FCWC Children’s Writing Intensive

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**The Secret Sauce to Successful Children’s Writing**

The **“S”** in **S**auce: **Spend** time reading lots of children’s book in the area you plan to write. I’m mostly a picture book and board book author, though I’ve had some success with nonfiction books for ages 8 to 12. So, I make a point to visit my local library often and check out a dozen picture books and board books.

\*Trends change so quickly in publishing—especially children’s—that you’ll want to focus on the books published in the last three years, weaving in a few classics, of course, like “Good Night Moon.”

 >What makes them work? Why do you like the text? What don’t you like?

 >Read both secular and Christian children’s books.

>Read the Newbery and Caldecott winners each year.

<http://www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia>

\*Don’t forget to read the magazines/webzines that you wish to write for, as well. *Highlights for Children*

<https://highlights.submittable.com/submit#:~:text=Highlights%20has%20a%20circulation%20of,of%20Highlights%20before%20submitting%20work>.

[*https://www.jainman.com/childrensmagazinesthatpay/*](https://www.jainman.com/childrensmagazinesthatpay/)

The **“A”** in S**A**UCE: **Allow** yourself to go new places in your children’s writing. Don’t paint yourself into a corner and say, “I only write in rhyme” or “I only write fiction.” Step out of that comfort zone and try sharing your stories in a variety of ways.

\*When we think we’ve arrived in any area of writing, that’s when we stop growing. That’s when we stop getting better. That’s a dangerous place to dwell. Keep learning! Keep getting better! Keep stretching yourself as a writer!

>Sometimes I write in rhyme like all of my “What Is…” books, and sometimes I write in narrative like “Dachshund Through the Snow”. Sometimes I write devotions for kids like my “Dinosaur Devotions” and sometimes I write counting concept books like “Counting Cows” (also in rhyme).

>Former editor at Waterbrook Erin Healy suggested early in my career to write every story in both rhyme and narrative to see which way the story really needed to be told. I am challenging you to do the same!

*\*Fiction versus Non-fiction books* **Fiction:** I would say 90 percent of all people who set out to write children’s books desire to write fiction and that’s OK. Making up stories that will take children to new worlds and different time periods is a fun thing to do! From talking animal stories to sci-fi adventures, making your fiction exciting and engaging is a worthy venture.

**Non-fiction:** Because so many writers desire to be published in the fiction realm, this is a wide-open market and a great place for beginning writers to get their feet wet. So, if you specialize in a topic such as fitness or nutrition or science or history, why not put that knowledge/specialization to work for you? For example, I met someone who graduated with a Food Science/Nutrition degree, and she writes educational (yet, still fun) children’s non-fiction stories about the four food groups/eating healthy for an educational niche publisher that focuses mainly on health topics.

**EXTRA SAUCE:** Dive headfirst into the Library Market. There are many library publishers such as Mitchell Lane Publishers—the one that I wrote six biographies for: (“Cleopatra” “Jamie Lynn Spears” “Tim McGraw” “Brandi Chastain” “Jessica Simpson” “Cliff Lee” “Katy Perry” and “Kenny Chesney” as well as a how-to title—“How to Convince Your Parents You Can Care for a Puppy” and a book about “Zumba”)

**\*Two new imprints with Mitchell Lane:** EZ Reader and Little Mitchie

The **“U”** in **S**AUCE**:** **Uncover** the emotion of every story—write that emotion into the page. It can be funny or sad or sweet or inspiring but let that emotion run throughout your entire text pointing back to that main point on every page.

\*The Spaghetti rule: My friend Peggy Thomas said this at our last NF Ninja conference and I loved it. She said you should be able to pick up a single piece of spaghetti from your story—that one long noodle that runs from cover to cover. Yes!

>Even in a “just the facts” kind of story, if you can find a way to weave emotion into your text, kids will like it better. Read Nancy Churnin’s books—she’s the master at this!

>Remember, the illustrations in a picture book will help with this emotional telling of the story.

The **“C”** in **S**A**U**CE: **Critique** groups will make you better and more accountable! Becoming a part of the Kingdom Writers Children’s Group a year ago April has made me such a better writer—from our monthly Zoom critiques of each other’s stories to our yearly conference where we teach each other from our strengths to our constant Email support and sharing—they make me want to be a better writer, and they challenge me to up my game.

 \*Join a critique group that writes in your genre—super important!

>Word Weavers might be a good option for you! (Eva Marie Everson is your contact).

 \*If you’re the smartest one in your circle, it’s time to add a new circle!

**\*Connect** with other children’s writers and learn from them via podcasts and newsletters and conferences.

**>Join writing/publishing societies:** The Society of Children's Books Writers and Illustrators is a national organization for writers and artists. Anyone can join. The society publishes a newsletter and various reports, including a list of legitimate agents and several market surveys, which members may obtain for the cost of postage. It is especially well-known for hosting conferences all around the country. These are open to members and non-members alike. Find SCBWI online at [www.scbwi.org](http://www.scbwi.org) (This organization is not a Christian one, though.)

**Extra Sauce:** Join your local chapter of SCBWI, too!

> **Attend writers’ conferences—both in person and online** (especially ones that offer children’s writing classes).

\*At End Game Press, we offered three KidLit online conferences over the past year, and you can still purchase the recordings. SOOOO good! <https://www.endgameconferences.com/egp-store/p/kidlitconference>

 Find out which publishers/magazines are sending editors to the conference you’ll be attending. Next, find out which of those publications/book publishers publish children’s articles and books. Now, research each of those companies individually, and learn what each house has been publishing; what has been successful for each house; how your writing would fit into each publishing program; etc. Once you have all of this information, you can make informed decisions about which ones you’ll want to “meet with” at the conference. (Most conferences allow two or three scheduled 15-minute appointments with acquiring editors.)

**Extra Sauce:** Put together proposals and “Synopsis” lists for each house/magazine. Using bullet-points, name the manuscripts you have available and offer a descriptive paragraph for each—length, age group, plot, title, stand alone or part of a series, etc. (Ask, “Would you like me to send you any of these manuscripts?” Most won’t want to take them from you at the conference because of travel—airlines only allow 50 pounds per suitcase, you know?)

**SAMPLE:**

\*“**Samantha’s Search for Something Special”:** When Samantha’s mother asks her to find something special to give to children overseas for Missions Sunday, Sam has a difficult time deciding what to give: her broken roller skates or maybe her doll without an arm. At the end of this picture book, she learns God gave His best when He gave us Jesus. This makes her rethink her gift choices. This is a lovely story for Christmas, especially. Written for 4-6 year olds, its rhyming words are fun to read aloud and offer great art possibilities.

**More Sauce:** Practice your “pitch.” Be able to describe your book idea in a couple of sentences—dynamic, thought-provoking sentences. So, when you see that editor at lunch, you can “wow” him/her with a brief summary of your book. ☺

The **“E”** in **S**A**U**C**E**: **Explore** new ways to share stories. In other words, look for new ways to tell the same story or teach a concept. For example, there are lots of NF animal books in the marketplace, but how many animal books only highlight pink animals? Only one that I know of: “Pink is for Blobfish: Discovering the World’s Perfectly Pink Animals” by Jess Keating.

**EXTRA SAUCE:** A few other techniques for sharing stories: Compare and Contrast like my friend Nancy Churnin did in “Martin & Anne” that takes the lives of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Anne Frank, born the same year on different continents, and talks about their kindred spirits. Here’s how a recent review describes her book: "The lives and legacies of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Anne Frank are drawn in parallel in this visually appealing picture book. Born in the same year on different continents, Martin and Anne both faced discrimination from the time they were school aged. Peers who were former friends fell in line with laws and policies made by privileged groups of which they were not a part. 'Whites only' signs and 'No Jews allowed' signs; a speech competition and a diary; beginning college at 15 and learning about Ghandi and writing about dreams for a better world―these experiences are illustrated in matching form on opposite sides of each spread. Martin grows up to win the Nobel Peace Prize, and his assassination at age 35 cannot silence his message; Anne's life comes to an end at 15, but her legacy lives on when her diary is published and becomes a bestseller. While the ending is trite ('Love is stronger than hate. / Kindness can heal the world'), the journey through their lives and the effect of coupling their lasting impact are powerful. The art emphasizes the message of parallel experiences and changing worlds. With natural tones of green and brown and stylized faces and forms, the images don't fall back on King's iconic look, creating instead a fresh tapestry of landscapes and humanity. **A surprisingly successful and enlightening combination strengthened by striking artwork.**"―Kirkus Reviews

Sharing a little-known fact about someone famous: My friend Peggy Thomas wrote “Farmer George Plants a Nation” which is about President George Washington but depicted in a way I’d never seen before—as a farmer! The book highlights his efforts to create a self-sufficient farm at Mount Vernon, Virginia, mirroring his struggle to form a new nation. Brilliant!