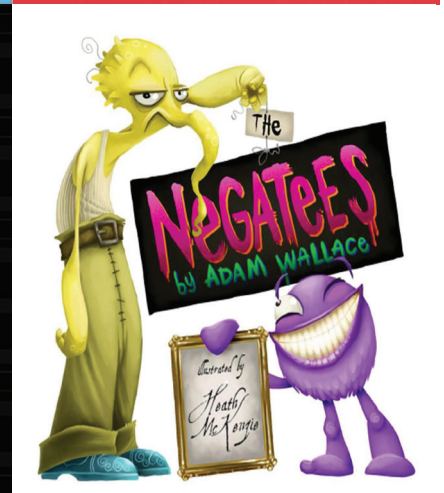
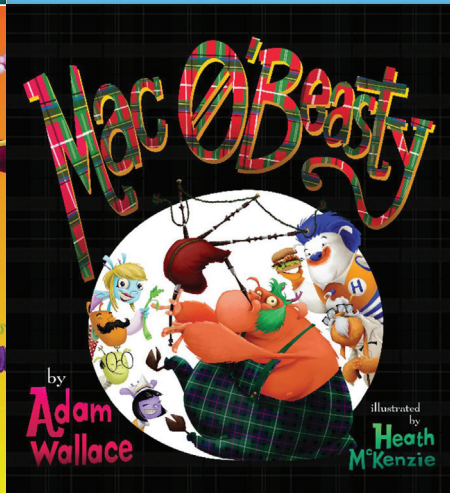
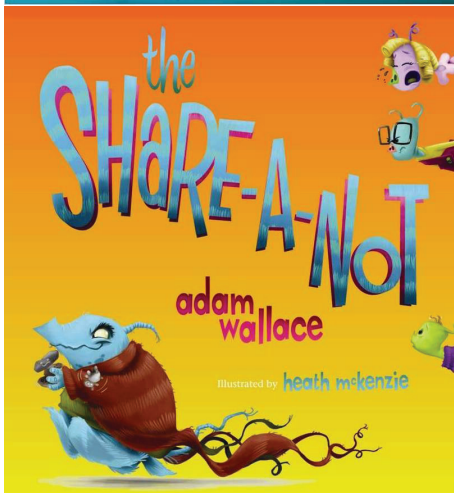
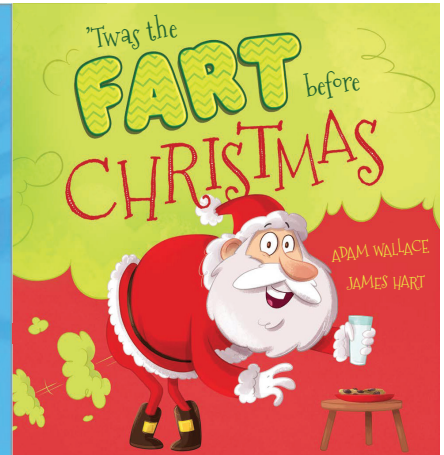
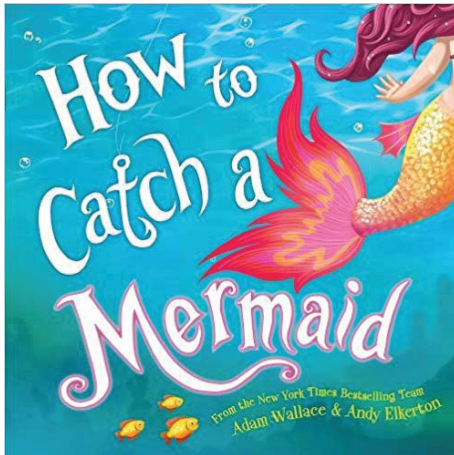


# PICTURE BOOKS 101!



FROM IDEA TO PUBLICATION!

WITH ADAM WALLACE

# iMPRINT PAGE!!!!!!

*Picture Books 101 - From Idea to Publication!*

A KBCC Production

First published in the year of the Zombie Pirates, 2020  
by  
Krueger Wallace Press

Email: **wally@adam-wallace-books.com** or visit  
**www.thekbcc.com** or visit  
**www.adam-wallace-books.com** or visit  
a bookstore. Seriously. They're the best!!!

All rights reserved. No part of this printed publication may be switched on, reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means (electrical, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise) without the prior written permission of the publisher and copyright owner, Krueger Wallace Press.

This edition printed by you on your printer. Or at Officeworks ... or your mum's ... or at work.

Designer/Typesetter: Adam Wallace

Edited by Tex Calahoon

Text and dribble stains copyright Adam Wallace 2020

Cataloguing-in-Publication entry is available  
From The National Library of Australia  
<http://catalogue.nla.gov.au>



Do not use this book as a spoon.  
This book is not a a loud scream or vanilla ice-cream.

# CONTENTS

**SECTION 1 - INTRODUCING THE COURSE! THE BENEFITS FOR YOU!**

**SECTION 2 - INTRODUCING YOUR HOST! ADAM WALLACE**

**SECTION 3 - NUMBERS! WORD COUNT, PAGE COUNT, AGE GROUPS, AND MORE!**

**SECTION 4 - INSPIRATION! COMING UP WITH IDEAS FOR PICTURE BOOKS!**

**SECTION 5 - INSPIRATION! IT'S ALL ABOUT CHARACTER!**

**SECTION 5A - BONUS SECTION 1! 27 PICTURE BOOK IDEAS YOU CAN "STEAL"!**

**SECTION 6 - WRITING! TO RHYME OR NOT TO RHYME, A QUESTION WITH MANY ANSWERS!**

**SECTION 7 - WRITING! LEAVING SPACE FOR AN ILLUSTRATOR'S ILLUSTRATIONS!**

**SECTION 8 - STRUCTURE! USING MOVIES FOR STRUCTURAL INSPIRATION!**

**SECTION 9 - STRUCTURE! UTILISING PAGE TURNS!**

**SECTION 10 - STRUCTURE! THE STRUCTURE SUPER SUCCESSFUL BOOKS USE!**

**SECTION 10A - BONUS SECTION 2! 3 PICTURE BOOK TEMPLATES YOU CAN "STEAL"!**

**SECTION 11 - PICTURE BOOK FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS)**

**SECTION 12 - SUMMING UP!**

**APPENDIX A - RECOMMENDED PICTURE BOOK READING LIST!**





# SECTION 1



## INTRODUCING THE COURSE!

# PICTURE BOOKS ROCK

They sure do. They rock harder than a chair, a horse, a band, heck, they even rock harder than a rock itself!

So what's so good about picture books? What's the magic? And how can you capture it and put it in a bottle ... or a book, at least!

Creating picture books is an amazing experience, from thinking up and writing the story to seeing it come to life in the expert hands of an illustrator, to seeing it in the world, to seeing the joy it brings children.

But is it easy to write a picture book? Absolutely! Is it easy to write a good, let alone amazing, picture book? **NOT AT ALL!!!** Or at least, it wasn't until now! Because now you are going to get the inside information from a CBCA Notable, New York Times, Amazon and USA Today bestselling author of picture books!

## SO WHAT IS IN THIS COURSE? IS THERE A KITTEN? IS THERE A HORSE?

No. There isn't. But there is a **HEAP** of info, tips and tricks! **By the end of this course you will:**

1. **Know everything you need to know about word counts, page lengths, age groups and more.**
2. **Understand why character is so important in picture books!**
3. **Be inspired to use movie structures to help you write picture books!**
4. **Write with the illustrations in mind!**
6. **Be able to weigh up the pros and cons of writing in rhyme!**
7. **Have the secret sauce! The structure that super successful picture books use!**
8. **Learn layout tricks that bring amazing energy and anticipation to you picture book!**
9. **Have new ideas on how to *GET* new ideas for picture books!**
10. **Get bonus FREE picture book ideas you can use right away!**
11. **Know the answers to many questions people ask about editing and submitting picture books.**

**NOTE: Homework will be assigned** (*there is space for this in the workbook, or you can use a separate notebook*). This means you will leave this course with, at the very least, ideas and templates and thoughts on picture books. At best, you will have **taken the ideas in this course and written a kick-butt picture book ... or books!**

First up, as in all my courses, I believe it is really important for **YOU** to think about what **YOU** would like to get out of this course. Why do **YOU** want to do it? Perhaps, even, why do **YOU** want to write picture books?

Having a strong why is really important in completing anything. It will help you find the time. It will help you push through parts that are hard. Certainly, in writing and getting picture books published, you have to push through, and having

## **HOMEWORK: WHAT DO YOU WANT TO GET OUT OF THIS COURSE?**

Write down the things you would like to learn from this course. Check back once you're finished, and if there's anything that wasn't covered, email me at **wally@adam-wallace-books.com** and I will do my best to fill in the gaps!

Now, write down some reasons why you would like to create picture books! To bring joy to kids? To tell a story that's been burning in you? To have a story for your kids? Whatever it is, write it down! Let it out!



## SECTION 2



INTRODUCING YOUR HOST  
ADAM WALLACE!



# YOUR HOST - ADAM WALLACE

Hi! Adam Wallace here. I'm going to keep this bit about me as brief as possible. Which isn't always easy for me ... which is why picture books are also not always easy for me!

Which is why I had to work out the formula, and once I did, it changed everything.

But where did it all start? Probably back when I was a kid, and my step-dad was a teacher-librarian. Our house was filled with books, and we were always read to.

And my favourites were Roald Dahl, Dr Seuss, and Bill Peet. You may not know Bill Peet, but he was a genius. I will be referring to his books as we go through the course, and they are definitely worth checking out.

My grandmother also wrote picture books, some of which were even illustrated by Mirka Moira!

So I've **always had a massive fondness for picture books**, and certainly when I started writing, like a lot of people, that was what I wrote first. And there is something magical about creating a whole story in a really limited number of words.

And to those people who think it's easy because they're short, to them I say **the hardest book I ever wrote was 10 pages long**, with 5 words on each page. Almost killed me! Literally! But when I got it done, it was **SUCH** a thrill!

Okay, so that's me. Everyone will have a different story as to why they love picture books, or why they want to write them.

In the end, the story matters but doesn't matter. We're here. We're writing them. And at some stage, years from now, there will be kids who remember **our** books from when they were little.

And to have that impact, to have that influence? Wow, just wow.

Right, so let's get to it. Let's get to dissecting picture books and making the whole process, from idea to publication, simpler!



# CREDIBILITY CHECK

Why am I giving advice on writing picture books? Because I wanna. And here are some numbers showing why I think I am a good person to be doing it.

## ADAM WALLACE – THE EVIDENCE

Created picture books with James Hart, Heath McKenzie, Andy Elkerton and other incredible illustrators.

Picture books published by companies in Australia, America and Slovenia.

5 picture books on the ***New York Times Bestseller List***

How to Catch a Leprechaun **Number 1** on the ***Amazon Bestseller List*** (all books)

4 picture books on the ***USA Today Bestseller List***

How to Catch the Easter Bunny read on the ***White House Lawn***

Over 80 books published

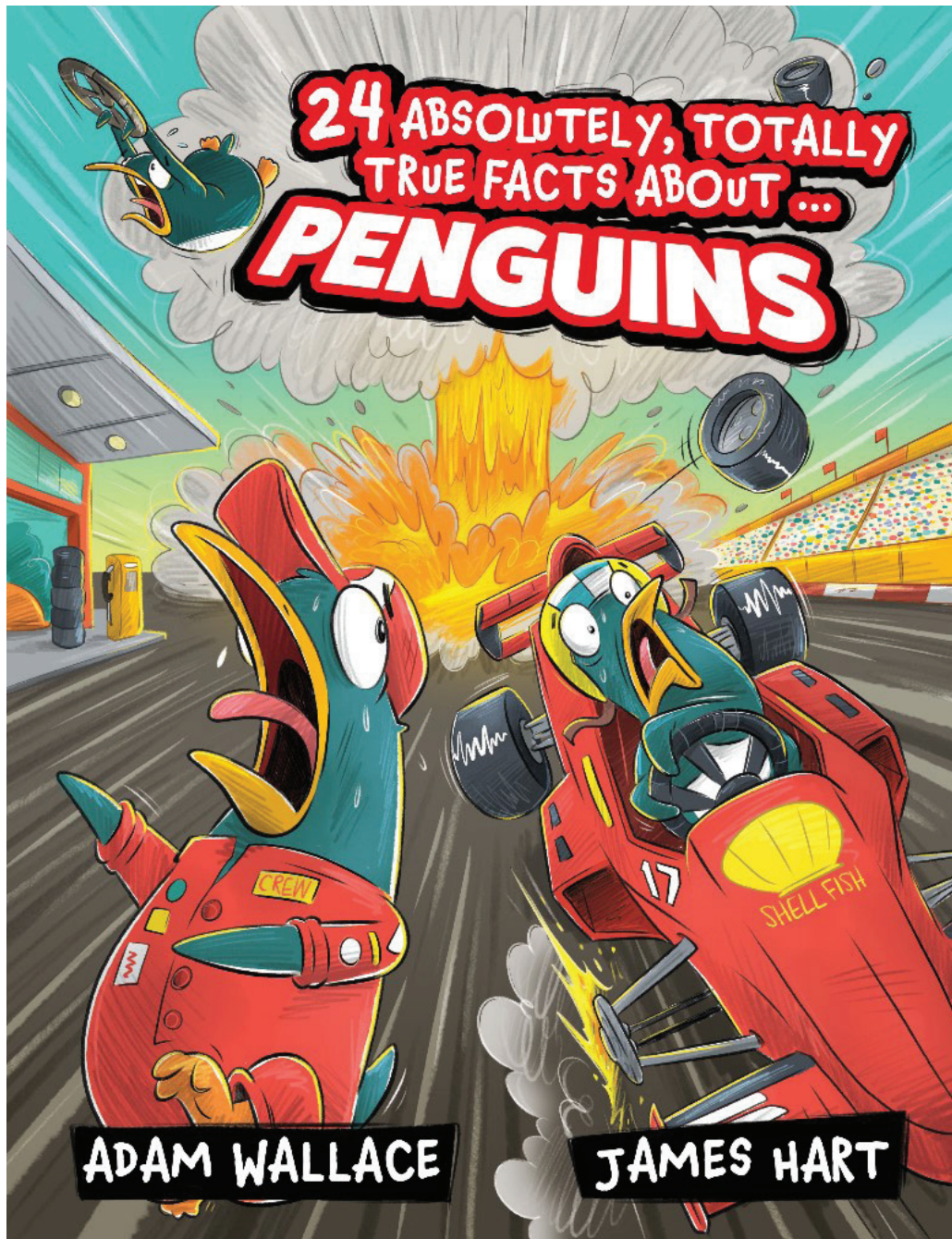
Over **2.3 million** books sold

Picture books in the DJ Khaled and ***Kim, Kourtney and Khloe Kardashian*** households - not delivered personally, unfortunately ...

# PAGES? WORDS? AGE GROUPS?



## SECTION 3



THE NUMBERS OF IT ALL!

First up, let me say this ... I think rules are meant to be broken! But I also think you **need to know the rules before you break them!**

So let's break it down like a rap star!

## HOW MANY WORDS SHOULD YOUR PICTURE BOOK BE?

As I said, I have written a picture book that was around **50 words long**. I have also written picture books that were near on **900 words**, some **400**, and the most recent one I'm working on is **1100 words!**

The Lorax, by Dr Seuss, one of the greatest picture books of all time, is around **1800 words** long.

The Arrival, by Shaun Tan, has **NO** words!

In most submission guidelines, **publishers say picture books should be under 500 words long**.

**AAAGGGHHH!!!!!!**

So what can you do? **Write the story your instinct wants to write**. See what comes out and how many words it is. That first draft can be any length you like. As you write more and more picture books (*and using some techniques we will go through in this course*), your instinct will start to write to the length you want anyway.

Then look at who you would like the book to be for, what age group.

Then look at other books for that age group and how many words they are (on average)

Then look at Publisher submission guidelines.

***Until you are Shaun Tan or Dr Seuss, if your book doesn't fit submission guidelines for word count, it won't be picked up unless it is the most amazing book ever.***

## HOMework

Look at some of your favourite picture books, and some of your non-favourite picture books, and count the words (*or Google them, for famous books!*). Do they fit with what publishers are asking for? Are they mostly under 500 words? Do the ones that seem to be aimed at very young children have lower word counts?

Take a sample and you may start to notice trends.

# HOW MANY PAGES ARE PICTURE BOOKS?

Again, similar to word count, this is going to change depending on the age group. Books for very young children, say 0-2 years old, will be much shorter than books for 4-7 year olds.

**Most picture books will be a multiple of four pages ... usually 24 or 32.**

This is due to printing procedures and costs, and is changing with the advent of digital printing, where books just have to be an even number of pages.

This number of pages also includes all the imprint pages, half-title pages, dedication pages, blank pages and more!

**Your actual story doesn't have to be a multiple of four pages.**

Unless you are self-publishing, and unless you are laying it out for the publisher, don't worry about page count for now (*although it is a nice way to get your word count working well!*).

## HOMework

Check out some of the picture books you looked at in the last homework, and see how many pages they are ... ***then see how many pages the actual story is!***

For bonus points, look at how many words are on each page, and how they are laid out. Note the similarities and differences.

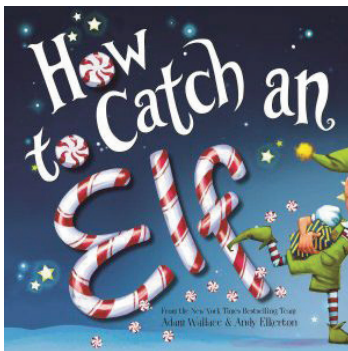


# WHAT AGE GROUP DO PICTURE BOOKS TARGET?

It's a pretty small age group range ... you know, just 0-100!!!!!! Yep, picture books are written for newborns, and they're written for toddlers, and kindergarten kids, and primary school kids, and high school kids, and even for adults!

Think I'm joking? I am ... **NO I'M NOT!** There are non-fiction and fiction and faction books, and all of these can be targeted at different age groups.

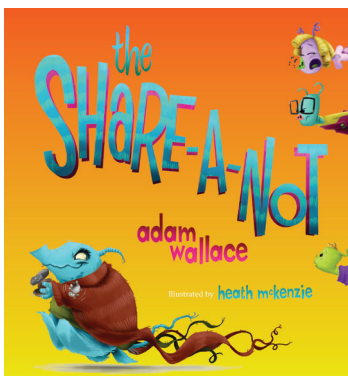
Here are some of the books I have done for different age groups.



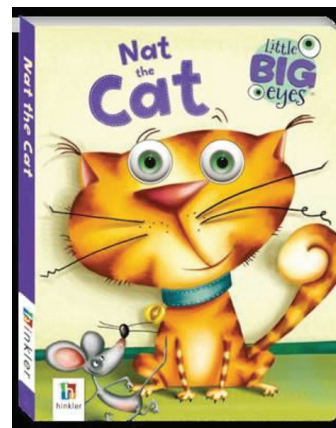
This series was aimed at 4-7 year olds.



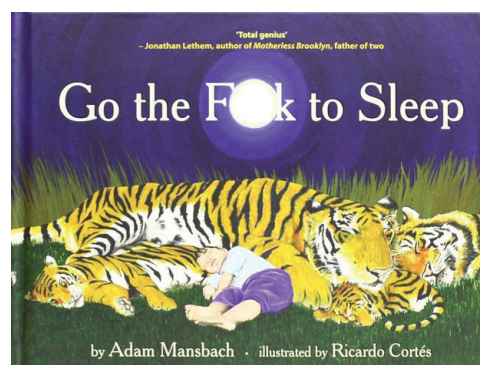
This book was aimed at 2-5 year olds.



This book was aimed at 5-9 year olds.



This book was aimed at 0-3 year olds



This book, which I didn't write, is definitely aimed at adults!



Things that influence the age group of a picture book are:

**Language** - simpler language for younger age groups. Don't shy away from putting in one or two hard words though! This is how vocabulary is built!

**Length** - Again, this can vary, but as a rule books for younger kids are shorter. Less words. Less pages. Less easily destroyed. Apparently young kids have a short attention span! Who knew???

**Humour** - Books aimed at younger kids generally involve physical humour. As the kids get older, they still love the physical stuff, but wordplay can be built in as well

**Themes** - Books for younger kids have very simple themes. Again, as they mature, the themes can become more complex, and involve things like losing a pet, getting a younger sibling, etc.

**Lessons** - This is a really interesting one! Kids in Grade 6 would be very unlikely to choose a picture book from a shop, but they can still be used in classrooms to pass on lessons!

And, in the end, after all that, it is still a generalisation! You may have an older kid who loves the feel and humour of picture books, or an advanced younger kid who is able to get different types of humour!

But these generalisations can really help you tighten your story. Having an idea of who the book is for will guide you in other areas, such as those mentioned above.

The easiest way to get an idea is to read, read, read, and to see what sort of books kids of different ages are loving. Then work out why.

## HOMework

**Find out what books kids of different age groups are loving, and why!**

Is it the humour? Are they often a specific length? Ask friends, teachers, parents, librarians, bookstore worker people, do online searches, as your kids, other people's kids, random kids on the street, anyone!

Search for patterns. See what's working, and then you have the choice to follow that path, or create a new path.



## SECTION 4



**WHERE DID I COME FROM?  
GETTING IDEAS FOR PICTURE BOOKS!**

# HOW DO YOU COME UP WITH YOUR IDEAS???

This is the question I get asked the most by kids ... **AND ADULTS!!!**

It's a tricky one to answer, because ideas can literally come from anywhere, and picture books can be on **anything!**

Google a topic and picture book, and see what comes up!

Oranges picture book? Yep.

Car crash picture book? Yep!

This is **AMAZING!** Because it means you can literally write about whatever pops into your creative brain!

In the next section, we will look at the importance of character in creating a picture book.

But for now, let's get random and see what comes out!

First, my top ways to get ideas for picture books, then some homework for you!

- 1. Observe!** Watch people and animals and couples and groups and everything! Observe different levels of status and how interactions play out.
- 2. Read!** The more picture books you read, the more you start to see the range of ideas and possibilities. Also, just because a theme has been done doesn't mean it's locked up. There are millions of books on bullying, and loss, and friendship. Read a book, then find a way to do that theme better!
- 3. Read!** Read other books! Novels, non-fiction, everything. From these, you not only see what ideas have been done, but it can spark ideas in you as well!
- 4. Listen to songs!** Songs are an **INCREDIBLE** resource for ideas as well! They have torment and longing and inspiration and joy and sadness and everything in between. I listen to songs as though they could be in the soundtrack to the movie of my book, and work scenes or stories around that!
- 5. Listen to people who won't do it themselves!** You are a book creator. Seriously, **SOOOOOOOO** many people will say to you one of three things ... over and over and over and over again!

"Oh, I have an idea for a book." "You know what you should write about?" "Ooooooh, now that's a great idea for a story!"

A lot of times, these ideas or situations won't spark anything ... but sometimes they will! A recent book I wrote that got picked up by Scholastic started with this exact thing!

- 6. Write Titles!** Just think of titles and write them down. Be as crazy as you like. You probably won't use most of them, but you only need one or two to spark some writing and it's a win!

# HOMEWORK

So those are some ways I have come up with ideas for picture books. Give them a go. Some may work for you, some may not. But the more things you try, the more books will fly! Now here are some other things you can try to get the imagination and inspiration flying!

**1.** Write down all the ways **people annoy you**. Just a word or two for each. I did these one time - **Greedy. Negative. Indulgent.** Complaining. Bullying.

People say children are little adults. I disagree. I think adults are big children. So all those themes are played out with kids as well. I chose the three words above in bold, and I wrote ***The Share-a-not, Mac O'Beasty***, and ***The Negatees***. Three of my all-time favourites.

Give it a go. This is something comedians often do for their routines. In a picture book, you can write about someone with the negative trait that annoys you, and you can teach them the lesson and change them! Then give the book to that person without saying it;s about them!

So write down 5 ways (*more if you like*) that people get on your bad side. What do they do? How do they act? Why does it annoy you? Even if it's something like cutting you off in a car park, that can be used indirectly in a picture book - a bird who always gets the good spot in the nest by waiting to see where the other birds go, then jumping in!

Awesome! Now write about a fictional character (*doesn't even have to be human*) who has that quality, but really exaggerate it! If they're mean, make them the meanest person ever! If they're selfish, take it to the extreme! See what comes out. It's easier to tone back than to go the other way!

This doesn't have to be a story. It can just be a character description!

**(NOTE: It is *really* fun to totally exaggerate the negative quality)**





**2.** Now flip it. What do you find funny or interesting? Then exaggerate that. I find farts funny, so I wrote a story called Whoops, with a kid who does a massive pop-off! I did it as my uni assignment (*and got an A, thank you very much!*).

So what do **YOU** find funny? It can just be a word (*slapstick, farts, dogs in clothes*) or it can be a sentence (*Seeing someone wobbling on their bike*). Write it all down!

Now, pick a couple of those things and write about them for 5 minutes. See if a story starts to appear, or if its more just thoughts. Play. Be silly. Be serious. Whatever! (*You may want to do this in your notebook or on your computer ... just in case an awesome story starts appearing and you get on a roll!*)

(\*\*\* You can also download this in an excel spreadsheet with the video of this section\*\*\*)

MAIN CHARACTER	SKILL/POWER	NEMESIS	LOCATION	SITUATION

Now do another one, this time you can enter any column headings you like. Maybe the nemesis has a skill. Maybe one column is Main Character's Best Friend. Whatever you want that you think fills out a storyline! There's even an extra column if you want! Fill these two boards ... **THOUSANDS OF IDEAS!**

[illegible]

## SECTION 5

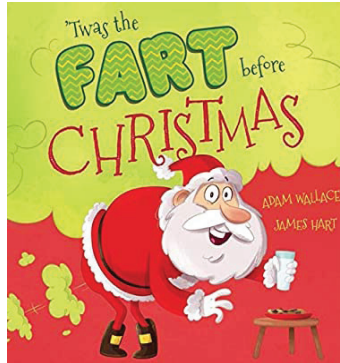


**THE iMPORTANCE OF  
CHARACTER!**

# CHARACTER IS CRUCIAL!!!

A lot of people will tell you that story is the most important thing in a picture book, but I disagree. Story **IS** important, don't get me wrong, but I believe the most important thing in a picture book, depending on the style, of course, is character.

What do I mean by the style? Well, for example, this one I did with James Hart ...



This was a series of fun pages with different animals popping off. So there was no central character. The character, in a way, was the events happening.

But if you're writing a **STORY** as opposed to a book, character is crucial. **CRUCIAL, I SAY!** Why? Well, let me elaborate!

## CHARACTER DRIVES THE STORY/PLOT!

You have a character, and that character wants something. They have an intention. Aaron Sorkin (*Genius, by the way. His class on [masterclass.com](https://www.masterclass.com) is a must watch for any writer*) talks about how intention and obstacle is the key in TV shows. In picture books, it's the same.

Have a character that wants something, then don't let them have it ... or at least make it hard! A kid wants to go to the beach, parents won't let him. A dog wants a walk, but it's raining. A selfish kid has to share. A naughty kid gets in trouble for playing pranks, or doesn't get the response they are after.

## CHARACTER PROVIDES CHANGE

When a character changes, or learns a lesson, or overcomes obstacles, that's a great start for a picture book. Kid can't do something at the start, keeps trying, does it at the end. **BAM!** Story arc!

## CHARACTER PROVIDES OPTIONS

This is a fun one. See, most often a character will have an **external goal**, or intention ... they want to go to the beach, they want to play pranks, they want all the lollies, they want a puppy.

Often though, the **internal goal** is different ... and the character may not even realise this! They want to spend time with their parents, who are always busy. They want the responses and the attention on them. They can't eat lollies at home. They want a friend because the other kids tease them.

The great thing is, this means the end result isn't always what it seemed was necessary, so you can do super cool twists, and **the support players can change as well!**

## CHARACTER DRIVES A SERIES

Not always, but if you want to write a series, a **HUUUUGE** percentage of the time you need a great character. Pig the Pug, The Hippopotamus on the Roof, The Pigeon on the Bus, Charlie and Lola, Winnie the Pooh, Knuffle Bunny, Pete the Cat, and many more.

Even something like Do NOT Open This Book, it's the character that drives the series.

Having a great character people know and love means you can throw that character into any situation, and people know how they will respond ... which also means you can twist that around every now and then too!

## CHARACTER PROVIDES SUPPORT CHARACTERS

Having a strong character also allows you to create a great support cast. Think about what the support cast will bring out of the main character.

Perhaps the kid is brave and arrogant ... but scared of dogs. Right! Support cast. A dog, obviously. A kid who knows the fear and uses it against them. Already theres an inkling of a storyline.

This also allows your character to overcome. They're scared of dogs? Have them overcome that to protect their friend. **BAM!**

It's nice to have support casts that bring out good and bad traits in your main character. One who is an obstacle to what they want, and one who is potentially the answer to their flaw. Main character is selfish, have a generous character who subtly shows them the error of their ways.

And on that ...

## CHARACTERS ARE FLAWED

In fact, they should be. In fact, they **MUST** be!!! Again, we want the character to change, and in the best stories, they change from a flawed character to someone who overcomes that flaw. This can often happen as they reach their **internal goal**. A character who is perfect but then gets a flaw and is awful at the end? Not an easy sell to a publisher ... but perhaps one who seems perfect, gains a flaw, then overcomes it could be a winner!

## CHARACTER DRIVES LOCATIONS/SITUATIONS

Yep, and this is the fun one. Similar to what I talked about in the series bit, knowing your character allows you to throw them into locations and situations, and it's great to use opposites here because that introduces our obstacles!

**Naughty character?** Send them to a super strict school. **Noisy character?** Put them in a library or church or funeral! A kid who hates being the centre of attention? Make it happen! Poor family? Get them among the snobby rich elite!

This allows your character to either find something else in them, or charm their way out of a situation and win over their rival, Or they get in massive trouble and may not even learn the lesson, but we, the readers, do!

# HOMEWORK

Okay! It's time to create characters! There are so many ways to do this, we're going to do a couple of simple ones.

Without really thinking about it, make up a character (*or more than one*) and 5 traits. It can literally be anything, but it's great if at least one is a flaw. For example:

1. **Boy. 6 years old. Hates cats. Scared of ants. Favourite food is bananas.**
2. **Monkey. Lives in zoo. Hates bananas. Loves to read. Can't help stealing things.**

Okay! Your turn!

Great! Now think about two supporting characters you could throw in a story with your character. They can be surprising or super obvious. For mine:

1. **His mum, who's a crazy cat lady. His sister, who has an ant farm.**
2. **His best friend, a hippo next door. The zookeeper, who also loves to read and has lots of books.**



Amazing! Okay, so now, think up some simple scenarios.

1. **His mum gets a new cat. He leaves out a honey sandwich in his bed. Gets a dog.**
2. **The zookeeper gets a signed copy of War and Peace. Monkey escapes from the zoo and robs banks. Hippo drenches all the monkey's books.**

Soooooooo ... what you have there is a very simple basis for not only a story, but potentially a series! And not every idea you brainstorm will come to fruition, but if you write fast and don't censor yourself, you never know what will come out; And the more you do, you get the opportunity to mix and match!

Sooooooo ... now do some more!

# NEVER WORK WITH CHILDREN AND ANIMALS

That's what they say, but animals are very popular in picture books. So it's animals ... **AND** children!

## WHAAAAAAT???

I know. Crazy, right? But there are a few reasons animals are great characters (*and monsters too*).

- 1. Children feel more comfortable talking about an issue they're dealing with if it involves an animal in a book.** I don't know the psychology, but it's true. They will discuss the issue, and what the animal did, or should do. It's actually quite incredible to see. Puppets have the same effect on a lot of kids.
- 2. It can take out the diversity issue.** Animals are animals. No one will say, "There weren't enough tigers in this book!" I don't want to make light of the diversity issues that do exist in picture books, but I also don't believe they should be dealt with in a token way. I also also believe that diversity in personality is just as, if not more important than race, religion, etc.
- 3. You can go both ways!** They can either be animals as animals dealing with animal things, or animals used doing human things. Either way, it works ... as long as your story works!
- 4. Animals, in a children's book, are more malleable.** Monsters **DEFINITELY** are! You can bonk a monster on the head, drop it from a plane, they basically can't be killed. It's awesome, gives you so much freedom!

# HOMework

Now we're going to create animal characters. Usually when I do this we draw a picture of an animal first, but I won't put you through that here. If you **DO** want to draw an animal though, go to [www.adam-wallace-books.com/free-adam-wallace-drawing-ebooks/](http://www.adam-wallace-books.com/free-adam-wallace-drawing-ebooks/)

You can download two how to draw books that will get you started creating super cool characters you can really start playing around with.

If you don't draw one, pick an animal. Then write down some absolutely true facts.

**Monkey. Eats bananas. Swings in trees. Gets carried by mum for a bit. Lives in the jungle. That sort of thing.**

Then, give it character traits or situations that are the opposite of that!

**Monkey. Scared of bananas! Afraid of heights. Allergic to bark. Too heavy to be carried, a giant baby monkey. Born in the city.**

You get the idea, go for it, and have fun! (*Also great to think about how the other animals would react to this!*)

And then do some outrageous things about your character. Kids are awesome at this!

**Age: 197. Has 27 fingers. Its head is on its shoulder. Eats bananas by shoving them up its nose. Whatever! Just crazy stuff!**

And finally, even if it seems totally dumb, **write a little story** using one or more of the things you wrote down about your animal. Have fun with it, even if it's a serious story. This is practice, and **practice writing is play writing**. There is no write or wrong. Try and keep it picture bookish length, but don't be locked in. See what comes out. Do it in any style, rhyming, non-rhyming, any age group, whatever you want.

**Have FUN!**



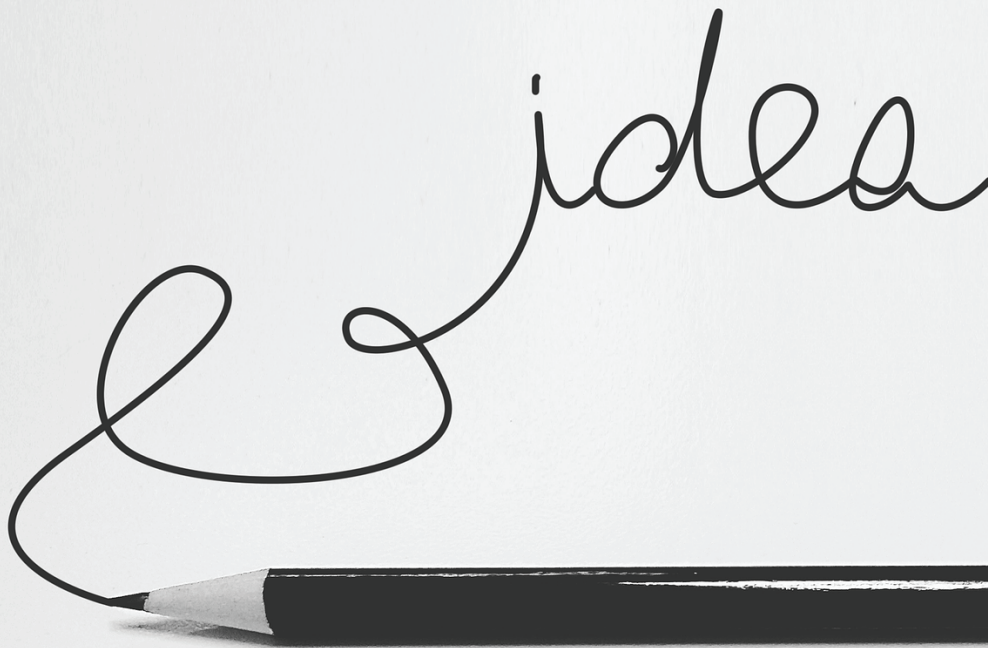








## SECTION 5A



**27 PICTURE BOOK IDEAS  
YOU CAN STEAL AND USE!**

# HeeeeeeRe We go!

The following are pure stream of consciousness ideas that you are welcome to steal, I mean use! Use them as writing prompts, use them to write a story you will submit for publication, or something in between!

It **would** be hilarious if publishers received 197 submissions all with the same title!!!

See if they spark something. Maybe part of one character will merge with part of another character for you, or spark something totally new!

## PICTURE BOOK TITLES

Johnny's Banana

Seven ways to trick a sister

What was that?

I know something you don't know

Manny's Many Moods

I got a mug for Christmas

**OW!** That was hot!

But I don't **WANT** to eat it! (I see a series here! But I don't **CARE** if it's good for me! But it tastes

**BAD!**)

This prickles, that tickles.

## HOMEWORK

Write down as many picture book titles as you can! Don't worry about whether they are good or bad or something you feel like you would even write about.

### **JUST WRITE THEM!**

The best ideas will surprise you ... which reminds me of the amazing story of how the Just Do It slogan came about!

The story goes that it was inspired by the last words of a man facing execution. They asked him for his last words. He said, "Let's do it."

(*Seriously! Google How did Just Do It come about!*)

**GO!**

Okay. Picture book titles.

# CHARACTERS

(\*\*I might say boy or girl or child or monster or dog, but the character can be anything!\*\*)

A lion who dreams of a sea-change (*or ski-change/city-change/etc etc*)

A monster whose only goal is to steal every single cockatoo egg in the world for his collection.

A child who sees her baby brother as an art canvas.

A monster that can't control its temper.

A monkey that is allergic to bananas.

An ant that is terrified of magnifying glasses ... and a boy with a magnifying glass.

A boy with Tourette Syndrome who can't stop his outbursts, and the librarian who saves him.

Triplets. 11 years old. One shy. One smart. One tough. All pickpockets!

A puppy with the cutest eyes ... who's a bully!

## HOMEWORK

Yep,. you guessed it ... your turn! I know we've done some character work already, but here is the most important lesson in picture books. Not just for characters, but for everything picture books.

**YOU CAN NEVER DO TOO MUCH!!!**

**EVER!**

**YOU CAN NEVER WRITE TOO MANY STORIES OR BRAINSTORM  
TOO MANY IDEAS.**

**EVER!!!!!!!!!!**

So write down every idea of a character that flows out of your brain, good, bad or ugly! Put it all down then sift through for the gold! And don't stop if you do one you love! Keep going and come back to it later!

# PICTURE BOOK FIRST LINES/STANZAS/STORY STARTERS!

Here are 8 story starters you can use to kickstart a story ... but don't feel you have to use them exactly! If your brain tangents somewhere else from these, **GO FOR IT!!!** Whatever comes out and is written right now is right!

Write fast, edit slow ... which is a PG variation on Peter de Vries' "Write drunk, edit sober" quote haha!

1. A puppy in Paris with a passion for pastry,  
Loved eating biscuits and cakes.  
But this puppy in Paris with a passion for pastry,  
Was about to make many mistakes.
2. Lottie's room was filled with hats of all shapes, styles and colours.  
And, on the inside of every single hat, Lottie had written: I LOVE YOU, GRANDPA.
3. Why was it there? And where had it come from? No one knew ... except for Taylor.
4. If there was one thing Angus knew, it was that he didn't know anything ... hang on a minute ...
5. A hippo eating cream-filled buns,  
Decided that she'd count by ones. (*Then some pages/scenes/somethings of counting by ones*)  
  
A lion who'd escaped from zoos,  
Decided that he'd count by twos.  
  
A monkey swinging through the trees,  
Decided that he'd count by threes.
6. Sasha never cleaned her room, and with good reason. The mess kept the ghosts in check.
7. "Mum would be **SO** angry if she saw me," Harry thought, skating along with a tortoise on his back. Harry thought it was dumb that hippos and tortoises couldn't be friends. It had always been that way, ever since the great pond battle of 1432. But, Harry thought, it's **DUMB!**
8. Slowly, slowly, ever so slowly, the giant snails slid over the roof of the house.



# A PICTURE BOOK TEMPLATE FOR YOU!

This one is a fully-fledged story outline. Again, totally just an idea and suggestions. Use bits of it, or all of it, or none of it. Aim it at a younger or older audience. Different illustration style thoughts. It's yours to do with as you wish!

**TITLE: ALDO THE INVENTOR**  
**ILLUSTRATED IN THE STYLE OF:** James Foley  
**TARGET AGE GROUP:** 4-8 years old

**CONCEPT:** Aldo is an inventor ... just not a very good one! And yes, this is something we have seen before, so how can we make it different?

Aldo's inventions are designed to be loving and make people feel good. Things that give hugs, or massages, or are for fun, whatever, but they actually cause chaos, mess, breakages, embarrassment to his family. One even loses his mum her job!

Aldo has had enough. He is going to give up. He decides to throw all the inventions out the next morning.

But that night a burglar breaks into the family home. On the way out, he sees Aldo's inventions and decides that he would like a nice face massage (*or your variation*) ... the face massager (*or your variation*) basically beats him up. He staggers from one invention to the next, going from bad to worse for the burglar, until seeing one last one, decides yes, he would like a hug (*or your variation*).

So he goes into the hug machine (*or your variation*) which malfunctions and traps him and keeps him there till the morning when the family see him and call the police.

Who call the media.

And a very big company pays Aldo a **LOT** of money for his inventions!

Aldo's inventions become famous and they **always** work ... just not in the way they were supposed to! (*They are now used as security devices, so are still doing good*).

**THEMES:** Thomas Edison's quote - "Just because something doesn't do what you planned it to do, doesn't mean it is useless."

Good intentions can make magic happen.

Be flexible! Be prepared to get to where you want by a different path.

Don't be a burglar!!!

If we want to change the world, make it a better place, we **will** find a way!

Don't look at the problem, look past the problem at the solution!

# HOMework

**So many ideas!** Counting up the ones I did previously, and the ones you did previously, and the character things we did before, and the storyboarding and everything else in **Section 4 ... we now have 75 gazillion ideas for stories!**

And people say it's hard to come up with ideas for a story!

Now, and I know we haven't looked at structure, rhyme, non-rhyme, anything like that yet (***that's all coming!***), but for wherever you are now, whatever you feel in your heart about writing picture books, whatever is ready to come out ... choose one of the things we've created, or a mixture of a couple of things, and **write a picture book story!**

Word length isn't crucial, especially in a first draft, but it doesn't hurt to have in mind a word length to aim for. Doesn't matter if you hit it or not, just have it in mind. 500 words is a standard one, so that can be a good start, but it's up to you.

Outside of that, however you want to write it is perfect! We will come back to this story, after we have done the other sections, and work on it some more, tightening it up.

But now it's time for you to have **FUN!!!! PLAY!!!!** And **CREATE!!!**











# SECTION 6

'I'LL TRY,' he said, 'BECAUSE I WANT TO DANCE,  
I WANT TO FIT INTO ALL OF MY PANTS,



I WANT TO PLAY BAGPIPES, IF GIVEN THE CHANCE,  
ALL AROUND THE LAND.'

## TO RHYME OR NOT TO RHYME ...

# IT'S RHYME TIME!

Rhyming picture books. We all know them. We pretty much all love them. They are crucial in helping kids learn to read. They have a sing-song quality that makes them fun to read to children.

## SO WHY DO WE ALWAYS READ THAT PUBLISHERS DON'T WANT SUBMISSIONS IN RHYME???

Honestly, I don't totally know, but here are rumours that have passed my way on the grapevine.

### 1. **PUBLISHERS GET A LOT OF STORIES IN RHYME THAT ARE BADLY WRITTEN.**

This is a big one, and totally understandable. If you are reading bad rhyme over and over again, you really don't want to read anymore of it! I'll look more at what bad rhyme is when I talk about how to write good rhyme!

### 2. **PUBLISHERS GET A LOT OF STORIES IN RHYME THAT ARE BADLY WRITTEN.**

I can't emphasise this one enough. If you are going to write in rhyme, write and test and edit and write and test and edit and get that story amazing!

3. **Nah, I think that's it.** Look, there may be more reasons, and I'm sure if you Google it you will find some, but in the end, it doesn't matter. There will be publishers out there who will say rhyming stories are okay to send in, but when you do, you want to be ready. You want to have worked on that craft till it bleeds ... okay, maybe not that much, but you get the idea!

**Stand out from the bad rhyme!** How? Well, there are some tips coming, my friend. There are some tips coming!

## HOMework

Read some rhyming books that have been published. **Read it to yourself and out loud.** See if there is a difference in how you read it. Read some super popular ones (*Dr Seuss, Aaron Blabey and Julia Donaldson*) as well as some self-published or less popular ones. See if there's a difference.

Is it good rhyme? Not so good? Write the book down, if you think it's good or bad rhyme, a good or bad story, and why. You'll start to get a feel for what rhythms work best (*for you!*) this way.

# TIPS FOR WRITING GOOD RHYMING STORIES.

## 1. IT DOESN'T HAVE TO HAVE THE SAME NUMBER OF SYLLABLES IN EVERY LINE!

This is one area lots of people get stuck. They think if every line has 11 syllables, or whatever number, then the rhyme will read perfectly. Unfortunately, this isn't true.

Say "however" and "animal" out loud. They both have three syllables, but I know I say animal faster and with emphasis on the "mal" whereas I say however with the emphasis on the "ev". Try this with other words that have the same syllables and see if you notice a difference.

Or "anyway" and "I went to." Both three syllables, can be said in a number of ways.

## 2. FORCE PEOPLE TO READ IT YOUR WAY

This is **HUUUUUGE!** Singers have a massive advantage over picture book authors. Singers tell people how their song goes, because of how they sing it. They can fix a poor rhythm simply by holding a note longer!

With a rhyming picture book, people can read them **HOWEVER THEY WANT TO!**

You may have a perfect rhythm when you read it, but someone else may read it quite differently.

The easiest way to test this is to read it out loud and see where you put the emphasis, and how that affects the rhythm, then **force people to read it how you do!** For example, read the following couplet out the three different ways (*this is from a story I have written and submitted ... we'll see if it's good rhyme haha!*).

There's no overacting otter, only an overacting you,  
We do not have penguins puffing pipes how could that possibly be true?

There's no overacting otter, only an overacting **you**,  
We do **not** have penguins puffing pipes, how could that **possibly** be true?

**There's** no overacting **otter**, only an **overacting** you,  
**We** do not have penguins puffing pipes! How could **that** possibly be true?

Did you read them differently? Did the pace you read at change? Did you find you put emphasis on words that weren't emphasised, **because** of the emphasised words? The second line is also very long, but can work if the author gets the rhythm and emphasis correct.

These are all things to think about when writing rhyme. You can play with length and syllables by changing the emphasis. The other trick is punctuation! Making people pause is awesome!

If you're seeing things like ratfish reading to relax,  
Here's my advice ... **lay off the snacks!**

Commas and ... are really crucial in writing rhyme, and can make all the difference in how a story is read.

Remember, you won't be there when most people are reading it!

You can even use ...

**PAGE TURNS!!!** For example ...

When the weather's nice, I ride my bike,  
I hope I don't ride over a spike.  
I ride round all my favourite spots,  
I ride through puddles ... (*Page turn, so long pause!*)

And now I'm covered in dots!

The page turn forces the reader to read it how I want, and builds the suspense!

### 3. READ YOUR WORK OUT LOUD

Speaking of crucial things, reading something in your head and reading it out loud are two totally different experiences! I know, sounds weird, but trust me.

Reading out loud, suddenly you stumble over sentences you didn't before. You notice typos. The rhythm of the stanza before suddenly affects the rhythm of the stanza you're reading. It's amazing how it helps.

And remember this ... picture books will most often be read out to children, by parents or teachers. So you want to make it the easiest and most interesting out-loud read ever. The punctuation and emphasis tips will help this, but so will reading it out loud. Pretend you're reading it to kids. **Actually** read it to kids, and note down if there are places it doesn't read smoothly.

### 4. HAVE OTHER PEOPLE READ YOUR WORK OUT LOUD!

Better yet, get lots of other people to read it out loud. This is both crucial **AND NERVE-WRACKING!** But **CRUCIAL!**

Again, you may think you have written it to be read a certain way, but suddenly people are pausing where they aren't meant to, or putting the emphasis on the wrong word.

And if you get more than one person to read it out loud, and they all stumble at the same points, you have some work to do on those points.

### 5. WRITE HOW YOU SPEAK

This seems like dumb advice, right? **We don't speak in rhyme, Adam! Think about it!** But so many people, like, **SOOOOO** many people, write rhyme unnaturally. This makes it feel forced, and usually happens when the rhyme is the most important thing to them.

The most common mistake is to put words in a different order to how you would naturally say them.

For example: The bird kept singing, it just wouldn't quit,  
As up in its nest, in the tree, it did sit.

I mean, that has so many problems haha! The rhythm is actually okay, but it is **SO** unnatural! In the tree it did sit? Come on! No one would actually speak like that. It sat in the tree!

How about: The bird kept singing, it wasn't the best,  
As it sat at the top of the tree in its nest.

I mean, that isn't great either, but at least it sounds a bit more natural!

Another example: I went to the shops to get something to eat,  
And guess who, on the way, I did meet?

You can see it is easy to get caught up in the rhyme and rhythm. But even if they work, it doesn't mean it's an easy or pleasant story to read.

## 6. TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS

You **know** what you like in a rhyme. ***Trust that!*** Don't worry about rules and meters and iambic pentameters or Seuss or Shakespeare ... write it how it sounds good to you ... **BUT BE HONEST!**

And play with the rules. Learn them, and play with them.

For example, from my book Mac O'Beasty:

A meal which was never far away,  
For Mac liked to eat at least nine meals a day,  
He never cooked his own food, he got take-away,  
From the vendors passing by.

Those vendors passed regularly by Mac's plot,  
He was easily the best customer they'd got,  
In fact, Mac O'Beasty ate such a lot,  
The salesman could buy nice houses, put their kids through private school, drive fancy cars and boats,  
and take nice holidays to exotic locations.

Lead people one way, and then surprise them by going in another, and it will have great impact. It isn't something you want to do too often, and I only did this once in this book, but it can work really well!

## 7. BE CONSISTENT

The flipside of that is you want to be consistent. Unless it is a real style to do a different rhyming type each stanza, be consistent in your rhythm. It makes it so much easier to read out loud.

For example:

When the moon is full on a snowy night,  
Something magical happens when the time is right.  
It's not an old silk hat that brings me to life,  
But the enchanted snow star shining down at midnight.

I don't thumpity-thump or give warm hugs-  
That's for my friends to do.  
These clever kids will try to trap me,  
But who will catch me ... you?

As you can see, it is a totally different style from the first to second stanza, and then the rhythm continues as for the second stanza in the rest of the book. It's an okay thing to try, I just think it makes it a little trickier to get into the rhythm.

In saying that, one of my books, *The Negatees*, has a different style every stanza hahaha! It breaks rules for rhyming and length ... but I love it! It's consistently inconsistent. I read some of it in the video.

## 8. READ, READ, READ AND FIND DIFFERENT STYLES

The more rhyme you read, the more you discover what you like, and what style suits you.

The two main styles I use are rhyming couplets, and whatever the other one is called hahaha, where the second and fourth lines in a stanza rhyme.

So something like this from ***Better Out Than In*** ...

The week had begun, things weren't looking good,  
Because you weren't feeling as well as you should.  
Your tummy was swirling around and around,  
You felt like hurling all over the ground!

Or this *from my new Christmas book* ...

The day before Christmas is a wonderful time,  
With magic and joy in the air.  
But one Christmas, long ago, before you were born,  
The magic? It just wasn't there.

And of course there are many others. From ***Mac O'Beasty*** again ...

A long time ago, in a land far away,  
There lived a monster who, I have to say,  
Enjoyed just sitting and eating all day,  
In his swamp, on a bed of slime.

OR this from ***Merry Christmas, Adam*** ...

Come on, Adam, join my crew,  
We're not cows, so we don't moo,  
We're not ghosts, we don't say, "BOO!"  
We're wolves! We howl! Let's go!  
"AHOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!"

OR this from my uncle's wedding ...

There once was a man named Enis

Oh. Better not to that one.

But you **CAN** do limerick style as well! Like this, from ***The Negatees*** ...

He had successes, this is true,  
Of course he did, we all do.  
The Negatees though, in his negative way,  
Thought the bad things would outweigh,  
The good, by a factor of two.



So play with rhyme. It's seriously one of the most funnest ways to write books for kids, and you have so many options.

And the more you play with it, the more you will find your voice and your style, and the easier it will be to focus on the story rather than the rhyme.

And, who knows, you may come up with a brand new style that revolutionises the way rhyme is written for kids.

## 9. A GREAT RESOURCE

The more rhyming words you know, the quicker you can write, which leads to a more natural sounding story. So building up that rhyming dictionary in your head is great, but if you get stuck,

**[www.rhymezone.com](http://www.rhymezone.com)**

is amazing!!!! I have it open **ALL** the time while I am writing, so if I am stuck, I can look a word up straight away.

It is great for beginner rhymers as well, and kids too ... but beware, it doesn't censor its rhyming words, so if a kid puts in duck ...

You can also buy rhyming dictionaries, all of which can be very, very helpful!

## HOMework

Read rhyming books and write in rhyme and read out loud ... over and over and over and over and over again.

Seriously.

Writing in rhyme is one of the areas that working on your craft over and over will lead to massive improvement.

Like, massive!

I have also put a few rhyming examples here that could use some work. Play with them and see if you can get them sounding awesome ... and then, maybe, even write a story! Don't worry about getting it in one go, have a few goes at each one if you need to.

The bird kept singing, it just wouldn't quit,  
As up in its nest, in the tree, it did sit.

I went to the shops to get something to eat,  
And guess who, on the way, I did meet?

Maybe even have a go at rewriting this first stanza with the same rhythm the second stanza has!

When the moon is full on a snowy night,  
Something magical happens when the time is right.  
It's not an old silk hat that brings me to life,  
But the enchanted snow star shining down at midnight.

I don't thumpity-thump or give warm hugs-  
That's for my friends to do.  
These clever kids will try to trap me,  
But who will catch me ... you?

Wonderful. Now, final challenge, and one I do all the time and love doing. Take a story you have already written, that **IS NOT** in rhyme.

Rewrite it, but rewrite it as a rhyming story. This can be quite a challenge, but is actually super rewarding.

**As an example, this is the start of a story I rewrote for a publisher in rhyme. I was also trying to shorten it.**

“Oh, my dearest Robin, you are such a special boy” his mum loved to warmly tell her little Robin. “You have such a big heart, you are curious, friendly to everyone and so deeply compassionate. Ever since you were born, I have known that Mother Earth has chosen you as one of her own...” And then she always described an event that had taken place at the maternity ward when she had pressed him against her chest for the very first time.

“It was a beautiful sunny day, I pulled you closer and suddenly noticed a bushy branch of a large tree in front of my window ...

**And so on. When I did it in rhyme ...**

When Robin was born, the sky was blue,  
It was a wonderfully sunny day.  
He slept with his mother, lying on her chest,  
On the bed in Ward 8J.

Okay! Your turn! Take one of your prose stories and rewrite it in rhyme. If you **haven't** written something in prose, take a picture book someone else has done and rewrite it in rhyme!







# SECTION 7

The Share-a-not grew quickly,  
and so did his greed,



9 months.



1½ years



2¾ years

He didn't understand,  
"Just take what you **need**."

His toys to him were his toys alone,  
He even took toys that he didn't own.



## WRITING FOR/WITH AN ILLUSTRATOR!!!

# EVERY PICTURE BOOK HAS 3 STORIES

This is something Leigh Hobbs, legend of the world, says. I may be kind of getting it slightly not exactly word perfect, but basically ...

The text tells one story. The pictures tell another story. The third story is the one the kids make up in their own mind!

Or he might say the third story is the one the text and pictures tell together, I can't remember exactly ... either way, it's good!

So how do we write to leave space for that gap? Well, you don't need to worry about it so much in a first draft, just get everything in there. But as you edit, think about what could be left out, and shown in the pictures.

This gets easier the more you do it, but there are definitely some things to think about.

## 1. DESCRIPTION

**Description** is **DEFINITELY** one thing that can be eased up on in picture books.

In a story I'm writing at the moment, initially it was like this ...

While the guards were distracted, Eve went to the box,  
Tore a corner of wrapping away.  
Then she snuck inside, and what she saw,  
Filled her heart with dismay.

Although, on the outside, the box was bright,  
With colours and patterns and a bow.  
Inside was dark, and dank, and cold,  
Eve's spirits sunk so low.

**That second stanza** is lovely and descriptive, and I love the word dank, but **it isn't necessary!** We will see the box in the first stanza, and we will see how dark it is on the inside in the stanza that follows these ones.

So that stanza is unnecessary!

You don't need to write how a character has long hair, or whose eyes narrow. You can be much more general! Same with place description. **They entered the creepy forest** gives the illustrator **SO** much more freedom than **They entered the forest, which was dark, and eyes stared at them from the trees, and the branches on the trees looked like arms, and there was a wolf sitting on the path and ghosts in the shadows!**

Trust your illustrator!



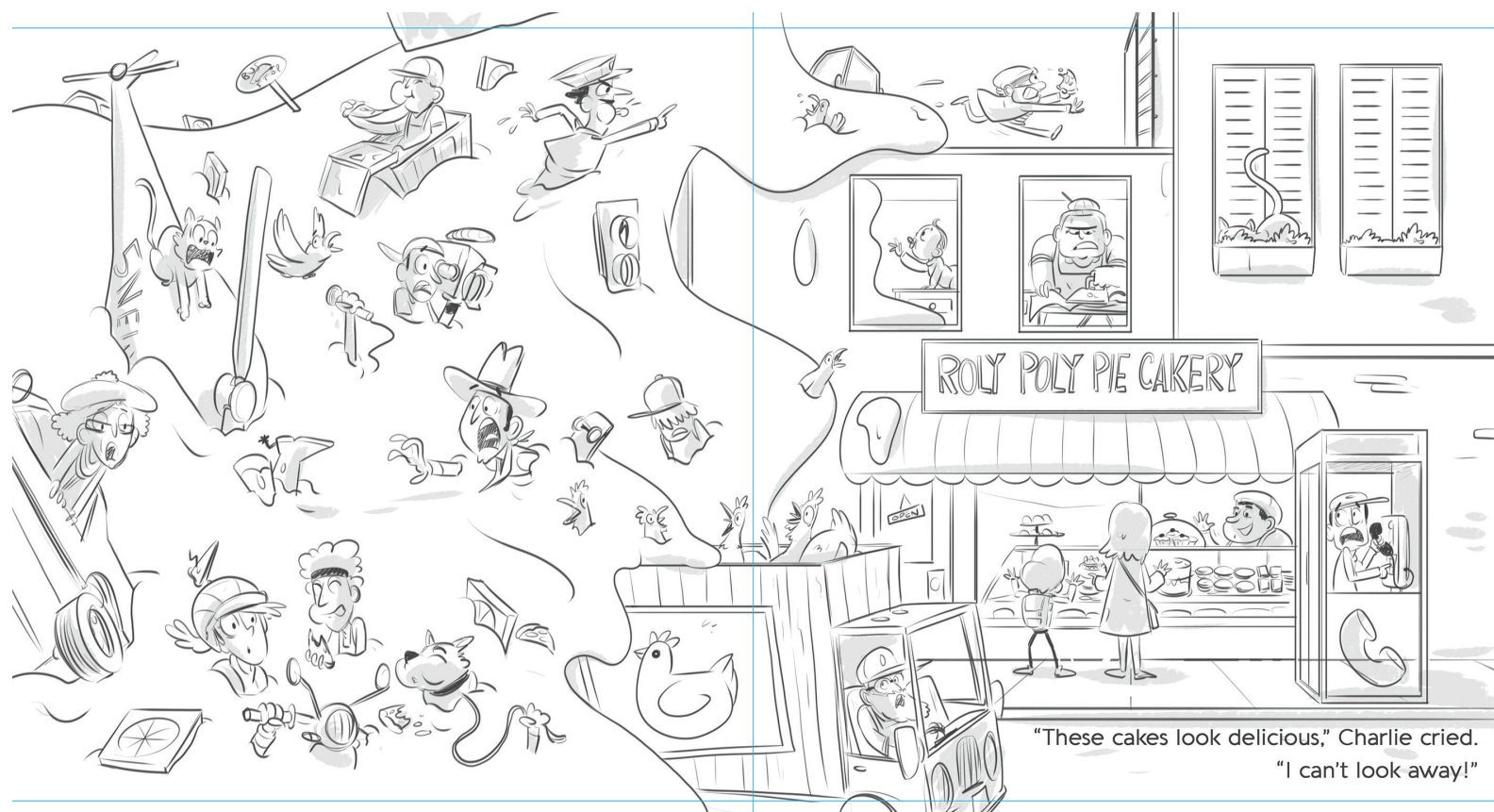
## 2. WRITE OPEN, NOT CLOSED

This is similar. **The storm closed in** is open. **The skies turned grey and the wind howled, knocking over trees and sending people scurrying for shelter** is closed.

Okay, I'm going to stop this bit here. Basically, you don't need to write details! That's the crux of these ones! **Write the internal, show the external. Give hints, show answers!**

Basically, writing open and leaving space gives **YOU** room to play!.

Check out this rough from a book I am doing with James Hart!



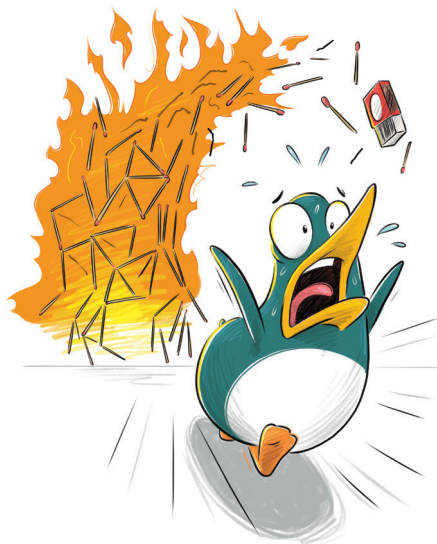
James and I have **definitely** taken Leigh's concept to the extreme, creating a **MASSIVE** gap between text and picture. The joke of the story is that Charlie and his mum walk to school, but are always looking at something and never notice the chaos going on behind them. This lets the kids fill in gaps and notice the whole other story going on. Also, if we had to write exactly what was going on in this picture, **it would be a million words!**

It's like silence on a stage. Don't be scared to leave some silence in your text ... a great illustrator will not only fill the silence, but make it ear-splitting!

Basically, in a reader, the picture can be exactly what the text says, as that helps with reading. In a fiction picture book, it is wonderful if the picture can give more, add more to the text.

## HOMEWORK

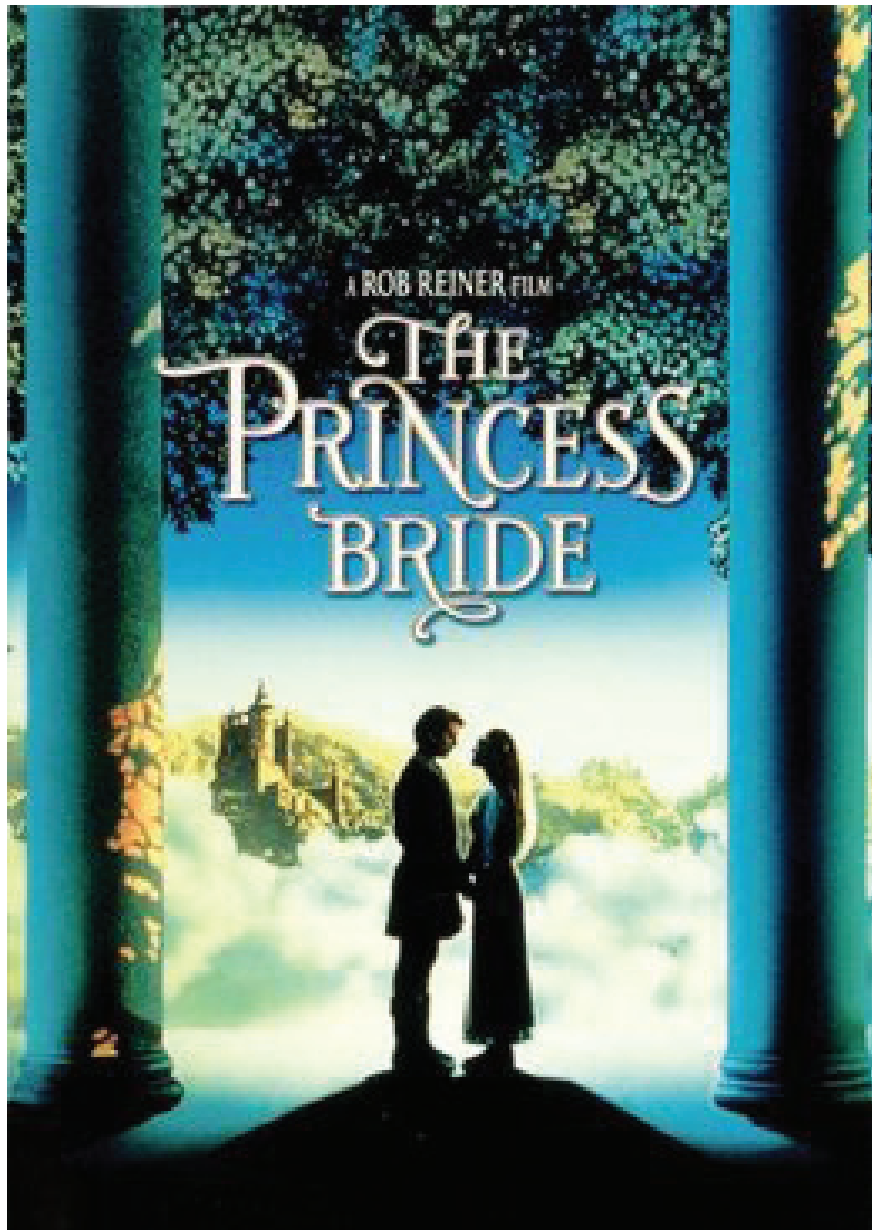
For the following pictures/scenes, have a go at **A)** writing text that fits exactly what is going on, and **B)** Write text that leaves a gap. See which one strikes you as more interesting. I won't tell you what I wrote in the book haha! Nah, I will! The actual spreads are shown on Page 90 in Appendix B!



Now read some of those favourite picture books from earlier. See if you can find the gaps, the missing bits that could have been written, but weren't. Rewrite some pages fully, as if there was no gap, and see how it flows ... if it flows!



# SECTION 8



MY FAVOURITE MOVIE EVER!!!

USING MOVIE STRUCTURES  
FOR  
PICTURE BOOKS!

# MOVIES? BUT THEY'RE SO LONG!

They sure are! But if we look outside the world of picture books for inspiration, suddenly we can have much fuller stories, and we can have tighter structures!

And, if you think about it, a picture book is to a movie like a T-Rex is to a chicken! The closest relative!

**And** we can scale a picture book to a standard movie structure! Many books on screenwriting break a screenplay into pages ... and the theory is a page a minute. So scale that! If a 100 page screenplay is 100 minutes, and something should happen by page 10, that's 10% into the story. Easy!

There's an important moment at Page 25? Well now, that's 25% through the picture book! And so on!

And there's so much more we can learn from movies. As **Robert Ben Garant and Thomas Lennon** say in their **AMAZING** book, **Writing movies for FUN-AND-PROFIT**, there is a simple structure to great movies.

**ACT 1:** Put a likeable guy up a tree.

**ACT 2:** Throw rocks at him.

**ACT 3:** Get him down.

Another director, **Irving Thalberg**, who did Marx Brothers movies among others, said a good movie is like a game of American Football. The home team is driven back again and again and again, and then, with no time left on the clock, they do an amazing run down the field for a touchdown and the win.

In **Save the Cat**, **Blake Snyder** talks about how even an unlikeable hero needs a moment at the start that shows they have something good about him, that they can change, that makes us root for them to do so. He also talks about structure a lot, too.

**The Hero's Journey**, from **Joseph Campbell**, has amazing moments that are used in movies that we can totally use in our picture books! A mentor, an inciting incident, the hero refusing to take the call to action, and then being forced to, and so on. I find this a tough book to get through, but there are great summaries on the internet (*There are a couple of links in the video description*)

**Kurt Vonnegut** does an **INCREDIBLE** talk on the shape of stories (<https://youtu.be/j9Qsiu8qqvA> ... *the link is also in the video description*). This is brilliant, and something I use all the time, in picture books and longer stories as well.

**Robert McKee** talks about needing a positive and a negative turning point in each scene of a movie. We can build this in too!

We can use all these ideas in our picture books, or as inspiration for them! Fo sho! And I'm going to show you how right now!

## THE LIKEABLE CHARACTER STRUCTURE

Put a likeable character up a tree. Throw rocks at him. Get him down.

It's such a simple structure! We have a character that is likeable, which means the reader is going to relate to them or at least want them to succeed.

We throw obstacles at them, preferably ones that grow as the story goes along. So now we are desperate for our character to win.

And then, at the end, they do, and everyone's satisfied!

Right? Yes. **Right!**

So apply this to picture book ideas.

Perhaps you have a nice kid who is being bullied. Could even literally have rocks thrown at them!

Or a kid who is naughty but charming. Likeable doesn't have to mean sweet and nice. Sometimes the naughty kids are not only the most memorable, but the most likeable in a weird way. Ask any teacher! They are more likely to remember the cheeky kids than the ones who fly under the radar.

## THE SPORTS GAME STRUCTURE

Oh boy, how we love an underdog!!! **Rocky 1 through Rocky 757! Rudy, Heart of a hero! Stand and Deliver! Freedom Writers! The Replacements! The World's Fastest Indian! Susan Boyle!**

Underdogs get us cheering and excited and knowing they might win but it seems impossible and we can feel the odds are so against them there's no way they can possibly oh my God they did it!!!

Stack the odds against your character. Make it impossible, seemingly, for them to reach their goal.

And maybe they don't reach the goal they were after, but gain something much more ... the internal external goal thing again!

## SAVING THE CAT

Maybe our naughty character has a puppy they love dearly. In lots of movies, the gangsta kids are sweet to their sick mother, or their little siblings. Maybe the bully looks after pigeons, a la Mike Tyson.

It can be anything, but something we can put out there to give hope to the reader that change is a-comin'!

## THE HERO'S JOURNEY

This is a little harder to fit into a picture book, but it can definitely be done. The inciting incident that takes our character out of their normal world, a mentor who guides them (*but in the end it **MUST** be the main character that saves the day, and it can't just be by luck*), the moment when all seems lost, and then the final victory and/or the change in the character.

## THE SHAPE OF STORIES

Oh, this is the one I have as my go to. We want, nay, we need positives and negatives through a story. Even if the character is being pushed back again and again, there can be little wins, little glimmers of hope, little clues as to what's coming.

But a flat graph sucks, and would be a hell a boring story. Curves are good, and even angled lines with little spikes are good too!

A picture book can have a simple or a complex graph, and can be more complex depending on the age group targeted. I like the Vonnegut one. Kid gets something. Kid loses it. Kid gets it again, or gets something much better!

**BAM!** Picture book!

## POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE TURNING POINTS

This works wonderfully in movies, especially if you have something that seems positive, but turns out to be negative.

Or it **seems** positive to the main character, but **we** know it is actually a negative!

The fun of picture books is we can totally play with this, and it goes back to the text and pictures telling different stories. Have the text be positive, but drop something in the picture that shows it isn't, or that hints at a path that will be negative.

Or vice versa ... remember, the character can't read what we write, so we can put anything we like in there!

## YOUR FAVOURITE MOVIE THEMES

This one was given to me by Michael Wagner (*legend*), who got it from somewhere else. The idea is you look at your top 5 or 10 favourite movies, and see if there is a common theme (*Mine, scarily, is revenge!*).

This then, can be a theme you can use when writing! It may be family, or love, or friendship, or whatever. Weave it into your stories, and you will find the writing tends to flow much easier!

And then, revenge shall be mine mwawhahahahahahahahaha!!!

**\*\*\*NOTE: This isn't genre! You may have 5 favourite horror movies ... look for the theme in those movies! Is it about friends sticking together, or is it about regret for past actions, or is it just silly fun?**



# HOMEWORK

So they are tips for writing movies we can apply to our picture books as well ... so let's apply them!

First, write down your top 5 or 10 movies and see if there is a theme that pops up regularly.

Then, taking one of the ideas from earlier in the book, yours or mine, write a story using one or more of the movie techniques described above, based around your theme. Sounds tricky, but once you have the structure and theme (*and we've done characters as well!*), once you have the bones, all you gotta do is add the blood and guts!

Then, take a nap or watch an awesome movie!



## SECTION 9



Then things changed.

It wasn't fun anymore.

The wind was too strong.

I was hauled through the undergrowth  
and thrown high into the sky.

Fear surged through me.

# FLIP THE SCRIPT WITH PAGE TURNS

# GIVING CAUSE FOR PAUSE

As we looked at in the **forcing people to read how you want them to** lecture, we can also use the layout to give people a breather, or to build anticipation, or to accentuate a moment.

The best way I know to do this, and there may be others, is via page turns.

## PAGE TURNS

**OH I LOVE PAGE TURNS!!!!** I first discovered the awesomeness of page turns when I illustrated my first book. I suddenly realised that I could set up a joke at the end of a right hand page, and then the page turn would reveal an illustration that was the punchline!

It's **SO** fun!

It can also be used to trick the reader, as they are turning blind. You can build their expectations in one direction and take them in another. This is certainly great when building tension, as you can build and build ... and then release when the page turn isn't what they thought!

It also works great with jokes and gives you options for a fun twist! It builds anticipation, it's awesome!

In the example I gave earlier, the lead up is always the same to the page turn ...

When the weather's nice, I ride my bike,  
I hope I don't ride over a spike.  
I ride round all my favourite spots,  
I ride through puddles and ... (*Page turn, so long pause!*)

Now I'm covered in dots!

This happens numerous times, the **Now I'm** rhyme after the page turn, until around the middle, when you get this ...

I ride over jumps, I get some air,  
The wind is flying through my hair!  
I jump so high it's like I'm flying,  
Then I crash land and ... (**PAGE TURN**)

Now I'm acting super tough because Janice is watching.

A page turn can also skip time! Maybe, in your story, monkeys have been appearing at a steady rate, but what next? Turn the page ... oh man! There are thousands of them!

When you're writing a story, have page turns in the back of your mind. They can be used to massive advantage in helping you "see" the story!

It's also an advantage if, I mean, **when** you submit, because you can show that you've thought about page turns, and how they can make your amazing story even better!

# HOMEWORK

Read some picture books and see if they use page turns. ***The Monster at the end of this book*** is definitely one, as is ***STUCK. Do NOT Open This Book*** plays on it. Don't turn the page! So it's building that expectation.

For one of the stories you wrote before, or one you had written previously, have a read through and see if there are any points at which you may be able to employ the awesomeness of a page turn.

Sometimes it can be as simple as a scene change, from light to dark, as we explored when looking at a stanza to leave out of my Christmas story.





# SECTION 10

I **chill** with all my penguin pals  
but these traps are everywhere!  
I'll head to the nocturnal house—  
I hope it's safe in there!



## THE STRUCTURE SUPER SUCCESSFUL BOOKS USE!!!

# WELL? WHAT IS THIS MAGICAL STRUCTURE?

Wouldn't you like to know? Yeah, I guess you would, that's why we're here!

This is actually so cool, and when I discovered this, I was so excited. It isn't in **all** successful picture books, of course, but ***it is in some of the biggest!***

Basically, it's a story that's more a series of events. Here's how it works, and it's especially good for rhyming stories (*but doesn't have to be in rhyme ... see **STUCK** and **Do NOT Open This Book!***).

## ACT 1

You start off with an **introductory stanza or three** (*Or a few pages for non-rhyming*) which shows us the main character(s) and the gist of the story (*going on a holiday, kids trying to catch a leprechaun, whatever*).

## ACT 2

The **next nine or ten stanzas** (*20 pages*) are a series of events, often funny, and often escalating. It can escalate in scale, or in being harder and harder for the main character to reach their intention, or both.

## ACT 3

In **the last couple of stanzas** (*few pages*), a goal is reached and we sum it all up.

14 stanzas. A stanza a spread, leaving lots of space for fun in the illustrations. 28 pages of text for a 32 page picture book, and generally around 450-500 words! **Perfect for submitting!**

Obviously page counts and word counts can be played with, but the general idea of this works really well **every ... single ... time!**



So what are some books that use this structure?

**Pig the Pug** by **Aaron Blabey** is a hugely successful series and follows this structure. In fact, it was **Pig the Tourist** that opened my eyes to it. In the various books, it's Christmas, or a trip, or Pig won't share. Then there is a series of Pig doing very, very funny things, usually him being not very nice. Last couple of stanzas, Pig gets his just desserts in a painful way!

In my **How to Catch** series, each one starts with a couple of stanzas introducing the elf, or leprechaun, or unicorn, and that they know the kids are going to try and catch them. Then there are 8 or 9 increasingly crazy traps, ending with the biggest of all. Then the final stanza is the character saying, basically, "Tough luck, kids! I win! Better luck next year!"

**STUCK**, by **Oliver Jeffers**, is the greatest picture book I have ever read. It starts with the kid playing and his ball gets stuck up the tree. He employs increasingly crazy and beautifully written attempts to get the ball down, but fails every time ... until he doesn't. He plays for a bit, goes to bed, then wakes up realising he's forgotten everything is still up the tree. It's wonderful.

**Heath McKenzie** books follow this structure beautifully too, especially wonderful given his incredible illustrations that add to the very funny text.

**DO NOT OPEN THIS BOOK**, written by the hilarious **Andy Lee**, and illustrated by **Heath**, also follows this idea really well. The monster says do not open the book, and gets increasingly angry, until the end when he collapses in exasperation!

**The Monster at the End of This Book** by **Jon Stone** does it too!

## CHARACTER, INTENTION AND OBSTACLE

As we looked at earlier, it is character, intention and obstacle that drives these stories.

Have a character and escalate the obstacles you put in their way. In the **Pig the Pug** books, Pig often does get his way until right at the end, then suffers the consequences of his actions.

The great thing about using this structure is that it is **ENDLESS!!!!!!** You are only limited by the situations you can think up.

## HOMEWORK

Take one of the characters you thought up in a previous homework section, or one from the story ideas I gave. Brainstorm on ways you could use this structure with that character.

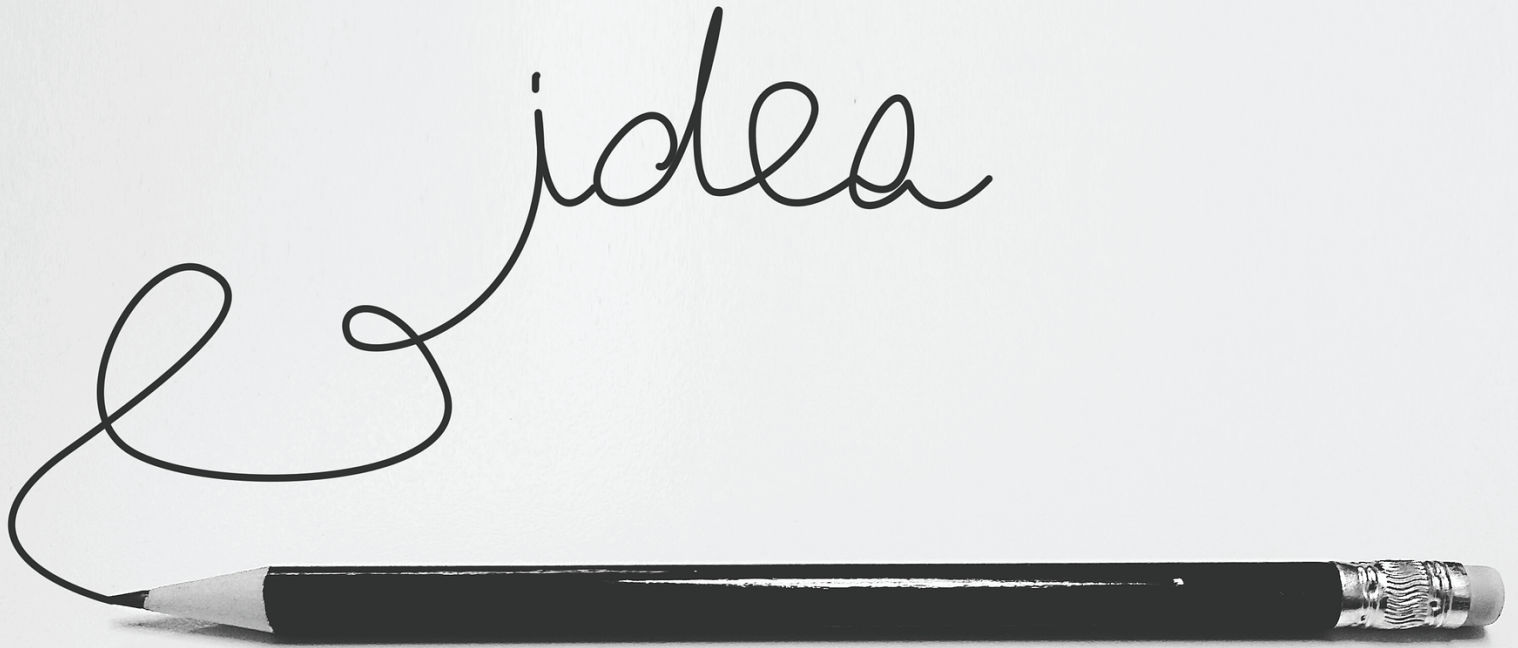
Certainly from my character ideas, the **lion dreaming of a sea-change** is perfect! Because then it can be city-change, country-change, whatever, and the obstacles would be super fun to put in!

At the start, the lion's dreaming of leaving and does. Obstacles can either be stopping him leaving, while he's trying to getting there, or even when he arrives. And at the end, the lion could return home, or could end up staying in the new place, possibly even against his will in a nice twist!

So do the brainstorming, then, if you're feeling brave ... **write a story on it using this structure!**



# SECTION 10A



**3 MORE PICTURE  
BOOK TEMPLATES  
YOU CAN STEAL ...  
i MEAN, USE!**

# POTENTIAL PICTURE BOOK TEMPLATE 1!!!

Remember, as with the earlier one, these are **just templates**. Use them, twist them, play with them however you want. Maybe use the title, maybe some of the themes, maybe the whole thing!

**TITLE: TOO MANY CHEFS**  
**ILLUSTRATED IN THE STYLE OF:** James Hart, Heath McKenzie craziness  
**TARGET AGE GROUP:** 4-8 years old

**CONCEPT:** A restaurant opens, but the owner is really bad at making decisions and telling people no. So he hires all the chefs that applied for the job. It's like a clown car in that kitchen!

In the lead up to the grand opening, the chefs can't work together, get in each others' way, argue over the type of food they should be serving, bump into each other, spill food everywhere, potentially have a massive food fight.

How will they ever work together?

Options are: The owner stands up and becomes a leader.

The chefs cause a fire because of their pettiness and stop the place burning down ... as a team. This makes them realise they **CAN** work together.

They realise all types of foods can be on the menu.

Or something totally different. Either way, the opening is a massive success. Then the owner says he is thinking of opening up a pastry bar as well, and will have a bake-off to see who will be the head pastry person.

The looks they give each other show this is going to be interesting!

**THEMES:** Teamwork.  
Leadership.  
Seeing other people's skills.  
Not always having to be right.  
Learning to say no..  
How to open a restaurant.

# POTENTIAL PICTURE BOOK TEMPLATE 2!!!

**TITLE: BEST FRIENDS**

**ILLUSTRATED IN THE STYLE OF:** Nicky Johnston

**TARGET AGE GROUP:** 4-8 years old

**CONCEPT:** This utilises the Romeo and Juliet concept, of two households at war, but love occurs across the families.

Obviously we can't have romantic love ... or suicide/murder haha! But we can use this (*and many other public domain stories at our disposal!*).

It's The Fox and the Hound as well, a great movie if you haven't seen it.

In my version, it's aliens from different planets that hate each other and no one hardly even knows why any more. The original thing has been twisted and turned into something that isn't even real. There is an intergalactic conference, and two young aliens, one from each planet, meet and hit it off. They sneak off and play at every interval, hiding the fact they are friends, because they know what it will cost, and that it won't be allowed. It's been drilled into them from birth that they must hate each other.

Or they just hit it off and have no idea they're not meant to, which is what kids do!

They are caught out by the parents, and one of the friends is terrible to the other, saying they were tricked/trapped, and saying that all the awful things about aliens from that planet are true. They do it to save themselves, but also to save the friendship and their friend. The innocent friend is shattered, and is taken as prisoner, a show of strength.

With the planets now on the brink of war, the free friend must go against everything they have been raised to believe to save the friend, and in turn, save the planets.

A good twist would be for them to use what is seen as a weakness and turn it into a strength. "We hated you for such and such, but it actually is good because ..."

**THEMES:** Friendship.  
Racism.  
Stereotypes.  
Seeing past rumours.  
The stupidity of centuries old rivalries.  
The strength of love and friendship to overcome dumb traditions and rivalries.

# POTENTIAL PICTURE BOOK TEMPLATE 3!!!

**TITLE: I'M THE BIGGEST OF ALL**  
**ILLUSTRATED IN THE STYLE OF:** Dr Seuss  
**TARGET AGE GROUP:** 4-8 years old

**CONCEPT:** I love this concept! It plays on the idea that there is always someone better and worse off than you. Everything is relative. **EVERYTHING!** Sometimes the things we take for granted, or think are our problems, can be other people's greatest dream.

But it also plays on the fact there is **no such thing** as hot, or cold, or tall, or whatever! They're concepts, constructs! It's 8 degrees? That might **seem hot to someone** from the South Pole, **but seem freezing to someone** from the Bahamas!

A child is the tallest in their class, so they're tall ... right? Not if they are in a room full of giants!

Someone is super strong, and can beat up the other kids ... until a new kid comes to school.

A kid lauds it over everyone else how rich they are, until they move to a new suburb and are the poorest ones there!

A kid is the smelliest of all, and loves it, but then goes to a Baked Beans Convention and is out-gassed.

And so on, a series of events that lead to the kids being confused. If I'm not the richest/fastest/smelliest/smartest/strongest/etc, then who am I? I was special because I could **DO** this better or **LOOK** better than anyone, but now I realise that's not always true!

And the beautiful thing is that what makes them special is that they are them! Yep, great English there, but you know what I mean!

I also like the idea that what makes us special (*or the opposite*) isn't what we were born with or into, like looks or money or size, but rather what is inside, **the things we are by choice rather than chance.**

**THEMES:** Defining ourselves by looks/stature.  
Defining ourselves by our job/talent/etc. Then, if we lose that, who are we?  
Competition.  
Arrogance.  
Seeing past appearances.  
Nothing is real it's all in our perception of it.

I had a play at a first and last stanza in rhyme. Obviously, you can write it however you like, but are also welcome to use these!

**FIRST:** Look at me! I'm the **BIGGEST** of all,  
I'm pretty much a giant, I'm so tall.  
But when I'm with *actual* giants, I start musing,  
Now I am the *smallest* ... this is confusing!

**LAST:** If I'm *not* the biggest, if I'm *not* always tall,  
If I'm not the stinkiest or fastest of all.  
It doesn't matter one bit, because I finally see,  
I'm the greatest at one thing, and that's being ... **ME!**





# SECTION 11



## PICTURE BOOK FAQS

# IS EDITING A PICTURE BOOK DIFFERENT TO EDITING OTHER BOOKS?

Yes, it definitely is ... but no, it definitely isn't. There are similarities okay! Certainly, there are some things I have found super useful when editing picture books! We looked at some of these in the rhyme section.

**READ IT OUT LOUD!** This works for all books, but *ESPECIALLY* picture books! Read it out loud. **READ IT OUT LOUD!**

**LISTEN TO OTHER PEOPLE READING IT OUT LOUD!** Crucial, crucial I say! You want to see if they stumble or look confused as they read, how they pause, where they pause, if they read it how you want them to, all of that!

**REMOVE UNNECESSARY WORDS!** This gets easier the more you do it, but picture books are concise, beautiful, tightly written works of art. Don't waffle. If it isn't necessary, or you feel like it needs to get to the point, tighten it! Cut out words you don't need. This is obviously important in rhyming books, but just as important in prose picture books. Short, sharp, to the point ... and let the pictures fill in those descriptive words!

**LAY IT OUT LIKE IT'S A BOOK!** Yep, just write Page 1, Page 2, etc in the spots where the page would start, and see how it reads. It may not end up like this as a finished book, but it really helps you get an idea of the flow of the book. I even pretend to turn a page after reading a RHS page! Seriously. Just to see how long it takes to get to the next bit, and if that is a worthy place to do a page turn.

## DOES YOUR PICTURE BOOK NEED A MESSAGE?

Okay, so this is an interesting one. You will often hear from publishers that a picture book needs a message. You will *also* hear from publishers that you are not allowed to preach that message!

So where does that leave you?

Picture books **DO NOT** need a message. They don't. Kids get messages thrust at them left, right and centre, from teachers, parents, other adults, everywhere. Sometimes a picture book **CAN JUST BE FOR FUN!**

And often, in those fun books, you will be able to pull a message out of it if you need to, but don't feel forced. If you wrote a book that was designed simply to make kids laugh? *PERFECT!*

In saying that, messages can also be wonderful in picture books. As mentioned earlier, they can help kids talk about issues they otherwise would remain silent on.

So really, it's up to you! If you have a message you would like to get across, put that message in there.

And remember, the most read book in the world is pretty preachy! Just realise it may be something publishers baulk at.

## DO I INCLUDE ILLUSTRATION NOTES IN A PICTURE BOOK SUBMISSION?

Generally, no. Most illustrators don't like to be told what to draw, as it takes away the option of them seeing it visually.

However, if there is something you've written where a punchline to a joke would be a picture of something particular (*ie the joke is that the T-Rex EATS the tractor*), yes, you can do a note for that!

It will also often be written in a publisher's guidelines whether or not it is okay to include illustration notes. So check those, and if you are going to send illustration notes as well, it is good to send two documents. One with illustration notes, and one without. That way, the publisher can ignore them totally, I mean decide what version to send to the illustrator.

## DO I INCLUDE PAGE NUMBERS IN A PICTURE BOOK SUBMISSION?

You don't have to, but you can. Again, the submission guidelines may specify, but often it is up to you. I like to do it as a) it can show you have thought about things like page turns, and b) it shows you have seen the book as a book, rather than just a story.

Both these things are valuable for a publisher to know about you as a writer.

## SHOULD I SEND IN PICTURES A FRIEND HAS DONE?

**NO!!!!** Unless your friend is James Hart or Heath McKenzie or Nicky Johnston or Leigh Hobbs, and the pictures are blow your mind incredible ... **NO!** And even then, it is still something to think about!

Publishers have a stable of illustrators they will turn to for a book, and they have an eye and an idea of which illustrator will fit which manuscript.

I have done submissions to publishers with James Hart, but that is because yes, we are friends, but we had also already done a number of successful books together, so were seen as a team. In that case, it can be okay, but is still something to potentially discuss with the publisher first.

## WHAT ARE THE CHANCES OF BEING PICKED UP OFF THE SLUSH PILE?

Pretty darn low. In fact, rumour has it publishers publish around 2% of submissions from the slush pile. There are a number of reasons for this, and they are covered in more detail in the **5 SCARY NUMBERS** free report, and also in Making Money 101 ([www.thebcc.com/p/makingmoney101](http://www.thebcc.com/p/makingmoney101))

# IS WRITING PICTURE BOOKS ONE OF THE FUNNEST THINGS EVER?

Yes. Yes it is.

# SECTION 12



And that was just the beginning ...

## SUMMING UP

# AND NOW, THE END IS HERE!

Yep, that's it. Our 32 page picture book journey is at an end sort of. I mean, I'm still talking.

Haven't quite worked out that economy of words thing yet. And that's the thing. We're always learning and writing and learning and growing as artists.

Never be stagnant, because if water become stagnant it stinks, and we don't want to be stinky!

So write and write and read and read and discuss and discuss and learn and grow and **always remember your why** and create with that in mind.

## Why are you writing picture books?

If it's to entertain kids, make sure your books are entertaining for kids. Don't get caught up in what you *think* you should do, **write to your why**.

If it's to educate in an entertaining fashion, don't write boring education stuff!

And most of all, **HAVE FUN!** You're making picture books, for crying out loud! You're bringing joy to children and parents and teachers, so **HAVE FUN WITH IT!**

That energy will shine through your writing and/or illustrations, and you will enjoy the process so much more.

If nothing else, reach back and find the memories of the joy you got out of picture books as a kid, and focus that memory into your creating. Write real, and raw, and from your heart.

That's as good a starting point as any.

That way, your story has the freedom to go wherever your imagination takes it.

Thank you so much, keep creating, and I look forward to seeing your books on the shelves.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ad Wall' with a long, sweeping underline.

Adam Wallace

# APPENDIX A

## RECOMMENDED PICTURE BOOK READING LIST!



To be honest, read whatever you can! Good, bad, average, whatever! See what works for you and what you like and what you hate and let that inspire your writing.

Try and figure out what the author's why may have been.

And then check out some of these. They are picture books that have influenced me, and that I think are brilliant for my reasons. Hopefully some of them connect with you as well.

**STUCK by Oliver Jeffers.** Amazing. Brilliant. Clever. Funny. Cute. I've talked about it enough already. Can't recommend it enough.

**The Lorax by Dr Seuss.** The way he uses language, and the way he writes rhyme is, in my opinion, unsurpassed. **He breaks the rules we are told are unbreakable** (*don't make up words, don't preach your message, word count, etc*), and he does it in a way that inspires and entertains. He's a genius.

**Oh, the Places You'll Go by Dr Seuss.** See notes for The Lorax, but again, breaks the rules in his rhythm and word use, and it works. He also gets a message in, and preaches it pretty strongly here as well. I know these two books are kind of obvious choices, but they're obvious for a reason. They're **INCREDIBLE!!!**

**The Pinkish, Purplish, Bluish Egg by Bill Peet.** He has a number of great books, but this is my favourite. A strong theme in Bill Peet's books is the thing that makes you an outcast can end up making you a hero. I heard something similar in a podcast, and I can't remember who was being quoted, but it was basically the things they sack you for when you're young are the things you get awards for when you're old.

If you take risks, it will freak some people out.

Take the risks anyway!

**Piranhas Don't Eat Bananas by Aaron Blabey.** This is a wonderful example of a fun story that kids **LOVE!** Read it and see if you can work out why, and then see if any of the things you notice are applicable to your stories.

**The Short and Incredibly Happy Life of Riley by Colin Thompson.** Beautiful, poignant, amazing. The life lessons in this book are wonderful, the pictures are off-kilter and appealing because of that, and it's a wonderful book for adults as much as it is for kids.



## APPENDIX B

THE TEXT THAT WAS  
ACTUALLY IN THE  
BOOKS!!!

The drive to the theatre was boring.  
That is all.



... BUILD A MODEL OF THE EIFFEL TOWER USING  
MATCHSTICKS!

*The lead in on the previous page was **Penguins can't ...***