

Guidelines for Authors

Here are some guidelines for writing for Magic World.

1. **The books should explain or raise questions about how something works that we cannot see visually with the naked eye.** It is not possible and not advisable to pack everything on a particular subject into one manuscript. Rather you should distill it down to one important and interesting aspect of the subject.
2. **We like to put the child at the center of the process of questioning.** To the extent possible, answers in the quest should come from the child's own exploration rather than from an adult. This means we favor presenting an experimental approach to discovery rather than a didactic one and would like to avoid things like "His teacher told him...". "He read it in a book..." If it is too complex for the child to figure it out all on his own, it could become a process of skeptical questioning of an adult by a child. One way to go about this is to imagine you have to figure out something with only the tools of a child. What you have to your advantage is only a wide eyed wonder and deep curiosity. What would you do first? What path would you go down? What mistakes might you make? In the process of discovery it is often just as valuable to do an experiment that gives you a negative answer (though not always great for journal publication, we know!!). A child should know this (not the journal publication part).
3. **We like to present open ended questions.** What is the really fascinating thing with respect to the topic that mankind still has not figured out? We want children to walk away with a feeling that there is still much to be figured out and that, perhaps, they might play a role in the process.
4. **We like debates** Is the topic you have chosen one where there are multiple theories, each with some supporting evidence? This could be presented as a debate between two children that evolves from their different approaches to experimentation.
5. **We are not keen on an explanation of nomenclature.** We are not concerned that the child should come away with a list of names for what something is called but rather with a sense for how something works and how one might go about figuring that out. In fact, when names are presented, there is a tendency on the part of a parent to focus on the name while reading ("What's this called? What's that called?") at the exclusion of conceptual understanding. The child is then praised for knowing what something is called even if they have not understood it conceptually. Thus we prefer that the emphasis is on how it works.

6. **We like to take a layered approach to explaining a concept.** This means that the book will have one or two primary conceptual messages that are relatively easy to understand by the lower spectrum of the target age group and sets the framework for the book. Within this, there would be another level of detail communicated through the text and possibly another level of detail communicated through the illustration (if it is a picture book). In this way, a child could go further in his/her understanding with each successive reading and as he/she gets older. One example of what we mean by this is described below. Please note that the language used in describing what is outlined below is not how it would be explained to a child but only to demonstrate the content of what should be communicated.

In Jig, Jiggle, Sneeze:

Primary message(s):

1. You get a cold because viruses (passed on from other people) get into your nose and make trouble.
2. There is a whole world inside your body that you can't see that has all kinds of things going on

Secondary messages:

1. Viruses get into the cells by binding to a receptor on the cell surface (using here a lock and key analogy).
2. They replicate themselves using machinery found inside the cells
3. They infect other cells
4. The immune response kicks in and fights them.

Tertiary messages (through illustration only, parents can point and explain, information will be available on our website)

1. The cell consists of a nucleus, endoplasmic reticulum and golgi body which are the machinery for replication of genetic material and protein synthesis.
2. The method by which virus makes use of this machinery to replicate itself
3. The method by which the various components of the immune response work (Antibodies, T-cells and Macrophages).

In My Magic World

Primary Message(s):

1. We don't really know how conditions for life on Earth came to be, though there are some theories.
2. These conditions are the right level of gravity, a protective magnetosphere, oxygen rich air and abundant water.

Secondary Messages:

1. Gravity depends roughly on size (density is too complex to present here) and is what is responsible for holding us on its surface.
 2. The magnetosphere stretches far into space and traps harmful charged particles.
 3. The air is rich in oxygen that is made by the plant life and is necessary for life's processes.
 4. Long ago Earth had a poisonous atmosphere that may have been transformed by volcanic outgassing.
 5. Water covers most of Earth's surface.
 6. It has been suggested that water came to Earth by way of icy comets.
7. **General tips on writing for children.** While the points above relate to the presentation of the scientific concept, all of the basic principles of writing for children apply here as well. The point of view must be consistent, the story should move at an appropriate pace and the character(s) must be well developed.

Character development is very important if the book revolved around a child's exploration. What is the child that is exploring like? What is the child's attitude and personality? Is he physical and bold? Is he quiet and shy? One type of child may be daring and take risky experimental approaches (the kind that makes explosions with their chemistry set), another may be quiet and thoughtful preferring to experiment in the mind. A picture book is short so every sentence you write, you must ask yourself whether it is consistent with the personality of the child. The better developed the character, the better the audience will relate to him or her.

You might also set up the motivation for an exploration at the beginning of a story – why does the child want to explore something? Was there something that he/she saw but couldn't figure out that set the stage for the journey?

Some useful tips on writing for children can also be found at these sites:

<http://www.write4kids.com/craft.html>

<http://www.underdown.org/writing-childrens-books.htm>