

My Storybook Process (Part 5): creating rising action

by Chazda Albright -

<http://greatstorybook.com/my-storybook-process-part-5-creating-rising-action/>

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Last week, I explained the structure and pacing for the first nine (9) pages of a book I'm creating called **Bunny and Witch: The Magic Word**. Now into week five and struggling with an annoying flu, I'll try and tackle the next important part of the manuscript and how it's paced: we're into Rising Action now.

To be quite honest, my momentum has lagged a bit this week. I'm not banging out material for the storybook like I was in the first four weeks of this project.

The manuscript is essentially finished. What I need to focus on right now is creating the panels. That's where I am with the project; but for you, *I need to back up and explain the decisions I made for the manuscript I'm currently using* to build my artwork for this project.

The 2 Types of Storybook Manuscripts

Because I'm creating the panels for this particular book (which will be a series), the Illustrator's Manuscript is my own. If I were to show the manuscript to an editor for consideration, this isn't quite what I would show them. I'd take out certain bits of information first, and make it look more professional.

That said, I doubt I would ever need to show an editor an Editor's Manuscript. Although doing this is

indeed the traditional thing to do, I just wouldn't bother to hand that over as a way to pitch my project unless the editor specifically asked for it.

In my experience, they never do, because instead of a manuscript, I show them a complete full-color mock-up of the storybook. (I have an Editor's Manuscript ready for them - just in case! Always be prepared for eccentricities and you will come off as a real professional.)

I remember the first time I did this. The Acquisitions Editor held the mock-up in her hand and was blown away. No one had ever shown her something like that before. (I'm sure she's seen many more since then.) This was several years ago - and no, I wasn't able to close the deal. She said that they were only interested in Novelty Items for their Children's Book Department. I told her I just didn't think the story would do well as a novelty - and that was that.

Dealing with Rejection

The thing is, you cannot think of a failed contract as a failed project. I learned a lot about publishing and about that particular publishing house by meeting the editor personally. I also realized that as big a company as it was, it just wasn't the right one for anything I'd want to create for kids.

When you [get a "rejection" from a publisher](#), don't take it as a rejection. Instead, try to think of it as a learning experience, because if you *get rejected right*, and with the right frame of mind, then it really will be something you can learn from.

The Illustrator's Manuscript, Continued

Last week, I [explained pages 1-9](#). Let's pick-up from where I left off.

PAGE 10-11: (Spread)

Witch thought a bit and remembered
Some word stuck in her throat
A special word her mother sewed
inside her clothes on a note.

<PANEL 1: Witch checks the inside of her vest lapel. There's a note pinned to the inside: "Please."
Bunny is busy, ignoring Witch as she plays.>

There's no dialogue on this page, just a key moment in the action. The idea of having a semi-evil character stop to check the inside of their lapel for a personal note about how to properly behave is one I came up with and first used in a different story.

That other, older story is one that will never see the light of day. It just doesn't work. But the one thing I could take away from that flop is the note pinned to the inside lapel.

Borrowing from Flops

I didn't come up with the tack to reuse good ideas from the failed stories of my past. Doing this is something I got from director Steven Spielberg. Being a fan of [Raiders of the Lost Arc](#), I have watched all the documentaries and any audio commentary I could get. I believe it was in the commentary that Spielberg explains the origin of a certain scene in the movie, a scene that had the entire audience in stitches when it was first released.

The Scene: Marion has been kidnapped and is planning to flee from Belloq, who has been trying to wine and dine the lady in his private tent. Just as she's about to escape, Major Toht (whose hand is burnt by the medallion) comes into the tent and stops her. Silently, menacingly, he pulls out a strange looking weapon - only to reveal with a twist of his wrist that it's in fact not a weapon, but a portable hanger on which he can hang his trench coat.

This is actually a scene that Spielberg used in another, earlier film that didn't do well. But this was a great little moment, so he reused it for the first Indiana Jones film.

A Favorite Moment in Bunny and Witch

I knew from the beginning that I wanted the Bunny and Witch books to be funny. This next spread is one of my favorite moments in the story.

PAGE 12-13: (Spread)

Pleeease.

Witch tried the new word, really tried.

It was a magic trick, so she applied

Every magical bit she could

To get the toy, THAT toy right there.

<PANEL 1: Witch wiggles her fingers at Bunny, as if trying to cast an evil spell. Bunny plays. We don't yet know if this will actually work or not.>

I think it's hilarious that the word "please" should be tried out literally as a magic word. Witch wiggles her fingers and gives it her best shot. In an earlier draft of the story, I describe Bunny as just looking up at Witch in this moment, completely nonplussed. So it was right away a given that Witch's attempt failed.

I decided to change that and suspend the result until the next page, [after the turning of the page](#).

PAGE 14: (Left)

Puleez.

Witch tried again, though not so nice.

Bunny thought, "Get away."

There's no need to ask her why.

Witch, you know, made Bunny cry.

<**PANEL 1:** Witch now impatiently asks, rolling her eyes with her hand out. Bunny pulls the two toys she has closer to her chest.>

Pretty please!

<**PANEL 2:** Witch now asks very aggressively, leaning towards her, the dolly dropped to the floor, her fists clenched and at her sides. Bunny's eyes are closed as if to say, "Forget it.">

PAGE 15: (Right)

Come on! Please?

Witch thought some more and realized
Maybe there's a better way.
She could be a little nicer
using this magic word today...

<**PANEL 1:** Witch asks nearly resigned, slumped. Bunny is relaxed.>

<**PANEL 2:** Witch is waiting, watching Bunny. Bunny has resumed playing with her toys.>

This is a panel for PAGE 4 of the storybook. I'm not yet sure how finished this image is, but I think it's a good start. Some changes are needed. I want to make the dolly confused and unhappy about being taken from Bunny without asking.

At this point in the story, it was important to break down the emotional beats more quickly. This is essentially my [action sequence](#), where Witch continues to try using the magic word in various ways - just not sincerely, which is the bit she still has to learn.

PAGE 16-17: (Spread)

Please. (Left)

Thank you. (Right)

Witch returned the pretty dolly
in apology and then
she tried the magic word
once again.

<**PANEL 1:** Witch returns the dolly to Bunny.>

PAGE 18-19: (Spread)

Witch waited for a little while.

It takes some time for tears to dry.
Forgiveness needs at least that long.
Witch gave the word another try.

<PANEL 1: Witch waits. Bunny is now playing with all three toys.>

Here, I decided to slow it way down again, to build suspense. We really aren't sure how ready Bunny will be to forgive Witch. Bunny might well decide to just accept the toy back and leave it at that.

Knowing When to CUT Pages of a Manuscript

I could make this a story about forgiveness and in an earlier draft I did consider that. I'm choosing not to go that direction. For this age group, that's another lesson to learn - and so it's ultimately another story. I really want **The Magic Word** to be about just "please," and the various ways we can say it and how that affects the meaning and purpose of the word.

The words, "I'm sorry" will be in another book about Bunny and Witch. This is a simple but really important decision to make when you're crafting the manuscript for a storybook.

In another storybook I've written (and that Georgie Edwoods is currently illustrating), I had to cut several pages of the original manuscript because I realized that I had too many lessons in the story. I cut 5 pages and that meant rewriting and shifting everything around. That's a pretty massive change to a storybook, but the story now works much better. It's clearer and more focused.

Those pages I cut are not in the trash though. They're good, and chances are I'll be able to reuse them in another book for that particular series (**The Adventures of Smippy and Boo**).

Next Week: the story finish

Next week as I continue to work on the artwork for this book, I'll explain the remaining pages of the story manuscript, blow by blow. After that, I'll explain some of the other types of pages that [the mock-up will require](#) (like Copyright Page, etc.). Sign up for my newsletter and I'll send that right to you.

I asked this question last week and got some great emails back, so I'll ask again: what projects are you working on these days? Write below, let me know - or just send me an email. I love reading those.

Keep your chin up, your head down, your nose to the grind and the pedal to the metal and see if you can actually physically do that for one full second. Then just brush yourself off and do a bit of writing. It's much easier.

This entry is part of the series

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