

# ELLIE'S ADVICE FOR ASPIRING AUTHORS

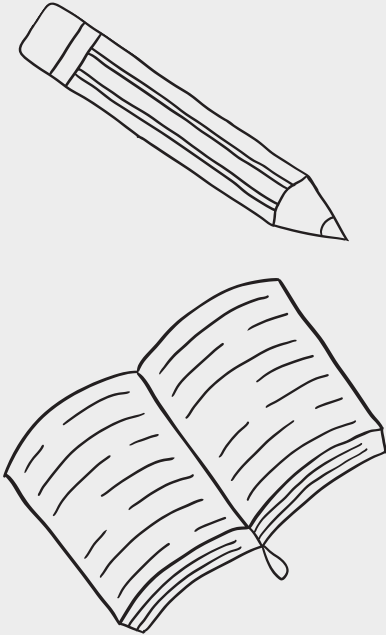
So you want to make a picture book! Wonderful! Kids need stories, including YOURS!

But how do you bring that story into the world?

## 1.

### MAKE THAT STORY THE BEST IT CAN BE

- Read at least 40 recent picture books. Ensure that list includes award winning books. Some awards you may not be familiar with: EB White Read Aloud Award, Pura Belpré Award, Schneider Family Award, Notable Children's Books, Robert F. Siebert. Check to see if your state has an annual book award and be sure to read the most recent picture book winners.
- Read a couple books on craft. *Writing Picture Books* by Ann Whitford Paul is one I've come back to time and time again.
- Take a class. Many local art schools and community colleges offer children's writing and illustrating programs. [Storyteller Academy 101](#) is also a great place to start.



## 2.

### BE A JOINER

- Join the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators and attend relevant regional programs regularly. SCBWI is a great community of both pre-published and published children's book creators. The more people you meet and the more conversations you have, the more you learn! And some agents/editors look specifically for people to be involved in SCBWI.
- Join or start a critique group. Note: your spouse ≠ critique group. (Even if your spouse is an accomplished children's media creator, it's probably unwise on many levels to have his/her as the only other eyes on your work.) Where do you find critique partners? All those people you met in that class you took! Or the regional SCBWI chapter you joined! They're all potential critique members. I have two critique groups and they're folks I met through classes and SCBWI conferences. Some SCBWI regions even have a Critique Group Coordinator.
- Attend a roundtable or one-on-one critique with an established editor and/or agent. These are usually offered at SCBWI conferences and can be a really good way to understand what the industry is looking for and how your work compares.



# 3.

## RESEARCH AGENTS & EDITORS

- You really did ALL of step 1, right? If not, go do it and stop trying to skip ahead.
- Are you self-publishing? If you are, this is where my advice ends. Sorry, I've never self-published and don't intend to. If you're looking into traditional publishing, read on.
- Create a list of agents who are open to queries. Publisher's Weekly has a Literary Agents Database and SCBWI's Essential Guide to Publishing also keeps a list of agents. Check their manuscript wishlists (#mswl) and mission statements to ensure you're a good fit. Follow the agents you're interested in on social media for more details on what they're seeking.
- Create a list of publishers who are open to unsolicited manuscripts. (This means "unagented" writers and illustrators. Note: This will NOT be your Big 5, the five biggest publishers in the industry. This is typically mid-size to smaller trade publishers. To find publishers when I started out, I looked at all, yes ALL the picture books in the same genre as my manuscript to find out who published them. I jotted those down and then looked them up one at a time to find out if they were open to submissions. It was time consuming, but I had a list of about 15 publishers and two of those ended up giving me offers on my first book!

# 4.

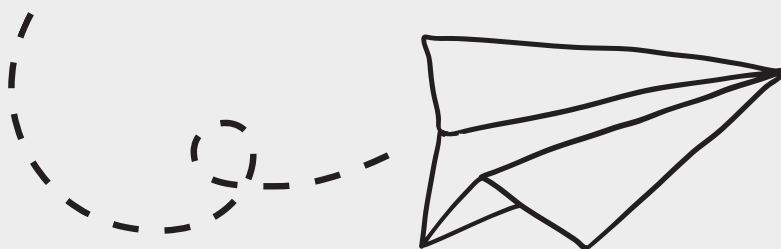
## SELL IT

- Write a good query letter. Many agents won't look past a bad query, no matter how good your manuscript or dummy may be. My agent, Adria Goetz offers some great advice in this interview with Rose Quinn.
- Write a pitch. More and more kidlit creators are getting discovered through Twitter "pitch parties." Pitch Wars has some great resources on getting started.

# 5.

## KEEP ON KEEPIN' ON!

- Be patient with your submissions and celebrate the small wins. In this business, you'll find that rejections aren't always bad news. In fact, don't even call it a rejection. Call it a "Notafit" instead. And when that Notafit comes with detailed information about how it could be a "Betterfit", that's good news! You are one step closer to getting your work out in the world.



BEST OF LUCK  
WITH YOUR  
ENDEAVORS!

ellie