



Children's Writer[®]

JULY 2011

NEWSLETTER OF WRITING
AND PUBLISHING TRENDS

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ChildrensWriter.com

Coming of Age: Magazine Fiction for Teens

By Deborah Vetter

Fiction for high-schoolers is edgier and more sophisticated than short stories for readers just a few years younger. It deals with tough issues, as teens belly up to the real world and become quick to question authority. Yet teen fiction is not all angst and anger. It can also be quirky and satirical, witty and fun.

Editor Kerri Majors and Co-editor Shannon Marshall say that anything goes genre-wise for their online magazine *YARN* (*Young Adult Review Network*). "The

main requirement," says Majors, "is that the story be well-crafted, with compelling characters, images, and language."

Cicada, which I edit, is also open to a wide variety of genres, including science fiction and fantasy, while *The Claremont Review*, a Canadian literary journal, prefers contemporary realistic fiction. Co-Editor Susan Stenson is looking for teen-written pieces with "honesty. Risk. Detail. Surprise. A sense of pacing." She adds, "We love language, so imagery, sound, sentence variety are key." (To page 2)
Susie Shellenberger, Editor

Picture Books: Character-Driven Does Not Mean Plot-Free

By Sue Bradford Edwards

In today's market, picture books need amazing characters to stand out. Olivia, Fancy Nancy, and Skippyjon Jones rule. Readers buy book after book in such successful series to spend more time with favorite story friends.

It would be foolish to think, however, that these amazing characters sell books on the basis of their winning personalities alone. They also sell books because they have adventures. They do things—sometimes naughty things, like topple the Leaning Tower of Pisa—that boggle the mind.

Unfortunately, many manuscripts that editors see fail to reflect this truth. "Often authors have a point that they want to make, so the characters don't seem real. They seem like they are in service of the lesson and interchangeable," says Plum Blossom Books Senior Editor Rachel Neuman. The lesson stands (To page 4)

YA and Creator of *Susie*, is looking for stories that feature “believable characters, great snappy dialogue, exciting plot or twists.”

Billy Lombardo, Managing Editor of *Polyphony H.S.*, says, “We’ve got nearly a hundred high school students across the country who read and edit for us. Their tastes are so wildly different, and I think this is reflected in the work we publish. What I’m finding is that we’re more likely to accept writing that has obviously been fretted over, proofread, and revised and worried over.”

What Makes a Story a YA Story?

Good YA writing can and does appeal to adults, and vice versa. “I feel there’s something not quite right about sitting down and trying to shape something [specifically] for the high school-age reader,” says Lombardo. “I’m beginning to think that if an author creates a story with believable, fleshed-out, adolescent characters, it might be considered a YA story.”

Lombardo’s “Petey” stories about a boy coming of age in Chicago’s Bridgeport neighborhood appeared in *Cicada* and became the nexus for his adult novella, *The Logic of a Rose: Chicago Stories* (BkMk Press).

Some stories gravitate naturally toward a particular niche. Suzanne Kamata wrote “Pilgrimage,” with *Cicada* in mind. The story won the Society of Children’s Book Writers & Illustrators’ Magazine Merit Award for Fiction. “Some readers had written letters to the editor [of *Cicada*] saying they were interested in stories about religion, and that inspired me,” says Kamata. “I also wanted to write about a biracial girl with a disability (like my daughter, who is half Japanese and has cerebral palsy). I don’t find a lot of characters like her in YA fiction, but I could imagine her in the pages of *Cicada*.” She echoes Lombardo, however, by saying, “Sometimes I write more for myself, having no idea where I will send the story when it’s finished.”

Stenson notes that contributors to *The Claremont Review* write often about teen life, including family,

school, fitting in, the environment, culture, and language barriers. The writers for this twice-yearly journal are young adults themselves, 13 to 19. Older adults interested in YA writing can discover much in the work of these young authors.

Shellenberger says, “I love stories on all kinds of relationships. That’s where teen girls are living.” A recent story in *Susie* shows a girl wrestling with her relationship with her boyfriend, who seems more interested in his iPod than in her.

Many stories in *Cicada* explore relationships with parents as teens struggle for independence or seek to resolve issues with absentee parents. Kamata adds the theme of identity to the list of high-interest YA topics. “As an American living in Japan, I probably think about my identity more than most adults. I don’t really know where I fit in anymore. Young adults are also often dealing with questions of identity, and trying to find their place in the world.”

What a YA Story Is Not

Even though it can be hard to agree on what a YA story is, editors are pretty clear on what it isn’t. *YARN* receives many submissions that Majors says “skew too young or too adult and seem to have nothing to do with the teen years.”

Short stories that skew too young may include *prank* stories starring junior high boys, or fiction about shifting loyalties as a friendship disintegrates because one girl is growing up faster than her BFF. Stories that skew too old may concern marital infidelity from the point of view of a workaholic husband reeling from his wife’s affair. Teens might not be interested in the breakup of a marriage from a grownup’s perspective, but they would be vitally interested in how this situation plays out from a teenage protagonist’s point of view.

Editors also prefer character-driven over issue-driven fiction, which is often too intent on conveying information or passing on a message. As editor of a Christian magazine, Shellenberger notes that “many authors

use dialogue to teach a lesson instead of creating believable conversations between characters.”

How do you capture a believable, contemporary teen voice? Marshall advises, “Listen, listen, listen. The more you listen to people (make eavesdropping your hobby!), the more believable your characters’ voices will become.”

Kamata says, “Some writers try too hard, relying on references to pop culture and the use of slang. To get a better sense of how teens think and speak, visit blogs, watch YouTube, hang out at the mall, talk to kids. Some teens won’t talk to their parents, but they’re willing to go out for pizza with a writer and be interviewed.” She also thinks it is a good idea to try out your stories on your target audience. “Young adults are very savvy and quick to spot a fake.” One teen read a story of hers and came back with two pages of corrections!

Publishers

Magazines that accept fiction by adults and teens:

- ❖ **Cicada:** www.cicadamag.com (teen website) and www.cricketmag.com (for adult submission guidelines)
- ❖ **Susie:** www.susiemag.com
- ❖ **YARN:** www.yareview.net

Teen-written fiction only:

- ❖ **The Claremont Review:** www.theclaremontreview.ca
- ❖ **Polyphony H.S.:** www.polyphonyhs.com

More YA fiction markets:

- ❖ **Cadet Quest:** www.calvinistcadets.org. Christian. Stories that appeal to boys’ sense of adventure and humor, and follow the designated theme.
- ❖ **Devozone:** www.devozone.org. Christian. Adventure, historical, multicultural.
- ❖ **Inteen:** www.urbanministries.com. Christian. Inspirational, multicultural, ethnic.
- ❖ **Read:** www.weeklyreader.com. Mix of contemporary and classic stories.
- ❖ **Scholastic Scope:** www.scholastic.com/scope. Contemporary, realistic stories about relationships, school issues, other teen concerns; and science fiction.
- ❖ **Shine Brightly:** www.gemsgc.org. Christian. Contemporary, science fiction, mystery, romance, animals/nature, sports.

Too Much Is Too Much

Teens wrestle with issues that include sex, cutting, eating disorders, parental expectations, suicide, drunk driving, and drug use.

Majors and Marshall discuss mature subject matter on a case-by-case basis for *YARN*. “As a high school teacher, Shannon acts as a great barometer for age-appropriateness,” Majors says, “but we are both committed to pushing the boundaries in YA fiction.” That said, she continues, “We would never publish something gratuitous; rather, the subject needs to be treated in a literary manner.”

“As much as we’d like to protect young people from terrible things, we can only do so much,” says Lombardo. “When young people are fully aware that life is sometimes unpleasant (or worse), I don’t know how helpful it is to keep those themes out of the literature they read.”

Shellenberger is open to tough topics. “Approach with reality,” she says, “but offer the hope we have through Christ.”

That Raw Eye

In the early years *Cicada* published dark, depressing stories because that was all we could find. Teens finally wrote in, asking us to lighten up. “Even teens need their daily dose of humor” was one plaintive cry.

Humor includes what Mark Twain calls “pure bosh” and what Stenson calls “that raw eye.” She says, “Humor is wonderful!” and adds that “Canadians think everything is funny.” Shellenberger agrees that “humor is everything” and can turn an average piece of fiction into an excellent piece of fiction. “The best way to use humor is to build it into the dialogue. That way it also helps to establish the characters.”

One of *Cicada*’s most successful humor pieces was David LaRochelle’s “Taking Alice to the Prom” (May/June 2009). This story turns the prom scenario on its head. Oh, there’s a classy steak dinner, flowers, a tux, and streamers and Mylar balloons in the gym. There is a boy, Steve, and a girl, Alice. It is just that Alice is a dog. But

as with most good humor, there is more to the story. Steve, like many teens, is struggling to figure out who he is apart from parental expectations. The undercurrent is subtle, but it is there: Steve is unsure of his sexual orientation. He is a little frightened by it, too. By taking Alice to the

“We see so much work that the writer has tried too hard to wrap with a nice Tiffany bow, when ambiguity would serve the piece better.”

prom, he is making a statement without making a *Statement*: “Let me be who I am—as soon as I figure out who I am.”

While many YA editors could use a good laugh, Marshall confesses that *YARN* would “welcome darker, more complex writing. . . . We see so much work that the writer has tried too hard to wrap up with a nice Tiffany bow, when actually more ambiguity would serve the piece better.”

Younger children like closure, but teens can handle more open-ended scenarios. “Silent,” by Joel Nason appeared in *The Claremont Review* (Fall 2009). In this teen-written story, a driver picks up a hitchhiker who asks probing questions—something that makes the narrator so uncomfortable that he ditches the hitchhiker. But he cannot ditch what the man has said: “I started thinking about myself, and where I was going. Behind me was a man I kicked out of my car, an ended marriage, and miles of road. Ahead there was nothing but the turnpike’s broken white lines stretching out into the Florida night.” Somehow, that last line hints at a sense of possibility. Sometimes a shift in attitude can be enough. You do not need that neat and tidy ending with the Tiffany bow.

The Long and the Short of It

When writing for children’s magazines, authors run up against tight word limitations. They can and

should think longer for YA fiction. As Shellenberger says, “How can you even develop a character—let alone twists, great dialogue, and a plot—in 1,000 words?”

Cicada suggests 2,500 to 5,000 words, while *The Claremont Review* allows up to 5,000 words and would

be open to more except that “we only publish twice a year, and we want a wide range of voices to be heard.” Shellenberger admits that *Susie* can’t go much over 2,000 words because of space, but she adds, “A great writer knows how to develop everything necessary to make a story sizzle in 2,000 words. The key? Solidify! Solidify! Solidify! We do not need to know what Grandma is wearing unless it is really essential to the plot line.” Kamata agrees. “YA fiction is usually more streamlined than adult fiction. There isn’t a lot of meandering around.”

Whether authors write short or long, editors agree with Shellenberger that “to write good fiction, you need to read good fiction.” She suggests Jenny B. Jones’s novels. “Jenny is a high school teacher in Arkansas and is surrounded by real *characters* daily as she views the life of her students. She has nailed the humor and also has excellent plots and believable characters.” Stenson recommends John Gould, Hal Niedzviecki, M.A.C. Farrant, and Leon Rooke. To this list, I would add novels and short stories by Chris Crutcher, Joan Bauer, Neil Gaiman, and Nancy Springer.

Then, when it is time to write, you will be able to create real, believable characters and, in the words of Lombardo, “give them problems and conflicts and fears and regrets and bad ideas and see what they do with them.” You will have a story.

Plot out while the characters fall flat, trampled by the moral the author wanted to get across wrapped in a ho hum plot. To avoid this, do one thing: Start with your character. Plum Blossom Books is the children's imprint of Parallax Press, which publishes "books on mindful living" and socially engaged Buddhism for children and adults.

Familiar, with a Twist

Creating a successful character means coming up with unique traits combined with qualities that young readers will see in themselves.

"Picture book characters that are most successful have the traits of a child, but with great individual character. The child sees himself but also sees that it is ok to be different, and usually funny," says Dutton Executive Managing Editor Steven Meltzer. "One of my new favorite characters is Betty Bunny. *Betty Bunny Loves Chocolate Cake*, by Michael Kaplan and illustrated by Stéphane Jorisch, came out in May of this year from Dial. One bit that I love involves Betty's mother telling her that she is 'a handful.' Betty thinks this is a great compliment and so when she wants to say something especially nice to her mother, she exclaims 'Oh mother, you are a handful!'" Most young readers have heard this phrase, or something similar, and have misused

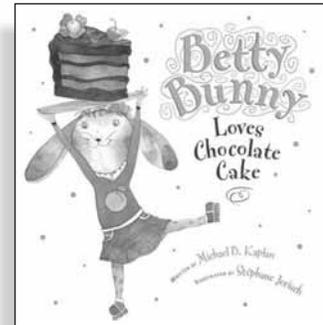
similar phrases themselves. Yet Betty Bunny does it in a unique and interesting way.

Pippin Properties President Holly McGhee also emphasizes the need for the familiar delivered with a fun twist. "It's about finding a trait within a character that's universal. It might be humility, pride, or embarrassment, but we as readers want to relate in some way to the character," says McGhee. "Spinky, from *Spinky Sulks*, by William Steig (Square Fish/Roaring Brook), is an incorrigible grump through the entire story, until he finally gets sick of himself and wants a way out." His solution may be his very own but what young reader has not had a grouchy, out-of-sorts day?

Successful characters come in all shapes and sizes. "Larger-than-life, spunky characters with strong personalities seem to stand out more in picture books like *Olivia*, *Eloise*, *Maddeline*, *Fancy Nancy*, etc. Their personalities shine, both in the text and in the illustrations," says Little Brown Executive Editor Alvina Ling. "Some quieter personalities stand out, too, like Arthur the Aardvark, Ferdinand, Chrysanthemum, and more. And then, of course, there are those characters that stand out because they're so fantastical and incredible, like the Cat in the Hat, or Stillwater, the panda from *Zen Shorts*." For more great characters, Ling recommends some books from her own list: *Sergio Saves the Game* and *Sergio Makes a Splash*, by Edel Rodriguez; *Children Make Terrible Pets* and *You Will Be My Friend*, by Peter Brown; and *Shark vs. Train*, by Chris Barton, illustrated by Tom Lichtenheld.

More important than personality type is depth and complexity. "My client Rebecca Janni is the author of a character-driven picture book series that began with *Every Cowgirl Needs a Horse* (Dutton)," says Andrea Brown Literary Agency agent Jamie Weiss Chilton. "Nellie Sue wants one thing for her birthday: a horse. She is a cowgirl through and through! But it is Nellie Sue's whole personality, not just the horse-loving aspect, that drives this series."

Whether you are hoping for a series or not, complexity in a picture book protagonist is a must. "Your character needs nuances that extend beyond what is required for the book's plot. For example, in *Every Cowgirl Needs a Horse*, we see that Nellie Sue is a hard worker with a great imagination and an optimistic



personality, not just that she wants a horse. In a future book, she mentions a cowgirl's code of honor, which is a great show-don't-tell character development detail. Small details like this fill out her character and makes her leap off the page as an individual." Read the book and there is no way that you will mistake Nellie Sue for anyone else. *Every Cowgirl Needs Dancing Boots* has a June 2011 publication date.

Wondering if your character is complex enough? Neuman has a question for you: "How much are you thinking about the character versus the story? Put your character into situations that won't be in the book. If you don't know what [he or she] would do, you don't know your character well enough."

To get to know your character better, Chilton recommends imagining his or her typical day. "Even if the day in question in your story is not typical," she says, you will gain insight into their daily lives.

Ling suggests that you interview your characters. "Do their answers come naturally? If not, put more effort into characterization. In fact, interviewing your characters is definitely a way to get to know them better. Are they the type of character who only answers with one word, or

Publishers

- ❖ **Andrea Brown Literary Agency:** 1076 Eagle Dr., Salinas, CA 93905. <http://andreabrownlit.com>.
- ❖ **Dutton/Dial:** Penguin, 345 Hudson St., New York, NY 10014. <http://us.penguin.com>. Agented authors only.
- ❖ **Little, Brown:** 237 Park Ave., New York, NY 10017. http://www.hachette-bookgroup.com/kids_index.aspx. Agented authors only.
- ❖ **Pippin Properties:** 155 East 38th St., Suite 2H, New York, NY 10016. www.pippinproperties.com
- ❖ **Plum Blossom Books:** P.O. Box 7355 Berkeley, CA 94707. <http://parallax.org>

ARF! Your Way to Great Characters

do they go on and on? What does their *voice* sound like? What are their hopes, fears, flaws, and motivations?”

Meltzer agrees. “It all boils down to knowing your character. You may never have to write that your character’s favorite food is meat loaf, but you should know it. You should know everything about your character, as you would about someone close to you.”

The last test is to ask a critique group for a read. Says McGhee, “Do readers connect to the character? If the answer is no, the writer must go back in there and find out where the character came from. What part of himself or the world makes the character what he is? Not always easy to figure out, but essential.”

A Black Moment

All of this character planning is ultimately necessary because that individualized protagonist will be active in a situation, a conflict, a plot.



“In some ways there aren’t any new stories, but there are two million unique people who approach things in their own way,” says Neuman. “If you start with a unique character you are more likely to have a unique story than if you start with plot.” McGhee agrees. “Find your character first. The plot will come from that.”

Plot needs to flow from character but not everything an interesting character does can be called plot. “Sometimes people mistake a strong character for a story,” says Ling. “There are so many manuscripts that are all about introducing a character and their personality without putting

“I always keep ARF in mind,” says author Tammi Sauer, about creating strong picture book characters. She is the author of, most recently, *Mr. Duck Means Business* and *Mostly Monsterly*, both from Paula Wiseman Books/Simon & Schuster.

❖ “**A** stands for **active**. I want my main character to be doing something. No one wants to read about a kid who just sits on the couch all day.” Among Sauer’s characters are a bully battling would-be cowboy (*Cowboy Camp*, Sterling) and two chickens who cut a rug (*Dancing Chickens*, Sterling). Their vitality pulls readers in.

❖ “**R** stands for **relatable**. I would never write a story about a little old lady who does yoga in the morning, works in her garden in the afternoon, and knits sweaters at night. I want my readers to have a connection with my main character. I want my readers to think, ‘Yeah, I know what that feels like.’” From monsters to hens, Sauer makes sure that her characters have a trait that her readers know and recognize.

❖ “**F** stands for **flawed**. My main character is not allowed to be perfect. Perfect is boring. A flawed character is much more interesting. A bonus? Those flaws often increase the tension.”

Together these three traits combine in irresistible ways. “In my latest book, *Mr. Duck Means Business*, Mr. Duck enjoys a life of quiet solitude and keeps a tight schedule for himself. He’s active: Each morning he stretches, fluffs his feathers, and glides across his perfectly still pond. He’s relatable: Mr. Duck enjoys the sameness of his days. Kids can easily understand what it is like to not want to embrace change. He’s flawed: Mr. Duck goes a little haywire when the other barnyard animals mistakenly think they’ve been invited for a swim,” says Sauer. “In the end, however, my active, relatable, flawed Mr. Duck makes a big discovery: Sometimes life calls for a little commotion.”

Create a commotion in your picture books with knowable, imperfect characters to draw an editor’s attention.

the character into any kind of conflict. The best picture books are strong in both characterization and plotting.”

Neuman receives many action-light stories in which the characters simply ask questions, but this tack does not work in today’s picture book market. “Often kids don’t ask questions as much as adults like to answer them,” says Neuman. “They don’t want to hear grown-ups explaining things. They want to see kids doing things.”

You may not know exactly what the character is going to do when you start writing, but that can be a good thing. “Allow your character to surprise you,” Neuman says, to help you avoid a predictable plot.

“Once I have a main character who is active, relatable, and flawed, something has to happen,” says author Tammi Sauer. “I start with a problem. Then I make things worse. And worse. And worse. Then I give the story a *black moment*—this is the point of the story in which the character must confront the biggest chal-

lenge of all. Having the main character solve his or her seemingly impossible problem is a great way for the character to show growth by the story’s end.”

Ling agrees. “A character should change in some way over the course of the book. But the change in that character—such as a new understanding of himself and/or others—needs to still ring true with the character’s personality.”

Character and plot. Plot and character. In today’s picture book market, the two are deeply interwoven. “Ideally, character development and plot development work synergistically—each enhances the other,” says Chilton.

“Everyone is desperate for good books. We are hungry for new authors,” says Neuman. “But you need to do your homework.” Read books from your target publisher. Take the time to create strong characters, not limiting yourself to the confines of 32 pages. Find and develop their story. Do this and you will find publishers taking your work seriously.

Kindergarten Stories: Simply Special

By Judy Bradbury

More than 2,000 entries for the kindergarten story contest crowded the mailbox, overflowing from box after hefty box. Creating a fiction or nonfiction piece about family or school life for five- to six-year-olds clearly was an appealing challenge that piqued the interest of *Children's Writer* subscribers and other writers who learned of the contest.

Those wishing to submit stories for consideration were encouraged to create a piece that was high-interest and fun while also being mindful of vocabulary and syntax suitable for a kindergartener. Originality and overall quality of writing would be considered closely. And what may have been the biggest challenge: All this had to be accomplished in a piece that came in at a maximum of 150 words.

Themes that Hit Home

What subjects were most popular among contestants? Birthdays, sibling issues, the first day of school, show and tell, show and tell gone bad, colors, numbers, learning to read, running to catch the school bus, being late for the school bus, riding the school bus, caterpillars, lightning bugs, pets, pet rocks, pets on the loose, loose teeth, baking with Mom, grandparents, a new baby, a new pet, a new friend,

making and keeping friends, bullies, chores, monsters under the bed, and even bathroom concerns. One story was about elephant poop!

These kid-friendly topics were vehicles for themes that hit home. Family dynamics, the joys and trials of friendships, the bonds and responsibilities of pets, increasing independence, and dealing with persnickety peers and siblings are real-time dramas youngsters encounter in the midst of a new and exciting chapter in their young lives—kindergarten.

Adults may long for problems that seem as simple as those faced by a five- or six-year-old, but respecting the depth of emotion—and the zing of wonder—that kindergarteners experience as they navigate their world is essential to writing a piece for this audience. The best stories or articles for emerging readers offer promise and possibility, honesty, and an understanding of the world from the viewpoint of a youngster less than three feet tall. They also have an elusive spark that ignites a child's interest in reading.

A story for this age group must be accessible and fun, and marked by clear, concise, and straightforward sentences. Plenty of white space on the page encourages a novice reader; dense print is intim-

idating to one who is new to decoding for meaning. Rhythm and repetition are hallmarks of the best material written for this age group, and rhyme done well is as popular as it ever was. A child, not an adult, should be the focal point of the story: his or her actions—not Mom's, Dad's, Grandpa's, the school bus driver's, or the teacher's—drive the plot and lead to the resolution. The humor in the story ought, first and foremost, to tickle the young child's funny bone, although wit and comedic features that adults can appreciate are welcome as well, since parents, caregivers, librarians, and teachers play a major role in the selection—and often the reading—of material for the kindergarten crowd.

The Winner's Circle

The submissions for the *Children's Writer* contest that rose to the very top of the heap exhibited these essential characteristics. The five winning pieces honor the mindset of a kindergartener. They are fresh, playful, straightforward, and concrete yet creative.

"Big, Little, and In the Middle," by Laura Crawford offers a simple yet factually rich comparison of animals of all sizes that culminates with how a child fits in with his family: "Dad is big./I am little./ Mom is in the middle!" Repetition



Editor in Chief Susan M. Tierney **Publisher** Prescott V. Kelly
Children's Writer, ISSN 1060-5274, is published by The Writer's Institute, Inc., 93 Long Ridge Road, West Redding, CT 06896-1124. Periodicals Class Postage paid at West Redding, CT, and at additional entry points. Postmaster: Please send address changes to *Children's Writer*, 93 Long Ridge Road, West Redding, CT 06896-1124. Published monthly. Subscription rate is \$24 for 12 issues. © 2011. All rights reserved. The material contained herein is protected by copyright.

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and the simple presentation of the concepts of size and comparison build upon one another throughout the piece and lead to a warm and satisfying conclusion that children undoubtedly will appreciate. This entry also readily lends itself to varied illustrations.

Kellie Klocko's "Who Will I Be Today?" skillfully treats the subject of the pure joy of a child at creative play. Kellie demonstrates a keen sense of the world of wonder a kindergartener inhabits. Peppered with well-placed repetition, her story is a delightful, spirited peek at imaginative play that ends on an upbeat, affirming note.

In "Kindergarten Counting," Gail Hargrave offers up a story that cleverly recounts a typical kindergartener's day within the structure of counting up to ten as the day begins, and back down again as an active day draws to a close. Avoiding exposition and needless narration, Gail effectively captures the energy that encompasses a kindergartener's world with short, snappy sentences. She successfully conveys a young child's joyful and satisfying sense of accomplishment at completing everyday tasks.

The contest's first runner-up is Jill Richards Proctor's "Sunday, Fun Day," a fine example of rhyme well done. Clear and bright as the summer sun, its images conjure up a playful family day at the beach. Proctor weaves alliteration, active verbs, and the sensations of a perfect seashore outing into a simple

Contest Winners

- ❖ **First Place:** "Farmer's Market," Gay Kamber Seltzer, Sherman Oaks, CA
- ❖ **Second Place:** "Sunday Fun Day," Jill Richards Proctor, Santa Barbara, CA
- ❖ **Third Place:** "Kindergarten Counting," Gail Hargrave, Charlton, MA
- ❖ **Fourth Place:** "Who Will I Be Today?" Kellie Klocko, Lisle, IL
- ❖ **Fifth Place:** "Big, Little, and in the Middle," Laura Crawford, Geneva, IL

Meet Our Winner

Gay Kamber Seltzer is high on life. It is apparent when you talk to her and hear the laughter, zest, and energy in her voice, and it is clear in her enthusiastic and positive approach to her active life, which includes a clear and certain commitment to writing for children.

A retired school teacher, Gay enjoyed working with children in the primary grades, and though out of the classroom some ten years now, she still manages to teach by working with her young goddaughter, Annabel, on her reading skills. In fact, it was Annabel who was the motivation for Gay's winning story. "Annabel is the age of the target audience for this story," reveals Gay, "and I had her in mind as I created 'Farmer's Market.' I have been working with Annabel on her reading and phonics skills to help get her ready for kindergarten."

The idea for Gay's contest submission grew out of her loyal patronage of the local farmer's market in her hometown of Sherman Oaks, CA, although she is quick to point out that she "never found a worm there!" This is not Gay's only story geared for children in the primary grades, however. Gay takes her writing seriously and writes regularly. "I have about 60 manuscripts," she says. Gay has published in *Highlights for Children* and other markets. She wrote "off and on" throughout her teaching career and has continued in her retirement. As a teacher, she wrote both original stories to augment the curriculum she was teaching, and curriculum materials for use by teachers. She enjoys writing creatively, primarily for young children, and bases her stories on her life experiences, as well as those of her three children and their children. She has set a goal for herself to find an agent to represent her children's work.

In addition to her goddaughter and former students, Gay relies on her team of grandchildren for continuing inspiration and to keep her stories fresh and immediate. When the oldest grandchild, now 16 years of age, was a mere toddler Gay began a tradition that remains a staple of their summers to this day. Nicknamed *Bubbie* (a Yiddish word for grandmother) by her grandkids, Gay established "Camp Bubbie," a weeklong holiday for all the children without their parents. "My husband (*Pops* to her Bubbie) and I rent a van and we take the kids everywhere, from museums and live theater to Dodgers games. Anything and everything is A-ok that week. If you want a doughnut at midnight, go for it! The only rule is everyone must be kind," explains Gay. Camp Bubbie has no doubt fueled many of Gay's stories, which she says she endeavors to fill with "simple vocabulary, humor, and fun. You have to add some fun." Sounds a lot like Gay's life.

story packed with active fun and ending with a delicious nap. From "Water wings/and shovel/pail./Playful puppy/wagging tail" to "Growing tired/need a nap./Room for three/in Mommy's lap," we are treated to what is sure to be a fond family story reached for again and again.

First-place winner, "Farmer's Market," by Gay Kamber Seltzer, is a fresh, humorous tale. The episode is set at a local farmer's market and told from the point of view of Willis, a common garden worm. Sprinkled with fact, this kindergarten kid-friendly story of 135 words wins with spritely dialogue that shows, rather than tells, of the plight of a wiggly worm that eventually wends his way to a wonderful home through trial, error, and perseverance.

Writing for the littlest readers is

a big responsibility. It is also a huge challenge. YA writers have the luxury of filling hundreds of pages as they weave their magic. Those who hope their tales will be read at circle time must cut to the chase.

Writers for kindergarteners must trim their story to its most elemental parts and yet capture and keep their young readers' interest with skillful word craft. They must endeavor to tell their story simply and smartly from the point of view of a young child. The goal of a story or article for kindergarteners is to capture the spirit and hold the interest of youngsters who naturally find wonder and joy in their expanding world. Tough to do? You bet! Satisfying to achieve? No doubt! Adding a reader to the ranks is no small feat, but it is an immensely rewarding endeavor.

CW Kindergarten Contest Winners

First Place: Farmer's Market



By Gay Kamber Seltzer

Willis Worm woke up in an apple box. He crawled to the top and looked around.

"Eek!" yelled a woman. "There's a worm in here!"

Willis crawled down the apples, over to the lettuce.

"Hey! Look at this," yelled a man. "There's a worm in here!"

Willis crawled out from the lettuce, over to the carrots.

"Look, Mommy!" yelled a little girl. "There's a worm in here!"

Willis crawled onto the dirt floor at the Farmer's Market.

Many people were walking around.

"Someone will step on me!" cried Willis. "I need a new home."

Willis crawled over to a tent filled with plants.

"Daddy, look!" yelled a boy. "This is a good plant. There's a worm in it."

"You're right," said Daddy. "The worm will help the roots grow. We'll give the plant a new home."

Third Place: Kindergarten Counting

By Gail Hargrave

I am counting up to kindergarten! One. Wake up. Two. Get dressed. Three. Eat breakfast. Four. Brush my teeth. Five. Put on my shoes. Six. Give out hugs! Seven. Run for the bus. Eight. Take a ride. Nine. Walk in the door. Ten. Here I am!

I can count again at kindergarten! One. Say hello. Two. Hang up my bag. Three. Make a friend. Four. Draw a picture. Five. Sing a song. Six. Read a book!

Seven. Have some lunch.

Eight. Read some letters.

Nine. Make more friends.

Ten. Time to go!

I can try to count back from ten. Ten. Put on my coat. Nine. Grab my bag. Eight. A ride back home. Seven. I am home! Six. Talk about school. Five. Get ready to eat. Four. Get nice and clean. Three. Read a book. Two. Give out more hugs. One. Go to sleep and back tomorrow!

Second Place: Sunday, Fun Day



By Jill Richards Proctor

Mommy
Daddy
Meg and
Me.

Sunday
Fun Day
At the
Sea.

Water
Wings and
Shovel
Pail.

Playful
Puppy
Wagging
Tail.

Picnic
Basket
Chips and
Cheese.

Inner
Tubes and
Water
Skis.

Running
Sunning
In the
Sand.

Testing
Waters
Hand in
Hand.

Flying
Paper
Dragon
Kite.

Letting
Go and
Losing
Sight.

Batting
Beach balls
Over
Head.

Feeding
Sea gulls
Bits of
Bread.

Finding
Sea shells
In the
Tide.

Chasing
Breakers
Slip and
Slide.

Building
Castles
On the
Shore.

Playing
Horse shoes
Keeping
Score.

Growing
Tired
Need a
Nap.

Room for
Three in
Mommy's
Lap.

Playful
Puppy
Meg and
Me.

Sleeping
Soundly
At the
Sea.

Forward Movement

412 Sycamore Street, Cincinnati, OH 45202. <http://forwardmovement.org>

The official publisher of the Episcopal Church, Forward Movement is currently looking for authors for a month of meditations for new parents, and is considering a similar publication for teenagers. It also wants meditations for retirees. The meditations should be no longer than 300 words, and may be prose or poetry.

The publisher wants regular authors of daily meditations for its devotional guide, *Forward Day by Day*. If interested, select three of the following biblical verses for the 215-word meditations: Psalm 139:21 (139:20 in the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer Psalter*); Mark 8:31; Acts 4:12; and Revelation 1:10.

Online writers' guidelines provide more details for all meditations. For the new books, mail or email to 30daymeditations@gmail.com. For possible books, pamphlets, or tracts, send a cover letter and complete manuscript by mail or email to rschmidt@forwarddaybyday.com.

PCI Education

4560 Lockhill-Selma, Suite 100, San Antonio, TX 78249.
www.pcieducation.com

PCI Education provides curriculum and supplemental materials, and specializes in special education. The target audience is students with varying degrees of intellectual and developmental disabilities, learning disabilities, and other special needs. It also publishes general education materials. PCI is looking for ideas and submissions for fiction and nonfiction.

Subject areas include behavior and social skills, careers, communication, community, critical thinking, language arts, math, reading, science, health, life skills, social studies, speech, and study skills.

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Pittsburgh Parent

P.O. Box 374, Bakerstown, PA 15007. www.pittsburghparent.com

Pittsburgh Parent wants articles on teens, health and safety, education, abuse, pre-school, child care, maternity, discipline, and party ideas. It also publishes fiction. This monthly reaches caregivers of children with up-to-date information on parenting, as well as local activities and events. Feature stories are open to freelancers; cover stories are assigned.

Features, to 950 words. Query for nonfiction; submit complete manuscript for fiction. Email to editor@pittsburghparent.com (Word or PDF attachment). Buys first print rights. Payment, \$50.

MuseltUp Publishing

14878 James, Pierrefonds, Quebec H9H 1P5 Canada. www.museitup-publishing.com

This e-publisher launched in spring of last year, and has a MuseItUp imprint. "MuseItUp Publishing accepts fully fleshed out stories in a variety of genres, from tween middle-grade chapter books to adult fiction. We currently do not accept nonfiction, anthologies, or works by more than one author," says Publisher Lea Schizas.

The publisher is currently looking for YA romance, middle-grade historical fiction, and middle-grade stories for boys. It does not publish nonfiction. Fiction genres desired include adventure, contemporary, fantasy, historical, holiday, horror, inspirational, mysteries, paranormal, science fiction, and Westerns.

Email to sub.musepub@gmail.com with the work's title in the subject line. Include a cover letter in the body of the email that indicates the title, genre, word count, and a brief author bio; attach a complete manuscript, synopsis, and résumé (RTF or DOC, but not DOCX). See the online writers' guidelines for more details. Royalty, 40 percent of download price. Print contracts are also available.



Vivify Your Scenes

By Chris Eboch

Every work of fiction has a story question that summarizes the plot. In my historical fiction novel *The Eyes of Pharaoh*, for example, the main character hunts for her missing friend. The story question is, “Will Seshta find Reya?”

Over the course of a novel or short story, the main character tries to reach a story goal through a series of shorter-term scene goals. Seshta’s short-term goals include looking for Reya in likely places, asking questions, and spying on people who may be involved in his disappearance. Each scene goal should be expressed as a clear, specific question, such as, “Will Seshta find Reya at the army barracks?”

Four Answers

Scene questions can be answered in four ways. If the answer is *yes*, you have a happy character and not much conflict, so save this answer for the last scene.

If the answer is *no*, the character has to try something else. That provides conflict, but it is essentially the same conflict you already had.

An answer of *yes, but* provides a twist. Maybe a character can get what she wants, but with strings attached. This forces the character to choose between two things important to her or to make a moral choice, a great source of conflict.

No, and furthermore is another strong option because it adds hurdles—time is running out, or your protagonist has a new obstacle that makes the situation worse, which creates even greater conflict.

One way or another, the scene should end with a clear answer to the original question. Ideally that answer makes things worse. The

next scene should open with a new, specific scene goal and probably a review of the story goal. Here’s an example from *The Eyes of Pharaoh*:

Scene question: “Will Seshta find Reya at the army barracks?”

Answer: “No, and furthermore, she thinks the general lied to her, so Reya may be in danger.”

Next scene: “Can Seshta spy on the general to find out the truth, which may lead her to Reya?”

Over the course of a novel, each end-of-scene failure should get the main character into worse trouble, leading to a dramatic final struggle.

Remember the Why

In real life, we do not always know why things happen. In fiction, we should. We expect story events to follow a logical pattern, where a cause leads to a reasonable effect. If you show a cause without an effect or an effect without a cause, you confuse your readers.

This logic goes beyond the cause and effect of major plot action to include a character’s internal reaction to the external action. Yet I often see manuscripts where action is followed by action with no internal reaction, so we do not understand a character’s motives. No matter how great the action, the reader is confused and skeptical.

Within each scene, show not just what your main character does, but why. Do not assume people can read between the lines. In one recent manuscript I critiqued, the main character heard voices. Ghosts? The narrator never identified them as such. Did he think the voices had another source? Had he not yet decided? Maybe they were not sup-

posed to be ghosts after all. The writer may have assumed that readers would interpret the voices properly, but by not putting the narrator’s interpretation on the page, he left this reader confused.

In *Manuscript Makeover* (Perigee Books), Elizabeth Lyon suggests using a pattern in scenes: stimulus—reaction/emotion—thoughts—action. In other words, (1) something happens to your main character (the stimulus); (2) you show his emotional reaction, perhaps through dialogue, an exclamation, gesture, expression, or physical sensation; (3) he thinks about the situation and makes a decision on what to do next; and, (4) finally, he acts on that decision. This construct lets readers see clearly how and why a character is reacting. The sequence may take one sentence or several pages, so long as we see the character’s emotional and intellectual reaction, leading to a decision. Here’s an example:

Pounding shook the door. (*stimulus*)

Lisa jumped. (*reaction*) It was after midnight and she wasn’t expecting anyone. Maybe it was a mistake. (*thoughts*)

She waited, hoping they’d go away. (*action*)

Take out the middle section and Lisa’s action doesn’t make sense. You can vary the pattern, but make sure you include emotions and thoughts so your character’s behavior is clear.

Link your scenes together with scene questions and make sure you include all the scene parts—stimulus, reaction/emotion, thoughts, and action—and you will have vivid, believable scenes building a dramatic story.

Tilbury House Publishers

103 Brunswick Ave., Gardiner, ME 04345. www.tilburyhouse.com

Tilbury House is an educational publisher with a strong children's line, as well as a regional publisher of Maine-related books for adults.

"We look primarily for culturally diverse stories about contemporary kids making good decisions," says Associate Children's Book Editor Karen Fisk, who handles queries and submissions. "Ideas of healthy community, green living, environmental mindfulness, the importance of friendship, honoring and affirming diversity, and being fair are important to us. We also like books that can be used in classroom settings." She is looking for books on the above subjects, and on social activism, for ages 7 to 12. Of most interest are picture books. Tilbury does *not* publish biography, fantasy, folklore, historical fiction, or poetry.

Children's books for Tilbury should appeal to both children and their parents, and be interesting to the national (not the regional) market, plus have the potential for a teacher's guide with more information and activities.

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Imagination-Café

www.imagination-cafe.com

This e-magazine for children ages 7 to 12 "is dedicated to empowering kids and tweens by encouraging them to explore their world and stretch their minds," says Editor Roseanne Tolin. Its "mission is to offer children the tools needed to discover their talents and passions, by providing them with reliable information, resources, and safe opportunities for self-expression."

Tolin is "most interested in acquiring interesting career articles, and Before They Were Famous pieces. New hands-on science and other educational-type pieces are welcome as well. Please see the site for writing style." *Imagination-Café* publishes across many categories of nonfiction, and includes a small amount of fiction.

Fiction, to 1,000 words. Queries accepted. Complete manuscripts with a cover letter are preferred; paste into the body of an email to editor@imagination-cafe.com. Also accepts queries or requests for assignments. Currently a nonpaying market.

Ronsdale Press

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Currently looking for fiction for readers from 8 to 15, Ronsdale Press is a literary Canadian publisher with about a dozen new books each year. Its juvenile books, fiction and nonfiction, are all directed at middle-grade and young adult read-

ers. For adults, it publishes regional history, biography, and books of ideas about Canada. Authors must be Canadian citizens or landed immigrants to Canada.

The company encourages new writers and multicultural writers. Proposed books should be thoughtful and literary, whether for children or adults. Recent titles include the YA novel *Torn from Troy*:

Odyssey of a Slave, and *Hannah and the Spindle Whorl*.

For fiction, query with sample chapters via regular mail to Veronica Hatch, Children's Acquisition Editor. Or, send cover letter, complete manuscript, résumé, and author biography. For nonfiction, add an outline, proposal, and competition/market report. No electronic submissions. Royalty.

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