

## Writing Children's Fiction

Many people carry the misconception that children's literature is easy to create. It is often thought that storylines can be much more simplistic than adult fiction, that language can be unelaborated and that characters don't have to be particularly three-dimensional. And in many ways this is true. Storylines for children's fiction do not have to be as complex as those used in adult fiction, language must be construed relatively simply, and characters do not need to come with all the baggage and background life stories that adult literature demands. But what is forgotten is the complexity of the reader for which one is writing for when they write children's literature.

A child sees the world in a very different light to most adults. That world needs to be captured and represented in children's fiction. To represent such a world through fiction is hugely challenging, and I take my hat off to all who do it successfully!

As with any form of writing, there are several steps that you need to follow when planning and writing a children's book. You need to do your research, you need to develop a storyline or plot, you need to create the primary characters and you need to ensure that the ending of the story will be satisfactory to the reader. Alongside these key steps, there are two additional areas that need to be thought about when creating children's literature:

- Language
- A Contemporary Setting

Let's discuss these in turn!

### Language

The mark of a great writer – their ability to use brevity successfully!

Children's novels are, by their very nature, short. A picture book will be carrying a few hundred words as a maximum; a book for a six year old reader will be coming in with a word count of around 1,000 words. Such a small word count leaves you without any room for error – EVERY WORD COUNTS. Let me say that again, EVERY WORD COUNTS! Every use of punctuation or grammar, every description, every sentence uttered by a character, every sigh, breath, movement, decision or thought has to be 100% correct. When you are working with a word count of 100, 500, 1,000, 5,000 words, EVERY WORD COUNTS.

### Contemporary Setting

The need to understand and potentially use a contemporary setting for your storyline does not mean that your children's book has to be set in the 'here and now'. Children's stories based in Medieval Times or in Out of Space (for example) are still hugely popular and successful. But..., a storyline should maintain a contemporary feel. Perhaps the easiest way to achieve this is to focus the text around a contemporary issue that affects 'Today's Children'. Think about divorce, same-sex families, bullying, step-families, illness, the internet, drugs, alcohol, sexual relationships, violence, or modern technology, and see how each of these key issues could be brought into the make believe world of your children's fiction piece.

### Main Steps to writing Children's Fiction

- 1- *Research. Know your market. Read current children's fiction releases for the age group you are interested in writing for.*
- 2- *The plot or storyline should have a contemporary feel*
- 3- *Use a mixture of creative language and speech to bring your characters to life. They must be instantly visible to the young reader.*
- 4- *Ensure the ending is satisfactory. Ensure all issues are resolved by the last page...don't leave your poor reader hanging!*
- 5- *Edit and re-edit the language until you are happy with the usage and placement of every single word!*

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