



I've said it over and over that writing for children is no different to writing for adults. It's certainly not easier and you still have to pay attention to the same literary conventions of strong characters and intriguing plot and setting that entice the reader to keep turning pages.

I mostly write for primary-aged children, and therefore the tips I offer here are going to be mostly related to that target audience, however if you want to write Picture Books (PBs), I have a great blog on this subject at <http://kerrilane.wordpress.com/> that is based on best selling picture book author **Aleesah Darlison's** success. (Scroll down to the article on PBs)

Tip 1: Identify your Audience

Are you writing for the 4-7 age group? The 7-9? 9-12? (*This latter age group usually bears the title **Middle Grade** and can draw readers from 8 upwards to 14 or so and can be up to 45,000 words*). It's crucial to understand the expectations of your particular target age group - the reading and vocabulary levels expected, and the level of plot intricacy and interest levels. If you're unsure, ask book shop owners for suggestions, ask your librarians for help, join groups and or attend as many writers workshops as possible. And there are always online sites that can help you as well. Then read as much material in that target age group as you can.

Tip 2: Make your story and characters age appropriate.

It sounds so simple, but it's so important. As a general rule of thumb, kids read 'up'. As adults we read, generally, anything aimed at adults, irrespective of character age. Not so with child readers. Their biggest wish is to be older and that's reflected in their reading taste. If they're 7 years old, they want to read about 9 and 10 years old for example. They KNOW what 7 year olds do and in their eyes, it's not so exciting – the excitement is always in those age groups above them. However, that can bring its own traps. Say your character is 14 years old – you must always be aware that you can be pulling from a readership of 9 or 10 – even as low as 8 as had been my experience – so ensure that the story is suitable.

I rarely have characters younger than 10, simply because my stories require them to have a level of independence that a younger child would not have as those stories include lots of adventure and humour and adults can get in the way.

Tip 3 - Adults

It's a sad state of affairs that adults are usually in the way in kids books. Ensure the story is about the children and not the adults. Adults/parents can have their place but are generally background characters who make rules and act as a moral conscience for your lead characters - but the child characters must be the ones making the decisions, having the adventure and getting into strife and mischief. Generally your primary-aged and middle grade stories will have more interest if the children also resolve their own dilemmas and solve their own problems.

Tip 4 – Pace and Plot

Keep your story moving. Remember your audience is still relatively new to this reading business and you are not only asking them to spend considerable time with you and your book, you are also competing with every electronic device known to man. Keep your plot busy and moving. Mystery

and humour are two evergreen categories that seem to be going back and back. And of course, each story has to have its hefty dose of adventure.

Tip 5 – Opportunities

I've based this on commercial fiction, but there are other opportunities as well. Non fiction books and interactive books, particularly those with internet affiliations are increasingly popular. Both commercial and educational publishers could be interested. Speaking of education, there's always a huge market for new authors to break into publishing by writing educational texts that are sold primarily into schools. Don't be confused that this is just non fiction, many hundreds of fiction titles are created for this market every year. Pearson Education, Macmillan Education and Blake Education are three markets that could be investigated.

Resources:

Jackie Hoskings – **Pass it On** is a weekly e-zine that focuses directly on the Children's Literary Market. (jackiehosking@bigpond.com)

Di Bates - **Buzz Words** (dibates@outlook.com) is another (fortnightly) e-zine that again focuses on the children's market offering opportunities and publishing house requirements.

Hunter Writers Centre offers various writing groups and professional workshops.

<http://www.kids-bookreview.com> – an online review site that will specify age target and offer great insights to what is currently being published

CYA – Children & Young Adult - <http://www.cyaconference.com/>
(conference & competitions)

SCBWI Australia - <http://www.scbwiaustralia.org/>
(Society of Children's Book Writers & Illustrators)

CBCA – Children's Book Council of Australia: www.cbca.org.au

Australian publishers: <http://www.publishersglobal.com/directory/australia/subject/children-publishers/>

*Award winning author **Kerri Lane** has been writing for almost 20 years, and has written over 70 commercial publications in that time with Australian and US publishers that incorporate fiction for adults, teenagers and children. Her multi-award winning novel **Dead, Actually** (Allen & Unwin) and its follow-up companion novel **Almost Dead** (2014) (A&U) are her latest YA novels. Her latest children's books include **The Not-So-Greatest Show on Earth** – a choose your own adventure novel, **Penelope and the Perilous Pencil**, and **Pedro and the Perilous Paintbrush** which is part of Random House's *Stories for 9 Year Olds*, released in December 2014. These books represent just some of her 8 books published in 2014. She is currently on deadline for her next YA novel with A&U, and planning her new adult suspense novel.*

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