Cultures in the Classroom

Author's Guide

Thomas Johnston–O'Neill, © 2001–2004

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INTRODUCTION

This document presents guidelines, suggestions and narrative strategies for writing a Cultures in the Classroom series book for The Worldview Press. This guide is designed to assist authors with writing compelling and interesting books that inform young readers about the diversity of world cultures. Much of what follows is specific to Worldview Press publications, much of the advice and guidance was shamelessly borrowed from writing manuals and other helpful sources.

Despite considerable experience with academic writing and publishing, many individuals who have expressed an interest in writing for this series of books have had little or no experience with writing fiction or with writing for children. The Worldview Press hopes that this guide will be practical and useful to such writers and that perhaps even authors who have had more experience with writing juvenile fiction will find it of value. A bibliography is provided at the end of this booklet for those writers who want to read more on the craft of writing fiction in general or more specifically about the art of writing for children.

NEW It is essential that new authors read the section on THE EDITORIAL PROCESS and utilize the CHECKLIST both of which are found at the end of this document.

THE SERIES OBJECTIVE

The goal of this series of books is to introduce elementary–age children to the wide diversity of world cultures. This goal will be accomplished through fictional narratives that focus on the experiences and adventures of characters who are similar in age to the intended readership. Books in this series must be set in present–day time and reflect contemporary cultural existence. Historical narratives or folktales are not desired for this series. In each book of the series, the main character will navigate through his or her cultural, social and physical world in order to solve a mystery, resolve a problem or to make a discovery. It is intended that cultural content will be integral to the plot, rising above mere background or setting. Showing "culture–in–action" will be favored over lengthy exposition or description. Great storytelling is absolutely essential!

In the future The Worldview Press will produce a separate series of books concerning sub–cultural and immigrant experience in North America. However, stories concerning Native American cultures are welcomed for the Cultures in the Classroom series.

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Initially, the Cultures in the Classroom series will be written in English for a North American school readership. This readership will include students who are both in school and those who are home−schooled. The grade−level of your readers will span the third through fifth grades. Usually, students in these grades are eight to ten years old. Needless to say, a North American English−reading audience in and of itself embraces a tremendous amount of diversity with respect to socio−economics, regional variation and culture. However, it is possible to make certain broad generalizations about this particular readership regarding typical stages of biological and cultural development.

Although there are great individual differences, eight to ten year old children are more independent in their thoughts and behaviors than younger children. Children of this age are interested in new ideas and new ways of doing things. While younger children tend to be more attracted to familiar themes and settings, eight to nine year old children are drawn to stories about people, places and times unfamiliar to them. Adventure stories, mysteries and detective stories are very popular with this age group. Abstract and critical thinking begins to develop more fully at this time. Because of this interest in the unfamiliar, the third, forth and fifth grades present an excellent opportunity to encourage an interest in other cultures.

Eight to ten year old children are often attentive, persistent and enjoy being challenged. Many students through the 3rd, 4th, and 5th grades become interested in collecting, categorizing and making fine distinctions. During this stage of development reading skills vary tremendously. Some children already read with great fluidity while others struggle. Some gender differences exist: girls are often more interested and skillful in reading while boys are more attracted to pictorial content. For many children, this period of development marks a shift from learning to read to reading to learn.

RELEVANCE WILL INCREASE INTEREST

The relevance of the subject matter to the intellectual, social and emotional lives of readers increases reader engagement. Although your readers are at a point in their development where they are greatly attracted to things unfamiliar to them, interest in a book can be improved if some level of relevance to a reader's own experiences in life is maintained. This relevance can be developed through the consideration of various aspects and conditions of childhood that are generally −− if not always universally −− shared by many children of the world. Specific conditions of childhood will vary from culture to culture but certain fundamental trajectories pertain everywhere. A fuller understanding of the developmental experiences of children in "America" will create a better foundation for understanding themes and problems that may have relevance to your readers.

Around the time that most American children are learning to read with greater facility, they are also experiencing fundamental changes that are related to moving from a position of dependence on others toward relative independence. Coupled with these changes is the increased necessity and drive to understand the social, physical and moral world and to make choices and decisions based on those understandings. It is a time of great experimentation for many children. Not only do children of this age have to take greater responsibility for meeting their own needs, but many children also take on new responsibilities with respect to caring for younger siblings, pets and doing chores formerly performed by their parents or older siblings. Around the second and third grade, children often have the added obligation of homework that involves a much greater degree of self−motivation, self−discipline and concentration. Skills and talents are no longer a matter of a guided quasi−natural development (like walking and talking). New skills, such as reading, mathematics, learning to play a musical instrument or a sport, require more conscious efforts at concentration and practice.

Social relations develop a greater complexity as children try to make sense of feelings related to friendship, comradery, trust, approval (of their peers and adults), and social adeptness, etc. Many children of this age experience having to stand by a friend who is in trouble, confront bullies, and cope with unkind remarks by other children (or adults). Boundaries are often tested and it is not rare for a child to experiment with socially proscribed behaviors such as lying, stealing, cheating

or "bad language." This is often a time of growing awareness of the wider world and social consciousness. Concern for the environment and the development of community values are increasingly encouraged by parents, teachers, the books and magazines children read, and the projects children participate in. At this age children often develop a greater awareness and concern for their "presentation of self" as exhibited through the opinions they express, the clothes they wear, the language they use, and the mannerisms they adopt.Socio–economic, ethnic, religious and gender differences also become more apparent, interesting and perplexing to children of this age. Indeed, the developing awareness of social and cultural differences –– a fundamental aspect of a child's developing world view –– presents a compelling rationale for the development of well–thought–out and sensitive educational materials directed toward a greater understanding of differing life–ways.

WANTS, WISHES AND FEARS

Many children's stories owe at least part of their success to the creation of characters who share similar wants, wishes and fears with their readers. Not surprisingly, children's fears often differ in degree and kind from those of adults. For example, in the tremendously popular Harry Potter series, Harry and his friends are desperately concerned that they might be expelled from the Hogwarts School for Witchcraft and Wizardry for unintentionally breaking school rules. This fear is often greater than their fear of grave bodily harm or even death. Although most adult readers probably would be more concerned with issues of mortality, the author of the series, J. K. Rowling, keyed into a more relevant (or common) fear of many children: being kicked out of school.

Reader identification entails feeling or perceiving an affinity with the wants, desires, fears and anxieties of the main character(s). Many children are frustrated because they are limited in their ability to satisfy their wants. As a result they often have a pressing desire to be older, believing that older children enjoy more rights and freedoms. Frustrated by life's constraints, young readers appreciate characters who, against all odds, are able to transcend the limits set by their lack of social, economic and physical power. Peter Pan not only didn't have to go to school, he didn't have any adults telling him what he could or could not do. And he could fly!

Adventure stories succeed because despite the perilous journeys and seemingly impossible predicaments suffered by the protagonist, she is somehow able to find the courage and inspiration to surmount the difficulties she is confronted with and persevere. Although younger children are often more afraid of the dark, of monsters or being abandoned by their parents (separation anxiety), children in the middle elementary grades are more afraid of social embarrassments, peer ridicule, peer ostracization, or being falsely or wrongly accused of some misdeed by either their peers or the adults in their life. Consequently it is not surprising that many children's books address such issues.

DO SOME RESEARCH

Most writers need to research the subjects they write about, but in this case it would be useful for you to research the subjects for whom you write. If you have or know children who are in the third through fifth elementary grade, ask them what books appeal to them. Read of these books yourself and ask these same children what they like about these books. Although you might not get a fully articulated response, you may discover some clues about why these books are appealing. If you are acquainted with any third, forth, fifth grade teachers, ask them which books are appealing to their students and ask if you can borrow some of these books. Be sure to emphasize that you want to know what books are most liked by their students, not just by the teacher. However, it also is crucial to know what books are appreciated by teachers and parents. Most of the time adults, not children, buy children's books. Strictly from a marketing standpoint, it is just as important to appeal to adult sensibilities as it is to children's tastes. Be aware that all Worldview Press books, as a standard procedure, will be tested and evaluated by elementary school students for readability and interest. Publishing appealing books is not the central goal of the WVP, but it is absolutely essential to whatever success we will achieve. It will be far more practical if you have an understanding of what appeals to and is comprehensible to young readers before you make a substantial investment of your time and effort.

LIBRARY RESOURCES

If it is greatly inconvenient for you to meet with an elementary school teacher, you may find it useful to visit a local library and check out several children's books. Many public libraries, even branch libraries, have children's librarians who will be quite delighted to direct you to books children enjoy.

READ TO CHILDREN

Reading books aloud to children will also help you develop your own "writing voice." Elementary schools and local libraries often have programs that invite individuals from the community to read to children. The nation–wide Rolling Readers program (that I participate in) allows parents and community members to work with children who are having difficulty learning to read fluidly. I wholeheartedly recommend this program, even if you yourself do not have any school–aged children. Not only will you help a child to learn to read, but you will also learn more about children's books. Reading aloud will help you to develop a better sense of cadence and pacing.

BOOKS THAT APPEAL TO CHILDREN

At the time this guide was updated (6–11–03) the 10 best–selling chapter books for children were:

- Artemis Fowl: The Eternity Code
- Junie B., First Grader: Cheater Pants
- The Second Summer of the Sisterhood
- The Bad Beginning
- The Reptile Room
- The Carnivorous Carnival
- Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire
- Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban
- Princess in Waiting
- The Thief Lord

Eight of the books on this list are fantasy, adventure or mystery stories. As everyone now knows the Harry Potter books are chock full of strange, magical and exotic creatures and events. But most of the main characters of the these books are, with respect to their personalities, quite familiar to readers. As such, children (and many adults) find it relatively easy to empathize with one or more characters in the book. Empathy, and its importance, will be discussed more fully elsewhere in this guide.

CULTURE: HERE, THERE, EVERYWHERE

Cultural behaviors, sentiments, proclivities, ideas and beliefs should be at the heart of your work and should not be mere background or setting. Authors should try to work as much cultural detail into their stories as is possible without doing damage to the integrity and flow of their narrative. Rituals (secular,religious, civil, medicinal, everyday), habits, styles of eating, pastimes, clothing and bodily ornamentation, architectural styles, recreations, sports, music, art, drama, economic forms/work, agriculture, industry, environmental conditions, kin and kith relations, political structure, religious activities, cosmological orderings, everyday styles and codes of social behavior, domestic environments, education systems, social/ethnic relations, gender relations, age–related cultural patterns, material culture, etc. Ideally the challenges your characters face and the solutions that they arrive at should have a discernable connection with the cultural world your characters inhabit.

Not all cultural information needs to be explicitly and thoroughly explained in your text as teachers will have a teachers guide (that you will help develop!) that will provide more detail. Authors are requested to end note their texts with more ample explanations of cultural material found in their narratives. These end notes will be placed in the teacher's guide.

AVOID ESSENTIALIZING, TRADITIONALIZING AND ROMANTICIZING

Although distinctive cultural patterns and behaviors should be featured in your story, it is also important to include any elements that might be transnational or common to many cultures. Your story should also be sensitive to contemporary cultural changes and trends. In other words, avoid essentializing or traditionalizing the culture you are writing about. If very few people wear traditional clothing on a daily basis, don't create a depiction that shows all your characters in styles of clothing their grandparents may have worn. Books written for this series that are set in the present should reflect the complexity of contemporary culture, not a stripped–down essentialized nostalgic or romanticized version of the culture. Cultures differ greatly in the amount of change and variation they exhibit and these qualities as they presently exist in the culture under consideration should be depicted as accurately as possible. Many communities are ethnically and culturally diverse and many cultures exhibit a great deal of cultural borrowing and syncretic blending. Few, if any, cultures today are pristine and insulated from neighboring or "outside" influences and while many cultural ideas and practices are forged in direct contrast to what is found in neighboring groups, it is also the case that many ideas and practices are borrowed or emulated. You are urged to maintain a sense of proportion about such matters, recognizing both the uniqueness of the culture you are writing about and also how the culture you are writing about has been influenced by other cultures. Unless your story specifically concerns such differences and similarities, the forgoing advice and cautions will be more germane to the subtle details, as opposed to the main thrust, of your story.

Be careful not elide elements of daily life that are seeming "foreign" to the culture you are depicting, if those elements are in fact common. Not everything in the frame must "fit" general cultural patterns and expectations. The last time I visited the village where I engaged in my field research, "game–boy" hand–held video games had become popular and many young people whiled away the hours playing them. An idealized view of this society would certainly elide such horrible "contaminations," considering them to be exogenous and spurious. However, Cultures in the Classroom books should avoid such idealizations, even if authors themselves lament such excrescence and corruptions! Sometime such seemingly exogenous phenomena can facilitate forging e a connection with your readers as some of these elements have global dissemination. For example, regardless of how I might personally feel about hand–held video games (the horror, the horror!), I am quite sure that many young American students would feel a greater connection with children living in a geographically distant culture, if they saw that those children shared some of their same fascinations.

STRESS SPECIFIC, NOT GENERAL, CULTURE

Nations, cultures and ethnic groups are rarely coextensive. Be specific about the group you are writing about and avoid subsuming your story in a generic amalgam of cultures living in a country. Instead of locating your story "in Kenya," identify the people you are writing about as "the Masai" or "the Luo" living in this or that specific geographical place. Instead of narrating a tale about an "Indonesian girl," be more specific, tell your readers that Dewi is a Javanese girl who lives in a village located on the southern slopes of Mount Merapi in Central Java. Your story does not have to reflect the dominant culture found in the country you are writing about. Writing about the adventures of a young boy living in a Senegalese community in Turin Italy is more than acceptable. One of the central goals of The Worldview Press is to teach Americans about other cultures. This is not the same as creating or re–inscribing homogenized images of national cultures. Being culturally specific will help avoid overarching cultural stereotypes. Being culturally and geographically specific will also make your story more intriguing and substantial.

UNIVERSALS AND PARTICULARS

Necessarily, much of what you will be writing about will be unfamiliar to your readers. You needn't explain every little thing in your story or frame your story entirely in terms that the average American student will find wholly agreeable to

their taken–for–granted notions about human nature. Indeed, part of your task will be to expand your reader's definition of what it means to be human. Nevertheless, it is extremely important that you create an empathetic bridge and a resonance between the characters you are writing about and your audience. On the surface this may appear daunting, particularly if the culture you are writing about differs substantially from cultural forms and behaviors commonly experienced in the United States. Fortunately all humans everywhere share a small complement of basic needs and desires. In his Philosophical Investigations, Ludwig Wittgenstein presented the notion of "family resemblances" in which he argued that two sets of phenomena could share a family resemblance, even in the case where no common elements existed. Although no particular cultural pattern may enjoy the status of a true universal –– as one is likely to find some society somewhere where such a pattern does not exist – many basic culturally–framed needs, desires, experiences and exigencies are widely shared. Humanity is shared more through "family resemblances" than incontestable universals. Although the particulars may vary greatly, the general arc of experience encountered by children is, analogous from culture to culture. Universals and widely experienced commonalities are by their very nature non–specific and relatively content–less, this is perhaps as close to an anthropological and logical axiom as one can get. Cultural milieu give these near universals or family resemblances their specific shape and meaning. So too, cultures typically –– perhaps always –– embrace an internal variety of behaviors, sentiments, beliefs and ways of being even in the context of generally held standards of behavior and belief.

THE COMMON GROUND OF CHILDHOOD

It is no liability for your story, or certain elements of your story, to be mildly perplexing, but it is a mistake to create an aura of inaccessible exotic foreignness. Few children will be captivated by a story that is altogether irrelevant to their own life experiences. Despite great cultural differences in child–rearing practices, acculturation as well as social, economic and environmental conditions, children everywhere share certain basic experiential realities as a consequence of their biological and social conditions. Every child is born without culture and everyone's childhood consists of learning a specific language and the essentials of a particular culture. Humans begin life utterly dependent on others, and as they grow, they take on more and more responsibility for themselves. Exactly how this occurs and the degree to which it occurs differs from culture to culture. The fact remains, however, that all children everywhere share a general trajectory of growing up, learning what they need to know, learning how to do new things and learning to become increasingly independent or autonomous. This gives you as a writer an avenue for creating a link between the children you write about and the children you write for. Most children are forced by circumstance to rely on their own "powers of the weak" as they can not generally obtain what they want or need without help from older children or adults. Stories with characters who successfully struggle against this general state of childhood existence will appeal to many children.

Despite this common thread, in most cultures childhood experience can not be simply reduced to the trials and tribulations of being relatively powerless and dependent. Childhood can also be a time of great wonderment, surprise, excitement, joy, warmth, love and humor. Anthropologists who have engaged in fieldwork in places unfamiliar to them are perhaps in a privileged position to understand such wonderment. Like children who are beginning to experience life beyond the borders of "home," many anthropologists are familiar to the excitement of seeing and experiencing new phenomena every day. Although writing manuals almost always stress conflict as an essential ingredient in a compelling story (see below), it may not be as essential for capturing interest in younger readers as it is for adults. Surprisingly, even wacky and silly plot twists delight younger readers. Third through fifth graders are often extremely good at visualizing fantasy worlds where the rules of existence are different from the ones they live with every day. Children this age still appreciate stories with anthropomorphized animals and strange beings, as long as the story itself isn't "babyish" and condescending.

AUTHORIAL VIEWPOINT

Worldview Press authors should attempt to approximate an indigenous–centered view of the culture they are writing about. If you are not yourself a member of the culture you are writing about, this is not an easy task. Your goal should be to encourage your readers to see the world through your characters' thoughts, feelings and taken–for–granted assumptions. Again, this is obviously difficult, but perhaps not impossible. If you are a member of the culture you are

writing about you will have an easier time trying to do this. However, being native−born does not translate into complete authenticity that comprehensively speaks for all members of the society. For example, I am a native−born member of the USA and if I were to write a story of my own childhood, my preoccupations and focus would not be the same as others who grew up in America. It is also quite possible that a learned, sensitive and observant anthropologist from Sweden, Sumatra or the Ituri Forest could write a compelling story about growing up in America that would not be an affront to the people being depicted. If you are an anthropologist, you will know that the problem of representation has been for many years a controversial subject. However, as Clifford Geertz has observed, surgeons learned long ago that it is impossible to perform surgery in a completely sterile environment. Their collective response to this knowledge has not been, however, to move operating theaters into the city sewers. Thoughtful and sensitive people who write cultural descriptions always serve two masters: the need to provide a description that aims toward, but can never fully achieve, some semblance of descriptive and representational accuracy and the need to describe cultures in terms that are at least somewhat comprehensible to their audience. If you set out to narrate a Dayak (Kalimantan) tale as a native−born Dayak would (in the manner such tales would be told "in situ") you would have to tell the tale in the Dayak language, and the story might be sung over the course of several days and nights. Even if it was possible to faithfully translate the whole story into English, most, if not all, of the cultural referents would be lost on American children. Wholesale "Americanizing" of such a tale would be an error in the opposite extreme. Delicate compromises need to be made but the more careful, thoughtful and aware you are of the inherent difficulties you will face, the higher the likelihood of good result. Perhaps something similar to Hans−Georg Gadamer's notion of fusion of horizons is the goal toward which you need to aim. Do your best guided by the knowledge that perfection will be beyond your grasp. While you may never be able to achieve a fully "authentic voice," −− you can, nevertheless, do your best to be as accurate as possible. This can be achieved by endeavoring to frame your story and the motivations and behaviors of your characters in a manner that would not be wholly foreign to the culture you are writing about. The point of the Cultures in the Classroom series is not to provide a compendious and unassailably accurate description of another culture of which you have an expert's understanding, but rather to write a captivating tale in which culture is more than just the background setting. If your story tickles young readers' interest in learning about other ways of living and thinking and reduces their fears and gross misunderstandings of cultural differences, you will have achieved splendid success as a writer for The Worldview Press.

Cultures in the Classroom books should maintain a positive, engaging and enlightening tone. Please keep in mind that young children often take stories they read very seriously, so you should avoid cynicism as it will likely create a sense of hopelessness.

FORMAT SPECIFICATIONS

Narratives in the Cultures in the Classroom series should be 2000−3000 words long. Finished books will be 48−64 pages long (including title/copyright pages and appendices) and all books will be heavily illustrated. Each page should contain between 0 and 150 words. Illustrations may span two opposing pages. Completed books will be 9 by 6 inches. The visual arrangement of the book will vary, and illustrations and text will be orchestrated for maximal visual and storytelling effect. When visualizing scenes, authors and illustrators should keep in mind the necessity for "white space" that is sufficiently large for the accompanying text. This may, on occasion, necessitate having illustrations that only cover a portion of the page. The author's main goal is to write enthralling content−rich stories, but authors should also visualize each and every scene so that they can provide their illustrator with detailed instructions. Every attempt will be made to enlist illustrators who are intimately familiar with the art styles (if such styles exist) that are found within the culture being written about, and authors are encouraged to recommend illustrators known to them who can fulfill these goals. If an illustrator has less experience with the cultural setting of a book that they will illustrate, detailed instruction and direction from the author will be required.

The Cultures in the Classroom series is intended for 3rd to 5th grade elementary school students. At this age−level, students are early readers and many are making the transition from picture books to text intensive books, which are often called "chapter books." The Cultures in the Classroom is intended for the "easy to read" category of books. Popular books about other peoples and cultures, whether written for children or adults, often make substantial use of graphic images to

illustrate cultural content and setting. Adults who shy away from academic works often learn about other cultures through their televisions, through travel books, or through the National Geographic. All of these media make tremendous use of photographic and visual images. Such images often carry far more cultural content than the text that accompanies them. Visual differences between cultures are striking to readers. For young readers, images and illustrations are effective aides for understanding texts. All books in the Cultures in the Classroom series will be profusely illustrated. Even if you yourself will not be illustrating the book you write, it is essential for you to visualize each scene you write. The images you visualize should be dynamic and move the plot along. Think of visual elements that will tell your reader something about the culture you are writing about, what kinds of clothes people wear, what kinds of houses they live in, what kinds of landscapes they traverse, what kinds of daily activities people engage in, how people associate with each other spatially, etc. If you clearly visualize each scene you will be better prepared to give clear direction to your illustrator.

STORYBOARDS AND BOOK DUMMIES

The text of your book should be submitted as either a Wordperfect ™ or Microsoft Word ™ file. Picture and story book authors often make use of both storyboards and book dummies as composition aids. Storyboards are universally used in video and film production, but they are also often used in children's book publishing. A storyboard is a panel or series of panels on which a set of rough sketches is arranged depicting consecutively the important changes of scene and action in a book. Storyboards allow a book to be visualized in its entirety. By using a storyboard authors, illustrators and editors are better able to organize and visualize a book. Storyboards can help uncover and correct problems with the flow and pacing of images and text and improve the overall balance and consistency in a book. Book dummies are either full−scale or scaled−down mock−ups of books. By constructing a book dummy authors will be able to get a good feel for what their books will look like and read like when they are completed.

PHOTOGRAPHS

Most good illustrators use either real−life models or photographs as references. Illustrators have found that human memory is insufficient for recalling important visual details. Consequently, few professional illustrators work solely from either their memories or imaginations. Norman Rockwell almost exclusively used photographs as references. He felt that it was the best way to capture fleeting facial expressions and movement. In most cases, illustrators for this series will not be able to use "real−life" models, so the need for photographic references is greatly increased. As a result, authors should provide illustrators with copies of photographs that show people, animals, buildings, landscapes, etc. Worldview Press authors have all had extensive experience living within the cultures and should have photographs that would be useful to their illustrator. The greater the number of photographs an author can provide, the more visual diversity the illustrator will have to work with. It is important that copies, not originals are sent to illustrators. Scanned photos are acceptable if their quality is sufficiently good. The cure for stereotypical representation is showing diversity, so the more visual reference material an author can supply to his or her illustrator, the better. By using photographs, an illustrator will be able to add subtle details and variety to their work making it more interesting, alive and educational. If an author does not personally possess photographs that are widely representative of the people and environment she or he is writing about, it is the author's responsibility to locate suitable photographs from available collections, magazines, books, etc.

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS

The Cultures in the Classroom series of books will be augmented by a teacher's guide and a multi−media compact disc that links to the WVP Web site. The teachers guide will include supplemental information about all of the cultures that are depicted in the various stories in the series. The teacher's guide will provide supplementary notes for individual books in the series. These notes will provide more detailed explanations of cultural features, understandings and patterns depicted in the individual stories. Ideas for discussion questions and class projects will be presented in the teacher's guide. A culturally distinctive food/snack recipe (capable of being prepared in a classroom) and a children's game will be included for each story. If possible, writers should attempt to work these food items and games into their stories. The multimedia CD will include photographic images, audio files of music and a demonstration/lesson in language and other yet to be

determined resources. If possible, video images displaying cultural activities will be included on the CD. The multimedia CD will be "Web−enabled," linking teachers and students to the WVP Web site and through this portal to other relevant Internet sites. In addition to writing their individual books, authors for the Cultures in the Classroom series will be responsible for working with the WVP staff to develop ideas and resources for supplemental materials and classroom projects.

MATTERS OF STYLE AND TECHNIQUE

Many of the suggestions that follow are derived from books and manuals written by established authors and editors who have analyzed the "elements of style" that are common to well−written and successful books. Much of the advice offered by these writers is culture−bound in the sense that it is intended to offer insights on writing books and stories that are intended for an English−speaking North American audience. As the anthropologist Laura Bohannan pointed out long ago in her famous "Shakespeare in Bush" article, what constitutes a good story, or more precisely, what makes a story good, it apt to vary substantially from culture to culture. However, this series of books is primarily intended for English−speaking North American readers, so it is wise to pay close attention to the advice offered by authors and editors who have had success with this readership.

Some of the following suggestions are general to story writing and some are more specific to children's book narrative strategies. Style and content considerations with respect to the specific goal of writing about other cultures will also be discussed.

THE SCENIC VIEW

In writing a book for children −− particularly a volume that will be highly illustrated −− it is useful to think of your story as a succession of scenes not unlike scenes in a movie or play. Typically screen−writers use the technique of storyboarding to achieve a tight integration between the text and the visual images the audience sees. Thinking in terms of a succession of scenes may improve your story by making its structure more definite and focused. One function of every scene should be to lead readers to the next scene, if this is not accomplished your story will appear unintentionally episodic.

Although resolutions can occur within a scene, each scene must perpetuate an ongoing conflict, tension, puzzle, problem, mystery or dilemma that encourages the reader to read on with vigorous interest. In the classic Chinese Novel The Scholars, Ching−Tzu Wu ends each of his 55 chapters with a teaser like, "But to know what good news Wang Hui received, you must read the following chapter." Make sure that some element or tension in each scene compels your readers to turn the page to find out what happens to your Wang Hui.

CHARACTERS AND CHARACTERIZATIONS

Every story has one or more characters, human or other. Readers care about plots because they care about the characters involved. One of the best ways for authors to create characters is to base their characters on people the authors know personally. Basing your characters on people you know from your lived experience within the culture you are writing about may allow you to create characters who are more complex, convincing and culturally genuine. If you invent all of your characters out of whole cloth you may have difficulty developing your characters' motivations and actions.

There is, however, no requirement for your characters to be exact descriptions of people you have known. Your fictional characters may be composites of several individuals. Your goal should be to make your characters interesting to your readers. In order to create a sense of drama and tension in your story, you may have to somewhat exaggerate your characters' actions, feelings or personality traits. Unfortunately you will not have the luxury of lots of narrative space to develop your characters fully. Complex characterization is much more appropriate to full length novels.

GET TO KNOW YOUR CHARACTERS

What does Risjon like to eat? What games/sports does he enjoy? Who are his best friends? How does he get along with his family? Does he like school? What kinds of habits does he have? What kind of clothes does he wear? How does he or she behave at home, at school, at the mosque, with his or her friends? What or with whom is he infatuated with? Try to imagine what the other characters in the story think or feel about the character you are considering. Most importantly: what single quality, habit, talent or behavior sets this character apart from other characters, makes them a unique and distinct character. The more distinct your characters are the more memorable they will be. The more detail you can imagine, the easier it will be for you to write a convincing and memorable character.

CHARACTER APPEAL

Generally, main characters should be likable and not irremediably anti−social. Some children's books narrate the redemption of formerly "bad−acting" characters. Sometimes these characters are the protagonists of the story and sometimes they are other characters who are reformed by the actions of the protagonist. Many folk and fairy tales have main characters that are wholly despicable. Many of these stories are didactic as they seek to illustrate what happens to people (or beings) that exhibit moral, ethical and spiritual failings. Some narratives revolve around a "just desserts" or "comeuppance" and also may have main characters that are unlikable. However, even in "just desserts" tales, likeable or innocent characters are required in order to highlight the depredations of the villain. It is unlikely that a story about a horrible lout who did horrible things to other equally horrible people would capture the attention of many readers.

PLOT INTEREST TIED TO INTEREST IN CHARACTER

Characterization is determined by what a character thinks, feels and does. Although it important to develop characters that are distinct, it is important not to go overboard by creating characters that are so unique in their behaviors that the reader is denied any sort of common emotional or experiential ground. If your main character is a one−dimensional image of childhood perfection −− pretty, popular, polite and brilliant −− readers who struggle with their own social relations, have to work hard to maintain their grades in school, are concerned about their appearance and don't always do what is expected of them will have a hard time relating to your main character. Add a touch of imperfection to your characters and they will seem more complex and real. Be careful not to err in the opposite by creating a character so hopelessly maladroit that they become insufferable to your readers, unless you plan to substantially relieve the misery of your character by the tale's end.

Initial depictions of personality may be used to set the stage for dramatic developments in your story. If a character is introduced as "timid," this creates the plot opportunity for the character to rise above his or her timidity through an act of courage. Similarly, if a character is described or depicted as honest, tension may be created in the narrative when this character has to consider whether to lie in order to protect someone he or she cares about.

PROTAGONISTS ARE ACTIVE

Main characters are active and respond to the events surrounding them. Main characters may start out as passive but they almost always end up finding some inner resolve or courage that allows them to break out of their passivity and take dramatic action. Often the early actions of the main character lead to the central crises. Main characters don't always have to be heroic to be liked, Winnie the Pooh, only wanted some honey . . .

SHOW RATHER THEN TELL

Avoid relying on summary adjectives to describe your characters − this is a sure−fire recipe for boredom. Don't say, "Wanwan was a kind girl" or "Antonio was inventive" or "Ayashe was mischievous." Instead, show Wanwan caring for a

wounded fledgling, show Antonio devising a clever solution or show Ayashe playing a practical joke on someone. Similarly, avoid statements such as "Mariko was sad" replacing them with "Mariko silently shuffled into her room, slumped down in the corner and wept." Or instead of saying, "Gakuru was delighted with his report card" say: "Gakuru dashed into the house letting the front door slam behind him. Waving his report card in front of his mom's face he screamed "Look Ma!" Again, showing is more powerful than flatly describing.

CHARACTER'S AGES

Your main character(s) should be as old or somewhat older than your intended reader. School–aged children are well aware of their progress through the years, and they have a greater interest in what they might experience in the future than what they may have missed in the past. Again, most children look forward to getting older, having more freedom and experiencing new things. A story about a child who is several years younger than the reader may seem "babyish" to the 3rd or 4th grade reader. Avoid erring to the opposite extreme, stories having protagonists many years older than the reader may be completely off the reader's radar screen.

GENDER ASPECTS

Stories with strong female characters appeal more to girls than boys and vice versa. This is not always so, but it is nearly always so. It is unlikely that the Harry Potter series would have been so captivating to young girls without the character of Hermione Granger. Many venerable children series aim squarely for one gender or the other (Babysitting Club, American Girls, Little House on the Prairie, Pony Pals, Sleep–over Friends vs. Goosebumps, Jigsaw Jones, Wish Bone, Magic Tree House, Baily School Kids etc.) On the other hand some children's book series aim for an audience of both boys and girls like Harry Potter, Animorphs, and . . . The Worldview Press will attempt to maintain a balance between books with strong girl and strong boy characters, but such a balance can be achieved within individual books as well and this possibility should be considered by authors.

CHARACTERS NEED TO BE CHALLENGED

In order to keep your readers' interest, your main character needs to be challenged. Almost always, the events that happen to or are caused by the main character constitute the plot of a story. While it is possible to conceive of a story in which the main character lives a sublime existence in which everything he or she desires comes to be, it is unlikely that anyone will be captivated by such a tale.

If you are writing a book with the intention of encouraging interest in the culture within which the book takes place, a book that revolves around a character struggling against cultural traditions will not satisfy the central objectives of the Cultures in the Classroom series. Cultural critique of "other cultures," however well it can be justified in the particular instance, is not consistent with The Worldview Press mission. Similarly, although the proposition that our readers can learn a great deal from other cultures is central to WVP objectives, ill–disguised critiques of American culture (however warranted) are also editorially discouraged. One needn't rebuke American cultural proclivities in order to regale in the riches of and lessons to be learned from cultures elsewhere.

SUPPORTING CHARACTERS

VILLAINS: HANDLE WITH CARE

Many books and stories employ villains. Villains fall into the structural category of "human vs. human" plots. Villains aren't always thoroughly bad characters, but their behavior, as it impacts the main character, is rarely ambiguous or mild. A merely annoying villain does not make for a compelling story. The villainy of the antagonist must be obvious to the main character, or in the case of a beguiling villain, at least the reader should be clear about the bad intentions of the villain. The rationale for making villains unambiguous is not that stories should be reduced to simplistic characters who

are either good or bad, but instead, the behavior of the antagonist must be sufficiently severe to create a significant impact on the life and well–being of the protagonist or on the well–being of someone the protagonist cares about. Just as your readers will not care what happens to a dull uninteresting main character, they also will not care about the difficulties your main character confronts if those difficulties are mild.

Although there are exceptions, in Western literature protagonists are allowed to be ambiguous but usually villains are not. Although Hamlet is was conflicted and unsure, Claudius –– although mildly troubled by guilt –– was thoroughly tyrannical and evil. Hamlet's humanity is underscored by the complexity of his feelings and motives. No such grant of humanity is accorded to his father's poisoner.

Many popular stories entail a protagonist struggling against the hurtful designs of a villain. Again, if your main character remains unchallenged and has an easy go of it, it will be difficult to create the tension (and its resolution) that make up engrossing drama. Villains are just one of many kinds of challenges your main character might encounter. The problem of "demonization" itself might make for a good plot. Ironic plots in which social pariahs or stigmatized individuals or groups prove to be more worthy than the majority are not unknown in literature. A classic example of this plot formulation is Victor Hugo's The Hunchback of Notre Dame, which concerns both a stigmatized individual (Quasimodo) and one from a pariah group (La Esmeralda), caught in a tragic struggle against the powers of social convention and authority.

THE SIDEKICK (and other companions)

One often finds sidekicks in mysteries, adventures and works that entail a journey. Some stories are narrated by a sidekick ("Elementary my dear Watson!"). Sidekicks are as useful to writers as they are to their fictional friends. A sidekick gives the protagonist someone to talk to. If a single character embark son the journey, unless they are fond of talking to themselves, your writing of the journey will necessarily be entirely descriptive. Pages and pages of pure description can be quite tiresome to your readers. Companions enable the full range of social interactions: verbal, emotional and physical. A companion can be conspired with, argued with, helped, saved from danger, confided in, comforted, teased, joked with, etc. As in the case of Arthur Conan Doyle's Dr. Watson, sidekicks can also function as the narrators.Particularly in children's stories, sidekicks needn't be human.

BE FAIRMINDED ABOUT ADULT CHARACTERS

It is not unusual in children's books and films to see most, if not all, adult characters portrayed as overbearing, annoying, stupid, evil or irrelevant. Presumably writers do this to establish some sort of easy rapport with children by creating an us vs. them dynamic where the status of the writer is conveniently elided. Such wholesale contemptuous representations of adults should be avoided.

THE ABSOLUTE IMPORTANCE OF CREATING EMPATHETIC CHARACTERS

With very few exceptions it is important that readers are allowed to feel empathy for the protagonist of the story. Empathy doesn't always mean that the main character is a marvelous individual who spends every waking hour bringing happiness and joy to everyone she or he meets. The main character must possess some sort of personal or situational qualities that the reader can feel some kinship with. If your readers have a difficult time identifying with your main character, they will not care very much about what happens to the character and how the character overcomes the perils or difficulties they encounter. The social importance of empathy will be discussed in greater length elsewhere in this guide.

EMPATHY IS POSSIBLE THROUGH SIMILAR EXPERIENCE WITH CHILDHOOD

As Worldview Press books necessarily involve characters who hail from cultures that are unfamiliar to readers, developing empathy may be somewhat more challenging. Fortunately, young readers are at an age where they are often quite attracted to books that are situated in cultural and historical settings that differ from the readers'. Empathy is built

out of common ground based on human emotions and motivations. This is not to say that all children have the same emotional pallet or that there are definable universal motivations. Clearly if our goal is to educate young people about cultural differences, we must first realize that children from various cultures see, interpret and act in the world differently from children from other cultures. The trick is not to assert that children everywhere are similarly motivated and share the same interests and anxieties, but instead to build a bridge (a fusion of horizons) between the reader and the main characters. The goal is not to deny differences but instead to make those differences somehow comprehensible. To this end, you must make sure that your main character's attitudes, feelings, motivations and actions make at least some sense to your reader. This, perhaps, is achieved most effectively by showing how your character's actions and ideas "fit" his or her cultural milieu. One method of establishing empathy is to begin your story with elements and situations that are recognizable to most of your readers. After this common ground is established, you can then move your story to a more unfamiliar terrain without losing your reader's interest. As the well−known illustrator Uri Shulevitz has noted, "A bridge spanning an abyss begins with a foundation on solid ground."

CONNECTION BETWEEN BIGOTRY AND LACK OF EMPATHY

One elemental aspect of ethnocentrism and its extreme forms of hateful bigotry is a lack of empathy for others. English scholar Cedric Cullingford, in research based on extensive interviews with seven− and eight−year−old school children found that children of this age often have a tremendous capacity for empathy and a remarkable capacity "for embracing the rich diversity of life." However, Cullingford adds, schools and parents often foster an attitude of exclusiveness and ignorance about such differences creating a psychological state of insecurity in some children that results in a fear−filled retreat from cultural "otherness." The Cultures in the Classroom series is dedicated to facilitating the natural curiosity and interest children often have for cultural differences. It is not enough to simply create an "objective portrait" of the people you are writing about, in some measure you need to underscore a common connection of humanity between your readers and the characters and people you are writing about. The motto of The Worldview Press is, "Many Cultures, One Humanity" and this principle should be reflected in the books written for the press.

MOTIVATION

Hollywood actors, in an attempt to give a more convincing portrayal of the character they are playing, often ask the screenwriter or director, "What's my motivation?" Indeed the phrase is now a Hollywood cliché. Every character needs a convincing motivation. Every character has wants and needs and their role in a narrative must be closely concerned with these wants and desires. It is a good idea to question the motivations of every character in every scene. No character should be put into a scene without your knowing what motivations lie behind their speech and actions. Unconvincing dialogue and action is often the result of a lack of attention to motivation. What separates compelling drama from melodrama is not the extreme behaviors or actions that occur but rather the relative degree of convincing motivation that lies behind such actions. Always ask of each character in each scene, "What does this person want now?" and try to answer the question in an immediate sense rather than an overly general "philosophical" sense. Another useful question is to ask what each character in each of your scenes "needs." Needs are often (always) more deep and more important than wants although obviously, the two are linked. Many plots are driven by the tension between the wants and needs of a main character with the resolution of the plot bringing the two aspects of the character into some sort of balance or harmony. Children want many things and in cultures that are dominated by consumerism wants are often for material objects, the latest Pokemon card, scooter, fashion accessories or clothing style. Burning desires for the latest and greatest consumer item are, of course, not limited to children. Creation of these wants is at the core of modern advertising. Most wants and needs, as well as their satisfaction, are culturally defined. It is important to recognize that wants and needs motivate characters to do things and characters doing things are at the heart of plot development. Characters who do things that can not be associated with some driving want or need aren't convincing or believable. When a plot twist has characters behaving in a manner that seems under−motivated the scene will seem contrived. The stronger your characters' motivations the more plausible their actions will seem. Indeed the most compelling stories often rest on motivations that are entirely over−determined.

WHAT MATTERS IS WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO YOUR CHARACTER

Your readers don't need to embrace precisely the same wants and needs as your main characters do. The beautiful film, Children of Heaven takes place in Iran. The film concerns a young boy who inadvertently loses his younger sister's only pair of shoes. Fearing that he will get in great trouble if his mistake becomes known to his parents, he and his sister attempt to deal with the situation the best that they can. The solutions and strategies the children adopt are both humorous and touching. In many ways this film is a perfect model for the Cultures in the Classroom series. While working within a cultural milieu that is substantially different from what an American audience is accustomed to or knowledgeable about, the film both teaches audiences a great deal about a different way of life and also achieves a very strong sense of the common bond of humanity. If you succeed in making your characters appealing to your readers, it won't matter much whether or not your readers have ever lost their sister's shoes. What will matter is that your readers will have experienced the emotions attendant with loss, the feelings associated with attempting to make amends and prove one's trust and love, or the difficulty of having to "face the music" for mistakes that they have made. However, the power of this film does not only come from depiction of negative emotions described above. One of the most affective and effective aspects of the film "Children of Heaven" is the fondness the brother and sister have for each other and indeed the love and convincing tenderness that exists within the entire family in spite of the serious difficulties they face.

PLOTS AND PLOTTING

(Hu)man Against . . .

As you may recall from your early schooling, most English language fiction can be analytically reduced to a contest between the protagonist(s) and other humans, the forces of nature or themselves. More modern works often pit protagonists against cultural conventions, technological folly or dehumanizing bureaucracies. Many novels encompass and blend together more than one of these themes.

Plots twists and turns should be developed from the effects of events and your character's perceptions of such events, not the other way around. If your characters think and feel the way they do because your plot necessitates these thoughts and feelings, then your story will seem contrived. If, on the other hand, your plot deepens or changes course because of the emerging thoughts or developing emotional reactions of your characters, your plot will appear more convincing and properly motivated. Historians attempt to understand past events causally, making such events appear more intelligible. Fiction writers make their narratives more intelligible, convincing and realistic by constructing their plots causally, having plot events naturally flow from the motivations, interests and actions of their characters.

THE BASIC STRUCTURE OF PLOTS

Although there are many types of basic plots, most plots follow the same basic structure. In the beginning we are introduced to the principal characters. Shortly thereafter a sequence of events occurs that forces the main character to take some sort of action. Captivating stories rarely entail just one thing going wrong, instead it is common for several things to go wrong in an escalating pattern. Matters begin somewhat simply but quickly become more and more complex. Tension is often created by characters facing ever increasing challenges in their quest to overcome the most serious of challenges. The climax occurs when the main character meets with his or her most serious challenge. Well–plotted stories often share a similar structure to operatic or symphonic music, were the orchestration moves towards a crescendo.

The climax is always followed by the dénouement where one side or the other wins the battle. Whatever the outcome, for at least the moment, life returns to relative calm –– though not necessarily a sanguine or completely unambiguous state of affairs. Plot sequence creates an emotional trajectory where difficulties or dangers rise in severity and complexity with each change of scene and each turn of the page. This is true for nearly all kinds of plots whether they be tragic, comedic or spiritually uplifting. Rising tension leads to the climax and the resolution of the climax is followed by release of tension. When writing for younger children it is important for your story to resolve the conflicts and tensions and tie up all the

loose ends. Many children will notice and be troubled by unresolved problems and children in general need to be shown a reassuring "way out." If the serious conflicts you have created are not resolved, your story runs the risk of leaving the reader with a sense of hopelessness, confusion or even despair. Your story should avoid being insipid or saccharine, but it also shouldn't leave a sour or bitter taste in the minds of your readers.

Because of the necessary limitations of space and sophistication, stories for early readers can not be very complex. Nevertheless, unless you have a compelling reason to do otherwise, your plot should follow the general curved trajectory of relative normalcy followed by rising tension and complication and ending with climax and resolution.

KINDS OF PLOTS

While the number of unique stories that can be written is infinite, the majority of those possible stories can be reduced to a much smaller set of plot types if stripped of their adornments. Some critics claim that there are in fact only a handful of plot types, some are more generous in their view. Ronald Tobias, suggests that nearly all stories can be reduced to the following plot types:

1. Quest

2. Adventure

3. Pursuit

4. Rescue

5. Escape

6. Revenge

7. Riddle

8. Rivalry

9. Underdog

10. Temptation

11. Metamorphosis

12. Transformation

13. Maturation

14. Love

15. Forbidden Love

16. Sacrifice

17. Discovery

18. Wretched Excess

19. Ascension

20. Descension

As a writer for the Cultures in the Classroom series, you needn't worry too much about what "type" of plot you have developed. This is important for authors who are seeking to sell their stories to publishing houses that specialize in specific genres. Several of the plot types listed above could be used to write a story for this series. Less promising would be plots concerning revenge, forbidden love, wretched excess, or descension as these plot themes are contrary to the general tone desired for this particular series of books.

THE WRITER'S MUSE

Nearly every writer wants to write a story that has a original plot, one that is both engrossing and utterly unique to the history of fiction. Some authors overflow with creative plot ideas, but many good writers have a harder time of it. Usually what makes stories interesting and unique is not their basic plots but the details that make plots come alive for the reader. Plots are a lot like transcultural universals, their interest and appeal are not found in their most general form but in how that form works itself out in the particulars. If you are at you wit's end trying to come up with a suitable story line, think about the plots of stories you enjoy and use one as a basic model from which you can build your own captivating story with the shadings and details that you choose. Westside Story was quite explicitly modeled on Romeo and Juliet; fairly befitting its legacy as Shakespeare himself –– contrary to his character Polonius' admonition about borrowing –– based a great number his plays on dramas, comedies and histories written by his predecessors and contemporaries. They are no less wonderful for their borrowed plots and characters. Besides, given that we all work within the cultural milieu of our own experience, you might find that even when you imagine you are writing something new and unique, it turns out that you have used plots, images, symbols and even characters that are not entirely unknown to you.

FOLKTALES AS MODELS

Another way to generate a story is to read folktales or narratives found within the culture that you are writing about. Could one of these stories be made contemporary, framed within present–day cultural realities and exigencies?

ANECDOTE

It might be useful to think of an interesting event or a story that you heard when you were doing your research or living in the place you will set your story. When I conducted my field research, an older man known as Pak Pangkala (yes, a pseudonym), told me that when he was only eight years old he ran away from home. He claims that he ran away from home because his mother had begun serving him corn instead of rice, and corn was what poor people ate. In the city he led the life of a ruffian, surviving on his wits and petty crime. Now the average American child does not, as far as I know, consider eating corn to be stigmatized, but there is in Pak Pangkala's tale a kernel (excuse the pun) of a good story. It is not uncommon for children to angry at their parents for the inequities they perceive when they compare themselves to other children. Pak Pangkala, as a child, was propelled by his child–like emotions to escape what he considered to be an injustice. He went on a journey where he met with many perils, difficulties and exciting, even dangerous, experiences. Eventually he returned home. Pak Pangkala's story has all the basic elements of a classic adventure story!

CONFLICT AND CHANGE

Most how–to books on writing stress the importance of both conflict and tension in fiction writing. Conflict and its resolution are plot elements that captivate readers. Although most good–hearted people like to emphasize harmony, joy, cooperation and understanding, in written works the importance of such values are typically only discovered through

conflict and travail. Quite simply, the importance of "the good" (however one wishes to define it) gains salience and importance through a consideration of "the not−so−good." This is not to say that your writing should aim toward a simplistic tale of good vs. evil. Although this sort of bipolar moral view fits well with presently dominant Western proclivities, it is advisable to make the ethical or moral choices confronting your characters more complex and ambiguous. If all of your main character's choices are easy and untroubled, it will be difficult for your readers to become actively engaged in your plot. Dilemmas, the lynchpins of many plots, require difficult choices. Challenge your readers to ask "what would I do if this happened to me?" If the answer is completely obvious, your reader will not be actively engaged. Good books make people think and this is true for children as well as adults. The best books often allow for a certain degree of ambiguity.

While conventional wisdom holds that conflict is essential to all good plots, Ursla K. Le Guin has challenged this hallowed notion and she proposes instead that, "Story is change" and although such change may be the result of conflict, it is just as likely to evolve from "relating, finding, losing, bearing or discovering, [or] parting". Le Guin urges writers to avoid "conflating story with conflict." Therefore, while conflict can be a very good plot device, it is not the only option.

THE MORAL OF THE STORY

Many children's books are unabashedly didactic. Eight− to nine−year−old children are already familiar with the question, "What is the moral of the story?" Children's books often attempt to promote "good behavior" and "good values" in young readers. Morals of stories can range from severe religious proscriptions to practical strategies for living. Often the moral of a story can be reduced to some crisp aphorism such as "don't count your chickens before they are hatched," or "you reap what you sow" (which in Indonesia is expressed, "plant rice, get rice"). Some morals developed out of religious traditions but many have more secular origins. Today, more often than not, the transgression of social codes results in what child development professionals call "natural consequences" rather than divine retribution. It's bad to steal because you hurt people and people won't trust you −− not because a god will visit a plague on your house. Developmentally American children start coalescing their "moral codes" around the ages of 7, 8 or 9. Rules are often taken to be absolutes and it is not until later that children develop more flexible and situationally dependent views. Paradoxically, children at this age often experiment with transgressing moral and ethical codes. They may "experiment" with lying or stealing or some other form of conscious "misbehaving." Children at this age are trying to figure out social codes and stories with "morals" are often appealing. Stories that end with a discernable moral are often tales of a developmental movement toward emotional, intellectual and social maturity. A well thought out moral of a story may create more interest for your readers. Although is often good to have a moral, it is generally not necessary to explicitly state the moral at the end of your tale. If your story is well−written, your audience will most likely get the point.

SUBTERRANEAN MOVEMENTS

It is very important to pay attention to the "sub−text" or potential implications of your story. Most authors have something to say, otherwise they wouldn't be writing. Many authors, even very good authors, encode their message into the manifest goings on in their work. On the whole, authors don't want their readers to miss the points they are attempting to make, so they hammer them home. Obviously many great authors are more subtle and skillful and are able to make their points metaphorically, allegorically or by embedding them in delicate movements of plot, meaning and emotion. In spite of the best efforts of writers to control the messages and meanings they are imparting to readers or audiences, it is often the case that the story, as a whole, implies meanings unintended by the author and even meanings contrary to the wishes of the author. Take three steps back from your work and then take two more. Ask the most general question you can about the "meaning of your story." What are you really saying about the people you are writing about? Are they resourceful, are they creative, are they caring, or could they be construed as having more negative qualities that you didn't quite intend?

POINT OF VIEW (POV)

Point of view is the vantage point or perspective from which a story is told. Most stories maintain a single point of view, but some offer multiple perspectives. It is useful to imagine that all stories and indeed all texts –– even the driest objective expositions –– have a narrator. Point of view simply refers to what that narrator knows, feels and can tell. Often, point of view is discussed in terms that are borrowed from grammatical analysis concerning (pro)noun/verb agreement, yielding first, second and third person points of view. In addition, point of view is often analyzed and discussed in terms of being either objective or subjective.

Structural and taxonomic analyses aside, the most fundamental questions concerning point of view an author should ask are: "What information do I want to convey and avail to my readers?" and "What tone do I want to achieve?" Most works of literature and nearly all folktales and children's stories are narrated through a point of view that is "all–knowing" or omniscient. Whatever your personal or philosophical preferences might be about omniscient beings, this point of view is the most flexible, versatile, and complex point of view an author can write in. In fiction (and often in non–fiction works as well) authors create worlds through their words. Fiction that seeks to undergird its plausibility and authenticity in the "real world" is subject to many constraints, but even in historical fiction, the author is largely responsible for creating the essential elements and intricacies (objective or subjective) of the plot and the complexities of human motivation that propel the events of the story. The omniscient narrator has knowledge of every nook and cranny of the world the author has created, he or she knows what motivations lie behind every action and he or she knows how everything will turn out in the end. The omniscient narrator need not tell all but they must know all. This point of view is not only aware of all the events that transpire everywhere within the story but is also privy to the innermost thoughts and feelings of every character. Compare the following two passages:

> John entered the room and was pleased to see Monica. Monica's eye caught John's and she felt relieved, knowing that this party would not be as dreadful as she had imagined.

With:

> John entered the room and smiled. Monica looked in the direction of John and her expression softened.

The omniscient point of view is both objective (observational) and subjective (knowing of character's thoughts and feelings). The second passage above is purely objective (a carefully observant fly on the wall) and does not offer direct access to the character's inner thoughts or sentiments.

One great advantage of the omniscient point of view is that it can be truly multi–perspectival without creating confusion in the reader. In the first passage above we know what both John and Mary do, see and feel. Some stories are written from the particular viewpoint of a character in the story and some stories actually change narrators (almost always at the beginning of chapters). In contrast to the all–seeing point of view, a "first person" point of view adopts the particular viewpoint of one of the characters in the story under the literary pretense that the narrator and author are one and the same individual. Imagine the reader confusion if you tried to change "first person" narrators in the passage above.

> I entered the room and was delighted to see Monica. I looked up from my plate and saw John, I felt relieved now knowing that this party would not be as dreadful as I had expected.

The only way to even get close to an elegant multi–perspectival view in other forms of narration is through dialogue and this only gives us access to what characters say they think or feel, which may or may not be reflective of what they actually think or feel.

Imagine:

> I entered the room and was happy to see Monica sitting on the sofa.

"Monica, I didn't know you knew the Malinowskis! I'm so glad to see you."

"Oh John, we have so much to catch up on," Monica gushed, and with a smile she whisked me out to the balcony.

Unfortunately, the reader has no way of knowing whether Monica felt genuine affection for John, or if instead, she was merely pouncing on the first opportunity to escape from the dreadful pontifications of the dreary Reginald who had cornered her in the foyer. It is not impossible to develop multiple perspectives in a first person narrative, but it is difficult to do efficiently. It should be noted, however, that some tack back and forth between an omniscient POV and a first–person POV. An example of this narrative technique is the Rumpole of the Bailey books by John Mortimer. If handled with skill, this blending of POV can be effective narrative strategy.

Despite the formidable limitations of first person narration, several advantages are conferred by employing a first person narrator. The first person point of view allows an author to create a fully realized and convincing character beyond that which is achievable through other points of views. The first person narrator is usually speaking directly to the reader in a form of dialogue with a mute partner (as opposed to a monologue with no particular listener implied). This can create a narrator–reader intimacy missing in other forms of POV.

Listen to Mark Twain's Huck Finn:

> Pretty soon I wanted to smoke, and asked the widow to let me. But she wouldn't. She said it was a mean practice and wasn't clean, and I must try to not do it any more. That is just the way with some people. They get down on a thing when they don't know nothing about it. Here she was a–bothering about Moses, which was no kin to her, and no use to anybody, being gone, you see, yet finding a power of fault with me for doing a thing that had some good in it. And she took snuff, too; of course that was all right, because she done it herself.

Contrast this with the "story–teller" mode of Mark Twain's Tom Sawyer:

> While Tom was eating his supper, and stealing sugar as opportunity offered, Aunt Polly asked him questions that were full of guile, and very deep –– for she wanted to trap him into damaging revealments. Like many other simple–hearted souls, it was her pet vanity to believe she was endowed with a talent for dark and mysterious diplomacy, and she loved to contemplate her most transparent devices as marvels of low cunning.

Although both passages quoted above represent ingenious and skillful storycraft, Huck Finn's seething over the Widow Douglas' hypocritical bible–thumping harangues is far more affective (but not necessarily more effective) than Twain's more coolly distant critique of the artful Aunt Polly.

First person narratives allow the main character to express their thoughts, emotions and opinions directly to the reader. Because main characters are almost always confronted with difficulties and challenges, writers should be careful that the sentiments their characters express don't come off as self–absorbed whining, unless this psychic state and its transformation into "better" state is important to the plot. If some misfortune befalls a character, an the character is worthy of your reader's sympathies, there is no need for the character to bemoan their fate as your readers will do this for you. Readers of this age group often have a strong sense of justice, and you needn't have characters "say" they are suffering if it is obvious that almost anyone would feel bad if placed in a similar predicament. If your character is wholly unappealing, his or her whining will reinforce your reader's emotional displeasure with the character. It is not surprising therefore that antagonists bemoan their fates more often than protagonists do. In the passage quoted above, Huck doesn't whine, he castigates, but even this requires subtle skill and cleverness to avoid turning away the reader's affection.

The opportunity to use dialect and distinctive speech patterns is also a quality of first person narratives and The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is a great example of the use of dialect. Ironically, when writing a story which is set in a non–English speaking culture, this advantage is lost. For example, although Indonesian farmers speak Indonesian differently than middle–class Indonesian city–dwellers, it would be an inelegant solution to write a story in English about

Indonesian farmers in which said farmers speak as if they were from rural Mississippi. As omniscient narrators don't often (although they can) narrate as if they were speaking directly to the reader, there is no necessity to make their grammar and lexicon consistent with the dialects, registers and language habits of the characters found in the story. Typically omniscient narrators "speak" either in "standard English" grammar and non−colloquial phraseology or in the manner that the author speaks. This is not always so, however, as some narration adopts particular speech and language styles that seek to create a particular atmosphere or ambiance that is assumed to reflect or invoke the setting of the tale or its fictive teller.

THE DIARY

One form of first person writing is conducive to writing about other times and other cultures: the diary. As dairies are written down, issues concerning patterns and mannerisms of speech, dialect or different languages are reduced given the differences found between casual speech and more formal writing. Many young girls keep diaries and presently several series of books based on the diary form are quite popular. Although The Diary of Anne Frank is perhaps the most famous diary (and still captivating to young readers), recent series of books such as the "Dear America" collection have also been successful with this format. The compelling Zlata's Diary, a Child's Life in Sarajevo, has also been immensely popular with European readers young and old. Diaries create an intimacy not generally achievable in other forms of writing. They are uniquely suitable for dealing with emotional and reflective content.

Compare the following:

> Kirsten was mad, she wished her teacher hadn't embarrassed her that way in front of the whole class.

With:

> "I hate him! I can't believe he said that in front of the whole class. When everyone laughed at me I felt like the blood drained from my body. I don't know how I'm going to face going to school tomorrow!"

THIRD PERSON NARRATION (sic)

Often stories are told from the perspective of a character in a story who is not the main character. "Elementary my dear Watson!" exclaims Sherlock Holmes. Emily Bronte's Wuthering Heights was narrated by two minor characters, Ellen (a.k.a. "Nell") and Mr. Lockwood. Somewhat confusingly, writing manuals often call this perspective a "third person" point of view, but in reality it is a first person account that is about a third person. This odd classification is no doubt due to the unhappy marriage between categories of pronouns and point of view. First person narratives make heavy use of "I" while third person narratives predominantly employ he, she or proper names. However ill−cast as a third−person form, the point of view of a minor character offers nearly the same advantages and disadvantages as the first person narrative. Only that which is observed by or known to the character can be availed to the reader, there will be no listening in to the closed−door secrets of other characters unless your narrator's ear is pressed against the bedroom door! However, one difference does exist. As the events of the plot revolve largely around a third person (Holmes) and not the narrator, there is a degree of detachment in this perspective, a detachment that may somewhat objectify the main character because readers can not possibly be let into their inner thoughts and feelings so all must be deduced either by the narrator or the reader.

DIALOGUE

Dialogue can fulfill many functions including:

a. making characters seem more convincingly real.

b. creating a sense of intimacy.

c. moving the story along when characters discuss and decide courses of actions.

d. revealing personality more efficiently than description.

e. revealing to the reader information known to the character speaking.

f. revealing emotional states of characters.

g. presenting background information efficiently.

h. quickening the pace of the story.

DIALOGUE MAKES CHARACTERS MORE LIFE–LIKE

Dialogue makes characters seem more lifelike. A character who is only described and never gets a chance to speak will seem distant and flat.

DIALOGUE BREAKS UP WHITE SPACE

Dialogue also breaks up the monotony of solid blocks of text. Coupled with the convention of beginning a new paragraph with every change of speaker, the monotony of solid blocks of text is also reduced by the fact that dialogue is often constructed out of shorter phrases and sentences.

DIALOGUE DIFFERS FROM NATURAL SPEECH

Dialogue is difficult to write. Fictional dialogue is almost never of reflection of natural speech. Dialogue is compressed and stripped down to essentials. Every word, sentence and paragraph of dialogue should be important to your story, convey meaning, and move the story along its journey. This is rarely, if ever, the case when people are actually speaking. In actual conversations people range from overly terse to vague rambling. Actual conversations are rarely efficient or powerful. The best examples of powerful dialogue are stage plays since –– with the exceptions of occasional soliloquies and narration –– stage plays are almost entirely created out of dialogue.

SPEAKING STYLE SHOULD FIT CHARACTER

In most cases your characters' manner and style of speech should reflect their personalities, just as in real life. Angry people sound angry, sweet people speak sweetly and dull people tend to drone on and on. Obviously, a disjuncture can be created between a character's personality or real intent and his or her speech pattern in order to show that the character is not what he or she seems to be. These sorts of disagreements between styles of speech and underlying intent occur in real life as well. Such contradictions should be employed with a specific purpose in mind, otherwise they will pointlessly confuse your readers.

DIALOGUE SHOULD REFLECT AND CONTRIBUTE TO THE MOOD OF A SCENE

> "Jod–d–d–y, I don't think we should go in there!

"Don't tell me you're afraid of a few bats," teased Winston's older brother, Sam.

In most cases the pace and qualities of expression of the dialogue should mirror and enhance the tone and mood of the scene. The exception to this is when you want to deliberately create tension between what people say (and how they say it) and the emotional timbre of the scene. If one of your characters becomes hysterical over an event that seems nothing more than a mere inconvenience, we learn more about the fragile (or perhaps self–dramatizing) emotional makeup of that character.

HE SAID, SHE SAID IS OK

Resist the urge to bracket each phrase of your dialogue with adverbs. More often than not the attributions "she said" or "he asked" will suffice. Young readers quickly become used to the convention of tagging the end of quotes with "she said" and won't notice the repeated use of this form. The added convention of beginning a new paragraph with each change of speaker often removes (if the sentences or phrases are short) the necessity to identify the speaker of every quote. Young readers might need more help in this regard, however.

Dialogue attributions can, if handled skillfully, contribute to a passage by adding a bit of observational detail, for example:

Sylvia, clenching her pencil tightly, shouted, "That's not true, I didn't look at her page!"

However, an overabundance of descriptive adverbs at the end of dialogue will detract from the flow of your writing and draw unwanted attention to your writing technique. This is less of a problem for young readers than seasoned adult readers and indeed a smattering of "he gasped," "she whispered," "he grumbled," "they exclaimed," "she whined," "he scoffed," can add some welcome variety. Well composed dialogue often obviates the need for cluttering adverbs like "he said consolingly." It is also wise to avoid incongruities such as, "Don't do it!", she hissed. (go ahead, try to hiss that line!), or inconsistencies such as "Shut Up!" he explained. Attributions placed between dialogue phases emphasize the identity of the speaker, while attributions at the end of a spoken phrase or sentence allow more of a focus on the content of the statement. Compare:

"I can't drive you to the park today," Jacob's mother said, "but you can go there on your bike."

vs.

"I can't drive you to the park today, but you can go there on your bike, said Jacob's mother.

With long quotes make sure that your attribution does not come at the very end of the quote as this will require your readers to wait too long to find out who is speaking and this delay can be disorienting. Try to insert the tag line (attribution) at the end of the first natural break in long quotes.

LANGUAGE ISSUES

FOREIGN/LOCAL TERMS

We strongly encourage the introduction of local terms and idioms into your story. Language is an essential part of any culture so introducing new words will enhance your story. However, the introduction of local terms should be accomplished with great care and moderation. Your readers are emergent readers and including more that a handful of local terms will make your book difficult to read. There is no hard and fast rule for this but every inclusion should be purposeful. You should also avoid, if possible, words that will be very difficult for your readers to pronounce.

Personal names found in other languages and cultures can be daunting to both children and adults who are unfamiliar with the phonemes of the language in question. Be careful when choosing names that may be troublesome for

English−speaking children to pronounce. For example, if an author is writing a book about life in Ireland, it is best if names such as Niamh, Padaraig or Siobhan are avoided. If a name uses a phoneme with no close analog in English or if it is "romanized" with unfamiliar spelling conventions, it may prove off−putting to many readers. The point here is not to "Americanize" your character's names, but to chose names that will not be impossible for someone (viz. all your readers) who has not studied the language system in question. Keep in mind the children reading the Cultures in the Classroom series have only had a few years of reading experience −− go easy on them.

AVOID NAME CONFUSION

To avoid confusion in your readers, endeavor to make each of your character's names begin with a unique letter of the alphabet unless you have a good reason not to, as with naming "twinned" characters alliteratively (as in Tweedle−Dee and Tweedle−Dum.) Except when a name is particularly mellifluous, charming or fun to pronounce, it is also probably a good idea to keep it short. Fortunately, it is likely that in many cultures where personal names are long and polysyllabic, shortened versions or nicknames are often used (at least this is true for both America and Indonesia!).

NICKNAMES

Playful nicknames are often appealing to children. If such nicknames are used, ideally they should meaningfully support (either literally or ironically) the impression you wish readers to have of the character. Don't call a character "Big Bob" if the question of Bob's bigness or smallness, actual or metaphorical, is never raised in your story. Entirely mean−spirited nicknames should be avoided unless you are attempting to show the harm such names cause.

PLACE NAMES

Place names also require careful consideration. You may want to use descriptive or metaphoric place names to convey some sort of overarching tone or impression. Indigenous place names that have descriptive meanings can be translated into English. For example, "Wani lives in the village of Kayu Manus, which means "Sweet Wood," in Indonesian. Generally you should not populate your work with indigenous words without providing their meaning in English or insuring that context will clearly define such terms.

KIN TERMS

Now is your chance to use all those kin terms you so assiduously learned! Kin terms are an excellent way to introduce your readers to differing ways of conceiving of family relationships and they also offer a taste of the language of the people you are writing about. Each volume of the Cultures in the Classroom series will include a short glossary of words, including counting numbers, kin terms and some other basic words and expressions. Unfamiliar words found in the text will also be defined in the glossary. In West Sumatra, children call their mothers and women of their mother's general age "Bu" and they call their fathers and men of their father's age "Pak" (but not their maternal uncles!). Encoded into these kinterms is a very different sense of social relations than most American children are used to. If your story includes characters who are the kin of the main character (and most stories in this series should), please use the proper terms of reference in your dialogues.

NITTY GRITTY WRITING DETAILS

GRAB YOUR READERS' ATTENTION EARLY

Anton Chekhov once remarked that the best way to begin a short story revision is to throw out the first three pages of text. A common error in writing shorter stories is to spend too much time on "setting the scene." If you don't grab your reader's attention early, you risk losing their interest entirely. Long prefatory descriptions of the culture or place you are describing

should be avoided. Resist launching your story with a wordy biography of your characters. Instead introduce your characters through their actions and fill in the adjectival details in the course of your storytelling. Get on with the action quickly. Many stories concern a break with normal reality or the normal course of daily events. In such cases it is necessary to describe what the normal reality is first. Do this with economy as your readers will undoubtedly be less interested in the normal course of things than they will be with the formidable challenges your characters have to deal with when things go awry. Although cultural description is an essential feature of the Cultures in the Classroom series, instead of beginning your tale with a long descriptive passage, you should weave your description into your story as it progresses.

AESOP'S EFFICIENT OPENINGS

Perhaps the best and most well–known examples of marvelously concise storytelling are Aesop's Fables written some 2,600 years ago. Consider the following first lines from a selection of these tales.

A slave named Androcles once escaped from his master and fled to the forest. (Androcles and the Lion)

An Ant nimbly running about in the sunshine in search of food came across a Chrysalis that was very near its time of change. (Ant and the Chysalis)

On a field one summer's day a Grasshopper was hopping about, chirping and singing to its heart's content. (Ant and Grasshopper)

It happened that a Dog had got a piece of meat and was carrying it home in his mouth to eat it in peace. (The Dog and the Shadow)

An Ant, going to a river to drink, fell in, and was carried along in the stream. (Dove and the Ant)

By an unlucky chance a Fox fell into a deep well from which he could not get out. (Fox and the Goat)

The Hare, one day, laughing at the Tortoise for his slowness and general unwieldiness, was challenged by the latter to run a race. (Hare and the Tortoise)

Hercules, once journeying along a narrow roadway, came across a strange–looking animal that reared its head and threatened him. (Hercules and Pallas)

An Eagle swooped down upon a Serpent and seized it in his talons with the intention of carrying it off and devouring it. (Serpent and the Eagle)

You will notice that not only do each of these first sentences start with some sort of important–to–the–plot action or activity, they also often telegraph the plot to the reader (or listener).

BE CONCISE AND KEEP YOUR STORY RELATIVELY SIMPLE

Avoid flashbacks, digressions and subplots. While these complexities are acceptable for older readers, they will confuse early readers. Unnecessary characters will weaken the flow. Long descriptive passages or scene–setting will make your readers fidget and descend into boredom. Non–essential dialogue (no matter how authentic) will sap your reader's will to read on. In a long novel one might get away with passages that exist for no other reason than to set tone, flesh out a character, or describe the utter magnificence of a sun setting over the purple mountains. In an early reader book no paragraph, sentence, phrase or word can be superfluous. The old joke: "I wrote you a long letter because I didn't have time to write you a short one" is apropos to writing for an early reader. Your daunting task (and surely you are up to it!) is to

write a short letter that moves your readers.

Your mission should be to make your story easy to follow, not labyrinthian. Make sure that the reader never loses sight of your main character for any more than the briefest of moments. Your plot may be linear or circular, but it shouldn't be disjointed.

CONCRETE AND SPECIFIC ARE PREFERABLE TO VAGUE AND GENERAL

While it is a mistake to be overly descriptive, it is a greater mistake to be too general and vague. "Ahmad went to the store" is inferior to "Ahmad walked briskly to his aunt Mariana's fabric shop". As Strunk and White have proclaimed in The Elements of Style, "The surest way to arouse and hold the attention of the reader is by being specific, definite and concrete." Specificity is the spice of good storytelling. This advice is even more pertinent to this particular series of books as distinctive cultural features are to be found in the concrete details of everyday life.

WRITE SHORT PARAGRAPHS

Long paragraphs are daunting to young readers. Writing shorter paragraphs will enable you to write in a crisper and more active style without wasting words. Wordiness will slow your tale down and your reader will lose interest.

VARY YOUR SENTENCE LENGTH AND STRUCTURE

The repetition of sentences that do not vary in length and structure is monotonous. A sprinkling of longer more complex sentences challenges young readers. More than a sprinkling will discourage. A repetition of short sentences will result in mechanical, uninspiring reading. If all of your sentences are arranged in a Subject–Verb–Object order, even the most hyperactive child will fall fast asleep. Mix things up!

AVOID COMPLEX SENTENCE CONSTRUCTIONS

Remember that you are writing for children who just now are making a transition from picture books to chapter books and their reading skills are still quite undeveloped. Try to limit most of your sentences to a single thought or concept but keep in mind that variety in sentence construction is also important and both complex and compound constructions can be sparingly added to the mix.

ESTABLISHING PACE

Short crisp sentences, phrases and minimal sentences increase the pace and tension of your writing. The effect is enhanced if the sentences are similar in structure. Employ this strategy when it is warranted by the action of the passage you are writing. Overuse will spoil the effect.

EFFECTIVENESS CREATED BY WORD ORDER

The effectiveness of a sentence can often be modified by changing the word order, placing the most important part first or last.

Compare:

The weather was good, the game was close and the crowd was enthusiastic.

With

The weather was good, the crowd was enthusiastic and the game was close.

CONTRASTS

Frequently invoking contrasts and juxtapositions in your story will help retain the interest of your readers, especially if your readers are young. "The cold winter wind howled outside but Mikala felt warm and safe by the fireside," or " His friends laughed when the old woman slipped on the ice, but Kenro felt sorry for Mrs. Watanabe."

USE TRANSITIONAL PHRASES TO MOVE TIME, PLACE AND SUBJECT

If you conceive of your story as a series of scenes, you will need to seamlessly connect these scenes together. Transitions are important elements as they lessen a sense of disorienting displacement. Transitions must be accomplished economically or your story will get bogged down with unimportant details. Unless necessary to the plot, details about what happened between scenes will hinder the flow of your tale. This is true both for spatial and temporal transitions. If two scenes are separated by two weeks time, it is not necessary to fill in everything that happened during those two weeks. "Two weeks had passed and Abdul still had not received his letter from the school." Your readers don't really need to know how Abdul spent those two weeks unless something happened during this period that was important and germane to the plot. As a general rule, keep transitions short.

A useful technique is to set up transitions in the previous scene.

"Ok, it's agreed, we will all met behind the old school after the call to prayer."

. . . (change of scene)

Arriving at the schoolyard, Hanifa was surprised that the others had started the game without her.

EXAMPLES OF TRANSITIONS

(Provost, 1985)

TRANSITIONS OF TIME

The following week . . .

In December of that year . . .

By the time Renaldo arrived . . .

After the prom . . .

Twenty years later . . .

TRANSITIONS OF PLACE (Change of Scene)

On the other side of the mountain . . .

In Black Eagle, Montana . . .

Meanwhile, back at the ranch . . .

When we got to Archie's place . . .

From my house I could tell . . .

TRANSITIONS OF SUBJECT

Consequently . . .

In this manner . . .

On the other hand . . .

In contrast to . . .

Despite all this . . .

USE MOTION AND ACTIVITY TO CONVEY MEANING

Use motion and activity to convey more meaning. Make sure your characters are not simply standing or sitting unless you want to emphasize their passivity. Generally people are moving or doing something when they are talking. Even if a character is just standing or sitting, more often than not they are also communicating with their face, hands or body. Posture, even if static, can tell the reader something important. The Worldview Press mission is to educate children about culture and cultures. Culture is not just what people believe, think and feel, it is also about what they do. Almost all of my fieldwork interviews were conducted while the person I was interviewing was doing something. Have your characters doing things that will tell your readers something about daily life in the culture where your story takes place. Having active characters will also make your story fuller and more interesting. If you write one static scene after another you will have a difficult time creating a sense of plot movement.

CREATE AN AMBIANCE AND MOOD

One of the better ways to establish the ambiance and mood is to use the "five senses" to describe the scene. Think not only of what your characters might see, but also what they might hear, smell, touch and taste.

USE HUMOR

Inject some humor in your stories, it will be greatly appreciated by your young readers. Dry, relentlessly earnest writing is even less appealing to children than it is to adults. Peculiar and odd characters and situations often delight young readers. Don't be afraid to be somewhat ironic, many children will grasp ironies as long as they are not too subtle. Americans tend to appreciate (or at least practice) sarcasm a great deal. As this is undoubtedly the least creative and appealing form of humor, you are editorially forewarned against it.

READ YOUR STORY ALOUD

There is really no substitute for reading your story aloud. If you find yourself tripping or stumbling over phrases or words, you can bet your young audience will have even more difficulty reading them. Like a piece of music, your sentences should flow and have a sense of harmony, melody and rhythm. Make your sentences sing.

CAUTIONS AND TABOOS

Being primarily focused on cultural issues, the most important Worldview Press editorial requirement is that stories must not be prejudicial and judgmental toward other cultures and ethnicities. Similarly, all forms of ethnocentrism, sexism, religious bigotry and deprecation of minority groups can not be shown in a favorable or naturalizing light.

BE COGNIZANT OF AND CAREFUL WITH CONTROVERSIAL SUBJECTS

To reach the widest possible audience for its books, The Worldview Press must be very circumspect and thoughtful about the inclusion of material that might be considered to be "controversial." Authors have the responsibility to make sure that the content of their stories are not needlessly offensive to potential book buyers (school districts and teachers) or large segments of parents or the children themselves. This does not mean that stories have to be completely purged of all content that might prove objectionable to somebody somewhere. Be reasonable and thoughtful with your content. I myself enjoy a beer with dinner and a very occasional glass of wine or an Irish Whiskey at bedtime. My personal experiences with alcoholic beverages are by any reasonable standard positive and perhaps even down–right healthy. However, tens of thousands of people die each year from alcohol–related traffic accidents, alcohol is implicated in a great deal of violence in America and alcoholism destroys countless lives (easily millions and millions) throughout the world. Given these undeniable social facts it would not be acceptable to submit a story that included alcohol abuse (i.e. people drinking to the point of losing their normal judgment) in anything but an obviously negative portrayal.

"BAD LANGUAGE"

Rightly or wrongly, many people are offended by certain words that fall under the rubric of "bad language." Obviously many works (most notably, J. D. Salinger's, The Catcher in the Rye) would not have the same authenticity and power if they were stripped of their "bad language." One of the goals of The Worldview Press is to challenge the manner in which Americans conceive of the world. However, the WVP editorial position is that this needs to be accomplished in a subtle and thoughtful manner and not through writing that seeks to shock and offend.

VIOLENCE

The depiction of violence is another matter that requires circumspection and restraint. Many American children are exposed through the media to thousands of graphic depictions of violence before they reach adulthood. Sadly, we live in a extremely violent society. It is quite possible that a causal relationship (either direct or indirect) exists between the level of simulated and real violence in the media and the level of actual violence in the real world. It is reasonable to assume that it would be better, not worse, to limit the exposure of children to violent situations and images. Regardless of these associations, many children's stories use either violence or the potential threat of violence as a plot device. Part of what makes children (or adults) enthralled with a character is the reader's level of emotional investment in that character's well–being. If that well–being is never challenged the level of emotional investment may be subdued. Protagonists need to be challenged and a frequent method of challenging characters is to bring them into harm's way. Often this means either actual or potential physical harm. Many beloved and adored books use violence or the threat of violence as their main device to enthrall readers. It would be difficult to imagine that the Harry Potter books would have been so successful without the evil and violent machinations of Lord Voltimort! Authors should make a distinction between violence that is necessary to the plot and story and violence that is simply included to raise the emotional pitch of the audience or readership. This is not always a distinct line but it is clear that many movies fail to make such a distinction as one act of gratuitous violence mercilessly follows another. Gratuitous violence will not pass editorial standards.

SEXUAL BEHAVIOR & SEXUAL IMAGERY

Behavior and images that could be construed as sexual should be avoided. Even mild romancing among pre–pubescent characters may make many book buyers uncomfortable, so please think carefully and considerately about any such inclusions.

PROSELYTIZING

Don't preach and keep the Cultures in the Classroom series objectives in the forefront. I myself have very strong views about politics and social injustices and a variety of other social, economic, cultural and environmental concerns. However, the primary goal of the Cultures in the Classroom series of books is to introduce children to the diversity of world cultures. The aim of the series is not to promote specific causes or to lambaste the forces of evil at work in the world today. These issues are fully worthy of editorialization and commentary, but not in this series of books for emergent readers. This is not to say that your story should be sanitized and homogenized to the point of being insipid. If, however, your story seems to be more about your personal or political views (however laudable or important they may be) than it is about the culture you are writing about, your story will not be consistent with the central objectives of this particular series of books.

AVOID NEGATIVE CULTURAL JUXTAPOSITIONS

In nearly all cultures there are found beliefs and behaviors that we as individuals may find in some manner objectionable. For example, where I engaged in fieldwork many individuals did not have any particular sympathetic regard for the suffering of non–human animals.

Focusing on behaviors that are abhorred or proscribed in one's own culture is certainly not the best way of encouraging understanding between cultures. In some places in Southeast Asia people eat insects. These creatures are not typically found in the diet of most Americans and indeed many Americans, displaying their ethnocentricity, would certainly consider such a diet choice "uncivilized." Of course, most anthropologists would observe that there is nothing intrinsically wrong with eating bugs and the more interesting question is why Americans don't eat such goodies while some people from some other cultures do. However surprising and exotic it is to Western tourists to see street vendors in Southeast Asian metropolis hawking fried locusts, such a practice does not merit undue attention in a book written for children who have been enculturated with different food taboos. While many children of the age you will be writing for take a great pleasure in practices they label "gross," the associative imagery is nevertheless almost always pejorative and such imagery should generally be avoided. Every account is an edited account and an insufficient description. There is no way to get around this. While it is true that the Cultures in the Classroom series seeks to expand reader's developing notions of culture and humanity, you are encouraged to do this with a delicate and subtle touch, not a heavy hand. Please remember that this series of books is meant to encourage interest in other cultures and to help children to develop empathy for other people. Negative imagery –– however "authentic" –– is contrary to these goals.

AVOIDING STEREOTYPES: Finding the diversity within

Portrayals that create or reinforce stereotypes –– whether negative or positive stereotypes –– should be avoided. The most effective way of avoiding stereotypes is by recognizing and depicting the diversity found within cultures. Within the confines of your story the best way to do this is by creating characters that are unique and distinguishable from other characters in your story. These differences can be expressed through differences in physical characteristics, clothing, habits, actions, expressed ideas and sentiments, and social location and associations. In no culture does everyone dress, act, think, feel or believe the same. Although certain commonalities may exist, focusing solely on commonalities will deprive your story, and the culture it seeks to represent, of its complex richness. Even positive stereotypes should be avoided as they tend to create an aura of implausibility that can be empathetically distancing.

SHOW RATHER THAN EXPLAIN DIVERSITY

As a writer for the Cultures in the Classroom series, you will undertake the difficult task of both representing cultural distinctiveness and avoiding simplistic stereotypes. Cultural representation, whether constructed by "insiders" or "outsiders," is always fraught with difficulties. Stereotypes are by definition simplifications. Avoiding stereotyping is made more difficult by the fact that you will be writing for early readers who can not yet easily assimilate complex

information. Your task will be easier is you attempt to show rather than explain the inner diversity of the culture you are writing about.

NEW *CONTRACTS*

Presently The Worldview Press does not offer author advances. When your story achieves a state of completion where we can make the editorial judgment that your story will be a valuable inclusion in our Cultures in the Classroom series, we will offer you a contract. Usually this will occur once we receive a draft that is substantially completed and does not require major revision. The contracts we offer are largely standard, however, owing to the special difficulties entailed in writing for this particular series our royalty rates for authors are greater than industry norms for "picture–books." Typically, authors will be offered royalties based on a sliding scale (rates increase when certain sales targets are achieved) that begins at 10% of net revenues for writers who do not have substantial experience writing fiction for young audiences. Illustrators will be chosen by The Worldview Press in consultation with authors and will, in most cases, be offered separate contracts. In collaborative projects, joint authors are encouraged to draw up their own collaboration agreement which specifies how responsibilities and compensations will be divided. Authors should realize that standard book contracts make far greater demands on authors than publishers in the development cycle of books as publisher responsibilities come more into play after books are printed and sold. We highly recommend that authors read Kirsh's Guide to the Book Contract to familiarize themselves with contract issues.

NEW *THE WORLDVIEW PRESS EDITORIAL PROCESS*

The Cultures in the Classroom series seeks to achieve the difficult goal of bringing together two distinct skill sets; cultural expertise and creative writing talent. Very few individuals have the education, training, talent and experience to excel in both domains. The real world effect of these differences in abilities is that most books written for children about other cultural and ethnic groups tend to be unsophisticated from an anthropological point of view and most anthropologists shy away from writing for non–academic audiences and virtually no anthropologists write fiction for children.

The Worldview Press encourages and will facilitate collaborations between experienced and knowledgeable anthropologists and talented and experienced writers who specialize in writing for young audiences. However, The Worldview Press, realizes that many "first books" are excellent and many people, (even anthropologists!) have latent talents that are simmering, just waiting to become manifest. As such, we encourage individuals who have a burning desire write for a younger audience or have what they think is a wonderful idea for a book, to contact us regardless of their lack of experience writing for younger audiences. If you have never written fiction or have never written for young audiences then writing a book for this series may be a challenge, but certainly not an impossible one. Sometimes, first books exhibit fresh, exciting, innovative and unpretentious qualities that are wonderful to behold.

FIRST STEPS

If you want to write for the Cultures in the Classroom series, you should begin by reading through this guide! Then you should contact us and ask if there are any books already published or being developed by our press that are set within the specific cultural or geographic area that you want to write about. This series endeavors to offer books set in a diverse range of cultures and we must orient our selections toward that goal.

The second step is to contact us about the idea(s) you have for a book. It is helpful to tell us something about your education, interests and fieldwork experience. Substantial experience with the culture your wish to write about is important. At this point, your ideas for a story do not have to be very detailed. It is often best to think of several ideas and then we can work together to decide which idea is most promising given the goals of this series. Please keep in mind books in this series are based on contemporary cultures, not historical cultures or stories set in "time unspecified, " mythical or folklore contexts. Myths and folklore can be used for plot ideas, but the characters and settings of your story must be set in contemporary times and be at least "quasi–realistic" (no talking animals please!).

AND THEN . . .

If your ideas for a story capture our interest and we feel that you have the requisite expertise, we will discuss with you how your story might be developed.

Writers differ in the ways they approach writing. Some authors outline their stories first. Other writers simply start writing and see where the characters and plot naturally take them. Both methods can produce wonderful stories, but both can also lead to troubles down the road. Outlines can be overly constraining and lack of them can create severe structural problems in a story. We suggest that authors create at least a basic outline because the format of this series limits the number of events that can reasonably transpire in a story, the complexity of the plot and the number of characters that can be included. The story must be limited to approximately 3,000 words, stories less than this may have to be "plumped up" and stories of greater length will in almost all cases be trimmed down.

Given the fact that many individuals who want to write for The Worldview Press are not very experienced with writing fiction for younger non–academic audiences, we are committed to providing thorough editorial feedback. However, this can only happen if authors are willing and active in communicating their progress (or lack thereof) with us. Authors should also realize that editing a book is accomplished within a cooperative, not competitive environment. We are very willing to read drafts, even early ones, and believe we can give substantial assistance with regard to storycraft, content development and format considerations. While it is certainly possible to "go it alone," and present us with a nearly completed manuscript, often an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Authors who do not read this guide thoroughly and do not share their progress with us run the risk of us requesting a complete re–writing of their story or having their story being rejected because their work does not meet the content, style or format requirements of the series.

OUTSIDE REVIEW

Your story – at whatever stage it is deemed editorially necessary – will be reviewed by outside readers. Outside readers might include, but are not limited to, school children, educators, editors, publishing advisors, cultural experts and individuals who have a significant relationship to the culture or cultural group being written about. We believe that outside readers are valuable to the process of ensuring the best book possible in terms of marketability, reader enjoyment and engagement, textual integrity, appropriateness to educational standards, age group conditions and cultural or ethnographic fact checking and representational balance.

AN IMPORTANT CAUTION:

Many people assume that because younger readers have less sophisticated linguistic abilities that this makes it easier to write for children. Just the opposite is true. In terms of composition, a 10 page academic article is substantially easier to write than a 3,000 word children's book. There are a considerable number of factors that have to be considered when writing for young people that one does not confront when writing for your peers. Consequently, the editorial process required for writing a children's book of this length may be far more intensive and time–consuming than an author is likely to encounter when writing for an academic audience that shares a similar linguistic competence to the author. Writing for this series can not accomplished with minimal effort and time.

THE WAYS OUR EDITORS CAN HELP MAKE YOUR STORY BETTER

"SUBSTANITIVE EDITING"

Among other things we will work to:

1. Fix errors or deficiencies in word usage (malaprops, redundancy, passive voice, wordiness, vagueness, word choice)

2. Edit sentence structure with regard to: clarity, complexity, syntax, effectiveness and power.

3. Edit paragraph structure (organization, length, consistency, coherence, transitions).

4. Fix style problems, including appropriateness of tone and voice, level of language to audience.

5. Rewrite awkward or confusing sections. We query the writer if we are not sure of meaning.

6. Review your manuscript for sentences, paragraphs, and sections that could be cut or ones that need to be expanded.

7. Ensure that your story fits the format and content requirements of the series as discussed in this guide.

8. Develop cultural content. Even though authors will quite naturally have more cultural expertise than we do, we can help you develop ways in which to better integrate and present cultural content into your story in an effective manner. It is also possible that your story will be read by other experts in the culture that you are writing about, or even members of the culture for their comments and suggestions on how to strengthen the cultural content.

9. Improve story dynamism. We can help you make your story more dynamic both in terms of plot and character development and in terms of paragraph, sentence and phrase construction. Our goal will to make your writing clear, coherent, consistent and compelling. First and foremost your story must be exciting to read and we can help you achieve that goal. In places in which we feel could be better−worded, we will suggest alternate word choices or alternate phrasing. Authors need not accept such changes, they may suggest an entirely different wording or phrasing or present a reasonable argument why the original wording should stand. However, The Worldview Press must retain the right to make stylistic changes that do not substantially effect meaning.

10. Insure language appropriateness. The books in this series have a specific range of readership, from third to fifth grade level (emergent readers). We can help you with making sure that your vocabulary and sentence complexity is appropriate to the general abilities of this range of students. As these books are set in non−American cultures, more often than not the real members of the culture being written about will either not speak English or will speak English that varies from American English. Anthropologists have a natural tendency to load up their writings with foreign words and phrases, but your audience will not be able to integrate too many unfamiliar words. Although it is true that a vast amount of culture is contained within language, given the developmental capacities of your readership you must limit the number "local terms" in your story, generally to less than a dozen. This includes English terms and usages that may be unfamiliar to your readers.

11. Improve consistency and coherence with potential and actual illustrations.

COPY EDITING

After your book has completed its substantive editing it will be copy edited. Copy editing will correct errors in punctuation, spelling, grammar, word usage and style.

PROOFREADING and FINAL EDITING

After your text copyedited, your book will be formatted to ensure coordination between text, illustrations and production requirements and conditions. At this stage typeface choice and layout will be determined. Page breaks, widow and orphan adjustment, text and illustration layout, hyphenation and page numbering will be established.

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For an author's view of the "editorial process," we recommend visiting the site of and reading the observations of the Australian author, Sara Douglass, which can be found here.

IMPORTANT NOTE:

Authors for this series are required to participate in the writing of an "Instructor's Guide" to the book they author which annotates their book, gives suggestions for discussion topics, reinforces content with classroom activities (games and recipes) etc. Authors are also requested to assist in gathering or preparing multi–media content that can be made available to their readers and classroom teachers.

CHECKLIST FOR A CULTURES IN THE CLASSROOM SERIES BOOK

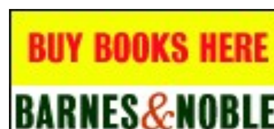
- The main character is 8–11 years old.
- The story is intriguing, delightful and captivating to young readers while maintaining appeal to adult buyers.
- Cultural patterns, behaviors and ideas are integral to the plot and not just background.
- A positive impression is created about the culture being written about.
- Free from ethnocentric slights, invidious comparisons and juxtapositions.
- Story and characters represent an "internal diversity."
- The main character is active, not passive.
- The book instructs but does not preach.
- A strong integration of pictorial and textual content.

And . . .

- Author participation in the development of a supplemental teacher's guide and multimedia CD.

HYPER– LINKED BIBLIOGRAPHY (for the *Cultures in the Classroom™* series)

The following is a hyper–linked list of books about writing, fiction writing and writing for children. You may click on the underlined text to follow the link. All but one of the links take you to the specific book listing on the Barnes and Noble Web site where you can read reviews of the book, get fuller bibliographic information and if you so desire, purchase the book. After viewing a selection you can return to this page by clicking on your browser's Back button. The Worldview Press will receive a small commission if you buy any books through the Barnes and Noble links on this page. Many of these books are also available from Amazon.com and you can reach their site here. Again, The Worldview Press will receive a commission for books purchased through the preceding link.



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