



# Writing for Children

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### **Why are writing picture books so important?**

It communicates messages in ways that impact next generation- Can you imagine what it would be like to meet someone who read your picture book and became a better person because of it? Your worldview pours out from you on to the page. You are impacting the world with your words. Kids today more than ever need solid concepts communicated in simplistic ways so the concepts can be understood.

### **Picture books create positive memories for children and promote a love of literacy-**

In the current school system, artistic programs are being cut and replaced to make room for basic subjects like reading, writing and arithmetic. But often reading is used as a measuring tool to ensure high test scores when it comes time for annual testing for state funding. It is a privilege to help children learn to read before they even begin school, so that children can appreciate books for the entertainment and educational value they present, not merely an instrument for learning.

### **Picture books written today have the potential to become classic books**

**tomorrow-** As authors, we have the privilege of presenting our words to the world. But for adults, books become less important and less at the forefront of people's minds. Picture books, however, grow with a child. A 3 -year- old who loves to touch the pictures of our book will enjoy reading the words for the first time at five or six. A child or a parent may want to keep the book as a memento of their childhood and may get passed down throughout the generations. Perhaps your grandchildren and great grandchildren may reap the benefits of your words!

Emile Buchwald said, "children are made readers on the laps of their parents." Some of my favorite memories of my children were when they were young. I put each of my kids in my lap and read books to them. Then, as they grew, I gave them larger books and we pronounced the words together and seeing them read for the first time. What a joy to participate in my kids' lives in this way. It has helped promote a love of reading in my kids and gave me precious memories to cling to as an adult.

Here are five tips to help you if you have a desire to write a children's book but don't know where to start:


- **Write what you know-** What experiences do you bring to the writing world? Start with one scene from one event and write about it.



- **Establish your felt need-** You're writing a book. What is the book's purpose? To entertain or to inform? Once you have established your purpose, next establish your felt need. What is the problem you feel children have? How can your book solve it?
- **Research-** What are your favorite children's books? Why are they your favorite? What vocabulary do they use? In a sense, children are the most difficult to write for since you have to communicate an entire message in a short amount of words. Descriptions have to be shortened and less vivid than adult books because kids already have to use their imagination. Any words that are used that kids do not understand it could jeopardize their comprehension of your material.
- **What is the book's competition-** Be well- versed in which children's books are already out there that are most similar to what you want to write about. What unique spin can you present about the topic you're writing about?
- **Be multi-layered-** Some of the best crafted stories are ones in which both the parent and child get something out of the story. Think about books like *The Giving Tree*, *Where the Wild Things Are*, or *Ferdinand the Bull*. Kids love the animals and the children in the story. But parents grasp the overall themes of gentleness and giving to others. These concepts are why these books have withstood the test of time after all these years.

Ann Whitford Paul, author of *Writing Picture Books* says there are **four ways to keep the audience engaged** in the story:

- **Writing Scenes with Action-** Action doesn't have to be intense to engage the audience. For example, you may be writing a book where animals save their village from becoming extinct. The action can be as simple as the main character, a rabbit, rallying the animal inhabitants to help stop the humans from destroying them.
- **Introducing New Characters in the Story-** The first scene can be just the rabbit learning of the village's fate, then slowly introduce the rest of the animal characters in the following pages. Children will love learning more about the animals in the upcoming pages.

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- **Moving Characters into Different Settings-** the village can have multiple locations within itself, or the animals can go on an adventure to follow the humans to varying settings.
  - **Changing the Emotional Intensity of the Scene-** Begin to give a sense of danger as the rabbit learns of the village's fate, then heighten the peril within each page as the animals come one step closer to extinction. This can also have a nice lesson about caring for the environment or that all animals have the right to humane treatment.

In a picture book, the illustrations are just as important as the text. A well-written text, when read aloud, will give way to specific images. The illustrations are used to enhance the text and bring that text to life. Hiring an artist that best captures the essence of your text is essential to a successful work.

How long does it have to be? Writingforchildren.com says, "What is a picture book? The easiest answer is a book with pictures but that's not quite right. A picture book is more than a book with illustrations. It's a book in which the pictures and the words work well to tell the story."

The structure of a children's book is similar to any fiction work, except carried out in a much shorter word count. Typically picture books reach ages 4 to 8 which is a broad range to reach. A 4-year-old are preschool aged where the child may just learning to read, to an 8-year-old, which is in second or third grade. The child could be beginning small chapter books. Therefore, it is important to keep the child engaged throughout each page turn. Losing their interest is likely bad news for you as a writer if you cannot keep their attention as the writing does not flow, issues with plot, etc.

Pay attention to the cadence or rhythm of the words you have written. Check your rhythm to make sure flow is read the book aloud. Often people resort to rhyming the text to give it a specific structure. However, if you are not good at rhyming, it can be more of a hindrance than a help to your writing. Rhyming is not necessary in a picture book. If you do choose to rhyme, however make sure you follow the structure that poets use in their work. Iambic pentameter, for example, will help keep the number of syllables needed in each line to remain the same.



## How to structure your book:

- **Your story should reach a climax.**- This is where the main character realizes the solution on his or her own problem. Most books emphasize that the child (if the child is the main character) to realize and learn a lesson on his or her own rather than an adult telling them what to do.
- **Resolve the conflict in a positive way-** If there is a lesson you want the audience to learn, make sure it is clearly stated here.
- **Make sure to use vocabulary that 4 to 8-year-old children can understand-** Not sure if they can understand it? Read your draft to a child that age and see what their comprehension level is. Ask clarifying questions to make sure they're comprehending the material.
- Although the typical page count of a picture book is 32 pages, some of that goes for dedication, copyright page and other notes. Shoot for 24 pages- 12 pages of text and 12 pages of illustrations.
- **Creating a storyboard can be helpful-** To visually map out your book, all you need is a simple bulletin board and some index cards. As you write a line from the book, tack it onto the board and place it in the order on the board where you feel it belongs. It might help you fill in the gaps and re-arrange your words so your book can achieve a healthy and engaging flow.

Writing picture books can be an enriching experience not only for the readers you impact but for you as an author as well. By following these few techniques, you may be able to bring the concept you have had strolled around in your head onto the page and into the hands of a child.

