

Let Me Help You

# Sell Your Homework

12-Week Course of Study:

*24 Ways to Write  
Stories for Kids*

*Lesson 1*

**THE PICTURE BOOK**

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# Introduction

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# HOW TO USE THIS COURSE

**Have you always wanted to write stories for kids but haven't known how to get started?**

**Are you a grandma or grampa who has lots of stories to tell to kids but doesn't know how to hold their attention?**

**Are you a homeschooling mother wanting a rich program to spark her brood to a love for writing?**

**This book is for you.**

Selling writers know secrets they don't share. This is a tattle-tale course of study that will teach you how to do what they do so you can sell stories the way they do.

Selling writers use their eyes. They see stories everywhere they turn.

Selling writers use their ears. They listen closely to the way people talk.

Selling writers love to read. They love books.

Selling writers notice colors and relish the sounds of words.

Selling writers develop a "sense of story," a sense of plot.

Selling writers are willing to work. They don't give up until they are

sure they have stories children and editors will love.

This course does several things. It examines story structures professional writers use to tell their tales.

Each lesson presents two of those structures and brings you samples, usually in a step-by-step format that is easy to follow.

Each lesson includes summaries of published story books, written using that lesson's structure. This not only proves these structures work, but it shows you the range of subjects you can include in such a book.

Following each summary, I've included a "YOUR TURN" suggestion so that you can take the ideas published writers present and use them to create your own stories. You cannot copy what other writers write, but you can share in their ideas.

For instance, let's say "Jack and the Beanstalk" is a published story. You cannot retell it, but you can take the idea and have the giant come down the beanstalk looking for the imp who stole his magic beans.

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These samples also clue you into which publishers are printing each kind of story.

Each week will include a sample bibliography sheet for those who wish to use your local library to find more samples of these structures.

You might call the librarian first, asking her to sift out of her collection stories that, for instance, start out with one character and gather into a cluster—like “Little Half Chick” or “Turkey-Lurkey” or “The Bremen-town Musicians.”

Then by the time you arrive, she’ll have a stack of books for you to study. If she can’t provide this service, go quick-scanning down the shelves.

If you’re working with youngsters, start them reading the first book you find or they may become distracted by other books and lose interest in the topic at hand. Once you have a stack for them, work ahead so you have a list of books to use with the next week’s assignment.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** You will have more selling success if you aim for the children’s magazine market than for the book market. Magazines have an appetite for stories. Book publishers are unusually selective.

As you do your research into published book stories, note what of the story and how much of the story is written on each page. Preplan your

book and know how many words (on the average—and it will vary) accompany each scene in the story.

As you study the structure, try to figure out not only how the writer did his task but how and why the story interested the book editor.

### **Note for Homeschooling parents**

**You may wish to take more than one week to cover each chapter of this course in your effort to fortify your youngsters’ literary skills.**

**This is a course that a family of students working on several grade levels can use. All the children will study each structure and will write a story on their own grade level.**

**As you, the parent, read and teach the text, you familiarize your students and yourself with a given story structure. Examine the sample and duplicate it there at home.**

**Then go to the library and study the market.**

**As your students see how others did what they are trying to do, they will realize the assignment is more than busy work. They’ll have a goal of writing a book the way grown-ups do.**

**Perhaps you will want them to illustrate their own book and bind it with construction paper and staples. Have them prepare a book cover with a title/ author/illustration on**

the front, a synopsis of the book on the back and something about the author (themselves) on the inside back flap.

As they become conscious of a market, they may be inspired to write for others, to write carefully, to learn the craft of writing so that they can send their very best work to an editor.

Realize, editors are unusually selective; and, as a rule, they resent receiving books from children.

Let your children send their book on its own merit, never mentioning in the cover letter that will introduce the book to the editor that the author is a child or a beginner.

Never send a handwritten story to an editor! Proofread every story before it is sent. It must be letter-perfect.

Include a self-addressed stamped envelope if you want the story returned. It is cheaper, however, to include a self-addressed postcard pre-drawn on the back so the editor can check the appropriate blank to show his decision. Tell him to discard the story if he does not want it.

Keep a record of all expenses, paper, stamps, everything, once stories go out to editors. These expenses are tax deductible.

Also, guard your children against disappointment. Editors receive and reject thousands of books and stories each year. These are

books written by both amateur and professional adults.

If you do sell, it's a cause to celebrate. Contact your local newspaper.

Take pictures. Send up flares.

### Tell Me a Story

Now, before we begin chapter one, let's examine the challenge of writing stories for children.

Many people say they can't tell stories. It's not that they don't know any; it's just that they can't put the things together that will keep a child interested to the end.

They may have heard a wonderful story that kept everyone at the office giggling all day. But when they come home and face the youngster clambering for a story, they forget the punch line or they forget the order of events or how the drama built slowly to the climax.

And keeping a child interested is not all that difficult. Sometimes all he really wants is the cuddling that goes with the story. He'll listen to anything. He'll even take old-time stories—stories of what it was like when Daddy was a boy. He wants to know where Dad lived, who his friends were, what games they played, what mischief they perpetrated. He knows he's tapped a source of supply that's unending if only Dad or Mom or Grandma would consent. All of them had interesting childhoods.

## Help Wanted

**Actually**, story telling is not all that difficult. Look at the endless shelves of books in children's libraries. Someone has struck mother lode. But what most people need is someone or some textbook or lessons on the internet that will spell out the secrets no one ever tells story tellers—or would-be ones.

My father died when I was four, so I had no one to teach me to box or make a model airplane or hit a baseball. And all through grade school I would stand beside home plate with the bat resting heavily on my shoulder. I would stand and stand and stand, waiting for the pitcher to throw the ball slow enough or high enough or low enough or . . .

**I so desperately** wanted to hit the ball and become the class sensation for a day. My friends would say, "That's okay, Dickie; take your time." But the rest of the team—my side as well as the other side—would moan and scream that I should swing at anything and just let the game move on. Eventually, I'd swing and miss by a mile. But I'll remember to my dying day the one day when I swung and actually did send that ball to the other end of the playground.

Countless would-be writers and story-tellers are standing beside home plate, waiting for the right thought or the right words, the right inspiration or the right mood. They can't get on with the game because no one has

stopped to really show them how to play at a cost they can afford.

## A Friend

In a sense, we're in a one-on-one game. We need the personal attention of someone who cares, someone who will pitch and pitch and pitch until we get the hang of it and find that—oh, yes—we do have to keep our eyes open when we swing and we do have to keep our eyes on the ball.

**These** particular lessons are designed to be that kind of friend—if lessons on the internet can be a friend. I can't tell you when to write or where, but I can tell you how and what for. I can give you a series of structures successful story-tellers use. I'll present stories professional writers have published and I'll use some of the stories I've written for examples. And let me say at the outset that my stories are not brilliant. Their purpose is to get you to say, "Is that all there is to it? Oh, I can do better than that!"

## The Task

**But writing** for kids isn't easy. Know this at the start. Few of us can just sit down and rattle off brilliance. Be prepared to rewrite, rewrite, rewrite to make your story the best you can. Be prepared to judge it and refine it, to toss it and start again. Avoid the mindset that says "what I do is perfect the first time and ready for the world to love and admire."

Does that discourage you at the start? Are you like the “Cheerful Cherub” creation of Rebecca McCann who said,

**My teachers criticize me  
And say I loaf and shirk.  
I’d do great things to show them  
Except it’s so much work.**

\* \* \*

### **A Ministry**

Although writing for children “ain’t easy,” it does have its own rewards. What can be so thrilling as to have a room full of restless children hanging on your every word? What can give you so exhilarating a lift than to receive a letter from someone who received the Lord Jesus as his Savior from reading a story YOU wrote?

**By learning** to build suspense, by learning to delay the climax of the story to the last possible moment, by capitalizing on inherent drama, you will develop a ministry with story telling.

**These lessons are as much for the oral story teller as they are for the writer.** These same structures work for both.

### **The Competition**

It takes time to learn to swing at the ball. It’s called practice, practice, practice. That’s how professionals got to be professionals. We complain that our youngsters are too TV-oriented to listen to the Gospel. It’s just that the

TV writers have mastered the arts of story-telling and we have not. They have created winsome, believable characters and we have not. They read widely. They watch and listen everywhere they go. They know what kind of person they themselves are, and they write from their own life and imagination and experience.

### **Look Inside**

**What kind of person are you?** Who you’ve been matters as much as who you are. Where you’ve been, how you’ve been, when you started, what you’ve done with your life and what life has done to you all matter. You make them matter if you’re going to write or tell stories to anybody—especially to children. They will be the grist of what you have to say because they display the subject matter—YOU.

### **You—the One and Only**

**Remember,** you are so totally unique to this world and to time that you stand as a distinct person, known to God from all eternity—identifiably known. He’s numbered the hairs on your head. He’s that interested in you.

No one has ever lived like you. You are the only one in the history of the world with your genes, your inheritance of character and quality, your mother’s nose and eyes, your father’s chin, your Aunt Martha’s temper, your great grandmother’s warts.

**Only you** have lived on West Sixth Street and then on Putnam Avenue and then on East Ninth. Only you were left in the rain when you were six months old by a forgetful grandmother. Only you caught cold and developed bronchitis that plagued your whole life. Only you were your father's darling and the sworn enemy of your brother and the boys in the neighborhood. Only you embody all these.

### **You—the reservoir**

And it is from this vast wealth of information and perception that you alone can draw. A world of secret impressions resides in the folds of your memory, and you alone can retrieve it for mankind.

**Your life** is a fathomless inkwell into which you may dip endlessly. False pride can cork the bottle, however, You may also think that no one is interested. But it's up to you to interest them—and that is where the writer's craft comes in. Flannery O'Connor says, "Anybody who has survived his childhood has enough information about life to last him the rest of his days."

### **Harness them**

Not only must you recall what you have done, but you must get control of your memories.

Who peopled that world with you?  
What did they look like?  
How did they act?

**What were** doorknobs like in those days?

How did the icebox smell (if you lived in the 1930s) when you opened the door and found the ice had melted?

What did the cars look like? What memories do you have of riding in cars then?

What were your impressions when you learned that they had invented portable radios or television or radar or satellites?

**What were** you doing in the 1950s? 1960s? 1970s? 1980s? 1990s? 2000s?

What houses did you pass as you walked to school? What lady yelled at you to "keep off my grass!"

Name all the teachers you've had through all twelve grades.

What was the name of the boy/girl who slapped you or kissed you in fourth grade and why did he/she do it?

### **Be a sponge**

**Writers** and story-tellers must soak up their world. You can do that only by watching the world closely and by listening and reading (especially newspapers) with the intent to repeat what you've heard. If your mother, brother, sister pokes you and scolds, "Stop staring." Forget it. Keep on staring. Just close your mouth. Tell your critic you are doing your research and that your teacher (me) told you to do it.

Some people can repeat whole conversations in the order of each speech. You can learn to do that. You can

learn to analyze a story being told so that you do remember it and can build the suspense and recall the punch line with all the accuracy and intensity of the natural story teller who told it to you the first time.

### **Prying eyes**

Another part of the craft comes in learning what to do with the drafts when you write of the gifts and rich heritage you have. To do this best, you first need a hiding place. You need a place where you can store your memory in written form without the danger of prying eyes discovering your secrets. You need to be able to write down everything you remember with complete freedom. A brief case with a spinning lock may have to do if you don't have a hatbox in the attic. Sometimes an artful contriver can locate a crossbeam in a basement or an old spaghetti box on the back of a top shelf to hide papers in. But find some place and then proceed to fill it.

### **Isolate the years**

Try numbering sheets of paper chronologically and then recording on each your history during that year of your life. It's doubtful that you will remember your childhood well enough to go month by month. But most people can remember that from this age to that they lived in such-and-such house.

**Simply** the act of writing your recall will be beneficial to you, for the

act of writing begets other acts of writing. All writing becomes easier for you the more you do it. So use your personal recall to prime your pump.

You may wish to start writing letters to your relatives to recount to them the things you are remembering. You may strike gold this way too for they may respond by telling you things about yourself that you never knew. They may have pitied you or hated you or loved you secretly. One short story was written to this exact point.

### **Secret memories**

A middle-aged couple decided that they had had enough visits from a friend they'd entertained at their house since all of them were children. She'd kept coming on visits all their life long, and they'd had enough of her. On this visit they would tell her not to come again.

They put telling her off until the last night. They didn't want to spoil the visit with unpleasantness. That last night they got to talking about their childhood, and she told the husband how all the girls in his school secretly loved him and how they would plague the barber when he went for a haircut. They each wanted pieces of his hair. Just to have him talk personally to any one of them would leave the poor girl breathless . . . and on and on.

Needless to say, that friend was never told not to come back. Her ability to unlock the treasures of the past

made her a welcomed visitor all her days.

Your ability to recite your impressions will do the same for you. But we're a breed who cannot even recall our pastor's message last Sunday morning. By Tuesday, it's gone forever.

### **Sharing**

We need to take lessons in listening. We need to become conscious of structure and learn to remember by listening for it. Every speaker has an outline. Careful listeners discover it. Scrupulous listeners write it down. Listeners who wish to share that message with others review their notes.

The same principles apply to writers of stories wishing to share their impressions. The technique begins as the novice story teller reads stories others have written. He learns to analyze them and to discover the secrets of writing others have discovered.

### **The Hard Way**

Somerset Maugham, I'm told, went so far as to copy word for word the writings of authors he respected. He wanted the flavor of their style to become the flavor of his style.

Other writers have counted the words in sentences and have then parsed them—determining that the first word was an adjective, the second a noun, the third an adverb, the fourth a verb. Then they count the syllables of those words and begin con-

triving a sentence that matches the masterful original in every way. Whew! What a painstaking way to learn a craft. Yes, it is a method; but I wouldn't recommend it.

We don't want ponderous prose. That's why these lessons are written. A story isn't communicable until you find a way to tell it, a structure that fits it like a glove.

### **The Solution**

Here are 24 ways to write your story. Sometimes you will have to go down the table of contents at the front of each lesson to find a structure that fits your story best. Experiment with different structures until you find the right one. Then, wonder of wonders, if you do it well, your reader will be oblivious to what you've done. Your structure will be hidden behind "vinyl siding." He'll never know the boards behind it are there because structure doesn't show.

Don't let anyone tell you that you cannot learn how to write. You can. Read all the texts on the craft you can find and then begin to write. It's like reading cookbooks. You can know in what order to put the oils and spices and when to add the chicken and sweet potatoes; but unless you do it sometime, you are no cook. You've got to get out the apron and wash your hands and open the refrigerator door. If you are going to mix up a delight, you've got to start stirring.

## Styles

As you work your way through these lessons, you will discover 24 styles of writing stories for juveniles. (Actually, these same styles will work for stories for adults as well as for novels.) You will be asked to pay attention to the structures on which these stories hang and to reproduce your own work—tell your own story—hang your own linen on the same clothesline.

## Ballad Weavers

And here we get back to the essential grist you have to work with—the threads of your life that will weave that linen. The people you have known, the houses you've lived in, the schools you've attended, the pets and friends and conflicts you've had, the joys and sorrows—everything you've experienced becomes material on which you can draw.

But you've got to use finesse. One author was sued because people saw themselves in unsavory situations in one of his later novels. They recognized the town in the story as their town and the neighborhood as their neighborhood. Even though he had a disclaimer that any similarity between persons living or dead was coincidental, the suit was threatened.

But if you change the names of the people and the towns, no one can say his privacy was violated. How can he prove that he himself has been damaged? Now, certainly discretion and

Christian integrity must be part of the writer's character. If what we write will hurt or embarrass someone, we shouldn't write it.

But the character of my fifth grade teacher can very really become the character of a major or minor character in one of my stories. The few of us who knew her have scattered far and wide. She wouldn't even remember me if she read my book—it's been that long. And many women have that same character. It's just that I can describe it vividly because I remember her vividly.

## Your People

I want you to write about characters who are universal but distinctive. We've got to have reality here. How does that character—and it may be yourself or a close or distant relative or a figment of your imagination—

Talk?

Sit down?

Stand up?

Respond to irritations?

What makes him lose his temper?

How does he respond to love and affection or criticism or threat?

Can you take him into a plot where his life is threatened and handle him believably? Fiction after all is about trouble.

**“Trouble is a direct consequence of desire. Characters are living embodiments of desire. A character without desire is immobilized. A corpse is without desire. . . . Contemporary fiction is about people**

**who want something and don't know how to get it or are prevented—by internal or external forces—from finding it. Or if they get what they want, it's not what it seemed when it existed only as a desire.”**

(Rick DeMarinis, *The Art and Craft of the Short Story*, pp. 83-84)

### **Realize**

Or can you take your character into a plot where he comes to realize something he didn't know before that changes his life? If you know him well, you should be able to draw on that knowledge. You should be able to discern what forces are working in him, be he teddy bear or four-year-old child. Then use what you know to wake the reader up to know it, too.

Interestingly, it is that knowledge that will get you out of jams. Write your character into a corner where even you don't know how he'll get out of a pickle, and he'll get himself out because the attributes that are part of his character will go to work. Many writers have no idea when they begin a book where it will end. Characters emerge with a will of their own and a destiny uniquely theirs. If your brother never apologized to anyone in his life and if you have patterned a character on him, you'll know that he will not use that method of escape in your story to get out of a tricky situation.

If you hit a dead end and don't know where to go, get up and go.

Take a walk. Drink some tea. Pull a weed. Take a shower. It'll come to you. It always does.

### **The Setting**

And it is the knowledge of a setting that will keep you from contradicting yourself in your story. I used Gondar, the town in Ethiopia where I taught school after I got out of college, for the setting of *They Called Him Shifta*, a novel. Since I had been there and knew the town like the back of my hand, I never had any problem being consistent in where my characters were going and where they'd been as they went around town and into the outlying towns of the province.

And in handling “business,” I knew my facts. I knew that many houses had openings between the kitchen and dining room used by the servants to pass the dishes back and forth. My hero called to the cook through that opening and discovered that an eavesdropper had been listening to every word of a strategic conversation.

As you can visualize the shapes of rooms, their arrangement, the placement of furniture—all the business of setting—you can utilize it realistically and satisfy the reader.

### **Responses**

We writers need to be students of behavior as well. We need to know that Jack's mother will become furious when he brings home seeds instead of gold coins. No wonder she

threw them out the window. Mothers in your stories will react the same way.

We need to recognize that conspiracy never stops. The wicked queen will follow Snow White until she is sure the girl is dead, dead, dead.

It's at this point that many of us remain amateurs. We don't know people well enough. And this is why so many television programs are so captivating. Their writers know people—what they will do in a crisis and how they will respond beyond their own recognized capabilities to meet a threat.

Too often, we Christians are the people of the pat solution. God comes down and works a miracle, and our hero is saved. Now, that's true in salvation; but it's not necessarily true in life.

I ran out of money and was starving during my graduate studies at a California university. I prayed for money, but it didn't come. I got so I could barely get out of bed. But no pot of gold landed at my feet. No forgotten uncle appeared to write a check that would pay for schooling, room and board. I had to work it out myself and the university gave me a scholarship.

We've got to be willing to let our character suffer and then let him find his way out of his dilemma himself. This is one of the hardest parts of good writing. Study how other writers handle this.

## **Research**

The serious writer will study, but he must also be himself. I know that many books on writing say that the serious writer will write for two hours every day. Or was it three? I consider myself a serious writer, but I don't. But once I start, I'll go for hours and hours and not even notice the passage of time.

Also, I consider thinking and conspiring just as important as putting my body in front of a word processor. Researching through my memories—things I can do while I wash the car or pull weeds—is as much a part of the creative process as typing. Keep this mindset when a superior—a dad, a wife or mother—comes up with a project that you must do NOW! Get up promptly and do it now and keep the creative juices flowing in your mind. If you say yes and don't do it, you turn on your spigot of nagging words. They will turn off your creative faucet and stop your flow of words.

## **Another Gospel**

And I do teach the gospel of learning to write fluently. When I teach college writing classes, I encourage my students to get in the habit of writing two words at the top of every blank sheet they have trouble filling. The two words are "Dear Mom." Letters home every day helped to uncork the fluency bottle and end writer's block. Only the steady output of words day by day can do that. Many

of them learned to write well, and I know their mothers loved me.

### **Study**

But rearranging your life to follow someone else's pattern for success can often be artificial. If I tell you I do some of my most creative thinking in the shower, will you stop taking baths and start taking showers? I hardly think so.

Some writers knit, walk, paint, play solitaire while they wait for their ideas to sort. And many others keep on feeding their family and doing the daily wash.

But the point remains. The serious writer will study.

### **Editors Only**

And he/she should never (well, hardly ever) let anyone but an editor read what he writes. Sometimes, members of one's own family are his most devastating critics.

"Mother, you're not going to let anyone see that!!!" can cripple a writer—any writer. Even writers' clubs can wreck what might have been a very fine writer when members go at a piece fang and claw.

Someone has said we writers are the only ones who shoot our wounded. We're too quick to judge the works of beginners. Have patience. Be kind with your suggestions, always beginning a critique sheet with praise. Encourage your fellow writer to study the printed works of those who've

caught the rainbow and find out what they did that turned them into a success.

It takes a very unusual person to help and encourage a writer while judging his material at the same time. This is the work of experienced writing teachers and thoughtful, gentle editors—not other beginners.

### **Craftsmen**

Finally, permit me a restatement. As writers, we Christians must become craftsmen. We must be creative. We'll get nowhere with haphazard thinking. We must be cunning artisans.

We need to ask the Lord to give us unusual wisdom and skill. Exodus 36:1 says we artists must be "wise-hearted" folk "in whom the LORD (has) put wisdom and understanding to know how to work all manner of work for the service of the sanctuary." Our stories need insight. We want our story to strike a chord in a reader's heart.

But just because we know a structure and follow it, we have no guarantee that any editor will want it. We can spend a year polishing it and still not sell it. As Rick DeMarinis says in his book, "There is no magic formula that will make hard work, commitment, inspiration, taste and good luck unnecessary" (pp. 9-10).

### **The Easies**

So much religious writing can be so much like modern religious music and so much religious practice. The easy-believism of our day carries over into the easy-thinking, easy-speaking and easy-writing current now. Much religious fiction is being laughed at in the marketplace. The harmonic progressions of many praise songs are childish. The cadence of their poetry is so often inartistic. Being religious doesn't make something automatically good. People call praise songs "7-11"—seven words sung 11 times.

### **Critical Question**

We need to ask, "Must every book for Christian kids have a spiritual message?"

Most editors of books for Christian kids these days seem to be ambivalent. Some say yes; others, no. So some that get published may not have a Christian message. True, you don't have to have the Romans Road in every book. But certainly there should be a red string of righteousness showing. There should be some evidence of Christian life in sight. You want to use talking animals, vegetables, minerals? Let them express Christian motives for their actions.

But the writer who wants to sharpen his skills and write for the secular press should be encouraged to do so. When a book manuscript wins the approval of a savvy secular editor, Christian publishers take note. Then

they are the more impressed when you come along with a fine manuscript.

Many Christian writers have realized we're in the service of the sanctuary. They have learned to polish their skills. They have matured in their craft and turned out many splendid books.

### **What's Next?**

To help you do just that, let me repeat what happens next.

Each chapter will give you general instruction and examples of the kind of story we're considering.

After that, you'll be given a suggestion, titled "YOUR TURN" that will give you an idea of a comparable story you might write. It's a good idea to go to your local children's library where you can look for other stories in that category. Read the magazines for children. Open the books. Examine all their ingredients. See how the professional storytellers have handled these challenges and then go to your desk to write one like it.

Finding similar stories in the library will help you in several ways. You see that many writers are using these same structures. You put your analytical skills to work to find what intrigued the editor about that particular one. Then you try to perceive what you must do to publish one like it. You'll know enough not to copy his subject matter, his talking fish. You'll see what he did with the structure and

do likewise with your four-year-old boy.

### **The Nitty-Gritty**

Make notes regarding the publisher, his address, and the kind of story it is. Build a reference list so you have a list of publishers who buy that kind of book. The *Writer's Market* text as well as your librarian can supply you with information about each publisher.

So, to summarize the over-riding goal of these lessons, I want to train Christian writers to write and to love doing it as well as to alert them to finding stories hiding everywhere—sometimes between the covers of someone else's book where we let the successful writer give us lessons on how to write.

Ideas cannot be copyrighted. Again, you can take another writer's idea and use it on your own, but you cannot take his words.

Not all the "YOUR TURN" suggestions will be religious. Many will simply want you to exercise your

mind and your imagination. Use them as—exercises.

As you present down-to-earth characters you'll win the readers you desire. But let some of them have a heart for God.

### **Our Goal**

Our challenge is that we must write as those who love God ourselves and who value all He has done and is doing in this world. Certainly we should look for opportunities to refer lovingly to our Savior or to His people or to His interests somewhere in our story. That's the ideal.

I preach what I practice. My Beanpole books and other novels are available at low cost in another place on this website.

Let's bring the rich heritage of our own personal life and experience to bear upon producing great books for the Christian child. There's no reason why we can't write children's classics.

After all, we serve the Lord Christ!

Professor Dick

*Let's Write a*

# Picture Book

**No other medium of print is as exhaustless in scope and possibilities as the picture book. Everything in this wide world can be its subject—with or without words.**

The rascals look so easy, especially the ones that are picture only. Let's start here, thinking of pictures only. Everybody loves a picture.

You don't need your camera to go this route. You need an eye that separates you from the millions of people who have cameras. You need to think "outside the box" and to train your children to do the same.

**As you look** around your house, your neighborhood, your town, plot your strategy. One photographer did. He found letters of the alphabet hidden everywhere. He saw them in wrought iron fences, spokes of wheels, hubcaps, banisters. Where will you find them? in the kitchen, the garage, the basement?

See the variety of fixtures, windows, doorways, corners of houses, gutter gardens. Look for dinosaurs along river banks. See caterpillars lined up at stop signs. See beetles at an air show.

**You can set up** your camera beside a freeway going in or a house being

built or a high-rise office building going up and take one picture every day to show the activity (or inactivity) occurring from day to day. I always say it takes four men to build anything: two to work and two to watch.

You may want to illustrate that old rhyme, "To market, to market to buy a fat pig. Home again, home again, jig-gity jig." Show what a trip to the market is like or a visit to the library or church. Picture books show how the trip begins, commences and how we return back to where we started. Non-reading pre-schoolers find these books fascinating, and they can "read" them aloud to their little sister.

If you go abroad, take your camera and do a book. You can deduct most of your expenses on your income tax if you can show that you finished and submitted the book. Children in other lands and their daily life can make compelling stories.

**Life in the animal**, insect and reptile worlds from day to day can be as intriguing. Whether rabbit, mosquito or garden snake, daily life for them is full of mystery and thrill. Why, the tiny mosquito has six moving parts inside its proboscis!

You can simplify vocations, transportation, space, science, the arts, his-

tory, geography, mathematics for children and harness them for them via your camera, your computer or brush.

The sky's the limit. An enterprising you and/or your children can put together with a simple camera, film and 8 x 10 prints some marvelous books.

**Picture books with words don't escape so easily.** Those words—even if there are only one hundred of them—are a fine art in themselves. They take time because there is more to it than following a vocabulary list of words of one or two syllables.

And that is what this series of lessons will be all about. It's making you (and/or your children) into a craftsman.

The craft lies in developing your own imagination that originates the story line itself. I'll prompt you to make that line compelling, intriguing, fun.

Usually, the youngster who picks up the book will be attracted by the pictures. But that book will become a treasure if you sing the story right into his heart.

Kids don't know anything about plot (what's at stake in the essential story), viewpoint (who the narrator is), climax (the solution to the problem), complications (roadblocks that make the solution hard to come to) or characterization (what your characters are like). But their attention is caught and held when YOU do.

**They don't know** anything about nouns and participles and adjective

clauses, but they'll love it when YOU do. Writers are more successful when they know their grammar because there are lots of ways to write a sentence.

Your stories will have a narrative hook beginning so the reader is caught with your first sentence.

You will hint near the beginning what your hero/heroine wants to get or find or do. You will think of roadblocks that will keep him from reaching his goal too easily and swift falling action once the climax has been reached.

Your words will have melody. Children love the melody of words. They love rhythm in the reading. They love it when the story is so beautifully told they are not conscious of how it is written.

Such writing will make it easier for the illustrator to do his work.

**Let's think** about the mind of the nursery-age (2 and 3) and pre-school age (4 and 5) child. In a sense, do you have one? Will you be able to take them through the known and venture into the unknown?

Very little things are so important to children at this age—a star earned for bringing a Bible to Sunday School, a teddy bear or doll or blanket.

**Do you know** what trauma can occur in the heart of a three-year-old when he finds his mother has washed his “goggie” and he finds he can see it through the stove window drying in the oven? This happened in our house—once.

Every properly raised youngster lives a life over which he and she have very little control. They live at the beck and call of someone else. They learn that a sweater is a garment you put on when mother is chilly.

Yet they learn to trust others. For this reason it is very easy for them to understand spiritual matters; and this is a dimension of writing for children that all writers need to know. Children this age can understand about God, the Lord Jesus, the Bible, church and matters of conduct.

**For instance**, a child aged two or three can understand that God loves him, that He made everything, and that He listens when we talk to Him.

He knows that the Lord Jesus was the Christmas Baby who grew to be a Man. He can understand that the Lord is his special Friend and even that He is God the Son whom the Father sent into the world.

He can understand that the Bible is God's Book, a special Book that tells us how to make God happy, a Book to be loved, a Book with good stories in it.

Church is the building where people who love the Lord Jesus meet together to learn about God. He learns it's where he meets his friends. It's his church—where he belongs.

He learns that he can please God by obeying those who tell him what to do and not to do. He learns it pleases God when he shares his things with others.

**The four and five year old** preschooler can understand that God is loving and good, all-wise and all-powerful. He can perceive that the Lord Jesus is his helper in daily life.

He understands that the Bible can speak to us, telling us what God wants us to believe and to do. It has verses we can learn that will comfort us when we have to go to sleep at night and when we have to give up our favorite truck to the little boy who comes to visit. As he matures, he grows in thoughtfulness, sympathy and sharing.

The beginner understands that he is a part of his church family.

Church is a place he can bring his gifts. And this is particularly important—he learns that God loves him good or bad. As that verse of “Jesus Loves Me” says:

**Jesus loves me when I'm good,  
when I do the things I should.  
Jesus loves me when I'm bad,  
though it makes Him very sad.**

So often we build guilt into our children by telling them that God only loves them when they are good. Then when they're bad—and they know when they are bad—they tend to despair of God's love.

How do you put this into 100-word stories?

You limit.

It's the same technique you use in any story you write. You focus on one aspect, one element of a greater truth,

and you use all your ingenuity to create something new and fresh.

**“Because children do develop so rapidly in the preschool years, a writer can think of books in terms of books for two-year-olds (simple but lively), for three-year-olds (a bit more complex—a bit more exploratory), for four-year-olds (full of answers to endless questions), and for five- and six-year-olds (reaching out to a wider world).”**

(Jean E. Karl, *How to Write and Sell Children's Picture Books*. Cincinnati: Writers Digest Books. 1994, p. 35. A wonderful book!)

Much is being said these days of mainstreaming the handicapped child right into the flow of life in public school, Christian school and Sunday School. “Mindy’s Special Day” could follow a young victim of cerebral palsy right into the beginners’ class and illustrate how the children show their love to Mindy by sharing with her and tenderly caring for her. They learn that God made Mindy the way she is just as He made them the way they are. He loves her just as He loves them. Wonderful stories can be made this way.

**And these stories may never get to an editor.** They may become part of the family treasure as Mother makes a home-made picture book about family adventures. Sometimes these are cherished by a child much more than a “boughten” book.

“Mommy made it for me”—what more beautiful words than these!

Many stories can be made from family trips and family life—the things that happen in the home.

We took a group of children to the beach when our Joel and Janice were youngsters; and I watched all the children pair up and run away, leaving one small boy all by himself. My picture book starts at that point.

**My first picture** would show the boy walking on the sand alone while in the distance the other children are running away.

My title is “What Does a Lonely Boy Do at the Sea?” I rejected the word “beach” because it’s a word Westerners use. Easterners talk about going to the “shore.”

Each page of my book sports a picture of my boy using the paraphernalia along the beach as he amuses himself. He starts out wearing a patterned jacket (it illustrates better than a solid-colored coat). During the course of the day he begins discarding his clothes one by one as the day gets hotter. He’ll play beside the water for the most part and eventually end up in the water.

I have 28 entries to allow four pages for title and copyright information in front and for an author-bio and end sheet in the back.

## **What Does a Lonely Boy Do by the Sea?**

By Dick Bohrer

1. **He’s a lion tamer.** (The picture shows him walking along the water’s

edge, using a tail of seaweed for a whip.

2. **He's a logger.** (And we see him walking carefully along a log that has washed ashore.)

3. **He's a sluice-digger.** (We see him building a canal in the sand by the surf's edge.)

4. **He's a coastguardman** as he stands along the shore looking out to sea. (His hand shades his eyes.)

5. **He's a builder-engineer.** (He knows how to build castles out of sand. He's already got the wall up and now he's working on a tower.)

6. **He's a fisherman.** (He holds a stick out over the water, pretending he has a line.)

7. **He's a clam digger,** digging holes in the sand.

8. **He's a lighthouse keeper.** (He stands on a rock ever so straight. Is his face lighted by a smile?)

9. **He's a jelly-spreader.** (He's smearing the jetsam he's found at surf's edge all over the sand.)

10. **He's a snake charmer.** (He's surrounded by a number of seaweed tails.)

11. **He's a rock-cutter.** (He's using the outer edge of his hand to pretend to slice a rock.)

12. **He's a shell-splitter.** (He's using the rock to open shells.)

13. **He's a dam-builder.** (He has a puddle of sea water he's trying to keep from returning to the ocean.)

14. **He's a beach-comber** as he scavenges for yuckies.

15. **He's a hill-slider.** (He comes sailing down a dune on his tummy, arms spread wide.)

16. **He's a cookie-cutter.** (He's shaping cookies in the sand in a "roll 'em and cut 'em and mark them with T" kind of action.)

17. **He's an acrobat.** (He tries to do cartwheels in the sand and stand on his head.)

18. **He's a cave dweller.** (On the Oregon coastline there are a number of small caves.)

19. **He's a China-finder.** (Obviously, he'll be digging deep holes.)

20. **He's a rock skimmer.** (And he's trying to dance rocks out across the fairly calm waters.)

21. **He's a surf-dodger.** (We picture him rushing back from an incoming wave.)

22. **He's a sand-painter.** (He's using dry sand over wet sand to make pictures.)

23. **He's a whirling dervish.** (Most lonely kids end up whirling like a top to see the world stand on end.)

24. **He's a Robinson Caruso.** (He's staring at a footprint.)

25. **He's a foot-dipper.** (Now we've got him beginning to get wet.)

26. **He's a squatter.**

27. **Oops! He's a pushover.** (A wave has knocked him down.)

28. **He's one tired kid.** (We see him dragging himself back home (or back to Mama) as the other kids are seen in the background returning, too.)

There. You have a pattern picture book to do variations on. You can't take a boy at the beach because I already have. But you can put him as a lost boy (or girl) alone in a market or at a circus or at a family reunion or first day at school or lost among the tents around the tabernacle in Israel's desert. There are endless possibilities as I mentioned earlier.

Now, how do you discern whether what you write or what your child writes is publishable?

Let's learn from published writers themselves. These people once faced a blank sheet of paper or a blank screen. What do they know that you don't? Or, what do you need to know that they do?

Each sample from here on is followed by a "Your Turn" entry that suggests how you can use the same idea the published writer used for a story of your own. Ideas cannot be copyrighted.

Learn from these. I want you to use them as inspiration to write and sell your own homework. What better way to learn than from the experts?

**Note to HomeSchooling parents: You might wish to make this chapter the year-long curriculum for a younger child, using each sample book idea as one week's assignment.**

**DREAMS** by Ezra Jack Keats (New York: Macmillan, 1974) presents a little boy who can not sleep well until a paper mouse he made

scares off a dog. It's illustrated with color paintings.

**YOUR TURN:** Have your sleepless child toss and turn and then start to pray for members of his family (their picture is beside the bed) or try to name all the people at church or all the missionaries he knows. All children experience sleeplessness. Think of other experiences all children share. Notice the solution came from something that child had made.

**THE LONELY DOLL** by Dare Wright (Garden City: Doubleday, 1957) presents black and white photographs of a doll and two stuffed bears that become involved in trips and escapades. It's very simply told.

**YOUR TURN:** Write a story about Samson taking a trip through the desert and fighting the lion and later finding honey. Tell it simply. Or tell a story about a toy that takes a trip around the toy box. It meets all sorts of toy creatures and tells each one about the Lord Jesus.

**A FIREFLY NAMED TORCHY** by Bernard Waber (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1970) has Torch, a lightning bug, turning night to day to the chagrin of all the forest animals. He can't control his fuse. Only when he goes to the city where bright lights shine on every corner does he burn out. On the way home he becomes just a twinkler.

**YOUR TURN:** Write a story about a lion that can't stop roaring and keeping all the animals awake. Have something happen to him that turns his roar into a meow. Will it be a fright? A cute lioness? A trap the other animals have built? A change of heart?

**WHAT IS NEW? WHAT IS MISSING? WHAT IS DIFFERENT?** BY Patricia Ruben (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1978) is a book of black and white pictures that asks young readers to compare left page to

right page and tell the answers to the three title questions. It's the kind of book any imaginative amateur photographer can compile.

**YOUR TURN:** You do Bible scenes where David picks up two stones instead of five. Perhaps he has a quiver of arrows on his shoulder and a banana sticking out of his pocket. Fill 14 spreads (questions on the left and the picture on the right) to fill your book. Change the questions Patricia Ruben used if you want to sell your book

**COME WITH ME TO NURSERY SCHOOL** by Edith Thacher Hurd (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1970) pictures the adventure of going to nursery school in black and white photography.

**YOUR TURN:** Do a "Come With Me to Camp" or Sunday School or first grade or Grandma's attic or garage or kitchen and tell all the things a visiting child might find.

**ANIMALS MADE BY ME** by Margery W. Brown (New York: G. Putnam's Sons, 1970) has rhyming couplets with black and white art.

**YOUR TURN:** Each page will have a two-line rhyme. Make up original animals and describe them—like a *kopioboppus* that rhymes with "hope he won't stop us."

**TEN WHAT?** by Russell Hoban and Sylvie Selig (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974). Water color—a kind of "twelve days of Christmas" in reverse.

**YOUR TURN:** Do your "Ten What?" about your fingers and toes. Describe each one. Tell how God made it. Give it a name and tell what it does. Or use ten cousins or aunts or friends in school or minnows in a school of fish or fishermen in a trout stream. Or change it to "Seven What" and write about the little boy's five loaves and two fishes the Lord used to feed

people. Change it to eight or six or twelve. Use too many and you and your reader will get lost.

**THE BROOK** by Carol and Donald Carrick (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1967). Three color art with lofty prose showing the course of a lovely, mountain stream.

**YOUR TURN:** Find a calendar scene and, in the most elegant language you can use, describe it. At the end, tell a significant impression of God's creation you come away with. Published stories often have a twist or special realization at the end that gives them reader-appeal.

**WE ARE HAVING A BABY** by Viki Holland (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972). Black and white photos from the viewpoint of the older child.

**YOUR TURN:** Don't worry about the pictures. Write a story of the baby's birth from an older child's point of view, emphasizing the wonder of Christian family love. But don't put the older child in the birthing room.

**BEFORE I WAS BORN** by Harriet Ziefert and illustrated by Rufus Coes (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984) in 32 pages, including the title page.

Summary: A child tells how the father built a cradle and the mother sewed a quilt in as they prepared for the birth of their baby.

In five steps, the test and illustrations, alternating between the mother and father at work on their projects, show how the cradle and quilt are readied for the child.

The story has 11 sentences and 117 words. The words that begin the book telling of a time long ago before the baby was born reappear near story's

end to tell that everything was now ready for baby to come.

**YOUR TURN:** Tell what preparations were made in your family to prepare for a birth. Or tell what a family on the mission field far from doctors would have to do at that time. Or tell how a family prepares for a birthday party or school play or a piano lesson concert—any special occasion.

**DO NOT TOUCH** by Lark Carrier (Saxonville, MA: Picture Book Studio, 1988). Hidden words associated with a child's day in school are revealed as the reader turns the page. The book begins with two words in 2 ½-inch black type. The second word is reprinted and its last four letters illustrate what the sun does when it comes up in the morning. We go to school with three words, the last four letters of the last word are reprinted on the next page to tell what the school bell does. Each of the 12 spreads plays on words.

**YOUR TURN:** This is very difficult to do. In these cases, the last four letters of the one word are the first four letters of the next or are the next word itself. Try it with a child's Sunday when everyone is home and getting ready for church or when sleepy kids have to get up to go to school.

**ELMER BLUNT'S OPEN HOUSE** by Matt Novak (New York: Orchard Books, 1992) in 24 pages.

Summary: When Elmer Blunt forgets to close the front door on his way to work, some animals and a robber come exploring.

The first sentence presents the reason why Elmer forgot to close the door. He had to rush to work because he stayed in bed too long.

In 12 sentences we have a Goldilocks in reverse. The animals come to Elmer's house and have a riot until they hear someone coming. They hide in a closet in Elmer's bedroom as a robber enters downstairs and proceeds to steal everything portable. The robber is delighted to discover furs in the closet, but runs out screaming and empty-handed when he finds they are alive.

Elmer returns to a messy house and cleans it up, thinking it's all his fault. The animals, hiding under the bed, slip out when he goes to sleep.

The book has charming illustrations ganged 13 on one page, 6 on another. They show what's going on in every room.

**YOUR TURN:** Play with a familiar story like this by perhaps having the giant come down and mess up Jack's room. Have him go back up the beanstalk before Jack wakes up in the morning. Jack can't figure out who made the mess. Or have the neighbor kids come in to steal. They hide in a closet when a robber comes. He feels their long greasy hair and runs out screaming.

**SIX-DINNER SID** by Inga Moore (New York: Simon and Schuster Books for Young Readers, 1991) 32 pp.

Summary: Sid, a cat, is living high. He has six neighbors thinking he is their own cat. He gets fed at each house until the neighbors catch on.

The first sentence simply gives the address of the first house where Sid lives.

In each house he also has six different names and six different ways of

acting—naughty, silly, cuddly, mean—and owners who scratch him in six different places.

All was perfect until he caught cold and six owners took him to the vet for medicine. The vet recognized him and told the six owners the truth. They resolved to give him only one dinner a day.

Sid's solution: He simply moves to six other houses where the folks know what he does and don't mind.

**YOUR TURN:** Write a story about a hungry little Jewish boy who goes from tent to tent in the wilderness asking for left-over manna. Or a neighbor child on crutches who goes house to house asking for candy. Perhaps one neighbor says, "I have something sweeter than candy. Would you like to hear about it?" Then you could have a little gospel message along with the lemon drop.

**Let's stop for a moment. If you and your children write secular stories, you are competing with more than 100,000 other writers. If you bring into your stories the spiritual realities little children understand, you compete for an editor's attention against one or two hundred.**

**You don't need to work the Gospel into every story. Refer to the list given earlier of aspects of spiritual life little children understand. Use one of them.**

**ANNO'S BRITAIN** by Mitsumasa Anno (New York: Philomel Books of Putnam Publishing Group, 1982, 48 pp.)

Summary: The illustrations show the reader what Anno's journey

through Great Britain is like as he moves freely through time and space.

Truly a picture book because not a word appears anywhere. Anno rows his boat into a bay at Dover and walks into London and back before rowing out at Dover. A detailed picture book—charming.

**YOUR TURN:** Contrive a picture book where your hero lands on one shore of the Holy Land and works his way across to the Jordan River and back. Identify what year this is and people it with the people living then. You may need a history book if you are writing about Old Testament times or New Testament times. Perhaps you will write about the Crusades or the return of Jews after World War II.

**ANNO'S U.S.A.** by Mitsumasa Anno (New York: Philomel Books of Putnam Publishing Group, 1983, 48 pp.)

Summary: The artist shows a lone traveler arriving in the New World from the West in the present day and crossing the country backward through time, leaving the east coast as the *Santa Maria*, Columbus's flagship, sails over the horizon.

**YOUR TURN:** Develop a story where Mary and Joseph and their Baby travel from Egypt to Nazareth. Draw pictures of the places they pass. Or show David's trip from shepherding to fighting as he runs toward Goliath, swinging a slingshot. Or use this idea to describe what a two-to-three year old experiences going to Sunday School and back home.

**ANNO'S FACES** by Mitsumasa Anno (New York: Philomel Books of Putnam Publishing Group, 1989).

Summary: This picture book shows fruits and vegetables, including the strawberry, orange, watermelon and green pea. By moving see-through plastic cards over the illustrations, we

see each fruit and vegetable smile or frown.

The only words in the book are the names of the fruits and vegetables that Anno has water colored in graphic detail.

**YOUR TURN:** Do your own picture book of your favorite foods. Or do a picture book of Sunday School teachers or the 12 apostles or family cousins or kittens in a litter.

**FREIGHT TRAIN** by Donald Crews (New York: Greenwillow Books, 1978).

Summary: A colorful train goes through tunnels, by cities and over trestles.

The first sentence simply states that a train passes along this track.

After the initial declarative sentence, pages picture the different kinds of freight cars that make up the train.

**YOUR TURN:** There are all sorts of things you can do with a freight train. Each car could come from a different state with a slogan on it telling the wonders that appear there. Each car could have a different animal in it. You might fill with each one with that state's bird and/or animal. You might use the states your child has visited or has relatives in.

**WAG, WAG, WAG** by Peter Hansard and illustrated by Barbara Firth (Cambridge, Mass.: Candlewick Press, 1993).

Summary: Pictures (of dogs) labeled with verbs telling the many different things dogs do as they live from day to day.

Water color pictures show in verbs 25 things dogs do. The 26<sup>th</sup> is the title of this book.

**YOUR TURN:** Do the same for cats or guinea pigs or mice, parrots, bears, babies, mechanics, doctors, nurses, mothers—whatever!

**MY FIRST LOOK AT SHAPES**, a Darling Kindersley Book (New York: Random House, Inc., 1990, 20 pp.)

Summary: Four-color photos show a variety of different shapes, including squares, circles, rectangles and diamonds.

Objects from every day life are appealingly catalogued for easy identification. The only words are the nouns that name each object. Picture ovals, for instance, include leaves, a lemon, eggs, beans, pebbles, soap in a soap dish and a small picture in an oval frame.

**YOUR TURN:** Draw or photograph your own list of shapes. They could be household shapes from the kitchen or play room or garage. They could be shapes from a Sunday School classroom. Or it could be My First Look at Missionaries or teachers or kinds of spaghetti or My First Look at Autumn or Spring.

**CLAP HANDS** by Helen Oxenbury (New York: Aladdin Books, Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987, 8 pp.)

This "big board" book (of strong cardboard) pictures multi-racial babies doing things babies do. Two short riming couplets tie the story together with a Daw dit/daw dit/daw rhythm.

**YOUR TURN:** Choose your subject as in "Wag, Wag, Wag." The rimes are easy:

See the baby yawn

Sitting on the lawn.

Oops, where went his grin?

He's sitting on a pin!

**DAWN** with words and watercolor pictures by Uri Shulevitz (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1974, 28 pp.)

Using only a few words in simple sentence structure (all of the subject words do all of the verb words), the author/artist shows the setting in which a boy and his grandfather are camping/sleeping at night.

In the dawn they row on across the lake which turns from blue to green as the sun rises.

**YOUR TURN:** Using simple sentences, describe an overnight trip a boy and his dad or grandfather or a girl and her mom or grandmother take.

**THE SIXTEEN HAND HORSE** by Fred Gwynne (New York: Prentice-Hall Books for Young Readers, 1980, 44 pp.)

A little girl takes literally the homonyms and figures of speech she has heard her parents talk about (a horse that has 16 hands, a running nose, bank a fire, flush a pheasant, churches that have cannons and bells that peel).

**YOUR TURN:** This book and the one that follows, both silly books, are fun to read but hard to write. Look for phrases we use all the time that don't mean what they really say.

**THE KING WHO RAINED** by Fred Gwynne (New York: Prentice Hall Books for Young Readers, 1970, 38 pp.)

A series of double-page spreads shows how a little girl takes our slang and cultural play on words literally

(forks in the road, frog in the throat, coat of arms, big bills in the mail, foot prince in the snow.)

**ACROSS TOWN** by Sarah (New York: Orchard Books, 1991). With not a written word and with only torn-paper illustrations, the author walks a lonely child across town. On the way he makes friends with a large white cat.

**YOUR TURN:** You walk a lonely child home from school and tell what animal he or she finds that will be a friend. Maybe he carries on a conversation with the Lord Jesus as he comes because all the third grade boys are following him to beat him up (which happened to me). Or this might be a walk to an ice cream truck or pop corn machine or lemonade stand. Maybe he stole the money and is arguing with his conscience.

**I LOVE MY HAIR** by Natasha Anastasia Tarpley, illustrated by E. B. Lewis (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1998)

Summary: An African American girl describes the different, wonderful ways she can wear her hair.

The first sentence simply declares that Keyana's mother combs her hair each night at bedtime.

After telling how Mama grooms her hair, Keyana describes the different ways she does it.

Her teacher tells her wearing an Afro is a way to show you are proud of who you are and where you came from.

**YOUR TURN:** Use a family scene to show what happens at "devotions" each night when the family reads and prays together. End with a sentence like "having devotions and loving the Lord Jesus are ways we can show we are proud to be His children—and members of His family." You can use this idea to write about the an-

guish your sister goes through when Mama brushes her hair 100 times or when your character washes an unruly dog.

**ED AND ME** by David McPhail (San Diego: Voyager Books/ Harcourt Brace & Co., 1990)

Summary: A small girl and her father buy and use an old pickup truck named Ed and then they build a garage to store it in for the winter.

The first sentence has the girl telling who sold the truck named Ed to her father.

Once bought, the truck served the family on errands and picnics and as a hauler of hay and wood and pumpkins. At summer's end, father built a garage for Ed.

**YOUR TURN:** Did you ever have a car or truck you named? Tell about it—where the family drove it, how it helped in sickness and happy times, where you kept it and what happened to it.

**A LITTLE BIT OF WINTER** by Paul Stewart with pictures by Chris Riddell (New York: Harper-Collins Publishers, 1998)

The first sentence in three words tells that winter is on its way.

Summary: As Hedgehog prepares for hibernation, he asks sad-to-see-him-go Rabbit to save him a little bit of winter. During the hard winter that follows, Rabbit buries a large snowball.

Hedgehog, on awakening, thanks Rabbit for the snowball. Rabbit asks if Hedgehog missed him during winter.

The Hedgehog sighs. "Oh, Rabbit," he says. (Note: This is a simple, fresh,

elegant, unexpected way of saying "Yes.")

**YOUR TURN:** Two friends will be separated for a time. Perhaps a big brother is going off to war. How will one help the other find out what he missed by being away that long. What might the one save to give the other? End it the way Paul Stewart ended his. Successful writers know how to speak to the heart.

**ELIZABETH'S DOLL** by Stephanie Stuve-Bodeen, illustrated by Christy Hale (New York: Lee and Low Books, Inc. 1998)

Summary: When a new baby is born to her mother, a young Tanzanian girl finds a smooth oval-shaped river rock she names Eva and pretends it's her baby doll.

The first sentence simply identifies the little girl and her baby brother by name (Elizabeth and Obedi).

Little Elizabeth washes, feeds and carries her rock baby on her back as the other mothers do. But her rock disappears when Elizabeth goes for water.

She searches everywhere and finds it in the kitchen fire pit. Eva is rescued, cleaned and cuddled at night time.

The story ends with Elizabeth's mama smiling and thinking that some day her little girl would make a fine mother—just the very same thing that Elizabeth herself was thinking.

**YOUR TURN:** Write about a child who substitutes a toy for something he dearly wants but cannot get. Tell what he does with the substitute, how he loses and finds it and the good that it does to the child to have that homemade toy. Maybe as a lonely boy looking for a friend to play with he has to substitute a rock. Perhaps the rock is the father he hasn't had.

## SELL YOUR HOMEWORK: PICTURE BOOK

Always look for deeper meanings and significance. Editors notice when the story ends on a winsome note.

### **EXERCISE**

Now, plan out your picture book. Make your title as winsome as you can. Try to get words that evoke emotion or put very colorful nouns and verbs into your title.

Draw 34 horizontal lines about an inch apart across your paper and number each space 1-32.

In the space at left, write out the few words that will appear on the given page. In the space at right, describe the illustration you would photograph or which you would suggest the editor hire someone to paint.

Remember, your page one is for the cover as is page 32 at the back.

The inside front cover is for Library of Congress registration and summary.

Your page three will be your title page. Your story will start on page four with picture and/or text. Many books have the story begin on page five.

Take your story through to pages 30-31. You may choose to leave page 31 blank.

On the following pages, I'm typing a manuscript sample to show you how to present your manuscript to an editor.

I've used 14 point, Courier New type face to look like typewriter type.

The text has 77 words which I note in the upper right. If you want to use an assumed name for authorship but still get a check made out to you, put your own name with your address in the upper left and the assumed name under the title in the lower middle. Always leave a large space in the upper middle for the editor to use.

Following the sample story, I've put a research sheet to use if you are planning to do more work in the library to keep current on what publishers are printing this year.

Write the publisher's address beside his name so you know where to send your manuscript if you develop one you feel would interest an editor.

*Writer's Market* from *Writer's Digest Book Club* (1507 Dana Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio 45207) is an excellent reference to have at hand. It lists the publishers who are looking for children's books and tells where to send the manuscript and what kind of payment to expect. Some publishers only accept what agents bring them.

The Book Club also handles the *Christian Writers' Market Guide*, produced annually by Sally E. Stuart. Her 609-page book presents lists of religious publishers looking for material.

If you order their book, tell the Club you are following my suggestion. ☺

## SELL YOUR HOMEWORK: PICTURE BOOK

**Notice:** I state "First American Rights" in the upper right to tell the editor I am selling the right to publish this in America and it's the first time I'm sending it out. The copyright notice is a device to protect your interests.

Do not justify your right margin. Do not put an extra space between paragraphs. Write a letter to go with your manuscript telling the editor what the story contains. If you have never published before, do NOT tell the editor.

If you are a student, do NOT tell the editor. Let him judge your work on its merit, not on yours. Do not put any marks at the end of the story, like \*\*\* or ### or smiley face ☺.

Again, if you want the manuscript returned, enclose a self addressed stamped envelope. If not, enclose a self-addressed, stamped post card. Fill out the back as if it were a note to you. Have blanks to fill in.

Dick Bohrer  
My address  
My address

First American Rights  
Copyright pending  
77 words

BUDDA-LIKE IT?

By Dick Bohrer

Page four: (Art: The room is black. Light coming through the bedroom door shows a two-and-a-half-year-old girl sitting ram-rod straight on the edge of her bed. Her clock reads 7:30).

Words: "How many times do I have to tell you no, Pamela Joy. You've had three drinks already and that is enough. You'll wet your bed. Turn over and go to sleep. NOW!!!"

SELL YOUR HOMEWORK: PICTURE BOOK

2 BUDDA-LIKE IT?/Dick Bohrer

Page five: (ART: Pammie has thrown herself spread-eagle on the bed, ruffled covers everywhere. Her clock reads 7:45.) No words.

Page six: (ART: Wide awake, she has turned over on her side. Her clock reads 8:00.) No words.

Page seven: (ART: She has her head on the pillow and her legs and feet up the wall. Her clock reads 8:15.) No words.

Page eight: (ART: She has her head at the foot of the bed and her feet on her pillow. Her clock reads 8:30.) No words.

Page nine: (ART: She has her head on the floor and her pelvis and legs on the bed. Her clock reads 8:45.) No words.

Page ten: (Art: She lies on her tummy on the floor. Her clock reads 9:00.) No words.

Page eleven: (ART: She hold her head up with her hands on her chin and elbows on the floor, eyes

SELL YOUR HOMEWORK: PICTURE BOOK

3 BUDDA-LIKE IT?/Dick Bohrer

wide open. She watches a hand through the doorway reaching toward the wall switch to turn out the living room light. Her clock reads 9:15.) No words.

Page twelve: (ART: She is on her hands and knees as the living room light is being turned out.) No words.

Page thirteen: (ART: The room is nearly black. We see Pammie up and moving. Her clock reads 9:30.) No words.

Page fourteen: (ART: The refrigerator door is open and she is standing in its light.) No words.

Page fifteen: (ART: She reaches for a spray can of whipped cream frosting inside the refrigerator door.) No words.

Page sixteen: (ART: In the light of the refrigerator door, we see her lick the nozzle of the can.) Words: "Um, budda."

SELL YOUR HOMEWORK: PICTURE BOOK

4 BUDDA-LIKE IT?/Dick Bohrer

Page seventeen: (Art: She puts the nozzle in front of her mouth and gives herself a squirt.) Word: "Ummmm."

Page eighteen: (ART: She squirts the whipped cream foam up and down the front of the fridge beside the open door.) Words: "Refridgemator like budda?"

Page nineteen: (ART: She stoops and squirts it around on the kitchen floor.) Words: "Floor like it?"

Page twenty: (ART: Leaving the refrigerator door open, she's at the stove, squirting the whipped cream up and down its side.) Words: "Stove like it?"

Page twenty-one: (ART: She's in the living room, squirting streaks of whipped cream foam down the table cloth.) Words: "Table like it?"

SELL YOUR HOMEWORK: PICTURE BOOK

5 BUDDA-LIKE IT?/Dick Bohrer

Page twenty-two: (ART: She squirts the seat of Daddy's dining room chair. The chair's arms show above her head.) Words: "Daddy like it?"

Page twenty-three: (ART: She bends over the living room carpet, giving it squirts.) Words: "Carpet like it?"

Page twenty-four: (ART: In front of the sofa, she streaks it and the sofa pillows.) Words: "Sofa like it?"

Page twenty-five: (ART: She stands in the living room, sucking the end of the nozzle.) Words: "Umm. Pam-mie like it."

Page twenty-six: (ART: In front of the glass book case, she smears the glass doors.) Words: "You like it?"

Page twenty-seven: (ART: In the bathroom, she squirts the whipped cream on the toilet seat.) Words: "You like it, potty?"

6 BUDDA-LIKE IT?/Dick Bohrer

Page twenty-eight: (ART: In her parents' bedroom, she squirts the whipped cream down the length of Daddy's bare foot hanging outside the covers.) Words: "You like it, Daddy?"

Page twenty-nine: (ART: Daddy sits up wide-eyed in alarm, not knowing what tickled his foot as Pammie ducks down, drops the can and scoots out of the room.) Words: "Who's there?"

Page thirty and thirty-one: (ART: Daddy stands in the living room, his back to the reader with his hand on the light switch he has just turned on. He and we see the kitchen, living room, bathroom panorama with whipped cream streaked everywhere. Through the bedroom door we see Pammie in bed, her covers up over her head with only her hand sticking out--no sign of whipped cream on her fingers. Her clock reads 10:00.) Word: "Yikes!"

SELL YOUR HOMEWORK: PICTURE BOOK

**Research Sheet**

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Author: \_\_\_\_\_

Publisher \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ No. of pages: \_\_\_\_\_

Theme (general subject) \_\_\_\_\_

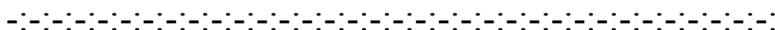
Library of Congress Summary: \_\_\_\_\_

Artistic medium: \_\_\_\_\_

First Sentence: \_\_\_\_\_

Synopsis: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Author: \_\_\_\_\_

Publisher \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ No. of pages: \_\_\_\_\_

Theme (general subject) \_\_\_\_\_

Library of Congress Summary: \_\_\_\_\_

Artistic medium: \_\_\_\_\_

First Sentence: \_\_\_\_\_

Synopsis: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



## Names and Addresses of Publishers Listed in this Chapter

Candlewick Press, 2067 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02140 (Attention: Mary Lee Donovan)

Coward, McCann & Geoghegan (no listing in Writers Market)

Doubleday Books for Young Readers, 1745 Broadway, New York, NY 10019 (*Not accepting any unsolicited book manuscripts at this time.*)

Farrar, Straus and Giroux Books for Young Readers, 19 Union Square West, New York, NY Responds in two months to queries; 2 months to proposals. Manuscript guidelines free. (Website: [www.fsgbooks.com](http://www.fsgbooks.com))

Greenwillow Books, HarperCollins Publishers, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10019 (Website: [www.harperchildrens.com](http://www.harperchildrens.com)) Currently not accepting unsolicited mail, manuscripts or queries. Please call (212) 261-6627 for an update.

Harcourt, Inc., Children's Book Division, 525 B Street, Suite 1900, San Diego, CA 92101 (Website: [www.harcourtbooks.com/html/childrens\\_index.asp](http://www.harcourtbooks.com/html/childrens_index.asp)) No unsolicited manuscripts or queries or phone calls

Harper Collins Children's Books Group, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10019 (Website: [www.harperchildrens.com](http://www.harperchildrens.com)) No unsolicited manuscripts and/or unagented manuscripts or queries. Such submissions will neither be reviewed or returned.

Houghton Mifflin Co., 222 Berkeley Street, Boston, MA 02116 (Website: [www.hmco.com](http://www.hmco.com)) Agented submissions only.

Alfred A. Knopf and Crown Books for Young Readers, 1745 Broadway, 9-3, New York, NY 10019 (Website: [www.randomhouse.com/kids](http://www.randomhouse.com/kids)) Wants distinguished juvenile fiction and nonfiction for ages 0-18. Send query with SASE. Address envelope to the Acquisitions Editor.

Lee and Low, 95 Madison Avenue, New York, NY (Website: [www.leeandlow.com](http://www.leeandlow.com)) (Our goals are to meet a growing need that addresses children of color, and to present literature that all children can identify with. We only consider multicultural children's books. We do not consider folk tales, fairy tales or animal stories.) Send complete manuscript with cover letter or through an agent.

J. B. Lippincott, Philadelphia (not listed in Writers Market)

SELL YOUR HOMEWORK: PICTURE BOOK

Little Brown and Co. Children's Publishing, 1271 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY (Agented submissions only)

Macmillan Publishing Co. (not listed in Writers Market)

Orchard Books, 557 Broadway, New York, NY (Specializes in children's picture books.) (No unsolicited manuscripts. Query with Self-Addressed Stamped Envelope -SASE)

Philomel Books, 345 Hudson Street, New York, NY (accepts children's picture books (ages 3-8) Query first. No unsolicited manuscripts (You can't just send the story in.)

Picture Book Studio, Saxonville, MA (not listed in Writers Market)

Prentice-Hall Books for Young Readers (unlisted in Writers Market)

G. Putnam's Sons, 375 Hudson, New York, NY (Agented submissions only. No unsolicited manuscripts)

Random House Children's Books, 1745 Broadway, New York, NY 10019

Charles Scribner's Sons, an imprint of Simon and Schuster, (see below)

Simon and Schuster Books for Young Readers, 1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY Website: [www.simonsays.com](http://www.simonsays.com) (Manuscript guidelines online)