**FCWC Children’s Writing Intensive 2023**

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**“Maybe You Should Write a Holiday Book for Kids…”**

Christmas comes every year. And so does Easter. And so does Thanksgiving. And so does the Fourth of July. Are you seeing a theme here? Writing holiday books for children is a great way to remain relevant for years to come in both the Christian market and the general market.

When I first wrote “What Is Easter?” during my lunch hour while working for a Christian magazine back in 2000, I had no idea I would sell it to Ideals Children’s Books (which is now Worthy Kids/Hachette Book Group) in 2003. Nor did I have any idea that 20 years later, it would still be selling well and blessing a new batch of excited readers. In fact, it was on the shelves of our local Walmart again this year! Of course, with the success of that little holiday board book, I decided a “What Is?” series might be a good idea.

It was, and it still is!

Next came “What Is Christmas?” and then “What Is Thanksgiving?”—both of which still sell amazingly well every year! After the success of those three “What is?” board books, I went on to write “What Is Halloween?” and “What Is America?” and Worthy Kids published those, too! The entire “What is?” series won best nonfiction children’s book series in the Moonbeam Children’s Book Awards in 2019, and I could not be happier (or more surprised!) about how it has all turned out.

The beauty of writing holiday children’s books is two-fold—both the general and Christian book markets sell them, and publishers need new holiday picture and board books each year. Here’s more good news: successful holiday books have staying power. In other words, holiday books may only sell seasonally, but they tend to enjoy many selling seasons. So, because I know a good thing when I see it, I keep on writing holiday titles. In recent years, I have written “C is for Christmas” (Little Lamb Books) and “Dachshund Through the Snow” (End Game Press), and I just signed a contract for yet another Christmas book!

I plan to keep on writing holiday children’s books as long as there are holidays on the calendar, and I suggest you follow my lead.

Here are five tips to help you craft your own holiday children’s book:

1. Read all of the bestselling holiday children’s books and be inspired by them, but don’t copy them. Ask yourself, “Is there a new way to tell this story? What new spin can I put on this holiday?” (Good example: Crystal Bowman’s “M is for Manger” the only holiday ABC book told in chronological order…brilliant!)
2. Brainstorm ideas and come up with a theme that will make your holiday book unique. (For instance, in “Little Colt’s Palm Sunday” “Sparrow’s Easter Song” and “Memories of the Manger,” the story is told from an animal’s POV—a colt, a sparrow, and an old dove. The POV in this series made my holiday books unique and fun. Josie Siler took that same idea and wrote “Howie’s Broken Hee-Haw” but added another dimension to her story, giving her main character a disability and showing kids that you were made on purpose for a purpose. That made her story different and special.)
3. Don’t try to rhyme your story unless you are gifted at rhyme because “near rhyme” will not fly with most editors. (I highly recommend taking Crystal Bowman’s “Rhythm, Rhyme, and Repetition: Mastering the Skill of Writing in Verse” class online.) Also, write your story in both rhyme and prose and see which is stronger.
4. Even though we know the ending of most holiday stories, you still need to create a sense of urgency and build suspense as you write. Or add humor! Think outside the box! (Example: “How to Catch an Elf” and the entire series by Adam Wallace)
5. Let the emotion drive your story. To get in the right state of mind, put on some holiday music and jot down all of the words that come to mind when you think about that particular holiday. (Tip: Study Nancy Churnin’s books to learn how to write emotion throughout your picture book text. Love her book, “The Queen and the First Christmas Tree” which tells the story of the first Christmas tree, Queen Charlotte’s gift to England. Great example of taking a little known fact about the origin of the first Christmas tree and building an entire story around it.)