

Children's Book Insider

The Children's Writing Monthly  March 2023

The Fairy Tale, Re-Imagined



**ABOVE THE SLUSHPILE
SUBMISSION OPPORTUNITY:**

Bushel + Peck
BOOKS

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This issue’s contributors

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Jean Daigneau is the author of *Code Cracking for Kids* and *Ellis Island and Immigration for Kids: A History with 21 Actives*, both from Chicago Review Press. She’s been published in newspapers and magazines, including *Highlights* and *Fun for Kidz*, and her work has appeared in *Guide to Literary Agents* and *Children’s Writers’ and Illustrators’ Market*. She is a former regional and assistant regional advisor for SCBWI Ohio North and currently serves on the executive board. She runs Two-4-One Kid Critiques with author Gloria Adams.

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

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

PJ McIlvaine is a screenwriter, journalist, blogger and kidlit writer. She is the author of picture books *Little Lena and the Big Table* and *Dragon Roar*, and the middle grade historical mystery *Violet Yorke, Guided Girl: Ghosts in the Closet*. Her YA alternate history adventure *The Conundrum of Charlemagne Grosse* comes out Sept. 2023. PJ is also a co-host of #PBPitch, the premiere Twitter pitch party for picture book writers and illustrators. <https://pjmacwriter.com>

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At Presstime:

Astra International Picture Book Writing Contest Open to Entries

The Astra International Picture Book Writing Contest is a unique competition designed to encourage, discover and honor talented writers of texts for picture books from all over the world; to foster literary excellence in books for young children; and to promote international cooperation and understanding through picture books. Sponsored by Astra Publishing House, Ltd. (USA), minedition (Switzerland and France), Kodansha (Japan) and Thinkingdom Media Group Limited (China), the Contest will name two Gold Prize Winners who will each receive \$5000, one Kodansha Award winner who will receive \$3000, and eight Honor Prizes of \$1000 each. three Silver Prize Winners who will receive \$5000 each, and 20 Finalists who will receive \$1000 each. The winners will have the opportunity to sign publishing contracts with the sponsors to publish the manuscripts in different languages. Each winner will be required to agree that sponsors have a one-year priority option to publish the winner's manuscript to receive the cash prize.

Open to published and unpublished writers who are 21 and older, who have a fiction, nonfiction or poetry manuscript for children ages 3-8 of 1000 words or less (manuscripts in Japanese can be up to 2500 words). The manuscript may be submitted in any of the following languages: English, Spanish, German, French, Japanese or Chinese. Go to readinglife.com/writingcontest?year=2022&type=index and follow the links and instructions to complete and submit an application form, including your name and contact information, details about your occupation, previously published works (up to 50 words), writing prizes or honors (up to 50 words), short biography/profile (up to 200 words) and your original picture book manuscript. Entries must be received by 11:59 a.m. ET on April 30, 2023. Winners will be announced in October 2023. You may not submit the manuscript to any other contests or publishers while under consideration for this award.

Holiday House Editor Seeks Middle Grade and YA Submissions

Holiday House is an award-winning publisher of fiction and nonfiction for children and teens. Sally Morgridge, Senior Editor, is currently accepting submissions for middle grade and young adult fiction, as well as graphic novels. She's looking for voice-driven books, vivid and unforgettable characters with voices that stick with the reader, unusual settings, ensemble casts, and beautiful writing. Open to mysteries, books about kids who are socially on the outskirts or unconventional, funny middle grade, heartfelt coming of age stories, and YA with larger than life main characters. Especially interested in work from marginalized creators. Also currently working on a collection of nonfiction books about climate change **solutions**.

Not interested in overly sweet books, didactic stories, heavy romance, science fiction, or high fantasy. Email a query letter embedded in the body of the email, and attach the manuscript as a Word document or PDF. Send to Sally Morgridge at smorgridge@holidayhouse.com. Responds within four months if interested. To see current Holiday House titles, go to holidayhouse.com/new-books/

Literary Magazine for Children Sponsors Poetry Contest

The Caterpillar is a magazine of literary poems, stories and art for readers ages 7-11, published quarterly in Ireland and distributed throughout the world from 2013 through the spring issue of 2023. Though the print magazine will cease publication after the current issue, *The Caterpillar* will continue to sponsor their children's poetry prize for a single unpublished poem for children ages 7-11 with an award of €1,000 (approx. \$1060) plus a week at the [Circle of Misse](#) writing retreat in

At Presstime continued

France. Second place wins €500, third place €250. All winners will be published in the [Irish Times](#) online. Authors from anywhere in the world can enter. Poems can be on any subject and of any length as long as they're appropriate for readers ages 7-11. There is an entry fee of €15 per poem, and you can enter as many poems as you like. Go to thecaterpillarmagazine.com/a1-page.asp?ID=7679&page=2 to see the online entry form and the contest rules. **Deadline for submission is March 31, 2023.** Winners will be announced in June 2023. For more information, or to purchase a sample issue, go to thecaterpillarmagazine.com/ You can also find *The Caterpillar* in many larger libraries.

New Imprint Focuses on Picture Books that Empower Girls

Entangled Publishing is a 100% women-owned independent publisher of romantic fiction in both the adult and young adult markets. They are now branching out to Little Lark, Entangled's new picture book imprint, which will center around female characters learning about themselves and finding their place in the world. The publisher strives to produce books that empower girls while encouraging social change. The imprint's debut title will be *I Love Everything About Me* by Fatima Scipio and Paige Mason, which follows a girl's adventures as she celebrates self-love and acceptance. The book is scheduled for fall 2023.

Future lists will contain board books and picture books, and Little Lark is actively seeking submissions from authors and illustrators with stories that fit with the imprint's mission. Manuscripts should be geared toward either the 24-page board book format for readers ages 0-2, or the 40-page hardcover picture book format for ages 3-8. Stories should always have a focus on positivity, social change, or bucking norms, and center primarily around female characters. All submissions are done through the publisher's Submittable form at entangledpublishing.submittable.com/submit/251687/little-lark. Illustrators may submit a link to their portfolio to be considered for illustrating an author's text, or submit a rough sketch dummy as a PDF for projects they've authored themselves.

Boutique Publisher Seeking Submissions with Environmental or SEL Themes

Blue Dot Kids Press, an independent children's publisher operating out of San Francisco and New Zealand which debuted in spring 2020, focuses on the environment, science, and encouraging children to take care of our world; as well as social/emotional learning: empathy, resilience, emotional intelligence, creative problem solving. The publisher's list consists of 10 thoughtful, purposeful books each year that speak to its mission and values. See all current titles at www.bluedotkidspress.com/books

Blue Dot Kids Press publishes books for ages 0-12. Currently looking for middle-grade fiction and nonfiction for ages 8-12; chapter book fiction and nonfiction for ages 6-10; fiction and narrative nonfiction picture books for 3-8; board books for kids ages 0-3. Open to all forms of storytelling, including graphic novels. Nonfiction material must be suited to supplement a school curriculum in some way and must include informative back matter. All manuscripts must fit into the environmental and/or social/emotional learning (SEL) interests of the publisher.

Email your manuscript to hello@BlueDotKidsPress.com. Include the title of your story in the subject line. Your submission email should consist of an introduction that includes a summary of your story, a brief biography of yourself, and contact information. Attach your manuscript as a Word or PDF document, or paste shorter manuscripts into the body of the email. Do not include illustrations unless you are a professional illustrator. No query letters—wants to see entire manuscripts only. All authors must be willing to actively participate in the marketing of the book (school visits, book signings, social media, etc.) Response in four months if interested in the work.

THE REINVENTED

Folk and Fairy Tale

by Jean Daigneau

Many of us grew up with fairy tales, either written or oral. For younger writers, fractured fairy tales might be more familiar. Fractured fairy tales are written as a parody of the original story or a tongue-in-cheek version. Often they are told from a different point of view and presented with a humorous twist, such as Jon Scieszka's picture book, *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*.

Long before written fairy tales, folktales were recited and often reenacted to teach lessons, make sense of nature, and explain the unknown. In the earliest communities, these stories were shared by elders or storytellers—called *griots* in West African culture. The oldest evidence of storytelling dates back about 44,000 years to an Indonesian cave painting, depicting human hunters with animal features—"therianthropes"—which have appeared in numerous myths across many cultures. Let's learn more.

A Long and Well-Traveled History

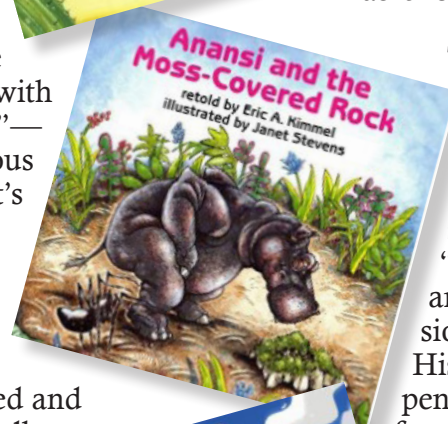
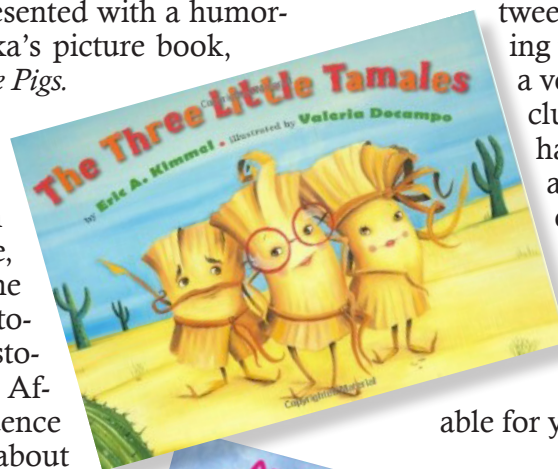
Fairy tales and folktales, passed down for thousands of years, changed and evolved with each retelling. French folklorist Charles Perrault is credited with creating the first written fairy tales in his 1697 book, *Mother Goose*. His stories, including *Little Red Riding Hood* and *The Sleeping Beauty*, were adapted and published from somewhat forgotten folktales. Of course, the Brothers Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen, among others, wrote, published, and memorialized many stories known today.

But, details often changed with subsequent versions throughout time and place—a kind of evolutionary global game of telephone. Research indicates between 800 and 900 versions of Cinderella in existence. Think about the cultural differences between a Guatemalan tribal elder enacting that story and a spice trader sharing a version in China. Early tales often included dark and violent details. They had sinister plots, graphic violence, and sometimes dismal endings. An early version of Hansel and Gretel had the children sent by their parents into the woods to starve. In one Swiss version, Snow White is accused of sleeping with the dwarves. Not necessarily acceptable for young readers today.

The folktales Perrault and others borrowed from often were intended to teach lessons and highlight cultural values. They usually showed characters making life-changing decisions, with the intent of showing how "good" decisions led to meaningful and fulfilling lives, while "poor" decisions resulted in serious consequences. Historically, villages or tribal people depended on cooperation among members for the entire community's survival. Poor decision-making could result in serious issues for everyone. The lessons about good decision-making, handed down from family members, storytellers, and community elders, were crucial, even as they evolved with changing times.

Writing the Modern Tale

Today's fairy tales share some elements of earlier versions. In both



The Reinvented Folk and Fairy Tale...continued

cases, the main character and the action have to be believable. The original version of *Beauty and the Beast*, written in 1740 by a French author and actually based on a true story, might not have survived if early readers were unable to buy into the believability of a so-called “beast” covered in hair, who could find love with a beautiful woman. As with any story, readers must be vested in their main character’s situation to work.

In contrast to early versions, however, today’s main characters and actions are often complex and convoluted; early characters were more one-dimensional. Settings from stories long-ago might simply reference a castle or the dark woods, while today’s settings can play an integral role. But almost always, the focus was and is usually on ordinary people having extraordinary adventures. And most stories are rarely told without a villain who attempts to thwart the protagonist at every turn.

Keep in mind, if you’re considering this genre, that while some of today’s books have a moral, they can also entertain for entertainment’s sake. In fact, picture book author and folklorist Eric A. Kimmel says, “That’s the problem with so many children’s books today.... The moral comes at you with the subtlety of a freight train.” No reader wants that, unless they’re reading *Aesop’s Fables*.

When drawing on old tales, middle grade novelist Shakirah Bourne believes, “You have more flexibility to adapt the mythology to whatever makes sense for the story. Just as others have done, you can put your own spin on the characteristics of the folk characters and adapt them to make them more relatable and relevant to kids today.” For instance, fairy tales today might feature strong but flawed, independent females or transgender characters. And since original folk and fairy tales are not copyrighted, you can borrow as much or as little from them as needed. Your version might include a plot twist, a new villain, or a contemporary setting.

Additionally, today’s fairy tales don’t always end happily ever after. Especially for middle grade and young adult readers, plots can be dark and dangerous, as long as they have all the elements of a good story.

Folktales in a Changing World

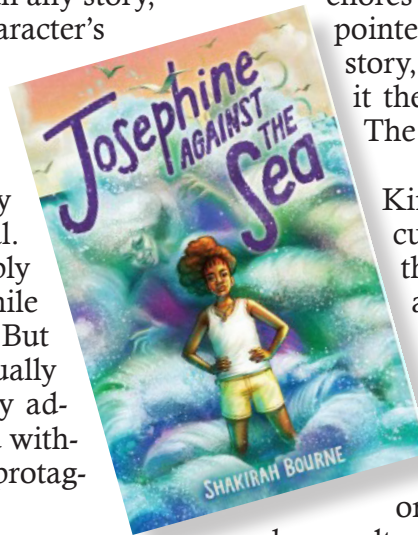
Kimmel has written over 150 books for kids and received numerous awards. He loved stories told by his grandmother “in three different languages: Yiddish, Ukrainian, and Polish.” Kimmel notes that he’d “do chores and she’d tell stories,” and when he pointed out a different version of a familiar story, she simply said, “That’s how I told it then. This is how I’m telling it now.” The evolving story in the flesh.

Kimmel’s books, which span many cultures, lean toward classic retellings that may change the setting or characters but retain key plot elements of the original. For example, his *The Three Tamales* is a Southwestern version of *The Three Little Pigs*, and his highly acclaimed stories about Anansi the Trickster infuse tales originating in West Africa and Caribbean culture with slapstick humor and mischief.

But he also acknowledges that today, “Enormous changes have taken place in children’s publishing.” He noted, “The story picture book—an illustrated book for older readers—is just about extinct. Graphic novels have taken their place.” While he continues to publish with small Jewish presses, he says this about publishing folktales today, “I’ve found within the last ten years that there’s just no market for folktales. Or at least not the ones I write.” In other words, the wave of highly-illustrated traditional folk and fairy tale retellings that spanned from the mid 1980s to about 2010 (fueled by the talents of authors and illustrators like Fred Marcellino, James Marshall, Jerry Pinkney, Paul O. Zelinsky, Janet Stevens, Ed Young, and Eric A. Kimmel) have evolved into something else.

A New Take on an Old Tale

For today’s readers, authors are often reinventing fairy and folktales to inspire new stories, without being too tied to the originals’ details. Bourne, author of *Josephine Against the Sea* and the upcoming *Nightmare Island* (June 2023), weaves elements of Caribbean mythology through modern middle grade plots.



The Reinvented Folk and Fairy Tale...continued

Bourne draws on her Caribbean nationality and its history of storytelling. “My ideas come from everywhere: observing society and the people around me, reading books and researching history, or scrolling through social media.”

Besides her own culture, she says, “I also examine issues that kids typically deal with—for example, peer pressure, anxiety, self-acceptance—and try to make sure my characters have to deal with these challenges as well.” Those issues reflect the world of tween and teen readers across the globe. Of her own books she notes, “I also wanted the stories to be fun; I had read more than enough books in school that only focused on trauma.”

But Bourne also advises that “sometimes, a mythological character isn’t a ‘myth’ to everyone, especially when it is based on the history of a group of people and represents their religious beliefs. It is important to be respectful to the character in how you portray them in the story so as to not offend an entire community, especially if you are not a member of said community.”

Fairy or Fractured, But Not Broken

Fractured fairy tales (those parodies of the original story) are another way to explore new approaches that still work. Fractured fairy tales DO retain enough details of the original for readers to recognize which story is being skewered, but also exaggerate or twist the elements so the plot goes in an unexpected direction. Here are things to consider when conjuring up a fractured or modern tale: What misunderstood protagonist or secondary character can you draw on for your story? What culture can you research or adapt from your own ancestry for setting? What plot twists can push a conventional tale in a new direction? Or what spin can you put on a classic ending to mix things up and delight your readers? Humor—puns, exaggerated situations, silly jokes, sarcastic narrators—is key to making fractured tales work.

Whatever approach you take, don’t become complacent because you’re relying on long-told fairy tales, family stories, or cultural tales. Bourne says, “After scouring the internet, which often repeats the same information, the best way to do research is by talking to elders, and asking the community about tales they heard growing up.” While we all might not have access to village elders, Bourne

found that “a few myths are well-documented since they are based on supposed true events in history. For one book, I spent weeks exploring our National Archives, reading ledgers, journals and old newspapers to get first hand testimonies. I even went as far as looking at wills for persons involved in the supernatural event.”

Finding Your Happily Ever After

Reimagined versions of fairy and folktales can still work today. As Kimmel advises, “Rule #1: There are no rules. Rule #2: When in doubt, remember the first rule.” Recapture the fun of the recently celebrated National Fairy Tale Day, February 26th, by stretching your creativity and rethinking your favorite childhood tale. You might just discover a villain who wants to set the story straight.

FOR FURTHER READING

The Three Tamales by Eric A. Kimmel, illustrated by Valeria Docampo (a fairy tale retelling)

Anansi and the Moss-Covered Rock by Eric A. Kimmel, illustrated by Janet Stevens (a folk tale retelling)

I Am Not a Prince by Rachael Davis (a fairy tale retelling)

Cinderella is Dead by Kalynn Bayron (a reinvented novel)

The Girl Who Fell Beneath the Sea by Axie Oh (a folk tale retelling)

Nightmare Island by Shakira Bourne (a reinvented novel)

It’s Not the Three Little Pigs by Josh Funk (a fractured fairy tale)

Redlocks and the Three Bears by Claudia Rueda (a fractured fairy tale)

Six Crimson Cranes by Elizaeth Lim (a folk tale retelling)

Frogkisser! By Garth Nix (a reinvented novel)

A Word on Copyright

Folk and fairy tales from hundreds of years ago are likely copyright free (in the public domain), and can be used or adapted as you wish. But you should be aware of copyright laws that protect published retellings (which cover the new details created by the author that differ from the original). According to the U.S. Copyright Office, “as a general rule, for works created after January 1, 1978, copyright protections lasts for the life of the author plus an additional 70 years.” For works published prior to that date terms differ, so it is best to consult the [Copyright Office website](#) or an attorney. And remember, laws in other countries may differ from those in the U.S.

Ryan G. Van Cleave

EDITOR, BUSHEL & PECK BOOKS

interview by Lynne Marie

We are happy to feature Ryan G. Van Cleave of Bushel & Peck Books, who has teamed up with David Miles (formerly of Familius) to create beautiful kidlit books that matter. As editor, Ryan draws upon extensive qualifications which include a Ph.D. in English/Creative Writing from Florida State University, heading up the Creative Writing major at Ringling College of Art and Design, and accolades as The Picture Book Whisperer in his capacity as critiquer. In addition, he's a keynote conference speaker, a ghostwriter, and writer of his own books.

LYNNE MARIE: Congratulations on this new position! Please share a little bit about this relatively new, independent publishing company.

RYAN G. Van CLEAVE: In 2018, David and Stephanie Miles formed Bushel & Peck to create beautifully illustrated, inspiring children's and novelty books that reimagine what a book can be. In many ways, the WOW factor of our books is self-evident. Let me brag about a few that happened prior to me arriving, such as *The Interactive Constitution*, *Forgotten Founders*, and the *Draw With* series. These are books that feel fun, fresh, and fascinating. (Wow, that's a lot of Fs!).

Most importantly, kids love them.

Another thing that distinguishes Bushel & Peck is our pledge to tackle illiteracy with our Book-for-Book Promise that delivers books to kids in need—one book for every one sold. As a writing teacher for the past 25 years, I'm all about helping people improve their ability to read and write. To date, we pledge to donate

over 300,000 books.

LM: Bushel & Peck already has an impressive, quality collection of books in its catalog, which can be viewed here: [All Books – Bushel & Peck Books \(busheland-peckbooks.com\)](https://busheland-peckbooks.com) Tell us a little bit about Bushel & Peck's mission and what their goal is moving forward.



RVC: We publish child-focused, imagination-fueled books for curious kids. You'll find books on art, history, science, and people who have made the world a better place to live. Undergirding all of that is an emphasis on diverse viewpoints that find ways to encourage a strong sense of community and belonging with every child and adult reader.

As for our goals? We're in a growth mode now to meet the increased demand for our titles and opportunities within the marketplace. To

that end, we recently launched three new imprints and multiple series.



Sunbeam is our new faith imprint, but it doesn't operate with a specific faith in mind—all are welcome and valued here. The books

in this imprint reveal how we all have more in common with each other than we don't, regardless of our faith, or even lack thereof. Two forthcoming Sunbeam titles are *The Interactive New Testament* and *Scientists of Faith*, which presents biographies of scientists throughout history who understood and practiced both as scientists and as people of faith. It's an engaging must-read.



MILK & COOKIES

Milk & Cookies is our new middle grade imprint that features both fic-

tion and nonfiction that covers the entire age range to include both younger and older readers. The launch list includes *The Worst Wizard: Awkward Magic* by Nicolas Jeter, which has invading hordes, smoochy old ladies, and a minotaur gym coach. Loads of fun!



MOONSHOWER

Moonshower is our poetry-only imprint that publishes single-author collections

and themed anthologies, like our forthcoming *Schoolapalooza* (edited by yours truly), and *Smoke at the Pentagon*, which is a look at 9/11 through the eyes of children. Thanks to award-winning author Jacqueline Jules for providing the poems for that moving book.

That's already a lot to share here, I realize, but like I said—Bushel & Peck is on a growth trajectory, so I'm heading up a number of new series as well. Here are two that are well underway but could always use new authors.

Our **Heroes Remembered** series features picture books that honor people whose important stories and contributions to the world were underappreciated or even ignored by history. These nonfiction titles about people who made a difference are complex, honest, and relevant to the lives of children today.

Our **Decide & Survive** series offers interactive history adventures about key moments in the course of human history. The series launches with exciting titles about Pearl Harbor and the American Revolutionary War spy Agent 355.

LM: What is Bushel & Peck looking for in an author? Are they seeking debut or established authors, or both. What about illustrators?

RVC: On one hand, we'd love for every submission to be from Newbery Medal winners and #1 *New York Times* bestselling authors, but here's the truth—we receive great manuscripts from debut or mid-career authors as often as we get great manuscripts from well-established authors and author/illustrators. We're happy to help develop the careers of young creatives.

We simply see that as part of the job for any press that cares about the current and future literary landscape for children.

Authors or illustrators who care as much about creating engaging new works for children as we do are exactly who we want to hear from.

LM: How would a prospective illustrator go about submitting to Bushel & Peck?

RVC: Our Google form for SUBMISSIONS is set up to allow them to send along a bio and links to whatever online portfolios they have—Behance, Instagram, their own website, etc.

LM: What variety of submissions will Bushel & Peck primarily be looking for? Single titles? Series? Fiction? Nonfiction? Please expand on this.

RVC: One of the things I did once I joined the Bushel & Peck team was talk to David about ways to structure and shape our list. After some exciting conversations, we decided to launch a few imprints along with a few series so readers would have an even clearer sense of what they'd be getting when they choose a Bushel & Peck book. It's important to do this for branding reasons, sure, but it's also helpful for prospective Bushel & Peck creatives to see where they might best be able to contribute to our catalog.

Let me add an extra thought here. I reject good writers and good manuscripts ALL THE TIME. Why? It's because they're not a great fit for us. We're not like Wordsong or Capstone or Beaming Books or Hippo Park or Lee & Low. From 30,000 feet up? Yeah, we all look pretty much the same. But when you come in and snuggle close the way a kiddo does in a before-bedtime book routine? To paraphrase Mark Twain, Bushel & Peck and the other kidlit publishers are about as different as lightning and a lightning bug.

To be clear, this isn't a judgment. Both lightning AND lightning bugs are cool—just in different ways.

What's the best way to learn about and appreciate the differences I'm referring to? Read a sizable selection of recently published books by any publisher that intrigues you. There's no better way to find out than that.

LM: Bushel & Peck has a unique delineation of ages for their books, as 1-3, 4-6, 7-10. What advice do you

Ryan G. Van Cleave...continued

have for the picture book writer who usually writes for 4-8 to hone in on these subdivisions?

RVC: Those distinctions were in place before I joined the team, but there's real value in thinking so specifically about a story's audience. The way many publishers handle intended reader ages reminds me of tabletop games which often claim that the fun is for ages 8 to 88 or something similarly preposterous.

The reality is that there's an ocean of difference between a child who's 4 and one who's 8. In so many ways, the changes they're undergoing are exponential, so having focused age goals for our books allow us a better chance to ensure a Bushel & Peck book is likely to be a hit (which is usually indicated by that potent phrase "Let's read it again!")

My recommendation for potential Bushel & Peck writers is to inhabit the worlds that kids do. Chomp too much sugary breakfast cereal. Play air hockey like your life depends on it. Flomp into a beanbag chair. Make fangs with a pair of gummy worms. Crawl around on your knees to appreciate the literal perspective from which kids view the world. I assure you—tables, door-knobs, and people appear quite different when you're looking UP at them.

Beyond that, spending time with children is the best way to know what they think, want, believe, and dislike. Knowing that is pure gold to any picture book writer or artist.

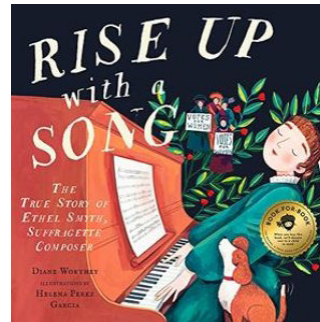
Let me put this more plainly. If your own picture book creative efforts are largely informed by your own decades-old experience as a child, you're going to run into issues. If you scrutinize the books that were big hits when you were a child, you'll find a surprising amount that wouldn't be as successful today. In a few cases, some of them might not even find publication at all because of how they handle topics/themes/language. Some things absolutely don't age well.

LM: Please tell us about your first acquisition for Bushel & Peck and what drew you to it.

RVC: The first book I worked with was one that was fairly far along in the process when I stepped in. Diane Worthey had a very good manuscript, and I was able to see mostly completed art by Helena Pérez García—that's so different from beginning the entire process with a text-only document. I spent a lot of time work-

ing with Diane to finetune the language with an eye—ear, rather!—for heightening the level of music in the words. I'm always a fan of attending to the melody of sound in a manuscript in general, but in this book? That type of attention made even more sense.

The end result was a starred review from *Kirkus*, which is a great way to launch a book. *Rise Up with a Song* has been earning more accolades and sales along the way, too, which makes me feel proud about what Diane and Helena and the press have created together.



Now, the first actual top-to-bottom acquisition I've made is a STEM poetry book by Irene Latham entitled *The Museum on the Moon: The Curious Objects on the Lunar Surface*. The moment I saw the manuscript, I knew it was a keeper. I'll give you just a few of the many reasons that led me to a purchase decision.

1. The concept is intriguing. The moon is a total dumping ground for all the stuff NASA sent up but couldn't realistically bring back. Why didn't I think about this before? So interesting.
2. Line by line, the poems have linguistic sizzle and pop. Words are used in interesting ways, and there's appropriate rhythm and rhyme.
3. The poems have helpful, context-providing STEM sidebars.
4. The manuscript has had input from scientists (like NASA folks).
5. I noted a few places I could help push the poem a bit further to be more effective in what it was already doing.
6. I had a clear vision for the illustration style that'd complement the poems. Though to be clear, art is David's world since he's such a terrifically gifted illustrator and designer. I offer input, but he has to "see it" too, and I knew David would for this one. (Spoiler-not-spoiler: I was correct. We both agreed that Myriam Wares was the perfect art-maker for this book.)

LM: What are you looking for in future projects? Do you have a specific wish list?

RVC: Like every publisher on the planet, we're always open to better representing the diversity of peo-

Ryan G. Van Cleave...continued

ple, places, thoughts, challenges, and opportunities that are part of our world. We've also got a soft spot for art, music, theater, and inventors. Plus, we LOVE laugh-out-loud stories—so much, in fact, that our next imprint will likely be one dedicated to the world of HAHA's.

LM: We are pleased that you will be accepting pitches from our members. Please share what you believe makes a strong pitch.

RVC: Just so we're clear, for picture books, just send the whole megillah. For anything else, a pitch is fine.

What makes a good pitch? Plenty of smart people have offered plenty of advice about this already, so Google as needed for that. But if you want my own two cents on it, I'll add this. It has to feel urgent. If you pitch something to a total stranger—as opposed to someone you already know and who would feel obligated at some level to pre-like the pitch—and the response is anything but “Tell me more!” then the pitch probably isn't ready.

LM: Should you request full manuscripts from this pitch opportunity, what do you want to see in the cover letter? Or would they submit via Bushel & Peck's regular submission process?

RVC: The regular submission process is the easiest way to handle things. I had a few things in my world go sideways at the end of 2022 so I got behind a bit with the slush pile, but I'm getting close to being fully caught up with this. Once that happens, my goal is for agented submissions to receive an editorial answer within a month, and unagented submissions to receive a response within 45 days.

It's a goal, not a promise. :)

As for a cover letter, I don't spend much time with them until after I've looked at the submission itself. Honestly, if the manuscript isn't strong enough to grab me on its own, finding out that you're an SCBWI Rising Kite winner or a *New York Times* bestseller doesn't magically make the story any better.

I'm a writer, too. And we all write things that are awesome, things that are serviceable, and things that are in varying degrees of hmmm to OMG-what-was-I-thinking?!?!?

Sometimes, we authors talk ourselves into submitting the latter stuff! If any of that comes through the Bushel & Peck submission pipeline, it'll boomerang back at some point with a nice note...but it'll be a no. We only publish about 20 books per season (with two seasons per year), so we're only taking manuscripts we love and can fully get behind. We don't have the bandwidth to take on anything that we're not bonkers about.

Bushel & Peck might be a newcomer to the publishing world, but we're stocked with industry pros top to bottom—did you see Dean Burrell just joined the team as Managing Editor to pair with our dynamite marketing person, Michelle Bayuk?—and our standards are as high as any NYC outfit. We're here to make a difference in the world of kidlit. That doesn't happen without a deep, passionate commitment to partnering with good people on good stories that matter.

That's Bushel & Peck in a nutshell.

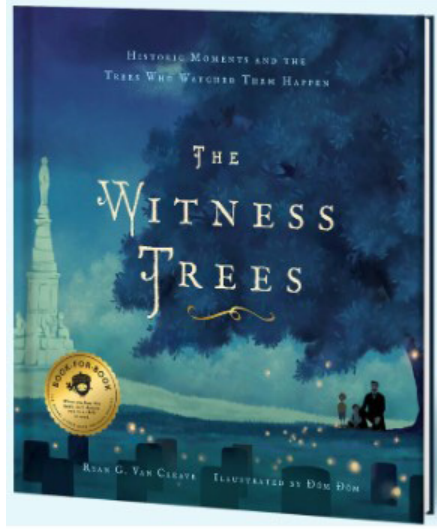
LM: When reading a query/cover letter, what process do you have? Do you read the cover letter first, or the

manuscript? How much of the manuscript will you generally read before you decide if you're interested or not?

RVC: Like I said above, it's always manuscript first. That's what matters most since we're potentially publishing the manuscript, not the cover letter.

For a picture book manuscript, I read every single word. For board books, early readers, and chapter books, I do the same. For MG or YA, I simply can't read every word nor do I need to do so. If you haven't sold me on the first page, I'll still turn to page two, but the clock of my limited time and attention is ticking fast. I won't keep reading much past where I'd have quit reading if I were a regular person picking a book up at the library or local indie bookstore shelves.

Yes, I can work on any manuscript and make it better,



but we get plenty of manuscripts that are so close to ready that I don't have to take on a project that's going to require oodles of work to get to where it needs to be. Children are discerning readers. You can't pull a fast one on them—the books have to be dynamite or they get read one time and then sit on a shelf to attract dust and eventually be sold at a garage sale for a buck or donated to Goodwill.

LM: How important is social media for an aspiring Bushel & Peck author? How important is a resume or prior experience?

RVC: With my students at Ringling College, I often talk about being a good literary citizen. That means a lot of things, but in a large sense, it simply means to be engaged. I always find it a bit disconcerting if authors aren't engaged with the kidlit world on social media at some level. That's different from saying people need to have a giant following.

In short, I feel more confident about their commitment to engaging meaningfully with the world through writing if I see it happening at some level already. Social media is one of a few ways to showcase that.

Past experience is always helpful, sure, but we won't disqualify anyone because they're sending us a manuscript that would be their first book publication. Or their first kidlit publication.

Let me circle back to literary citizenship again, since it's so vital. If you're unsure what this is or what you might do as part of your writing/reading career, check out Cathy Day's or Monmouth College's blog post on this topic. Give some of these things a try even if you don't get immediate literary karma in return.

literarycitizenship.com/2012/09/24/cathy-days-principles/#more-28

blogs.monm.edu/wrightstuff/2014/04/27/defining-literary-citizenship/

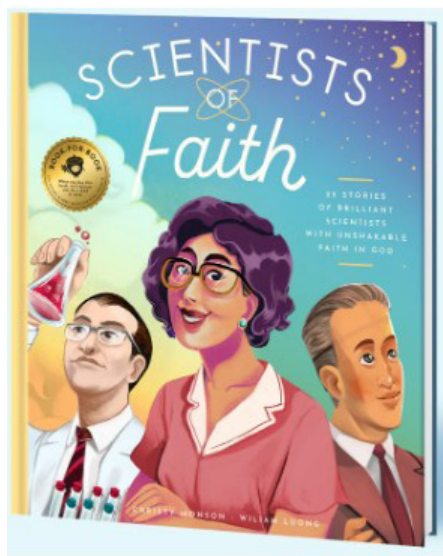
LM: Name three things that make a manuscript stand out for you.

RVC: I'll answer this with a focus on picture books, since that's mostly what I'm acquiring at the moment. In no particular order, three things that I have to see in a picture book manuscript for me to seriously consider it are:

1. An engaging voice
2. Tension/conflict/drama
3. Attention to page turns

LM: As a Writing Program Administrator and Writing Coach, do you have any tips for writers to keep an editor reading on to the second page?

RVC: Don't send a first draft.



Also, even if you're certain you've created the next *After the Fall*, *The Year We Learned to Fly*, or *My Lucky Day*, put aside the manuscript and let it breathe. Then return to it one more time and read it like you're a child—with an open mind and an open heart, and not a lot of patience for stories that don't deliver.

Only then should you consider submitting it.

Note: If you don't know the three books mentioned above, go read them immediately. You can thank me later by buying me a root beer at an

SCBWI conference.

LM: What are some of the top issues you see in submissions that don't make the grade?

RVC: There are a lot of ways for a manuscript to fall short early on.

- A title that looks dashed off or it's actually more of a theme than a title. If you can't be bothered to put real effort into a title (or a pitch or a cover letter or an author's website or ...), why should anyone assume the manuscript has been thoughtfully created and revised?
- Wonkily formatted art notes that end up being intrusive and awkward (I mean physically on the page, though they can be similarly problematic in how they assume art directors and professional il-

illustrators can't determine how to create an unhappy girl without the note "she is frowning" or even "she has a giant frown on her face").

- Using language that is too descriptive. Revisit the above note as needed, and trust that your illustrator will be a professional.
- Assuming picture books have to rhyme.
- Talking down to kids (often through language/style that comes across like a lecture).

LM: Please take a moment to explain the importance of reviews of books we love for authors and particularly for smaller, independent publishers. What are some ways to get the word out and support beautiful books?

RVC: You're now talking about literary citizenship again—hooray! Reviews matter. We live in the Age of Recommendation, and I can't speak for others but I'll say that for me, I'd rather listen to people for recommendations than algorithms and AI. I don't care where those recs come from. Goodreads. Amazon reviews. Reviews in newspapers or magazines. Twitter. TikTok. Conversation.

Joining a book club or participating in a community's One Book reading program are other fine ways to be meaningfully involved in the world of words.

For small presses like Bushel & Peck, it can be a challenge to compete with the big NYC presses and imprints since we're just operating on a smaller scale. But we absolutely can compete so long as we have great stories, include great illustrations, and get the books well distributed and well reviewed.

Part of getting a book well reviewed is—to no one's surprise—getting reviews. That's where you and your own sense of literary citizenship comes in.

Note: I review books at my blog, [Only Picture Books](#). You'll note that I never review books that earn lower than 3.25 out of 5. I don't think there's value in bashing someone. If I see a book that would earn a low rating like that, I'll just not review it. I also don't skew upward either, even if I know or like the creator(s). For different reasons, a dishonest positive review is as bad

as a total hatchet job that's accurate.

LM: Veering into the world of literature for a moment, what makes *The Great Gatsby* your favorite book? What do you believe makes this novel so timeless?

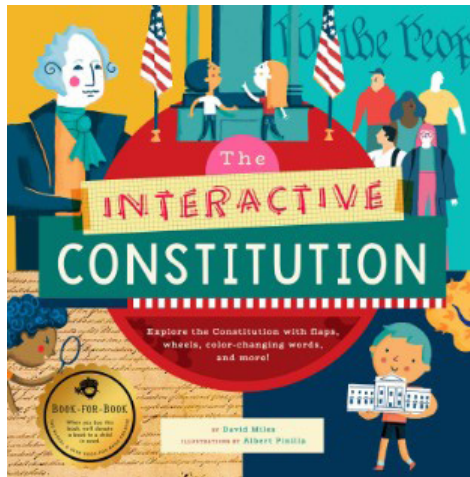
RVC: The language is beautifully poetic and, at times, haunting. As someone with a Ph.D. in poetry, I respond well to well-wrought language used purposefully to great effect. Also, the story is flawed, the characters are flawed, and the author was flawed, but wonderfully, deliciously so.

What makes it timeless? Behind capturing an era with stunning clarity, *The Great Gatsby* is what the best stories are—a gift that keeps on giving. Despite generations of readers inspecting/scrutinizing the story for all it has to offer, *The Great Gatsby* keeps serving up a bit more each time.

I mean the book, mind you. NOT the films.

It's also fascinating to me how it's so widely misunderstood. See this BBC article for a pretty good accounting of this phenomenon.

[bbc.com/culture/article/20210209-the-worlds-most-misunderstood-novel](https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20210209-the-worlds-most-misunderstood-novel)



LM: Staying in the adult world for a moment—as the Author of *Memoir Writing for Dummies*, what advice do you have for any kidlit writers who may also be working on a memoir?

RVC: Be realistic about the size of your intended audience. While our lives all feel important to us, it's unlikely that we all have stories that will be the next *Eat, Pray, Love*. And that's okay. I'm not saying your story doesn't matter, but it's unrealistic to expect NYC publishers to get excited about a project that probably has a best-case audience of 800.

Adjust your expectations—and submission strategy—accordingly. Self-publishing might be the best route to go if you're really just recording your life for your immediate and extended family. University publishers or small/indie presses might be a happy medium.

Ryan G. Van Cleave...continued

LM: You are also the author of *Writing SciFi, Fantasy and Horror for Dummies*. How important is world-building, even for picture book writers? Explain.

RVC: Every story has a world, and every world must be created, even if it's eerily similar to—or even the same as—the world in which we eat, breathe, and binge watch second-rate Netflix original shows.

LM: Please share a tip on how to effectively build a world in a picture book.

RVC: If you pick the right detail to include, it doesn't take more than one to create a vivid world. Trust me—a pro illustrator will handle the rest. That's the collaborative beauty of picture books. A writer creates the story and characters, then the artist deepens and expands it in unexpected, vital ways.

LM: Please ask yourself and answer a question (or two) that you wish I would have asked you, but didn't.

RVC: Ooooooh. I'm feeling delightfully delirious with the power to control my own interview ending. Hmmm...here goes!

LM: You've got quite a few books coming out with Bushel & Peck where you're the author or co-author. How strange is that to be both editor and writer there?

RVC: Prior to joining Bushel & Peck as an editor, they bought quite a few of my own picture book manuscripts. In fact, working with them so successfully as an author was what helped us realize we were a great team, which led to my current position there. So, that's where a good number of those are coming from, such as *Body Music*, my co-authored poetry book with Jane Yolen, or *The Witness Trees*, my nonfiction picture book that comes out this May.

Like so many other presses—Little Bee, Disney, etc.—we produce some books in-house. Since I'm a full-time writer, too, a lot of that falls on me. It's important to note that every book goes through the same editorial process which includes having an editor (who isn't the author!) shepherding the book along. For some of my forthcoming books, we've even gone beyond our own team to bring in outside experts to serve in that role, such as Brooke Vitale, who edited thousands of books for Disney and other presses.

There's an advantage, too, to me running through the Bushel & Peck editorial process fairly often from “the

other side.” I get to experience things as our authors do. This helps me see ways to support them in their own work as Bushel & Peck writers, but it also means I occasionally find something we can do to make the entire process better.

One of our goals is for Bushel & Peck to provide the best publishing experience a creative has ever had. We want the process and the final product to be a WOW for everyone involved.

LM: Last question! What movie quotes do you use on a regular basis?

RVC: Two come to mind. The first is the gem from Jerry Maguire: “You had me at ‘hello.’” Though, of course, I replace the key word with whatever's relevant to the moment, as in “You had me at ‘baklava’” or “You had me at ‘nuclear particle accelerator.’”

The second is from *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, though I regularly misremember it as being from *It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown*. It's where Charlie Brown's sister, Sally, is sharing the long laundry list of gifts she wants from Santa, saying, “All I want is what I have coming to me. All I want is my fair share.” That gives me the giggles every time.

This month, instead of our regular special [Above the Slushpile](#) submission form, Ryan G. Van Cleave prefers that all submissions come through the Bushel & Peck submission form at bushelandpeckbooks.com/pages/submissions Until March 31, 2023, if you clearly state that this is a CBI submission in the text box for your bio (titled Your Background), Ryan will respond more quickly than to submissions from non-CBI subscribers. You'll be able to include the pitch for your work, upload your cover letter, manuscript and marketing plan, and any relevant links (author website, online portfolios, etc.) Bushel & Peck is currently accepting fiction and nonfiction picture books (including faith-based content for the Sunbeam imprint), middle grade fiction and nonfiction, and poetry (single-author collections and anthologies centered around a theme), as well as the Heroes Remembered and Decide & Survive series mentioned in this interview. Study the publisher's current catalog at bushelandpeckbooks.com/collections/our-books to be sure your work fits with the Bushel & Peck list.

ENDINGS

Make Yours WOW the Reader

by Jane McBride

How many of you know the ending of your books before you have written the first page, even the first paragraph or the first line? I always know the endings of my books. They will be happy. That's a given since I write romance.

Romance writers often talk about the HEA ending: happily ever after. But some endings don't or can't have an HEA. Some endings will be sad. Others will surprise the reader. But all good endings should have one thing in common. They should be satisfying. They should make the reader think, "It couldn't have happened any other way."

Let's take a look at some different kinds of endings:

The happily-ever-after ending (as mentioned above). This is a typical romance ending, appearing in novels as well as classic fairy tales. These are my favorite kinds of endings, but that hat does not mean my characters will never face hardship. On the contrary, they will face plenty of hardships, including villains, natural disasters, betrayal, and a bunch of other bad stuff. However, they will overcome these obstacles and eventually triumph over them in a way that leaves the reader hopeful for their future. You don't have to be writing a romance to give your characters a happily-ever-after, but you do want high emotional stakes and a feel-good ending. For examples of happy endings, check out *Frankly in Love* by David Yoon (young adult romance), *Dear Mrs. Bird* by A.J. Pearce (YA historical fiction), *Saving Winslow* by Sharon Creech (middle grade), *The Tale of Despereaux: Being the Story of a Mouse, a Princess, Some Soup, and a Spool of Thread* by Kate DiCamillo

(chapter book ages 7-10).

The bittersweet ending. This ending takes the reader through sadness before arriving at happiness, and often includes a loss for the protagonist. But the story concludes with the main character in a hopeful, forward-facing place. In the picture book *Lubna and Pebble* by Wendy Meddour, a young refugee girl and her father can finally move from the World of Tents to a home, but her friend will be left behind. She decides to give him the one item—her most treasured possession—that has brought her comfort through the months of uncertainty. John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* is a young adult novel with a bittersweet ending.

The surprise ending. Who doesn't love a good surprise ending? They give the reader a jolt, something to cause her to sit up and take notice. How do you write a surprise ending? Short answer: carefully. Longer answer: it may help to brainstorm possible endings. Consider writing ten ideas for ending your story, then go back and pick the best one. Hint: it's rarely the first one you come up with. Ask yourself, what is the least likely ending for the story? Then ask how you can make it fit in the story's context. Does it mesh with the character and the overall plot? Surprise endings should also be unexpected but inevitable—they can't just come out of nowhere for the surprise factor, but should leave the reader thinking, "Of course it had to end this way." One great example of an inevitable surprise ending is Dan Santat's picture book, *After the Fall (How Humpty Dumpty Got Back Up Again)*. For fun examples of surprise endings, try picture books *Charlotte and the*

Endings...continued

Rock by Stephen W. Martin, *Egg Drop* by Mini Grey, *Polar Bear's Underwear* by Tupera Tupera, *Poor Little Guy* by Elanna Allen, and *The Giant Jumpree* by Julie Donaldson.

The twist ending. These are surprise endings turned up a notch. The twist at the end reveals something about the protagonist or the story premise that we didn't see coming, but still makes sense. In fact, the twist ending often makes any loose plot threads fall neatly into place. For a twist on twist endings, try E. Lockhart's young adult *We Were Liars*, Robert Cormier's classic novel *I Am the Cheese*, and the picture book *I Want My Hat Back* by Jon Klassen.

The goes-back-to-the-beginning ending. Sometimes called circular stories, this ending leaves the protagonist in the same place as at the beginning of the

story, but with different, improved circumstances or mindset. In other words, the character may be back where they started, but they've changed in some way. The classic picture book *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak has Max being sent to his room without his supper in the beginning, and then returning to his room at the end, only this time his supper is waiting for him and it's still hot. Lauren Oliver's young adult *Before I Fall* has the protagonist reliving the last day of her life seven times before solving the mystery of her death.

LAST WORDS ON ENDINGS

If you are stumped about an ending, ask yourself two questions. Who is my character? And what is his/her primary goal? Then write the only ending that can fit your story.

For another take on different ways to end your story, check out



In this 100-minute on-demand webinar from WritingBlueprints with instructor Jes Trudel, you'll learn:

- How to use Jes's powerful Story Endings Matrix
- How to develop your Story Goals
- How to determine your Story Outcomes
- How to understand & master the 5 Types of Story Endings
- How famous authors have used each story ending type
- How to Reverse Brainstorm
- How to Reverse Outline
- How to choose *exactly* the right ending for your story

For more information, go to:

writingblueprints.com/p/finish-big-mastering-the-5-kidlit-story-endings

Sara Shepard

PLOT TWIST QUEEN

interview by PJ McIlvaine

It's a good thing Sara Shepard didn't listen to a teacher who wasn't a fan of her writing. Following her passion, Shepard can now boast of being a number one *New York Times* best-selling author of the hugely successful sixteen-book *Pretty Little Liars* series which also became a popular TV show. In total, Shepard has written more than thirty novels, taking being prolific to a whole other level. Writing in multiple genres and formats including screenwriting, Shepard is known for her twisty plot lines and conflicted characters. Her new book, the young adult *Wait for Me* (Union Square, 2022), is an engaging blend of paranormal romance and mystery thriller that will keep you guessing who dun it. A graduate of NYU who also has an MFA from Brooklyn College, Shepard now makes her home in Philadelphia.

PJ McILVAINE: Did you always aspire to be a writer?

SARA SHEPARD: I'm not sure I always aspired to be a writer, but I always loved writing, and it was probably always a secret dream. There's a cartoon I drew in one of my journals from fifth grade that's a line graph—at the top is “published author”, in the middle is the label “okay author,” and at the bottom is a stick figure labeled “Me, terrible author.” But still, I labeled myself as an author!

PM: What was the first thing you ever wrote?

SS: The first thing I ever wrote was probably a story on a piece of computer paper that I also illustrated. The first thing published, technically, was a story called “Quizzles” about little yellow creatures that lived in a girl's garden—it was environmentalist before environmentalism was cool, as I was in fifth grade and it was 1988. I wrote many short stories, poems, plays, and attempts at novels between then and the first thing that was actually published, which was a book series I wrote called *Samurai Girl* about a Japanese young woman who realizes the mafia is after her and she has to rely on her innate Samurai ancestry to help her through...or something. I don't quite remember.

PM: When did you realize that writing could be a viable and profitable career?

SS: I started out as a ghostwriter, writing books that are someone else's idea with other people's names on them. That didn't pay very well, but at least it *did* pay, which was a huge deal at the time. I wasn't really sure being an author paid until I submitted *Pretty Little Liars* and got a contract for a four-book series. But I wasn't doing it only to be paid. I was doing it because I loved it. (Of course, it's nice that you can also be paid to do this.)



Sara Shepard...continued

PM: Did you have any doubts or memorable rejections on your journey to becoming a best-selling New York Times author?

SS: I was rejected many times for many things! In fact, I had a teacher during my junior year of undergrad who said that I was such a confusing, terrible writer that I needed to go to the school's writing help center to sort out my thoughts. (I didn't go. And for the record, it was an academic sort of paper, not a story.) I submitted stories all over the place and no one wanted them. And when the first *Pretty Little Liars* came out, it wasn't instantly popular. For a long time, I was pretty sure no one had read the book. I obsessively checked Amazon and read every review, and a lot of them weren't favorable. I've now learned not to read reviews! I was *shocked* when I found out the second book was on the *New York Times* Best Sellers list. Like I said, I was certain no one was reading the series!

PM: You write in multiple genres and have been successful. Do you have any advice for writers who want to follow your trajectory?

SS: Write what you want to write! Don't try and follow the trends or feel that you have to write something a lot like the last thing you wrote because that last thing was good or well-reviewed or your peers liked it. Follow your inspiration. The end result will be much better.

PM: How do you know when an idea is a keeper?

SS: Sometimes I don't. Sometimes I'll get quite far into a novel and realize that I've gone down the wrong path. Other times I'll write half a book, ditch the idea, only to come back to it sometime later and think, "Hmm, that's actually really interesting." Save everything you write! You never know when you might need it.

PM: Have you ever given up on an idea?

SS: Yes, for sure. I have quite a few documents that are 10-100 pages long that I think are "starts" of something that go nowhere.

PM: What inspires you to write in one genre over another?

SS: It depends. Sometimes it's just audience—I like writing for teens, but I also wanted to write for adults or even younger kids in middle grade. I like adjusting according to what sort of reader it might be. Or sometimes it's the topic I want to explore—*Wait For Me* is about reincarnation and romance. It's mostly

just what I'm interested in. Occasionally I can feel really inspired by something I've read or a movie/ TV show I've watched, which will lead me into a slightly different genre. Even this far into my career, I can still start ideas by writing thinly veiled fan fiction of someone else's work.

PM: What is your writing routine like, do you write daily or when inspiration hits?

SS: It depends on whether I'm on a schedule. I like having a deadline because if I don't, I'll lack some motivation to actually sit down and write some pages. It's better if someone

holds me accountable. If I do have a deadline, I tend to write (or work, because sometimes that involves editing, promo stuff, emails, etc.) from about 8:30-3:30, while my kids are in school.

PM: Being such a prolific writer, how do you keep so many balls juggling without losing steam or creativity?

SS: I do think there's a limit of balls I can have juggling at once—if there are *too* many, I lose track of the story and then become less invested. But as long as I'm into all of the things I'm working on, and



Sara Shepard...continued

none of those things are *too* similar, I find it pretty easy to flip back and forth from one project to another depending on the upcoming deadline.

PM: How long does it take you to write the first draft? How many drafts do you do before you know it's ready for the world?

SS: It can depend. Usually, uninterrupted, a draft takes a few months. Interrupted, it can take way longer. I would say most of my books go through at least three or four drafts if not more. A lot of that is up to my editor!

PM: Do you have an agent? What tips would you have for those in the query trenches?

SS: I do have an agent, and I do think they're very helpful both creatively and on the business side. As far as querying goes, I think the key is to be persistent and not give up. If you are lucky enough to have more than one person interested in you, go with your gut on who you feel will really be invested in your career. It can be thrilling to have a "star" agent interested, but sometimes it might be that lesser-known agent who gives you and your work more of their time.

PM: Your latest book *Wait for Me* is a young adult psychological mystery thriller-paranormal romance mash-up. What was the inspiration for this particular story? I understand it started out as an adult novel and then you switched the genre. What was the reason? How much research did the book entail? Do you see this book as a standalone or a potential series?

SS: I'm going to try and answer these all at once! The inspiration for the story came from two screenwriters—Kevin Williamson (*Scream*) and Julie Plec (*Vampire Diaries*). A few years ago, they came up with this movie concept about reincarnation and romance, but it went nowhere. I met them through a mutual friend and they showed me the pitch idea, wondering if I could make it into a book. So that's how it started. Their idea was about two adults from the start. At first, I changed it to be about two teen-

agers instead, but the setting wasn't right, and people weren't resonating with how it was from two different POVs...it just didn't have sparkle. Then I tried writing the idea from only one POV but making it more adult...but that didn't feel quite right for the material, either. I ended up keeping the one POV idea but aging the characters down to college age (actually, the main character is even a little younger). It's YA that could appeal to older readers. It felt right thematically—there's a very fairytale romance involved, and the main character is somewhat naïve and unsure of herself, and this story is sort of her coming-of-age moment in life. That felt very YA for me, not adult. I'm glad I made the switch.

The book required some research about the setting, reincarnation, and a certain mental illness diagnosis. It was fun to research all these aspects, especially the reincarnation piece. There are some incredible stories out there about people who believed they've lived past lives. I'm not sure if the book could be a series, but I'd love to revisit Casey and Jake again.

PM: Your *Pretty Little Liars* series has had amazing success. Did you always envision it as a series or is that something that evolved? How involved were you in the subsequent TV series?

SS: I always thought *PLL* would be a book series, though I never knew it would be sixteen books long. I wasn't involved in the TV show, but I know that so many people involved read the books and used details in the episodes. That was so much fun to watch!

PM: Do you have any tips or advice for writers struggling to write one book, let alone a series? Do you outline each book or just dive in and see where the story takes you? How do you keep track of all the characters and plotlines?

SS: I think my advice would definitely be to outline, especially if you're thinking about doing a series. A series works a lot of the time when you're building a story slowly over time...meaning that at the end of book one, you'll want to have a cliffhanger of sorts to make sure readers want to come back and read book two, and so on. That can be in the form of a new mystery, or a secret revealed, or some other

Sara Shepard...continued

new complication/obstacle that the characters will face.

I usually try and outline my books at least somewhat. The *PLL* books were heavily outlined because there were so many characters and plotlines to keep track of. *Wait For Me* had less of an intense outline, but there was still a lot of moving parts—the romance, the backstory, the mystery, what Casey believes versus what she’s being told, etc. That said, there are times when you think you have an iron-clad outline and, as you’re writing, the story starts to change. It’s okay to diverge from the outline! Sometimes, better ideas can occur to you as you’re writing. A good deal of the time my finished book is quite different from the original outline I wrote.

PM: Do you find publishing more challenging now than when you first started out? In hindsight, what would you have changed or done differently?

SS: I think there is so much more talent out there these days than there was when I started writing, so that makes it harder for sure. In hindsight, I might have tried to get involved in the TV aspect a little more. I don’t know if I would have been suited to work in a writer’s room (see the introvert question below) but it might have been fun to get more of a taste of that world from a writing perspective.

PM: How active are you on social media? Are you an introvert or an extrovert?

SS: When the show was on, I was pretty active on Twitter. These days, I’m much more private. I know you’re not supposed to be as an author. It’s such a struggle. I’m not naturally extroverted so the idea of just putting random stuff on social media feels really strange to me. I’m like, “Why would anyone care that I wrote three paragraphs today?” I always get very envious of other authors who are witty and amusing on social media. I wish I could enjoy it more!

PM: What are you currently working on? Do you have a passion project? Do you set new goals for yourself? You’re also a screenwriter, is that some-

thing you’d like to do more of?

SS: I’m currently working on an adult novel and a middle-grade series. The middle grade is called *Penny Draws a Best Friend*, and I did the illustrations! I would say that’s my passion project because I’m not really an illustrator but it’s been a lot of fun. I think my goals for myself are to do things I feel passionate about, not because I think I “have” to if that makes any sense. And yes, I’d love to do more screenwriting!

PM: Of all the books you’ve written, is there one particular character you wish you could revisit and perhaps change their story arc?

SS: I feel like this one is easy because so many of my killed-off characters lived on in *PLL* the show! I would have loved to keep Toby and Mona alive. I loved what the show did for those characters, and I definitely got rid of them too soon.

Follow Sara on [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#).

SUBPLOTS

What They Do What They Don't Do

by Jane McBride

I love a good subplot. I love the extra zing it can add to an already good story. I love the complexity of layers it adds as well as new characters.

But before we go adding subplots to every story we write, we need to think about whether or not a subplot is right for a particular story. Some stories are just too short for subplots. Other stories want to stand on their own. And yet other stories can be overwhelmed by a subplot.

What is a Subplot, Exactly?

A subplot is a secondary plot in the story. When you pick up a book and read the back cover copy, you are reading about the main plot. The subplot can be one that adds further complications to the main plot featuring the main character(s) or it can involve secondary characters in their own plot, one which mirrors or contrasts with the main story line.

Consider these questions when you are thinking of adding a subplot to your book:

Does your book have enough meat to it to support a subplot? What do I mean by “meat?” In this instance, meat is substance. A weak main plot won't hold up a subplot. In fact, a subplot may steal the show from the main plot. What if the main plot of your middle grade reader centers around a nine-year-old boy Aidan trying to get his parents back together? His efforts are predictable and familiar: he leaves photo albums open to pictures of family celebrations, he tries to orchestrate a romantic dinner for their anniversary, he asks them about how they met. In other words, rather ho-hum events for a middle grade reader.

Then he confides in an elderly neighbor who pays

Aidan to walk his dog and finds out the neighbor used to be married. But the neighbor's story—that he and his wife were spies during the Cold War—turns out to be more compelling than Aidan's story, the primary plot line. What is the fix here? Either rework the subplot so it doesn't pull the tension away from the problem in the main plot line, or make the more intriguing subplot the main story. In either case, the subplot needs to be connected to—and support—the main plot in some way. The relationships and events in the subplot should either help the protagonist solve the main plot problem, or throw more obstacles in his path. If the subplot feels like it belongs in a different book, then it probably does.

Do you have sufficient word count to include a subplot? Picture books, easy readers, and early chapter books don't have enough words to fully develop a subplot (though a subplot can be shown in picture books through the illustrations). Also, younger readers may not be able to follow more than one plot thread unfolding simultaneously. For older readers and even adults, the addition of subplots may depend on the genre and format of the book. In the romantic suspense novels I write, which come in at approximately 55,000 words, there is not room to add a subplot. The books already include romance, suspense, and faith elements. Adding another plot to the story would far exceed the word count of this established line.

However, single titles (not part of a series) have more flexibility. If you're writing a character-driven book, you may decide to add an action-based subplot to vary the pacing. ON the other hand, a plot-driven book (such as a mystery or adventure story) may gain more depth with a subplot revolving around the protagonist's relationship with another character, or tackling some emotional dilemma related to

Subplot...continued

the main story.

Do you know what the purpose of the subplot is?

If you are throwing in a subplot only because you need to increase your word count, forget it. It will stick out just as would padding a story any other way. If the purpose of your subplot is to strengthen the main plot, good for you. What if your main plot centers around 17-year-old Tara who discovers she is pregnant? Woven into the story is that of her mother who discovers she, too, is pregnant. The girl must decide what to do. Should she give up the baby for adoption or should she keep it and raise it? A problem arises with the mother's pregnancy, threatening her life. She, too, must make a decision. Should she carry the baby full-term, or should she end the pregnancy and possibly save her life? Do you see how the subplot mirrors the main storyline? Mother and daughter grow closer as they both wrestle with one of the most important decisions they will ever make.

Do you know how to make the subplot complement the main story line?

Let's make up a plot with an accompanying subplot and determine if they can work together. The main plot: Thirteen-year-old twins Lindsay and Leslie decide to stage a coup against the seventh grade bully in their school. The bully, Patricia, forces younger kids to hand over lunch money as well as lunches. She also makes other kids do her homework. If they fail to do it, she beats them up. Patricia failed two grades and so is bigger than other kids in her class. She also teases the kids she knows are easily intimidated, often making them cry. Lindsay and Leslie have each other, and Patricia normally leaves them alone, but the twins don't like seeing other kids threatened and bullied. Lindsay and Leslie set up Patricia for a fall, capturing her bullying on their phones. They intend to take it to the principal, even to the school board if necessary.

What kind of subplot would go along with this? Several come to mind, but the one I like best has Patricia as the subplot's character. Suppose after Lindsay and Leslie record Patricia bullying a young girl on their phones, they are about to turn it in to the principal when Lindsay happens to go into the girls' room at school and hears someone crying in one of the stalls. She starts to back away, to give the poor

girl her privacy, when she realizes the person crying is Patricia. Lindsay convinces Leslie to hold off talking to the principal, and that afternoon they see Patricia being yelled at and smacked by her mother in the school parking lot. They later learn that Patricia is being abused, verbally, emotionally, and physically at home. The main plot centers around the sisters' attempt to stop a bully. Patricia's story weaves through the primary one, causing Lindsay and Leslie to question what they thought was true and to come up with a different way to put an end to Patricia's bullying. They succeed but not in the way they expected. As they learn more about Patricia, they find a way to help her feel better about herself. Patricia finds that she has a talent for drawing and starts using that, gaining the attention of the school's art teacher. As she grows in self-confidence, she doesn't feel the need to bully other kids as she once did. It's the best kind of victory: a win-win one.

What are the Hallmarks of a Good Subplot?

A good subplot will reveal more information about the characters. In the example of the teenage girl who discovers she is pregnant, the subplot involving the mother shows the girl's empathy and love for her mother.

A good subplot raises the stakes. The above example about twins Lindsay and Leslie trying to stop a bully and the subplot of the bully's being bullied by her mother shows the horrible effects of bullying.

Wrapping Up

Subplots can not only enhance the main plot; they can also bring the story alive in ways it wasn't before adding it. Finding the right subplot to complement and strengthen the main plot is the mark of an experienced writer. Remember that a subplot can't fix a weak main plot. If you aren't sure about a certain subplot, try it out. If it doesn't work, try another. Remember: you are not married to it. The only thing you are married to is writing the very best book you can.

The Mother's Heart

Magazine Serves Homeschooling Moms with a Christian Focus

interview by Sharon O. Blumberg

Editor's Note: From time to time we'll be alerting you to opportunities to write for markets that serve readers who may also buy children's books, such as teachers or homeschooling parents. This allows you to use your knowledge of children in other ways, add to your writing resume, and reach readers who may be interested in your books

Kym Wright is the mother of eight wonderful homeschooled children and the author of the exciting new book: *Booster Shot: Energize Your Homeschool with Unit Studies*. Kym holds a Bachelor of Science Degree from Judson College in Marion, Alabama. She has been homeschooling for 20-something years, with her oldest daughter learning to read at 3½, and she has authored hundreds of articles on homeschooling, education, mothering, and practical living. Her articles have appeared in many national publications including *Practical Homeschooling* and *Home Schooling Today*, and Kym has been a columnist for many homeschool publications. She now publishes a premium online magazine called *The Mother's Heart*. The theme of her magazine is if the mother's heart is right, and she is convinced of the value of her role as a mom, she'll make great choices for her family.



SHARON BLUMBERG: Please tell us about yourself, and how you came to be editor/publisher of this online magazine?

KYM WRIGHT: In 1996, we saw a need for encouragement for moms, homeschool mothers, and husbands in setting priorities and getting things done. This was before the blogs, vlogs, Instagram, Facebook, and most online resources. We were a print publication but realized we could reach more

people through an online publication.

SB: How do people find/subscribe to your magazine?

KW: We are carried by Magzter and we have a website: the-mothers-heart.com

SB: Many of the subscribers of *Children's Book Insider* are teachers, and all are working on children's books. Given this interest and experience, what type of material do you think our subscribers might be best suited to write for your publication?

KW: First, remember our audience: mothers, mothers of many, homeschoolers, and dads. Write articles that reach our audience. If you've published a book, mention it in your bio.

SB: What is the theme of your magazine, and what topics are you looking for?

KW: We are interested in heart and informational articles on all facets of motherhood, homeschooling and making a warm home environment: organization, living in God's strength, encouragement for mothers, joyous mothering, creative homemaking, child-raising, getting it all done, father's viewpoint and roles, adoption, and other topics related to Titus 2 and Proverbs 31 living.

The Mother's Heart Magazine...continued

Please begin the writing process with an outline. Please keep the tone positive, real-life, with hope and a good ending. Personal experiences or other anecdotes which relate to the article topic make great lead-ins.

We prefer articles to be 750-1000 words for short articles, 1250-1750 words for feature articles.

SB: What is the link to your writer's guidelines?

KW: Please find the link below:

<http://tmhmag.com/Writers%20Guidelines%202016-2019.pdf>

SB: What kind of monetary compensation do you offer writers?

KW: We either pay you a fee of \$10 - \$75 for the use of your article, or we will exchange one article for an eighth-page (1/8) ad for you or your product(s). We will also include a 30-word bio, with one website address.

SB: Do you work with writers for editing modifications?

KW: Yes, or we make edits ourselves.

SB: Is there anything you would like to offer for our writers that I have not asked you?

KW: We request articles sent as an email attachment or embedded in the body of the email. We rarely accept reprints. Please let us know if your article has been published anywhere else (in a magazine, newsletter, newspaper, or other publication, or in an email, on a website, or to an e-loop).

If you are sending a simultaneous submission (sending one article to editors of two or more different publications), please let us know.

Please attach a professional-quality headshot and 30-word bio with your article.

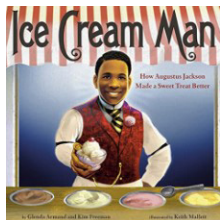
Articles and ads are due the first (1st) of the month, six (6) months before publication.

To download a sample issue to study the style and content of *The Mother's Heart* before submitting, go to tmhmag.com/issues/issue_126.htm



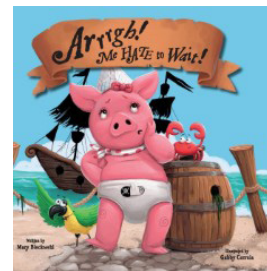
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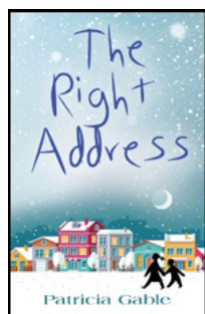


Kim Freeman (kimfreeman.us/) is thrilled to announce the release of *Ice Cream Man: How Augustus Jackson Made a Sweet Treat Better*. Kim co-authored this inspirational picture book biography, for ages 4-8, with Glenda Armand. Discover the inspiring story of Augustus Jackson, an African American entrepreneur who is known as "the father of ice cream." The beautiful illustrations are by Keith Mallett. Available at Penguin Random House, your favorite bookstore's website and [Amazon](https://www.amazon.com).

Mary Bleckwehl's new picture book, *Arrrgh! Me HATE To Wait!* launched January 26. It is a story of an impatient piggy pirate who can't wait to go to big pig pirate school. This is Mary's tenth children's book and is illustrated by Gabby Correia of Capetown, South Africa. Available on [Amazon](https://www.amazon.com).

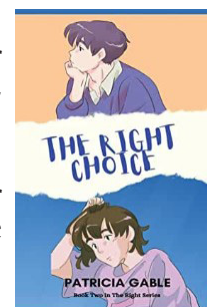


Patricia Gable (patriciag.net) announces the publication of the first two books in a three-book series set in the 1980's, published by Booklocker. Both are for ages 8-16, and available on [Amazon](https://www.amazon.com).



The Right Address. Annie and Willie, two foster siblings, run away from their foster home and hide in a small town. Adventure follows as they try to survive and find their forever home.

The Right Choice. Freshman Christopher is an outstanding basketball player until his life turns upside down. What choices will he make to turn his life back around?



OTHER GOOD NEWS

Sapphire Chow is thrilled to announce that she is now represented by Anjanette Barr of Dunham Literary!

Leslie Eva Tayloe, Mona Voelkel, Renee Bolla, Tarja Nevala, and Dianne Koebel-Pede have formed Kidlit At Heart (kidlitatheart.com), a children's book marketing group comprised of women children's book writers from the U.S. and Canada. They have all have taken different routes to publication—three self-published, one traditional/hybrid, and one work-for-hire—and all have books out in 2022, 2023, and beyond. The group will be doing a panel presentation at the Women in Publishing Summit this month on "Forming a Collaborative Children's Book Marketing Group."

Send us your good news! If you'd like to announce a recent publication (book or magazine, traditionally or self-published), please send a short description of the project (title, publisher, age range, pub date, and 1-2 sentence description) along with a JPEG of the book cover or, if available, the magazine cover/spread of article. Also include up to two links (your website, Amazon listing, etc.) Please note that we don't have the staff to hunt down any details that you forget to include. We'll print what you send us, so you may want to wait until you have a book cover and firm pub date to take best advantage of this announcement. **If you'd like to share other good news** (you found an agent, started a blog, finished revising your manuscript, were invited to speak at a local festival, etc.) please send a brief description of your news, up to two links you'd like to share, and, if desired, one related image as a JPEG.

Email all material to mail@writeforkids.org, and put "Celebrate" in the subject line. All material must be received by the 20th of the month to appear in the following month's issue.