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THE ALL-IMPORTANT "R's"

HOW TO WRITE FOR KIDS WHEN YOU DON'T HAVE ANY...

- 1. Rent a Child for the Day:** If you don't have any children, you need to hang out with children so that you'll understand kid lingo, children's likes and dislikes, current trends, etc.
 - *Offer to babysit for the neighbors' children or your relatives' children
 - *Take your turn watching the kids' nursery at church
 - *Work with Girl Scouts; Boy Scouts; other children's groups
- 2. Research: hang out where kids hang out:** You'll want to observe children at play. Watch how they interact. Listen to how they talk. Observe how they move and what they wear, etc.
 - *Go to the Park.
 - *Go to Chuck E. Cheese
 - *Go to a toy store or hang out in the toy section at a discount store like Wal-Mart.
 - *Go to the zoo and do double duty (You can observe kids and also observe animals, taking notes on both for future books.)
- 3. Research: read what children are reading:** You should read the children's books that are winning awards and selling well, as well as the classics.
 - *Read the books that are in the genre you want to write. So, if you're longing to write picture books, read several picture books each week.
 - *Read both secular and Christian children's books.
 - *Read the Newberry and Caldecott winners each year. Go to <http://www.bravemonster.com/pastwinners.htm> to see the winners from the past 63 years!
 - *Read blogs of kids in the age group you're targeting.
 - *Seventeen Magazine, American Cheerleader, American Cheerleader Junior, Young Miss, Cosmogirl!, Brio, etc.
- 4. Research: watch what kids are watching:** You should watch the TV shows and the movies that appeal to the audience you're trying to reach. This is all a part of your research so that your dialogue, your plots, your settings, your characters will be current and ring true.
 - *Watch the Disney channel on TV—shows such as "Hannah Montana" "That's So Raven" and reruns of "The Lizzie McGuire Show."
 - *Watch Nickelodeon on TV—shows such as "Unfabulous" and "Zoey 101" as well as "The Fairly Oddparents"
 - *Watch "American Idol" on Fox.

*Watch the Kid's Choice award shows and see who is hot and who is not in all genres (On the Nick network)

*Watch movies that appeal to the age group you're writing for...so if you're trying to target tween girls, rent "Sleepover," "Mean Girls," "Dreamer," "What a Girl Wants," "Ella Enchanted" and go see "Horton Hears a Who."

5. Research: listen to what kids are listening to...like Radio Disney. You should know what artists and groups are "hip" with the age groups you're targeting.

*You should know the most popular songs by Kelly Clarkson, Carrie Underwood, Clay Aiken, Jump 5, Casting Crowns, Third Day, Mariah Carey, Usher, Maroon Five, Green Day, Lindsay Lohan, Escape the Fate, the Jonas Brothers, etc.

*This is an interesting article about what today's kids are listening to, so read it: http://www.usatoday.com/life/music/news/2004-03-29-classic-rock-kids_x.htm

6. Research: fill in gaps with online research.

*Approach writing for kids like you would any other article/assignment. Research it online!

*If you've spent time with children and you've read their books and listened to their music and you're still not sure what words are "cool" with them at the moment, go online and find out. www.urbandictionary.com is a good source

*For example, if one of your characters is a surfer dude, go here to learn how that character might talk: http://surfing.about.com/od/wordortheday/index_r.htm

*To learn about current trends: <http://sev.prnewswire.com/leisure-travel-hotels/20050602/NYTH13602062005-1.html> online.

7. Remember: think back to when you were a kid: Word choices/slang and clothing fads/trends come and go, but the raw emotion of a story never goes out of style.

*Use your own childhood experiences or those experiences of your own children and draw from them.

*BJ Stone, author of several middle grade novels, relies on memories to make her books kid-friendly because her children are all grown. She says: "My book, *Ola's Wake* (Henry Holt and Random House) was inspired by my mother's antics and my imagination. In fact, I get most of my ideas for novels from my childhood memories—like the time I climbed a windmill in west Texas, or the time I rode a horse with my cousin and we were bucked off in a sticker patch. Those events inspired my *Windmills* and *Sticker Patches* books."

* Tap into memories of your proudest, saddest, most embarrassing or disappointing moments. Slang, toys, and fashions come and go, but feelings are universal and timeless.

*Childhood memories may be the story buds for numerous future articles and books. The key is to remember with all of your senses—what you saw, how it felt, how it smelled, etc. Become that child again...