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## Five Reasons to Write Nonfiction for Kids

Most children's writers today seem to be writing fiction. Why? Because it’s fun to write about fuzzy, talking puppies in rhyming text, right? Here’s the problem…there are only so many available slots in today’s marketplace for fuzzy, talking puppy stories.

On the other hand, publishers of children's nonfiction—both book publishers and magazine publishers— are often desperate for good manuscripts from talented writers.

While it’s never good to simply “follow the market” and write to fill a hole, it’s wise to broaden your horizons. So, if you’ve only written fiction and you prefer fiction writing, that’s OK. But why not try your hand at non-fiction on a regular basis?

If you can just adjust your creative flow to include researching and writing interesting nonfiction pieces that children will enjoy, you might just see your name in print more often, gain consistent work, and consistent cash. Yay!

Here are some practical reasons why you might want to consider nonfiction:

**1) It's Really Fun & Interesting!**

Perhaps the best thing about writing nonfiction is all the neat stuff you get to learn on this non-fiction journey. I've learned all about Cleopatra; Tim McGraw’s life story; how Kenny Chesney made it to Nashville, Tenn.; and how the cardio craze “Zumba” came into existence; etc. I’ve also learned what to do when your best friend moves away; how to shop for designer clothes on a tight budget; how to organize and throw a super cool party; how best to prepare for cheerleading tryouts, and how to choose extracurricular activities and volunteer opportunities that will look great a college application -- all while writing articles and books for which I was paid. Not a bad way to extend one's education, eh?

**2) So Many Ideas to Develop into Creative & Interesting Nonfiction!**

The topics mentioned above are just a few that I've covered in over 30 years of writing non-fiction. Not only are the possibilities for topics unlimited, but I also almost always get to choose what I want to write about. I pick topics that interest me. I also look for an unusual angle or a bit of mystery or intrigue. When writing about Cleopatra, I learned that she wasn’t really as lovely as Hollywood made her to be on the Big Screen. In fact, some historians say she was downright homely. So, I wrote a fun sidebar called, “Cleo: Hot or Not?” It was part of my library book put out by Mitchell Lane Publishers.

\*Newsflash: Kids like reading nonfiction articles and books!

**3) The Markets for Nonfiction Are Continuing to Grow!**

There are many new markets, and market categories, for nonfiction children's writers. Today, publishers are aware that even the youngest children want to learn more about the world around them. From books to blogs to online magazine articles to print magazine pieces to curriculum…there are many nonfiction markets for your ideas.

Early reader and emergent reader books now feature nonfiction topics as often as they do fiction stories. Fresh ideas for concept books (shapes, colors, numbers, alphabet, etc.) are always in demand as new parents search for ways to stimulate their preschoolers’ imaginations. Supplemental materials for curriculum and educational publishers include such things as BIG Books, workbooks, and hi-lo (high interest, low vocabulary) books and even coloring books. (Coloring books are quite popular for children and even adults these days!) For example, I wrote “The Life of Noah” and “The Life of Jesus” activity books for Ideals Children’s Books. Many middle school and high school publishers now include topics on current social issues as well as "self-help" for kids. Biographies are a staple, of course, and books featuring extreme sports (dirt biking, skateboarding, surfing) are hot, along with multicultural books.

Such books are published by both trade and educational publishers, each having its own unique style and viewpoint. A savvy nonfiction writer will adjust his or her style and presentation to appeal to a variety of publishers, while writing at a number of different grade levels. And the publishers make it easy for you. For instance, most library publishers offer writers an instruction sheet that explains exactly what should be included in each book.

\*You just have to figure out where your idea for a nonfiction article or book best fits because nonfiction for children ranges from toddlers to teens.

**4) It’s Easier to Break Into the Non-fiction Market and Establish those Editorial Contacts.**

Children’s fiction is about the hardest market to break into in the publishing industry, so isn’t it interesting that about 85% of the people who want to write for children, want to write fiction? So set your sights on the nonfiction market!

I’ve found that editors of nonfiction children’s magazines and book series are often open to working with new writers and often willing to collaborate on an idea. An editor may e-mail or call to discuss strategies, especially if the piece is to be part of an anthology or series. I've found that most editors are happy to have me suggest ideas as part of their existing series of books. (That’s why it’s important to study a publisher’s backlist, website, etc.) Most editors welcome a new angle, a fresh approach, or a great new title they can add to an already existing series. If you can be a good source of creative ideas, can produce quality writing on time, and if you always conduct yourself in a professional manner, you'll be an editor's dream author... which brings us to our last reason for writing nonfiction.

**5) You'll Get Assignments—Lots of them!**

Yes, believe it or not, you can have editors calling/emailing you to offer you freelance writing jobs. It has happened to me; it can happen to you! ☺ Of course, you can't expect this the first time you write a nonfiction piece. But once you have a few under your belt -- and especially if you specialize in something that not every other writer in the world is doing (like writing test assessment passages or assessment test questions or personality quizzes), you can quickly join the "stable" of on-call writers that editors of these pieces turn to each and every school year for new material. Find your niches and promote yourself within those areas of expertise. For example, maybe you could do a weekly blog for a teen website, covering extreme sports or something you’re interested in.

I have a writer friend who is a science teacher, and she writes lots of science-type library books and supplemental classroom materials. (Science and math nonfiction pieces are definitely in demand—think STEM, baby!) I have another friend who specializes in curriculum for Sunday School and Kids Church dramas. She loves writing those pieces, and they provide extra income for her. Learn from them, and dive right into the children’s nonfiction market.