

REACHING YOUTH with FICTION

Continuing Session

By Tim Shoemaker

The Gotta Haves 12 essential elements when writing for middle grade and youth

1. Great cover -The *FIRST THING* most youth will look at is the *COVER*.

2. White space -The *SECOND THING* many see is *how much text* is on a page.

3. Powerful Opening -*Not the first page*-... but the first line... and PARAGRAPH

Strong Start Killers ...

- Zoom-in start ...
- Description start ...
- Backstory start ...
- Weather start ...

4. Action -Youth need *something GOING ON* or *ABOUT to HAPPEN* ...

Action must be believable ...

Tips, Techniques, and Secrets to Stronger Action Scenes

- Using the setting to maximize the action scene ...
- Don't cut the action short—but keep the sentences short ...
- Add conflict—and take away time ...
- Stay in Deep POV...
- Don't underestimate how dialogue can be action ...

When Action Means Fighting ...

- Make your adversary a Goliath ...
- Make your protagonist a David ...

Getting the Fight Right

- SHOW, don't tell—and deep POV ...
- For every ACTION, show a REACTION ...
- Show SEQUENCE, not SIMULTANEITY ...
- Use COMPLETED VERBS over continuing action verbs ...
- Use interior monologue and dialogue to SET THE PACE ...
- Slow-mo really happens ... but use it SPARINGLY ...

5. Show the Story— and from the Character's POV -You *don't* want to TELL a story, you want to SHOW it.

When it's OKAY to TELL ...

Four Tips for Showing Instead of Telling

- Show reader what's happening ... let them interpret what's going on ...
- Choose the Words that show it best ...
- Show me only what is important to that character at that moment in the story ...
- Show me what's going on outside your character, and then show me how they react ...

6. Use DEEP POV – we want to write everything through our POV character's eyes

Five Things to Consider to Help You Write in DEEP POV

- Perspective ...
- Personality ...
- Priorities ...
- Predisposition ...
- Pandora's Box ...

Four Places to Specifically Look at to Deepen POV in Your Manuscript

- Descriptions ...
- Backstory ...
- Dialogue ...
- Interior Dialogue ...

7. Believability – Sometimes it's hard to take Christian fiction seriously ...

We Need to Make Every Aspect of our Story Believable ...

What are Some Things to Watch For?

- Timelines ...
- Reactions ...
- Non-reactions ...
- Physical impossibilities ...
- The Christian Element ...

Ways to Overcome Issues of Believability

- Let a character question the unbelievable ...
- Anticipate the areas and help the reader over the hurdles ...
- Always ask ... would my character really react this way?
- Trust your gut ...
- The Christian aspects ... does it fit naturally?

8. Likeable Main Character -If they don't *QUICKLY IDENTIFY* with *the main character*, if they don't like him, what happens?

- Resist the urge to try to make your character LIKEABLE by giving them GREAT LOOKS or ABILITIES ... IT MAY BACKFIRE ON YOU.

9. A Clear Goal -What does the character want—*bad*?

- Your protagonist should have an inner need ...

10. Strong conflict -WHAT or WHO is going to *GET IN HIS WAY... MAKING IT TOUGHER THAN EVER* to *ATTAIN HIS GOAL*?

11. Great Dialogue

Three Ways We Weaken Dialogue

- Too much dialogue at one time ...
- Dialogue that is too real ...
- Fake dialogue to reveal backstory ...

Three Ways to Strengthen Dialogue

- Keep dialogue between two people when possible ...
- Keep dialogue short and snappy ...
- Think of dialogue as a game between characters ... Ping Pong Principles ...

12. Short Chapters with Cliffhangers -End chapters with something that will make them want to *TURN* the *PAGE*, not *CLOSE* the *BOOK*.

Other Important Things to Consider When Writing for Youth

1. Avoid the Cheap Shots

- Portraying parents as dumb ...
- Portraying authority as primarily bad ...

2. Shoot Higher with Your Writing

A. The QUESTION of LANGUAGE and SEX

Some Christian fiction authors seem intoxicated with a sense that they are being real. Edgy. Gritty. **So, they add language. Sex.** You don't need either to be real.

- **As a Christian ... we don't have "Foul LANGUAGE options" in our tool belt.**
"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen." Eph. 4:29
- **As a Christian ... we must be very careful about how we use SEX in our writing.**
*"But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk, or coarse joking which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be partners with them. For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light."
Ephesians 5:3-4*
*"Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do secret."
Ephesians 5:11-12*
- **What about using language for "BAD CHARACTERS"?**
Is someone who uses a lot of PROFANITY, FOUL LANGUAGE, one who we think of as being really INTELLIGENT ... or is bad language sometimes a sign of a LIMITED VOCABULARY? We tend to think of people who use foul language as not being smart. Dumb "bad guys" aren't scary.

B. AVOID "HOKEY" CHRISTIAN WRITING

Forced, unrealistic, agenda-driven, predictable, simplistic, sacrificial death scene ...

C. SHARE TRUTH ... NOT SERMONS

Dozens and dozens of times in the Gospels we read a verse with JESUS saying . . . "I tell you the truth . . ." **One of Jesus' express purposes was to teach truth. Scripture records JESUS ...**

- STRAIGHTENING OUT MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT GOD
- STRAIGHTENING OUT MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT SCRIPTURE

IF WE GET READERS TO UNDERSTAND THE TRUTH ... MIGHT THAT NOT LEAD THEM TO CHRIST? REMEMBER ... THE WORLD WANTS TO SUPPRESS TRUTH (MATT. 14:4-5)

MY PERSPECTIVE when WRITING for YOUTH

- IF YOU THINK of THEM as Just Kids... your writing will take on the *TONE* of a PARENT ...

HERE'S HOW I THINK of YOUTH...

- I think that they're just about AS SMART AS ME... and SMARTER in some ways. (math... technology)
- BUT they're MORE IMPULSIVE.
- AND their JUDGMENT isn't always so good... and they make BAD DECISIONS as a result.
- THEY ARE SMART... but not nearly as EXPERIENCED as I am.
- With their LIMITED EXPERIENCE and LACK of JUDGMENT they LACK WISDOM.

Writing for youth is a worthy mission ...

Thanks for attending!! -Tim Shoemaker www.timshoemakersmashedtomatoes.com