

## **HOT MARKET:** **Short Nonfiction**

### **How to Develop a Relationship with an Editor**

### **Agents & Publishers Seeking Writers NOW**



## **BUILD AMAZING HEROES!**

# Children's Book Insider

The Newsletter for Children's Writers

## At Presstime:

### *Katherine Paterson Prize for YA and Children's Writing Accepting Entries*

The annual Katherine Paterson Prize for YA and Children's Writing is sponsored by *Hunger Mountain*, a print and online journal of the arts that publishes fiction, poetry, creative nonfiction, visual art, young adult and children's writing, writing for stage and screen, interviews, reviews, and craft essays. The print issue comes out annually in the fall, and online content changes on a regular basis. The Prize has three categories: Young Adult (for ages 12 and up — a short story or novel excerpt up to 10,000 words); Middle Grade (ages 8-12, short story or novel excerpt of up to 10,000 words); and Picture Book or Writing for Young Children (picture books and short stories for up to age 8). Novel excerpts should stand on their own. Picture book submissions may include pdfs or photocopies of illustrations, but it's not necessary (will be judged by the same standards as text-only picture book entries). One Grand Prize winner will receive \$1000 and publication in *Hunger Mountain*; three category winners will each receive \$100 and publication. Contest is open to all authors, published or unpublished. Entries must be unpublished but may be submitted to publishers while being considered for the Prize (inform *Hunger Mountain* if entry becomes published).

Entries can be sent electronically at <https://hungermtn.submittable.com/submit>. Include a cover letter in the Comments section that lists the age group the story is intended for, and a brief synopsis if the entry is a novel excerpt. Your name should NOT appear anywhere on the manuscript. Print entries may be mailed with an index card with story title, intended age group, your name, address, phone number, and email address. Do not put your name on the manuscript itself. You may also enclose a self-addressed stamped envelope for notification of winners. Entries should be typed, and on one side of the paper only. Send entries to: KPP, *Hunger Mountain*, Vermont College of Fine Arts, 36 College Street, Montpelier, VT 05602.

**All entries must be postmarked or emailed by June 30. Each entry must be accompanied by a \$20 entry fee.** Make checks payable to "Vermont College of Fine Arts".

You can read "Covered Up Their Names" by Jackie Lea Sommers, the 2013 grand prize winner, and "The Bus" by Maggie Lehrman, the 2012 YA category winner, and "The Mapmaker's Boy" by Christina Soontornvat, the 2012 Middle Grade category winner in *Hunger Mountain* Issue 18. Order at <http://www.hungermtn.org/subscribe/>

### *Agent Accepting Queries*

**P.S. Literary** (<http://www.psliterary.com>), located in Toronto, Canada, handles commercial and literary fiction and nonfiction for adults and children and sells to publishers in North America, Europe and throughout the world. Associate Agent Maria Vicente is looking for New Adult fiction (protagonists in their early 20s); high-concept young adult, middle grade and picture books (all children's fiction must have strong hook and commercial appeal); and nonfiction proposals in the pop culture, pop psychology, design, and lifestyle categories. Looking for unique and creative concepts, fiction with visual components, likes magical realism and nonfiction inspired by online culture. Query with a one-page letter that includes the title and category of your work, a brief synopsis or overview (should read like the book's back cover copy); and author biography. Query via email (the whole letter should be pasted into the body of the email) to [query@psliterary.com](mailto:query@psliterary.com). Put "Query for Maria: (title of manuscript)" in subject line. Responds in 4-6 weeks.

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March 2014

## At Presstime:

**Children's Book Insider** makes every effort to verify the legitimacy of small and new presses and literary agents before printing information in "At Presstime." However, authors and illustrators should always proceed with caution when approaching publishers or agents with whom they are unfamiliar, and read contracts carefully. Go to <http://is.gd/9ta64> for a free copy of our Special Report, [How to Determine If a New or Small Press is Legitimate](#).

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### Upcoming Events

**The 21st Century Children's Nonfiction Conference** will be held at the State University of New York in New Paltz, NY, on June 20-22. Topics covered will include what is new in children's nonfiction publishing; how you can use your talent to create books, eBooks, apps, and other media; finding work and setting up a business in the children's nonfiction market; how to sell and market your nonfiction products with 21st Century technology; building your brand; applying your expertise in fiction to a writing nonfiction; and the Common Core Standards and how your nonfiction books and apps can meet them. Faculty and panels will include trade nonfiction, educational and magazine publishers; published authors and illustrators; eBook and app developers; book packagers and editors. Opportunities for one-on-one critiques and consultations, marketing strategy reviews, portfolio reviews, and an optional Friday intensive are available for an additional cost. Early bird registration (before May 31) is \$390; \$440 thereafter, includes conference fee and all meals. Low-cost dorm lodging is available. For more information or to register, go to <http://www.childrensnfconference.com/>.

**Island retreat and workshop:** Veteran children's book editor and publishing consultant Emma D. Dryden will be holding a week-long residency and writing workshop at the Noepe Center for Literary Arts on the island of Martha's Vineyard from July 6-12. The week will include four craft seminars to prepare your book to catch the eye of an agent and publisher, plus plenty of free time to write. Seminars include First Pages & First Impressions; Hearing Voices: How to Listen To, Craft & Nurture the Voice of a Story; What in the World...? Internal and External World Building; and Revision Precision. Cost is \$1295 for the workshop and six nights lodging; \$495 for workshop without lodging. For more information, go to <http://noepecenter.org/emma-dryden-childrens-book-writing-workshop/>

Teen book festivals are sprouting up all over the country, and are a terrific opportunity to see popular authors of young adult books interact with their fans and hear them talk about their writing. These events are celebratory and often free to attend. The **9<sup>th</sup> Annual Greater Rochester Teen Book Festival** will be held on May 17 at Nazareth College in Rochester, NY. The long list of authors includes Ellen Hopkins, Jay Asher, Lauren Myracle, Ann Brashares and E. Lockhart. For information, go to <http://www.teenbookfestival.org/> Other teen book festivals this spring: NoVaTEEN, March 8, Arlington, VA; Colorado Teen Literature Conference, April 5, Denver, CO (registration is currently full); Greater Houston Teen Book Convention, April 26, Houston, TX; Pasadena Teen Book Fest, April 26, Pasadena, CA.

### Publisher Accepting Fiction, Nonfiction Up to Age 12

Boyd's Mills Press publishes children's books for ages 3-12 under four imprints: Boyd's Mills (imaginative, socially-conscious, educational picture books and informative, lively nonfiction); Calkins Creek (nonfiction and historical fiction for ages 8 and up); Highlights Press (puzzle and game collections from *Highlights* magazine); and Wordsong (poetry collections). All submissions are evaluated for all imprints. Seeking picture books (submit entire manuscript. If you are also an illustrator, include the manuscript, a dummy, and sample reproduction of one piece of final artwork); poetry (book-length collections that include multiple poetic forms—send entire manuscript); middle grade fiction (all genres—send the first three chapters and a plot summary); and nonfiction for all ages, especially books with a narrative quality (include a detailed bibliography with your submission. Highly recommend including an expert's review of your manuscript and a detailed explanation of the books in the marketplace that are similar to the one you propose. References to the need for this book by the National Academy of Sciences or by similar subject-specific organizations will strengthen your proposal. If you intend for the book to be illustrated with photos or other graphic elements, it is your responsibility to find or create those elements and to include with the submission a permissions budget, if applicable.) Submit with a cover letter listing the genre, age group, and any relevant author information. Label the package "Manuscript Submission" and include a self-addressed, stamped envelope if you want the materials returned. Send to Submissions Editor, Boyd's Mills Press, 815 Church Street, Honesdale, PA 18431. Responds in 3-4 months. It's highly recommended that authors study recent titles before submitting. Go to <https://www.boydsmillspress.com>

## Writing Workshop

### Mid-book Burnout: Don't Let it Happen to You

by Jane McBride Choate

Here's the synopsis: You (the protagonist in this story) are writing a fabulous book, you've overcome the conflicts of having too little time and energy and your children needing you every other minute. You resolve every conflict by organizing your time, going to bed earlier so you have more energy, and telling your children not to bother you unless something's bleeding. A lot. Then IT happens: the black moment when you've reached mid-book burnout.

What's the character (you) in this synopsis to do?

Mid-book burnout occurs, big surprise, in the middle of the book. You've used up your creative energy in crafting a dynamic plot, wonderful characters, and maybe even a dynamite ending. But you just can't keep going. For whatever reason, you're stalled. You have another 50 to 100 pages to fill and you're fresh out of ideas.

Now that we understand what mid-book burnout is, let's look at some possible reasons why it's occurred and what you can do about it.

***Your main character has lost his way.***

He doesn't know what to do next. He's floundering. Solution: go back to your character's back story. What motivates him to do what he's doing? What is the goal he wants above all others? What is he ready to risk his reputation, perhaps even his very life for? Is he an orphan who is trying to find a family of his own? Or is he the younger brother in a family who has always felt inadequate compared to his older, over-achieving brother? Whoever your character is, ask yourself what makes him willing to risk everything to achieve that goal. If the goal isn't all-encompassing, all powerful, maybe you need to re-evaluate his quest.

***You've run out of conflict.*** Even if you've clearly established your character's backstory and motivation, it is easy let conflict go flat. Conflict must be internal as well as external. Once again, look to your character. He will tell you what is keeping him from achieving his goals. One technique is to interview him and ask him what terrifies

him enough to make him question his goals or his ability to attain them.

***Your writing has turned flat.*** Do you find yourself resorting to clichés? Are you repeating scenes with only a change of wording? Are your characters arguing about trivial matters? Do some eavesdropping. Go to the mall and listen to kids talk while they're at the food court. Chances are you'll pick up some interesting and fun ideas. Have your character write a letter to you, telling you what he's afraid of or what he's dreaming of. Change your place of writing. Do you ordinarily write at the kitchen table, as I do? Go to the family room and look out the window. Set up shop at the nearest Starbucks. The important thing is to get a change of venue and a change of perspective.

***Your chapters lack cliff-hanger endings.*** We all know what cliff-hangers are. We see them on television at the end of the season when the characters are left in jeopardy and we must tune in for the season premiere in the fall. How can you inject that same quality into your chapter endings? A common ending to chapters is to have the character fall asleep thinking about what he'll be doing the next day. I know. I've done it. It is cheating the reader to end a chapter that way. What about ending with a question? Perhaps a supporting character asks the protagonist, "What are you going to do to fix that?" (*That*, of course, is a seemingly insurmountable problem.) Let your character overhear two other characters talking, where a secret is revealed, a secret that will completely change the course of your character's life. Or put him in a predicament that it appears he cannot get out of. Of course, all of these must be based upon your character's age, experience, abilities. Obviously, the secret that a three-year-old girl overhears must be different than what a 13-year-old overhears, and their reactions just as different.

Mid-book burnout happens to the best of us. Don't despair. Get yourself and your characters moving.

**Jane McBride Choate** is the author of 32 novels and a CBI Contributing Editor. Her Gratitude Project blog has the 2014 theme "Joy in the Journey". Read it at [www.janemcbride.blogspot.com](http://www.janemcbride.blogspot.com).

## Why Should You

Thank an editor,” you’re wondering, “for *what*? An editor is my sworn enemy, whose bastions must be stormed and armies of red-pen-wielding assistants vanquished for the cherished prize of publication.”

Maybe your metaphors are a little tamer, but you probably feel this way at different times because . . . .

A. Despite your dogged submission deluges, no editor has published you and you’re sure none ever will.

B. Your countless drafts and submission of a 200-word piece finally reaped a small magazine’s acceptance. Four months after the piece appeared, you received a whopping payment of two contributors’ copies, which arrived in your mailbox folded like a limp accordion. When, hands shaking, you opened to your page, a printing error obscured nine-tenths of your name.

Such blunders and disappointments are inevitable. But whether you get paid in dollars, copies, a six-month subscription, or an autographed picture of the editor’s twin Dobermans, thanking the editor makes sense for several sound reasons:

### 1. *It’s polite.*

OK, admittedly weak. You may have abandoned this as a reason for anything the moment you left your parents’ house. Keep reading.

### 2. *It’s thoughtful.*

We writers are prone to self-pity and narcissism: we’re unappreciated geniuses, the publishing world is against us, the hacks get the breaks, etc., etc. By thanking the editor, you’re going beyond your self-absorbed world and extending yourself to one of those in your writing world who matter most.

### 3. *Thanking the editor says you realize editors are people too.*

They toil so we can have a vehicle for our writing, boast to friends and relatives, especially our fancy-attorney big sister, and chalk up another notch on our resumes. Don’t editors deserve a little recognition and appreciation?

### 4. *Thanking the editor acknowledges the partnership.*

We tend to have a love-hate relationship with editors. Sometimes we feel we’d do anything to get them to publish us, even to cutting

the guts out of our most labored-over beloved creation. Sometimes we’re sure they’ll never publish a writer who slides in on the slush pile. Sometimes we’re certain they have a stash of in-house writers chained in the basement, hollow-eyed and starving, feverishly grinding out everything that ever appears in the magazine. Sometimes we think editors exist only to torment us with the dreaded R word.

When we thank the editor, we neutralize all this erroneous, self-defeating, and egotistical thinking.

### 5. *Thanking the editor is politically savvy.*

The editor will remember your thoughtfulness and likely regard your next submission with kinder, gentler eyes. At least you’ll get to the top of the pile faster. And when you submit after you’re published, *which should be very soon after*, you can refer to your letter of gratitude. Some writers, building on the magazine editor’s good judgment in the current publication, attach the next submission with the thank you letter for the first—a fine idea. See the sample letter at the end of this article.

### 6. *You can always find something to thank the editor for.*

I do *not* mean how well your own published piece reads. Praise of your words should come from the droves of readers who write in thanking the editor for publishing your piece.

Instead, you can find many things to extol: the layout, the headings, when or where in the publication your piece appears, that cute cartoon near the title, the judicious editing of your 500-word bio, or, if you’re really scraping, the font style. See sample to the right.

### 7. *Thanking the editor feels good.*

Relating to number two above, thoughtful acts feel good. Getting out of yourself feels good. And the universal law applies: when we give, in this case a thank you note, we receive in return. We receive not only a good feeling but a possibly more favorable reading of our next submission, a more simpatico relationship, and certainly a greater sense of equality and mastery.

### 8. *When you thank the editor, you’re thanking yourself.*

This is really the most important reason. Your note is a letter to yourself. It says, “I am a professional. I am a writer. I have a file of letters

# Thank the Editor?

by Noelle Sterne

to editors who have published my work. I'm part of the community of writers and editors." *Now* how do you feel?

So, thanking the editor is more than a pandering gesture or another endless administrative task keeping you from your writing. Rather, it's a lesson in self-worth, expansiveness, and professional empowerment. At the least, it's an opportunity to produce a sincere little gem. See the sample again.

If you're not published yet? Write the letter anyway. You don't have to mail it. Make files with the names of each publication and editor, call them "Correspondence," and put your letter in it. When you write it, you'll be "acting as if," visualizing in advance the outcome you desire. Along with consistent application of butt to chair and fingers to keyboard, this is one of the most direct actions you can take toward reaching your dream of publishing.

When, on that miraculous day, you open the issue and see your byline and piece staring back at you (with no typos), you'll be ready. Your letter of thanks will speed from your typing fingers to the editor's desk, eyes, and heart.

**CBI editor's note:** *Noelle's points are especially relevant when writing for magazines, because the time from acceptance to publication of an article is generally shorter than when publishing a book. And the best time to submit another piece is when your newly-published work is fresh in the editor's mind. Plus, magazine editors like turning to authors who have proven they can produce what the magazine is looking for, and are easy to work with.*

*But book editors appreciate your thanks as well. Though you'll have a lot more back-and-forth contact with your editor during the publication of your book, a written thank you upon receipt of your author's copies is always a nice gesture. And a good time to submit your next manuscript!*

*What about that editor you met at a conference, who took the time to answer questions about your work-in-progress, or give you a 20-minute critique session? A thank you based on the sample letter above goes a long way toward making a good first impression, and creating good associations when your manuscript finally crosses her desk.*

**Noelle Sterne** is the author of *Trust Your Life: Forgive Yourself and Go After Your Dreams* (Unity Publishing, www.trustyourlifenow.com). Her posts have appeared on several blogs such as *Author Magazine*, *ReadLearnWrite* and *MediaMagnetism*. She has an ongoing feature in *Transformation Magazine* and a story in *Chicken Soup for the Soul: Just Us Girls*. She is also the author of articles on writing in various publications, including *Writers Digest* online.

## A Sample Letter Thanking the Editor

*This letter is a model for your own. Change the details as applicable. The numbers following each paragraph refer to the explanatory notes after the letter.*

Priscilla Powerful, Editor  
*Writer's Last Hope*  
 450 Winnebago Way  
 Campgrounds, WA 98038

Dear Ms. Powerful:

I appreciate receiving the four copies of the June issue of *Writer's Last Hope* in payment for publication of my article, "Don't Feel Licked: Keep Hoping to Your Last Stamp." (1)

I was pleased to see this article featured in the front [back, middle, last page] of the magazine. The striking layout effectively highlighted the main points for the reader. (2)

In reading the magazine, I found your editorial, "What's the Use of Keeping On Keeping On?" not only enlightening but inspiring. I'm sure this piece will also help many other writers who are your readers. (3)

Toward further helping your readers, I enclose another piece for your consideration. For writers who are sick from overexposure to rejection slips, my 600-word "Blow Your Nose and Reboot Your Laptop" offers encouraging hints. (4)

I have shared your publication with many writing friends. Your dedication continues to provide much-needed hope to both beginning and more experienced writers. (5)

By the way, congratulations on your second-place award in the annual Northwestern Conference of Small Writing Magazines Published in Campgrounds. (6)

In eternal writing hope,

*Winona Writer*

Enc/SASE/Your preferred email address. (7)

## Explanatory Notes

1. Identify the payment, issue, and your piece by name.
2. Specify the reasons for your thanks. Don't lay it on too thick. One or two points are enough.
3. Compliment something else in the issue, preferably something by the editor. Next choice: a major feature (not yours). (See also 6.)
4. Jump on the bandwagon. Press your advantage. What's to lose?
5. This is a more global compliment, reporting increased circulation to the editor and doubtless boosting her faith in her publication.
6. An alternative or addition to 3.
7. Always!

## Guest Editorial

### Document Your Year with a Writing Portfolio

by Suzanna Henshon, PhD

Do you keep careful records of your progress as a writer? Many times we are so immersed in writing stories and poetry that we don't know the importance of keeping a portfolio to document the ups and downs of the writing life. When we keep careful records of conference programs, writing drafts, and submissions, we are better equipped as writers. We know what we've written and what we're working on. We can even look ahead to our next project.

Portfolios can be electronic or paper, or a combination of both. If you prefer keeping records electronically, create a computer file just for your portfolio, with separate folders for your manuscript drafts, query letters, a spreadsheet of where and when you've submitted, and another for records of writing related activities and research. I also suggest a physical folder or file that can hold handouts from conferences, issues of magazines you've submitted to, business cards you've collected. I prefer physical portfolios that can be paged through occasionally. Below are some considerations for creating a portfolio that can sit on a shelf in your office or the corner of your desk:

*Buy a three-ring binder.* A large binder will allow you plenty of space to keep the documents you need along with drafts of stories, letters from editors, and conference information.

*Decide what your portfolio will be about.* Have a theme—perhaps you may decide to give it a title. Print up a front page with a date, your name, and your address. This makes it official. You are committing yourself to being a serious writer during the next year, and to documenting the progress you make on a weekly basis.

*Buy dividers and label them by category.* When you start to organize your work, you may have trouble developing categories. So I recommend starting with a resume (which includes all your publications), a list of ideas for possible projects, works-in-progress (you don't have to actually keep your manuscripts in this portfolio—just list the file name and location on your computer, and dates of your revisions), and publications (create this category even if you're unpublished—you're thinking positive!). You may also decide to set up a category for critiques and information about your writing group, including other people's work that you may be editing. By dividing it into different sections, you can be organized and efficient.

*Keep it up-to-date so that it's always a fresh document.* Overall, your writing portfolio will always be a work-in-progress. You'll want to be flexible with what you put inside; sometimes it makes sense to take out old material and put in new things, in order to keep it current.

*Include some pockets at the back* to stick conference brochures, fliers from book signings you attended, tickets from museums where you did research, etc. In that sense, your portfolio also becomes a scrapbook of your writing year.

*Use your portfolio to record your career as a writer.* A writing portfolio is a wonderful way to chart your progress and creativity concurrently. You can easily document your submissions, query letters, drafts, ideas, and input you have received during critiques with your writing group. With one glance, you'll be able to review when you were most productive, and which projects need more attention.

*Carefully store your portfolio.* At the end of the year, many writers are tempted to recycle their three ring binders. Here's my advice: don't do that. When you dismantle your portfolio and throw away the contents, you'll lose your record of an entire year. You never know when you may need to find a story draft, an editor's name, or past conference information.

A portfolio is a great way to become more serious about writing. More than anything, developing a portfolio forces you to stop thinking of writing as a hobby and to start thinking about it as a calling, or even as a job. When you have to document what you are doing, when you are doing it, and how you are progressing, you become accountable to yourself. What could be more important?

*Suzanna Henshon is an author, educator, and CBI Contributing Editor.*

## Your Publishing Career

### Writing Short: Are Magazines Your Only Option?

by Kathryn Lay

If you've been around the children's publishing industry a few years, you'll have noticed that the number of children's magazines available for freelancers have gone down. Others want all rights, meaning you can't resell the article to another magazine after it's been published. But what are your other choices for short stories and articles?

Start by being aware of other opportunities that exist. Here are some examples:

#### ***Sunday School take-home papers***

Many denominations have thin 'papers' that are given out at church or in Sunday School. These can range for very young to adult in age. They are given out weekly. That's 52 issues a year. There are often three or more pieces of nonfiction and/or fiction, essays, poems in each one. That's more than 150 opportunities for freelancers. Some are written by staff or a specific group of writers. But others are open to freelancers such as *Encounter* for teens.

A good place to look for these is in Sally Stuart's annual Christian Writer's Market Guide. You can check it out at her website at <http://www.stuartmarket.com>.

#### ***Educational markets***

Several years ago I saw mention of a publisher who put together books of stories used by teachers. I had a short story I had not sold and sent it to them. They bought the story and have since used it many times in their publications. The upside was the high payment and a nice looking story in a booklet of stories and lessons. The downside was that I sold all rights.

Another time I heard of a company, CTB/McGraw Hill, that purchased short nonfiction and fiction pieces for educational purposes. I've sold several stories to them in the past for more money than I normally get from a short story in a magazine. Again, it was All Rights, but these days, it's difficult to resell a short story anyway unless you turn it into a picture book.

#### ***Testing materials***

I've sold/resold fiction for state and national testing in various ways. One way

was when published fiction, such as with *Highlights* or *Cricket* magazines resold my published pieces and I was given a portion of the money. It was like 'free' money as I didn't have to do any more work.

One story in *Spider*, "Cave-a-Phobia", back when the parent company Carus Publishing only bought First Rights, was noticed by a state testing group. I received an email asking me for permission to use it in their next testing cycle. I had just recently read an article by someone who mentioned this type of sale and that though they don't offer money, if you tell them how much you want, you will often get it. After talking to several professional writers, I picked a price in the middle of the recommended fee range. I was thrilled when they agreed to it. For the next three years, they repurchased that story, each time for a slightly higher fee.

After a story is published in *Highlights*, sometimes they get requests to reprint the story elsewhere. They are always gracious and send the author a portion of that money, even though they're not obligated to as they buy All Rights.

An online friend mentioned to me once about hearing of a company who needed short stories for a testing project. They all had to go through a Lexile analyzer to gauge readability (<https://www.lexile.com/analyzer/>). I ended up selling 25 stories to them in six months.

Later, a friend mentioned that the Texas University Interscholastic League was needing short stories for second grade storytelling competition. I've sold around 18 stories to them in the last five years.

Watch and pay attention to market publications such as *Children's Book Insider* for opportunities to place your short fiction and nonfiction. Make online friends through writer's message boards—you never know who will share information.

And when you see that information, take a chance on it. You never know where you will see your writings. I sold one of my YA short-shorts to a coffee company years ago and saw it on a coffee label!

#### ***Publishers Who Might Use Short Material***

##### **Lists of textbook publishers:**

<http://bibb.k12.ga.us/new/images/textbooks.pdf>

<http://www.acqweb.org/textbooks>

##### **Publishers of materials for teachers:**

Heinemann,  
<http://www.heinemann.com/>

Prufrock Press,  
<http://www.prufrock.com/>

Stenhouse Publishers,  
<http://www.stenhouse.com/>

Evan-Moor,  
<http://www.evan-moor.com/>

Carson Dellosa Publishing,  
<http://www.carsondellosa.com>

Teacher Created Resources,  
<http://www.teachercreated.com>

Teacher Created Materials,  
<http://www.teachercreatedmaterials.com/>

**Kathryn Lay** has published more than 1600 articles, essays, and stories ranging from religion to children's stories, essays to fantasy fiction, parenting to marriage, humor to how-to's. A few of the many publications in which she's appeared are *Woman's Day*, *Guideposts*, *Writer's Digest*, *Cricket* and *Chicken Soup for the Mother's Soul*. Her books include the *Sensing Their Prey* nonfiction picture book series from ABDO Books, *Wendy's Weather Warriors* series from Calico Chapter Books/ABDO, and *Josh's Pumpkin*, a picture book from Pelican Books.



## The Basics

### Give Your Story a Modern Hero

by Suzanna Henson, PhD

Many writers don't spend enough time developing a full-fledged hero who will be the center of the story, a character whose actions will drive the plot forward. But by looking at models like Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* and other sources, you can create authentic heroes with whom young readers will fall in love; you have centuries of mythology, stories, and history to inspire you.

First of all, you may ask, "What exactly is a hero?" These days, heroes come in all different shapes, sizes, and cultural backgrounds. In the ancient tradition, a hero is someone who completes a feat, performs a deed, and brings back a boon of knowledge. Whether the journey is physical or spiritual, the hero must venture into unknown territory and bring home knowledge and the ability to change his present situation. It's easiest to spot heroes in fantasy, science fiction and adventure books as the plots lend themselves to epic story arcs that force the characters away from their everyday lives. But other genres such as historical fiction, mysteries and even contemporary tales can have a classic hero at their core.

To develop a modern hero, start by looking at the different classic hero types, such as the Chief, the Warrior, and the Lost Soul. "We Need a Hero: A Look at Eight Hero Archetypes" by Tami Cowden (<http://www.likesbooks.com/eight.html>) provides a terrific explanation of different heroes with examples from movies. But don't stop there. Mix in hero traits with other characteristics to create a protagonist who is accessible, interesting and flawed. Take a look at Jill

Williamson's list of character archetypes at the Go Teen Writers blog (<http://bit.ly/1gNu9sN>). What if your hero is also an Innocent (inexperienced and naive)? Or a Manipulator (think Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone with the Wind*)? Or maybe a Thief?

Use these same archetypes to inspire your villains, who will be working against the hero. Look at different combinations and think about how your hero will be pushed and pulled in various directions by the other archetypes on the list. It's fine to choose a basic archetype for your villain, but then be sure to mix in other traits so these characters don't become too predictable.

If you study heroes of modern children's books, you'll see that they often step outside traditional gender boundaries. Popular young adult series like *The Hunger Games*, *His Dark Materials*, *Uglies*, and *Divergent* have featured female protagonists inspired by ancient sources. Use old stories as a starting point, then brainstorm on how you can spin off into a new and innovative tale. Stories like *Just Ella*, *Ella Enchanted*, and *Cinder* are modern takes of the classic fairy tale *Cinderella*.

Regardless of the genre, readers want heroes who are a little more courageous and clever than themselves. But they also want these same characters to struggle with everyday flaws like impatience, ineptness, inexperience, shyness, or even bad hair and pimples. Allow your hero to fill her role in your plot, but make her real enough that readers will stick around to see if she actually survives her journey and makes it back home.

#### Resources on Heroes and Other Archetypes

*The Hero with a Thousand Faces* by Joseph Campbell

*The Power of Myth* by Joseph Campbell

*The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers* by Christopher Vogler

*A Writer's Guide to Characterization: Archetypes, Heroic Journeys, and Other Elements of Dynamic Character Development* by Victoria Lynn Schmidt

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