**THE BASICS OF WRITING FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS**

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Here are some factoids and tips to help you get started writing picture books (with story/narrative), chapter books, middle-grade novels, young adult novels, and non-fiction for kids and teens...

***PICTURE BOOKS (WITH A STORY/NARRATIVE):***

Read loads of recently published books before you begin!

These are for kids up to age eight.

Aim for about 600 words.

You can submit your manuscript without pagination, as double-spaced text. If a publisher buys it, the art director will be the one to decide where breaks go, so don't worry too much about that. Just know that picture books are generally 32 pages (or 16 double spreads), with a few pages devoted to front matter.

If you're an experienced illustrator, you can submit your own illustrations but it's a good idea to say you're open to having another illustrator illustrate your story.

Do not include illustrations if you aren't an experienced illustrator, even illustrations by someone else. If an editor is interested, they will match you with an illustrator on their roster.

Your story should answer the question: will NAME be able to WHAT despite INTERNAL + EXTERNAL CONFLICT?

The three-act structure applies. The first couple of pages introduce the character, then a problem is introduced at the end of Act I. In Act II, the action (attempts to solve the problem) builds until the crisis point. In Act III, the character's feelings are examined and the problem is solved. There is an emotional and physical resolution.

Stories should have layers, e.g. be an adventure story that's really about something else.

Ideally, they will appeal to both kids and adults.

Universality is good but be sure to put a unique spin on your relatable theme.

Repetition/refrains are popular.

Rhyming, holiday and animal books can be hard to sell.

If using rhyme, make sure your rhyme scheme is PERFECT.

Refer to submission guidelines on literary agents' and publishers' websites. There are a few independent publishers in both Canada and the US that accept unsolicited manuscripts. The bigger publishers generally work with agents.

***CHAPTER BOOKS:***

Read loads of recently published books before you begin!

These books serve as a bridge from picture books to middle grade novels.

Readers are seven to ten.

Characters are usually eight to ten.

They range from 5,000 to 15,000 words.

Chapters are short--500 to 700 words.

The plot usually revolves around a development in the main character's daily life.

The three-act structure applies (with an opening act introduction to your main character, a second act that includes attempts to solve the problem posed at the end of Act I, culminating in a crisis, and a third act with a physical and emotional resolution).

Humourous books are popular in this age range.

A unique voice is a plus.

***MIDDLE-GRADE NOVELS:***

Read loads of recently published books before you begin!

Readers are eight to twelve.

Characters are usually nine to eleven in the lower range and twelve to thirteen in the upper range.

These books can range from 20,000 words (lower MG) to 40,000 words (upper MG).

All genres are go (historical, adventure, sci-fi/fantasy, mystery, etc.). May also be thoughtful contemporary realistic.

Whatever genre and style you write in, be sure to include your main character's worries, hopes and dreams.

The three-act structure applies (with an opening act introduction to your main character, a second act that includes attempts to solve the problem posed at the end of Act I, culminating in a crisis, and a third act with a physical and emotional resolution).

These books may feature subplots in addition to the main plot. Make sure your subplots somehow comment on or reflect the main plot.

And make sure each of the plot lines serves your underlying theme. (Make sure your book is \*about\* something.)

Keep things moving. Forward plot in every scene.

MG readers are learning their parents make mistakes!

Basically, kids in these books are venturing out to conquer new territory.

A unique voice is a plus.

***YOUNG ADULT NOVELS:***

Read loads of recently published books before you begin!

Readers are twelve to eighteen.

Characters are usually fifteen and up.

They can range from 50,000 words to 80,000 words.

Keep in mind that YA readers are reading adult novels as well.

The three-act structure applies (see MG notes).

Subplots that somehow reflect or comment on the main plot are a must.

As is ensuring all your plot lines serve your underlying theme. (Again, make sure your book is \*about\* something.)

Viewpoint is 'close'--first-person or deep third, with a good deal of introspection.

Teens must identify with your main character's feelings. Characters must feel utterly real.

Focus on character and growth without being preachy.

But keep things moving. Try to ensure plot is forwarded in every scene.

A unique voice is a plus.

***NON-FICTION FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS:***

There is non-fiction for young readers, MG readers and YA readers.

Write about what interests you. Ideally, you should have expertise on your topic (published articles, work experience in field). Teaching experience is good too.

It's a good idea to look at school curricula guidelines.

Be creative in your presentation.

Sometimes editors will come up with ideas for non-fiction books in-house and pay authors a flat fee to write them.

Generally, non-fiction books stay in print longer than other books.

Sometimes you can sell a non-fiction book on proposal (with only a query letter, detailed chapter-by-chapter outline and three sample chapters).

I hope these factoids and tips prove useful! Good luck!