

# Writing Creative Nonfiction for Kids

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**Sheila Seifert**, the workshop speaker, is the editorial director of parenting content for *Focus on the Family* magazine and FocusOnTheFamily.com. She has written/co-written over 20 books and has over 1,000 freelance sales. One of her scripts was produced and then aired on PBS, and many of her other scripts were compiled and published in books. Her books include women’s historical fiction, juvenile fiction, ebooks on writing and more. Her most recent co-written book is *Bible Kidventures: Stories of Danger and Courage*. For over a decade, Sheila has taught writing, literature and reading as a university instructor. She is the founder of Kay’s Simple Literature, reading curriculum for public, private and home-school teachers.

## What do these terms mean?

**Nonfiction**

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**Fiction**

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**Creative Nonfiction**

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## “Kids” Defined

Though sometimes used to describe baby goats, “kids” in the publishing industry means children. Books for kids are called juvenile fiction. The age range for these books are 0 to 12 years old. The book market is broken down into:

- picture books
- beginning readers
- beginning chapter books
- junior novels
- books for 8- to 12-year-olds (or 9 to 13)

## Today’s Workshop

Learn how to use fiction techniques to bring Bible and other true stories to life. Don’t get caught being boring as you write for elementary school children.

Workshop summary:  
Good research, the balance between knowing what you can fictionalize and what you can’t, and choosing the right fiction techniques for your story makes good creative nonfiction for kids.

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# Types of Creative Nonfiction

## Personal Essay

*Facts:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*Use:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*Audience:* \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

*Value:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*Kid audience:* \_\_\_\_\_

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## Blog

*Facts:* \_\_\_\_\_

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*Use:* \_\_\_\_\_

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*Audience:* \_\_\_\_\_

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*Value:* \_\_\_\_\_

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*Kid audience:* \_\_\_\_\_

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## Memoir

*Facts:* \_\_\_\_\_

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*Use:* \_\_\_\_\_

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*Audience:* \_\_\_\_\_

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*Value:* \_\_\_\_\_

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*Kid audience:* \_\_\_\_\_

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## Case File

*Facts:* \_\_\_\_\_

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*Use:* \_\_\_\_\_

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*Audience:* \_\_\_\_\_

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*Value:* \_\_\_\_\_

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*Kid audience:* \_\_\_\_\_

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## Textbook & Sunday School Material

*Facts:* \_\_\_\_\_

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*Use:* \_\_\_\_\_

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*Audience:* \_\_\_\_\_

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*Value:* \_\_\_\_\_

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*Kid audience:* \_\_\_\_\_

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## Bible Stories

*Facts:* \_\_\_\_\_

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*Use:* \_\_\_\_\_

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*Audience:* \_\_\_\_\_

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*Value:* \_\_\_\_\_

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*Kid audience:* \_\_\_\_\_

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# Creative Nonfiction Constraints

Elements	Flexibility	
	Change	Rules to Follow
Word Choices		
Perspective		
What Happened		
When It Happened		
How It Happened		
Why It Happened		
Where It Happened		
To Whom It Happened		
<b>Dialogue:</b> There is a fine line between creative nonfiction and historical fiction		

## Easy Literary Devices

**Alliteration** is the repetition of a single sound at the beginning of words near each other.

*Example: Bring me a bundle of branches.*

**Assonance** is the repetition of a single vowel sound within a series of words. *Example: Find more cores on the floor.*

**Hyperboles** are an exaggerated descriptions and often include two *as* words. *Example: He is as tall as an oak tree.*

**Metaphors** compare two things

without using *like* or *as*.

*Example: He is a bunny (if he really isn't a bunny).*

**Onomatopoeias** are words that sound like their definitions. *Examples: buzz, sizzle, boom, meow*

**Personification** means giving an object a human quality. *Example: The wind lifted the girl's hat and tried it on.*

**Similes** compare two things. Search for the words *like* or *as*. *Example: He ran just like a bunny.*

# Literary Device Example

## Father and Sons

*by Aesop, translated by V.S. Vernon Jones with an introduction by G.K. Chesterton*

A certain man had several sons who were always quarrelling with one another, and, try as he might, he could not get them to live together in harmony. So he determined to convince them of their folly by the following means. Bidding them fetch a bundle of sticks, he invited each in turn to break it across his knee. All tried and all failed: and then he undid the bundle, and handed them the sticks one by one, when they had no difficulty at all in breaking them. "There, my boys," said he, "united you will be more than a match for your enemies: but if you quarrel and separate, your weakness will put you at the mercy of those who attack you." Union is strength.

## Sticks and Strength

*by Sheila Seifert, adapted from the Aesop fable "Father and Sons" published in Adventures in Odyssey 90 Devotions for Kids*

Once, there lived a family with five children. These kids quarreled about everything. They bickered over breakfast. They picked fights at playtime and squabbled over clothes, friends, and even toothpaste.

This brood of battling brothers and sisters fought so much and so often that their father finally yelled, "Bring me a bundle of branches!" Now that may seem like a strange thing for a father to say, but they did live near a forest, and he had a good reason.

Before long, they brought him the requested sticks and only squabbled seven times as they did so. Their father took the large stack and handed them to his oldest son.

"Break this heap in half," he said. The oldest tried, but it was too thick to break.

The father took back the sticks and gave them to his second.

"Split these sticks in half," he said to his daughter. She tried, but she couldn't. So her father gave the bundle to each of his babes, but none could break the bundle in half.

Then the wise father handed each child a single stick.

"Break it," he told them. Each broke their branch easily. He had them break more until the bundle of branches had been completely broken.

"If you stand side-by-side," said their father, "your adversaries won't be able to stop you. But if you bicker and battle and stand alone, you can easily be broken."

# Perspective and Structure

## Daniel 1:3-4

Then the king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family[a] and of the nobility, youths without blemish, of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand in the king's palace, and to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans.

## Daniel 1:8

But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself.

## Daniel 1:16

So the steward took away their food and wine they were to drink, and gave them vegetables.

## Daniel 2:9

[Nebuchadnezzar said,] "Tell me the dream, and I shall know that you can show me its interpretation."

## Daniel 2:16

And Daniel went in and requested the king to appoint him a time, that he

might show the interpretation to the king.

## Daniel 5:5

[After King Nebuchadnezzar's death,] the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace.

## Daniel 5:13

Then Daniel was brought in before the king.

## Daniel 5:28

[Daniel said,] "Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians."

## Daniel 6:1

And Darius the Mede received the kingdom.

## Daniel 6:10

[Daniel] got down on his knees three times a day and prayed.

## Daniel 6:16

Daniel was brought and cast into the den of lions.

## Daniel 6:22

[Daniel said,] "My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths, and they have not harmed me."

What does perspective mean for writers?

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# How to Make Changes

1. Change the person: first, second, or third persons
2. Change the point-of-view, possibly not the main character.
3. Emphasis: Focus on one specific area or re-balance the emphasis of the nonfiction story (eg., Cinderella could focus on her relationship with her godmother).

## Booklet Directions

Make a copy of the booklet for each student. Have them follow these directions to make their booklets:

1. Fold the sheet of paper in half the long way. The printed side of the sheet should be showing, and the non-printed or blank side should not be showing. Unfold.
2. Fold the sheet of paper in half the short way. The printed side of the sheet should be showing, and the non-printed or blank side should not be showing.
3. Fold the lines that are half-way between the center fold and the edge of the paper into the middle; this time the blank side of the sheet will be on the outside. (The short, outside edge, on

either edge of the sheet should be lined up with the center fold.) Unfold the outside edges only.

4. With a scissor, cut along the crease that has a dotted line on it in the middle of the page. Unfold.
5. Refold the sheet of paper in half the long way. The printed side of the sheet should be visible.
6. Push page cover-1 toward page 4-5 so the middle pages form a diamond. Push together so these front-back pages form: cover-1, 2-3, 4-5, 6-7.
7. Fold so the cover is on one side of the booklet, page 7 is on the back of the booklet, and all other pages are between them.
8. Your booklet is done.

**I** → The king recognizes you as a wise man. Then one day he has a dream. He wants someone to tell him his dream and what it means. When no one can, he orders the death of all his wise men. That now includes you. Fortunately God reveals the dream to you, and you tell the king. No one dies. You serve this king for many years. When he dies, others become king. You serve them.

**WHAT WILL YOU DO?**

Make a choice. Check the box.

- Choice 1: If you serve God with King Belshazzar, go to "G" on page 4.
- Choice 2: If King Belshazzar has a task for you, go to "C" on page 2.

**E** → The king of Babylon takes good care of you, but he owns you, You are still his captive. Go to "K" on page 7.

**F** → The king does not repent and you do not ask him to. Go to "D" on page 3.

**G** → King Belshazzar does not serve God. He thinks only of his own pleasure and personal gain. Go to "C" on page 2.

**H** → You have no place to flee to. Your land has been conquered. Go to "I" on page 5.

**J** → You pray openly three times a day. Today is no different—except your prayers today break the law. Your punishment is time in the lions' den.

King Darius is upset about being tricked. He tells you, "May your God deliver you." You are put into a deep pit filled with lions. A large stone is rolled over the opening. It is completely dark. Lions move toward you.

The next day, the stone is moved. The king says, "Has your God saved you?"

"Yes," you say. "I am not harmed." This makes the king happy. You are helped out of the lions' den. Those who tricked you are thrown in. They do not survive.

THE END

**D** → You tell the king that he and his kingdom will be destroyed. That night, he is killed. The Medes take over. Darius leads the Medes. He becomes the new king. He puts you in charge of all his wise men. That is good. His wise men do not like this. That is bad. They set a trap for you. They trick the king into passing a law. The law says that no one can pray to anyone but Darius for thirty days.

**WHAT WILL YOU DO?**

Make a choice. Check the box.

Choice 1: If you secretly keep praying, go to "B" on page 1.

Choice 2: If you pray openly at your window, go to "J" on page 6.

**K** → The food isn't made according to God's Laws so you want to drink water and eat vegetables instead of it. The king's servant allows you to be tested. After ten days of eating this way, you look healthy. He lets you continue.

**WHAT WILL YOU DO?**

Make a choice. Check the box.

- Choice 1: If in time you meet King Nebuchadnezzar, go to "I" on page 5.
- Choice 2: If eventually you escape, go to "H" on page 4.



If you liked this story, you might like this book: **Bible Kidventures: Stories of Danger and Courage**

**C** → King Belshazzar does not follow God. Instead, he throws a party and uses items from God's Temple. This is an unholy thing to do. An invisible hand writes strange words on the wall. No one knows what the words mean. The queen tells the king to send for you. God reveals the message to you, and you tell the king.

**WHAT WILL YOU DO?**

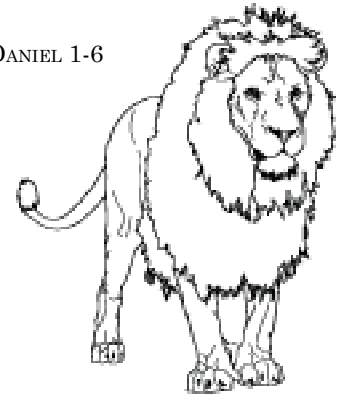
Make a choice. Check the box.

Choice 1: If you give the king bad news, go to "D" on page 3.

Choice 2: If you tell the king to repent so God will forgive him, go to "F" on page 4.

**Daniel and the Lions' Den**  
*written by Sheila Seifert  
illustrated by Riley Naylor*

DANIEL 1-6



**WHAT WILL YOU DO?**

**A** → Pretend you are Daniel. You live in Jerusalem, until Babylon's king defeats your city. Then you and other young nobles are taken as prisoners. But you get to live in the king's palace and eat his food. You are taught the stories, language, and wisdom of the Chaldeans.

**WHAT WILL YOU DO?**

Make a choice. Check the box.

Choice 1: If you fight your way out of the palace, go to "E" on page 4.

Choice 2: If you refuse to eat the king's food, go to "K" on page 7.

**B** → You fear God more than men. You do not hide your faith. Go to "J" on page 6.





# Get a free copy

(for a limited time)

of the Bible stories partially brainstormed in this workshop,  
by searching for the manuscript by title (about a month from now):

“Who Is In Control of Your Life?”

at

[TeachersPayTeachers.com!](http://TeachersPayTeachers.com)

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## Liability Waiver

I, \_\_\_\_\_, understand that the brainstorm at the end of the Colorado Christian Writers Conference (2016) workshop about writing creative nonfiction for kids, which is taught by Sheila Seifert, is optional and is an opportunity into Sheila Seifert’s writing process. It is not a partnership, co-author agreement, or any type of business transaction or submission.

Material brainstormed and discussed in this workshop may be used in her manuscripts. These manuscripts may be sold personally, publicly, or commercially in print, on the web, as a PDF, or in the cloud or by any means now known or not yet invented.

I understand that I will not receive a fee, stipend, royalty, or any reimbursement or recognition for any part of my participation in this workshop or the brainstorming and writing process. All materials, brainstorming, writing, etc., belong wholly and solely to Sheila Seifert.

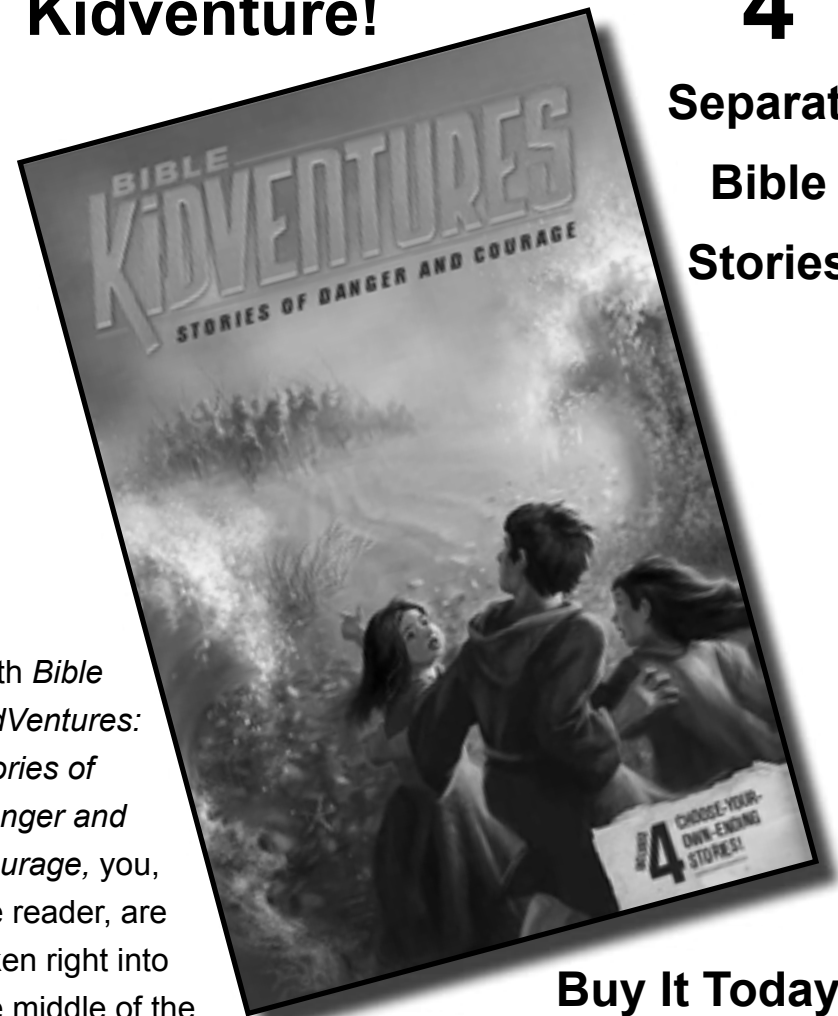
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Signature

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Date

## Choose Your Own Kidventure!

# 4

## Separate Bible Stories



With *Bible Kidventures: Stories of Danger and Courage*, you, the reader, are taken right into the middle of the

action of your favorite Bible stories. In each story, you are the main character and what happens is completely up to you! Through your choices, you can receive great rewards, get into big trouble, or even lose your life. It’s your turn to witness Bible history in action by entering the story and choosing your own path.

## Buy It Today!