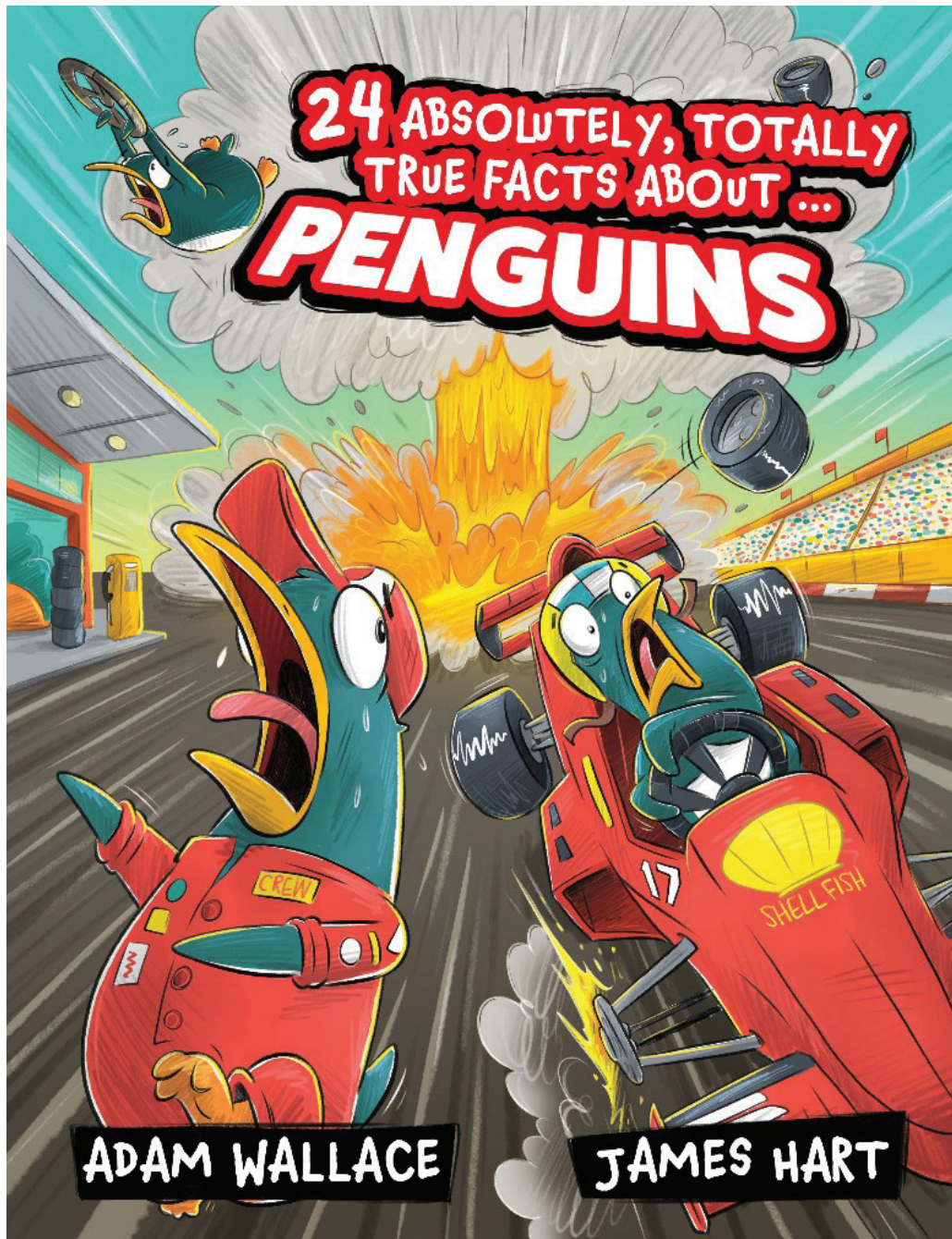


SECTION 3



THE NUMBERS OF IT ALL!

PAGES? WORDS? AGE GROUPS?

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!***

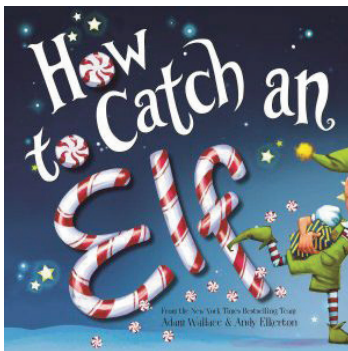
For bonus points, look at how many words are on each page, and how they are laid out. Note the similarities and differences.

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.

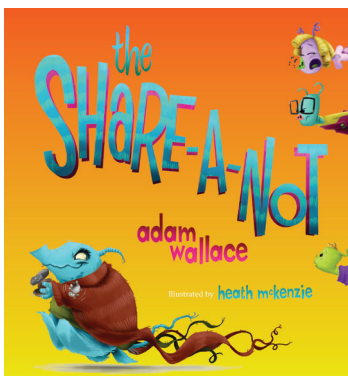
Here are some of the books I have done for different age groups.



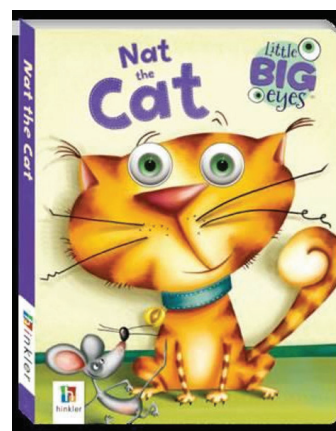
This series was aimed at 4-7 year olds.



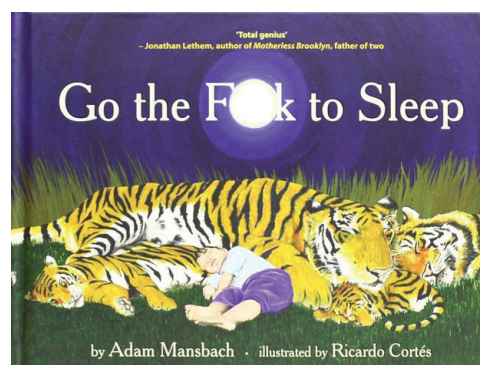
This book was aimed at 2-5 year olds.



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.