Picture Book Writing Pathways for Beginners with Andrea Rowe

Tips and suggestions for starting out when writing for children

Picture book genres

- **Nonfiction books** includes informational books, (auto)biography
- **Fiction** books include fantasy and realistic fiction
- **Fantasy** can be traditional fantasy, modern fantasy or science fiction
- **Realistic fiction** can be historical fiction or contemporary fiction
- **Concept and predictable** books (patterns and sequences, a what comes next book), **wordless books**, **beginning readers** and **board books**
- **Multicultural, First Nations, Own voices** narratives apply to all

Picture book basics

The essential elements of a contemporary picture book are:

Length / word count

- 32 pages (sometimes 24)
- Approx 450 – 500 words
- Sometimes you can go over or under depending on the **narrative style**
- There is no set work length but **avoid being too wordy**

Audience

- **Readership ages** require appropriate grammar / topics / relatable concepts
- **Picture book ages** 0 – 3, 5 -8 years, 8 – 13 years, 10 – 13 years
- Consider **your audience**

Content

- **Non-fiction:** prose writing that is informative or factual rather than fictional
- **Fiction:** literature in the form of prose that describes imaginary events and people
- **There should be a story.** It can be very simple, or it can be a roller coaster right full of twists and turns
- **Content:** The world is your oyster but moralising / preachy picture books are a bit on the nose

Language

- The very youngest readers need **simpler text**
- By **rhythmic, rhyming** allows you to stretch readers' vocabulary
- **Harder words** should be understandable from the context
- **Don't talk down** to your audience

Picture book prose versus rhyme

Poetry / rhyme is:

- Expressive and **artistic rhyming**
- Uses rhythm, imagery and figurative language to **create emotional impact**
- **Ideas are contained in lines** that may or may not be sentences
- Follows a **formatted rhythm** or to emphasize an idea
- Uses **metrical patterns**, such as rhyme and meter, to create a musical quality
- Is more condensed, **communicating a lot of meaning in a few words**

Prose

- Everyday **narrative writing**
- Straightforward writing with **limited decorations**
- Or **elaborations in writing** applications such as alliteration, characterisation, onomatopoeia
- **Ideas are contained in sentences** that are arranged into paragraphs
- **Traditional conventions** with capitalisation and punctuation
- Usually written in a linear fashion, with a clear **beginning, middle and end**

Picture book words and pictures

- Words and pictures **work together** and share storytelling task
- **Leave room** for the illustrator do their job
- Only give direction about **illustration** when absolutely necessary
- Consider **surprises, turn pages** and read out loud interaction

Writing picture book resources

- WordHippo.com
- Thesaurus.com
- Rhymezone.com
- Recording voice apps
- Notebook or laptop
- Time and space to write
- Be a collector of ideas
- Ask *What if*? when exploring your story direction

Overview of picture book plot

Focus on writing

Who

- Who are we meeting?
- Character and support characters

Where

- Where do they live?
- Setting now and setting where they wants to get to

What / why

- Give your character a problem
- Your action is where do they go / what do they need to do?

What / who

- What do they take. Who do they take?

- This is your Story Building

What

- What happens next? What do they encounter?
- Confront and consider your Problem

What

- What does your character do? Is there a surprise twist?
- What Action will they take?

And finally

- How does your story climax or end?
- What is your Resolution?

Kidlit writing connections and communities

Memberships and events:

Children's Book Council of Australia CBCA https://cbca.org.au
Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators SCWBI) https://www.scbwi.org
ASA Australian Society of authors https://www.asauthors.org
KidLit annual conference http://www.kidlitvic.com
CYA conference https://www.cyaconference.com

Podcasts to listen to:

Reading with a Chance of Tacos https://readingwithachanceoftacos.com/tacos-podcast/
The Sunshine House https://podcasts.apple.com/au/podcast/the-sunshine-house/id1622772038
Words and Nerds https://danivee.com.au/podcasts/
Middle Grade Mavens https://www.middlegradepodcast.com/
One more Page https://www.onemorepagepodcast.com/
Picture Book Summit https://picturebooksummit.com/podcast/
Book Smitten https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/booksmitten/id1552422241
Your Kids Next Read https://podcasts.apple.com/au/podcast/your-kids-next-read-with-allison-tait-and-megan-daley/
Totally Lit https://podcasts.apple.com/au/podcast/totally-lit/id1485705068
So you wanna be a writer? https://www.writerscentre.com.au/blog/category/podcasts/so-you-want-to-be-a-writer-podcast/
First Time Podcast with Kate Mildenhall and Katherine Collette https://thefirsttimepodcast.com/
Magic lessons https://www.elizabethgilbert.com/magic-lessons/
Better Reading https://www.betterreading.com.au/category/podcast/

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