

#3 What's in Your Bag of Tricks?— In this session, Michelle will share some tricks of the trade that have helped her sell 23 children's books to major publishers such as Zonderkidz, Ideals Children's Books and Simon & Schuster. Specifically, she will teach you how to craft a killer query letter; how to put together an amazing book proposal for your YA and teen children's non-fiction and fiction books; how to prepare for a writers' conference, including crafting a synopsis list; and several other tips that will give your manuscripts a better chance of publication. Don't miss this one!

Michelle Medlock Adams, Quad Cities Christian Writers' Conference 2008 Faculty
iufan@michellemedlockadams.com
www.michellemedlockadams.com

Whenever I teach at writers' conferences, I almost always get this question: "Do I really have a chance of ever seeing one of my children's stories in print?" The answer is, "YES!" but you can't be moved by the unfavorable staggering statistics. Here is the reality: mid to large-sized publishing houses receive more than 5,000 unsolicited submissions each year. (And that is a very conservative number.) Of those submissions, about 95 percent are rejected immediately (Usually an intern or an editorial assistant just sends you a form rejection letter without ever passing your manuscript to the editors...). If a submission makes it past the first guard (the intern or editorial assistant), that submission gets into the hands of the assistant editors. Of that 5 percent, some are query letters that editors like and actually ask to see the entire manuscripts! Also, the great manuscripts submitted in their entirety make up that 5 percent, and those submissions make their round through the editorial department. The end result? Only about 1 to 2 percent of unsolicited submissions are purchased for publication.

OK, so you're wondering how so many new children's books are published each year when houses are taking so few manuscripts from the slush pile, right? Well, the slush pile manuscripts are usually submitted by new writers or writers who don't have agents, and as I already stated, only 1 to 2 percent of those authors are having successful publishing adventures. The rest of the 98 percent of books published each year are submitted by experienced writers and those who have already published with that particular house. In other words, that writer has a relationship with an editor at that house and continues to do books there...great situation to be in, right? Well, it's not impossible. All things are possible through Christ who gives us strength...right? So, don't be discouraged by the statistics. You may be a new writer or a writer without an agent, but so was I! And I am a slush pile success story.

You have to realize that your submissions will stand out if you format your manuscripts correctly and if you craft a killer query letter/cover letter. The following tricks of the trade will give you the best chance at becoming a published author—taking your manuscripts out of the slush pile and onto the book shelves. Yay!

1. Don't limit your stories to just picture books—market them in children's magazines, anthologies and websites.

*This is especially good advice if you've never been published in the children's realm. Getting some children's magazine articles published will build your

Writer's Résumé and give you more credibility. Get this book: "Magazine Markets for Children's Writers 2008"—a Writer's Institute Publication. Call 800-443-6078, or go online to www.WritersBookstore.com to order.

- a. For example, before I dove into writing tween/teen devotional books for Zonderkidz and Ideals Children's Books, I wrote a few fun articles for "Sweet 16!" and "Brio." Those sales not only put a little money in my pocket, they were useful to mention in my proposal when trying to sell my tween/teen devotional books.
- b. As long as you don't sell all rights, you can always develop your magazine stories into full-blown picture books.

*In order to sell to magazines, you'll have to know how to craft killer query letters. See additional handout for Killer Query Tips...

2. Go to writers' conferences both secular and Christian and get to know the editors. Like any other profession, relationships are key to your success. When you get to know editors face-to-face at writers' workshops and conferences, you're no longer just a faceless name on a sheet of paper circulating through an editorial office. So, make an investment to attend one or two writers' conferences a year.
 - a. Tip: If you're a children's writer, you should not only attend a Christian Writers' Conference but also a Society of Children's Book Writers & in your area. At secular conferences, you'll meet with editors from houses like Scholastic and Simon & Schuster, which won't be represented at most Christian Writers' Conferences.
 - b. Go armed with ideas and a synopsis sheet of your available stories, as well as book proposals for YA fiction and non-fiction.
 1. A synopsis sheet is a listing of your available book titles with a paragraph description about each book.
Example: ***"Mama's Belly"**: A topic that never goes out of style—welcoming a new baby to the family. In my picture book for 4-6 year olds, the little girl makes observations about her mother's growing belly. It's full of fun language and great illustration possibilities.
 - c. Even if you can't attend a certain writers' conference, visit the conference website and learn which editors from what houses will be attending. Then, if you can't be there, you'll learn of the house's editorial needs and possibly the name of a new editor at that house. (Sneaky, eh?)
3. If you want an awesome book proposal format—one that works for both fiction and non-fiction—get "Proposals With Pizzazz" by Christopher Maselli.
 - a. It is the only format I use when trying to sell YA books as well as non-fiction books for women and Christian Living titles. Christopher Maselli won first place in a Writer's Digest Magazine competition for best book proposal format, so get it! You won't be sorry.

4. Take industry newsletters; network with other children's writers, and join writers' groups in your given genre.
 - a. While owning the current writers' market guides is a good thing so you'll know where to market your stuff, you'll also want to take some children's writing newsletters and magazines so you'll know the most current trends in the industry, as well as what houses are looking for what kinds of manuscripts at this given moment. (See Resource Sheet for a listing of online and print newsletters and industry magazines.)
 - b. Network like there's no tomorrow! Most other writers are generous and will share information, as well as pass along work if their plates get too full.
 - c. By joining a children's writing writers' group, you'll be able to "Test" your material on your peers before sending off a lame story to an editor. The more eyes on your manuscript, the better, right? You can help each other grow and become better writers.

5. Look for ways to be more than a one-hit wonder...
 - a. Once you get your foot in the door with a publisher, be that publisher's go-to guy or go-to gal!
 1. Once your publisher knows you can hit a deadline and that you're easy to get along with, and that you're willing to do whatever you can to market your book, you'll stand out from their other authors. Offer to write books that they need but don't have.
 - a. So, the next time they need an Easter board book, they will call you.
 - b. So, if you write a children's board book that your publisher is having good sales with, propose a series of board books. That's what I did with "Why I Love You, God," which resulted in "Why I Praise You, God" "Why I Trust You, God" and "Why I Thank You, God."
 - c. Cultivate those editorial relationships for long-term publishing benefits.
 1. Send holiday gifts.
 2. Drop little "How are you doing?" emails from time to time.
 3. Try and schedule lunches with those editors at events such as ICRS, etc.
 - a. When you meet, be prepared to propose new material! 😊