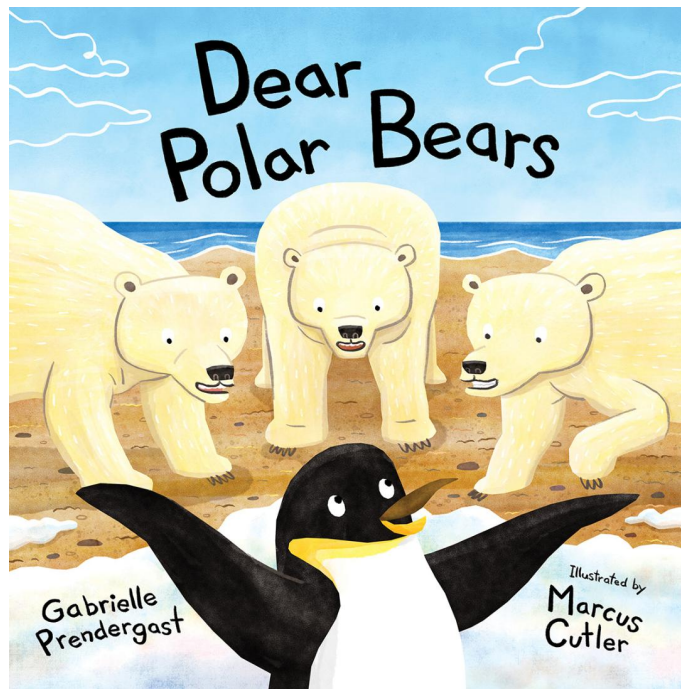


Elevating Your Work: How to Create Children's Picture Books That Are Not Just Entertaining, but Transformative

With author
Gabrielle Prendergast



Picture Book vs. Story Book

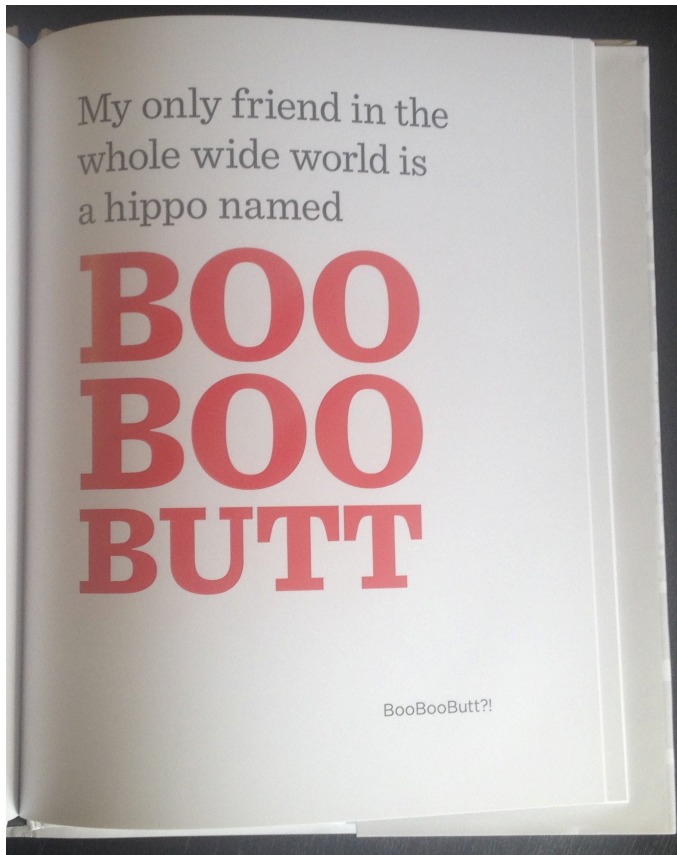
- Picture books are typically under 500 words
- Storybooks can be longer (up to 2500 words or more)
- Picture books usually rely at least partially on the illustrations to tell the story
- Storybooks are often more akin to short stories with ancillary illustrations
- Picture books are suitable for reading aloud
- Storybooks are more geared towards independent reading
- Picture books (apart from those made as “branded” books like Disney or Barbie) are more often divergent interpretations of classic or traditional stories (fairy tales for example) – *Bunty and the Magic Shoes*
- Storybooks are often direct retellings or transcriptions of classic or traditional stories – *The Red Shoes* by Hans Christian Andersen
- Storybooks are very hard to sell. Most of them are produced “in-house”
- Storybooks are sometimes published as “early readers” – For example *The Berenstain Bears*



Look! Something very funny is happening to Bunty!
She is jumping high in the air like a kangaroo. She
cannot sit still. Over goes the chair!

What Is a Picture Book?

- Is it a story told with words and/or pictures?
- There are wordless picture books
- There are a few picture-less picture books
- A picture book is a book, typically for children, in which the illustrations (or the LOOK of the words) are as important as—or more important than—the words in telling the story.



The Book With No Pictures by BJ Novak

- Usually there is some interplay between words and images



Wolf in the Snow (Wordless Picture Book) By Matthew Cordell



Why Write Picture Books

- ✓ Strong market always looking for new ideas
- ✓ Many picture books have very long lives as new readers are born
- ✓ High demand from schools and libraries
- ✓ They're fun
- ✓ You can write about almost any topic
- ~~✗ They're easy~~

How to start: what you need to know

- Don't try to illustrate your own unless you are a professional artist
- You don't need to find artists unless you are self-publishing
- Picture books are typically 24-40 pages
- It's very hard to get an *agent* with a picture book unless you are also an artist
- You can submit picture books directly to some *publishers*

How to Start: Inspiration

- Questions children ask “How small is Pluto compared to Earth?”
- Things children say – take notes!
- Non-fiction topics such as biographies
- Family stories
- Word play – ie. *The Wonky Donkey* by Craig Smith
- Retellings or Subverted tropes – ie. *The Paperbag Princess* by Robert Munsch
- Idioms or turns of phrase – *Sheep in Wolves' Clothing* by Satoshi Kitamura

Homework 1

Exercise: Collect a list of unusual or interesting sounding words. What does the SOUND of these words inspire? What about the MEANING?

Examples:

- **Curmudgeon** — (n) a bad-tempered person
- **Cacophony** — (n) a harsh, discordant mixture of sounds
- **Flummox** — (v) to perplex someone greatly
- **Gibberish** — (n) unintelligible or meaningless speech
- **Kerfuffle** — (n) a commotion or fuss
- **Ragamuffin** — (n) a person, typically a child, in ragged dirty clothes
- **Whippersnapper** — (n) a young person considered to be presumptuous or overconfident
- **Woebegone** — (adj) sad or miserable in appearance

Develop some of the words into picture book ideas or texts

Ex. The Curly Curmudgeon - (a bad tempered poodle?)

Cacophony Cove – A very noisy town? Maybe the sea lions are always barking!

How to Start: Who is your reader?

- who is the reader?
 - any age from 0-100+
- always think about boys AND girls reading
- always think about culture/race/background (ie not all kids celebrate Christmas etc)
- -picture books are usually aimed at children but often read by adults TO children
 - call and response
 - incorporating a song
- early language learning (“Goodnight...?” “Moon!”)
- some picture books are aimed at older children to read to themselves
 - tend to be either narrative (not word play or call and response) or informational
- -some are geared towards classroom use
 - often themed (bullying, science themes, cultural or historical themes)
- -what will children understand? What will they not understand?
 - Vocabulary
 - Themes
 - Subject matter

How to Start: Thinking about Illustrations

- how will the illustrations fit with the story?
- usually 24-32 pages or 12-14 “spreads” (must be a multiple of four)
- You can include *critical* illustration notes in your text if necessary
- Often part of the story is told through the illustrations “Let the wild rumpus start” (*Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak):



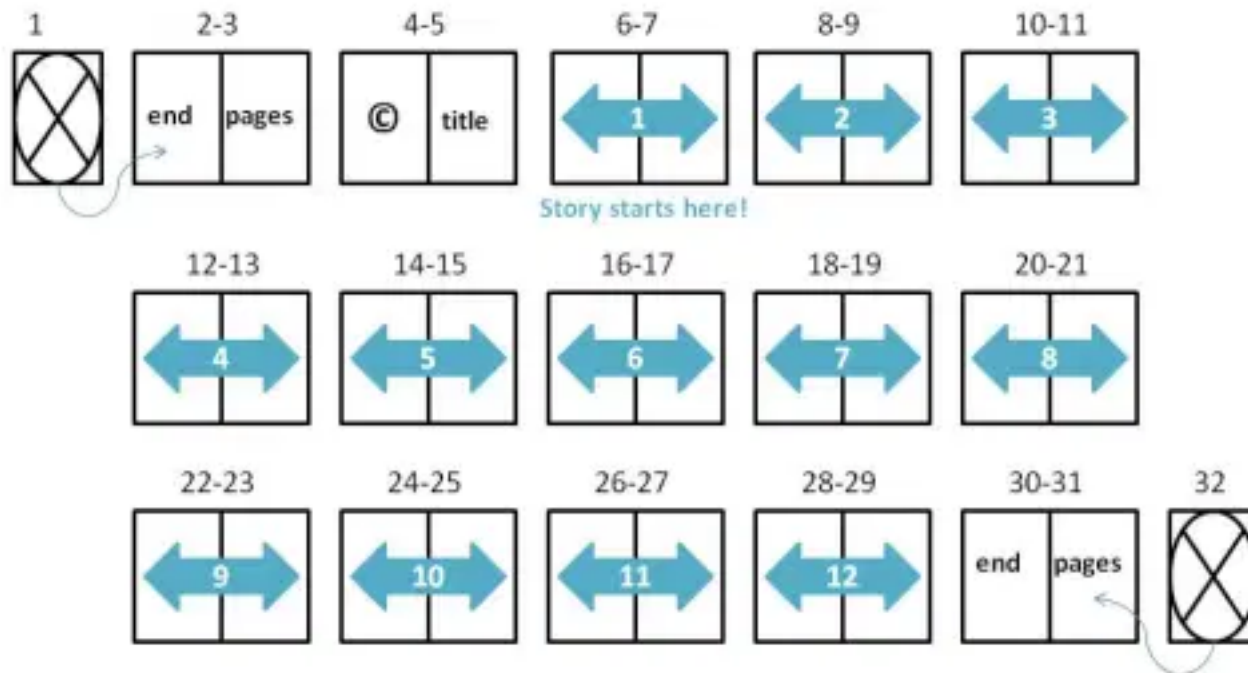
How to Start: Thinking about Illustrations

- Give the story “room” for illustrations
- you won’t choose the illustrator
- you won’t decide HOW the story is illustrated
(ex *If Pluto Was a Pea*)
- The illustrations might change or define the narrative of the story



How to Start: Thinking about Illustrations

- You can use a “dummy” to pace out your story and see how the illustrations will fit



*Pages 1 and 32 are pasted face-down onto the book cover and aren't seen.

Graphic by taralazar.wordpress.com

Homework 2

Make a picture book “dummy” either by stapling pages together (ending up with 28 pages or 14 “spreads”) or in Word, Publisher or other app. Enter your own words or the words of a poem, prayer, song lyrics etc. Include sketches/notes about what the illustrations could be.

Writing Your Picture Book: Things to Keep in Mind

- Brevity
- How does it sound?
- Point of View and Tense
- Form/format
- Tone/Style
- Who is your protagonist?

Brevity

- **Discussion Question: Why Are Very Short Picture Books Popular?**
- Under 500 words is ideal
- *Say Goodnight* by Helen Oxenbury (20 words!)
 - Up, Down, up in the sky*
 - Swing Low, swing high*
 - Bumpity Bumpity hold on tight*
 - Hush little babies say goodnight*
- *I Want To Be An Astronaut* by Byron Barton - 86 words
- *Goodnight Moon* by Margaret Wise Brown – 131 words
- *Where The Wild Things Are* 338 words
- *If Pluto Was Pea* 325 words

In Class Exercise 1

- write a children's Haiku (17 syllable poem with lines 5/7/5 syllables)
- Example:

The white duck says “quack!”

The water runs off her back

“Quack!” says the duck. “Quack!”

How Does It Sound?

- **What are some of things your English teachers taught you to look for in the WORDS or sound of poetry? (ie not metaphor or imagery etc)**
- **Rhythm/meter**

I want to be an astronaut/ A member of the crew
da dah da dah da dah da da(iambic tetrameter)/da dah da dah da dah
And fly on the space shuttle/Into outer space
Da dah dah da dah da da/ dah da dah da dah
- **Rhyme - rhyming picture books are HARD and very few agents/ editors will even look at them BUT that doesn't mean you can't incorporate rhyme into your story**

"But the wild things cried, "Oh please don't go—
we'll eat you up—we love you so!"
And Max said, "No!"
(actually typeset as above with line breaks)
- **Or Rhyming wordplay – ie. *The Wonky Donkey* by Craig Smith**

How Does It Sound?

- **Repetition**

From *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle

On **Monday**
he ate
through **1**
apple.

But he was
still hungry.

On
Tuesday
he ate
through **2**
pears, but
he was still
hungry.

On
Wednesday
he ate
through **3**
plums, but
he was still
hungry.

In Class Exercise 2 (handout)

- Using The Very Hungry Caterpillar as a model we are going to write our own picture books
- Choose an animal (you can name them if you want) - caterpillar
- Choose an emotion or state - hungry
- Choose an action relating to that state “ate through one...”
- Have your animal go through the days of the week like the very hungry caterpillar
- Try to resolve your story

How Does It Sound?

- Repetition

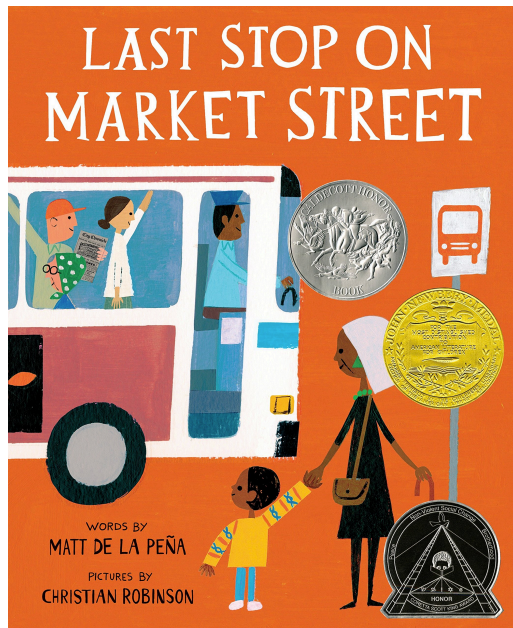
From *If Pluto Was a Pea* by Gabrielle Prendergast



How Does It Sound?

- Alliteration
 - Popular with alphabet books
 - *K is for Kissing A Cool Kangaroo* by Giles Andreae
 - *Ellsworth's Extraordinary Electric Ears* by Valorie Fisher
 - Also used in prose stories, particularly literary/lyrical picture books

“The bus creaked to a **s**top in front of them. It **s**ighed and **s**agged and the doors **s**wung open”.



In Class Exercise 3

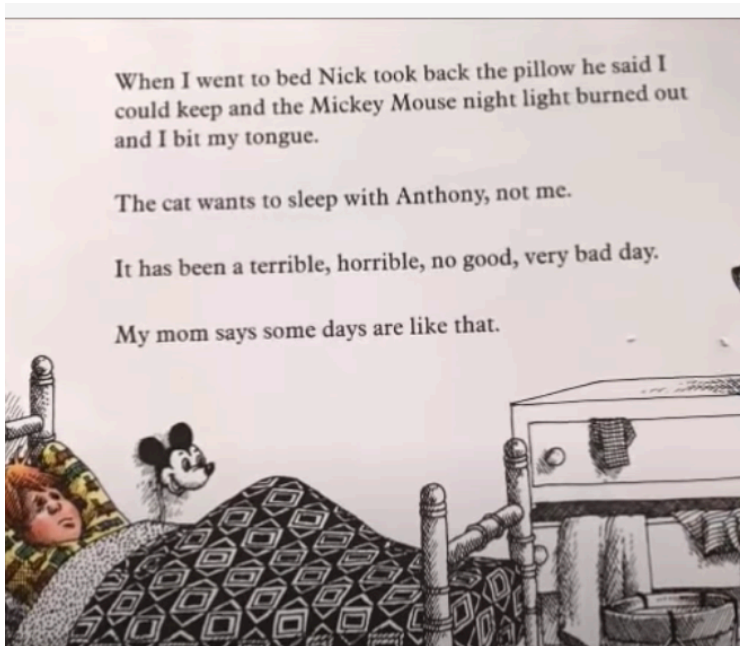
- Exercise – choosing one or more of the below elements, create short poem for children based on the word “snug”, “moon” or “singalong” (or a word of your choosing)
 - Rhythm
 - Rhyme
 - Repetition
 - Alliteration

Point of View/Tense

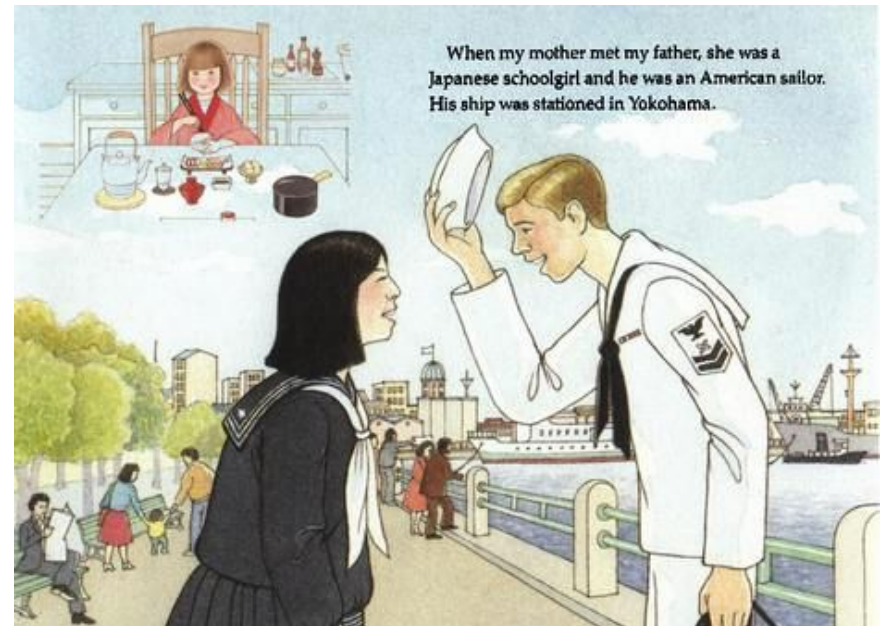
- Who is your narrator?
- 2nd person quite common
 - *The Day You Begin* by Jacqueline Woodson
- Past tense 3rd person
 - *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak
- *Present tense 1st person*
 - *A Screaming Kind of Day* by Rachna Gilmore

Point of View/Tense

- Discussion Question – what effect might using 1st person *past tense* have on a picture book?



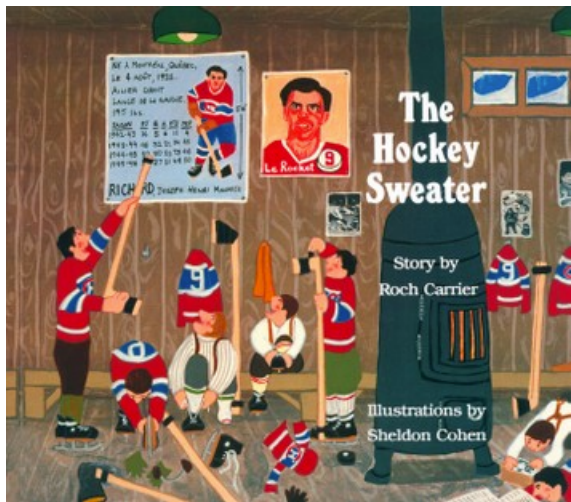
Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day by Judith Viorst (past tense to present perfect to present tense)



How My Parents Learned to Eat by Ina R. Friedman

Point of View/Tense

- Discussion Question – what effect might using 1st person *past tense* have on a picture book?



The Hockey Sweater by Roch Carrier

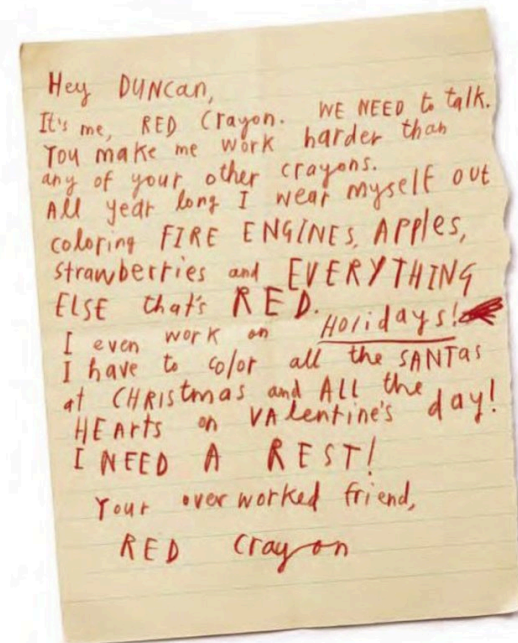
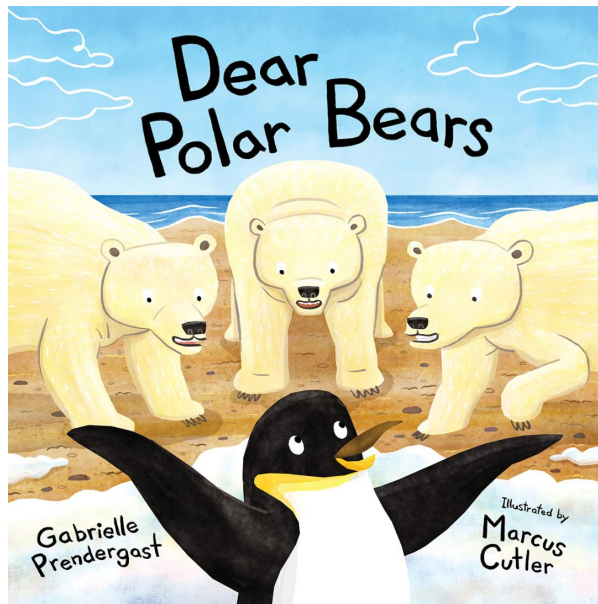
“The winters of my childhood were long, long seasons. We lived in three places - the school, the church, and the skating-rink, but our real life was on the skating-rink.”



Blackout
By John
Rocco
(2011)

Form/format

- Epistolary (letters) – *The Day the Crayons Quit* by Drew Daywalt
- *Dear Polar Bears* – by Gabrielle Prendergast



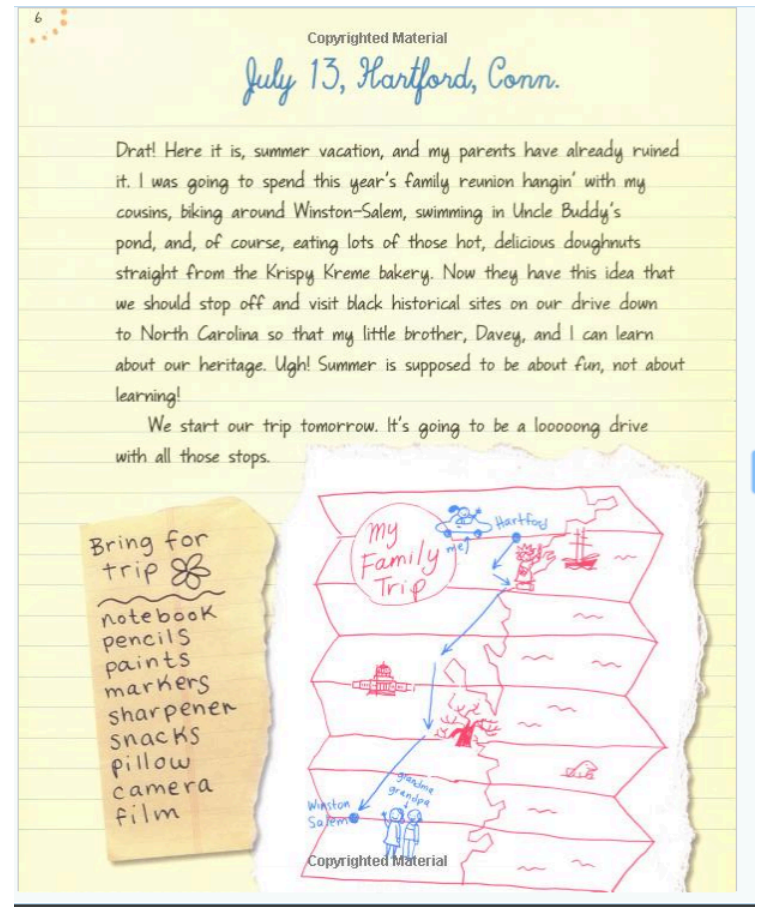
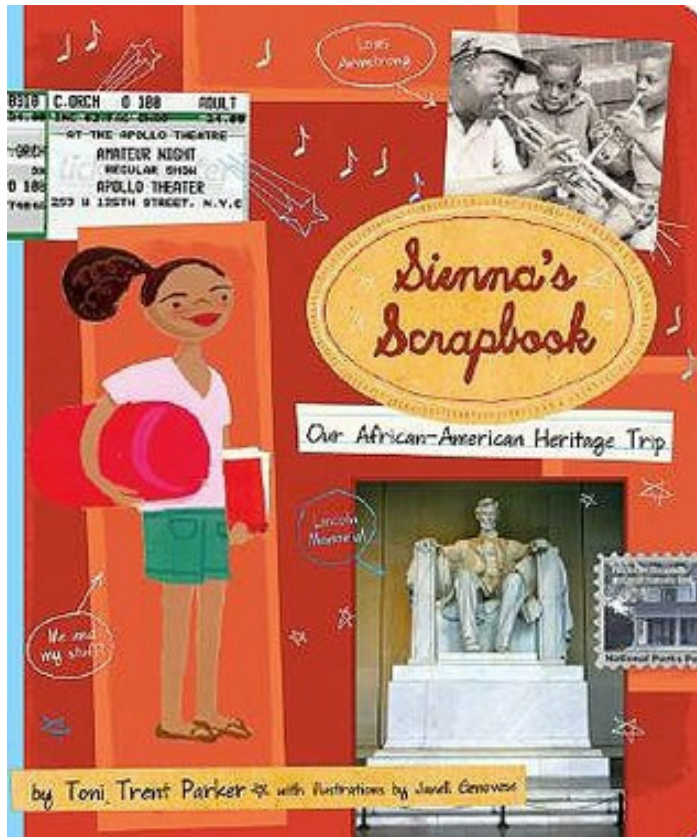
Form/format

- Epistolary (diary) – *Diary of a Wombat* by Jackie French



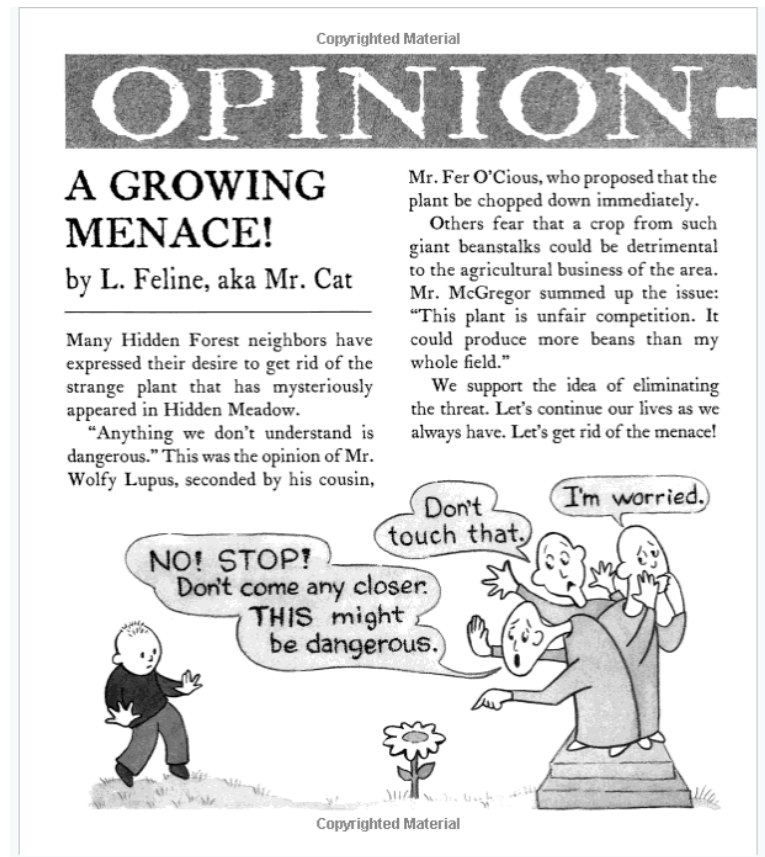
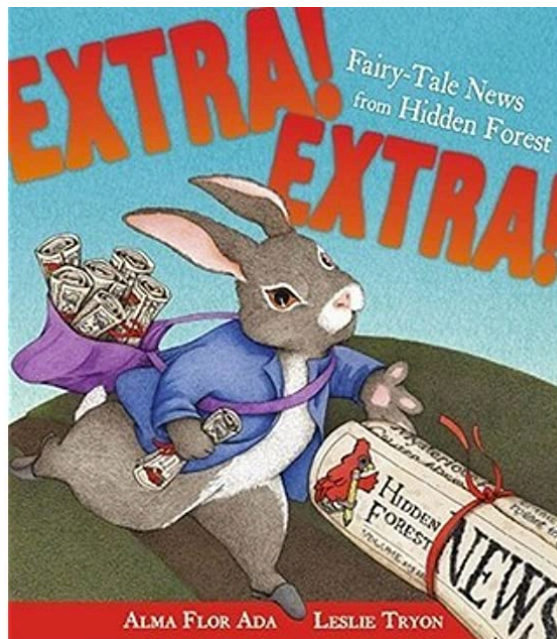
Form/format

- Epistolary (varied)– *Sienna's Scrapbook* by Toni Trent Parker



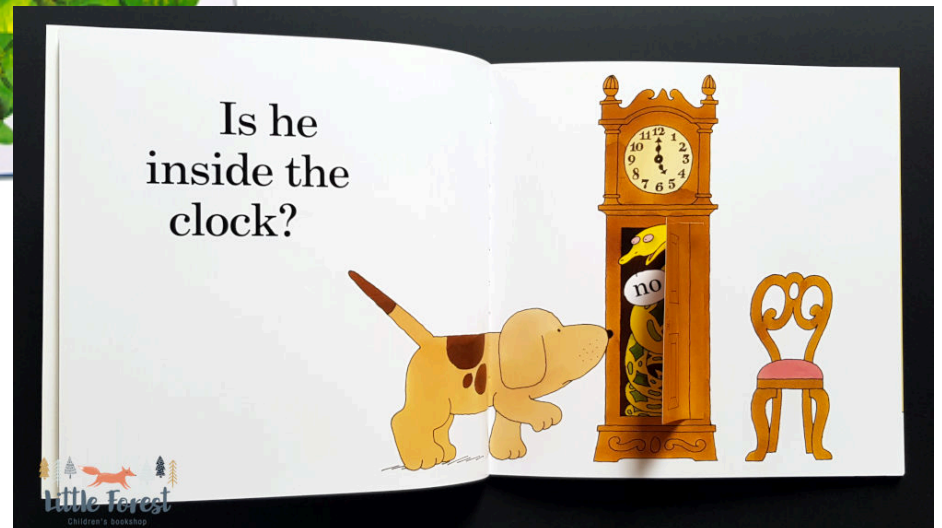
Form/format

- Epistolary (newspaper) *Extra! Extra! Fairy-tale News From Hidden Forest* by Alma Flor Ada



Form/format

- Pop Up/Toy/Movable



In class Exercise 3

- write an epistolary based poem or story for children
 - Letter (to an animal, a cloud, a character)
 - Diary entries (of a baby, of Cinderella, of a truck)
 - Newspapers articles (about fairy tales, written by a child about their family)
 - Something else – texts, tweets, post it notes etc

Tone/Style

Humorous

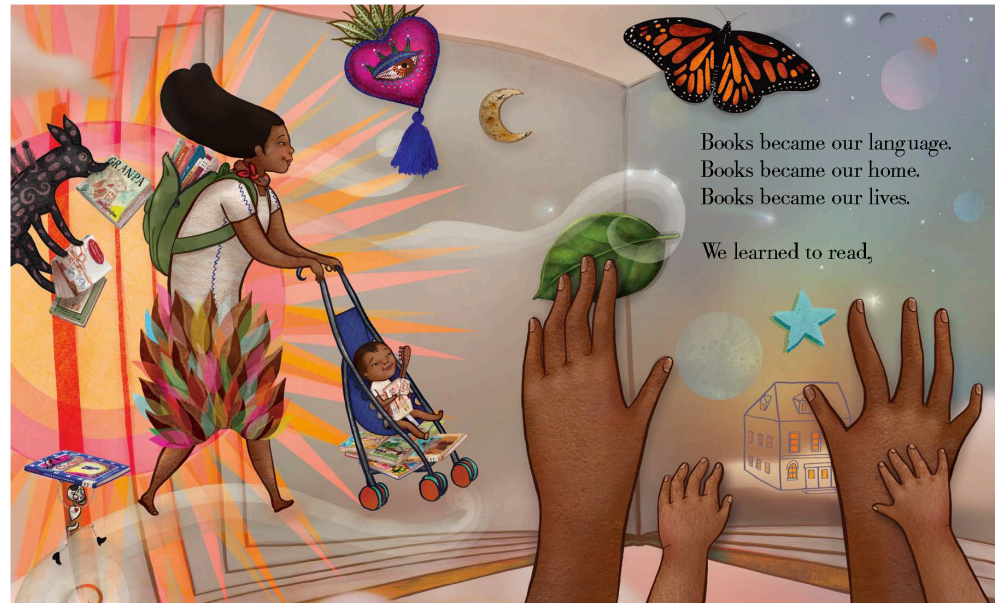
- *The Wonky Donkey* by Craig Smith
- *Hop on Pop* by Dr. Seuss
- Usually includes humorous illustrations
- Usually have an illustration style that matches the tone
- Very popular with kids



Tone/Style

Lyrical/literary

- *Dreamers* by Yuyi Morales
- *Last Stop on Market Street* by Matt de la Peña
- Sometimes about “issues” or non-fiction
- A range of illustration styles, often artistic
- Often award winners
- Very popular with:
parents, librarians
and teachers



Tone/Style

Non-fiction/educational

- Often NOT narrative
- Might include lists or diagrams etc
- Usually very direct illustration style or photographs
- Popular with schools and libraries
- Qualify for specific awards
- Need very careful research and consulting

Who is Your Protagonist?

Should be either a child or childlike (animal, alien etc) except in the case of a biography

If an animal are they:

- a realistic animal?
 - *Harry the Dirty Dog* by Gene Zion
- or a fantasy (talking, wearing clothes etc) animal?
 - *Are You My Mother* by P.D Eastman
- Think about the origins of the animal if possible (should a zebra be in an African setting for example?)

Who is Your Protagonist?

- The protagonist, just as in longer fiction, should have
 - an arc – room to change by the end of the book
 - Strengths and weaknesses
 - A milieu/setting – urban or rural, type of family etc.
 - a plot – goals and obstacles.
 - They might have supporting characters and/or an antagonist too

Who is Your Protagonist?

- The protagonist, just as in longer fiction, should have
 - a **resolution** – the story should almost always have a happy resolved ending for the protagonist and/or the reader.

Original Draft

If Pluto was a pea

The massive comet cloud we think is at the edge of the solar system would be nearly 20,000 km further out. That's halfway around the world (12,400 miles). Imagine a pea in England and a blanket of fog covering Australia. That's how far it might be from Pluto to the comet cloud.

The Solar System would still be very large

If Pluto was a pea.

Final Draft

If Pluto was a pea

Pluto's smallest moon, Styx, would be too small to see.

And *you* would be much, much smaller than that.

But still not too small to think big thoughts
And do great things.

Tips

- Make it new and unique
- Write your first draft then delete 30%
- Read and study award winning and bestselling picture books (Caldecott Award, Newbery etc)
- Don't appropriate stories you have no cultural or personal connection to.
- Make large casts diverse
- Don't "preach"
- Fairy tales and fables etc. are public domain as are myths and legends (stick to your own culture), Shakespeare, Dickens etc.

Any questions?

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Facebook @authorgsprendergast

Homework

1. Collect a list of unusual or interesting sounding words. What does the SOUND of these words inspire? What about the MEANING?

Examples:

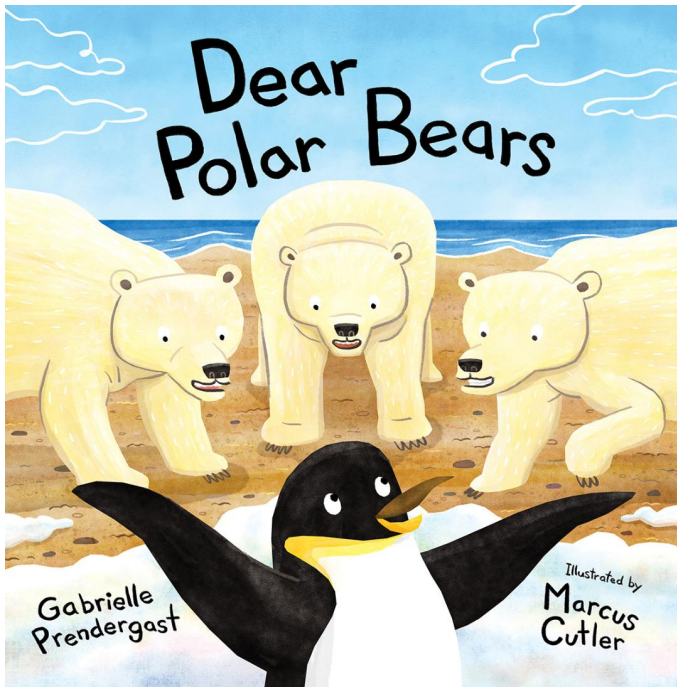
- **Curmudgeon** — (n) a bad-tempered person
- **Cacophony** — (n) a harsh, discordant mixture of sounds
- **Flummox** — (v) to perplex someone greatly
- **Gibberish** — (n) unintelligible or meaningless speech
- **Kerfuffle** — (n) a commotion or fuss
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- **Whippersnapper** — (n) a young person considered to be presumptuous or overconfident
- **Woebegone** — (adj) sad or miserable in appearance

2. Make a picture book “dummy” either by stapling pages together (ending up with 28 pages or 14 “spreads”) or in Word, Publisher or other app. Enter your own words or the words of a poem, prayer, song lyrics etc. Include sketches/notes about what the illustrations could be.

3. Develop one of the exercises or lessons of this week into a picture book manuscript of between 100-300 words

Elevating Your Work: How to Create Children's Picture Books That Are Not Just Entertaining, but Transformative

Week 2!



Exercise: ABC and Counting Books

- ABC books seem to be constantly renewed and revisited
- ABC books are generally written in one of two styles:
 - “A is for _____” or
 - “Alison Ate Another Apple” etc.
- Counting Books normally just cover numbers 1-10
- Both are often “themed” – ABC Animals, Counting Shapes etc

Exercise: Conceptualize and write the first few pages of an ABC or counting book using one of above styles

Try to focus on a specific topic that is **current and relevant to today’s kids**

Share Your Homework

- When offering feedback to your classmates think about:
 - How might children react to this manuscript?
 - How might illustrations add to this story?
 - How does it sound read aloud?
 - How would this manuscript be “pitched” to agents, editors and booksellers and buyers?
 - What does this manuscript remind you of (ie. other picture books with similar themes or “vibe”?)

Submitting picture books

- **Minimal** illustration notes
- Include only notes wherein the illustration needs to tell part of the story or contradict the text in an ironic way
- Example from Dear Polar Bears:

Text

Things here in Antarctica are okay.

A little warmer than usual.

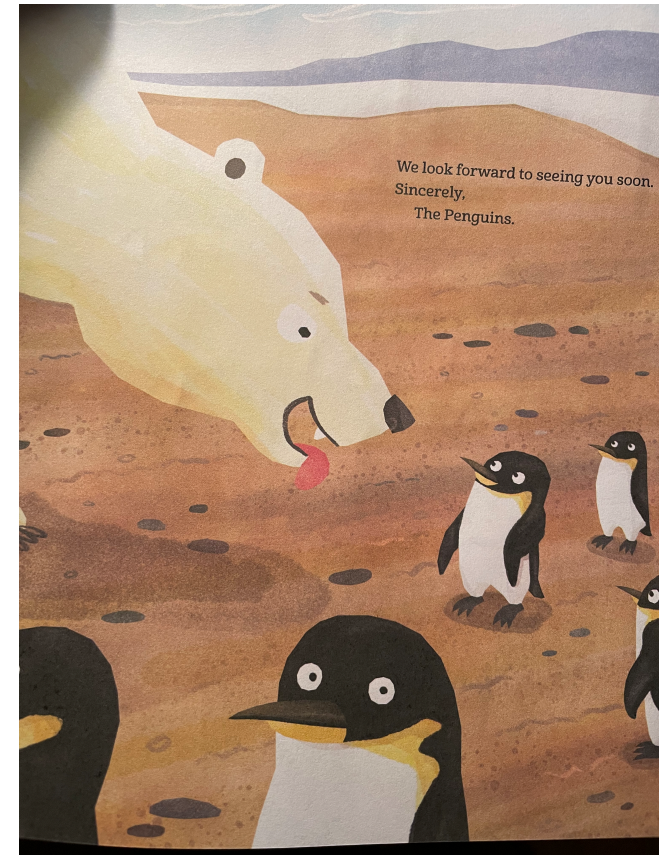
Illustration notes

Are they?

Maybe there's some garbage lying around

In Class Exercise

- Add some illustration notes to your manuscript(s)
- Rather than specific details about color, shape, placement etc give your illustrator keywords or emotional guidance. (for example: “The bears look hungry. One of the penguins looks scared”)



Week 2 – submitting picture books

Please find below my nonfiction *manuscript* *If Pluto Was A Pea*

If Pluto was a pea, the Earth would be a golf ball.

The solar system is unimaginably large to children; and the scale of the planets and sun is very hard to grasp. But shrink Pluto down to the size of a dried pea and things become a lot easier to picture.

If Pluto Was a Pea compares the sizes of the planets to familiar things such as beach balls and acorns and helps the reader to visualize our amazing solar system.

Suitable for a photographic or simple drawing style of illustration, *If Pluto Was a Pea* also lends itself to classroom exercises and additional teacher guides or resources.

Dear *Agent*

I'm writing to you about my picture book manuscript, **Dear Polar Bears**, a deceptively light-hearted story with a subtle environmental message.

Polar bears and penguins live in similar climates, but they never, ever meet. What if they had a party together? In *Dear Polar Bears*, the penguins of Antarctica invite the polar bears of the Arctic to join them for a party at the South Pole. But how will the Polar bears get there? And what will they bring?

Written in epistolary style, *Dear Polar Bears* combines a heart-warming story of friendship with some thought provoking imagery about the diversity of the arctic, the vast distances between the poles, and the impact of human life on the Polar Regions and the rest of the earth.

I'm the author of the award winning YA novels **Zero Repeat Forever** and **Audacious**, as well as the bestselling and multi-nominated middle grade novel **Pandas on the Eastside**. Having recently amicably parted with my agent, I am now seeking new representation for both picture books and longer form projects in middle grade, YA and adult. My first picture book, **If Pluto Was a Pea**, was published in 2019 from Simon & Schuster. You can read all about my books here: <https://angelhornpages.wordpress.com/my-books-2/>

I have attached the complete manuscript below, along with another document containing some illustration thoughts.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me by email at gp@angelhorn.com or by phone on 604 831 1735. I am also available on Skype or Facetime.

Sincerely

Gabrielle Prendergast
www.gsprendergast.com

In Class Exercise

- Write your short pitch (40 words)
 - EXAMPLE: The solar system is unimaginably large to children; and the scale of the planets and sun is very hard to grasp. But shrink Pluto down to the size of a dried pea and things become a lot easier to picture. IF PLUTO WAS A PEA, and entertaining non fiction picture book on STEM themes
 - Polar bears and penguins live in similar climates, but they never, ever meet. What if they had a party together? DEAR POLAR BEARS, a deceptively light-hearted story with a subtle environmental message.
- Does your pitch answer WHO, does WHAT?

In Class Exercise

- Write your long pitch (about 150-250 words)

Example: The solar system is unimaginably large to children; and the scale of the planets and sun is very hard to grasp. But shrink Pluto down to the size of a dried pea and things become a lot easier to picture

If Pluto Was a Pea compares the sizes of the planets to familiar things such as beach balls and acorns and helps the reader to visualize our amazing solar system.

Suitable for a photographic or simple drawing style of illustration, *If Pluto Was a Pea* also lends itself to classroom exercises and additional teacher guides or resources.

For narrative: Does your long pitch answer WHO does WHAT, WHY, WHERE, HOW, WITH WHOM and WHO or WHAT tries to stop them?

For non-narrative: does your pitch explain the concept, the potential audience and

In Class Exercise:

- Many authors take inspiration from existing texts or traditional stories.
Example: my upcoming picture book *Go Sloth Go*.

Develop a picture book idea/text based on:

Baa Baa Black Sheep

Humpty Dumpty Are You My Mother?

The Ugly Ducking

Hey Diddle Diddle Twinkle Twinkle

Five Little Ducks

Row Your Boat

Green Eggs and Ha

Hop on Pop

Fox in Socks

A story of your choice

Start with a Mind-Map

