



WRITING FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG ADULTS

Marion crook, PhD

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INTRODUCTION

Since the first publication of this book, the publishing industry has changed greatly. Authors have more ability to contact each other in on-line writing groups, at organized meetings, and creative writing classes. Trends in subject matter have moved. Children's writing has gained prestige. Thank you, J.K. Rowling. The success of the *Harry Potter* books created a huge swell of confidence among writers of children's books.

"See!" We wanted to shout. "We can write wonderful books that make money!"

Many publishers have closed their doors; however, the publication of children's books remains steady and publishers continue to give writers opportunities for sales. Some find a home online by self-publishing (the Indie world) and are satisfied with the sales generated there. Such sales have the positive quality of control over marketing, but often the obvious lack of editorial input. It is possible to buy editorial input and improve the quality of self-published books. This is becoming attractive to many.

Reports on sales of children's books which include Young Adult, but often do not include the recent category New Adult (ages 18 to 25), show that sales increased in 2012 and decreased in 2013 to remain

much as they had been. While book sales aren't skyrocketing, there is still a solid market for hard copy books and e-books. The stimulus of *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins created a bulge in sales for 2012. Perhaps your new book will be the catalyst for sales in the coming years.

Writers haven't changed much. We still want to write wonderful stories. We want to engage the reader. We want to live in the exciting world of the imagination — and get paid enough to stay there. No, we haven't changed much. The writers I meet are still interesting, creative, energetic, and willing to work very hard. Most of us continue to want to improve our writing and put out story after story that captivates our readers. I am sitting at my computer on a hot summer day in the beautiful town of Gibsons, British Columbia (when everyone else is on the beach), thinking about the many writers who are also at their computers, working to bring the ideas in their minds — through their skills, and with all the precise and perfect words they know — into the minds of readers. I hope this book helps you and makes that process easier and more enjoyable.

Who can write for kids and teens? Anyone can, but to write well, you need special skills. Writers of children's books can be young, old, married, single, with children, or without children. They can be teachers, plumbers, nurses, or bakers. In some ways, writing for children is like paddling a canoe: Almost anyone can do it, but performing well requires skill, practice, and some understanding of what you're doing.

Writing for children can make money for you. If you continually produce high-quality stories that please your publishers and your readers, your books may have a long life and bring you royalties for years. But such a sustained writing life requires enthusiasm, energy, practice, and knowledge. Luckily, we all have some knowledge of children, if only from our own childhood. We usually remember what happened to us as a child, how we felt, and what we expected.

I remember my five brothers and sisters and my cousin who lived with us embarking on all kinds of adventures in the West Coast Canadian country of my childhood. When I was 13 years old I remember tying my 6-year-old brother to a rope secured around my waist when I was rock climbing because I felt responsible enough to keep him from falling, but not so responsible that I stayed at the bottom of the cliff face. The credo of my siblings was that if you got yourself into trouble, you got yourself out of it. We called for help only in instances of broken bones or concussions.

I grew up, got a degree in nursing, and practiced community health nursing in the Cariboo country in British Columbia, Canada. My husband, four children, and a part-time nursing job kept me very busy. We lived on a ranch when my children were young, and I associated with friends of my children who were, for the most part, independent and interesting people. They solved problems, dealt with perplexing situations, and had strength of character. They were not “little adults,” nor were they helpless. I told stories to my children and wrote short stories for the CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Company), and then, in 1982, I wrote about Susan George, a 16-year-old intrepid amateur sleuth who managed to create excitement through four books. I left my nursing job and began to write full time. I sold my first books to Grolier Ltd. and contracted to write more. I have had 12 books of fiction and 11 other nonfiction books published since that time.

When I began to write for children, besides my own childhood experiences from which to draw, I had some rudimentary skills of grammar and composition and a fuzzy notion of conflict, resolution, and suspense. But I also had great respect for my readers. I remembered myself as a girl reading L.M. Montgomery’s *Anne of Green Gables* and *Emily of New Moon*. The girl I was in those early reading years responded to the honesty and integrity of the characters and, as an adult writer, I was determined to give my readers characters of similar worth: Characters who were intelligent, forthright, interesting, curious, and honest. Right from the beginning, fundamental to my writing was that my fictional characters were strong. I wanted my readers to respect these imaginary people and engage in life with them with verve and the expectation of excitement. I expect you, too, to approach your writing with a definite attitude toward children.

I learned my writing skills with study; the help of my agents, editors, and publishers; hours of rewriting; and by teaching others. Teaching workshops to high school students and adults was a great way for me to learn clarity of process. In order to explain what you do, you must first understand it. My students taught me. You also can learn.

One of the most exciting aspects of writing for children and teens is the sense of a new beginning with each book. I always start with the idea that this book is going to be the best one I’ve ever written. Certainly, it is always the project I find most interesting at the time. When interviewers and children ask me what book of all I have written do I like the best, my answer is usually, “The one I’m working on now.”

What I'm presently creating seems to be the most entrancing, probably because I have a sense of almost unlimited choice about what this book is going to say.

Aside from the personal satisfaction of creating magic for your readers, there is an educational goal that writing for children serves. Children who read early and enjoy it are more likely to incorporate reading into their lives and sustain a lifelong interest in books and so in the subjects, personalities, and ideas contained in books. Anything is possible for those who read.

Writing for children is wonderful, emotionally satisfying, exciting, and sometimes overwhelming, but it takes the same imagination, energy, skill, and tenacity that writing for adults does, with the added skill of putting yourself into the skin of your reader at a particular age. I have lost track of the number of people I've met who believe that writers of children's books will one day "grow up" to write "real" books for adults, as if skillfully written, well-crafted magical books for children are somehow practice for an adult book. Books for children may be shorter, but they take a similar (perhaps greater) degree of skill and energy as writing books for adults, and the competition for publication is fierce.

"But you don't have to use big words." It's true that the vocabulary of a children's book may be smaller than that of an adult book, but the writer still must choose the perfect word. There are hundreds of choices of simple words that can create different mental pictures. If you write for children, you are a time-line traveler jumping in your imagination from 35 years old to 5 years old.

As well, each new story can be an educational experience. I learn from my characters and I find that intriguing. In *Cutting It Close*, Jayleen Morgan is a young woman who is very aware of the sounds in the world. I, Marion Crook, didn't think I was. So, during the time that I wrote that book, I found myself listening to the world in a way I never had before. My computer hummed in G; my printer in D. I'd never noticed that before. The fish tank sent a rippling percussion to the high notes of the microwave accompanied by the thud of the neighbor boys bouncing on their trampoline. After I finished *Cutting It Close*, I started a book project with a blind athlete whose whole world is described in sound and touch. I felt I had had an introduction with Jayleen and so was able to understand my athlete friend much better. Imaginary characters like Jayleen can create new dimensions in our lives.

A story can start with a slowly evolving idea or with a series of real events that stimulate you to see a character in those events. It can start with a flash of brilliance that demands immediate writing. Or it can be a slow process. For example, you might have been making bread for years, wondering how children could learn this skill, making notes about simple ways of teaching bread-making, and decide to compile them into a book. Or you might be sitting on the seashore one day wondering what it would have been like to live on that shore 100 years ago. A 12-year-old child who seems to own the shore comes to your mind. That child won't leave your mind until you write his or her book.

The ideas for stories, or the commitment to telling those stories, come from you. This book will show you how you can take your ideas and translate them into manuscripts. We are a team, you and I. You provide the ideas, the tenacity, and the will to succeed, and I will provide the way.

You can read this book to get the general idea of the publishing industry (the way in which writers interact with publishers and agents), as a check on ways in which you can improve your already proficient writing, or as a guide to producing your first story. Even if you are an experienced writer, it might help to use this book as a guide. Start with an idea for a story and work through it, jotting down suggestions on your tablet, on index cards, or in a computer file as you read.

By the time you have read this book, you will have enough information for a good beginning to your book. If you are one of those people who live with a laptop computer on your knees, you can create a directory for your book and type notes into the computer in dated sequence.

I hope to save you some of the arduous hours I had to spend trying to understand the publishing industry, as well as trying to understand the craft of writing: Why a passage wasn't working, why the plot seemed to be imploding, why the characters irritated me. I can remember striding up and down the driveway between my house and the barn talking to the crows and the chickens about an intractable plot that had faded. I was angry, frustrated, and baffled in turn, but finally blasted that reluctant plot into an exciting conclusion.

I recognize that not all writers for children want to write fiction. Some readers will want to write nonfiction books. I have 11 nonfiction books published and I understand the necessity of good organization and good writing in this genre. But it is confusing for me and certainly

confusing for you if I move from writing about fiction and then about nonfiction throughout the book. To keep this book flowing smoothly, I have written with the focus on fiction, but the advice applies to nonfiction as well, for many of the skills are shared. However, there are unique aspects to each, so I have also included a chapter specifically for nonfiction writers (see Chapter 6).

I would love to hear from you about the book you are writing and how my book helped you develop your ideas and characters. To inspire me and help develop my own writing, write and tell me what you would like me to add in the next edition of this book. You can write to me care of Self-Counsel Press, or you can talk to me on the Internet at marioncrookauthor.com.

Good luck. I wish you a stimulating, creative read and an even more stimulating career.



I

IN THE BEGINNING

1. Why Write?

Telling stories is an ancient skill practiced in public at community festivals, around the campfire, in religious rites, and in private at the cradles of the young. It involves an innate ability to pick dramatic words in a way that paints a mental picture and gives the tale a sense of pace and tension. The story becomes important, even if only for a short time, to the one who hears it or reads it. It is a way of communicating excitement and the optimistic belief that the world is a remarkable and knowable place. Many writers have an enthusiastic following of readers who want to share in their adventures.

Telling stories is also an age-old method of communicating morality lessons to ensure that a point of view spreads in a palatable manner. Writing can be a way of instructing, advising, and guiding others. Most children don't want to read stories that are written with such motivation, but many writers believe that teaching justifies their stories. A "moral" story isn't necessarily a good story. The danger in writing morality tales is that the writer may ignore the needs of children and write from behind a screen of righteousness that thinly hides a lecture. As you may remember from your school years, most of us hate lectures.

Stories also offer an illusion of control as if the world can be controlled by the way we interpret it. Most writers offer stories that have beginnings, middles, and ends describing life as neatly compacted and logical. Perhaps this illusion of controlled life gives readers a sense of order.

You want to write a book that will delight many years later. You want your book to be the best you can produce, written in a style that is uniquely yours, perhaps using ideas that have never been written about or in a format that has never been tried. Writing is about creating.

It is almost impossible to stop writing once you begin. Beware of what habits you are embracing when you first decide to write. Writing becomes your passion, your joy, and your compulsion. You write at bus stops, in dentist offices, in cafés, as well as on beaches, in lonely woods, at your computer, and in bed. In the middle of an argument, you can detach your mind and consider how you would treat this scene in a book. Shameful, really. You wonder sometimes if you are clear about the dividing line between fiction and reality. Some writers begin as hobbyists or recreational writers, jotting down ideas after work or on the weekends when they have a free hour. They may find themselves spending more and more time at it until they think about it most of the day. Others begin as professional writers, knowing they will commit their working lives to producing manuscripts, and so plan time and the financial support they need for writing. Both types can be compulsive about writing once they experience the zest and satisfaction that writing brings to their lives.

You might write because you want to be noticed, to be recognized as a unique and valuable person. Every writer needs a certain amount of ego or they would never write. You might also write hoping the stories you create will live forever and your life and energy will live on in those stories. You might write to discover yourself, for by writing you often find out what is important, how you feel, and what you know. Perhaps you want to write to push your habits of thought farther and farther from your usual paths and into a different, challenging, and even peculiar world of your imagination. My character in my last book is intrigued by quantum mechanics. That is a very difficult subject and one that required great effort on my part to obtain some understanding. Your characters definitely push you.

There is, likely, a mixture of many motivations in most writers. They are complex and simple, obvious and deep. Some writers are aware of what they feel and why they feel as they do. Others are aware only of

their feelings after they have written their stories. You may not always be sure of your reasons for writing, but you will likely be convinced of your undeniable need to write. It's amazing, really, that psychiatry has not diagnosed writing as an altered state of consciousness, and writers as those who can go into a trance and leave reality at the strike of a computer key.

So you may have some understanding of why you write, but why write for kids and teens, a disparate, multicultural, widely different group? Perhaps because when you begin to write for a certain age group, you begin to know those readers: The way they react to words, phrases, and plots; the language they find intriguing, and the worries and hopes they entertain. When you feel an intimate connection with readers, you're likely to continue to write for those same readers. And, of course, once you gain a reputation for being proficient at one type of story, publishers are more likely to offer you contracts for books and stories in that genre.

2. A Writer's Attitude

Writing stories for children requires an honest, passionate energy. You must care about the characters and create vibrant connections between you, the story, and the reader. The reader is never distant when you write for children. The reader is at your feet, on your knees, hanging over your shoulder, commenting by email on your plot, dashing off letters about words and style, calling you on the phone, and entering into the world of your characters with the conviction that those characters are important and the reader has the right to engage with your story and with you.

If writing for children and teens is the genre of choice for you as a writer and you want to learn from them, be flexible to their changing needs, and continually learn about the new ways your readers view the world and react to situations and stories. How do cell phones affect children? What does your 12-year-old protagonist eat? What kind of bully would exist in your ten-year-old character's life? If you have the mind that finds these questions intriguing, you will likely have the right attitude for writing for kids and teens.

3. A Writer's Beliefs

Writers invest their stories with their own beliefs, ethics, and angst. They live in their imaginations trying to understand the moral choices

of their characters, trying to reveal “truths” as they understand them in the action of their stories, and suffering with them as they experience emotions. At the same time, writers must try to establish their own lives in the real world, an amazing mental juggling process. Morals are messy, often relative and difficult. One right or responsibility that is paramount for one person may impinge on another. As a writer, you need to try to decide what is important to you.

The stories you write expose your beliefs. If you value independence or obedience, looking good or being athletic, that will show. The way you think about children, your admiration for them or lack of it, your respect for them or lack of it, will show in your writing. When you write, you strip your pretenses and protective social mechanisms from your personality and expose your beliefs and values to the reader. This is the terrifying exposure that writers discuss in whispers. Your readers might laugh. Or worse, they might snicker derisively.

Writers, like readers, continually try to understand what is good and what is evil, what is right, wrong, important, and vital in the world. They try to write as close to their personal beliefs as possible. They wrestle with the meaning of life and search for truth, and try to reveal these in their stories. What they say to their readers depends on what interests them about the world.

If you’re primarily an educator, and if you’re thrilled at the prospect of leading readers into a new world, stimulating them with new ideas and encouraging them to think for themselves, you’ll see writing that accomplishes this as morally correct. If you’re someone who views reassurance and safety as important for children, then you may write to promote that response in your readers. If you’re someone who thinks that children don’t get enough excitement in their lives, you may write to give them a vicarious experience of danger and adventure. Some writers see their mission as one that shows readers that the world is a dangerous place and they need to be alert, competent, and suspicious of others. Some readers want to know that it is possible to maneuver in a dangerous world.

Insofar as your writing reflects your beliefs about what children need, you’ll feel you’re a morally responsible writer. So, our ethics depend on what we think is important in children’s lives and what we value in ourselves. Different writers have different values. There is space for differences in this genre.

3.1 Believing in your characters

Readers will respond to your story positively or negatively. There will be some reaction. If they don't like your work, they won't read the story through. Those readers who choose to stay with you to the end will probably absorb much of what you say, both the text and the subtext — the underlying message. The subtext may reflect your personal values most clearly, which you may or may not be conscious of.

For instance, you may tell the story of a girl who wants to capture a wild horse. The girl is clever about wilderness tracking, an experienced rider, and courageous. Then if, in the course of her adventures, she asks her father and brothers to capture the horse for her, and they do, you have told your readers a wonderful story of quest and adventure with the underlying subtext that girls cannot manage on their own. That may be what you believe, and so your writing expresses that belief. And it's totally ethical because it is true to your beliefs.

That particular subtext would bother me greatly, since I write stories in which girls can achieve on their own with the message that achievement is not only possible, but necessary. However, I would defend your right to create a story that was an expression of your beliefs.

Elements of your story that you take for granted as plausible or realistic may reveal your beliefs. If your editor questions a basic belief, pay attention. Although the editor may have different beliefs from you, his or her questions can help you identify your biases and show the impact they have on your writing.

In one of my books, an editor questioned the capability and competence of my 11-year-old protagonist. The editor didn't believe that an 11-year-old girl could be as organized and capable as I had described her. I had had, by this time, intimate acquaintance with my daughters and their friends and with scores of schoolchildren from a variety of backgrounds, both rural and urban, many of whom were remarkably capable. I thought that my faith in children's abilities was better grounded than the editor's. The editor's doubts made me consider something I had taken for granted. However, I remember that I did examine that belief when challenged.

In another instance, the editor questioned my belief in the protagonist's goal. "You don't believe that it's important, so the reader won't believe it's important." She was right. I didn't. I scrapped that plot. There is always the strong possibility that the editor is right.

3.2 Believing in your readers

Some authors of children's books, particularly beginning authors, "talk down" to their readers. An aura of condescension permeates the writing like nauseating medicine, forming an unappetizing subtext. This can be present in varying degrees and can creep into your work. Ask yourself what kind of conversation you would have with your readers. Would you listen as much as you talked? Would you ask them for ideas? Comments? Would you want to know what they thought? If your answers are yes, you probably don't talk down to your readers and write in an honest and intimate way. It's usually not obvious to writers when condescension chokes their work, but it's obvious to readers, and they react to it. A psychologist once told me that lecturing was the worst form of abuse adults could inflict on a child. Don't do it.

One method of measuring whether you are too distant from your audience is to get to know a group of children. Offer to speak to a Brownie or Cub Scouts group or school class about writing. Listen to the children discuss a topic. Find a teacher friend who will allow you to sit in on the class for a day, or offer to help with a field trip. Take a neighbor child to the movies. Do as I did and join the five- to seven-year-old Rollerblade hockey team in your back lane. Children are often very honest and will tell you what you need to know. In this case, the assessment of my Rollerblading abilities. "Youse is not a very good skatah, you know, Marion. But youse is a good goalie." You may be able to change your views and your belief system by listening more closely to what they say.

3.3 Letting your audience believe in you

You want to get to know as many children as you can, as well as you can. What do they want, fear, and expect? What do they do in their day? What is usual behavior for them and what is unusual? How much free time do they have? What do they eat? When and where do they eat? Do they have their own phone with unlimited texting? Do they have pets?

It is perhaps more important to know a few children well than many children slightly. You may find more revelation about a child's point of view from one child than from a group. As well, children differ so much in personality that what is important to one child may not be important to another.

Children do have some things in common. It may help your writing if you have a background in child psychology, but it isn't necessary. Most parents read reams on what to expect from children at each age of their life, so a good book on parenting will probably give you much information and even ideas for plots. Theoretical knowledge is useful, but it isn't a substitute for friendships with children.

Try not to be overwhelmed by the changes that flash in and out of children's lives so rapidly. Group interests vary over the years and you can be out of touch with an age group very quickly. Ten-year-olds at one time were interested in baseball stars. A few years later they were interested in basketball stars. Dinosaurs gave way to Batman. Birthday parties occurred at home one year and at the Light Tag Arena the next. A girl who rides horses might ride English style on bridle paths at one age, but a few years later, girls of the same age ride western in gymkhanas, and a few years later in events just called "games."

You need to decide how you will come to feel connected to your readers. What matters to you? What do you think is important to your reader? I'm committed to showing readers protagonists who think for themselves, take chances, and are independent. As well, I want to show those characters as respected members of their families and communities. I want to convey the belief that individual children are valuable and important, and I want the readers to believe that about themselves. The readers' beliefs are, of course, beyond my control, but I hope that in identifying with my protagonist, readers can, at least while reading the story, believe in their own worth.

If you haven't already done this, you might want to examine what your attitudes are to your readers. I find it helps to imagine an individual reader. When I wrote *Riding Scared*, I imagined a 12-year-old girl sitting in a ferry lineup on her holiday in the backseat of the family car; ignoring her younger brothers, her parents talking in the front seat, and the comings and goings of the ferry terminal, concentrating because she was enthralled with the story of Gillian and Hawkeye. I thought about how such a reader would react to the story, and I wrote to her.

4. A Writer's Responsibilities

When you write for children, you have the responsibility to do no harm, but that doesn't mean you have to live a completely virtuous life. Your failed marriage, a brush with the law, or the occasional descent into debauchery doesn't necessarily end up between the covers of children's

books. How you live doesn't necessarily dictate how you write. But as a writer of children's books and stories, you should recognize ethical responsibilities to both yourself as a writer and to your child readers.

The book industry also has expectations that children's stories be entertaining, stimulating, and/or instructive and that they not be harmful. The definition of "harmful," of course, can be relative. It's often defined by official and self-appointed censors but, at the very least, publishers and the public expect that the author intends no harm to the reader. Generally, children's authors avoid vulgarity, obscenity, and graphic violence.

Children have both surface needs and deeper needs. Many children enjoy the suspense, tension, and fear that comes with stories of adventure and fantasy. The popularity of the *Goosebumps* books ought to show the most skeptical that children do like to be frightened — a little. What the writer of horror and fantasy needs to remember is that children do not want to feel overwhelmed with helplessness. Nor do they want to believe that the world is such an unpredictable and wicked place that the witches and phantoms of the night will inevitably gobble them up if they step outside their houses.

In a story of fear and fantasy, you need to give the reader some hope that all will be well and that the protagonist can control the ending. Don't take away hope and persuade a reader that life is inevitably dangerous, uncontrollable, and wicked. Life may indeed be dangerous, quixotic, and wicked, but children need to believe that justice and truth have a good chance of prevailing.

5. Moral Tales

Today most of us laugh at the "moral" tales of the past century where good children conformed and were obedient and bad children were eaten by witches, dragons, and sea serpents. Nowadays, most writers don't tell children what to think or try to lead them into paths of righteousness.

Nevertheless, morality and ethics are as strong today in children's literature as they were in the 19th and 20th centuries; they are just different. Compliant and unquestioning children were praised in the past; curious and questioning children are lauded today.

While it's true that modern children's stories don't hold conformity and obedience as the virtuous paths of good children, they aren't without their proselytizing tendencies. Some values are professed as more

important than others. After all, most writers today don't write amoral tales. They write moral tales about saving whales and preserving the planet, including the notions of justice and fairness and the value of honesty. Today's writers are usually moral people and their writing inevitably reflects this.

What remains the same in the good writing of the past and in the good writing of today is the writer's respect for the reader. Perhaps today, writers are more likely to give young readers credit for a reliable moral sense of their own than writers of the past did. Perhaps they are more aware that cultural expressions of morality differ and are less likely to proclaim their own culture's values as the one right way for everyone.

When I write, I hope that readers will notice my protagonist's particular view of the world and perhaps be inspired to act with his or her courage in their own lives, but I don't write to instruct the reader. If the reader wants to participate with me in that aspect of the book, that's wonderful. If readers choose not to do that and prefer to read for the adventure or for the suspense of the story, then I'm happy they enjoy it. I want to give them the sense of excitement and the energy that I think is important in a rich life. At the same time, I offer my understanding of good and evil, right and wrong, joy and sorrow, and expect readers to take what is useful to them from my work. I want them to feel that they are valued and respected and that life can be positive. This is my particular commitment to my readers. Yours might be the same, or quite different, but you do enter into an unwritten contract with your readers to be moral and responsible in a way that has meaning to you.

6. Appropriation of voice

Years ago, most nonfiction for young readers in North America was written from the point of view of Caucasians. Times have changed. We live today in a multicultural world that demands sensitivity to many points of view. North Americans are beginning to view their society as richly diverse, pluralistic, and fascinating. They want more information about neighbors who come from or live in a different culture from their own.

Publishers, quite rightly, demand inclusion and tolerance and are wary of cultural appropriation. There is more awareness today than in previous years that writers may not be able to adequately portray a culture different from their own. This means that you need to research carefully the background information that will make all your characters believable, including those characters who are rooted in different cultures.

Cultural differences usually are wider than racial differences, but race and culture also can be inseparable in one person. Be sensitive to truths about your characters and, if you write about a culture that is different from your own, have your work read by someone who is intimate with that culture.

Currently, among writers there is controversy about the “appropriation of voice,” that is, whether writers of one culture or race should write about a different culture or race. Underneath this issue are concerns of dominance, oppression, power, and stereotyping. Generally, writers oppose this type of censorship, but at the same time acknowledge the abysmal productions that offend. Subtle forms of *Little Black Sambo* still creep into our literature.

It’s important to recognize the value of the real, authentic, and accurate portrayal of culture without setting stringent prohibitions against who can write about whom. If those strictures about appropriation of voice are too harsh, women will not be able to write about men, nor adults about children. Keep in mind the authenticity of your point of view while writing about other cultures, but go ahead and write. As the T-shirt of my librarian friend reads, “Every book in my library offends someone.”

7. The Many Paths from which to choose

Children read stories or have stories read to them. They read poetry, books of information, and stories of fact written in a fictionalized manner. They have their own magazines such as *New Moon Girls*, *Yes! Magazine*, and *Owl Magazine*. They have their own live theaters and, of course, they have their own movies and television shows. Movies and television scripts share many of the basic principles of writing, but they are constrained by the medium, by the expectations of the industry that are particular to the two-hour drama and the half-hour sitcom. (If you want to write movies for children, read this book and then a book that is specific to the film industry such as *Writing Screenplays*, published by Self-Counsel Press. Adapt the knowledge you gain here to the world where the camera is a point of view that must be incorporated into the story.)

Children also read magazine articles and attend plays. They may develop an interest in literature when they perform impromptu dramas for their family audience. “Let’s pretend” is part of children’s play

and naturally incorporates imaginative stories. For a child, the world is full of endless possibilities, dreams, and stories. Writers of children's books can share in this sense of adventure and exploration.

When you write books for children, you can write them in the form of a short novel, a long novel, a picture book with words, a poem, an illustrated poem, a series of novels with one set of characters appearing in several books, one book in a publisher's series, a book of information at a five-year-old level, or a book of information for teens on complicated subjects such as eating disorders. No matter where you fit in, you want to write an excellent book.

Every year the best novel, the best book of information, the best poetry, and the best picture book win national and international awards. Publishers meet every year at the international book fair in Bologna, Italy, to exchange information and buy and sell children's books. I attended one year with enthusiasm and a rudimentary vocabulary in Italian, and I was overwhelmed by the artistry and excellence of the books from many different countries. I remember sitting in a corner in the vast trade-fair building reading a book by a Spanish writer about a little boy who could not have a pet but whose understanding family allowed him to keep a clothes brush as if it were a pet. I sat entranced by this book, while hundreds of people milled around talking about books and making deals. That book was so well written that even now, years later, I remember how much that boy wanted a pet. There were wonderful books everywhere at that trade fair. Publishers worldwide are constantly in search of interesting, well-written stories. No matter how many books there are in the world, publishers always want more.