



Writing TIPS FOR Tweens

Advice and Tips from Bestselling
and Award-Winning Middle Grade Authors!



INSPIRE • ENGAGE • EDUCATE





Dear Educators:

Writing is an important skill set that every student will come across at some point in their educational development. Writing is also something that should be fun, inspiring, and be able to foster a love of reading. With that in mind, we've created this brochure filled with tips and tricks from award-winning and bestselling middle grade authors that your tween readers love.

Please feel free to download and share this with your colleagues and, most importantly, your students. If you're interested in setting up writing workshops, in person or virtually, please go to PenguinClassroom.com/Request-an-Author-Visit and fill out the form.

Thank you so much for all you do in sharing books and writing with young readers. We hope you and your students find this brochure helpful. We'd love to hear from you, so please get in touch via social media (our social media handles are on this brochure), contact us via our site, or email us at schoolandlibrary@prh.com.

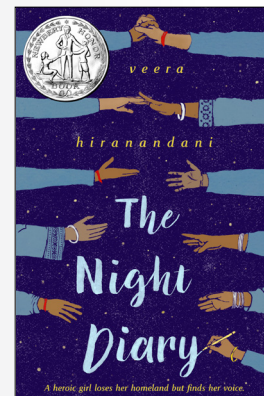
Penguin Young Readers School & Library team





"Writing can be exciting and magical. But it can also feel hard, especially when you don't feel inspired. Most writers only get to a satisfied place in their work after many revisions, but it's not always fun. When I feel stuck, these three things help me find the magic again."

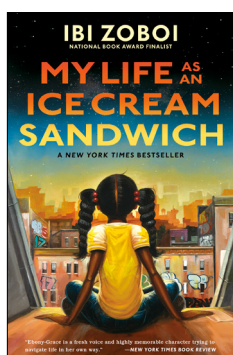
—VEERA HIRANANDANI, author of *The Night Diary*



1. PUT THE WORK DOWN — Sometimes I need a break, but when I do take a break, I make an appointment with myself to come back to the work. After a day or two away, I usually see surprising things after I read it again. I have new ideas about the parts that aren't working, or I end up liking what I wrote more than I thought I did.

2. READ OR WRITE POETRY — I like reading a poem or two from some of my favorite poets. It often gets my writing juices going and it's quicker than getting absorbed in a novel. Or I'll have a new idea and, though I may not want to write a whole book about it, expressing it as a short poem loosens up my writing "muscles" and I'm ready to take on the bigger work in progress.

3. LISTEN TO MUSIC — Sometimes listening to a song that captures the tone or "vibe" of my story can be just what my brain needs to recharge and get me in the mood to create again.



"Remember learning about the five senses in kindergarten? Describing what you're seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and feeling can really make your reader believe that they are part of the story."

—IBI ZOBOI, author of *My Life as an Ice Cream Sandwich*



1. Remember that no one is perfect. Give your main character healthy flaws, something they have to overcome. Maybe they are good at science and not very good at making friends. How can they use their skills to work on their weaknesses?

2. Remember that everyone has a dream. Give your character something that they want to achieve. To keep your story short and focused, list three things your character must do in order to reach their goal.



Adam Gidwitz, author of *The Unicorn Rescue Society*

The MOST important thing to do while you're writing is to have fun. Don't worry about spelling, or grammar, or even whether your piece is good or not. Just have as much fun with what you're writing as possible. The more fun you have, the more creative you'll get, and the more you'll write. The more you write, the better you get. You can think about all the things I said above as much as they help you...but if they get in the way of you having fun while writing, stop thinking about them and just enjoy yourself!

THREE IMPORTANT ELEMENTS FOR WRITING CHARACTERS IN YOUR STORY:

- 1. MAKE THE READER CARE ABOUT YOUR MAIN CHARACTER.** You can do this by giving your main character some kind of problem (his big sister is always beating him up) or making the main character do something admirable (she saves a turtle who's about to be run over by a truck). Do this early on, right away, so we care about the main character from the get-go.
- 2. GIVE YOUR MAIN CHARACTER SOME CHALLENGES.** If everything is easy for the main character, the story is boring.
- 3. HAVE YOUR CHARACTER GROW.** If the challenges stay impossible, that's depressing. As the character gets better and better at conquering the challenges, the reader's going to feel really good.



Joseph Bruchac, author of *Two Roads*

One of the things I often say when I visit schools is that **the difference between a writer and a non-writer is that a writer writes.** The only way to be a writer is to actually write. Don't just talk about it or plan to write. Sit down and do it. And don't wait for "inspiration." If I waited for inspiration to hit me, I would not have written half of the books I've published.

One of my favorite poets was a man named William Stafford. He was also a friend of mine and one of my mentors. What Bill did each morning was to get up early, look out his window, and start writing based on what he saw outside. It might be something like **"Two robins are hopping across the lawn as if the grass was a trampoline."** (By the way, Bill did not write that—I did after looking out my window just now.) Once he began like that, he could keep going.

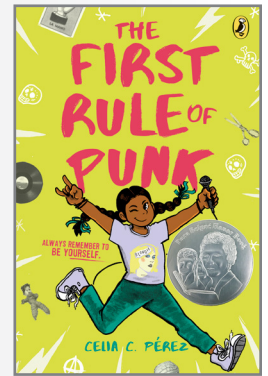
So, now it's your turn. Look out your window and then write (or dictate into your phone) what you see there. As the long-ago Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu wrote, "A journey of a thousand li starts beneath one's feet." Take that first step by describing what you see to begin your own writing journey.





"Writing is a personal process. Don't worry about what works for others. You'll discover what works for you."

—CELIA C. PÉREZ, author of *The First Rule of Punk* and *Strange Birds*



1. Don't think about it too much. The more time you spend thinking, the less time you spend writing.
2. Ideas can come from anywhere or from anything. My story ideas come to me when I'm not necessarily thinking about them or looking for them. On a related note:
 - Open your eyes to the world around you. If you're wondering if there's a magical place where ideas come from, there is: look around.
 - Be flexible. Don't have your heart set on your story going one way. Sometimes you'll find that the story has its own plan.
 - Unplug and do other things. Go for a walk, stare into space, play with your dog, make something with your hands.
 - Write for yourself. Write about what interests you and what sparks your curiosity.
 - Read for inspiration and for insight into how other writers create stories and use language.

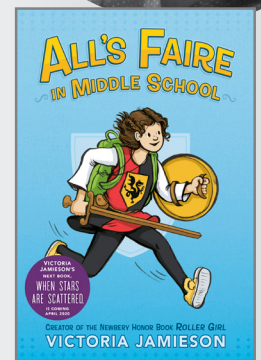
Victoria Jamieson, co-author of *When Stars are Scattered*



DRAWING A STORY STARTER

1. PRACTICE drawing faces showing different emotions.
2. Next, IMAGINE what happened to make your character feel that way.
3. You can PRETEND each face is a different character, and make up a story!

I will often use drawing as a way to brainstorm new ideas. If I'm stuck with writer's block, drawing usually helps to get my creativity flowing again. It's worth a doodle!

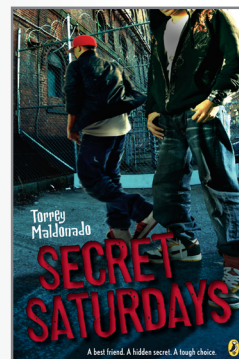
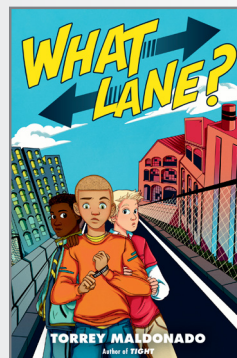




Torrey Maldonado, author of *What Lane?*

The actress Zendaya, who plays MJ in *Spider-Man*, sat me down and told me this tip. Well, she said it on TV, but I felt like she was speaking to me. 😊 Her tip relates to writing: "If there's any definition to being perfect, you're perfect at being yourself."

Everyone else sucks at being you. When writers try to keep up with each other, you stand out if you write from your heart and write your truth that no one knows. I used to be self-conscious about my Brooklyn accent and the "other side of the tracks" where I'm from. But I was born and spent my whole life in Brooklyn. Once I owned that and wrote from that perspective, my writing launched to a place that readers appreciate. You are an expert at being you because you've spent a lifetime in your body. Own who you are and write your experiences people don't know. From as honest a place as you can, let your truth pour onto the page. Then, you'll write what no one can imitate.



Lexie Bean, author of *The Ship We Built*

1. MAKE A PRACTICE OF NOT JUDGING YOUR THOUGHTS!

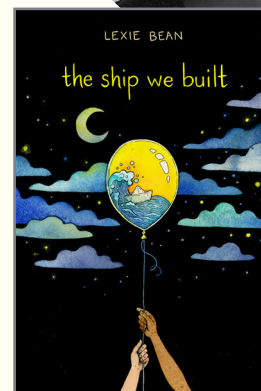
Before I became an author, I regularly journaled and drew in notebooks without lines. I wrote down everything that came to mind—no matter how silly, nonsensical, repetitive, or visual.

2. LET YOUR FIRST DRAFT BE JUST FOR YOU, THEN EXPAND YOUR AUDIENCE WITH EVERY DRAFT YOU WRITE.

Draft two can be for you and your closest friends, the next can be for friends and strangers who are familiar with the world you're speaking about. And so on until your audience includes strangers unfamiliar with your world, family members, and people who may simply disagree with you.

3. WRITE WHAT ONLY YOU CAN WRITE.

Trust the power of your own experiences. If you're afraid to write them, that probably means the world needs to hear your story, because there is somebody out there who also needs your words to feel understood.



Jessica Kim, author of *Stand Up, Yumi Chung!*



1. Write! Write a lot! Get a journal or type it out on your computer and keep working at it. Then print it out or make copies and mail or email it to your friends and family. Maybe post it on a blog! Pay attention to any feedback you get. Which parts did people like the best? Why? Study the things that worked and figure out how to improve the parts that didn't.

2. Read! Read a lot! The best way to learn is by watching. And for us, dear writer, that means we have to read a ton of books. I read boatloads. Many times. That's right, don't just read books once, reread it a few times. The first time you read, just read for the pleasure of the story. The next time, come armed with some highlighters (as long as they're not library books). Then write down phrases or paragraphs that gripped you. Try to figure out how the author made you feel a certain way or made you laugh out loud or surprised you so unexpectedly the book slipped right out of your hands. Study the craft. Then try to achieve that same effect yourself with your own story.

3. Don't quit! This is—by far—the hardest piece of advice. Getting your work published is T-O-U-G-H. It isn't this thing that happens if you follow all the steps and do all the right things. It takes a good amount of skill, timing, and luck. So prepare to buckle in for the long haul. Focus on your stories and enjoy the ride.



Max Brallier, author of *The Last Kids on Earth*

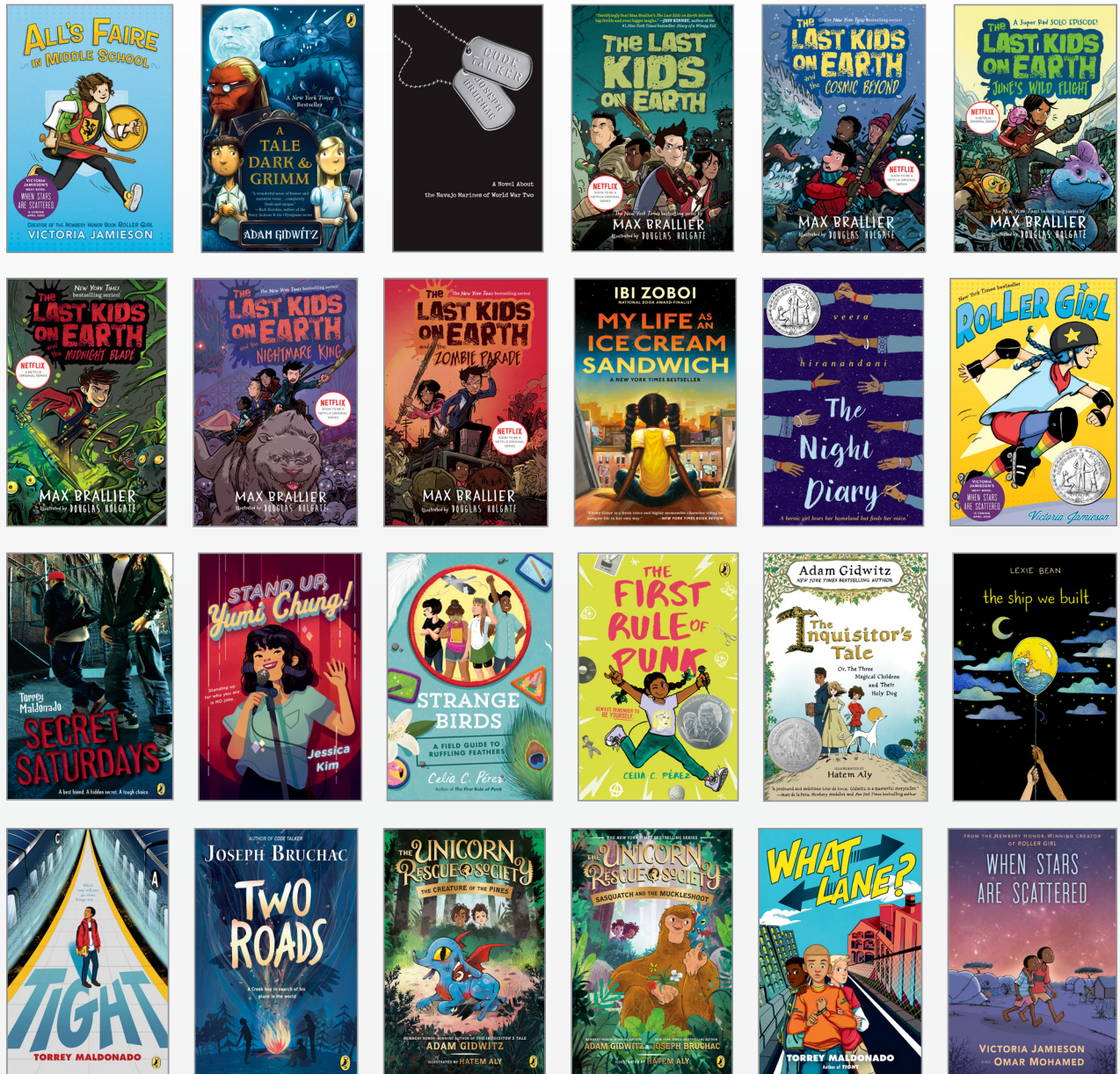
START SMALL! The first stuff I wrote was really short. Books are long and big and overwhelming. But a short story? That can be, like, three pages! And if it starts to click, you can write a whole story in one sitting. Then you have something that's finished—it's all yours! That's a great feeling.

WRITE FAST AND WRITE UGLY. I start off writing in messy sentences, bullet points, little lines of dialogue. My goal is just to get to the end of the story, even if along the way it's messy. The sooner I get to the end, the sooner I get that feeling of **"HEY, I FINISHED SOMETHING!"** Also, the sooner I get to the end, the sooner I might realize there's something to fix. And there is always stuff to fix.

IF YOUR WRITING IS STUCK, PICTURE YOUR STORY AS A MOVIE. Close your eyes and watch that movie. Just write what's playing behind your eyelids. You did it!



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