

Date: January 2023

From: Janet Lawler, Award-Winning Children's Picture Book Author

To: Folks Interested in Writing for Children:

I am happy to give you some pointers to you as you try to get your work published. One of the first things I did, and I highly recommend, is to **join the SCBWI (Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators)** <https://www.scbwi.org/> The SCBWI offers significant online resources about how to get started writing for children, both from a craft and business perspective.

SCBWI also runs conferences. A national mid-year conference is held in NY each year in late January or early February. The annual conference is in August in Los Angeles. (recent in-person events have had virtual options). Regional SCBWI chapters also run smaller events that support members with specialized workshops and topics. Our New England chapter conference is usually held in the spring.

Attending conferences is one of the best ways to learn more about the craft of writing for children, meet editors to whom you can submit your work, and make friends with others who share your passion. You can often sign up for a critique of your work and actually meet with an editor or agent. Usually, panels of agents and editors share what publishers are looking for and discuss current industry trends. You can also find out a lot about an individual editor's preferences by online research and following them on social media.

Most children's agents will consider middle grade or YA projects (or picture books by author/illustrators). You need to be sure to understand each agent's preferences and their submission requirements before you send them your project. I do believe it is a good idea to try to get represented by an agent, especially for middle grade/YA novels. But many agents will not consider picture book writers who do not also illustrate, and picture book writers often start out doing their own submissions. Many publishers (though not all) consider un-agented submissions, but response times are lengthy. If you want to try to find an agent, that whole process is very time consuming, and you need to show a prospective agent a project that has not had any (or many) submissions already.

I also recommend joining a critique group (there are some online; and the SCBWI helps connect people); a critique group will help you improve your writing and stories (a *never-ending* process!).

There really are no shortcuts in this industry; it took me several years of research and writing to break in. The best things to do are keep researching markets (what sort of books each publisher prefers; what specific editors like/want), **read a lot of books in the genre you write**, attend conferences, and continue writing and polishing stories before submitting. There are also some excellent industry blogs, such as: <https://kathytemean.wordpress.com/> and <https://picturebookbuilders.com/>

Between economy ups and downs, e-book growth, and publisher mergers and dissolutions, it seems that the actual opportunities to get work into print is shrinking (fewer slots, publishers looking for "big" hits, or celebrity stories, since a name helps sell a book; current trends favor writers and subjects that reflect diversity, inclusiveness, and authenticity).

Traditional publishers do not usually consider work that has already been self-published. Most often, authors choose one or the other path. There is considerable information available out there to evaluate these two routes to publication. But remember that if you self-publish, you are really running a business (production, sales, distribution, etc.) in addition to being a writer. And that is *after* you get expert help with illustration, wdesign, layout, copyediting, etc. Self-publishing is time-consuming and can be expensive.

My primary recommendation is to really focus on the craft of writing and perfecting your stories before you try to find a publisher *or* agent *or* self-publish. In spite of challenges in the market, stories that stand out will find homes, and with all the different platforms for stories, there is still, and always will be, a need for good content.

I hope this advice helps, and you may find others with different views. This is based on my experience. Feel free to visit my website and sign up for my blog.

Best of luck with your creative endeavors!

Janet Lawler <http://www.janetlawler.com>