

Introduction and Lesson One



**INSTRUCTOR:
KAREN CIOFFI**

Fiction Writing For Children

From Writing, to Publishing, to Sales

Welcome to Fiction Writing for Children

Learn How to Write for Kids, Learn How to Submit a Book, and Learn about Book Marketing

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<http://karencioffiwritingforchilde.com>

Let me help you write your story or turn your idea into a publishable story

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Please note: I do not endorse any products within this course, unless specifically stated.

A Bit About Your Instructor



I'm Karen Cioffi and will be your instructor for the next six weeks as we explore Writing Children's Fiction.

Just so you have an idea of who I am and what my qualifications are, I'm a multi-award-winning children's author, ghostwriter, freelance writer, editor with 4RV Publishing, fiction staff writer for an online learning center, and online marketing instructor.

My memberships include:

National Association of Independent Writers and Editors
Professional Writers Alliance
Freelancers Union
Association of Ghostwriters

Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI)
JacketFlap and AuthorsDen

My Links:

<http://thewritingworld.com> (free monthly newsletter)

<http://karencioffiwritingforchildren.com>

<http://writersonthemove.com> (writing and marketing tips)

Twitter: <http://twitter.com/KarenCV>

Facebook: <http://facebook.com/writingforchildrenwithkarencioffi>

GooglePlus: <https://plus.google.com/+KarenCioffiVentrice/about>

Pinterest: <http://pinterest.com/KarenCioffi/>

LinkedIn: <http://www.linkedin.com/in/karencioffiventrice>

Please be sure to subscribe to my newsletter, The Writers World, at:

<http://thewritingworld.com>

You'll get three+ free site-related ebooks and you'll get writing and marketing tips from Writers on the Move.

Week One: Lesson 1

Choosing Your Target Audience

Exploring the various age level genres and guidelines in order for a writer to target the right audience.

This lesson is divided into 9 sections:

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Introduction to Writing Children's Fiction

Children's books USUALLY fall into one of three basic categories: picture books, middle grade, and young adult. To become published in any of these genres, you need to take the necessary steps to achieve success whether aiming at traditional publishing or self-publishing.

In regard to both traditional publishing, there are four steps needed to become a traditionally published author - the first step is writing.

Actually writing, and all that it entails, is the basis of becoming a published author or writer, whether writing books, articles, becoming a ghostwriter, or copywriter. Within this first writing step, there are four subcategories.

Writing for Children: Four Traditional and 'Self' Publishing Steps – An Overview

1. Writing and Reading

The first step for a successful writing career is to write. But, simply writing isn't enough; the new writer will need to learn the craft of writing, along with the particular tricks of writing for children. Writing for children is more complicated than other forms of writing. The reason is because you're dealing with children.

Rules, such as age-appropriate words, age-appropriate topics, age-appropriate comprehension, storylines, and formatting are all features that need to be tackled when writing for children. But, the very beginning is to learn the basics of writing.

In order to learn the craft of writing, you'll need to read books and magazines relevant to learning to write. One book simply won't cut it; the topic of writing is too broad. You'll want the perspective and insight from a number of experienced authors. There are a number of resources in this book to help you in this area, and you can always ask writers in your writing groups what books they recommend.

Within this first step, aside from reading books and magazines on the craft of writing, you will need to read, read, and read in the genre you want to write. Pay special attention to recently published books and their publishers. What works in these books? What type of style is the author using? What topics/storylines are publisher's publishing?

Dissect these books, and you might even write or type them word-for-word to get a feel for writing that works. This is a trick that writers new to copywriting use – you can trick your brain into knowing the right way to write for a particular genre or field. Well, not so

much trick your brain as teach it by copying effective writing. *Just remember, this is for the learning process only – you cannot use someone else’s work, that’s plagiarism.*

2. Writing for Children: Critiques

The next step, number two, is to become part of a critique group and have your work critiqued.

Critiquing is a two-way street; you will critique the work of other members of the critique group and they will critique yours. But, there are advantages to critiquing other writers’ works – you begin to see errors quickly and notice what’s being done right. This all helps you hone your craft.

Because critique groups are so important, I’ve included an article, “Critiques are Essential,” at the end of this lesson.

3. Writing for Children: Revisions and Edits

Step three on the writing rung is to revise your manuscript based on your own input and that of your critique group. This process should go on until the manuscript is as good as you can get it. It’s recommended to put the story away for a couple of weeks and then revisit it. You’ll see a number of areas that may need tweaking and revising that you hadn’t noticed before.

Then it's on to self-editing and proofreading.

4. Writing for Children: Take it to a Professional

It would also be advisable to budget for a professional editing of your manuscript before you begin submissions. No matter how careful you and your critique partners are, a working editor will pick up things you missed. If your budget just doesn’t have enough for a professional edit, read everything you can on self-editing; the article links above have some helpful tips. Then, apply what you learn to your manuscript.

Once you have a polished manuscript, the next three steps in a writing career are: submissions, a contract and sales, and a writing career.

It’s important to mention that the above four steps should be taken whether you are going the traditional publishing route or you’re going to self-publish.

Just because you may be by-passing the publisher’s gatekeepers, who protect the integrity and quality of the work they accept, your manuscript should be the best possible, a quality product.

Self-publishing is not an excuse to cut corners, rush a book, or create a substandard product. Remember that your book is a reflection of you and your writing ability.

Choosing Your Target Audience

When you think of writing for children, what do you think of?

Do you picture writing a bedtime story? Or, maybe a funny picture book? Or, maybe you think of the middle grade or young adult crowd.

What children are you envisioning reading your stories? Or are your books being read to young children, maybe babies?

Do you want to enlighten a child? Do you want to scare a child? Do you want to provide a child with a life lesson? Do you want to make a child laugh? Do you want to bring the child through a suspenseful mystery? Or do you want to take the child on a fantastic journey, broadening his imagination?

You need to think about these things when planning to write a book.

Often teachers, or parents, or grandparents, who are around children a lot, develop the desire to write for children. They might see how a child lights up when reading an engaging book. Or, they may want to spark the child's imagination and bring him or her on a fantastic journey.

So, again, there's a lot to think about.

Being a writer, like being any kind of artist who creates something from nothing, is an amazing ability. It's almost like magic. And, you are in control. You decide what to create. The cap on your imagination is your only limit.

Now, we'll go over the different genres available to the children's fiction writer.

Writing Children's Books: Basic Genre Differences

There are a number of genres within the children's book arena. The target audience ranges from babies right on through to young adults. This provides a unique situation for writers to pick and choose a genre that feels comfortable to write in, while still remaining within the children's book market.

Each genre is geared toward a specific age group and has its own set of rules and tricks.

Children's Books: An overview of the different genres and a description of each:

Bedtime stories

These stories are simple and soothing. They are written to help lull little ones off to sleep and are in the form of picture books. The age group can be from newborn to five or six years of age.

Examples of bedtime stories include:

Day's End Lullaby by Karen Cioffi.

Good Night Moon by Margaret Wise Brown – a classic

I want to also mention a couple of Amazon's ebook listings for "bedtime picture books:"

The Magical Dragon's Three Gifts by Rachel Yu [Kindle Edition]

A Wolf Pup's Tale (by Rachel Yu [Kindle Edition])

Board Books

Board books are simple picture books geared toward babies and toddlers. They are designed to hold up to a toddlers prying and pulling fingers. Board books can be black and white or very colorful. These books usually teach simple concepts, such as numbers from one to ten, days of the week, colors, and simple words.

Examples of board books are:

The Very Hungry Caterpillar by Eric Carle (a classic baby board book)

Good Night Moon by Margaret Wise Brown (another classic)

Grover's Guessing Game About Animals (a Sesame Street book)

Picture books for the 2 - 5 year old group

These books are meant to be read aloud to the child. Rather than simply concept themes, simple story lines can be written with short sentences and words. These books are for children in the 'pre-reading' stage and the word count can range from 100 - 500 words.

Examples of this genre are:

The Runaway Bunny by Margaret Wise Brown

Where the Wild Things Are by Maurice Sendak

Fancy Nancy by Jane O'Connor (can also be in the 4-8 year old genre)

Stephanie's Ponytail by Robert Munsch (can also be in the 4-8 year old genre)

Caps for Sale by Esphyr Slobodkina (fits in the next genre also)

Picture books for the 4 - 8 year old

This genre makes up most of the picture book market. These books are also meant to be read aloud to children, but for the older child it can be read individually, as an easy or early reader. The pictures will give a visual element for children learning to read, helping with the comprehension of the text. The wording and themes can be a bit more interesting, but still rather simple.

For the writer, in this genre you will need to introduce 'showing' to create an engaging reading experience for the child. The average picture book is 32 pages and under 1000 words.

Examples of books for this age group include:

Walter the Farting Dog by William Kotzwinkle

Owen by Kevin Henkes. (can also be in the 2-5 year old genre)

Sh, Sh, Sh, Let the Baby Sleep by Kathy Stenke

Harold's Fairy Tale by Crockett Johnson

The Pea in the Peanut Butter by Allyn M. Stotz (self-published)

The last book mentioned can also fit into the 2-5 year old group. We'll be using *The Pea in the Peanut Butter* in the workshop as a great example of an exceptionally good beginning.

Many of the picture books (PB) can fit into either PB genre.

Chapter books for the 6 - 9 or 7 – 10 year old group

Children in this group are learning to read. The vocabulary and storyline is expanding, but clarity is still a must. These books may be labeled as 'early readers' or 'easy

readers' by educational publishers and are designed to be read by the child. The word count is usually between 5,000 and 12,000.

Examples of chapter books are:

Clarice Bean, that's me by Lauren Child
Because of Winn-Dixie by Kate DiCamillo.
The Boxcar Children by Gertrude Chandler Warner
The Stink Series by Megan McDonald

In regard to *Because of Winn-Dixie*, the protagonist is ten years old. **Since children tend to read-up (the protagonist will be 2 – 3 years older than the reader)**, the target audience is around 7 – 8 years old, placing it within this genre and possibly the younger end of middle grade.

Middle grade books

The middle grader is between 8 and twelve years old. The middle-grader will go for stories that he can associate with and characters he can form a bond with. The word count is usually a minimum of 20,000 to 25,000, depending on the publisher.

As the child is able to comprehend more and is maturing, so should the stories. Stories and conflict can be more involved and you can now introduce more than one protagonist or point of view. This age group can also be introduced to science fiction, fantasy, and mysteries.

Examples of middle grade books include:

Walking Through Walls by Karen Cioffi
The Lucky Baseball: My Story in a Japanese-American Internment Camp
by Suzanne Lieurance (this is considered historical fiction)
A Single Shard by Linda Sue Park

The early *Harry Potter* books by J. K. Rowling are also middle-graders.

Young adult books

This genre encompasses the twelve to sixteen and up age group. YAs can be edgy; plots and characters can be complex and serious issues addressed.

Examples of young adult books include:

An Audience for Einstein by Mark Wakely
The Rock of Realm by Lea Schizas
The Kane Chronicles by Rick Riordan
The *Twilight* series by Stephenie Meyer

The latter books in the *Harry Potter* series

A useful way to get a better idea of what the different genres consist of is to visit your local library and talk to the children's section librarian. She'll be able to show you books in each genre and give you tidbits of information on which are the most popular, which are classic, and much more.

A note: Many books can fall under two different genres. For example, *Fancy Nancy* is categorized for ages 4 and up, so can fit into two genres. Other examples are *Winn-Dixie* and *The Pea in the Peanut Butter*, as well as *Walking Through Walls* (it's also consider a YA). And, depending on the publisher, the word counts for genres can vary somewhat.

A final note: Ebooks and self-publishing have changed the face of children's writing. Authors now have easy means to publish without the long, drawn-out process of traditional publishing. But, as mentioned in the Introduction to this course, this is not a 'pass go' card that provides leeway for unprofessional and unpolished books. No matter what publishing path you're taking, take the time to do it right.

For a bit more on book genres check out these two articles:

Identifying Genre

<http://kidlit.com/2012/03/05/identifying-genre/>

The Difference Between School Readers and Picture Books

<http://robynopie.blogspot.com/2009/08/claire-saxbys-sheep-goat-and-creaking.html>

Writing Children's Books: Genres Within Genres

From the previous pages, you can see that genres consist of books for different age groups. But, there are also different subject matter genres within those genres.

Here is a list of some of the subject matter genres for children's writing. Some may be used for all of the age groups, while others will be specific to picture book, chapter, middle grade, and/or young adult.

Subject matter genres include:

Adventure
Comic
Crime
Docufiction
Epistolary
Faction
Fantasy
Historical Fiction
Horror
Mystery
Philosophical
Poetry
Romance
Saga
Satire
Science Fiction
Superhero
Tragedy
Thriller/Suspense
Urban
Westerns

To get a feel for the different genres, go to your library and ask the librarian for books on the various subject matters. Take the time to check a number of them out - you never know, you may develop a liking for one or two you're unfamiliar with.

Finding Children's Story Ideas

Sitting at the computer with a blank word document in front of you may be intimidating for a writer.

Hmmm. What should the story be about? You think and think. You gaze out the window. You draw a blank.

Alexander Steele wrote a short article in the October 2010 issue of *the Writer*, "Where can you find the seeds of a good story?" It was interesting to read that Herman Melville, author of *Moby-Dick*, had his own whaling adventures which he used to create a wonderful, everlasting story. Steele advises, "Probably the most fertile place to look for ideas is right inside the backyard of your own life."

You might be thinking you don't have close contact with children, so you don't have any experiences to draw on. Or, you may be so busy living your life and raising your children that you don't have time to stop and notice all the amazing story opportunities that are right in your own backyard. Well, even if these scenarios fit, you can take steps to rectify the situation.

Finding Story Ideas if You *Don't* Have Close Contact with Children

1. Turn on the TV. Yes, this is an excellent source for story ideas, as well as watching children's behavior. While it may be in the confines of a scripted show, the writers of these shows try to keep it as real as possible. Take note of the situations, the attitudes of the actors, the scenes, and everything else. Even children's cartoons have engaging storylines. It may be just the spark you need.

2. Go to a playground with notebook in hand. Watch the children play and listen to them talk. If you're a professional writer (ghostwriter), or you're already published, consider asking your local age appropriate school if you could sit in the lunchroom during lunch periods. A useful way to get a positive answer would be to first ask if you could give an author or writing presentation to the students. The principal would need to be sure you are a legitimate writer. Please note though, there may be legal and safety aspects a school would need to consider.

Note: If you do go to a playground or other area where there are children, be sure to inform parents/guardians of what you're doing. It'd be a good idea to bring a copy of one of your published books with you, so they feel comfortable that you are indeed a writer. It's a crazy world, always take precautions, and keep the safety of our children at the forefront.

3. Read newly published children's books, and reread ones you enjoyed as a child, then reinvent a story. This is a tip I took advantage of with my own children's fantasy

book. I read an ancient Chinese tale and reinvented it for a children's book. In a teleclass, I was recently reminded of this story idea source by multi-published children's writer Margot Finke.

Finke advised to study books you like; pay attention to why they work, then "craft an entirely new story." She explained that, "quirky and fresh" wins publishing contracts today.

Finding Story Ideas if You *Do* Have Close Contact with Children

1. Study the children you do have contact with, whether your own children, your grandchildren, or other relatives. Children are an amazing source of inspiration and ideas. They have an innate ability to make you feel: just looking at a picture of children may make you smile; hearing a baby laugh can actually make you laugh.

Watch the children, notice their mannerisms, body language, movements, attitudes and emotions, speech, and their interactions with other children and adults. You'll not only get story ideas, you'll also get dialogue and 'showing' descriptions.

2. If you have regular contact with children, you really shouldn't need any other steps, but if the age of your new story differs from the ages of the children you see, use the steps noted above for writers who don't have contact with children.

Writing for Young Children: Ten Basic Rules

I write for children and I also write marketing and health articles. Writing in multiple genres, I can tell you that writing for children can be much more challenging. When writing for children, there are guidelines to keep in mind to help your story avoid the editor's trash pile. Here is a list of 10 rules to refer to when writing for young children:

1. This is probably the most important item: be sure that your story does not suggest dangerous or inappropriate behavior.

Example: The protagonist (main character) sneaks out of the house while his parents are still sleeping.

This is a no-no!

2. Make sure your story has age appropriate words, dialogue and action.

Example: You put the word 'fragile' in your manuscript, is it age appropriate for a 3rd grader?

3. The protagonist should have an age appropriate problem or dilemma to solve at the beginning of the story, in the first paragraph if possible. Let the action/conflict rise. Then have the protagonist, through thought process and problem solving skills, solve it on his/her own. If an adult is involved, keep the input and help at a bare minimum.

Kid's love action and problem solving!

4. The story should have a single point of view (POV). To write with a single point of view means that if your protagonist can't see, hear, taste, touch, or feel it, it doesn't exist.

Example: "Mary crossed her eyes behind Joe's back." If Joe is the protagonist this can't happen because Joe wouldn't be able to see it.

5. Sentence structure: Keep sentences short and as with all writing, keep adjectives and adverbs to a minimum. And, watch your punctuation and grammar.

6. Write your story by showing through action and dialogue rather than telling.

If you can't seem to get the right words to show a scene, try using dialogue instead; it's an easy alternative. Just don't overdo it.

7. You also need to keep your writing tight. This means don't say something with 10 words if you can say it with 5. Get rid of unnecessary words.

Example: Watch for the overuse of the words such 'was.'

8. Watch the timeframe for the story. Try to keep it within several hours or one day.

9. Along with the protagonist's solution to the conflict, he/she should grow in some way as a result.

10. Use a thesaurus and book of similes. Finding just the right word or simile can make the difference between a good story and a great story.

Using these techniques will help you create effective children's stories. Another important tool to use in your writing tool belt is joining a children's writing critique group, as mentioned earlier.

No matter how long you've been writing, you can always use another set of eyes. If you're a beginning writer and unpublished, you should join a group that has published and unpublished members. Having published and experienced writers in the group will help you hone your craft.

Critiques Are Essential

As an editor, moderator of a children's writing critique group, and a reviewer for multiple genres, I read a number of manuscripts and books. Reading both well written books and books that lack polish, it's easy to tell which authors haven't bothered to have their work critiqued or edited.

Seeing the unnecessary and unprofessional mistakes of writers publishing unpolished work, I always include the importance of belonging to a critique group in articles or e-books I write about writing. Even experienced authors depend on the unique perspective and extra eyes that each critique member provides.

The critique group can catch a number of potential problems in your manuscript, such as:

1. Grammatical errors
2. Holes in your story
3. Unclear sentences, paragraphs, or dialogue
4. The forward movement of the story
5. Overuse of a particular word, adjectives, and adverbs
6. Unnecessary words to eliminate for a tight story

The list goes on and on. And, there are even more potential problems to be watched out for when writing for children. It's near impossible for even an experienced writer to catch all of his or her own errors.

Your critique partners will also provide suggestions and guidance. Note here, it is up to you whether to heed those suggestion and comments, but if all the members of your group suggest you rewrite a particular sentence for clarity, hopefully a light will go off and you'll pay attention.

Along with having those extras sets of eyes to help you along, you will begin to see your own writing improve. You will also be able to find your own errors and those of others much quicker. This will help you become a better and more confident writer.

Now, while the critique group does not take the place of an editor, they do help you get to the point where you think you're ready for submission. At this point, it is always advisable to seek an editor to catch what you and your critique group missed. And, believe me, there will be something in your manuscript that wasn't picked up on.

When joining a critique group, be sure the group has both new and experienced writers. The experienced writers will help you hone your craft through their critiques of your work. Be sure to join a critique group.

Writing Conferences, Workshops, Magazines, Books, and Articles

As you begin your writing journey, it's important to understand that there is much involved in writing. And, honing your writing craft will be an ongoing project.

This course will give you what's needed to write your children's story and submit it, but as with any craft, there's always more to learn. So, I'm including a number of writing conferences, workshops, books, and magazines you can look into.

Writing Conferences:

The Guide to Writers Conferences & Workshops

<http://writing.shawguides.com/>

This site lists global conferences and workshops

Writing Conferences, Workshops, Retreats, Centers, Residencies, Book & Literary Festivals

<http://www.newpages.com/writing-conferences/>

Lists events by location

The Muse Online Writers Conference

<http://themuseonlinewritersconference.com/>

A yearly one week writers' conference held in October. Excellent workshops covering writing (all genres) and marketing, and also provides pitch sessions.

Write on Con

<http://writeoncon.com/>

WriteOnCon is a totally free, interactive online Writer's Conference held annually during the summer (usually in August).

Catholic Writers Conference

<http://www.catholicwritersconference.com>

Free writing and marketing workshops that anyone can attend. It's usually held each February or March.

Writing Workshops and Classes:

Savvy Authors

<http://www.savvyauthors.com/vb/blog.php>

Writers on the Move

<http://writersonthemove.com>

Working Writers Club

<http://workingwritersclub.com>

Free Writing Groups

JacketFlap

<http://www.jacketflap.com>

Connects you to the work of more than 200,000 authors, illustrators, publishers and other creators of books for Children and Young Adults

AuthorsDen

<http://authorsden.com>

Where authors and reader come together - more than a million readers every month

Writers on the Move (Yahoo Group)

<http://finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/vbt-writersonthemove/>

Provides free monthly writing and marketing webinars or chat workshops.

Muse Conference Board (Yahoo Group)

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/MuseConferenceBoard/>

You need to attend the Muse Online Writers Conference to become a member.

You can also do an online search for online writing groups and/or children's online writing groups through Yahoo, or other email provider.

Magazines

The Writer

Writer's Digest

Writer's Chronicle

Poets and Writers

Books on Writing Referenced in this eCourse

HOOKED

Author: Les Edgerton, from *Writer's Digest Books*
About novel writing, beginnings in particular

Second Sight: An Editor's Talks on Writing, Revising, and Publishing Books for Children and Young Adults

Author: Cheryl B. Klein

Story Engineering

Author: Larry Brooks
Mastering the six core competencies of successful writing

Crafting Scenes

Author: Raymond Obstfeld

Articles to get You Started:

When You Can't Attend A Writer's Conference

<http://www.writersonthemove.com/2011/11/when-you-cant-attend-writers-conference.html>

Benefits of Outlining

<http://wordplay-kmweiland.blogspot.com/2011/09/benefits-of-outlining.html>

The Basics of Plot: A Classical Approach

<http://educationwantstobefree.blogspot.com/2011/09/basics-of-plot-classical-approach.html>

Creative Writing Prompts

http://workingwriterscoach.com/?page_id=4102

This is just the tip of the writing resource iceberg. As you join writing groups ask the experienced authors and writers for 'writing resources' they recommend.

They'll be more writing resources in the Bonus Lesson at the end of this course.

Your Assignment

Go to the library and browse through the different children's genres. Ask the librarian which are the most popular genres and within each genre which are the most popular books.

Decide what genre you want to write in. Remember, this is not set in stone . . . this is just the beginning.

Read, read, read, read, read, read, read . . .

Books that will be used as examples throughout the lessons:

Walking Through Walls, a middle grade fantasy adventure (used extensively for analysis – awarded the Children's Literary Classics 2012 Silver Award and took first place in the January 2012 Editors and Predators Reading Poll, Children's Novel category)

Stephanie's Ponytail, a picture book, (used rather extensively for analysis)

The Pea in the Peanut Butter, a picture book

A Single Shard, a middle grade book (received the Newbery Medal)

The Lucky Baseball, a middle grade historical fiction

Because of Winn-Dixie, a chapter book (received a Newberry Honor)

Caps for Sale, a picture book

While you don't have to buy any of these books, it'd be advisable to have them in hand to follow along with the analysis, especially for the two used extensively. See if they are available through your local library.