**REACHING YOUTH with FICTION**

By Tim Shoemaker

***The Gotta Haves …*** 13 essential elements when writing for middle grade and youth

**1. Great cover** -The *FIRST THING* most youth will look at *is the COVER*.

**2. White space** -The *SECOND THING* many see is *how much text* is on a page.

**3. Powerful Opening** -*Not the first page*-… but the first line… and PARAGRAPH

**4. Action** -Youth need *something GOING ON* or *ABOUT to HAPPEN* ...

**5. Show the Story** -You *don’t want to TELL a story*, *you want to SHOW it*.

**6. Use DEEP POV** -We want to write everything through our POV character’s eyes

**7. Believability** -Sometimes it’s hard to take Christian fiction seriously…

**8. Likeable Main Character** -Readers must *QUICKLY IDENTIFY* with *the main character*.

**9. A Clear Goal** -What does the character want—*bad?*

**10. Strong conflict** -WHAT or WHO is going to *GET IN the WAY of ATTAINING HIS GOAL?*

**11. Great Dialogue** -Feels real, but with the boring parts taken out.

**12. Short Chapters with Cliffhangers** -Make them *want to TURN the PAGE*, *not CLOSE the BOOK*.

**13. Satisfying Ending** *-“The first page sells the book. The last page sells the next one.”* Micky Spillane

**HOW DO YOU MAKE AN OPENING STRONGER?**

* **START with a ONE-LINER that GRABS the READER**
* **START with HYPERBOLE … an EXAGGERATED STATEMENT**
* **Hint at TROUBLE ... or that something bad will happen…**
* **Be a little MYSTERIOUS …**
* **Make the reader wonder *…“What’s going to happen here?”***
* **CREATE a QUESTION**
* **ASK a QUESTION**
* **INTRIGUE the READER**
* **START with ACTION**
* **START with SUSPENSE**
* **START with HUMOR**
* **START with DIALOGUE**
* **Hint at DANGER**

**Take a look at YOUR writing ...**

* **Does it *GRAB YOU*?**
* **Where is the *FIRST PLACE* it *GRABS YOU BY THE COLLAR* and won’t let go?**
* **How can you *START YOUR STORY THERE*?**

***Strong Start Killers …***

* Zoom-in start …
* Description start …
* Backstory start …
* Weather start …

**WHAT MAKES FOR A SATISFYING ENDING?**

* **If it is a MYSTERY …**
* **If it is SUSPENSE …**

*Readers want the hero to dig deep … develop the strength of character they never thought they had.*

* ***The OBVIOUS GOAL***
* ***The INNER NEED***

*What if these two are in conflict—where you can only choose one … how do you handle that?*