

# MARY KOLE :Q&A

## **Why are children's books so exciting to write and publish?**

Children's books attract a passionate group of writers because we are quite literally shaping the bright young minds of the future. Child and teen readers tend to be curious, voracious, and deeply invested in character and story. It's impossible to find a more passionate readership. Plus, the books we write and publish for young readers can have an incredible impact on people who are still figuring out the big questions of life. Quite simply, kids' books can change lives and, maybe, in a small way, the world. There is no better motivation than that!

## **You're a freelance editor, helping writers work toward their publishing dreams. What's key to writing for middle grade and young adult readers?**

For hooking young readers, character tends to be the most important craft element. Learning how to write a compelling character brings with it the concepts of relatability, voice, interiority, and theme. A writer's primary job is to make readers care deeply, and so character is the key that unlocks everything else in a manuscript.

## **How did you come up with the term "interiority" and how crucial is this concept to compelling children's literature?**

I've been using the term "interiority" to define a character's thoughts, feelings, and reactions. This concept has become one of the cornerstones of my editorial philosophy. How a character interacts with the story is crucial to a reader's engagement with a manuscript. Which events matter? Why do they matter? What's the hidden context that can come to the surface and deepen a scene? How does the plot act on characters and their relationships? What is a character's primal, driving objective as they move through a story?

All of these things are wrapped up in the practice of interiority. How a character goes through the plot, what they focus on, what it means to them, etc. This is what matters to audiences. Interiority creates writing with nuance and substance.

## **What are the secret ingredients for writers looking to succeed in the publishing industry?**

Very few writers are an overnight success. J.K. Rowling and Stephenie Meyer are noteworthy exactly because their stories are so unique. Most writers achieve success over a period of years, with stumbling blocks and "drawer manuscripts". But the most common traits I see in working writers are: perseverance, humility, and a driving desire to learn and grow.

## **What's one trap that aspiring writers fall into?**

Many people chase the reward (publication) instead of the work (writing). Writing is such an emotional and intimate craft that everyone wants to see their dreams come true in a big way, sure. But publication is one small facet of the writing life, believe it or not. Those writers who find lasting fulfillment come to love the writing, revision, and learning process. They are fulfilled by the joy of practicing their craft, no matter what else happens.

## **What's the hardest writing lesson to learn?**

Relax. No seriously, relax. (Easier said than done, right?) Trust yourself to communicate clearly, and trust your reader to interpret it. Try to find your own writing voice instead of emulating what you think your writing is or should be. This maturity and confidence, which come with time and practice, often separate aspiring writers from published authors.