How to Become a Millionaire Children's Author

LESSON NINE

by

Scott Thornton

You do not need any previous writing experience!

Use these professional techniques and insider secrets and tips to easily write page-turning stories with the WOW factor, and join the growing legion of millionaire authors.

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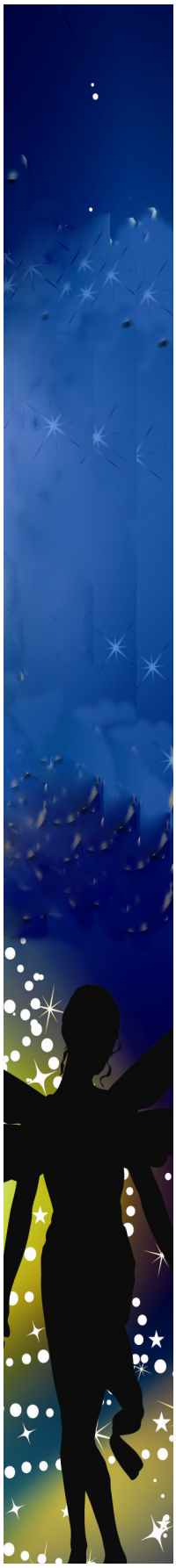


Welcome and a huge 'Thank You' for purchasing 'Lesson Nine' of the twelve part course, 'How to Become a Millionaire Children's Author'.

Let's continue with the hottest and latest insider tips and techniques you can use to build your own personal wealth from writing for children.

Writing for Teenagers

Of all the divisions of writing for children, teenage fiction books are possibly the most difficult. Almost adult, yet beset by the uncertainty of the best way to interact with the adult world and tormented by the effects of the hormones raging in their blood-streams, **teenagers themselves often do not know what they want to read.**

It is only in the last decade or so that the publishing world has categorised books for teenagers as a separate market. And it has taken British publishers a long time to catch up with American publishers in this area.

In America, the *series* reigns almost, but not totally, supreme. The success of such series as **'Sweet Valley High'** (Bantam) or **'Nancy Drew and the Hardy Boys'** (Armada) has lead to a broiler-house situation where some publishers are rumoured to provide teams of writers with detailed outlines to work from.

Publishers Need Contributors to Series

Whether or not this is true, certainly all the publishers who deal with these series are on the lookout for writers who can contribute stories and writing skills that will fit the blueprint.

If you feel you could do this, write to the British arm of the publishers and ask for a copy of their 'Guidelines for authors' before you get too involved in your story. These guidelines tell you what the publishers are looking for and it is essential that you follow their suggestions, otherwise rejection is certain.

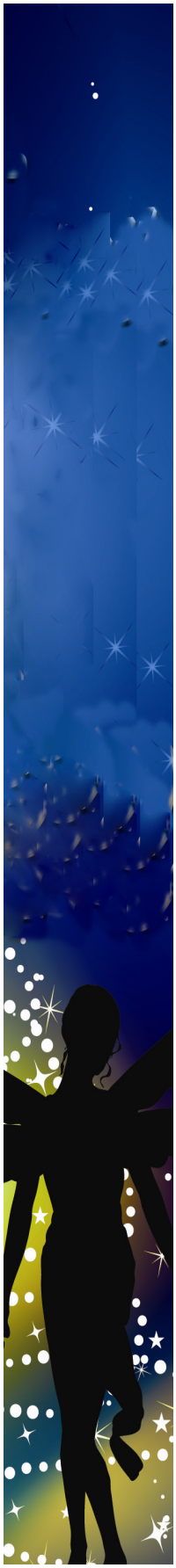
Thankfully in Britain there is still plenty of scope for the well-written one-off book for teenagers. Many publishers are still uncertain of how best to tap this market, and this makes them keen to take books based on a wide range of themes. They are also constantly aware of the desirability of series, so if your book sells well, they will want you to write more about the same characters.

First Step is Market Research

As with any other form of writing, your first task when contemplating a book for teenagers is to conduct your own market research. Go into book shops and libraries and find out what is being bought and borrowed. Even though you may not want to write for any of the popular series, read enough of them to get a good idea of what is in them.

Analyse these books by studying:

- Length (usually between 35,000 and 60,000 words) but you need to



decide what length of book you want to write.

- Storylines.
- Themes.
- Conflicts.
- Characters.
- Note what viewpoint is used and what type of voice.
- Notice, in particular, what proportion are aimed at boys and what are aimed at girls.

You will soon discover that by far the greatest number of book, are aimed at girls. Teenage boys tend, sadly, not to be great readers of fiction.

But boys will read:

- Fantasy (Zandar the Sword-bearer From The Plains of Gothlak sort of thing!).
- Science fiction.
- Books about their favourite television series.
- Sports adventures still enjoy a small but steady popularity, but not as much as they used to.

The politically correct lobby would like us to believe that this is due to sexual stereotyping, but like many of their deeply held beliefs, this is not really true. It is a fact of life that boys like the challenge of proving themselves in adventurous situations, whereas most girls are more interested in handling relationships.

This is not to say that girls do not like to imagine themselves having adventures, for they do; but they also like to read stories of romance, which most boys do not.

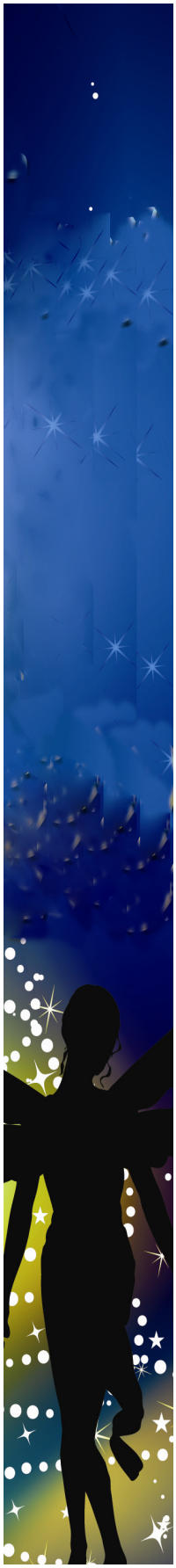
Themes

The most popular theme, or sub-theme, for teenage books is that of handling relationships.

The formats are mainly:

- In romantic stories for girls, this will be boy/girl relationships.
- In adventure stories it will be siblings or groups of friends.
- In school stories it will be peer-group relationships.
- In many other stories, it will be the familiar battle of relationships between rebellious teenagers and their parents.

This need to show characters struggling with the dilemmas of *modern* life may be one of the reasons historical stories are less popular now. **Almost all books for teenagers are set in the present day.**



Examples of these modern stories are **'The Working Class'** by **Rachel Anderson** (Oxford), where a class of fifth formers is assigned a fortnight's work experience; and **'Fashion Victim' by Holly Tate** (Knight). This is number 4 in the Bell Street School series. When Jasmine hears about a competition to find the Young Designer of the Year, she can't believe her luck. Who at Bell Street School knows more about fashion than Jas? But the rest of her design team aren't so enthusiastic, unlike rich kid Gina, who has a tempting offer to make. Jas must decide what is more important; her friends or her ambition.

'Spy Girl' books by **Carol Hedges**, **'Out of the Shadows'** and '**The Dark Side of Midnight'** are about the character Jazmin Dawson. She goes from schoolgirl to a spy girl – all in a day's work for wannabe secret agent which is described as, "an action-packed page-turner with a heart". The age range is 11+ and published by Usborne.

Some publisher's age grade their books 11+, because the libraries use this system.

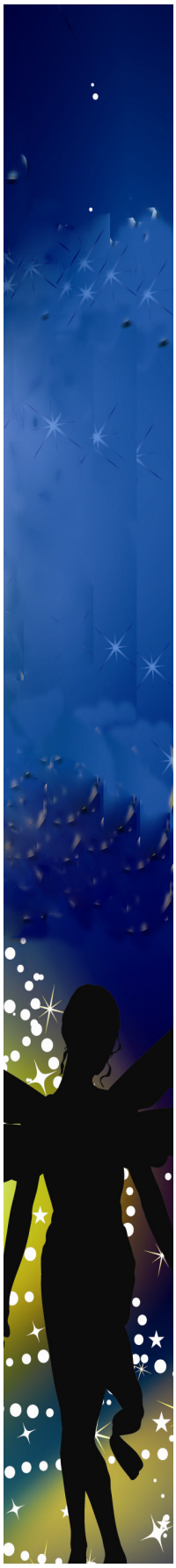
Horror stories are very popular, and the readers' enthusiasm for them seems unlikely to diminish. There are several series, each specialising in a slightly different aspect of horror, such as Scholastic's **'Point Horror'** series, with titles like **'The Return of the Vampire'**, **'Thirteen'** and **'Trick or Treat'**; Lions **'Nightmares'** series, with titles like **'Horrorscope'**, **'Nightmare Inn'** or **'Deadly Stranger'**; or **'The Power'** (Red Fox). This series by **Jesse Harris** is about a schoolgirl who is described as 'smart, pretty and psychic'. Is it a gift or a curse? Since much of this girl's time seems to be spent in dealing with death, you might think it is hardly a gift, but the readers like it!

There are also many one-off examples of this genre:

'We All Fall Down' by **Robert Cormier** (Gollancz). Four teenagers 'trash' a house in an act of mindless violence and in the process push fourteen year old Kate down the cellar steps, leaving her smashed and helpless. This is a book of tremendous force, and the horror of the first lurid description of the trashing is unforgettable.

'Ghost Songs' by **Susan Price** (Faber & Faber). Ambrosi grows up to be a storyteller and his stories are no ordinary tales, for he has lived in the branches of the Great Iron Ash and a Shaman wants him for an apprentice.

'Appointment With a Stranger' by **Jean Thesman** (Macmillan). Try as she might, Keller can't find out anything about gorgeous Tom Hurley. He saved her from drowning but she never sees him anywhere around town or at school. He only seems to exist up by the pond in the woods. There's something very strange about Tom, but she doesn't want to believe it, until she has to!



The main readership for horror stories is girls, and so most of the main characters are also girls. Many of these stories are told in the first person, except of course in those where the heroine gets bumped off along with everybody else.

The division between horror stories and ghost stories is often quite blurred. There are two main sources of horrific events:

- **Human agency** (where a psychopath targets the heroine),
- **Supernatural agency,** which may produce its effects directly to the heroine, or through a third party by some form of possession.

Writing about the supernatural is not just a matter of producing a ghost to explain unusual events. That would be another form of the 'With one mighty bound ' syndrome, the classic fall-back of the lazy writer.

You should plot these stories even more carefully than any other type of story, with the supernatural incidents recurring more frequently and becoming more serious as the story progresses.

Let's have a go at plotting a teenage horror story:

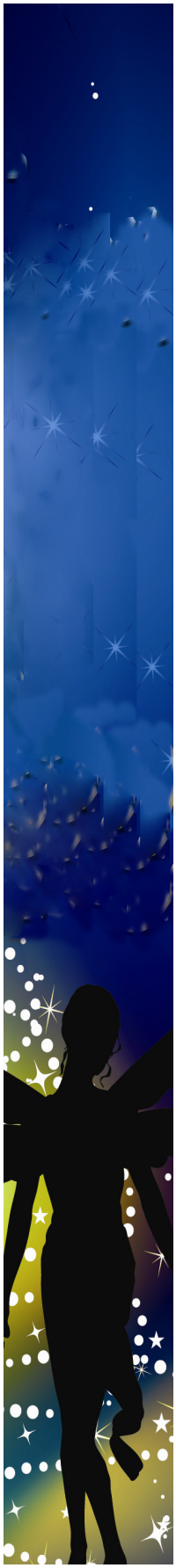
At first, you can have easily explained incidents, such as a book found on the floor, which the cat could have knocked from the table. Our heroine (let's call her Helen) didn't notice the cat in the room, but it is the likeliest explanation as nobody else has been there.

Then there is a gust of wind through the open window and the book hits the floor again. The curtain must have brushed it off the table. The fact that it lays on the floor with the pages open at the same place as last time is surely just a coincidence?

Helen's cat won't go into the room, struggling and scratching her when she carries it in. He must have frightened himself by the book. Strange, though, he's never scratched her before. Now her hand is bleeding and there's a drip of blood on the book - but when she comes back with a plaster on the scratch and a damp tissue to clean up the blood spot, she can't find the stain. She was sure it was on this page with the picture of the old house.

What is this book, anyway? Ah yes, it's the book of local history Mum got at the market last week, saying they ought to find out something about their new home. So where is this house, then? The gate posts look familiar, just like the ones down the road. There's no house there now, it must have been demolished. Helen wonders if it is the same place.

Then she dreams of the house, and herself standing in the gateway looking at it, and a scratchy voice whispering "Nell, Nell." Why should that make her wake up with a jolt, her heart racing? How silly, there's nothing to be frightened of. It must have been that cheese sandwich she ate before she went



to bed, Mum says cheese can give you bad dreams.

So why does she keep on dreaming about the house when she hasn't had cheese, and why is it that every time she dreams she is closer to the house and the open window with the curtains blowing and a feeling that something is behind her, ready to push her onwards if she stops? Why won't the scratch on her hand heal? It almost feels as though something has been sucking it - and where has that book gone?

Helen goes to see the bookseller in the market, to ask if he has another copy of the book, or any other books on local history. He tells her the stories about the house, and its sinister owners, and the governess, Nell, who disappeared without trace one stormy night. At last Helen realises that she is the focus of some malevolent force that is trying to lure her to the house.

It had nearly succeeded, too. She had intended to go and look at the overgrown garden on her way home, to see if she could trace the foundations of the house. Well, now she knows better than to do that. She will go straight home and tell Mum the whole story so they can work out what to do next.

But the bus breaks down half-way up the hill, and she has to walk home, up that road, and the clouds are getting thicker and it's getting quite dark and the wind is getting stronger and she can see the gateposts in front of her.....

If you haven't read **M R James** recently especially **'The Mezzotint'**, it's time you did!

Two other modern writers of ghost stories worth reading are **Susan Hill** especially **'The Woman in Black'** (Longman); and **Rosalind Ashe.** Her best are **'The Laying of the Noone Walker'** and **'Moths'** (Ulverscroft), where the spirit of a previous owner of the house gets closer and closer to the heroine, finally getting hold of her at a party.

Here's some of her excellent description of this event:

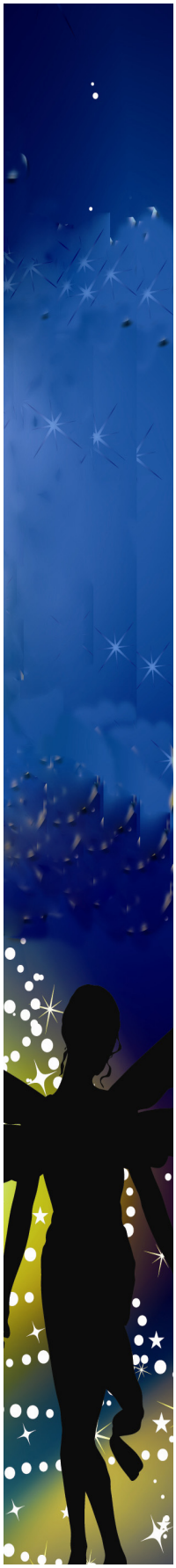
"Moving through the guests to its victim like the trail left on the retina by a swirling sparkler on bonfire night."

Apply the Standard Rules

If you want to write stories of the supernatural, you should read adult versions as well as teenage versions. There are a number of **conventions** about the supernatural world that you should not lightly break.

For instance:

- The presence of ghosts chills the air.
- Animals refuse to go into the affected area.
- Ghosts can disturb the air as they pass, or touch you, but you can't



touch them.

- They can be seen or felt or heard, but not all three together.
- When they are seen they fade in and out of sight rather than pop up fully visible.
- If the floor level has been raised since they were alive, they still walk on the level they knew, appearing to be cut off above the feet.

Yes, you *can* alter or reverse these conventions for dramatic affect, but it is not advisable.

Suspense

The most important thing to remember when writing horror stories, ghost stories and mysteries, is that they all need **a constant dose of suspense** to keep the reader turning the pages.

One of the best ways of doing this is to make your most exciting scenes span two chapters, so that the scene does not end as the chapter does. The break should come at the crucial moment of high tension, so the reader is half-way through the next chapter before they realise it.

Mysteries and Thrillers

Think of your favourite thriller writers, the ones where you take the book to bed with you intending to read a couple of chapters before you go to sleep, only to find that it's 4 a.m. and you've finished the book because you couldn't put it down.

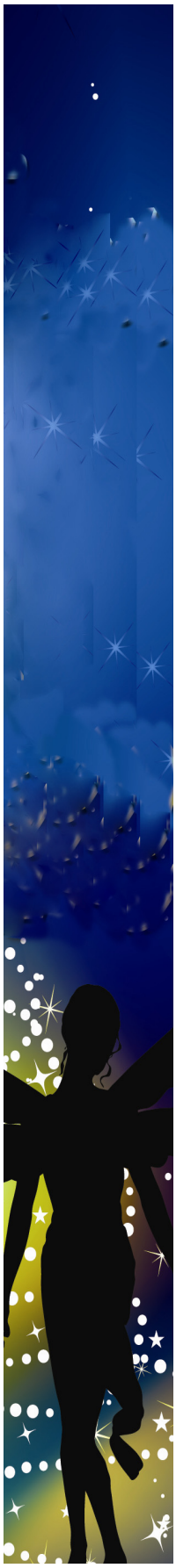
Dick Francis, Tom Clancy, Jack Higgins, Frederick Forsyth, Stephen King, best sellers all of them; all produce these un-put-downable books that draw you in and drag you to the end. Read a selection of them, paying particular attention to where they put their chapter endings.

The Cliff-Hanger

This is a good time for me to explain one of the **Top Insider Secrets…**
The best chapters end on a moment of suspense that is known as a cliff-hanger.

The cliff-hanger is where every scriptwriter has to end the dialogue or/action prior to every advertising break – to make sure viewers don't change channels. With a drama that is split into two or more parts (a serial) at the end of each part, it ends on a cliff-hanger – and has you champing at the bit to watch the next part.

The best books end their chapters on a cliff-hanger – to make sure you don't want to put the book down and never come back to it. Every good writer wants their readers to keep turning the pages. If at the end of a chapter readers are not sufficiently interested to know what happens next, why should they



continue? The answer is of course, they won't.

How to Create Cliff-Hangers

Okay, so how do you create your cliff-hangers? It is easiest, until you get the knack of it, to write the whole of the incident and then decide where to break it for the chapter ending. You may have to change a couple of sentences, either side of the break, to make it appear smoother. If you find doing this breaks the flow of your writing, leave it and sort it out when you get to the revision stage.

One of the best ways to learn how to be a great writer is to study how someone else has done it, when they are obviously a master at that skill. The writer **Dan Brown**, has this cliff-hanger technique completely mastered. His book, **'The Da Vinci Code'** is so good you don't want to put it down until the entire book is read. So, if you've only ever watched the film, I recommend you read the book, if for nothing else than to see how he divides the story into chapters.

Planting the Seeds of Doubt

Mysteries should not only be full of suspense, they must be genuinely **mysterious.** At, or quite near the beginning, you should plant the suggestion that things are not what they appear to be, that something unusual is going on.

For example:

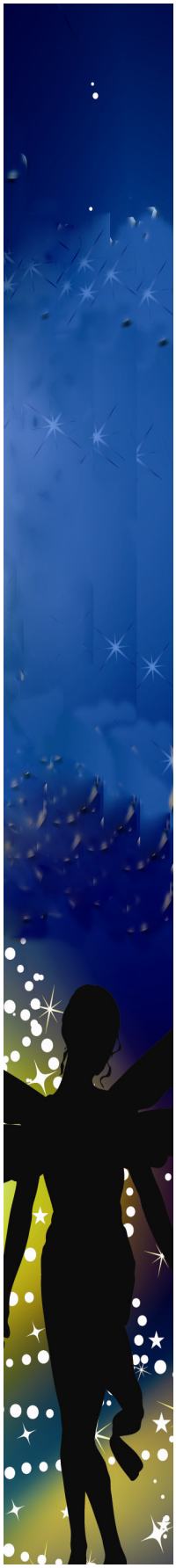
The geography master, Tim Shanks, is late one morning and is overheard telling the Head, in response to a sharp question, that he's had to come on the bus because his car had broken down. This is a reasonable enough excuse except that he had hesitated as though he was trying to think of a plausible reason for his lateness.

Then our heroine sees the car for sale on a garage forecourt. It's unmistakable, Tim Shanks is a keen rally driver and his car had lots of special equipment. Maybe, she reasons, he didn't trust it anymore and had traded it in for another one; but he turns up the next morning on a bicycle and continues to cycle to school.

The next odd thing is that he's now got a cheap plastic watch, instead of the gold designer watch that he'd won in a recent rally. He doesn't seem to have his laptop computer any more either, and he's looking worried all the time. There's definitely something odd going on here. He may have succumbed to gambling fever, or got a drug habit. Or maybe he's being blackmailed?

Red Herrings

This type of plot allows plenty of scope for red herrings and false trails in amongst the genuine clues. You need to build in some minor triumphs along the way, small mysteries that can be solved while the big one remains elusive until the very end.



The 'big one' must be something that is a real threat, too. There are many legitimate reasons why a young male teacher could need a lot of money, and not necessarily want to tell people about it. He could be in the middle of a divorce and having to pay his solicitors; he may have fallen into arrears with his mortgage and be facing eviction; or his wife or child could have been diagnosed with some dreadful illness that needs expensive treatment.

But none of these credible if mundane reasons can be 'solved' by the teenage heroine, to produce a happy ending for the teacher and comeuppance to the villains.

Let Your Teenage Characters Solve the Mystery

One of the biggest let-downs is when the teenage 'detectives' get almost to the end of the book and then meekly step aside whilst the adults take over.

The best mysteries are those which do not feature the sort of crime that needs the police to be involved at the end. This leaves the way free for your teenage 'spy' or 'detective' to solve the crime. The '**Alex Rider'** books by **Anthony Horowitz** are great spy thrillers for boys, in which the teenage hero always unmasks the criminals.

Blackmail is a useful crime for this purpose, for having discovered who the blackmailer is, the tables can be turned and the blackmailer forced to make reparations on pain of being exposed to the police.

Keeping Your Readers Guessing

Although it is not generally a good idea to seek the opinion of lay people on your work, you should ask a couple of friends to read your mysteries and tell you the point at which they were able to work out the solution for themselves.

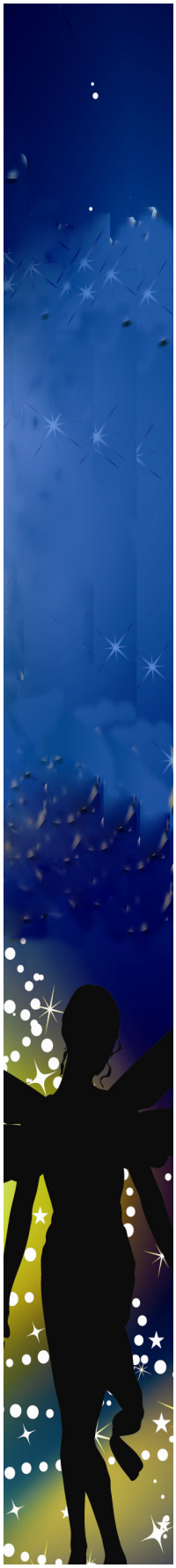
If it is too early in the story, you will have to adjust the scenes that gave the game away, or add another red herring. Of course, some people are very good at this, but don't make the mistake of thinking that the youth of your target audience means you can get away with sloppy plotting.

Other examples of good mysteries are:

'Shoot the Teacher' by **David Belbin** ('Point Crime' series from Scholastic). The head teacher at Beechwood Grange has been shot dead. Adam is new to the school, and though an outsider, finds himself thrust into the thick of a murder investigation.

The school is full of secrets, and nothing is quite what it seems - and the shootings have only just begun...

'Missing!' by **Fiona Kelly,** in the Mystery Club series (Knight). The mystery club are Holly, Belinda and Tracy, who share a love of ice cream and mystery



stories. There is no shortage of real-life mysteries for them to sort out: danger and intrigue seem to follow Holly and the Mystery Club wherever they go. This one is about theft and kidnap.

"Tracy didn't notice the car driving slowly down the street. Suddenly it accelerated and mounted the pavement right beside her. The door crashed open and a hand reached out and grabbed Tracy's arm. Sharp fingers dug into her flesh, dragging her towards the car... "

'The Talking Skull' by **Robert Arthur,** in the The 3 Investigators Mysteries series (Armada). Jupe, Pete and Bob are the Three Investigators, a unique team dedicated to cracking the mysteries no-one else can solve. In this one, they buy an antique trunk that contains a gleaming white skull. The spooky contents lead them on to a thrilling treasure hunt and into the middle of a sinister plot.

Romance

The other enormously popular subject, for an exclusively female readership, is romance. There are romance series but they are not as common as other themes. **The emphasis is very much on romance, rather than raw sex.** Editors won't let you get away with scenes that are at all explicit, and even in today's world young girls don't want to read them.

What they like is tender love scenes, with gentle kisses, not too slushily described. Heroes' lips may be warm and insistent, but not bruising. Their arms should be strong and their grip firm but not rough. Well, not often, anyway. Sometimes they can be a little rough in the grip of passion if they think she is going to leave them for another boy. In short, romance is the same today as it was in the forties, thirties, twenties and probably the last century too – and the ten before that! A thin veneer of political correctness won't change a thing!

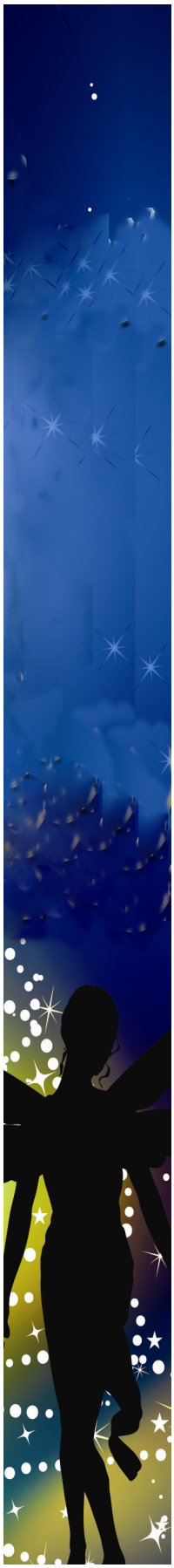
Settings for Romantic Stories

Be careful about your settings. Young people tend not to meet at parties or discos any more. Favourite meeting situations now are demonstrations, environmental meetings, sports clubs or checking exam results at the notice board.

And of course, the Internet and mobile phones play a huge part in all our lives, but especially for teenagers. They will talk online through email and chat rooms and will text each other. How many times do you see teenagers walking along the street, mobile phone clapped to their face, animatedly chatting? And they send each other photos through their mobiles etc.

It's another world now and it's their world and so any romance of today, has to include this aspect of life.

And think about what the Internet alone can be used for in the context of romantic stories. Here are just a few ideas off the top of my head:



- Searches for a ‘lost’ member of the family using the Internet (and during the search our heroine finds love).
- Meets someone from a Chat room (and maybe the heroine discovers something important about herself which changes her life and leads her to love).
- Heroine logs onto her boyfriend’s computer and discovers something that begins a chain of life-changing even life-threatening events.

All of these activities offer scope for conflict, **for the course of young love must not run smoothly.** Other girls or boys intervene, jealous scenes lead to break-ups because one party accuses the other of being more interested in winning the tennis tournament or cleaning out an old canal. Or our heroine discovers a loving text from her boyfriend on her sister’s mobile.

But of course it all comes right at the end: girl finally gets boy. Or if she doesn't, at least she has at least learnt something about boys and relationships that make her resolve to do better next time.

(Aside: It’s tough to do, but try not to ‘date’ your work with specific technology references. The Internet is obviously huge right now, but will it seem ‘old’ in five years and archaic in ten? Who knows. At one time the telephone seemed like it would never change, but read this and see if it sounds dated:

“Anne hung around the hallway hoping her parents would leave her free to make the call. She hesitantly put her finger into the number 5 on the dial. Dare she make the first move and phone him?”

Hmmm… how many homes still have the one phone in the hall? Isn’t this already a bit dated? And telephone dials? They went out years ago. And the number ‘5’ as the first number? Not these days – it would be zero. You can see there are three traps in this one short piece. Maybe four if you consider Anne to be a 1950’s name.

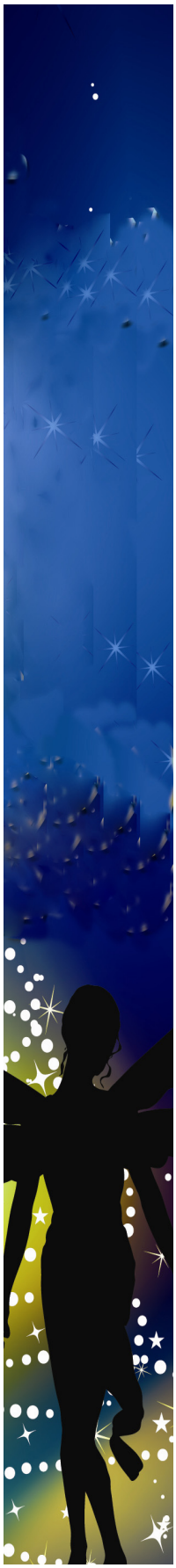
Or how about this:

Mary’s handbag was ridiculously heavy due to her new mobile phone. It had cost a month’s salary but it was worth it…

Here are some good examples of romance titles. You will see that they vary considerably in their story-lines.

'Please Don't Go' by **Peggy Woodford** (Corgi). Mary visits France and meets Antoine - handsome, twice her age and married. She also meets Joel, tall, gangly, red-haired Joel who seems to want to be more than a friend...

‘Gregory's Girl' by **Gerled Cole** (Lions). Life for Gregory is becoming more confusing by the day. Does he really love football, or does he love the latest



team member - gorgeous Dorothy of 5a? Will he score with Dorothy? Will he score at all? Who's going to be Gregory's girl?

'My Darling, My Hamburger' by **Paul Zindel** (Red Fox). How on earth do you handle a boy who wants to go all the way? Their teacher's advice is to go for a hamburger, but Liz and Maggie aren't too convinced about this. Soon events begin to get out of hand, and Liz, accused of behaving like a tramp, decides to tackle the issue her own way - with disastrous consequences.

'Crock of Gold' by **Judith Saxon** (Corgi Freeway). Addy's job at the local pottery is boring, painting identical poppies on mugs. She needs her wage packet, but Lance is just working there for the holidays. A ghost is rumoured to haunt the local museum and they go to investigate together - and suddenly anything seems possible.

'Kristi' by **Merilee Moss** (Penguin's Hot Pursuit series of romantic thrillers). It always happens when she is at home alone, the creepy phone calls, the lights out, her private things rearranged. Someone seems intent on making Kristi think she is stark staring mad and no-one believes her.

'Unleaving' by **Jill Paton** Walsh (Red Fox). For years Madge spent blissful summers at her grandmother's house in Cornwall. Then at the age of 17 she inherits the house and lets it to a university reading group. She finds the company exhilarating, and the Professor's moody son intrigues her. As their relationship develops and a horrifying event takes place, they arrive at an understanding - not only of each other but of the strange and complex nature of love.

'Two Guys Noticed Me' by **Marjorie Sharmat** (Bantam) is a light romantic comedy. Can Jody cope with two boys in her life and how can she choose between them?

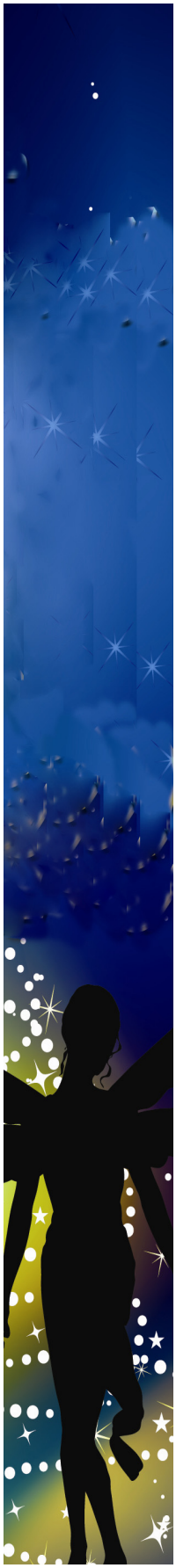
'Heartbeat' by **Norma Fox Mazer and Harry Mazer** (Mandarin Teens). This is one of the rare books with a boy as the viewpoint character. What do you do if your best friend asks you to approach the girl he fancies? Even worse, what if you like her too? It all makes for a moving story of love, friendship and conflicting loyalties.

'Grow Up, Cupid' by **June Oldham** (Kestrel). Mog claims men aren't worth the bother, but since they comprise half the human race they are hard to avoid and some, like the very visual Denis and even the forgettable Keith, have attractions which are difficult to ignore.

'Girl, Missing' by **Sophie McKenzie**, is well worth a read. It's for 12+ readers and the author got the idea for her story after a spell on the Internet.

Teenagers 3, Rest of World 0

Besides these specific categories of teenage books (and I haven't forgotten



fantasy and science fiction. I'll be concentrating on them in Lesson Ten) **there are many stories that can only be loosely categorised as 'teenagers against the rest of the world'.**

In **K.M. Peyton's 'Who Sir? Me Sir?'** (Puffin) it is a group of school-mates against the pentathlon team from a private school for rich kids, and to a certain extent against authority. Nails, one of the team, is a tearaway with a penchant for joy-riding in other people's cars.

In **'The Boy Who Wasn't There'** by **K M Peyton** (Doubleday) the main character, Arnold, a misfit who has a history of absconding from care, is described as only thinking "of the immediate present, never of the past or the future" and "at home with night-time business, he nevertheless found country dark a good deal more uneasy than town dark. He was an urban creature born and bred, street-wise, up to all the tricks. The present wide spaces, the powerful silence, the earthy, dew-dripping coldness in his nostrils, made him nervous. This was not his scene".

He finds a body in a country lake, then has to jump on the coach that is taking a junior orchestra to a concert, or be found by the police and taken back to the home.

In **'Monster in our Midst'** by **Peggy Woodford** (Macmillan), Alan and Nick live near a nuclear power station. Everyone is used to it, but then it is chosen for a nuclear dump, and the green fields will cover radioactive waste. Alan and Nick join in the protest .

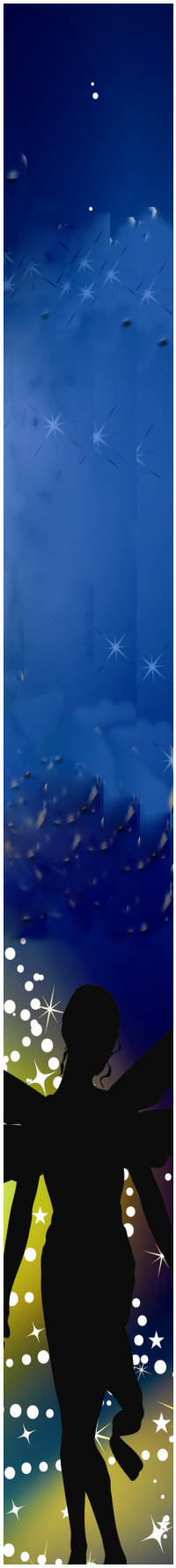
In **'Blood and Mortar'** by **Peggy Woodford** (Corgi), fifteen year old Nick is appalled when he hears that his Uncle George plans to auction the ancient thatched cottage that has been in their family for generations. His rescue attempt goes hideously wrong, and he finds himself charged with murder.

In **'Where the Quaggy Bends'** by **Chris Powling** (Lions), gang warfare centres on an old house by the river and the old man who lives in it.

Often described as misfits, or the product of the breakdown of society in inner cities, the only thing that is unusual about these rebellious teenagers is that their rebellion has taken them further than most.

Adolescents all experiment with risk taking as part of the growing up process, but some take the need to demonstrate their independence further than even they had intended. They ignore all the warnings from their parents, considering them old fuddy-duddies, frequently going out of their way to do what authority has told them they should not. In their anxiety for approval by their peers, many of them join gangs and get into a downward spiral of behaviour that can include shop-lifting, vandalism and drug-taking.

While publishers accept that this sort of behaviour is all too common, and



therefore should not be ignored, they are concerned about how it is portrayed. Few would consider a manuscript that glorified anti-social behaviour, or showed it in any way that would encourage readers to copy it. **If you involve your main characters in these activities, you should show them drifting into it inadvertently, and realising the stupidity of it before the end of the book.**

Any type of teenage fiction, no matter what its main theme, should have a sub-theme of **character growth** in the main characters.

The Teenager's World

The main fear of teenagers, whether male or female, is the fear of rejection, and many of their agonies are based on the erroneous belief that it is the externals of appearance by which they are judged.

For example:

- A spot on the face before an important date seems like the end of the world, and convinces the sufferer that the wretched thing is flashing at the world like an oscillating beacon.
- Girls and now, boys worry about their weight.
- Girls despair because their hair is a nondescript colour.

Even their parents are cruel and insensitive, telling them that the world is full of boys and they've plenty of time!

If any of this comes as news to you, you should not think of writing for teenagers until you have spent some time observing a representative sample.

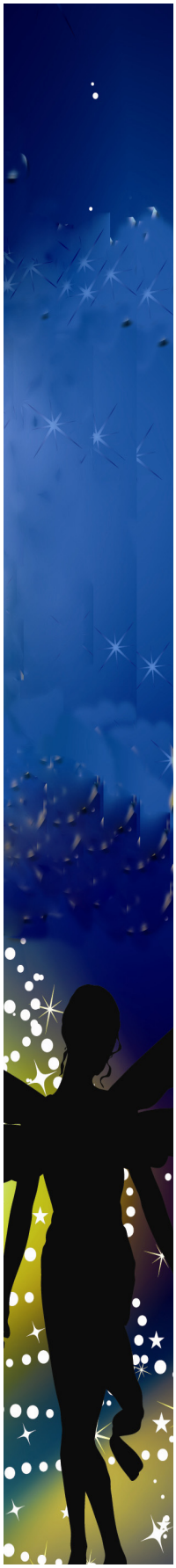
Notice the way they hang around in groups, hoping something interesting will happen to dispel the feeling that everyone else is having fun, fun, fun whilst life is passing *them* by.

See if you can spot the girls who have obviously altered their appearance since they left home and the disapproving eye of their parents; with over-thickly applied make-up and skirts rolled over at the waist-band to make them shorter.

Boy Meets Girl

Watch the movements of the age-old pre-pairing parades that take place on Saturdays in High Streets and shopping precincts, as boys and girls stroll up and down in small groups. They pretend to ignore each other, but if you look closely you will see that they are using what the body language experts call 'gesture clusters'. Each gesture is like a single word that you can add to other words to make a sentence.

Boys put together a cluster of gestures with hands in pockets, head down and



slouching along or leaning on a wall. They are really saying: "I want you to think I don't care about girls". Alternatively, if they want to attract girls in general, rather than a particular one, they pull their stomachs in, straighten their backs, puff out their chests, smooth their hair and even brush imaginary dust off their clothes, all of these gestures say: "Look what a fine fellow I am!"

Some of the more aggressive ones make overt sexual display signals, sitting or standing with spread legs and hands arranged with thumbs in their belts and fingers pointing down at their genitals.

Girls respond to this by giggling to disguise their nervousness. They lean on their friends or push them to say "Isn't he awful?"

Sexually experienced older girls, will respond to the male displays with a cool stare and may look pointedly from the boy's face to his crotch and back to his face with a knowing look.

Top Insider Tip…

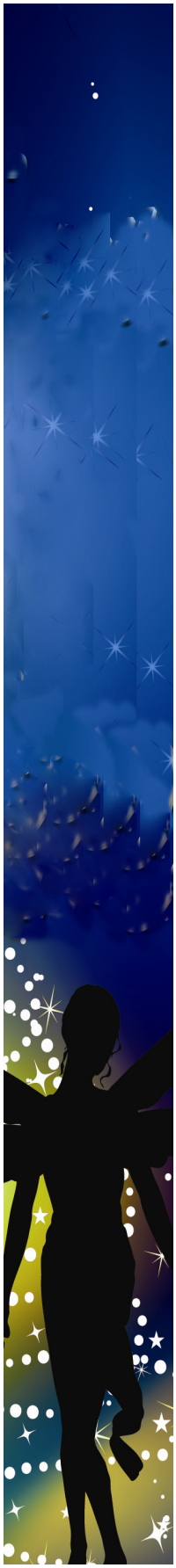
Neither your heroine, nor her friends, would dream of behaving like this, but they may know someone who does...

Here are some examples of what nice, ordinary, girls and boys do:

- The girls preen in more or less the same way as the boys.
- Girls with generous bosoms are less likely to put their shoulders back than their smaller friends.
- Lumpy bosoms are not the result of some dread disease, but of socks in the brassiere!
- Girls toss their head to flick their hair back, or twiddle a strand with their fingers.
- With a lowered head, girls glance sideways from under their eyelashes, look away, then take another peek.
- Girls avidly read magazines that tell them how to flirt like this, and then they practise for hours in front of their bedroom mirrors.
- Teenagers spend hours on the telephone to their friends, but to their parents they can be mono-syllabic, although girls are not so bad as boys.
- Teenagers of both sexes listen incessantly to music. They all own i-Pods and have their own choices of ring tones for their mobile phones (note both i-Pod and ringtones may become very ‘yesterday’ very soon!).

The Role of Music in Teenagers’ Lives

Many teenagers seem unable to concentrate on their homework without loud music surrounding them. Although you may not care for the music, it is worth



listening to the lyrics of the latest pop songs. A lot of them portray the world as teenagers see it, and you may gain some insights.

However, because pop music changes so fast steer clear of fine details in your stories of what is currently fashionable, for fear of dating your book.
Some aspects remain constant though and they are:

- Guitars and drums are common (so if your hero or heroine is a guitarist, drummer or singer, you're on safe ground).
- Groups have been called groups (or bands) and played 'gigs' for over 40 years so you're probably safe there too.
- You will be safe enough mentioning the Beatles and the Stones (as the bands the previous generation liked) but as far as other groups and their songs are concerned, it is safer to make up your own names and titles as they will be yesterday's news before the ink dries on your first print run.

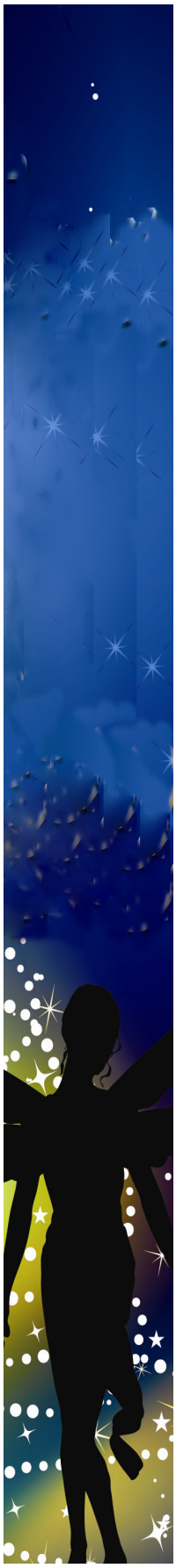
You're almost certainly safe mentioning 'incessant driving rhythm' as rhythm will always be at the base of music – even in one thousand years! Don't mention particular music genres by name as current, e.g. rap, drum and bass, garage, house and suchlike. They will be dead, dead, dead probably by the time you read this, let alone in ten years.

It is also best to invent your own fashion crazes.

For example over the last fifty years there's been all of these fashion crazes – and I've probably missed some - (often linked with music, fashion models and fashion designers):

- Teeny Boppers.
- Beatniks.
- Teddy Boys.
- Bikers and Hells Angels.
- Hippies and Flower Power.
- Mary Quant (fashion designer) look.
- Vidal Sassoon (hairdresser) and Twiggy (model) look.
- Jean Shrimpton (model) look.
- Skinhead.
- Punk.
- Grunge.
- Goth.

The only thing you can be sure of is that there will be other crazes that adults will think equally outrageous. Let your imagination run riot. As long as it is not indecent, anything is possible.



Who would have believed, when you were young, that teenagers would ever wear safety pins through their noses and red, green and blue hair like giant cockscombs? Or, completely black outfits, usually topped with a long black coat and purple-black lipstick with masses of black mascara and eyeliner?

The same goes for the causes which teenagers support so avidly. Motorway protests, environmental issues and animal rights will probably carry on for a long time as a general principle, but will laboratories still use animals for experiments, or live animals be exported for meat?

All you can be sure of is that teenagers are convinced that adults have allowed dreadful things to be done, which the teenagers will put right in the brave new world they intend to create... (Hmmm. Didn't we want to do that too? How come it didn't happen?!)

Teenage Magazine Fiction

There is hardly any market for prose fiction for boys in magazine form. The main market is short stories for girls, and this translates into short *romantic* stories. You will find, when you study the magazines, that some feature serials, but these are commissioned from experienced writers. **Magazines will not consider serials submitted by unpublished writers.**

Always write first to the fiction editor to enquire whether they will consider unsolicited work from freelancers, and also ask for a copy of their guidelines. These will tell you their preferred length (from 1000 to 2500 words) and suggest that you familiarise yourself thoroughly with the magazine before you start. **They will also tell you what type of themes they prefer and if there are any themes they do not want.**

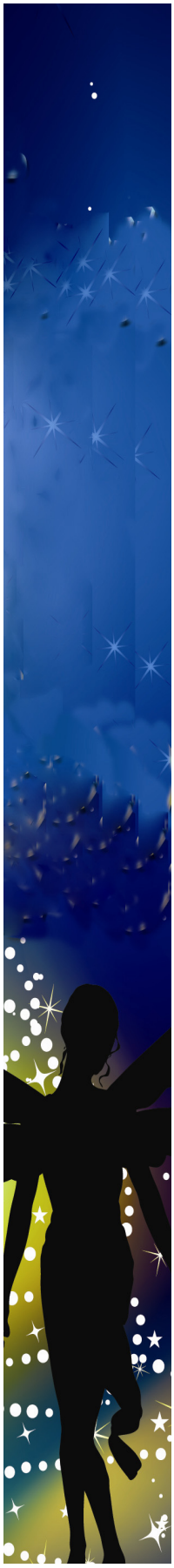
In general they do not want:

- Tales of gloom which includes AIDS and stories about the effects of drugs and broken homes.
- Stories that treat sex irresponsibly. That includes explicit scenes and considering unprotected sex.

If you read the whole magazine, especially the agony columns, you will find that the readers' concerns are much more commonplace but very real to them nevertheless.

You should set your stories in the modern day, and because they will be printed within a few months of your writing them, you **can mention current crazes and fashions without fear that they will date**. Of course, if the magazines reject your story you should check this point before you send it out again.

Your female characters should be between thirteen and eighteen years old, and depending on the magazine, older girls may be working. Your heroines are



meant to be like the readership, so of course they will be witty and charming, although they may be a little shy with boys.

Ideally you should write your story in the first person ("I first realised I was in love with Tony when..." rather than "Mary first realised she was in love with Tony when..").

A fairly standard format is:

- To start the story with a dramatic high point – Act I – Beginning.
- Then use a flashback to explain what caused it – Act II – Middle.
- Finally, returning to the present day for the ending – Act III – End.

Flashbacks are easy enough to do by changing the form of your verbs. Start with the simple past tense (e.g. 'he told me'), change to the pluperfect (e.g. 'he had been cheating on me'), then go back to the simple past tense for the ending.

The "he's been seeing another girl" or "I thought he'd been seeing another girl but I was wrong" story-lines are quite common. Another classic story-line is "I never thought the best looking boy in town would fancy a little mouse like me", as is "He's more interested in his silly football (cricket, etc.) than he is me". Another is "He's a bad lot – everyone knows it. But deep down he's an okay guy, only I can see this and save him…" (Rrrright… Can we call that the triumph of hope over experience?)

Settings

Exotic settings are always popular, although holiday locations in Europe are generally more credible than those further away. Older heroines may be working abroad, as nannies or hotel staff, and that offers scope for romances with local boys as well as visiting English boys.

Just be careful, if you choose to set your stories abroad that you know something about the country you are writing about.

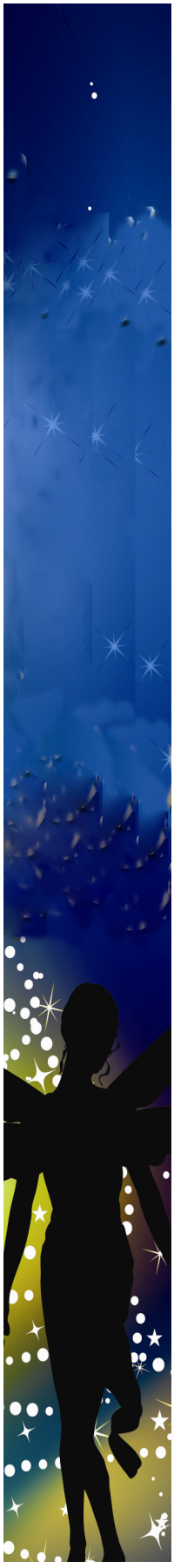
If you don't know about your chosen location but really want to set your story there, use the Internet. Simply type in "tourist information" and the country and you should get reams of text and pictures – more than enough for the location to be real enough for you to write convincingly.

That will make certain you don't make a mistake like stating that Seville is in France or locate a bull-fight in Italy.

The Confession Story

An interesting and popular form of magazine story is the **confession** story.

You *must* write this in the first person, and ideally in a style that suggests a teenager confiding in her best friend. The theme is always one of the narrator



telling us how she made a mistake and what she has learnt about life as a result. She is passing this lesson on to the readers so that they won't make the same mistake, and she is truly sorry for what she has done.

In most cases, her 'crime' will have been triggered by jealousy. This could be jealousy of another girl who is succeeding with the boy she wants, or jealousy of a rival at school or the sports club. The results of her action should not be life-threatening, but they should be self-evident so you do not have to moralise too much.

These confessions are not the true-life stories they pretend to be, but some writers specialise in them and write nothing else. You will not get a by-line, but you might like to try your hand at them.

Copyright, Moral Right and Public Lending Right

Many new writers are confused by copyright and in particular by what they should do to protect their work.

In the UK and Europe, you do not have to do anything at all. Copyright in original works of prose, poetry, music, etc. **exists from the moment of creation** and lasts for the lifetime of the creator plus seventy years. The idea that you have to register your copyright with a central body, or lodge a copy of your book with your bank or solicitor is incorrect, as is the suggestion that you have to post a copy of your manuscript to yourself and keep the sealed envelope intact.

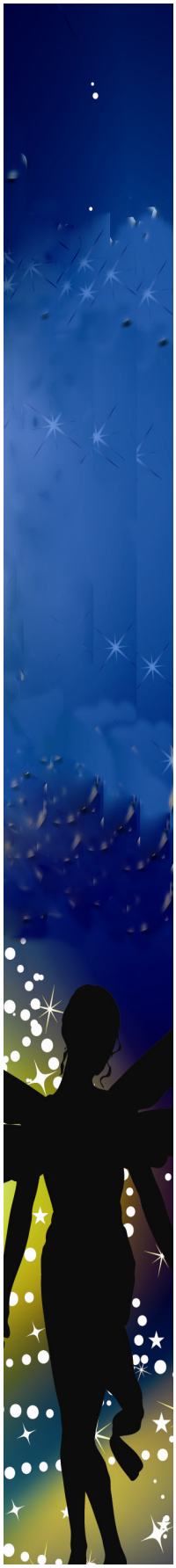
The only reason for doing any of this is to be able to demonstrate when you wrote the book, and the only reason for needing that proof is if there is a court case over infringement. Although there have been a couple of cases recently where authors have alleged publicly that another author has stolen their ideas this is such a rare occurrence that you just do not need to worry about it.

There is no copyright in ideas or plots, only in the form of words used in the actual book, and in these recent cases it is the plots that have been in dispute, not the words of the text. You could write a novel about a school of wizardry and witchcraft attended by boys and girls who want to learn magic – and not have the slightest problem from J K Rowling's lawyers. I would not advise this, of course!

Can You Trust Publishers?

Some beginner writers are concerned that publishers will 'steal' their ideas; rejecting their book and then getting another author to write one on the same theme. This is pure paranoia. Publishers simply do not do this. They would not stay in business long if they indulged in such practices, and the fact is that they have no need to resort to these underhand methods.

There is no shortage of ideas for book plots, so there is no need to 'steal' ideas for this reason - and if they have to pay someone to write the book, why pay



anyone other than the person who thought of it first?

A new writer who has good ideas is someone to be nurtured and encouraged, not fobbed off and cheated, so don't worry about it.

All of that said, it is normal practice to put, on the title page of your manuscript 'Copyright Jane Doe 2010.'

Don't confuse copyright with your moral right to be identified as the author of your books. You will have seen the paragraph on the title pages of books that says 'Jane Doe has asserted her moral right, etc.'

The purpose of this is to allow you to sell your copyright* and still be eligible for Public Lending Right, which goes to the person or people whose name appears on the title page. PLR is a government scheme that pays a small amount to the author every time their books are borrowed from Public Libraries.

You have to register with the Public Lending Right office (the address is in the Writers and Artists Yearbook) every time you have a book published, giving the full details.

*It is not normally a good idea to sell your work outright. It rarely happens with children's books, but there are some publishers of adult fiction who produce books for libraries only, who only operate on the 'flat fee' basis.

Pen Names

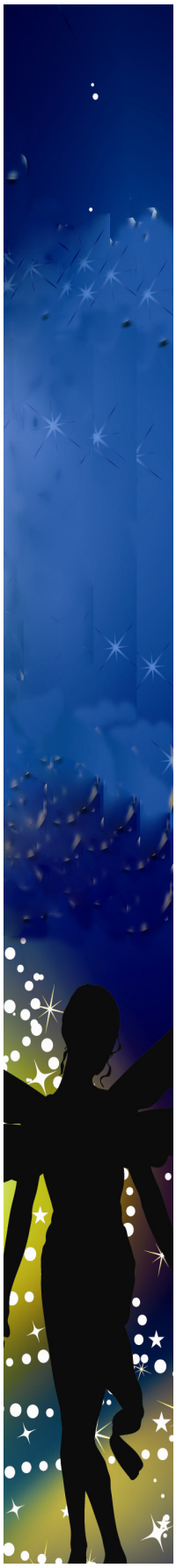
While most writers use their own name, some prefer to use a pen name. Unless you have some reason for keeping your identity a secret from your public, there is no real reason to use one unless your own name is:

- Difficult to pronounce,
- So like a common name that people tend to get it wrong (for example, Jines),
- The same as another well-known author or could be confused with such (e.g. Steven King, John Robert Rowling etc.).

The only other reason is that some authors who write several different types of books prefer to keep them separated in the public's mind with different names.

For example, when **Edith Pargeter**, who writes serious novels of medieval history, started to write modern detective stories, she did so under the name **Ellis Peters**. When she combined the two and started writing about the medieval detective monk, **Brother Cadfael**, she continued to use the latter name.

If you elect to use a pen name to preserve your privacy, be sure to tell your publisher and they will take care to keep the secret. You do not need to go to



the length of keeping your real identity secret from them, as if you do so you will have to make arrangements with your bank to accept cheques in the new name. You will also have to tell the Inland Revenue, and ensure that your will informs your executors of the name.

Finally, you will have to inform the Registrar of Public Lending Right.

Your publishers, and the editors of any magazine you write for, will need to know of your pen name at the very beginning. The best way to deal with this is to put your pen name on the title page of your manuscript, with your real name underneath it in brackets.

Developing a good style

It is not easy to define style. The dictionary says it is a manner of writing, but that isn't very helpful.

I have written this course in a friendly style, to make its contents easily accessible to you. Some people might call it a 'me to you' style.

'Three Men in a Boat' by **Jerome K Jerome** is written in what Edwardians found an exquisitely comic style, but what is, to the modern reader, still funny but rather laboured. There have been many imitations of this style, which tend to be less funny and more laboured.

Raymond Chandler's style is laconic, a matter of fact recital of desperate deeds, narrated by a world weary man.

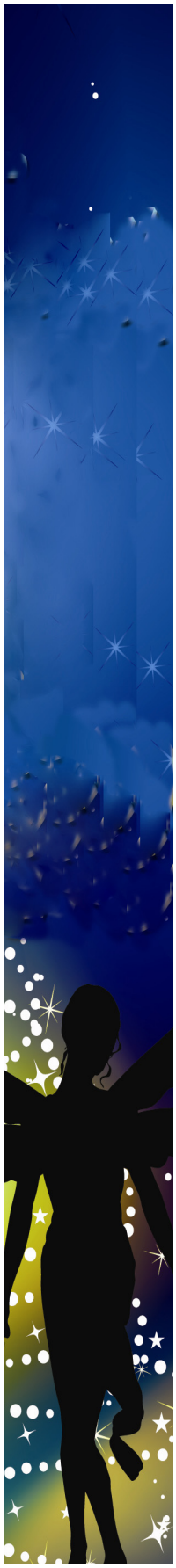
Enid Blyton's style was, certainly by our modern standards, little short of patronising. At the time she was merely continuing the cloying tone in which many adults, and all of the BBC, addressed children, but it must have annoyed many of them even then. Try saying "Well children, *wasn't* that a silly thing to do?" to a modern child and you will be likely to receive a rude two word response.

You will develop your own style as you practice your craft, and ideally that style should typify you as a person.

Your style will grow from:

- Your own personality.
- The way you view life.
- Your social situation and upbringing.
- Your education.
- Your beliefs.
- The quality of your imagination.

If you are a happy, outgoing sort of person, with a good sense of humour, you



will have little difficulty in developing the lively style that modern youngsters like.

If you are not all of these things, you will just have to work at it a little harder.

Style is essentially a matter of how you put words together, but the effect you should always seek is **clarity** - and that requires careful choice of words. Remember that words should be **precision instruments.**

Although English is a wonderful language to write in, because of the many alternatives for every word, it also offers opportunities for unclear writing. There are so many similar words, that a hasty or lazy writer can use the wrong one and muddy the waters.

For example, here is a statement which to us means the opposite of what its writer intended:

"Clarity is the hallmark of juvenile writing."

Unfortunately, 'hallmark' can also mean 'stamp' and 'juvenile' is used more frequently to mean 'childish'. So the sentence comes across as 'clarity is the stamp of childish writing'.

The writer probably meant:

“The mark of good writing for young people is clarity.”

Here are some other words that may carry the same dictionary definitions, but which, by usage, mean different things:

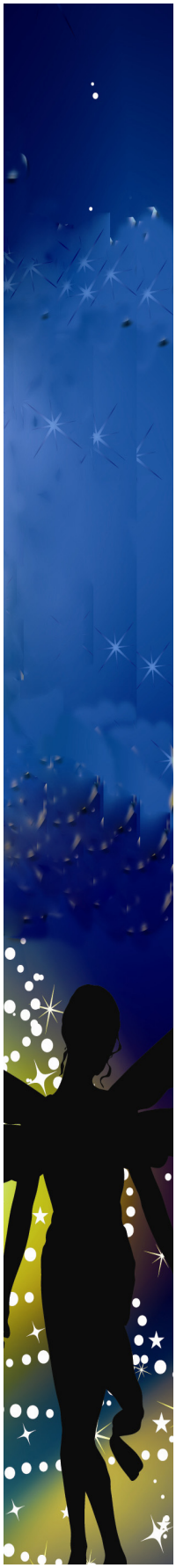
that/which	especially/particularly	live/reside
buy/purchase	anticipated/expected	kill/slay
start/begin	escape/flee	wreck/destroy

Look each of these words up in a full dictionary (not a pocket version) and then see if you can think of any others.

It doesn't matter too much if you use one or two words that are not quite right for the job you want them to do, but if you consistently mis-use the same words, or mis-use many words your writing will be woolly, like a photograph that is badly out of focus.

So choose your words with accuracy and use them with restraint. Many beginner writers get carried away with enthusiasm and overstate everything they say. They leave nothing to the reader's imagination, as they sprinkle adverbs and adjectives liberally through the writing.

This 'over-egging the pudding' occurs most often in dramatic passages,



but often it slows the action down because it takes so long to read.

Here are some examples:

'He ran very fast'. It would be better to say 'He dashed' or 'he sprinted'.

'She hit him violently'. 'She struck him' would be better.

'She pulled herself from his restraining hands'. 'She tore herself free' would be better.

Another aspect of over-enthusiasm is the use of **superfluous** words. Known as 'tautology', this involves using extra words that are meant to emphasise but are redundant, or say almost the same thing as the original word.

Examples:

- 'Green grass'.
- 'White snow'.
- 'Red blood'.
- 'A great big giant'.
- 'Huge, towering mountains'.
- 'All at once she suddenly realised'.
- 'In a flash, he instantly grabbed'.
- 'He nodded his head' (What else would he nod?).

Create Unusual Images

Finally, a good style is one that **avoids clichés** and finds its own way of creating images.

For example, a teenage girl could be embarrassed by her aunt who, despite being over sixty, insists on wearing teenage fashions. The obvious cliché is 'mutton dressed as lamb', but not only is that a cliché, it doesn't reveal the full embarrassment potential. How about this instead:

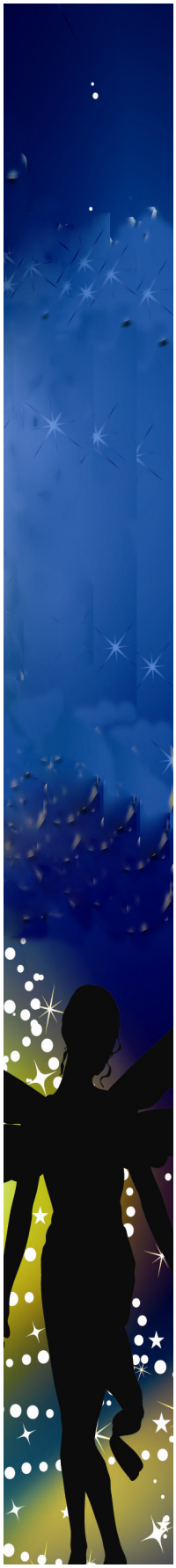
“Auntie Margaret wore mini-skirts above varicose veined legs and trendy long earrings that only served to draw attention to her wrinkled neck.”

Don't go overboard with these images though, or you will slow the narrative - and don't use too many of them, for the same reason. However good your style, you are primarily meant to be **a story-teller, not an essayist**.

Common Mistakes

Showing off

It may seem strange to think that people who are new to the craft of writing



could be confident enough in their ability to show off, but it does happen. The problem is that the show-offs tend to do certain things which editors recognise and instantly label as showing-off, and you might inadvertently do the same things and earn the label when you do not deserve it.

For instance, there is the practice of **filling your writing with references to art, music, or literature.**

Even if you do not intend it this way, unless your story hinges on these subjects, it looks as though you are saying: "Look how well educated and clever I am. I know all about these important artistic things".

Closely allied to this are the **loving over-long descriptions of the artistic works and the feelings they induce in your characters**. Now it seems you are not only saying how well educated you are but also, "Look how sensitive I am. I have a deep understanding of the meaning of art/music/literature".

Then there is the **excessive use of unusual words in the narrative**. You can use them in the speeches of a character whom you mean to be a pretentious ass. Otherwise, all they say is "Look how clever I am. I know all these long words".

Or there are the **unnecessary comments on the human condition** that say "Look how profound I am", or the twee passages that say "Look how cute I am". Or there is the **excessively grammatically correct writing** that is meant to say "Look how well I can write" but which really says "Look how rigidly pedantic I am".

Finally there is the ultimate sin of using **words or phrases from a foreign language**, usually French. This says "Look what a clever linguist I am". Don't do it!

In short, anything that says between the lines, "Look at me, writing", is a bad idea. It is like an actor whose words and gestures say "Look at me, acting".

Your function as a writer in any area is to get your message across to your readers, and that message should never be a declaration of your abilities. If your writing is good, it will be obvious without you having to labour the point.

So good luck with your writing and above all, have fun with it until next month. See you then!

Scott Thornton