

PIECING TOGETHER A PICTURE BOOK One Writer's Way



The first two squares with a mouth, eye, ear, nose and hand are to emphasize the importance of looking at the world through all of my senses. Words are all I have to place a reader in my story's world. Describing how a barn looks is not enough. For vivid reading, I must write about the smells, sounds, tastes and touch of it.

The tree and window square represent taking time to daydream and trying different ways to stimulate my imagination. I like to ask myself, "What if?" Then I put two things together that would never be and see what happens. For example, what if a snail could cook? It's fun playing with different possibilities and having a story develop.

The quilt in the next square signifies the importance of writing about what I know. I love quilts. Every room in our house has something I quilted. In fact, I'm so quilt crazy, I once even wallpapered an entire room with tiny squares of fabric. Eventually I wrote two books about patchwork and quilts. The strongest writing comes from things I care passionately about. That's why I don't worry about another writer writing my story. Only I can write about things that matter to me.

The last square on the first row is my going-for-a-walk square and is to demonstrate that good writing ideas are all around. On my walks, I've been inspired to write about feet and shadows and even water. Ideas don't have to be big and/or important. There are plenty of ideas in everyday life for poems and stories.

In the second row, the first square shows how sometimes ideas don't come to me. Then I leave home in my car, or by bus, or bike and go searching. I might interview someone or just go out and experience the world outside my home.

The next square of books on a shelf signifies the importance of research, not only in the writing after one has an idea, but also as inspiration for writing. Perhaps I find an area that is not covered in present-day books. Maybe reading a non-fiction book about dogs inspires me to tell a fictional story about a dog. Libraries are one of my favorite places.

The next square is especially important to me, because I write for children but no longer have young children at home. For my books to sound contemporary, I make sure

that I hang out with kids at my local zoo (or perhaps the park, playground, or shopping mall.) Listening to kids' speech patterns, their interests and concerns also gives me ideas.

And when I get an idea, it is just like a light bulb going off in my head.

I get out the pad of paper I always carry with me so ideas can't get lost and forgotten in the clutter of my mind.

We're now on the third row. I always carry a pen, too, so I can write immediately. That way I won't forget. All of my first drafts are done with pen and paper.

I start, using the only tool all writers have—the letters of our alphabet. Think of the incredible variety of writing we have gotten using just those 26 letters.

Of course, I don't like what I write the first time, or maybe even the 2nd or 3rd or 27th time. That's when a wastebasket comes in handy to crumple up my paper and start again . . . and again . . .

Finally though I get something that feels pretty good. That's when I go to my computer and type up my story. I'm on a real high, sure that my newest writing is wonderful.

But, the next day I read my story. UGH! The first version is never as great as it was when it was in my head, so I change into the spider on the first square of the fourth row. Instead of going over and over and over a web to patch up holes and make it strong, I go over and over my story trying to make improvements. It's not unusual for me to completely rewrite a story 50 times.

During my spider phase I drink a lot of hot apple cider to help the time pass quickly.

Writing is snail slow. Sometimes a story takes months, even years, to get right.

But finally my story is right and I print up a wonderful mistake-free copy and . . . We're now down to the last row where I mail it off to a publishing company.

Sadly, very often the story comes back to me, dropped by my letter carrier into the mail slot in my garage door. It's hard not to get discouraged. 180 of my manuscripts (18 different stories) came back to me, before I sold my first book.

But one day the phone rings and an editor calls to buy my story. HOORAY! THREE CHEERS! and WHOOPEE!

Now it's time for the artist to go to work. Here you see the artist's brush and palette of paints. I rarely meet the artist who illustrates my books and rarely have anything to say about who that illustrator will be. That's the choice of the editor working at the publishing company.

Finally after anywhere from one and one-half years (which is very quick) to sometimes even five years, I will receive a finished, published book with hopefully lots of starred reviews.

A stylized signature of "Anne Whitford Paul" in a cursive font, written in white on a green oval background.

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