and consider myself a character-driven author, but I wondered what would happen if I started with plot. I asked myself what kind of character would find herself in a particular situation. Rather than build a plot around the character, as I usually do, I started with the situation that would kick off my plot, and built a character around that. In many ways, I felt like I was working backward, but I gave it a try and came up with some interesting results.

Let me give you a brief overview of the plot in question, my current work-in-progress for adults. It is a woman-in-jeopardy story where a young woman, Rachel, a caterer, sees her fiancé murder someone at a charity fundraising event he is hosting. At her cry of distress, he sees her. She runs, knowing he will kill her. However, her fiancé has unlimited funds and powerful friends, including some in the police department. How can she possibly elude him?

I asked myself, what kind of character would find herself in this situation? How had she not known that her fiancé was a stone-cold killer? The answer to that came easily: she had been swept off her feet by his good looks and charm and interest in her. Even more powerful, though, was his outward commitment to helping others, such as the fundraising event he was giving for Denver's homeless population. Having grown up in the foster-care system and then on her own at 18 years old, Rachel understood what it was to have nothing and to feel desperate. Was she so starved for love that she would fall victim to such a man? The answer turned out to be yes. In foster-care, she had bounced around from home to home, always looking for someone to truly care about her. She was vulnerable to anyone who showed interest in her and showed compassion for others. (She didn't know that his show of hosting charity events was a front for conducting business with the city's rich and powerful.) How did she meet her fiancé? When she

was old enough, she struck out on her own. Still on the streets, she found a job washing dishes at a small diner. The owner respected her hard work and offered her a small room at the back of the diner. He recognized that she had a skill for cooking and promoted her to cook. He helped her find another job in a real restaurant where she gained a reputation as a superior chef and eventually started her own catering business. It was through that where she met the "man of her dreams." How does she now know how to evade the men he sends to search for and kill her? Her time on the streets when she was younger taught her survival techniques. Now, she wants to run as far as she can and put the whole thing behind her.

All of these and answers to other questions helped me shape and form my character.

Let's try this with a book for teens. Josh, a 15-year-old sophomore in high school, finds himself being blackmailed by two high school seniors into hacking into the school's records and changing grades. There's the plot set-up.

How did Josh end up in this situation? What had he done that was so bad that he would be vulnerable to blackmail? Was he so weak that he would succumb to mild threats by a couple of bullies? It turns out that Josh was trying to protect his older sister, Rene. The bullies had obtained pictures of her that her boyfriend took of her and were threatening to send them to everyone in the school. Why does Josh feel so protective of his sister? Renee has mild Down syndrome symptoms and was taken advantage of by a boy. Josh will do anything, even put himself in jeopardy, to defend her. How could he do anything different? He knows he will get into big trouble if it is discovered that he has hacked into the school records, but what can he do?

What about a story about a younger character, such

*Character-Driven Author...continued*

as a chapter book for ages 7-10? Can we still build a character around a plot? I think so.

Eight-year-old Ethan is especially close to his grandfather. When his grandfather dies, Ethan refuses to go to the funeral. He doesn't want to admit that his grandfather is dead. His parents and extended family are upset with him, but he begs his parents not to make him attend the service. At last, they give in and respect his feelings. Nobody is very happy at Ethan and see his refusal to attend the funeral as selfish.

What makes Ethan so close to his elderly grandfather? Does he have the same closeness to his father? It turns out that Ethan's father was a high school and college football star who almost made pro. Ethan's older brother is following in his father's footsteps. And though his father has done his best to help Ethan develop his athletic skills, Ethan doesn't have those same skills and, what's more, isn't interested in sports. Instead, he is interested in animals and conservation just as his grandfather was. Every summer, his grandfather, a retired veterinarian, and Ethan tramped through the woods, looking for small animals who had been hurt. This particular section of woods is a prime hunting place for the rural community, where Ethan and his father often find animals that have been shot by a rifle or bow-and-arrow but not killed. They bring the wounded animals, especially birds and geese, to a small clinic at the back of the grandfather's house. There, they tended them until they were well enough to be set free. As Ethan works through his feelings about his grandfather's death, he searches for a way to honor this man who has made such a difference in his life. But what can he, an eight-year-old boy, do?

**What do these three examples have in common?**

- In each, the story starts with a plot problem. Each character must find a solution to that problem. As one problem is solved, another arises. The character is fleshed out by his/her solution to the problems.
- All ask questions of how and why? How did Rachel, Josh, and Ethan find themselves in the positions they did? Why did they react the way they did? With each answer, the characters develop layers and a backstory that explain their situation

and their reactions to it.

- The plot arc causes the characters to find (or re-find) their core values and, at last, act upon those values. When they recognize those values, they have to make a big change, and do what they can to act accordingly. That big change is crucial. Test the character's core values against the various plot points in your book. Does it hold up? Do the plot points build to the core value emerging triumphant? If not, perhaps you should rethink either the core value or the plot points or both.

What is one of Rachel's core values? Justice. She couldn't let the man she thought she loved get away with murder, no matter how terrified she is of him. She resolves to find a way to bring him to justice, even at the risk of her own life.

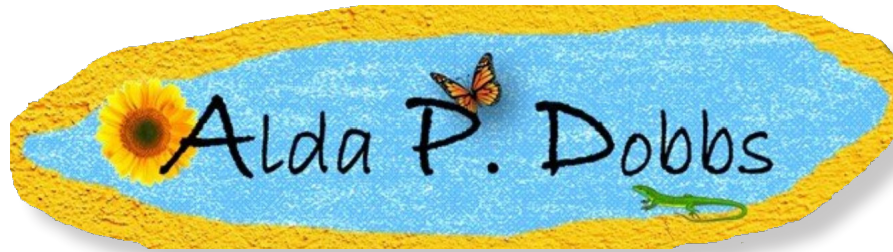
What about our second example where teenager Josh is being blackmailed? What is his core value? It turns out that he has two: standing up for family and doing the right thing. He finds a way to beat the bullies and show the school authorities what is going on.

Finally, what about Ethan? Can an eight-year-old have a core value? Of course. For Ethan, it is love for his grandfather. He finds a way to honor this man he loved so much by continuing to care for the small animals in the woods and by convincing his parents and the town to establish a preservation area in those same woods where hunters aren't allowed.

**IN CONCLUSION**

I probably won't approach all my books with this plot-first-then-characterization technique, but I have found it helpful several times. It has shown me a new way to move beyond cookie-cutter characters and make them real people with flaws and fears, strengths and skills, values and principles.

# THE BAREFOOT DREAMS OF



interview by PJ McIlvaine

Working odd jobs might not be the best way to write. But it certainly worked for debut author Alda P. Dobbs, for those experiences, like a fine Mexican tequila, infused her characters, settings, and stories. But the greatest influence of all on her writing was her beloved great-grandmother, whose emotional tales of the struggles and hardships she endured during the complicated 1913 Mexican Revolution and later, as a refugee in America, fueled Dobb's middle grade historical novel *The Barefoot Dreams of Petra Luna* (Sourcebooks, 2021), initially written as an article for a children's magazine. Dobb's writings have won various awards including the Barbara Deming Memorial Fund Award, the Joan Lowry Nixon Award, and the Sustainable Arts Foundation Grant and she's written articles for *Highlights Children's Magazine*, *Guideposts*, and *La Prensa* newspaper. Born in a small town in northern Mexico, as a young child her family later moved to Texas. Dobbs is passionate about connecting children to their past, their communities, different cultures, and nature in her storytelling. She now makes her home in Houston with her husband and two children. When not writing, she enjoys walks, biking, dancing, reading, and sleep (don't we all), and her favorite movie is *Contact* (one of mine as well). Keep up with Alda's upcoming events and news at [www.aldapdobbs.com](http://www.aldapdobbs.com)



nut seller. How have all these odd jobs helped and informed you on your writing journey? What job did you like the least? The best? Is there a job you wish you would've tried and didn't?

**ALDA P. DOBBS:** You're right, I've had numerous jobs, but I truly believe each one has had an impact on my writing. Every person I've met, interacted with, or observed during those jobs has fueled my imagination for stories, characters, and settings then and now. I've liked all my jobs, though some were more challenging than others. I'd have to say sawing concrete cores outside in 100°F plus weather for hours was rough. However, each concrete slice took about 10 minutes to saw off, so there was plenty of time to let the imagination flow.

My favorite job was at the wax museum, right across from the Alamo, because I met so many people from all over the world. Many were extremely friendly and always happy to give me detailed answers to my

“Where are you from?” questions. I learned foreign words and began a collection of coins from different countries, which led to an intense appetite to travel and discover cultures different from my own. Something I've always wanted to do is be a storm-chaser, like the professional ones on TV! I did a little storm-chasing on my own long, long ago, but it'd be really cool to have one of those big, heavy steel cars with all the gadgets.

**PM:** What were your writing influences growing up?

**PJ McILVAINE:** According to the biography at your website ([www.aldapdobbs.com](http://www.aldapdobbs.com)) you've had quite the background, everything from lab technician to a pea-

*Alda P. Dobbs...continued*

Was reading a big part of your life as a child? What was your favorite book as a kid and why?

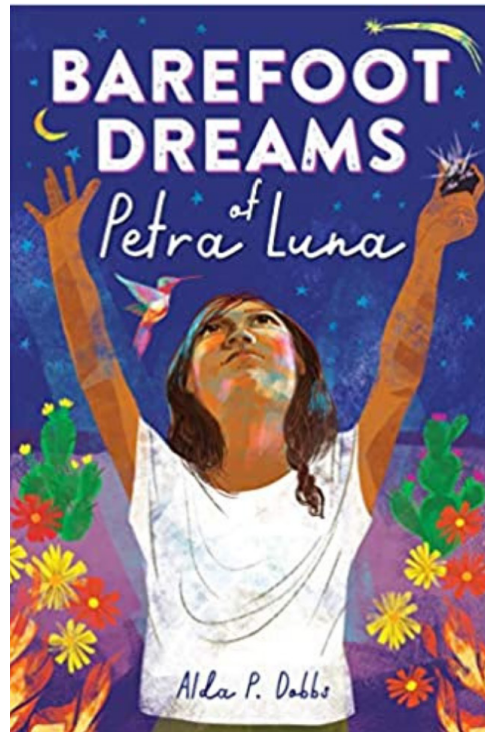
**AD:** As a child I never kept a journal or wrote much. English was my second language and it took me years to learn it. I believe that may be a reason why I was a reluctant reader growing up. I rebelled against English due to my frustrations from learning it. What influenced me as a child most were the storytellers in my family and being a constant observer of people and nature. The first book I ever read cover to cover (at age sixteen) and that became my favorite, was an old copy of J.D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* that I found riding on a city bus coming home from work. That book forever changed me. I was in awe because it was me and my angst on those pages. Even though I was a Mexican girl from south side San Antonio, struggling to help my single mother, and Holden was a yuppie white boy from the northeast, I was Holden Caulfield. After reading it, the urge to tell my own stories was ignited.

**PM:** What inspired you to write Petra? Would you call it a memoir of sorts or homage? Is this a book that you felt compelled to write, that only you could've written? Did you experience writer's block or doubts while writing it?

**AD:** Petra was inspired by experiences my great-grandmother endured during the Mexican Revolution. They all told of extraordinary events and unbelievable trials. This story is a homage to both her and my grandmother because of the adversities they faced and the sacrifices they made to bring opportunity to future generations. It's also a memoir of sorts because I believe every author pours a little of themselves into their stories. I was compelled to write *Barefoot Dreams of Petra Luna* because it's a history that is not taught in books nor schools. One of the major challenges in writing the book was weaving in facts of the Mexican Revolution, a very com-

plex war, in a way that readers, and especially kids, could understand and grasp its severity.

**PM:** How long did it take you to write the book? How many drafts? Did it involve a lot of research re your family and the location? Was it difficult to blend reality with fiction into a seamless narrative?



**AD:** After three years of writing and several rejections on another manuscript, I began writing magazine articles, including some for *Highlights for Children Magazine*. The idea of Petra Luna came to me in 2013. The story began as a children's magazine article and then morphed into a picture book. A year later, during a writing conference, an agent suggested I turn my picture book into a novel. It then took another five years to complete *Barefoot Dreams of Petra Luna* and part of its follow-up book. In all I'd say it took about 6 – 7 drafts. I researched many things, even the most mundane, and some never made it into the book but it allowed me to know the characters and setting intimately. I researched the Mexican Revolu-

tion, desert plants, curanderismo, Aztec mythology, Náhuatl, music from that era, etc. I also printed out segments of Sanborn maps and assembled them together like puzzle pieces to let me know what streets Petra Luna had walked on. When I cross-referenced the map with old photographs, I could see buildings she came across and even walked into. I kept a timeline handy that followed actual dates chronicled in newspapers to help weave in the fiction.

**PM:** Do you see yourself in the main character, Petra? When did you know the book was “ready”?

**AD:** I do, I think I'm as stubborn and determined as she is, maybe not as much at Petra's age but I am now. Then again, I believe characters always carry a little bit of their creators in them. I knew the book was “ready” when I began receiving positive feedback and requests at conference critique sessions,

*Alda P. Dobbs...continued*

and also when I began winning awards for my unpublished work. I also had trusted professional readers who told me they thought it was ready.

**PM:** What was the publication process like? Did you have input into any illustrations?

**AD:** So far, it's been amazing and eye-opening. It's humbling to know how many people work on a book to get it "packaged", printed and up on shelves. I've had the pleasure to work with amazing teams at Sourcebooks: editorial, art, and marketing and I must say, I'm very lucky. I was asked for my input for the book cover and the artist, John Jay Cabuay, did a phenomenal job in capturing Petra's spirit and strength.

**PM:** What is your writing routine/process? Do you write every day or when inspiration strikes? If you weren't writing, what would you be doing?

**AD:** I've never really had a writing routine (after 10 years of writing, I'm still striving to find one!). After signing my publishing contract, I've had to be more conscientious about writing time since I now have real deadlines. I've always been a night owl and tend to be more creative at night, but as a mother of two young kids, I've had to adjust my times.

**PM:** Do you have an agent?

**AD:** Yes, it's Ammi-Joan Paquette with Erin Murphy Literary Agency. I met Joan during a writer's conference in 2016. She read my book's first chapter and asked me to submit whenever I felt ready. We kept in touch and I'm glad we did because it took another three years before I submitted to her. She signed me up within a month and my manuscript went on submission right as COVID19 surged in New York City. It was a scary, difficult time but Joan did a great job and we sold the book in our first round!

**PM:** What tips or tricks do you wish someone would've told you starting out?

**AD:** I wish I'd known how busy the journey became once the contract was signed. Time appears to have moved at warp speed ever since!

**PM:** What are your writing plans/goals going forward? Do you have a pet project?

**AD:** Currently, I'm working on the follow-up book to *Barefoot Dreams of Petra Luna*, which is slated for Fall 2022. I'm also working on a couple of picture books, a middle-grade contemporary, and even a YA historical...stay tuned!

**PM:** How has your writing fared during the pandemic?

**AD:** I've had my ups and downs, just like many writers out there. It was tough homeschooling and having a husband working in a different city, but the silver lining of the whole thing was observing the strength in families and communities during a world-wide trial.

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

**AD:** I see myself writing in different genres, from picture books to young adult and by then I hope to have learned new ways to help bring literacy to disadvantaged communities and also find ways to help young writers hone their craft.

# HYBRID PUBLISHING IS IT RIGHT FOR YOU?

by Brooke Van Sickle

**T**yping your final edit is an exciting step for an author. You officially have a finished manuscript! But now the journey to publishing starts where you must choose the right path for you.

As children's book writers, you have three different options when it comes to publishing your book — using a traditional publisher, publishing it yourself (called self-publishing), or using a combination of the two, known as a hybrid. Hybrid publishing has been increasingly popular for writers because of its quicker turnarounds and high amount of author control, but how do you know if this is the right choice for you and your story?

## What is hybrid publishing?

A hybrid publisher aims to combine the help and support of a publishing house while giving the author full control of the end product for their book. However, not all hybrids do this in the same way. There are some who help you after the final files are complete. Also known as a Vanity Press or Publisher, these houses will help you print your book and get it into distribution. If you were to choose this type of publisher, you will first need to find an illustrator and editor to help you finish your story before working with them.

On the other hand, there are hybrid publishers who will help you create those final files. These are full-service hybrids, which means they help with the complete publishing process; editing, finding an illustrator, book design, printing, distribution, and marketing. Some offer package deals for you to choose from at different price levels, while others are all-inclusive — walking you through each step of the process as a team for a set price.

Hybrid publishers typically don't have the same submission requirements as traditional publishers, but they still may have a submission process in order to work with them. This is because certain houses might only be able to accept a limited number of books a year or may only publish certain

kinds of books. When you're doing your research, you'll want to look for the costs involved, services included, and how to get started with the hybrid of your choice on their website.

*[Editor's note: To further clarify the difference between submitting to a traditional publisher and a hybrid publisher, traditional publishers pay for 100% of the editing, design, illustration, printing and distribution of a book, and generally offer the author an upfront advance against future royalty earnings. Therefore, they only offer publishing contracts on books that they are confident will sell enough to earn back their investment and a profit. Traditional publishers also control the publishing timeline (which can take 2 or more years), the cover design, and the book's illustrations. Because hybrid publishers are a form of self-publishing, the author is paying for all of the above, but in turn has control over every step of the process. So while hybrid publishers don't have to worry about earning back their investment (and therefore can open up the publishing process to any author who wants it), some hybrid publishers may limit the books they work on to a certain type of book, or limit the number of titles they take on each year. See more details below.]*

## What about marketing?

The buzzword on any author's mind, no matter how they're publishing their book, is always marketing. While the author is the best person to market their book because they are the most passionate about the story and have the most time invested, a publisher can still be a great resource to help.

Like traditional publishers, hybrid publishers should also have a wide range of distribution to get your book more exposure with retailers. But even the best book is going to need a marketing strategy in order to be found amongst the noise of all the books published each year.

Hybrid publishers may offer marketing as part of



## Hybrid Publishing...continued

their package, or as a separate add-on you can purchase in addition to publishing. This could include things like submitting your book for awards, reviews, or running ads for you. And sometimes they may help you create a custom strategy or create creative assets, like social media graphics, a website, or sales sheet.

When you're doing your research, it's important to know what marketing is included and what's still your responsibility. You should also plan to market your book as well because breaking into your friends and family network is one of the best ways to jumpstart your book into the marketplace.

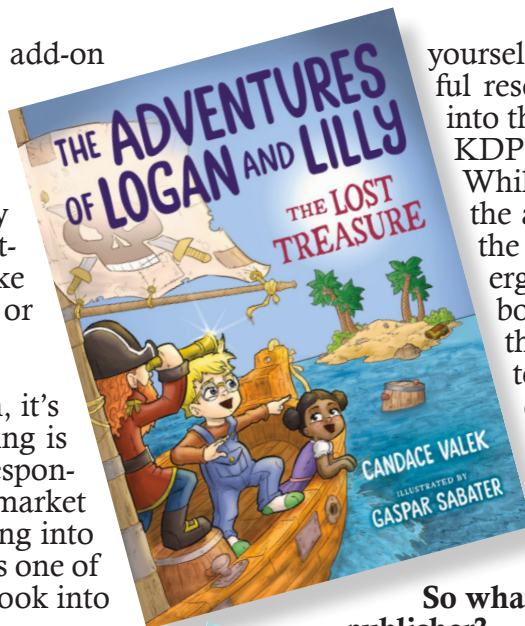
### How does this compare to using a traditional publisher or self-publishing?

The most common form of publishing, and probably the choice you thought about first, is working with a traditional publisher. (Understandably! These have been around since the creation of books.)

Traditional publishers are a wonderful resource to help connect authors to readers and bring their books to life. They handle every step of the publishing process, including editing, finding an illustrator, book design, printing, distribution, marketing and promotion. (All. the. things!) And the best part is you don't have to provide anything upfront besides a fantastic story.

However, this option can take a while for an author to find the right fit for their story. And once you have a contract, the publisher may choose to create the story in a way that isn't exactly your vision, which is why some authors choose a different path—self-publishing.

Publishing your book yourself means that you're now in charge of all the steps in the publishing process. You have to find the editor, illustrator, book designer, and printing house, or do them all



yourself. Luckily, there are some wonderful resources to help you get your book into the hands of readers, like Amazon's KDP or IngramSpark.

While this is a faster option that gives the author more control, it does mean the author has to invest more time, energy, and potentially money into their book. And with all the resources out there, it can be a little overwhelming to know where to start or what to do.

This is why it's nice to have that third option—hybrid publishing—to choose from.

### So what's the downside to using a hybrid publisher?

Working with a hybrid publisher isn't all positive. Like anything, there are some cons you have to consider. The biggest drawback of which is the upfront investment.

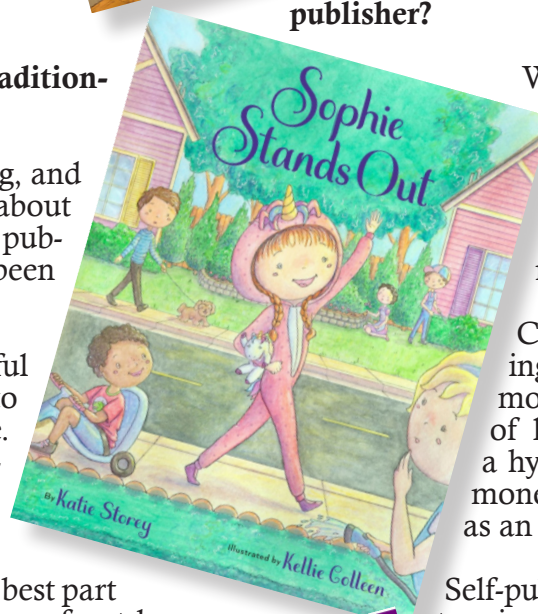
Contrary to traditional publishing which requires almost zero monetary investment outside of learning the craft of writing, a hybrid publisher does require a monetary contribution from you as an author.

Self-publishing also involves a monetary investment from the writer, however, you normally have more control over the budget and can make it more cost-effective if necessary.

### So how much does hybrid publishing cost?

On average, a hybrid publisher could cost between \$8,000-\$10,000 to publish your book. (Some may be less or more depending on the services they offer.) The reason for this large investment is because of the print-run.

Unlike print-on-demand companies, like IngramSpark and Amazon KDP, hybrid publishers will



*Hybrid Publishing...continued*

print a small number of copies for the author to have on hand. (Usually between 500-1,000 but numbers will vary depending on the publisher.) And printing books is costly.

**How do you decide if this is worth the investment for YOU?**

Research. Before deciding which publishing option you want to choose, you should know what goals you have for your story. (Really think about what having a book published means for you.) Then research the steps involved in order to make it happen.

It would be wonderful to hand you a list of hybrid publishers to pitch to just like we can with traditional publishers. But these lists aren't as easy to come by because of a variance of names in the industry, services the publishers offer, and the variety of genres they publish.

However, if you're serious about working with a hybrid publisher or at least doing more research on them, start by looking at sources like Alliance of Independent Authors or Booklife Services for a list of possible publishers. Or you can also type in "children's book hybrid publishers" in a search engine to see what comes up in your area, too.

If you find a hybrid publisher you're interested in, you should research their previous books, the services they offer, and meet with them. This is someone you're going to be working with for weeks, if not months, so you want to make sure it's a good fit. (And be sure to come with a list of questions for your meeting.)

Publishing is a journey that doesn't have one path to follow. As a writer, you have to know what's going to work for you and chase that dream. Because your story has a place on a bookshelf—you just have to get it there.

**About the Author**

**Brooke Van Sickle is CEO & Publisher of [BiblioKid Publishing](#), an American hybrid publishing company dedicated to creating children's books. They have an experienced team with over 30 years of work in traditional publishing and strive to create all their books to compete in the commercial trade market.**

**As a full-service hybrid, all their authors go through an extensive editing process, then BiblioKid will help them find an illustrator or work with the author's own illustrator to bring their story to life with the help of their Caldecott award-winning art director. Learn more about them and schedule a free consultation call at [submissions.bibliokidpublishing.com](#).**

**And if you're ready to start your own writing journey, you can download a children's book template for free at [journeytokidlit.com/childrens-book-template](#), compliments of Brooke. Just her way of saying thank you and to help you get started writing that book you can't stop thinking about.**

# Colleen Tierney

## Library Manager of Hutto Public Library in Texas

interview by Sharon O. Blumberg

**L**et's talk with Colleen Tierney, Library Manager of Hutto Public Library. She will tell us the kinds of books children and young adults enjoy reading. In addition, we'll discover reading trends and age ranges for current book categories.

**SHARON BLUMBERG:** Please tell us a little bit about yourself, and how you came to be a librarian who helps children enhance their love of reading.

**COLLEEN TIERNEY:** I have been a librarian for 17 years, most spent in elementary libraries. I started my career in public libraries. I love being a librarian and never would have thought this would have been my career path. I was a good reader as a child but I didn't enjoy reading. I did love libraries but was intimidated by the "keepers of books" that would shush my silly self upon entering their sacred doors. It wasn't until I had kids of my own and took them to the library, did I understand that libraries weren't just for quiet book-worms. After I had my first child I looked into becoming a librarian. I realized that it was possible to be a librarian, and love children and books, not just keeping them in perfect order! I am a patron-focused librarian who is deeply driven by equity and access as my primary purpose as a public servant. Excitement and joy about books do not need to be contained to a library whisper in my library.

**SB:** How do you help children find books they will enjoy reading?

**CT:** I always start by asking what they read last and what they enjoyed about it. Or I ask what their favorite book is. This is a sneak peek into their personality and their interests. I think most readers are trying to recreate the last reading experience that they enjoyed and that is especially true for children.

**SB:** What kinds of books are most popular for different age ranges?

**CT:** Young adults are interested in books that talk about what is really going on in the world, so realistic fiction. Graphic novels and Manga are popular with teens right now as well. As for younger readers, funny books are extremely appealing. Children want to be entertained when they read, and humor is the type of entertainment that will have them coming back for more.

**SB:** Have you noticed any trends in children's reading habits?

**CT:** Graphic novel interest is exploding. There are not enough of them to satisfy readers' hunger. They seem to be grabbing the interest of many different reading types. The challenge is to keep enough in the library for all the readers! There are a lot

of books/series being turned into TV series and/or movies and that always increases popularity as well.

**SB:** What age groups are attracted to illustrated books?

**CT:** Younger readers definitely, but with the in-



## *Colleen Tierney...continued*

crease in publishing of graphic novels, it seems, older and older readers are enjoying illustrated books. They are so accessible to young people. They seem to be less intimidating. I am a firm believer in allowing children to make selections that appeal to them because then they will LOVE reading. The research shows that reading is reading and the impact on the developing brain is the same whether the book has pictures or not.

**SB:** Do you find that children are attracted to books their friends like?

**CT:** Absolutely, especially as they get older. Younger children tend to follow the beat of their own drum but after kindergarten, unfortunately, it seems that they begin to notice what the herd is reading.

**SB:** Are there holes in the market for the kinds of books that children are asking for?

**CT:** There needs to be more books that have pictures as well as text on the page, like the Dogman and Diary of a Wimpy Kid series. The presentation in these books make reading less intimidating and more palatable for reluctant readers, but other readers as well.

**SB:** What kinds of books are great read-alouds for storytimes?

**CT:** Books that tickle the kids' funny bone. There is no greater joy than reading a book that makes children laugh. The hardest part is not laughing at their laughing—it can be quite contagious and will throw off the flow of the story! I love doing voices and making the characters come alive so I have to be careful to not crack myself up with the voices I use.

**SB:** Are there any authors that are currently pretty popular with children and young adults?

**CT:** Well, if the library consisted of mostly just Mo Willems and Dav Pilkey books, all our young readers would be satisfied. I seriously think that they forget that any other authors exist. It is a challenge to turn them on to something other than *Elephant and Piggie* and *Dogman*.

**SB:** Is there anything else that I've not asked, that you would like to include?

**CT:** I genuinely believe that all children have the capacity to love books and appreciate stories, it is just a matter of exposing children to them, early and often. Language acquisition and literacy happen quite naturally and beautifully when children are exposed to stories from birth. It is never too early to begin to teach children the love of books.

