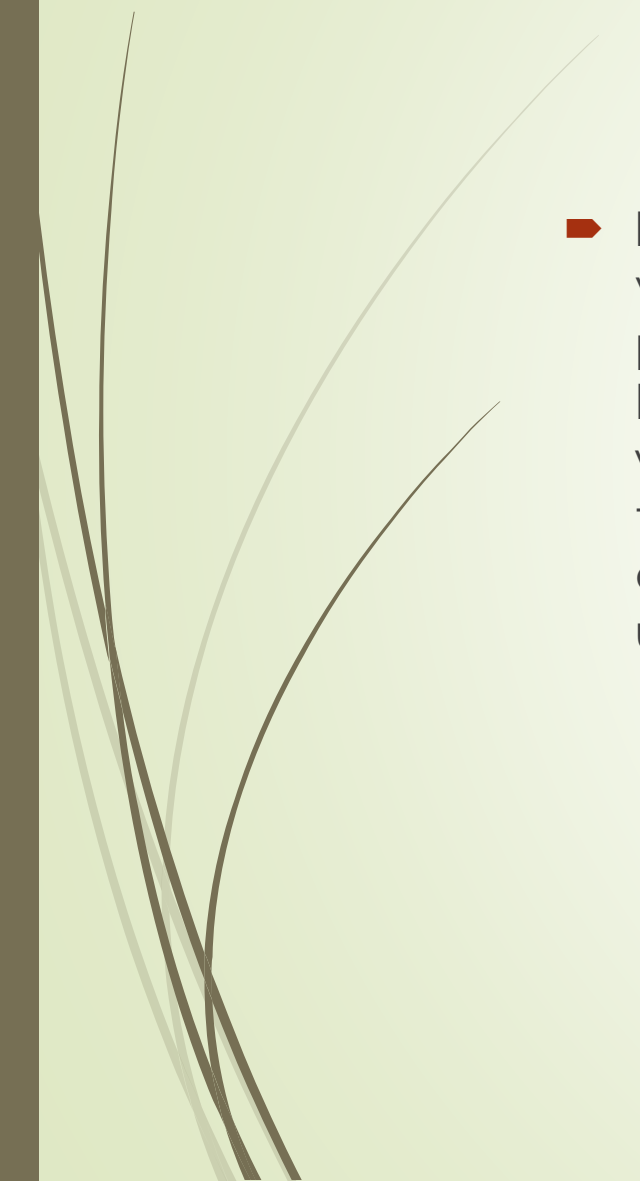




Writing for Children

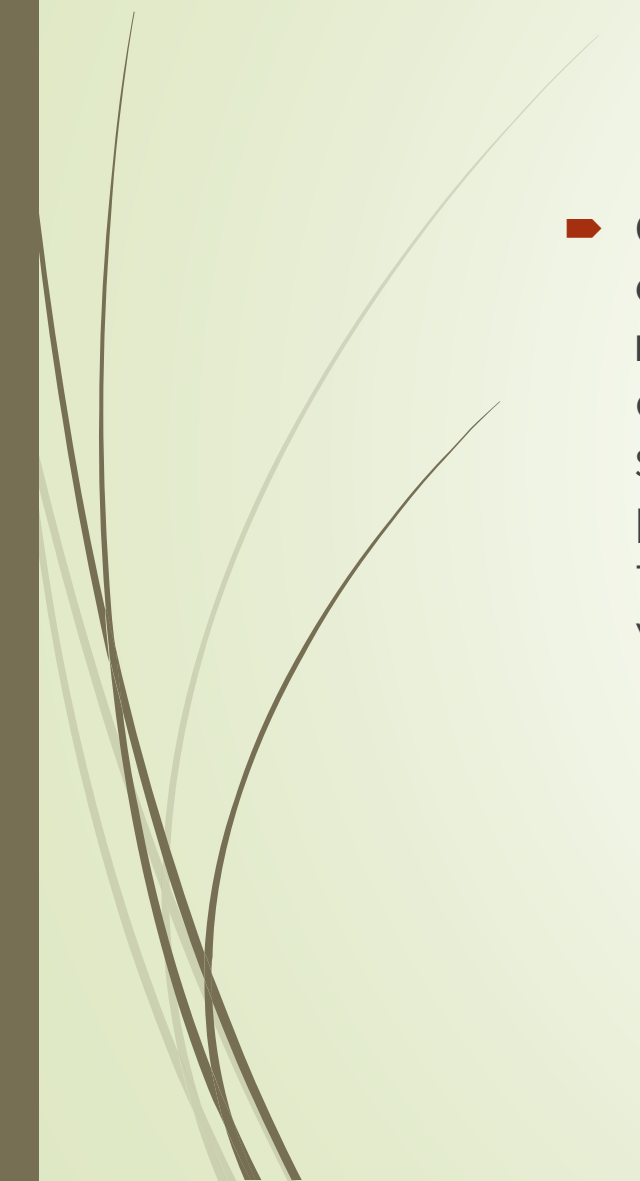


Why is writing for children so important?

- ▶ **It communicates the gospel in ways that impact the next generation-** can you imagine what it will be like to meet someone in heaven who read your picture book and became a better person because of it? Whether your books are overly Christian or not, you as a Christian view the world in this way. Your worldview pours out from you onto the page. You are impacting the world for Christ with your words. Kids today more than ever need sound doctrine communicated in simplistic ways so the concepts can be understood.
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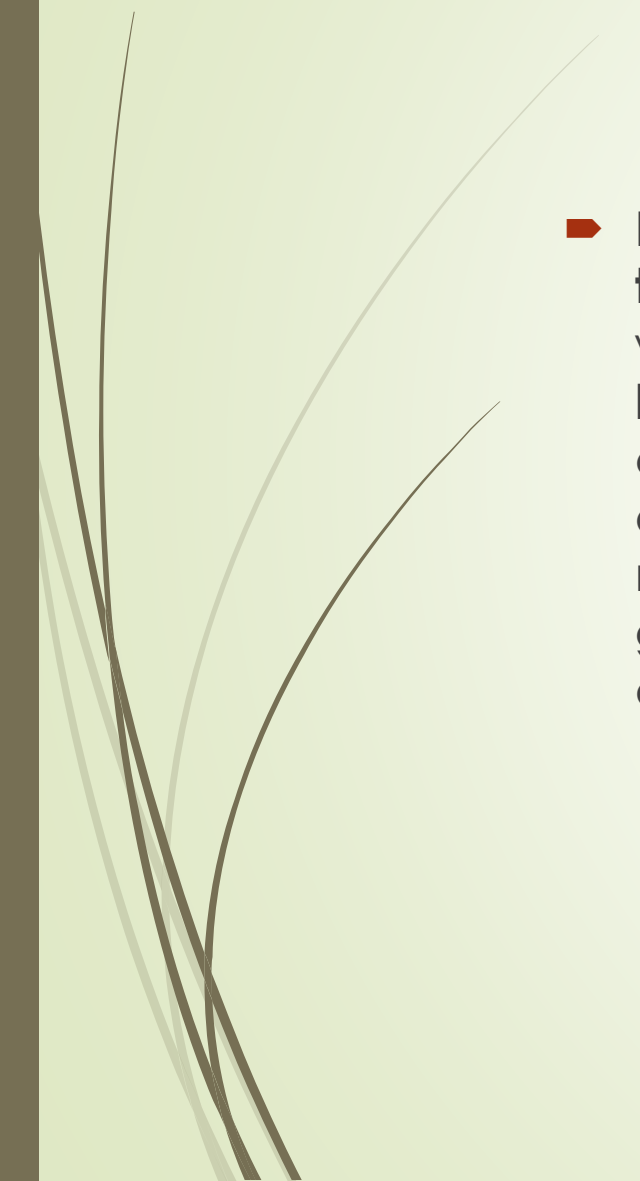



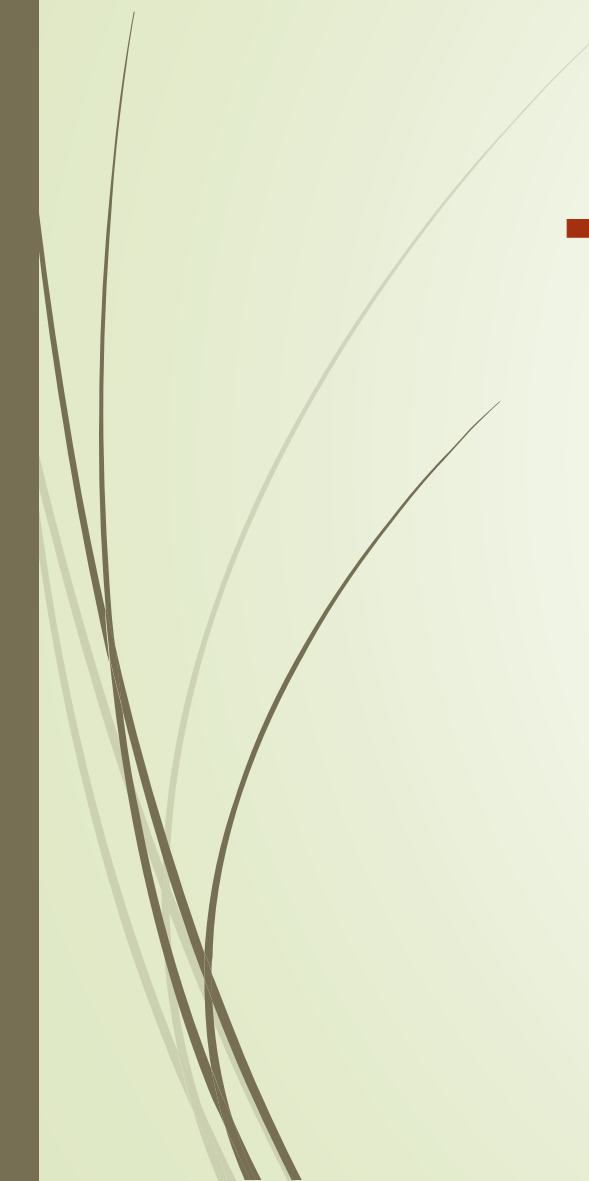
Why is writing for children so important?

- ▶ **Children's books create positive memories for children and promote a love of literacy**- in the current school system, artistic programs are being cut and replaced to make room for the basic subjects- reading, writing and arithmetic. But often reading is used as a measuring tool to ensure high test scores when it comes time for annual testing for state funding. It is a privilege to help children to learn to read before they even begin school, so that children can appreciate books for the entertainment and educational value they present, not merely an instrument for learning.
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Why is writing for children so important?

- ▶ **Picture books written today have the potential to become classic books tomorrow-** As authors, we have the privilege of presenting our words to the world. But after a couple of years, our books become less important and less in the forefront of peoples minds. Picture books, however, grow with a child. A three year old who loved to touch the pictures of our book will enjoy reading the words for the first time at age 5 or 6. A child (or parent) may want to keep the book as a memento of their childhood, and may get passed down throughout the generations. Perhaps your grandchildren and great children may reap the benefits of your words!
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- ▶ Emile Buchwald said, “**Children are made readers on the laps of their parents.**” Some of my favorite memories of my children when they were young was putting a kid in my lap and reading books to them. Then as they grew, putting larger books and pronouncing the words together and seeing the read for the first time. What a joy to participate in my kids’ lives in this way. It has helped promote a love of reading in my kids and given me precious memories to cling to as an adult.



5 Tips for writing if you don't know where to get started:

- ▶ **Write what you know – God doesn't waste pain. He shapes us through our experiences, both positive and negative. Take some time and recall a specific memory or experience that shaped you, preferably as a child. Evoke the senses. Let us see it, smell, it taste it, etc. The best books are ones that we write from our experiences. Children relate to experiences that are things they have the possibility of going through as well (or wish they could go through.)**



5 tips to start writing if your don't know how to get started:

- **Establish your felt need-** you are writing a book. What is the book's purpose? To entertain or to inform? Once you have established your purpose, next establish your felt need. What is the problem you feel children have? How can your book solve it?



5 tips to start writing if you don't know how to get started

- ▶ **Research-** What are your favorite children's books? Why are they your favorite? What vocabulary do they use? In a sense, children are the most difficult to write for since you have to communicate an entire message in a short amount of words and pages. Descriptions have to be shortened and less vivid than adult books because kids already use their imagination. Any words that are used that kids do not understand can jeopardize their comprehension of your material.



5 tips to start writing if you don't know how to get started

- **Who is the book's competition-** Be well-versed on what children's books are already out there that are similar to what you want to write about. What unique spin can you present about the topic you are writing about?



5 tips to start writing if you don't know how to get started:

- ▶ **Be multi-layered**- some of the best-crafted stories are ones in which both the parent and child get something out of the story. Think about books like *The Giving Tree*, *Where the Wild Things Are*, *Ferdinand the Bull*. Kids love the animals and the children in the story. But parents grasp the overall themes of gentleness and giving to others. This is why these books have withstood the test of time after all these years.



4 Ways to keep an audience engaged with your story:

- ▶ **Writing scenes with action-** Action doesn't have to be intense to engage the audience. Let's say, for example, you are writing a book where animals save their village from becoming extinct. The action can be as simple as the main character, a rabbit, rallying the animal inhabitants to help stop the humans from destroying them.



4 Ways to keep an audience engaged with your story:

- ▶ **Introducing new characters in the story**- the first scene can be just the rabbit learning of the village's fate, then slowly introduce the rest of the animal characters in the following pages. Children will love learning more about the animals in the upcoming pages.



4 Ways to keep an audience engaged with your story:

- ▶ **Moving characters into different settings-** the village can have multiple locations within itself, or the animals can go on an adventure to follow the humans to varying settings.





4 Ways to keep an audience engaged with your story:

- ▶ **Changing the emotional intensity of the scene** – one scene can give a sense of danger as the rabbit learns of the village's fate, then heighten the peril within each page as the animals come one step closer to extinction. This can also have a nice tie in lesson of caring for the environment as God's stewards of the earth he has given us or that all animals have the right to humane treatment.
- ▶
- ▶ In a picture book, the illustrations are just as important as the text. A well-written text, when read aloud, will give way to specific images. The illustrations are used to enhance the text and bring it to life. Hiring an artist that best captures the essence of your text is essential to a successful work.
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- ▶ Ann Whitford Paul, *Writing Picture Books* (Cincinnati: Writer's Digest books; 2009). P. 9.



Traditional vs. self-publishing

- ▶ Writing for children can be even tougher than writing for adults because the competition is so much more difficult because there are so many more people writing for children. When people ask me about becoming an author, I always ask them two questions:
 - ▶ How much are you willing to spend?
 - ▶ How long are you willing to wait?
 - ▶
- ▶ These two questions apply to children as well as adults. Self-publishing can be quite expensive depending on whom you hire for cover design, illustrations, editing, etc. Make sure your dream doesn't outweigh your budget. If you decide to traditional publishing, understand it may take years for your publishing dream to become a reality, if at all.
- ▶




Your Book's Structure

- ▶ The structure of a children's book is similar to any fiction work, except carried out in a much shorter word count. Typically, picture books reach ages 4-8 which is a broad age range to reach. Four year olds are preschool age where they are just learning to read (or for the more advanced child, reading well) to 8 year olds, which is 2nd or third grade, where the child could be beginning small chapter books. Therefore, it is important to keep the child engaged throughout each page turn. Losing their interest is likely bad news for you as a writer if you cannot keep their attention, the writing does not flow, etc.
- ▶
- ▶ Pay attention to the cadence, or rhythm of the words that you have written. To check your rhythm to make sure it flows, read the book aloud. Often people resort to rhyming the text to give it a specific structure. However, if you are not good at rhyming, it can be more of a hindrance than a help to your writing. Rhyming is not necessary in a picture book. If you do choose to rhyme, however, make sure you follow the structure that poets use in their work. Iambic pentameter, for example, will help keep the amount of syllables needed in each line to remain the same.



How to structure your book

- ▶ Establish main character and any other characters within the first two pages of the book.
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How to structure your book

- ▶ State the conflict. What issue does the main character seek to resolve?
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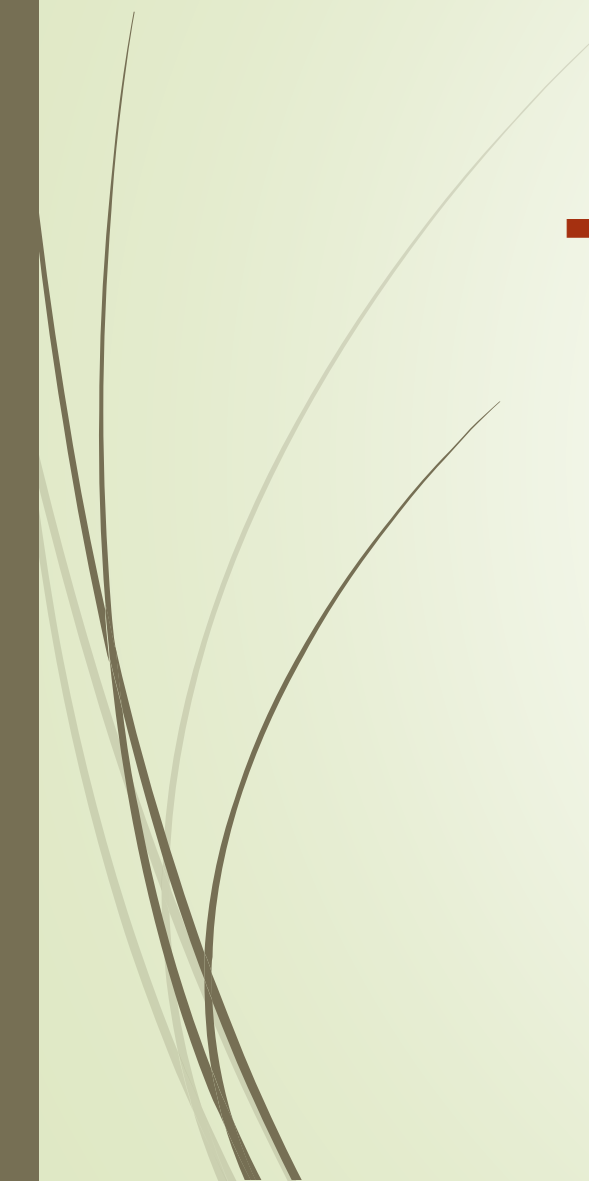


How to structure your book

- ▶ The story should reach a climax. This is where the main character realizes the solution on his/her own. Most books emphasize a child (if a child is the main character) to realize and learn the lesson on his/her own rather than an adult telling them what to do.
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How to structure your book

- ▶ Resolve the conflict in a positive way. If here is a lesson you want the audience to learn, make sure it is clearly stated here.
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How to structure your book

- ▶ Make sure to use vocabulary that a 4-8 year old child can understand. Not sure if they can understand it? Read your draft to a child that age and see what their comprehension level is.
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How to structure your book

- ▶ Although the typical page count of a picture book is 32 pages, some of that goes for dedication, copyright page and other notes. Shoot for 24 pages: 12 pages of text and 12 pages of illustrations.
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How to structure your book

- ▶ Creating a storyboard can be helpful in visually mapping out your book. All you need is a simple bulletin board and some index cards. As you write a line from the book, tack it onto the board and place it in the order on the board you feel it belongs. It might help you fill in the gaps and rearrange your words so it can achieve a healthy and engaging flow.





A final word

- ▶ Writing picture books can be an enriching experience not only for the readers you impact but for you as an author as well. By following these few techniques you may be able to bring the concept you have had swirled around in your head onto the page and into the hands of a child.
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