

Children's Book Insider

The Newsletter for Children's Writers

At Presstime:

Small Press Seeks Middle Grade and Young Adult Manuscripts



Pants On Fire Press, founded in 2007, is the publisher of award-winning titles for picture book, middle grade and young adult readers. Looking for high-quality books that tell timeless and engaging stories that delight and inspire. Currently Pants on Fire Press has acquired all its picture books through 2013, but is open to middle grade and young adult submissions. For middle grade, seeing stories that allow readers to relate to the characters and the world they live in, with exciting plots and strong voices. Manuscripts are 10,000-35,000 words. Young adult manuscripts should feature an authentic voice; memorable characters the readers can relate to; powerful, believable world-building; and protagonists ages 15-19. An age-appropriate romantic element is a plus even if it's not the center of the story. The best concepts feature a new premise with a marketing hook that can be conveyed in 2-3 sentences. For example, editor Becca Goldman is looking for a YA thriller involving the food industry and GMO/pesticide cover-ups. "Sustainable organic food is huge right now. The public has never been more critical of the big food and agricultural/chemical companies like Monsanto, DuPont and P&G. Genetically modified seeds and foods are being linked to cancer, and the federal government is turning a blind eye because of effective corporate lobbying. I think it's a great topic for a YA book." Manuscripts are 40,000-80,000 words.

Query by email with a letter pasted into the body of the message that contains a synopsis, the genre of the book, approximate word count, a short pitch, writing credentials, complete bio, agent's information (if agented), list of any previous titles with sales history, and author contact information. Also paste the first three chapters into the body of the email. Submit to submission@pantsonfirepress.com. Allow 8-12 weeks for a response. Responds only if interested in seeing more of the work. Go to www.pantsonfirepress.com to see recent and upcoming titles.

Charlesbridge Accepting Exclusive Submissions for All Ages

The Charlesbridge Trade Division publishes high-quality books for children, from picture books through middle grade. Fiction centers on lively, plot-driven stories with strong, engaging characters. Nonfiction books focus on nature, science, social studies, and multicultural topics. Fiction titles include lively, plot-driven stories with strong, engaging characters. All titles offer accurate information, promote a positive worldview, and embrace a child's innate sense of wonder and fun.

Seeking picture book, early reader, chapter book and middle grade manuscripts in a variety of fiction and nonfiction topics, including holidays, biography, history, science and nature, art and music, problem solving, social issues, diversity, math and counting, animals, multicultural, humor, contemporary, and historical fiction. Not actively seeking alphabet books, board books, coloring books, activity books, or books with CD-ROMs. For picture books and easy readers, send complete manuscript with a brief cover letter. For fiction manuscripts longer than 30 pages, send a detailed plot synopsis, a chapter outline and three chapters of text. For nonfiction longer than 30 pages, send a detailed proposal, a chapter outline and three chapters of text. Charlesbridge accepts unsolicited manuscripts submitted exclusively for a period of three months. "Exclusive Submission" should be written on all envelopes and cover letters. If you have not heard back after three months, you can assume Charlesbridge is not interested in your work. All manuscripts will be recycled. Send work to the attention of Submissions Editor, Trade Division, Charlesbridge, 85 Main Street, Watertown, MA 02472. For current titles, to go <http://www.charlesbridge.com>

Inside cbi:

At Presstime....1

Cause + Effect = Plot....3

Special Report:
Work Smarter, Not Harder (Part 1)....4

From the Editor....6

The Art of the Interview....7

Introducing Your Characters to Readers....8

October 2012

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](#).

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 Web site: www.write4kids.com Children's Writing Web Journal: www.write4kids.com/blog

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
Managing Editor: Jon Bard
Contributing Editor:
Jane McBride Choate

Standard print subscription rate: \$49.95 for 12 issues in the U.S. Electronic options available. See www.write4kids.com or call 970/495-0056 for more information, or for subscriptions outside the U.S.

To place an order call 970/495-0056.

Text copyright © 2012 Children's Book Insider, LLC. Subscribers may reprint up to 300 words with credit to Children's Book Insider, 901 Columbia Road, Ft. Collins, CO 80525-1838. For longer reprints, email Laura Backes at Laura@write4kids.com.

Agents Accepting Middle Grade and Young Adult Submissions

Two agents at the Sandra Dijkstra Literary Agency (<http://www.dijkstraagency.com/>) are accepting fiction for older readers.

Thao Le is selectively building her list and she is currently looking for **middle grade** and **young adult** soft science fiction, fantasy, and horror and all of their sub-genres. She is also looking for lighthearted, funny, and moving contemporary YAs with a raw, authentic teen voice. She's particularly drawn to unique characters, smart-mouthed dialogue, and strong plots that can balance romance and action. Thao is *not* currently looking for poetry, picture books, short stories, or non-fiction.

Jennifer Azantian a published author of several short stories and brings to the agency her passion for literature born of a writer's heart. Her personal tastes run toward all flavors of the fantastic. She has just begun to acquire projects and welcomes all submissions that match her interests. Please note that Jennifer is *only* interested in **young adult** science-fiction and fantasy (including all of their sub-genres).

Submit by email with a query letter, a one-page synopsis, a brief bio (including a description of your publishing history), and the first 10-15 pages of your manuscript. Send all items in the body of the email, not as an attachment. Note if your submission is exclusive both in the query letter and in the subject of the email. Send to Thao Le (thao@dijkstraagency.com) or Jennifer Azantian (jen@dijkstraagency.com). The agency is only able to respond to queries in which they're interested. If you have not heard back after six weeks, you can assume the agency has passed on your work.

Erin Harris is a new agent with Folio Literary Management (<http://foliolit.com/>). She is acquiring literary fiction, book club fiction, young adult, and select narrative nonfiction. For YA, she's looking for contemporary, voice-driven novels that approach the universal experience of being a teenager from a surprising or an unlikely perspective (some of her favorite authors: John Green, David Levithan, and Peter Cameron). She's currently shying away from representing anything involving angels, chimera, Greek gods, and dystopias. However, she is open to YA books with highly original supernatural concepts or undertones. Regarding nonfiction, Erin is drawn to adventure narratives, particularly those in which physical and spiritual journeys become intertwined (Jon Krakauer's *Into Thin Air*, Cheryl Strayed's *Wild*). She also enjoys memoirs that illuminate another culture or explore cross-cultural conflict (Alexandra Fuller's *Don't Let's Go To the Dogs Tonight*, Ayaan Hirsi Ali's *Infidel*). Regardless of genre, she's looking for books that have compelling concepts, impeccable, stop-you-in-your-tracks writing, and a topic she can explain to editors clearly and succinctly.

Email submissions should include a brief description of the project, an author bio, and the first 10 pages of your manuscript or nonfiction book proposal. Send to Erin Harris at eharris@foliolitmanagement.com. Due to the volume of submissions, Erin can respond only to queries she wishes to pursue further.

Carolrhoda Lab Accepting YA Submissions in October Only

Carolrhoda Lab is the young adult imprint of Carolrhoda Books, publishing distinctive, provocative, boundary-pushing fiction. While normally closed to unsolicited submissions, editorial director Andrew Karre is opening the doors to young adult fiction manuscripts from **October 1 to October 31, 2012**. Anything received after midnight on October 31 will not be read.

Karre is accepting electronic submissions only. Send a *very* brief cover letter and attach the entire manuscript to the email. Put QUERY in the subject line (even though you're attaching the manuscript). Email to carolrhodasubmissions@lernerbooks.com.

Karre has posted very specific likes and dislikes, as well as submission guidelines, on his blog at <http://carolrhoda.blogspot.com/2012/09/send-me-your-ya-manuscripts-beginning.html>. Please read before you submit. Also take a look at some of Carolrhoda Lab's current offerings at <http://catalogs.lernerbooks.com/index.cfm/catalog/F12UpperGrades>

Writing Workshop

Cause + Effect = Plot

by Jane McBride Choate

When I started writing, I believed that a story was one incident followed by another and then another until I ran out of things to happen to the character. (And I wondered why those books were rejected.)

With more experience and a number of books under my belt, I've learned that a string of incidents, whether related or not, does not constitute a plot. Plot is defined as the events that make a story, how they relate to another to in a pattern, in a sequence, in cause and effect.

We know about cause-and-effect in our daily lives. If we eat too much and exercise too little, we will likely gain weight. If we eat the right foods in the right portions and exercise moderately, we will probably lose weight.

Let's make up a character named Lily. Lily is 11 years old. Lily has studied gymnastics for three years. Lily likes to compete and to challenge herself. Lily meets another girl also studying gymnastics. Lily makes a new friend.

We have a story. Right?

Wrong.

Lily had a goal: to take gymnastics. She did things, but the story lacks cause-and-effect.

Let's add a few twists to the story. What if the girl Lily meets at class is better than she is at gymnastics? What if she and the other girl try to outdo each other? What if their competition leads them to disobey the coach about safety rules, and Lily is injured? What if she is unable to compete in a big exhibition that she has looked forward to for many months? What if she questions her choices? What if she begins to understand that she has lost much of the pleasure she first felt in taking gymnastics because of her intense competition with the other girl?

Are you beginning to see the differences between the first version and the second? In the first, we have a string of events that, while they may be interesting in themselves, are not truly connected. Any of them could be taken out without altering the outcome. The second story connects the events,

with each new step building upon the last.

Every part of a story should be an absolutely essential step along the way to the outcome. If a scene can be removed without altering that outcome, then it doesn't belong in your story. If you have done your job well, that outcome will be inevitable. Upon finishing the book, the reader should be left nodding and thinking, "Yes. It couldn't have ended any other way." Even if the ending is not happy, it is satisfactory. Leaving a reader with an unsatisfactory ending will likely make her feel cheated.

Each attempt your protagonist makes to solve her problem or reach her goal should change something vital for her. If your sixteen-year-old main character, Cara, lies to her friends about her relationship with her boyfriend, that lie should cause her more trouble. As she struggles to cover the first lie, she lies again, once more creating additional problems for her. Only when she realizes that she is digging herself in deeper with every lie she tells does she find the courage to tell the truth.

One way to keep the cause-and-effect development in your book is to look at each event through your main character's eyes. Continually ask yourself, "How does this make my character feel? How will she react?" And, finally, "How will she act in the future because of this? Will that action make it better or worse?" (Some writing teachers call this sequence action and reaction. Others refer to it as scene and sequel.)

Apply these questions to each scene in your story. If you can't answer the questions with a logical answer, it is probably because a scene is either out of order or doesn't belong in the story in the first place.

Be ruthless in cutting scenes that don't advance the action. This self-editing will save your editor having to slash the scene and minimize your rewrites.

Jane McBride Choate is an author and CBI Clubhouse Expert Guide. For more information about Jane's books, go to www.cbiclubhouse.com, and click on "Meet Our Expert Guides".

Work Smarter,

How many times have we as business people, employees, and parents heard and uttered the adage “Work smarter, not harder?” How many times have we, as writers, applied this admonition to our work? Do we know what it means? Do we know how to make it work for us?

Writers, as small business persons, need to maximize our efforts, our time, our energy. We don’t have the luxury of squandering any of our resources. A recent royalty check of seventy-two cents (yes, that was the actual amount) reminded me that not only is the wolf knocking at my door, he’s darn close to gnawing right through it.

So what’s a writer to do?

Organizing for Fun and Profit

Melissa Mayhue, award winning author of fantasies, acknowledges that “working smarter, not harder, is something I continually struggle with.” She offers several tips to keep her and her writing on schedule: “Since I’m writing a series, I’ve learned to print out or copy any research that I use as a basis for a particular story. I have a notebook devoted to each book so I can quickly refer back to facts I might have used in a particular storyline. It saves time when I bump into things in a later book. I also keep a notebook with all my characters by book, their ages and descriptions, genealogy charts and, most important since I write time travels, timelines! Revisiting characters at various times can really mess with my ability to add years correctly. I also keep places and definitions that relate to my world-building in that notebook.

“For me it basically boils down to trying to stay organized and setting goals and priorities. I’m a list person. I make them and mark them off! There’s something about being able to see concrete evidence of what I’ve accomplished and what I still have to do that helps me. Having everything written down also allows me to prioritize what I have to do and fit in those inevitable surprise things that pop up in life. By the way, computer lists and calendars don’t work for me—they’re too easy to ‘save’ and not look at again. I have to have actual paper and pen-

cil lists and calendars.

“Besides lists, I have one other physical ‘paper and pencil’ mind trick that keeps me on track. When I’m approaching deadlines and my brain is refusing to give me the story I need, I determine how much time I have left, how much blank story is still to be done, and then calculate how many words/pages per week I have to achieve to meet that goal. Then I track my production daily. In writing. By hand. In a notebook I keep open next to my keyboard. Every day I note starting word count, starting page number, ending word count, ending page number and how close to target I am.”

Think Like a Lawyer

Lawyers keep track of their time, right down to the quarter of an hour so that their firms can bill hours to their clients. These billable hours are the life blood of law firms. So what does this have to do with writing?

Amanda Cabot, another award winning writer, recommends keeping track of your time by recording your tasks in a record book for at least a week, preferably two. Another alternative is to use software like TraxTime. “Take your analysis of productive times beyond ‘morning vs. night,’” Cabot advises. “A writer needs to consider the entire week. When are you the most creative/energized?”

Will Work for Dollars

Sounds simple, doesn’t it? Work for money. Hey, we all know that. Or do we?

Writers, just like other small business persons, have tasks that don’t pay. We accept those as part of the profession. How we handle them, though, distinguishes those who make it from those who are barely making it.

New authors frequently fall into the trap of spending so much of their time promoting their books that they fail to recognize that the income-producing work—writing—is taking a back seat.

Speaking at conferences, book tours, blogging are all viable promotional efforts. However, keep them in perspective. While they may bring larger royalty checks in the future, there’s no guarantee. What does that

Not Harder (Part 1)

by Jane McBride Choate

mean for you? You have to keep doing the actual writing in the meantime.

Promoting your work is important, but keep your eye on what pays the bills: putting your rear in the chair and pounding out the next book and the next.

Historical writer Elaine Levine applies her smart work principles to her promo efforts: "I try to make one product handle multiple things. I have a serialized prequel to my book on my website. I could have spent the time that I took to write the installments blogging or guest blogging, but those have only one use.

"By writing the prequel, I can record those clips and have an audio/visual product on my website, republish that product to YouTube and various podcast directories, retell the prequel on Twitter, and use it for readings in Second Life. Plus I then have a giveaway I can handout at conferences and other places. So the one product went a long way toward establishing an Internet buzz and early readership."

Putting First Things First

New York Times bestselling author Allison Brennan sets priorities—and then keeps them.

"Family comes first, then writing, then writing commitments, then everything else. What has helped me is staying off-line during my set writing time, and 'reward' myself with online time when I hit my daily page goal. It doesn't always work, but I'm getting better."

Award-winning author Karin Tabke echoes this counsel. "The important stuff trumps the less important, i.e. the laundry stays in piles and the dust bunnies compete for the tumbleweed look alike award. Family first, writing second, and everything else falls into place."

Cabot sets a high standard for herself: two chapters a week. To maintain that ambitious goal, she asks herself, "Why do I write? If you being your answer with the words 'I want,' chances are you won't succeed. If you answer, 'I need,' you may be on the right track."

When tempted to do other things rather than write, Cabot poses the question, What is the opportunity cost? "Understand that time

to write is not free," she warns. "It comes with a cost. Ask yourself questions: How important is writing to you? What sacrifices are you willing to make?"

Going to the movies with a friend is a fine way to spend an afternoon. You have figured out the cost: \$6.50 for a ticket, another \$5 for snacks. A pleasant outing for under \$12.00. A bargain, right? Well ... maybe.

Have you taken into account the time cost? The movie lasts ninety minutes. Say it takes you a half hour to get there, a half hour to return home, plus the transition time between returning home and getting back to your writing. Let's be conservative and estimate three hours. What could you have done with those hours?

- Outlining a chapter
- Revising two chapters
- Writing ten pages

None of us can exist in a vacuum. We need the sociality with others, the stimulation away from our computers. Be aware of how you spend that time, however. Know the true costs of how you spend your time and then do what works for you.

Writers can benefit from small business strategies to become smarter about their work time. Here are some tools to help (but don't use them as an excuse not to write!)

Time Tracking Software

TraxTime, <http://www.spudcity.com/traxtime/>

Toggl, <https://www.toggl.com/>

freckle, <http://letsfreckle.com/>

actiTime, <http://www.actitime.com/>

Books

Work Smarter, Not Harder by Jack Collis

Your Best Just Got Better: Work Smarter, Think Bigger, Make More by Jasom W. Womack

Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity by David Allen

Next Month: Practical tips for writers on how to work smarter.

Jane McBride Choate is a CBI Contributing Editor.

From the Editor

Dear Reader:

When I was eleven, I went away to summer camp for the first time. My father wrote me this letter:

Dear Punkins:

Now that you are up there with all them wild and fuzzy things, the chipmunks and alligators and whatnot, I wonder if you could do a couple of things for me. I have had my heart set for a long time on owning my own wombat. Not a real big one necessarily; just any old wombat that I could call my own, and keep under my bed at night and poke sticks at when the spirit moved me, or maybe feed ice cream and soda crackers to if I had any left over I wasn't using. Since there aren't many left around here (I haven't seen one in Lincoln Park, I don't think, in at least a month or two) I thought maybe you could catch one around the tent somewhere and bring it back with you when you come next Tuesday.

You've got to know how to do it, of course, and I don't think I've ever explained to you how a wombat must be caught, so pay attention now. You've got to grab it by the right hind leg. That's the short one. If you grab it by the left front leg it will just curl up in a ball on you and you'll never get it straightened out; everybody will think it's just a worn out old softball, frazzled around the edges, and not a real wombat at all. So catch it by the right hind leg and then, quick as a wink, stuff it into a pillow case or an old paper sack and throw in a peanut butter and jelly sandwich every day or two to keep it happy until you are ready to bring it home. Whistle to it if you want to. Sometimes they like that, and if it's a girl wombat and not a boy one, and if it isn't too scared, it might even whistle back.

Get me a white one if you can. They're usually shorter-haired than the brown ones, so they don't pick up as many bugs and things. But a brown one is all right too, of course.

The other thing I would like you to do for me while you are out there is to keep an eye open for my Uncle Clyde. The last I heard from him he was riding his motorcycle around one of those lakes up in Wisconsin, trying to find a way to get over to the other side without having to put on his flippers and his swimming mask, and maybe...just maybe...you will run into him one day. If you do, say howdy for me. But don't borrow him any money. He will just spend it all on popsicles and get sick, because he likes them so much he can't help eating them stick and all.

We miss you, Punkins. We hope you're having a really good time, but we'll be glad when you're back here with us again.

Love and things,
Daddy

I've often been asked about the difference between style and voice. Style involves the choices you make as a writer; the words you use, the length of your sentences, the pacing of your chapters. Style makes your work literary or commercial, scholarly or pop culture. Genres have distinct styles — dystopian is different from sci-fi, cozy mysteries different from thrillers. You can consciously develop a particular style as an author, starting with imitating a style you like and gradually making it your own.

But voice is another matter. Voice is not just what you say, but how you say it. It's the rhythm of the writing, it's the tone of the text, the intent behind the words. Voice infuses style with heart and soul. It's uniquely yours, and you only acquire it after writing for a long, long time.

I've read manuscripts that were good stories, written with a style that clearly showed the author had studied the craft of writing and was carefully choosing every word. But many of these manuscripts were completely forgettable because they lacked voice. The characters didn't live for me beyond the words on the page. The story didn't resonate on anything but an intellectual level. The work had no soul.

No one but my father could have written this letter. Everyone who reads it learns something about him; information that fills the spaces between the words and radiates from the page. For me, of course, it's more personal. Though my father's been gone for 24 years this month, every time I read his letter I hear the rapid-fire *plunk plunk plunk* of his manual typewriter, see the crinkles around his eyes when he smiled, and am back at our kitchen table listening to him spin stories about Uncle Clyde. That's the power of voice.

Your Publishing Career

The Art of the Interview

by Jane McBride Choate

Sooner or later, most working writers need help. We need expertise or knowledge beyond our own. Where do we go for help? How do you conduct an interview? What are the rules of etiquette? How do you prepare for an interview? Should you record it?

◆ Depending upon your relationship with your chosen expert, call or email and ask when it would be convenient to hold the interview. Don't presume and just show up. This is a business meeting and should be treated as such.

◆ Be respectful of her time. If your interview promises to be lengthy, explain that and ask if her schedule will allow her to spend an hour or so with you. If the answer is no, respect that and limit your questions to the most important. By narrowing your focus, you will probably have a tighter article.

◆ If you have only a few questions, you can probably hold the interview over the phone. Prearrange a time to call, keep it short, have your list of questions ready. Nothing is more annoying than someone who stammers out haphazard and disjointed questions.

◆ Ask if you can send your questions by email. This has the advantage of allowing the person to answer at his own convenience and in his own time. I have conducted many successful interviews via email and feel that I get more information in this way than over the phone or in-person.

◆ Send a thank-you note afterward. A handwritten note is a rarity these days and is always appreciated. You want to maintain good relations with your experts and sources. Your mother was right: good manners count and never go out of style.

◆ Ask if you can record the interview. Do not try to interview someone without receiving his permission to record what he says. That is just plain rude and smacks of dishonesty. No excuses. If the person isn't comfortable with being recorded, be prepared to take detailed notes. Don't trust your memory. Even the best memory can

play tricks on a person.

◆ Be certain to give credit in your article or story for the help. Many writers have an acknowledgments page where they gave credit to the people who helped with expert advice.

◆ If you are writing a story or an article for a magazine, let your expert know about any time constraints or deadlines you may have. Also, you may well need more direct quotes for a magazine article. Be meticulous in quoting your source. Don't substitute your words for his. Use standard rules in punctuating any quotes.

◆ Do your homework. Come prepared to ask intelligent questions. Don't insult the person by asking foolish questions that show you didn't take the time or interest to do the necessary research. Ask questions that require more than a yes or no answer. If you are going to the trouble of interviewing someone to strengthen your article or book, take the time to formulate questions that will provoke thoughtful, insightful answers. If you show that you have taken the time to prepare, your expert may share stories with you that he wouldn't ordinarily.

◆ Show that you are a professional. Arrive promptly. Unless you are interviewing a rancher who raises llamas and you will be tramping through fields, dress as you would for any business meeting. Remember, you have only one chance to make a first impression.

Jane McBride Choate is the author of over 30 books. Follow her two blogs: The Menopause Monocle (<http://www.menopausemonocle.blogspot.com>), and The Gratitude Project (<http://www.janemcbride.blogspot.com>).

Where do we find experts?

◆ Look in your own backyard. Chances are you have friends, co-workers, members of your church, parents who serve on the PTA with you, or neighbors who have a wealth of knowledge on a variety of subjects. Are you writing a book about World War II? What about asking your grandfather? Or the elderly man who sits next to you in church? Are you penning a book about a child spending the summer on his grandparents' apple orchard? Go to the owners of the orchard who live down that country road you've been promising yourself that you'd explore someday and explain your quest.

◆ Google. Type in the subject you are interested in. Two good sources are The Journalist's Toolbox (<http://www.journaliststoolbox.com/newswriting/expert.html>) and ProfNet (<http://www.pnnewswire.com/profnet/>)

◆ Make use of your library. Librarians are wonderful sources. If they can't put you in touch with an expert, they have resources who can help steer you in the right direction.

Start a file of experts. Don't limit yourself. Who knows? Someday you may need an expert on the mating habits of alligators!

The Basics

Introducing Your Characters to Readers

by Suzanna Henshon, PhD.

Many writers make the mistake of introducing a character with a complete physical description, similar to what you would find on a dating site. But great character descriptions don't rely on physical aspects; the core qualities of the protagonist are far more compelling. We don't know how Hamlet looks, but we can't forget his desperation and grief

Depending upon the genre you are writing, there are many ways to introduce and then describe a character in a story. You might begin with a line of dialogue and then a brief description; you could have other characters mention the main character before she even steps onto the page. When you describe a character, it should clearly connect to the storyline. Roald Dahl introduces his characters with nasty habits and equally displeasing physical descriptions in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. There is a clear connection between the inner qualities and the external description. Here are some more tips:

1. Give the reader a few details. In *A Little Princess*, Sara Crewe is described as having a very unusual, faraway look in her eyes, suggesting an "old soul." Later readers discover Sara (who has the inner qualities of a princess) lost her mother at an early age. The physical description enhances our understanding of Sara as a person and provides a catalyst for plot development.

2. Let the character step naturally into the story with minimal description. In *Where the Wild Things Are*, readers first see pictures of the young boy with his dialogue. We know more about how Max speaks than we do about his physical description. We never read a description, but we see him striding boldly across the page and presiding over the Wild Things.

3. Consider the voice of the story. If the character speaks in the "I" voice, she will introduce herself; usually it is more appealing and realistic if she is self-conscious and not a physically perfect specimen. If the character is introduced in the third person, focus on specific

characteristics. We know that Harry Potter is a small, disenfranchised boy who wears glasses, and the story takes off with this physical description.

4. Paredown the details. When you provide a few details, ask if they are essential to the story. Often it's better to reveal a character slowly rather than telling every detail the moment the figure steps onto the page. In *The Secret Garden*, Mary Lennox is described as the most disagreeable-looking child ever seen, with a thin face, thin body, straw hair, and a sour expression. She later transforms into an attractive young woman both in personality and character due to the events of the story. In *Little Women*, Jo is described as being wild and carefree in the early scenes; she challenges the confines of domesticity in the novel, so her physical description complements the plot.

5. Draw a character sketch. Think outside the box. What does your character like to eat? What does she read in her spare time? How will her personality impact the plot? Think carefully about how the plot and main characters conjoin; consider that every character in your story will have a motive or agenda. It is far more interesting for the reader to interpret your character's motive than to read a description about her hairstyle.

6. Consider what makes your character memorable. The main character should be interesting to follow, and readers will slowly develop a connection with your protagonist. What makes your character tick? Why is she memorable? Is she anxious? Creative? Or excited? Think about individual qualities. Many writers draw up generic characters, but you need to think beyond physical descriptions and stereotypical beauty (even if you are writing a fairy tale).

As you create a character, visualize her in your mind. Remember that the best characters aren't memorable because of their physical appearances; the finest characters step into a story gradually but never leave the reader's heart and mind. Readers remember their actions and motives; readers develop an emotional connection.

Dr. Suzanna E. Henshon teaches full-time at Florida Gulf Coast University and is the author of several young adult books, including *Mildew on the Wall* and *Spiders on the Ceiling*.