

## CHILDREN'S WORKSHOP OCTOBER 2011

### WRITING A PICTURE BOOK TEXT

What do we mean by a picture book? It is not just a children's book with pictures. A picture book, for publishing purposes, has some specific requirements.

1. It is aimed at children under seven
2. Has a simple storyline
3. Has a short text – maximum 750 words and usually considerably less
4. Full colour illustrations throughout

AND.....most important of all

5. Because of the way the finished book is assembled, the number of pages is always in multiples of eight. The minimum number of pages is 24. This is usually picture books aimed two-and three year-olds. The more usual length is 32 pages. However, this includes *all* the pages, including the front and back-covers, publishers' information and title pages. This means you generally have only 24 pages (or twelve double-page spreads), in which to tell your story.

### TIPS FOR NEWCOMERS

1. Don't try to offer the full package (text and illustrations) even if you are, or are working with a really good artist. Publishers won't take a chance on complete unknowns. They will want to team you up with a recognised illustrator.
2. As a newcomer, no rhyming stories or stories with a specifically British storyline. In order to defray the costs of illustration, they will be hawking your story round the international book-fairs (Frankfurt, Bologna and London being the main ones) trying to get foreign publisher interested. Rhyme makes translation difficult. Well known children's writers such as Julia Donaldson (of Gruffalo fame!) can get away with because she is more or less guarantee good sales figures.
3. For the same reason, although humour is a good thing to use, be aware of purely cultural references that would only be funny in the UK .
4. Think visually. Give your illustrator scope for something interesting and different on each page. If the story takes place in only one location, the pictures could be awfully repetitive and boring.
5. Don't tell the illustrator his (or more likely her) job. Obviously if there is something you need to have in the picture which isn't apparent from the text, you must put in an

illustrator's instruction; otherwise, trust them to get on with it. Also remember that the pictures can do some of the work for you. For instance, you might have in mind:

*"Susie unwrapped her present. It was a beautiful paint-box."*

You don't need the second sentence; the illustration will show it more effectively.

6. Remember your story will probably be read aloud by mums, dads or teachers, so make sure it will be enjoyable for the adult as well as the child. Read it aloud yourself to see if anything sounds awkward, ambiguous, difficult to say or is likely to make an adult cringe!

### SUBMITTING A PICTURE-BOOK TEXT

Submissions for picture-book texts should be, as always, typed double-spaced, on one side of the paper only, but should indicate page breaks. Or it could be a series of numbered pages, each with its own text. Include a brief covering letter, giving a short synopsis and a few details about yourself. As with all children's publishing (make that ALL publishing) it is highly competitive business. So be professional; be prepared for rejection, but be stubborn. It is not necessarily the best writers who get published, just the most persistent!