

Children's Book Insider

At Presstime

Boyd's Mills Press Accepting Submissions

Boyd's Mills Press publishes fiction and nonfiction for preschoolers through young adults. Interested in a wide range of topics including animals, adventure stories, contemporary and historical fiction, sports, problem novels, nature, science, craft and activity books, and multicultural books showing children as an integral part of a culture. Recent titles include *Big Moon Tortilla* by Joy Cowley, illustrated by Dyanne Strongbow (picture book), *Horse For All Seasons* by Sheila Kelly Welch (middle grade fiction), *Go, Go, Go* by Stephen Swinburne (nonfiction picture book), and *Puzzlemania* (puzzle book for ages 6-12). The Wordsong imprint publishes poetry collections for all ages (see Jane Yolen's *Horizons: Poems as Far as the Eye Can See* with photographs by Jason Stemple for ages 8-12). Submit complete manuscript for picture books, query with synopsis and sample chapters for middle grade and young adult fiction, and all nonfiction. For poetry, send 25-45 poems grouped around a theme. Submit with SASE to Manuscript Coordinator (fiction and nonfiction for Boyd's Mills Press) or Wendy Murray, Editor (Wordsong), Boyd's Mills Press, 815 Church Street, Honesdale, PA 18431. For more titles, see www.boydsmillspress.com.

Publisher Seeking Books About Texas and the Southwest

Hendrick-Long Publishing Company is a small press focusing on children's books about Texas and the Southwest. Seeking historically accurate fiction (picture books through middle grade) and nonfiction (middle grade and young adult). All submissions *must* have a Texas/Southwest theme. Recent titles include *Life in a Rock Shelter: Prehistoric Indians of the Lower Pecos* by G. Elaine Acker (nonfiction, grade 7 and up), *Camels for Uncle Sam* by Diane Yancey (historical fiction, grade 4 and up), *True Tales of Texas* by Bertha Mae Cox (nonfiction, ages 8 and up), *Hats Are for Watering Horses* by Mary Blount Christian, illustrated by Lyle Miller (picture book), and *Baxter Badger's Home* by Doris McClellan, illustrated by Vicki Diggs (easy reader, grades K-2). Query for *all* submissions with synopsis and sample chapters (if applicable). Send with SASE to Michael Long, Publisher, Hendrick-Long Publishing, PO Box 1247, Friendswood, TX 77549. For more titles, see www.hendricklongpublishing.com.

Submission Updates

Lisa Findlay, Assistant Editor of **Random House Children's Books**, has notified CBI that she's been inundated with submissions recently and is no longer accepting unsolicited manuscripts.

Jane Gerver is no longer Executive Editor of Scholastic's **Cartwheel Books**. Scholastic is cutting staff considerably, and advises authors to hold off submitting until things have stabilized.

SeaStar Books, an imprint of North-South Books, is up for sale and is not accepting submissions.

Hampton Roads Publishing is discontinuing its Young Spirit imprint of children's books. Any children's book submissions will be returned unopened.

Inside C.B.I.:

At Presstime....1

Build Your Story
Chapter by Chapter....3

Special Report: How to
Enter Writing
Contests...and Why
You Should....4

From the Editor....6

Little Kidz Rule:
Writing Board
Books....7

How to Read a
Publisher's Catalog....8

August 2003

◆ At Presstime

Children's Book Insider makes every effort to verify the legitimacy of small and new presses before printing information in "At Presstime." However, authors and illustrators should always proceed with caution when approaching publishers with whom they are unfamiliar, and read contracts carefully. For a free copy of our Special Report, *How to Determine If a New or Small Press is Legitimate*, send a SASE to CBI at the address below. You can also download this report and others from our Web page: <http://www.write4kids.com>

Published 12 times/year by Children's Book Insider, LLC, 901 Columbia Road, Ft. Collins, CO 80525-1838. 970/495-0056. ISSN 1073-7596. E-mail: mail@write4kids.com <http://www.write4kids.com>

Subscribers: Please notify us immediately of change of address. CBI is mailed third class and will not be forwarded by the post office.

Publisher: Laura Backes
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Moira Allen, Mary Bowman-Kruhm, Margaret Shauers, Nancy Sondel

Subscription Price: 12 issues/\$34 (Canada: \$38 US; other countries: \$43) Single issue: \$3.25

To receive a free CBI Collection catalog or place an order call 800/807-1916. You can also get a catalog via e-mail by sending a message to: cbi@sendfree.com

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Twenty-Second Annual Delacorte Press Contest for First Young Adult Novel

The Delacorte Press Contest is open to US and Canadian writers who have not previously published a young adult novel. Manuscripts should be 100-224 typewritten, double-spaced pages with a contemporary setting suitable for readers ages 12-18. Each manuscript should have a cover page listing the title of the novel; the author's name, address, and telephone number; and a note stating whether or not the manuscript needs to be returned. The title should also appear on each page, and pages should be numbered consecutively. Include a brief plot summary with the cover letter. Submit manuscripts in padded envelopes (not boxes) and include a self-addressed, stamped envelope of appropriate size if you want the manuscript returned. Otherwise, enclose a business-size SASE for notification. Manuscripts sent to Delacorte Press may not be submitted to other publishers while under consideration for the prize. Manuscripts must be post-marked after October 1, 2003, but no later than December 31, 2003.

The prize of a book contract (on the publisher's standard form) covering world rights for a hardcover and a paperback edition, including an advance and royalties, will be awarded. The award consists of \$1,500 in cash and a \$7,500 advance against royalties. Send manuscripts to: Delacorte Press Contest, Random House, Inc., 1745 Broadway, 9th Floor, New York, New York 10019. For more information, go to www.randomhouse.com/kids/games/delacorte.html

Children's Authors' Bootcamp Coming to Chicago

Children's Authors' Bootcamp, the weekend-long writing workshop led by CBI publisher Laura Backes and author Linda Arms White, will be held at the Holiday Inn in Rolling Meadows, IL (northwest Chicago) on September 13-14. Bootcamp focuses on writing fiction for all ages of children and is perfect for beginning or intermediate writers. Cost is \$239 for both days (9:00-4:30) and includes lunch, snacks and handouts. Sleeping rooms at the Holiday Inn are \$85 per night (the hotel has a free shuttle from O'Hare Airport). For more information and a registration form, go to www.wemakewriters.com or email Linda Arms White at CABootcamp@aol.com. To pay with a credit card, call 303/747-1014. This one's filling up fast!

Boys' Quest Accepting Submissions

Boys' Quest, published six times a year, is a magazine for boys ages 6-13, with readers age 8-10 being the specific target age. Looking for material that deals with timeless topics such as pets, nature, hobbies, science, games, sports, careers, simply cooking, and anything else likely to interest a young boy. Each issue revolves around a theme; authors may request a current theme list by sending a SASE to the address below.

Editors want lively writing from a young boy's point of view with boys directly involved in activities that are wholesome and unusual. Nonfiction accompanied by photos and fiction stories (both up to 500 words) are needed, as well as jokes, puzzles, poems, simple recipes, and carpentry projects. Send complete manuscript with a cover letter and SASE to Marilyn Edwards, Editor, *Boys' Quest*, PO Box 227, Bluffton, OH 45817-0227. Pays a minimum of 5 cents per word for fiction and nonfiction, with additional payment given if the piece is accompanied by photos or art. Pays a minimum of \$10 for poems and puzzles, and variable rates for games and activities. Purchases first American serial rights; pays on publication.

Publisher Seeks Resources for Teachers

Stenhouse Publishers publishes resource books for kindergarten through high school teachers in the areas of fine arts, literacy, social studies, math, writing, conflict management and games. Recent titles include *Day One and Beyond: Practical Matters for New Middle-Level Teachers* by Rick Wormeli; *Thinking Through Genre: Units of Study in Reading and Writing Workshops 4-12* by Heather Latimer; *Great Beginnings: Creating a Literacy-Rich Kindergarten* by Resi J. Ditzel; *Music as a Way of Knowing* by Nick Page. Submit a proposal that describes the book's intended audience and length, the writing style you'll use, how the book will be organized, information on yourself and other books you've written, when you expect to complete the first draft, and whether your book will include samples of students' work (writings, drawings, etc.). The proposal can take the form of a cover letter and chapter-by-chapter outline. (Authors must get written permission for any student work that appears in the book, signed releases for any photographs of students, and pay all permissions fees for the use of extracts from published books.) Submit proposal with SASE to Philippa Stratton, Editorial Director, Stenhouse Publishers, 477 Congress Street, Suite 4B, Portland, ME 04101-3451. For more titles, see www.stenhouse.com

◆ Writing Workshop

Build Your Story Chapter by Chapter

by Laura Backes

One of the challenges authors face when writing anything longer than a picture book is knowing when to insert chapter breaks. Chapters serve several purposes, one of which is to divide the text into manageable chunks. The younger the reader, the shorter those chunks should be. Easy readers and young chapter books (for kids up to about age 9) have chapters under five pages long. It's important to give beginning readers frequent breaks. Middle grade novels average eight pages per chapter; young adult chapters can go up to 12 pages. These numbers are general guidelines; the story should ultimately dictate the length of the chapters. But keep in mind that while there's no such thing as a chapter that's too short, excessively lengthy chapters can give the impression that the plot is stalled instead of moving forward.

Chapters are built from several scenes that make up one plot point. Shorter books have simpler plots, therefore fewer scenes are required for each plot point. For example, in the first two chapters of a chapter book for ages 7-10, Emma's father has taken a new job that requires him to travel frequently. So Emma, who lost her mother when she was a baby, will now live with her grandparents while Dad is on the road. (**Plot point 1:** Emma moves in with Grandma and Grandpa. **Scenes:** Emma's father brings her to grandparents' house; Emma says good-bye to Dad who is leaving on a long business trip; Emma watches Dad drive away from the window of her attic bedroom. End Chapter 1). Emma's sad about leaving her school and is afraid her old friends will forget about her. She's also afraid Dad will forget about her tenth birthday, which is less than a month away. Grandma and Grandpa think birthday parties are frivolous, and never do more than send her a card. (**Plot point 2:** Emma encounters the unfamiliar surroundings of her grandparents' house and learns that her grandparents haven't celebrated a birthday or anniversary for 30 years. **Scenes:** Emma unpacks in the dark, musty attic room; Grandma gives Emma a list of chores; Emma mentions her birthday at dinner and is told there will be no party. End Chapter 2). Middle grade and young adult novels are more complex, weaving subplots into the main storyline. So a chapter may contain a plot point for the primary story, as well as a plot point for a subplot. Or, a chapter may exist solely to develop a subplot, in which case it would also be made up of scenes that convey one subplot point.

Once you've determined when your chapters will break, you need to decide how you'll

accomplish this. Easy reader chapters are best when they are self-contained units--in other words, each chapter stands alone almost like a short story. They are distinct events that don't necessarily lead immediately into the next chapter. This allows the child to read one chapter in a sitting and then pick up the book later without losing the thread of the plot. In action-packed plots for older readers, you may choose to break the chapter in the middle of a scene, thus heightening the suspense. For example, in the last scene of Chapter 4, Josh is alone in the house at night and hears a knock on the door. He tiptoes up to the window and peers out at the porch, but sees nothing. Then he hears another knock. If you resist having him answer the door until the beginning of Chapter 5, your readers won't put down the book.

More middle grade and young adult fiction is being written with two main characters who alternate telling the story. The clearest way to do this is to give each narrator his or her own chapters. Alert the reader to each chapter's viewpoint character either by writing in third person (*Hannah woke early the next morning...; Brent dashed into class just as the bell rang...*), or by titling the chapters with the viewpoint characters' names. Ground the reader in the time and place immediately. Use words like *The next day*, *That night*, or *Later that week* to show how much time has passed since the last chapter this character narrated. When the setting or time period changes between two scenes within a chapter, you can insert a drop down (an extra blank line) before the new scene to give a visual clue that the story's moving forward, but also use a transition to show when and where the new scene takes place (*The street lights came on just as Hannah rang Brent's doorbell.*)

Outlining your story before you begin writing can help decide where your chapters will break. Or, after your first draft is complete, go back and jot down the plot points you've covered in each chapter. Do you have two major plot events in one chapter? Try breaking that chapter into two. Does the chapter fail to advance the main plotline or a subplot? If so, that chapter doesn't serve a clear purpose in the story, and should either be cut or incorporated into another chapter. Building a book with strong chapters keeps the story moving, and guarantees the plot will be much more satisfying to the reader.

How to Enter Writing Contests...

I won my first writing contest when I was in high school. I had been writing for many years, but with the busyness and activity of high school, time with friends and family, I put away my writing. And then the 'contest' was announced. My biggest fan, my mother, encouraged me to enter, so I wrote and entered a thriller short story. The judges were professors from the local college. I believed I had no chance to win.

But as I sat in class one afternoon, the announcements were made over the loud speaker. My writer's heart leapt when my name was called and a girl from the creative writing club came into the room, placing a beautiful First Place, engraved plaque into my hands.

Since that time, I've placed over 100 times in various writing contests.

Contests are profitable (in more than one way), encouraging, a chance for learning and preparation, and motivating. Opportunities abound for entering prose and poetry in contests, whether through local writer's groups, magazines, online sites, or book publishers.

Here are some of the ways that entering contests can be beneficial to your writing.

◆ *Learning manuscript preparation*

You won't win a contest with a sloppy, ill prepared, hard-to-read manuscript. As a contest entrant, I've seen how manuscripts sent in a hurry kept me from winning at all. Sometimes after studying the scoring points or judge's comments, I found that my 3rd Place or Honorable Mention would have placed higher if I had been more careful checking my spelling, making sure the my ink wasn't too light, and making sure to follow every rule.

As a contest judge, I've often had to choose between one or another well-written entry as final winner. Sometimes, the manuscript mechanics becomes the final decision. If it's bad enough, it is weeded out right away for the same reason.

By making sure your manuscripts are in the best of shape for a contest, you'll be ready to send it on to an editor. And by taking the time to carefully read and follow the rules of a contest, I've been more careful about reading guidelines for publishers and learning what they want.

◆ *Receiving an unbiased critique from someone who doesn't know who you are*

Judges are comparing your piece to others entered in the same category, much like an editor comparing the huge amount of manuscripts received every day. I've used the critiques received for both winning and non-winning manuscripts to make them more saleable before sending out. Some suggestions have made the manuscripts better. Other suggestions I've ignored.

You don't always have to win a contest for it to be worth your time to enter, as long as critiques are promised. A manuscript that doesn't win may still be very good and publishable.

Don't let a loss get you down, but do let a win encourage you.

◆ *Gaining approval for your writing.*

Rejections come hard, but winning contests can rebuild your self-confidence. When you've learned that your manuscript competed against a 500, 100 or even 25 others and came out on top, you feel recharged, ready to pound on those editor doors once again. And, if you don't win, well, you know that you were up against many others and...if you can handle it, you can handle whatever happens to your 'babies' when they're shipped off to editors.

◆ *Earning monetary awards*

In 1996, nearly one third of my writing income came from contest wins. Some of my stories have made more money in contests than when they finally sold.

Another advantage of contests is that you can enter the same manuscript in several different contests, though not in the same contest the next year. Several wins on one well-written manuscript is very profitable.

If the contest includes publication, it may also include more money and prestige than other pieces that house has published.

◆ *Getting published*

"The Worst Sport Ever" was a humorous short story I entered into the *Pockets* fiction contest. It didn't win. But I was just as thrilled when I received a letter notifying me that they wanted to purchase and publish my

and Why You Should

by Kathryn Lay

story in a future issue. Other writers have entered *Highlights for Children* contests and had similar experiences. Sometimes you don't win the contest, but you do win an acceptance.

Contests are one way some publishers have of finding publishable stories.

Amanda Jenkins researched publishers for 'edgy' YA novels and found that there weren't a lot of places to market her book. The Delacorte contest seemed a good way to get a foot in the door at Random House. When the contest winners were announced in April of 1996, Amanda learned that she was the winner of the 14th annual Delacorte Press Prize for First Young Adult Novel for *Breaking Boxes*.

Amanda believes winning the Delacorte launched her career. She has since acquired an agent and sold four more novels to HarperCollins. Her books have been nominated for the California Young Reader Medal and the *Los Angeles Times* Book Award.

Amanda says, "Many people in the YA business are aware of the Delacorte contest. The contest not only gets you published, it automatically gives your book a slightly stronger push off the starting block. Winning the Delacorte helped attract attention in my cover letter to my agent."

Martha Moore, the 1994 winner of the Delacorte, author of *Under the Mermaid Angel*, *Angels on the Rooftop*, and *Matchit* agrees that winning this award launched her career.

"I immediately received invitations to speak, sign books, and more. I will always be grateful for getting this wonderful opportunity."

Another author won the children's story category for *Writer's Digest* competition and was further awarded by soon after selling his story as a picture book.

◆ Winning recognition from peers

Sitting in an awards ceremony, hearing your name called and going forward to receive your award amidst applause is a great boost to your writing ego. How exciting to learn there were 50 entrants in a category and you won first place.

Contest wins also help balance those

rejections. I frame my winning certificates and hang them on the wall in front of my computer. When I'm down or frustrated with rejection, I look over the awards and get a boost to my self-confidence.

Every writer craves assurance and approval of their work. A contest win or encouraging word from a judge has kept me submitting a manuscript that I might otherwise stuff in a file and give up trying to sell.

Now that you know why to enter, there are ways to push your chances of winning a little higher. What do judges look for in a winning contest entry? Often, the same thing an editor looks for in a publishable manuscript.

In one annual contest, the first year I heard about it was two weeks before the entries were due. I hurriedly printed out my entries. None of them placed at all. Editorial comments made by the judges all said the same thing, that the pieces were good and well-written, but there were too many misspelled words, the ribbon or photocopies were too light, and on one entry I forgot to remove my name on the manuscript. The following year, I prepared early for this contest. I entered five categories and won three first places. The next year I entered four and won two first places and a third.

As a judge, I've seen plagiarized entries, or manuscripts that were sloppy with typos, strange margins, a light ribbon or dot matrix printer, single spacing, etc. These were placed in a separate pile for judging. Although I tried not to be too picky, I knew I wasn't doing the writers a favor by not letting them know the errors that would shout AMATEUR! to an editor.

If the story is well-done, they are then 'considered' for winning. Other stories had no point, they rambled on without a plot or believable character. As essays they might have worked. But not as fiction. Some had limited marketing ability.

Are you excited? Find a contest by checking writer magazines online and off or getting in touch with your local writers group. Prepare your manuscript as if an editor were reading it. Send it in. Then, rejoice over your wins and learn from your losses.

A few contests:

SCBWI Golden Kite published book awards and SCBWI Magazine Merit awards: <http://www.scbwi.org>

The Children's Writer contests: <http://www.childrenswriter.com>

Byline Magazine contests: <http://www.bylinemag.com/>

Marguerite de Angeli for first middle grade novel and Delacorte Press contest for first YA novel: <http://www.randomhouse.com/kids/games/index.html#writing>

Dutton's Ann Durrell Fiction Contest, Sept. 15, 2003 deadline, Ann Durrell Fiction Contest Coordinator, Dutton Children's Books, 345 Hudson St., 14th Floor, NY, NY 10014

Pockets fiction contest: <http://courtyard.upperroom.org/pockets/contest.html>

Highlights for Children annual short story contest, themed. For information write to *Highlights for Children* Fiction Contest, 803 Church Street, Honesdale, PA 18431.

Kathryn Lay has had over 800 articles, essays and short stories published in magazines and anthologies. Her middle grade novel, King of Fifth Grade, will be published by Holiday House in Fall 2004. Kathryn is the NC/NE Texas Regional Advisor for SCBWI. Read more about her writing on her web site: <http://hometown.aol.com/rlay15/index.html>

From the Editor

Dear Reader:

Last month I got a call from a reporter at the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* who was doing an article on the considerable number of reissues of decades-old books in publishers' Fall 2003 children's catalogs. Had I noticed this trend? she asked. I had, and I'd also noted (and written about in **CBI**) the tendency for publishers to take a beloved book and reconfigure and remarket it to death in the form of board books, picture books, videos and merchandise. In my opinion, Winnie the Pooh loses some of his charm when his Disney-rendered form is splashed all over bed sheets and bath towels.

Some books (just about anything by Margaret Wise Brown or Roald Dahl, for example) deserve to be reissued if they've been out of print. Books with a timeless appeal should be introduced to a new generation of readers. But the sheer number of reissues, television and movie tie-ins, and new formats of well-known stories released in the last few years means fewer original books are being published (coincidentally, I received the article below from an artist agent just days after speaking to the reporter, confirming that this trend is affecting illustrators as well as writers). One reason is money. It's far cheaper to reissue an existing book than to create a new one--publishers spend less marketing a known product (consumers are already familiar with the book), and if the text is in public domain, it's free. If an anniversary edition of a famous book is coming out, lesser-known books by the same author may be reissued at the same time and lumped together in one advertising campaign.

All businesses experience ups and downs, and publishing is no exception. As a writer, it's time to ask yourself how you'll ride out this wave. Many will become (understandably) frustrated, and simply give up. If you view writing for children as a way to make a living, you'll probably be disappointed at the size of your paychecks for the next few years. But if you write because you love it, because you can't imagine not writing, then use this time to hone your skills. Take writing courses. Join a writer's group and a professional association where you can network. Enter writing contests. Consider markets you haven't explored: nonfiction for magazines (including puzzles, games and activities), parenting magazines, teacher resources. Some magazines pay minimally, or in contributor's copies only, but give you a publishing credit you can add to your resumé.

Above all, keep submitting, but know that some rejections may be due to publishers temporarily cutting back their lists. If you're committed for the long haul, you'll be ready when the economy swings back. And with any luck, by then there will be fewer authors vying for coveted spots on publishers' lineups. --LB



Assignments...Gone MIA? by Christine A. Tugeau

In a recent *Publishers Weekly* article about the book market (July 14, 2003), Lynn Garrett states: "While spring lists brought inklings of difficult days for some publishers, fall offerings confirm the reality. Many...are publishing fewer books, and some small houses seem to have gone MIA [Missing In Action]." As an illustrators' rep, this quote really caught my attention. It's about the industry in general, but we've felt this in children's publishing for about a year as well.

The current general economic malaise of the country causes everyone to hold their breath and take baby steps forward. Publishers are in a defensive mode as they, like us, wait for the pendulum to swing the other way. Statistics oddly show that there were *more* books published in 2002, but *new* titles declined in all areas. The Bowker survey shows a whole industry preparing for a slow economy and a 'decline in sales even while technology makes it easier than ever to create, publish and sell more books.'" (PW June 2, 2003). Picture books have shown a drop in sales recently and that may be because there are fewer kids in that age group today. Fiction for middle grade and young adult age levels seems to be the hottest just now and promises to be for the near future.

Many artists have felt the dramatic reduction of educational assignments--the 'bread and butter' of many illustrators' careers. It's been reported that there were fewer state adoptions of textbooks in '02 and '03, and programs have been delayed. The state funding decline has certainly driven down sales to schools and libraries as well, which has hurt curriculum-based and trade book sales and publishers. I'm constantly reassuring artists that is isn't a reflection on their work, but rather a shortage of assignments.

Word has it that the prices this year for new assignment work will be a bit lower than we're used to. Publisher conservatism comes into play again here. Publishers have to keep prices down to be competitive enough to sell their books to schools on tight budgets. Paper, printing, personnel costs all continue to go up. Unfortunately one of the few areas publishers can spend less is with the writing and the art.

It's true that the industry, like the country, (and much of the world) is in difficult times. But I am actually cautiously optimistic. Work is still there--it *has* to be because the market need children's books, which need illustrations! My best advice to artists to avoid becoming "MIA" themselves is to *stay* in action. Develop a couple of strong multi-imaged promotional pieces that convey a story with wonderful, believable characters. Send these out every so often, one 'series' at a time, to your client list or to art directors at publishers where your work would fit. Take on jobs you might not usually do. Do a great job and it can lead to more serious assignments later. Of course, do your best work always...it's a matter of artistic pride. It's a small market and one with a memory. Make sure your reputation is one of quality work, on time, and with a smile! Develop solid relationships and you will be remembered when the good times come again.

Christine A. Tugeau runs her own artist's agency in Ridgefield, CT.

◆ Writing Workshop

Little kidz Rule: Writing Board Books

by Candice Ransom

Like Merlin in *The Once and Future King*, who lived his life backwards, I am getting “younger” as a children’s book writer. I began my career writing young adult books, moving “backwards” through middle grade novels, easy readers, and picture books.

My first picture book, *The Big Green Pocketbook*, was short, simple, and geared toward young children. After that, I wrote multi-layered picture books for somewhat older kids. As I labored over texts that combined history, folklore, and legends, I often wished I could write another “Pocketbook.”

Then the market grew tight and it became harder to place longer picture books. I had to stop waiting for simple stories to drop out of the sky and start writing them!

As I studied books for kids age two to four, I found myself drawn to board books. Anyone who has had a baby is familiar with these sturdy books featuring wipe-clean pages, simple typeface, uncluttered art, and short, often rhyming, text. But I had never had children, and had always dismissed board books.

Our library keeps its board book collection in a basket. One day I reached into the basket for a square book called *Summer* by Chris L. Demarest. The bright wood-block illustrations charmed me. Demarest had distilled the very essence of childhood into rhyming two-word stanzas. It was a masterpiece of simplicity. I was hooked.

Along with reading board books, I read child development books like *Your Three-Year-Old: Friend or Enemy* by Louise Bates Ames. It had been a long time since I was three! I needed a refresher course.

Young children are interested in everyday things, the “sock and clocks” world *Goodnight Moon* author Margaret Wise Brown entered so easily.

Board books follow those interests: trucks, cars, farm animals, taking a bath, washing a car, playing with toys.

Texts are simple with support illustrations. If the narrative reads, “This is my cat,” the art shows a cat. Concrete language and visuals are crucial. At this age, children are just learning to connect words and objects. They can’t understand abstracts.

My first attempt had a shaky opening:

“Big Pig wakes up very late./Little Pig likes to greet the day.” Late and day are near rhymes. Fine for country music lyrics; bad for board books. Greet the day is an abstract. How would an illustrator depict that scene?

I had to go back to the drawing board, literally. Since I often storyboard picture book manuscripts, I carried that process one step further by doing the art for *Big Pig, Little Pig*.

I’m not an illustrator and don’t even play one on TV! I chose the medium of cut paper collage because it went well with preschool stories. I rewrote the first lines of my story: “Big Pig drinks tea to wake up./Little Pig sips milk from a cup.” Now the characters are doing something concrete. The art is nothing to brag about (and for my benefit only, to see the visual possibilities of the text), but the exercise enabled me to see where the text needed help.

I tackled rhyme and meter next. To avoid becoming sing-songy, I experimented with rhythm. If one line had three beats—accent/unaccent/accent—I varied the rhythm of the next line. *Big Pig, Little Pig* is written in couplets, seven syllables in the first line, eight in the second.

As I wrote, drew, and studied, I began to see what worked in board books. The best had a real story. In *Wibbly Pig Is Happy*, Wibbly Pig builds a sand castle, eats an ice cream cone, drops his cone, and gets a soothing lick from a dog. Wibbly Pig is Everytoddler. Little kids can relate to his problems.

Simplicity is the key to writing board books. Simple ideas; simple stories. Since my grocery lists rival *War and Peace*, I had to curb my wordiness. As an exercise, I wrote a board book featuring Little Pig by herself. The text consists of two-word stanzas using an “abab” rhyme scheme. The last line is three syllables, which deliberately breaks the pattern and lends an air of finality. And there is an actual story! It was a challenge to pack all that into 16 words.

I’m addicted to writing board books. I go around the house muttering rhymes and even my husband says things like, “Should we let out Big Cat or Little Cat?”

So if you enjoy sitting on the floor, eating Cheerios out of plastic bags, and cuddling an old stuffed rabbit, you definitely should be writing for little kids. They rule!

No Children Required

Writers for this age usually base their stories on their own young children’s experiences. Since I never had children, I ventured into the field to observe little kids in their natural habitat:

Libraries: Check to see if you can “audit” story hour.

Fast-Food Restaurants: McDonald’s is a good spot to note the eating habits of toddlers.

Parks, Playgrounds and Petting Zoos: Great places to observe little kids at their ram-bunctious best.

If you’d like a crash course in preschool behavior, “borrow” your three-year-old neighbor or great-nephew for half a day. Or volunteer at a daycare center as an aid (only the hardest souls apply).

My Top Ten Preschool Books

Wibbly Pig is Happy, Mick Inkpen, Viking.

Bean’s Night, Sara Hines-Stephens, Harcourt.

Plane, Chris L. Demarest, Harcourt.

Bubbles, Bubbles, Kathi Appelt, Harper Growing Tree.

Away We Go! Rebecca Kai Dotlich, Harper Growing Tree.

Book! Kristine O’Connell George, Clarion.

Here Come Trainmice, Wong Herbert Yee, Houghton.

Owen’s Marshmallow Chick, Kevin Henkes, Greenwillow.

One Stuck Duck, Phyllis Root, Candlewick.

Big Fat Hen, Keith Baker, Harcourt.

Candice Ransom’s newest picture book, *Liberty Street*, will be published this fall with Walker Books.

◆ Marketing Workshop

How to Read a Publisher's Catalog

by Laura Backes

Most publishers post their current offerings on their web sites. But the actual catalogs are easier to study, and usually give more information such as the backlist (books from previous seasons that are still in print) as well as merchandise. You can often sign up for the catalog mailing list online, or can request one by mail by sending a 9 x 12 self-addressed, stamped envelope with four first class stamps to the publisher's marketing department.

Publishers' fall books are heading into the stores as we speak, so it's a good time to collect some current catalogs and get a sense of who's doing what. This can take some time, especially with the weighty catalogs from larger publishers, but it's worth the effort. I examined HarperCollins' Children's Books Hardcover Fall 2003 catalog, and came up with the following results. The notes in italics are details a writer might add to his/her marketing folder for future submissions:

Picture Books: 45 total (9 titles featured animal characters; 13 had holiday themes--not unusual for this time of year. *Heavy on Christmas, Thanksgiving and Halloween. Perhaps need more unusual holiday books?*). Three books had continuing characters from previous books, or were part of a series. (2 picture books had longer texts and were listed as ages 6-10. *Though by famous authors, could this be a new trend toward older picture books?*) Only 2 picture books were from first-time authors, several were book/CD packages, several retellings of classic stories, one reissue of Shel Silverstein's *The Giving Tree*, one previously unpublished book by Margaret Wise Brown. (Styles tend to be humorous, silly and fun. *Clearly these editors like humor, but perhaps want to balance the list with a more serious subject?*) Four nonfiction picture books (all animal themes, ages ranging from 3-9. *Seems to be more of an open market here for nonfiction than fiction.*)

Easy Readers: I Can Read Series, 2 with continuing characters (both ages K-Grade 3, one has 64 pages, one 48. *Check formats to see why lengths so different.*) One historical fiction book for grades 3-4 (also 48 pages long). MathStart Series has 3 new titles, all by same author, for three different age groups. (Maybe open to an-

other easy reader series based on a theme--geography, history, etc. for preK through second grade?) No easy readers by first-time authors.

Chapter Books: Two titles, ages 6-9 and ages 7-10, contemporary and fantasy stories. (Room for more chapter books.)

Middle Grade Fiction: Sixteen in all, 8 original books (1 by a new author), 3 reissues from the Narnia series, 1 addition to the Lemony Snicket series, a trilogy of previously-published fantasy titles, 1 poetry collection. (Likes middle grade fantasy, humor, animal characters, contemporary stories.)

Young Adult Fiction: Four total, 1 by a new author (though author has illustrated several books). (Realistic stories, gritty plots, horror, fantasy/science fiction.)

HarperTempest (young adult imprint): Six novels total, two by new authors. (Acquiring proportionately more new YA authors than any other age group.)

The Harper catalog also includes HarperFestival, an imprint of books for preschoolers through first grade. Many are classic stories published in board book format, licensed character and television and movie tie-ins. Heavy reliance on well-known authors and illustrators.

This study did not include Harper's paperback catalog, which would show what's being reprinted in paperback (indicating strong sellers) as well as original paperbacks and series books. The Greenwillow catalog (a Harper imprint) would provide even more information. Armed with a good sense of what Harper's publishing, you'll know if your manuscript not only fits in with the overall list, but is something the editors have never seen before.

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