

Writing Great Books for Young Adults: Everything You Need to Know, from Crafting the Idea to Getting Published

By Regina L. Brooks

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Break into the Bestselling Young Adult Market with this Indispensable Guide!

Whether you're just getting started or are on the hunt for an agent or publisher, Writing Great Books for Young Adults is your complete insider source on how to succeed in the flourishing world of YA fiction and nonfiction. In this updated and revised edition, veteran literary agent Regina L. Brooks offers invaluable advice for YA writers on everything from shaping your novel to crafting the perfect pitch for your book.

Learn How To:

•Develop an authentic, engaging voice and writing style
•Construct dynamic plots that will resonate with readers
•Avoid common pitfalls related to tone and point of view
•Navigate the emerging genres of YA nonfiction and New Adult
•Create an exceptional query letter and proposal that will grab the attention of agents and publishers

You'll also discover how successful film adaptations like *Harry Potter* and *The Hunger Games* have broadened the market for your book. Filled with tips and advice from agents, editors, and popular YA authors,Writing Great Books for Young Adults is your ticket to an incredible YA career!

"Brooks offers writers who are serious about attracting teen readers solid guidance through the creation process of writing YA fiction."—*Library Journal*

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Writing Great Books for Young Adults: Everything You Need to Know, from Crafting the Idea to Getting Published By Regina L. Brooks Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #587676 in eBooks
- Published on: 2014-10-07
- Released on: 2014-10-07
- Format: Kindle eBook

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Editorial Review

Review
"Brooks offers writers who are serious about attracting teen readers solid guidance through the creation process of writing YA fiction." - ***Library Journal***

"Brooks believes that the young adult period is a vitally important one for developing lifelong readers. As an agent, she has represented children's, young adult and adult fiction authors for the past decade... Written from the perspective of an industry insider, the book shows budding authors how to edit their work with fresh eyes." - ***Kirkus***

"Brooks fills her book with clear examples that illustrate her points... She tells you exactly how to craft an attention-grabbing query letter to an agent, and how to write a book proposal that will look professional and give you the best chance of getting a book contract. If you're looking for an A to Z guide on writing and publishing YA fiction, Regina Brooks' how-to is the place to go." - ***Writer magazine***

"*Writing Great Books for Young Adults*, is a fabulous must read! This is an excellent source for all authors who are interested in writing great books for young adults! It has everything you need to know and it tells how to do it right... I would highly recommend this novel as the first and only tool for those interested in writing YA. I rate this book a 5 out of 5 stars!" - ***Universal Creativity Inc14***

"Regina Brooks covers all the essentials of writing great books for young adults, such as plot, character, setting and dialogue. I found the explanation of the differences between plot ("a chain of events where each event has a cause") and story ("the sequence of events as the reader imagines them to have taken place") particularly helpful, as this is an area which is not always well explained." - ***Book in a Week***

"*Writing Great Books for Young Adults* outshines its competitors, by combining all of the writing themes together. Instead of focusing just on dialogue, it will have a chapter on the subject, and so on, making it a great start for aspiring writers. " - ***Book Cupid***

"Fantastic advice for anyone wanting to write fiction for young adults... a must read for anyone wanting to improve their skills or break into young adult fiction." - ***Batch of Books***

"If you are a writing teacher, this book would make a great teaching resource for you. The depth it goes into would really make some fantastic lessons and talking points with your students. I would also recommend this book to anyone currently writing a book or planning to write. It simplifies the process and helps you gain an understanding of what is needed to be clear and concise when writing to keep a teen reader's attention. " - ***The Flashlight Reader***

"If you are thinking of penning one or already have and are now shopping around for a publisher, I highly encourage you to pick up a copy of this book. Drawing from her experience as a literary agent, Regina Brooks breaks down the whole process, from developing ideas to submitting queries to agents, into easy to implement steps. Each chapter deals with a different, major, area, such as theme, character development, setting, satisfactory endings, finding the right agent, and lots more." - ***History and Other Thoughts***

"There's a lot of useful information on the writing process, the publishing process, and everything in

between." - ***Mother. Gamer. Writer.***

"Brooks writes in plain language and an engaging style accessible to all in this resource for writers entering the YA fiction market, whether they are still in the writing process or whether they are looking for a publisher. In addition to chapters on characters, plot, setting, dialogue, the book also offers tips on getting constructive feedback and finding an agent." - ***ProtoView***

"This book made me want to drop everything and write! Teachers would find this to be a valuable guide for students with its informative and inspirational writing advice." - ***Unleashing Readers***

About the Author
Regina L. Brooks is the founder of Serendipity Literary and has been developing books for over a decade. She has been highlighted in several national and international magazines and periodicals, including Writers and Poets, Essence Magazine, Writer's Digest Magazine, and Sister2Sister. She lives in New York City, New York.

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INTRODUCTION

"Welcome to the world of Young Adult Fiction."

Those are the words I use to kick off the workshops I conduct at various writers conferences held throughout the United States and abroad. But they're not just words. If you want to write YA fiction, you've got to be willing to step into a whole new world.

This book is designed to help you enter that new world. Here you'll find detailed descriptions of how to avoid the traps many potential YA authors fall into, as well as tips on how to create the next YA bestseller.

WHAT IS YA FICTION?

Of course there are universal standards for writing prose for any audience. To a large extent, however, elements of YA fiction, especially the tone and the narrator's perspective, differ markedly and require a whole new set of rules.

This notion of YA's otherworldliness doesn't seem to be a concept understood by most people who want to write for teens, at least judging from the manuscripts that cross my desk. I hear similar comments from colleagues in the YA world. Most of these pros wouldn't be surprised to hear that among the stacks of manuscripts I receive, 90 percent of the writers seem confused about what YA fiction is.

It's not surprising that people are confused, given that something as basic as a list of bestselling YA titles is commonly found on the same page as picture books for toddlers, complete with lift-the-flap and pop-up features. The illusion of YA as solely an extension of traditional children's books may also explain why many novices who try their hand at writing for teens rely on memories of what they enjoyed reading in adolescence. Depending on the individual's age and experiences, that might mean nineteenth-century Louisa May Alcott's Little Women; J. D. Salinger's Catcher in the Rye, published in 1951; S. E. Hinton's The Outsiders, 1967; or Judy Blume's Forever, 1975. Highly commendable classics all, with messages that continue to resonate with youth, but they don't necessarily represent what YA editors are looking for now.

So what is YA fiction, exactly? Most publishing industry insiders consider YA fiction to be fiction written for readers from about the age of twelve to eighteen, featuring characters in that same age range. Keep in

mind, however, that these age boundaries are somewhat flexible. While YA can often be a coming-of-age story, not every coming-of-age story is YA. If the character is an adult reflecting on his youth, that's not a YA novel.

As a literary agent representing writers of different genres, one of my jobs includes presenting my clients' manuscripts to editors who decide whether they will purchase them for their publishing houses. Editors develop areas of expertise, such as food, science, business, and religion. I have long noted that certain personalities gravitate toward YA publishing, and that they have sensibilities and interests that are strikingly different from editors who work in other genres.

Just as teens like to push the envelope, YA editors, who generally have easygoing personalities, are more open to taking risks. They are often willing to try fresh approaches and formats. It is this dynamism that makes them more experimental than button-down. Mirroring their readership in another regard, YA editors exhibit high levels of curiosity. Most significantly, in addition to wanting to inform and entertain, they care about getting young people to read, and seem determined to publish books that address adolescent vulnerabilities and engage in the problems of the day.

None of this is meant to suggest that they should be nominated for sainthood. Like anyone else in business, editors must keep their eyes focused on the bottom line. Because that requirement doesn't seem to diminish YA editors' sense of purpose, it enhances the illusion that they inhabit a separate world.

The tremendous creative and commercial success of YA lit is improving opportunities for writers and readers, giving the genre the respect it deserves. Rick Margolis, executive editor of the School Library Journal, which he describes as "the largest reviewer of children's books in the country," points out that he does a lot of reading and believes YA books are now among the best genres being published across the board.

Agreeing with Margolis, Carol Fitzgerald, Book Report Network founder, whose company launched Teenreads.com in 1997, explains, "YA books are shorter than most of those written for adults. That requires authors to write with wit and precision." She says proof of their exceptional quality is in the fact that many YA books are winning awards traditionally won by adult fiction.

Among the increasing numbers of YA authors cited for excellence is M. T. Anderson, winner of the 2006 National Book Award for The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing, Traitor to the Nation. An exemplar of how writers can cut their own swaths through the YA world, Anderson employed multiple viewpoints as well as letters, newspaper clippings, and scientific papers to tell the story of Octavian, a black youth raised as a Revolutionary-era slave.

Anderson's story is one of many YA entries that will be discussed here in a chapter-by-chapter feature, "Anatomy Lessons," which includes advice and encouragement from award-winning authors. Another ongoing feature in this book is "Advice from Publishers Row," encapsulating wisdom from top YA editors. My intention is to give you the sense that you have a panel of experts standing at the ready to guide you through the writing process. One more chapter-by-chapter feature, "Author Working," will help get your creative juices flowing.

CROSSOVERS

A lot of people in the publishing industry believe that confusion about what constitutes YA lit is heightened by the success of some titles known in the industry as "crossovers." Publishing houses generate additional revenue from some books by marketing them to both adult and YA readers, thus crossing over from one audience to another. Francesca Lia Block's cult novel, Weetzie Bat, written in 1989, is considered the

original crossover, continuing to attract readers from fifteen to thirty-five. Two of the most commercially successful crossovers are Mark Haddon's The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time and Yann Martel's Life of Pi. Both were published in 2002 and have sold over two million copies each. Those books were adult books that crossed over into the YA market, but there are others that start out as YA and then cross over to an adult audience; for example, Stephenie Meyer's Twilight series and Cecily von Ziegesar's Gossip Girl series. The first became a feature film and the second a popular television series. All these crossovers have led to the creation of a new genre, New Adult, which is the focus of Chapter 13.

Author of the crossover series Harry Potter, J. K. Rowling has said she had no particular age group in mind when she started Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone; however, she did know she was writing for children. The first Harry Potter novel was eventually published in 1998 by Scholastic, the world's largest publisher and distributor of juvenile books. The company targeted Harry Potter to children nine to eleven. What happened, of course, made publishing history, with Rowling's work garnering millions of fans worldwide, both older and younger, including a substantial segment of teens. Later, two separate editions of Harry Potter were released, identical in text but with the cover artwork on one edition aimed at children and the other at adults.

Rowling's young wizard also cast magic on the YA world, changing the way the industry viewed the genre. Harry Potter's $29.99 selling price reminded publishers that young people were not only willing to shell out big bucks to read but that they also had the means to do so. In 2006 in the United States alone, teens had $94.7 billion a year to spend, a figure that increases about $1 billion a year, according to Jupiter Research.

Rowling's success led to her books being turned into movies aimed squarely at teens, and again they attracted a much broader audience. The Harry Potter film series is on track to become the top-grossing franchise in movie history. The success of a book can often inspire producers to look at YA books specifically for the purpose of making movies aimed at teens. Some examples of book-to-film include Twilight by Stephenie Meyer; Ella Enchanted by Gail Carson Levine; Confessions of a Teenage Drama Queen by Dyan Sheldon; I Know What You Did Last Summer by Lois Duncan; Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants by Ann Brashares; The Fault in Our Stars by John Green; The Hunger Games by Suzanne Collins; The Fifth Wave by Rick Yancey; The Book Thief by Markus Zusak; Divergent by Veronica Roth; and The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy by Douglas Adams.

As I'm sure you've noticed, the market for YA film adaptations is huge; ten adaptations alone were made in 2013. These cinematic successes mean that YA books are reaching broader audiences than ever before-parents, film executives, and other adults. The numbers bear this idea out. According to New York magazine, the two biggest audiences for YA fiction are readers ages eighteen to twenty-nine, who buy 35 percent of all YA purchases, and readers ages thirty to forty-four, who buy 27 percent of all YA purchases. Similarly, these success of these film adaptations make the YA market look lucrative, spurring authors to write for it. The end result is that YA is a multimedia genre that transcends the page.

While many YA novels have crossed over into the adult market, that should not be the goal of your YA manuscript. Instead, focus on writing the best-written book you possibly can. Crossover audiences follow the best-written book, so producing an outstanding manuscript should always be your aim.

THE NEW WORLD OF YA FICTION

As my friend and editor Kat Brzozowski tells budding writers, "A lot of YA books do edgier stuff now. Teenagers' lives now aren't the same as they were twenty years ago."

Over the decades, teens have been changed by a combination of what some describe as less parenting and more media. The nation's wake-up call came in April 1999 when two boys went on a shooting rampage at

Columbine High School outside Denver. Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold killed twelve classmates and a teacher, and wounded twenty-four others, before committing suicide. The massacre provoked a national debate about cliques and bullying.

Shortly after Columbine, Carol Fitzgerald, founder of the Book Report Network, spoke to a gathering of publishing executives. "I told them that compared to what's really going on in the lives of young people, the books that were being published read like pabulum. I reminded them that they owed more to young people and to their teachers and parents, and I asked them to give teens books that matter in their lives."

A lot of publishing executives must have had similar thoughts. A proliferation of titles followed that immersed readers in the real world. During the eighties and nineties, YA authors had tackled subjects such as premarital sex, homosexuality, and AIDS. But many books published in the new millennium delved into risqué subjects such as incest, drag queens, oral sex, self-mutilation, and date rape. Edgier and trendier, they are not your mother's storybooks, and maybe that's just the point, suggests Mark McVeigh, a senior editor at Dutton. He says, "The lives of kids today are barely recognizable from the childhoods anybody over thirty led in the way they approach sex, drugs, alcohol, parental attention or the lack thereof."

Keep in mind that teenagers live in the same world as you do. They don't live sixty years ago, they don't "go steady" anymore, and being asked to the upcoming sock hop is hardly the greatest of their concerns. One of the most important things you can do-in fact, one of the standards by which your novel will succeed or fail with its readers-is to accurately reflect the world and how today's teenagers perceive it.

LIVING THE DREAM

I assume that you picked up this book because you have something you want to communicate to today's teen readers. My goal is to help you understand and avoid the challenges and pitfalls of writing for today's YA audience.

Experience tells me that working through this book will not only help you produce a better manuscript but will also allow you to look at your own world with fresh eyes. That has certainly been the case for me. I started out with a degree in aerospace engineering from Ohio State University and as an avid reader was attracted to a career that lasted more than a decade in senior positions at major publishing houses like John Wiley & Sons and McGraw-Hill. While I still feel equally at home in the mathematical world of engineering as in the literary world, I have been able to creatively mine my technical background in helping writers hone their craft. Engineering trained me to identify areas of strength as well as structural weakness, and because that's what editors do, I have learned to think like an editor in evaluating manuscripts.

Because I'm in a profession that allows me to represent authors I deeply respect, I derive a great deal of pleasure from championing their work. An agent is an author's first line of defense. But we learn right away that in the business of writing, not everyone loves the same books. Sometimes it takes a while until a manuscript lands in the hands of just the right editor.

Keep that in mind as you learn from this book, developing your manuscript and polishing it like a gem before you hand it over to those who will judge it. My advice is that when possible, learn from criticism, but don't let it weigh you down. (I work with one writer who records any nasty criticism she receives on paper towels, which she then burns.)

It may help you to know that the author of one of the most famous YA books of our time was described by a critic as "not having a special perception or feeling which would lift the book above the curiosity level." The Diary of a Young Girl, first published in 1947, was written by Anne Frank, a gifted Jewish teenager who detailed her life in hiding in Nazi-occupied Amsterdam before she died of typhus in a prison camp. Later,

First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt spoke for many of Frank's fans, describing the diary as "one of the wisest and most moving commentaries on war and its impact on human beings." Readers seemed to agree. The diary has sold more than twenty-five million copies.

Perhaps this story will help you remember that critics, much like the adolescents whom I hope will populate the pages of your new world, are only human. Also keep in mind that while every ear may not be sympathetic, most criticism is intended to help you create the best possible book you can. With that in mind, I hope you will grasp the tools contained in this book to produce your own Catcher in the Rye, Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince, or Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants. I, for one, look forward to reading-if not representing-them.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Dorothy Pierce:

Why don't make it to be your habit? Right now, try to prepare your time to do the important action, like looking for your favorite book and reading a e-book. Beside you can solve your short lived problem; you can add your knowledge by the book entitled Writing Great Books for Young Adults: Everything You Need to Know, from Crafting the Idea to Getting Published. Try to the actual book Writing Great Books for Young Adults: Everything You Need to Know, from Crafting the Idea to Getting Published as your close friend. It means that it can being your friend when you experience alone and beside associated with course make you smarter than in the past. Yeah, it is very fortuned for you personally. The book makes you considerably more confidence because you can know everything by the book. So , let me make new experience in addition to knowledge with this book.

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