

TOP PICTURE BOOK TIPS

by Rose Inserra

Barbara Seuling began her Los Angeles presentation on picture books by stressing the importance of a good pitch. Start by writing a good cover letter. It should be like a polite handshake. When you're selling picture books, you're selling yourself and showing your voice. Send the manuscript to a specific editor and target publishing houses who have similar books to yours. The U.S. publishing house are huge and have many imprints, so it's important to find out exactly who to send it to. Most importantly enclose a self-stamped addressed envelope. For Australian authors, find a friend in the States and ask them to send you some US stamps. Two 33 cents stamps is the correct amount for a business size envelope. Enclose more if you want the manuscript returned.

Reasons for rejections –

1. Not enough story, too slight.
2. Story is told through the adult's eyes.
3. Poor research.
4. Unoriginal ideas. Nothing is new. You must find a way to make it fresh and new.
5. Theme not suitable for a picture book. Think of what appeals to a six year old.

Other tips:

- Clarify the story line. Be sure it's clear to you first. In 25 words or less write down a summary of the story with a beginning, middle and end.
- Don't underestimate children. Be realistic and give them an honest view of the world.
- Revise lots. This shapes your book. You must always keep looking until it's perfect.
- Think visually. The story must have pictures for illustrators to draw. It must be written so that the page can turn.
- Make a dummy book for yourself. 32 pages is the typical picture book size. To set it up: Get 16 pieces of paper. Layout your book. Leave one page in front and back. See how your words fit into that space.
- Best advice: Take frequent breaks and go on holidays to refresh your writing and replenish with creativity.

This last piece of advice from Barbara will not get an argument from me.

Rose Inserra has worked as an editor, publisher and author and she has lost count of the number of books she has in print. 'Dictionary of Dreams' is her latest top selling book. Dynamic, innovative and imaginative, Rose can be contacted at: rose.inserra@bigpond.com