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Magazine article or Picture book?

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**Magazine Article or Picture Book?**

Often when I sit down with writers for one-on-one appointments, I see great stories but not solid picture books. I’ll comment, “This is great, and it will be a strong magazine article” and I see their faces drop. Just because it’s not picture book worthy doesn’t mean it isn’t a wonderful story, it just means there isn’t enough there for a successful book.

So, how do we know when it’s a magazine article or a picture book? Here are six questions to ask regarding your work that will help you make that distinction…

1. **Is your manuscript illustration worthy?** More specifically, does your text necessitate at least 12 different scenes of illustrations?

>In a magazine article, the text makes sense without any artwork—the illustrations simply enhance the article.

>In a picture book, illustrations are needed. They help tell the story through each scene.

1. **Does the story appeal to both the child and the adult, and does it have the re-readability factor?**

>A magazine article doesn’t have to be satisfying to an adult. You’re writing for the child who subscribes to that publication. Also, a magazine article, though written well, is probably a “one and done” kind of piece as far as re-readability is concerned.

>A picture book needs to satisfy both the child and the adult reading it. And, it has to be tolerated by the adult who will hear every night, “Read it again.”

1. **Does it read like an article or more lyrical like a picture book?**

>A magazine story can be told in a more straightforward manner—more like a news story with a little kid-friendly pizzazz.

\*Also, if a story is mostly dialogue, it’s usually a better magazine article.

>A picture book’s text can make you stop and say, “Aww” or “Wow.” It should be more lyrical—every single word counts. It doesn’t have to be rhyming to read like poetry.

**4. Is your story character-driven or is it more situation-driven?**

>A magazine story is often more focused on the situation or the topic of the text.

>A picture book is often more focused on the characters—bigger than life characters. (And many times, those character-driven books are part of a series of books like Berenstain Bears.)

**5. Is the plot simple or a little more complex?**

>A magazine article usually has a very simple plot—problem, obstacle, and resolution.

>A picture book’s plot can be more complex with the main character encountering a series of obstacles, one building upon another. (Think of the book, “My Friend, Rabbit” by Eric Rohmann.) Think of layered text.

**6. Is your manuscript based on #trending themes or timely/newsworthy information, or is it built on an evergreen topic?**

>A magazine article will most likely be the avenue to discuss trending topics or newsworthy items because by the time a picture book about that topic makes it through the publication process, it will no longer be trending or newsworthy. Online magazines can address those topics almost immediately.

>A picture book can tackle trending or newsworthy topics if written for an anniversary of a news happening or if it’s written from a new perspective. Seasonal/holiday books are great examples of why evergreen topics work for picture books. My “What is Easter?” and “What is Christmas?” children’s books have sold well since they first released in 2003 and 2004 and they continue to sell every single holiday season, whereas a picture book addressing the fears we have about the Coronavirus will probably not have a great shelf life.