

Publishing children's writing

Why and how

by Theresa M. Sull

To publish something means to place it before the public, to make a written work generally known, or to spread around an idea. Adults typically share their work in one of two ways: privately or through a commercial publisher. Both are viable, valuable ways to get the word out—in cookbooks, biographies, self-help guides, and novels.

Preschool and school-age children can publish their work too—and you are the key. The tools are simple and the rewards bountiful.

Enter the publishing world with a simple examination of commercially produced books. Help children recognize that all

published materials include some basic information: a title, the name of the author, the name of the illustrator, a simple copyright symbol ©, and the publication date. The copyright symbol identifies the work as the property of a particular individual—not to be copied or shared without the owner's permission.

Examine how publications are put together: hardbound books, paperbacks, brochures, maps, and newspapers. Some are produced on thin, cream-colored paper (newsprint), with black ink, and folded. Others are published on heavy paper with full-colored photographs and illustrations. Common bindings include saddle stitching (staples through the crease in folded paper), stab

stitching (staples along a folded edge), side sewing (cord or thread stitches along a folded edge), perfect binding (glued edges), sewing to show (cord or thread stitches through the crease in folded paper), and spiral bound with plastic or metal combs.

Computers created a "desktop revolution" that allows anyone with access to a computer and printer to publish inexpensively. And the Internet invites contributors to have their work available worldwide—without paper, printing or binding.

Private publishing

Private publishing is what we do every time we place our written work in a form that can be shared: holiday letters, recipes, and haiku, for example. Child-produced artwork, poetry, and notes are privately published when you send them home to be shared with family members.

Create opportunities that promote private publishing. Make sure the author, illustrator, and copyright date are included on each publication.

- Encourage children to design holiday cards and birthday cards. Copy and fold the cards; and make them available in the classroom post office.
- Let children produce invitations to center events: a parent supper, a speaker, or even a

workday. Copy the invitations and post them on doors, bulletin boards, and children's cubbies.

- Help children develop board games with a drawn playing surface. Collect game pieces and store the games in plastic zip-top bags.
- Equip your writing center to encourage book and story writing. Prompts like "I wish I could..." or "Shoes are..." can get children started. Consider creating simple books cut into shapes—a house, a fish, a football, for example—to encourage creative writing.

Encourage children to share their writing at an author's tea, with cookies and fruit juice. Invite children to read their work to visiting family and friends. Ask the children to include an

"About the author" statement. One child, Julia, proudly composed her biography, which included this information: "Julia used to have three pets, but now she has one—a cat named Pumpkin. She has made three books, not counting this one." Collect all of the children's work in a spiral-bound book for the class library.

School-agers can investigate private publishing by creating school newspapers, newsletters, cookbooks, joke books, and literary magazines. These publications can be hand-produced or generated with a computer using familiar software like Microsoft Publisher®. Help the children learn about format, deadlines, and the economics of production.



Book binding made easy

Here's what you need

- paper
 - yarn
 - masking tape
 - hole punch
1. Fold papers in half to create the book's pages.
 2. Punch an odd number of evenly spaced holes, at least an inch apart along the folded crease.
 3. Cut a piece of yarn at least four times the length of the folded edge.
 4. Wrap a piece of masking tape around one end of the yarn to make a stiffened "needle."
 5. Starting at the bottom edge of the book, pull the yarn needle through the first hole. Leave about six inches of yarn dangling to secure the yarn when you're finished.
 6. Pull the yarn needle in and out of the holes from the bottom to the top.
 7. When you reach the top of the book, loop the yarn over the top edge and back through the top hole.
 8. Again, pull the yarn needle in and out of the holes, now from the top to the bottom of the pages. The yarn makes a binding all the way down the front and back edge of the book.
 9. Tie a knot or a bow on the bottom to secure the yarn. A yarn tassel is optional.

Moving beyond in-house publishing

Introduce children to the world of publishing beyond your program. Collect newspapers from a variety of cities. Help the children identify common features—headlines, photographs, editorial columns, comics, and classified listings, for example.

Carefully examine the editorial page and the letters to the editor usually written by local citizens expressing a personal opinion. Consider helping your class compose and sign a letter to the local newspaper in response to a recent story or photograph. You can also encourage parents to help their children address local issues—like an unsafe crosswalk or poorly equipped city playground. In the process, you'll be molding tomorrow's community leaders.

Examine an array of magazines with the group. Again look for common features: an index to articles, photographs and illustrations, departments or regular features, and a staff box listing the names of the people who produce the magazine.

Include a selection of literary magazines that publish children's work: *Stone Soup*, *Word Dance*, *Potluck Children's Literary Magazine*, and *New Moon*, for example. Examine the stories, poetry, and drawings and challenge the group to create work to submit for publication.

Encourage work on individual or group projects: introduce a subject and let the writers and artists respond.

Five reasons to publish

- To demonstrate that writing is a form of communication.
- To demonstrate that writing has value in the world beyond home and school.
- To provide a validation of children's self-worth.
- To give parents, grandparents, and friends a concrete product to acknowledge and praise.
- To demonstrate that children, too, can be authors.

The Internet widens opportunities for published children's work. Because print publishing is expensive (including staff, paper, printing, and distribution costs), editors must be selective in who and what is published. The Internet, on the other hand, is inexpensive to maintain. Many on-line literary magazines accept all submissions, regardless of writing ability, unless the submission is inappropriate for children.

All publications—print and Internet—offer guidelines for submitting children's work. In general, publishers require:

- typed—not handwritten—work,
 - a cover sheet that includes the child's name, age, address, and email address,
 - a color photocopy of original artwork, and
 - a statement that the work has not been previously published.
- Use the web site information on pages 36-37. Check the specific submission guidelines for each publication and follow them carefully. Usually editors discard submissions that are not properly submitted.

Why publish?

Even if a child does not pursue a writing career, there are at least four good reasons to publish children's writing.

1. Publishing reinforces a child's understanding of writing as a powerful communication tool. Children are more likely to read and to write when they understand that manuscripts are the personal voice of an author.
2. Publishing demonstrates that writing has value in the world beyond home and school. As adults we know that many employment opportunities depend on good writing skills—from resumes and job application forms to memos and reports. Publishing offers children an opportunity to see the value of writing beyond storytelling and fantasy.

3. Publishing offers a powerful validation of self-worth. The exercise in creativity reinforces determination, risk-taking, and tenacity—skills necessary for school and employment success. Gifts of children's publications offer family and friends a concrete product to cherish. The publication's author recognizes connections—to the work produced, to the ideas that inspired the work, and to the audience that applauds it.

4. Publishing demonstrates to children that they, too, are authors—with stories, insights, and experiences—in the tradition of Rosemary Wells, Maurice Sendek, and Brian Pinkney.

Support young authors. Early recognition—and publication—could be the start of a career. After all, several famous writers, including Stephen King, Langston Hughes, Ernest

Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Sylvia Plath were all first published in their teens.

Caregivers who help children see themselves as writers may be attending a real book signing someday, where an author scribbles in their book, *Thank you for believing in me and for encouraging my first writing....*

About the author

Theresa M. Sull, Ph.D., is an author, trainer, and early childhood educator. During her 25-year career, she has taught young children both with and without special needs, consulted to their families, taught college students and teachers, published articles, and coordinated public school, university, and nonprofit programs.



Resources

Check out and then share the following print publications that use children's work.

Stone Soup

Children's Art Foundation
Box 83
Santa Cruz, CA 95063
www.stonesoup.com

This is a bimonthly print periodical with featured stories and art on the Internet. Eight- to 13-year-olds from all over the world contribute their stories, poems, book reviews, and artwork.

Word Dance Magazine

Playful Productions, Inc.
P.O. Box 10804
Wilmington, DE 19850-0804
www.worddance.com

Word Dance is a quarterly publication with samples on the Internet. The magazine accepts story, poem, and artwork submissions from children kindergarten through eighth grade. They also accept group projects.

Potluck Children's Literary Magazine

P.O. Box 546
Deerfield, IL 60015-0546
www.potluckmagazine.org

This quarterly literary magazine publishes poetry, short stories, book reviews, and artwork by 8- to 16-year-olds. Sample work is on the Internet site.

Young Voices

P.O. Box 2321
Olympia, WA 98507
www.youngvoicesmagazine.com

Elementary, middle, and high school students can submit their stories, artwork, and poems to this quarterly magazine. Sample articles are online.

Creative Kids

Submissions Editor
P.O. Box 8813
Waco, TX 76714-8813
www.prufrock.com/prufrock_jm_createkids.cfm

Published by Prufrock Press, this quarterly magazine includes games, puzzles, stories, and opinions, all by produced by children ages 8 to 14. See samples on their web site.

Skipping Stones

P.O. BOX 3939
Eugene OR 97403-0939 USA
www.skippingstones.org

Skipping Stones is an award-winning resource in multicultural education containing writing by adults and children. Now in its 15th year, *Skipping Stones* publishes bimonthly during the school year; sample work is included on the web site. Children ages 8 to 16 may submit essays, stories, letters to the editor, riddles, and proverbs.

New Moon: The Magazine for Girls and Their Dreams

34 E. Superior St. Ste. 200
Duluth, MN 55802-3003
www.newmoon.org

Especially for girls, *New Moon* is a bimonthly magazine that publishes letters, articles, and fiction by 8- to 14-year-old girls. Sample issues are available on the web site.





The following are Internet sites that publish children's work.

Kids on the Net

www.kotn.ntu.ac.uk/about/index.htm

Kids on the Net features writing by children at home and at school all over the world. This site is based in Nottingham, England, and accepts submissions from children ages 6 to 16.

Kids On Line

www.kidsonlinemagazine.com

This web site accepts stories, art, jokes, and verse from children and teens.

KidPub

www.kidpub.com

KidPub has been collecting children's stories since 1995. Its database contains more than 42,000 stories. Read for free. To submit a story, children must join the Authors Club for 58 cents a month.

KidAuthors

www.kidauthors.com

Based in Massachusetts, KidAuthors accepts writing submissions from children ages 6 to 18. This site contains nearly 10,000 poems and stories by young people.

ZuZu

www.zuzu.org

ZuZu began as a print newspaper in New York City but went completely online in 1995. It accepts online submissions of children's writing but wants artwork by snail mail addressed to: Restless Youth Press
271 East 10th St. #64
New York, NY 10009

Resources for teachers

Bishop, A.; R.H.Yopp; and H.K.Yopp. 2000. *Ready for Reading: A Handbook for Parents of Preschoolers*. Needham Heights, Mass.: Allyn & Bacon.

Frank, M. 1995. *If You're Trying to Teach Kids How to Write...You've Gotta Have this Book!* Nashville, Tenn.: Incentive Publications, Inc.

Henderson, Kathy. 2001. *The Young Writer's Guide to Getting Published*. Cincinnati, Ohio: Writers Digest Books.

McCarrier, A.; G.S. Pinnell; and I.C. Fountas. 2000. *Interactive Writing: How Language & Literacy Come Together, K-2*. Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann.

Soderman, A.K.; K.M. Gregory; and L.T. O'Neill. 1999.

Scaffolding Emergent Literacy: A Child-Centered Approach for Preschool through Grade 5. Needham Heights, Mass.: Allyn & Bacon.

Weber, Chris. 2002. *Publishing with Students: A Comprehensive Guide*. Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann.