

1, 2, 3... KICK! Getting Started on Your First Illustrated Storybook

by Chazda Albright -

<http://greatstorybook.com/1-2-3-kick-getting-started-on-your-first-illustrated-storybook/>

This entry is part 1 of 6 in the series [How to Start](#)

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You have an idea for a storybook or you have the desire to write a story that inspires the young – but where to start?

There are three questions to consider before getting started on a storybook project. And then it's time to kick-off and get running.

1. Is this something I really want to do?

I've read blogs and heard webinar hosts tell people how fast-and-easy it is to make a heap of money writing the easiest thing in the world: storybooks. Writing children's books as a get-rich-quick scheme is so far removed from reality, it's hard for me to understand how anyone can sell that idea. And to be clear, it isn't the easiest thing in the world. It's good honest work.

For the individual who wants to publish and market their own story, it is a fantastic time to take advantage of the ebook and POD market. Technology brings immediate accessibility at a low cost; but deciding to become an indie writer also means serious business.

Marketing is work. Producing a book all by yourself is work. There are no half-measures here, not if you want good reviews and steady sales.

Write what you love, but be prepared to *re-write*. If you've done the illustrations yourself and you are not a professional artist, be prepared to redo the artwork *at least* a few times. Once you have more experience

as a writer and/or illustrator of books, that process becomes easier.

But that is a process, and your first storybook is very likely going to be very difficult to **Finish** - and by that, I mean polished and ready for the market. Do not be hesitant about doing the extra work of making your story the best it can be. All too often, books are put on the market before they are ready.

I find this unforgivable in books for kids. The readers learn from you and are (we hope) inspired by your book. If you publish grammar and spelling mistakes, then you are teaching those errors to your readers. Don't do that.

Growing, developing ideas. Coming up with ideas for storybooks is great fun. Getting them down into a tightly crafted storybook is hard work. Great, wonderful and hard work.

The reward of happy readers is so extraordinary you can't believe it. You get so filled up with it that you cannot contain it... and you have to do it again. Creating stories for kids is extremely fulfilling.

2. Will my protagonist be a character that yields a series or is this a standalone story?

The reason this is one of the first questions you should ask yourself is because it will determine what *kind* of story you create. Why? If your character is real (meaning: feels real, like a *flawed* and *personable* character), then it might well launch into a series.

If the character is an archetype, one being used to express a morality story through modern myth, fable or legend, then it's much more likely to be a standalone project.

[This does not mean a well-loved character cannot be archetypal](#) or that a series of books cannot tackle morality issues. But in the realm of storybooks, there is a big difference between a character that is *relatable* and one that is *symbolic*. This is one of the simplest ways to differentiate and determine what kind of story you want to tackle: by deciding what kind of hero you want to create.

For example, in [Roadrunner's Dance](#) by Rudolfo Anaya and David Diaz, the story is a modern spin on fable telling, and tells the story of the roadrunner. This is unquestionably a standalone book, because it's an origin story of the roadrunner – what makes the bird a special symbol of the southwest and in New Mexico in particular (it's the state bird).

[Charlie Hits It Big](#) by Deborah Blumenthal and Denise Brunkus could very well become a series of books about Charlie. He doesn't symbolize an idea or hope, doesn't express or explain anything about why things are how they are. He is just a funny guinea pig. He has a human family for support characters. This book makes kids laugh and is often pulled off the shelf as requested reading.

Let's look at this type of character comparison from a single storybook creating team: Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler. They've created [The Gruffalo](#), which has become an industry. It's a book series, a short film, theater production (internationally), and is fully merchandised. It has a sequel and a spin-off as well. The sequel is about the Gruffalo having a child. After that, the books are about the Gruffalo *kids*. That's a spin-off series.

This duo has also brought us [The Snail and the Whale](#), one of my favorite books, and it is a stand-alone. It is about ideas, valuable ones. The Gruffalo is as well, but the mouse is smart and witty and the Gruffalo is a great, monstrous antagonist. These are characters that can then be further developed and drawn out further. Gruffalo has a family life, so we go there.

3. What age group(s) will be my target audience?

This is an essential question for kids' stories, and one that should be decided upon before the first word is drafted. Best advice: think about the storybooks you love and want to emulate. Then find out their target demographic.

When we look at books like Winnie-the-Pooh, it's sometimes difficult to determine that because there is a potential gap-age, meaning: it's a book parents can read to pre-readers and it's a book kids can read on their own, but there may well be a two-year gap in between when the child wants to read (on their own or perhaps to you) but can't yet read at that level.

Don't worry about this overly much. These books are for everyone and marketers know this. That closes the potential gap and the book is then simply for ages 0 and up.

When do you need to worry a bit about demographic?

When the book is clearly age specific, you need to [write language appropriate to it](#). For example, a potty training book for toddlers will have a wildly different language than a Young Adult graphic novel.

Don't know what these are? Let's break it down.

Book-type to age group.

Baby - Toddler

Pre-reader (3-5)

Beginning Readers (6-8) (eg: I Can Read)

[Early Readers](#) (7-9)

[Chapter Books](#) (8-11)

[Middle Grade Readers or MG Novels](#) (9-15)

Young Adult or YA Novels (or Teens)

New Adult

Adult

Board book: these are the simple, illustrated books made out of thick cardboard pages, often with a glossy finish. The idea is that little ones can then gnaw on them and it won't matter too much... or that it will at least take longer to become mulch. These are reads for the teething stage. For a list of really good examples, [GO HERE](#).

Illustrated Storybook: very generally, these are the books that often become classics, beloved stories for any age group. Market? Baby (sometimes noted as age 0) and UP - that includes mom and dad.

Storybook for pre-readers: any kind of illustrated storybook that is specifically meant to be read aloud to children who cannot as yet read. Ages Baby-6.

Picture book: this is a very general term, and sometimes very loosely used. Most often refers to books with photos instead of illustrations or paintings. Can be for any age group, but is largely used in identifier books for pre-readers. For a complete [list of the types of book with pictures, Go Here](#).

Chapter book: These are novels for early readers. Each chapter is relatively short, larger text, with 2-5 illustrations per chapter. These are essentially the first novels a kid will read. For more details on what to include in a [chapter book, Go Here](#).

YA novels: YA, or Young Adult. This is a strange age identifier, because it basically means teenagers, involving stories about angst-filled teenager life. Sometimes each chapter begins with an illustration. Most YA novels are fantasy or science fiction based stories, but some are more about family life and school issues. *The YA novel market is booming, so this is what many agents are hoping to get from writers.*

Graphic novels: The definition for graphic novel is changing, so it's difficult right now (perhaps... as ever) to pin this down definitively. These can be for any age group, can involve any quantity of illustrations and can be anything from an illustrated novel to an expansive, even serialized comic book. Essentially, anything goes and it all falls under one very large category. No wonder then that most graphic novelists have a hard time marketing their work so that it's profitable (even the big gun companies). We need to more clearly define this craft.

Off and Running

What storybook format appeals to you and what kinds of characters do you want to create? Make these decisions with care, because you will spend a lot of time with them - perfecting and editing and rewriting

and repainting too. It's an organic process, so get these basic questions really pinned down from the start. They will give your creative process more structure.

“It's never too late to be what you might have been.” - George Eliot

Keep creating, no matter what.

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