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Chapter 07: American Typo

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THE INSIDE, OUTSIDE, AND UPSIDE DOWNS OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

From Poets and Pop-ups to
Princesses and Porridge

Jenifer Jasinski Schneider, Ph.D.

The Inside, Outside, and Upside Downs of Children's Literature: From Poets and Pop-ups to Princesses and Porridge

Jenifer Jasinski Schneider, Ph.D.

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HOT TOPICS AND CURIOUS QUANDARIES

SECTION 2

CHAPTER 07

AMERICAN TYPO

(GHOST, FAN, SERIAL, AND CELEBRITY
WRITERS—AND ILLUSTRATORS)

Natural Born Serial Killers

Series books are a “menace” (Kinlock, 1935); they capture “swaggering and infantile art,” (Powell, 1917), and their content will “blow out boys’ brains” (Mathiews, 1914). In the early years of the American Library Association, some librarians believed series books killed the creative spirit and allowed readers to wither in redundancy. Church leaders, civic associations, and parents agreed.

**SERIES BOOKS
ARE A MENACE**

**SERIES BOOKS WILL
BLOW OUT BOYS’ BRAINS**

Certainly, modern sensibilities have changed the perceptions of literary experts.
Certainly not!

Modern cultural critics are often quoted about the embedded racism or outright sexism associated with series books. Literary scholars detest the repetitive plots and stagnant characters. Teachers, on the other hand, have found that consistent characters and simplified plot structures are supportive vehicles for children who struggle with or who are disinterested in reading, especially boys (Senn, 2012). However, boys are often bullied away from particular book series due to the content (e.g., see Shannon Hale’s essay on the exclusion of boys: <http://oinks.squeetus.com/2015/02/no-boys-allowed-school-visits-as-a-woman-writer.html>)

What a double standard for boys! Girls have no problem reading “boy” books (you know I don’t believe in such a thing, but for the sake of argument, stay with me), but boys can’t read girl books? Let kids read. Why so judgy?

Love them or hate them. Series books are different things to different people. And many series have solid stories and high literary values in addition to all kinds of fan-love.

A Series Sampler

In a previous chapter, I read *Olivia* (Video 7.1).

Video 7.1 *Olivia*, by Ian Falconer <http://www.kaltura.com/tiny/rths0>

Now find out what happens when she goes to the circus (Video 7.2).

Video 7.2 *Olivia Saves the Circus* by Ian Falconer <http://www.kaltura.com/tiny/xpzo2>

Or, perhaps you've developed a Math Curse (Video 7.3)?

Video 7.3 Math Curse by Jon Scieszka and illustrated by Lane Smith <http://www.kaltura.com/tiny/jfcxf>

Science Verse, by Jon Scieszka and illustrated by Lane Smith (Video 7.4)?

Video 7.4 Click, Clack, Moo: Cows that Type by Doreen Cronin and illustrated by Betsy Lewin
<http://www.kaltura.com/tiny/s4rlm>

How about a duck and some cows? Are you interested in what Clicks, Clacks, or Moos (Video 7.5)?

Video 7.5 Click, Clack, Moo: Cows that Type by Doreen Cronin and illustrated by Betsy Lewin
<http://www.kaltura.com/tiny/t57dm>

Haven't had enough? How about cows that quack, snooze, and Dooby-Dooby-Moo (Video 7.6)?

Video 7.6 Dooby Dooby Moo by Doreen Cronin and illustrated by Betsy Lewin <http://www.kaltura.com/tiny/v3gb1>

These books are certainly not the stuff to cause menace or the blowing of brains. What's the problem?

In this chapter, I focus on how series books are made and how their creators become serial writers or illustrators. It has a lot to do with success, time, opportunity, and demand. Of course, series books are tied to audience reception and sales, but is there something inherently valuable that attracts readers in the first place? What do you notice about the books I just shared with you?

Number of Sales

Many scholars, librarians, and teachers dislike series books for their stilted plots, flat characters, and predictable dialogue (e.g., Zipes, 2002, p. 171). As Caroline Hewins wrote: “The series habit should not be encouraged” (1915, p. 10). But it's hard to disagree with the numbers.

- In 2013, Veronica Roth's series of three books about a dystopian future, *Divergent*, *Insurgent*, and *Allegiant* sold 6.7 million copies: 3 million hardcover, 1.7 million paperback and 2 million ebook.
- In 2012, Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* trilogy sold 27.7 million copies: 15 million print books and 12.7 million e-books (Roback, 2013).
- In 2011, *The Hunger Games* books found their audience and sold 9.2 million copies.
- In 2010, Jeff Kinney's *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* sold 11.5 million, followed by Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson* series, which sold over 10 million copies.
- In 2009, *Twilight* was the winner with 26.5 million copies sold.

What comes first: the series or the success?

Number of Uses

What is it about series books that makes them so appealing? As we know, sales are not indicative of quality. So perhaps the success of a series rests with different numbers.

Success could stem from the number of classroom uses. For example, some children's books are trolled for vocabulary keywords (Liang, 2015). Others are reread to build vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency (Korat, 2010). Some books are read, and deplored, for their focus on banal topics that are ironically entertaining for children (McKenzie, 2005) (Figure 7.1). And some teachers use series books to support vocabulary acquisition for second language learners (Cho & Krashen, 1994).

Figure 7.1

Come on! Who isn't laughing at this cover and concept? Artie Bennett also wrote *Poopendous* and *Belches, Burps, and Farts, Oh My!* Cover from *The Butt Book* by Artie Bennett and illustrated by Mike Lester, 2009, London, UK: Bloomsbury. Cover art copyright 2009 by Mike Lester.

Classroom usage can be convincing. In fact, when I searched for teacher resources on www.ReadWriteThink.org, I found over 350 classroom lesson plans and afterschool resources focused on series books. However, teachers rarely target one particular series as the focus for their instruction unless that series is already popular. In other words, instructional uses do not make a book popular.

Number of Critiques

Another factor in the success of series books is the number of condemnations it draws. Jessica Roy, of www.Fusion.net gathered several of the initial reviews of *Harry Potter* and found consistent commentary from the irrelevant, old, white, British guys (I added the irrelevant part). *Publisher's Weekly* gave a favorable review of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* debut (Figure 7.2), comparing Rowling to P.L. Travers and Roald Dahl. The *New York Times* was fond of Harry as well. But the reviewers from *The Guardian*, *Christianity Today*, and the *Wall Street Journal* found fault.

Figure 7.2

You may not know that Harry's British title is *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. Either way, critics on both sides of the pond wrote mixed reviews. *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* by J.K. Rowling and illustrated by Thomas Taylor, 1997, London, UK: Bloomsbury. Cover art copyright 1997 by Thomas Taylor.

The same is true in music and movies. Taylor Swift is often too popular to be good. I'm sorry, but Taylor Swift captures the human experience of adolescence, societal expectations, and bullying. She lays bare the unrealistic expectations placed upon girls and the slander levied against them when they don't want to be the cheerleader in short skirts. She's also criticized as a faux feminist. Oh, so there's one brand of feminism? I wasn't aware.

For a different crowd, Jimmy Buffett's lyrics, made pleasant with rhythmic melodies and steel drums, capture reflections on life, love, and loss.

I hear depth in Metallica and Eminem. Listen to what they are saying then pay attention to how they say it musically.

Look at the acting of Bradley Cooper, Zach Galifinakis, and Ken Jong in the *Hangover*. I'm really serious about this. I see layers and depth.

Scholars and critics seem to hate popularity. From the early ALA rants against vulgarity in dime novels (West, 1985) to the recent rage against adults who like to read YA books (Burnes, 2014; Graham, 2014a; Wolitzer, 2014), if it's popular; it's never quite good enough. Yet, those who levy sweeping dismissals should be more conditional in their admonitions. As Moses (1907) warned, "Democracy in literature is falsely associated with mediocrity" (p. 8).

Those who abhor the popular (similar to those who must have Henri Jayer Cros Parantoux wines and nothing less will do), are not revealing the depth of their literary palates nor are they thinking of the literary diets of the proletariat. They are holding forth, and in doing so, exposing their personal issues. Rather than seeking audience with the scholar class, they should take a reprieve to the psychiatrist's couch and whilst there, curl up with some Karl Marx, Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, and the newest Harper Lee. Then put on their Beats by Dre and reflect on the linguistic stylings and musical renderings of Taylor Swift as she explores the layers of teenage angst because she, better than they, knows the *intended* audience.

Marx, Benjamin, and Adorno are associated with forms of literary criticism and views of the "popular." My reference to Harper Lee is associated with the sales of and buzz about *Go Set a Watchman*, which were completely based on the popularity of *To Kill a Mockingbird* a book that some believe was ghostwritten by Truman Capote. And I think it's funny that highbrow critics are so dismissive of popular literature when I know they are obsessed with other forms of pop culture such as which devices they use (headphones, phones, watches) or how many Twitter followers they have.

I find thoughtless, erudite-light criticism amusing. This positioning of grandeur is rampant among the children's literature crowd who find they aren't quite as respected as those who write about Russian literature, Holocaust studies, or Arthurian traditions. Thoughtless positioning is also pervasive among the High Literature crowd because they seem to resent it when good books are written for other audiences. Of course some series are formulaic and some authors are stilted, but others are complex and well-written. Of course "the job of criticism is to make distinctions between good things and bad things and between complicated things and simplistic things" (Graham, 2014b). But the critics do more than "evaluate the text" when they condemn the reader.

My point is this: one's theoretical approach to literature serves as justification for different kinds of critical activity. In other words, there are different ways to read and critique literature. And these different ways of reading are why some people dislike English literature or poetry courses—the professor/instructor tries to retrain the students' approaches to reading. At times, this is a good thing. It's helpful to learn how to think and see differently. The problem comes from the snobbish attitudes surrounding certain schools of thought or rigidity in thinking. There is more than one way to read a book.

Children's literature is *intended* for children and young adults. Unlike dead literature studies, children's literature is an active, evolving collection whose consumers, not only vote with their feet, they vote with their Likes, Tweets, and Cosplay. Working in the field of a living literature requires some intellectual risk taking, the willingness to be connected to kids (even if it is in circumstantial ways), and the ability to study literature as integral to social existence, not isolated from it. Popularity is social existence.

Number of Promotions

Some series books are hyped up. As Zipes (2002) pointed out, much of the hype about Harry Potter was due to the rags-to-riches story surrounding J.K. Rowling. For example, *New York Times* writer, Michael Winerip (1999), wrote:

On the whole, "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone" is as funny, moving and impressive as the story behind its writing. J. K. Rowling, a teacher by training, was a 30-year-old single mother living on welfare in a cold one-bedroom flat in Edinburgh when she began writing it in longhand during her baby daughter's nap times. But like Harry Potter, she had wizardry inside, and has soared beyond her modest Muggle surroundings to achieve something quite special. (<https://www.nytimes.com/books/99/02/14/reviews/990214.14childrt.html>)

Certainly there is legitimacy in examining the publishing machine, which explains some of the success of *Harry Potter* (Figure 7.3) and other series such as *Nancy Drew*, the *Bobbsey Twins*, and many books in the Stratemeyer Syndicate. Even in the early 1900s, the literary market was influenced by publishers and profits (Video 7.7). The same is true today. Perhaps current series success is also a function of social networking and the speed with which trends are promoted digitally: all reasonable explanations for a book's success.

Figure 7.3

Harry Potter was re-titled, repackaged, and re-illustrated for the US market. *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* by J.K. Rowling and illustrated by Mary GrandPré, 1998, New York, NY: Scholastic. Cover art copyright 1998 by Mary GrandPré.

The Girls' and Boys' Series Books Collection at USF is one of the most extensive collections of twentieth century American juvenile series books in existence. Many can be viewed online: <http://www.lib.usf.edu/special-collections/childrens-young-adult-literature/girls-boys-series-books/#>

Video 7.7 Series Books for Girls and Boys <http://www.kaltura.com/tiny/ypxbq>

Yet, Zipes dismissal is off-base. Children and young adults don't read publisher previews or literary critiques. Kids don't care that Rowling was single, a mother, on welfare, and wrote on paper rather than a computer. Kids liked *Harry Potter* when they read the book and that's why it spread like wildfire.

In positioning series books as a viable option for struggling readers and a bridge between picturebooks and novels, Dubrovin (1979) found 12 common characteristics recommended by publishers of formulaic books:

- Fast-paced opening;
- Simple and direct story line;
- Limited number of characters;
- Viewpoint of the main character;
- Short time span;
- Tight writing;
- Brief, carefully woven descriptions;
- Short chapters;
- Lots of dialogue;

- Plenty of action scenes;
- Short sentences, simple constructions, everyday vocabulary;
- Snappy conclusion.

But these characteristics do not explain the success of the rest of the books in any series. Perhaps, as suggested by Zipes, the publicists and publishers “push” these books and the librarians (lemmings that they are), blindly recommend books without reading them? This might be true in some cases, but millions of copies? Someone is reading. Someone is liking. Somehow the children are finding the books and making a choice whether to come back for round two or move on. There is something in the book that resonates with readers.

Librarians as lemmings? I’m joking here. As Neil Gaiman famously wrote, you don’t “mess” with librarians:

<http://journal.neilgaiman.com/2004/12/world-aids-day-post.asp>

Number of Readers

The reality of any series success is the connection between the author, the text, and the reader. Kids read what they like: what’s funny, interesting, scary, dangerous, and different. Sequels are written due to the success of the previous book. Without success, the second book wouldn’t go under contract because publishers have to make money. Series books are working books; they are books that people read. As Catherine Ross (1995) wrote: “series books do not enfeeble readers or render them unfit for reading anything else. It is not helpful to establish a hierarchy in reading in which a reader’s passionate engagement with a pleasurable book somehow does not count as ‘real reading’” (p. 233).

I couldn’t agree more. Series books can be formulaic, repeating the same story lines in different spaces and times (e.g, *Nancy Drew*, *Goosebumps*). Series books can also be more intricate, garnering lots of attention and mixed critical acclaim. As with all children’s literature, the quality varies and attracts readers for different purposes.

The Making of a Serial Writer (Or Illustrator)

Like any other gift, writing for children cannot be taught; it has to be born. If possible, with the exception of drama, it is the most difficult art to master, since its narrative will not stand imitation, since its simplicity must represent naturalness and not effort, since its meaning must be within reach, and without the tone of condescension (Moses, 1907, p. 6)

Whereas some devalue the writing of series books, others recognize the creator's ability to write or illustrate for a massive, exacting audience as a laudable task. In this section, I explore the serial authors and illustrators who create successful series as well as non-series books. First, I highlight famous series creators, the people you know and love. I also feature authors and illustrators who are prolific creators, the people you should get to know. Second, I share information on ghostwriting, a common practice in children's, young adult, and adult literature. Third, I delve briefly into celebrity authorship and, fourth, conclude with a look at fanfiction: the literary equivalent to MMOGs (Massive, Multiplayer, Online Games).

You can find lists of great authors and illustrators here:

<http://www.balkinbuddies.com>

<http://www.scbwi.org>

The Prolific and Profound

Think of an author or illustrator from a children's book series-- someone you read during your childhood or someone with whom you are familiar. What do you remember about her or him? Back in the day, before the Internet, it was hard to get to know authors and illustrators (Video 7.8). Sure, some of them made school visits, but those experiences were rare. Now, take a look at these authors' and illustrators' websites. What do you notice?

J.K. Rowling. You know her name. You know her characters (*Harry Potter*). Now get to know her through her website. This is not a basic website (<http://www.jkrowling.com>).

Video 7.8 Meeting Authors and Illustrators: Autographs, Materials, and Tweets
<http://www.kaltura.com/tiny/z8k2b>

Marketing and publicity have always played a role in the children's literature industry. Check out the old ways of author and illustrator promotion.

Nikki Grimes. Author of books such as the *Dyamonde Daniel* series (Figure 7.4), Nikki Grimes is also an author of award-winning poetry and picture books. What's featured on her website? (<http://www.nikkigrimes.com/>)

Neil Gaiman. Neil Gaiman is hugely popular and critically acclaimed for his books. What does his website reveal about his work? (<http://www.neilgaiman.com/>)

Figure 7.4

Dyamonde Daniel is a memorable character, and Nikki Grimes' series focuses on her normal, everyday life experiences. *Almost Zero: A Dyamonde Daniel Book* by Nikki Grimes and illustrated by R. Gregory Christie, 2010, New York, NY: G.P. Putnam's Sons Books for Young Readers. Cover art copyright 2010 by R. Gregory Christie.

Suzanne Collins. Author of the *Hunger Games*. View Suzanne Collins' website. What do you think about the content and coverage? (<http://www.suzannecollinsbooks.com>)

Jeff Kinney. Author of *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*. Jeff's books are really popular. How does his website target his audience? (<http://www.wimpykid.com>)

Mo Willems. Mo has several series (Pigeon, Elephant & Piggie (Figure 7.5), Knuffle Bunny) and they are wildly popular. How does his website reflect his authorial and illustrator personas? (<http://www.mowillems.com/>)

Figure 7.5

Elephant & Piggie books are one of several series written and illustrated by Mo Williams. *I Broke My Trunk (An Elephant & Piggie Book)* by Mo Willems, 2011, New York, NY: Disney-Hyperion. Copyright 2011 by Mo Willems.

Personalities and products. Commercially successful series authors or illustrators often develop a brand. In addition to writing books, they license products, make appearances, and sign movie deals. What starts with a book can turn into an entire enterprise including theme parks and West End plays. As you may notice, most of their websites are professionally designed and feature opportunities for games, author connections, and book, video, or toy purchases. Of these series writers, only Suzanne Collins' website is reminiscent of an older website that feels as if she wrote it and manages it herself. Her website also focuses on critical acclaim and sharing information rather than the user's experience.

Mo Willems is particularly good at interacting with his audience. He creates videos of read alouds, posts coloring pages, and he posts on Twitter.

Other successful series authors and illustrators manage their own websites, book their own visits, and run more of the business of publishing and selling books. Here are a few examples of some other award-winning authors and illustrators who are successful, but they don't have theme park rides (yet):

Vicki Cobb <http://www.vickicobb.com>;

Henry Cole <http://www.henrycole.net>;

Ethan Long <http://www.ethanlong.com>;

Elizabeth Levy <http://elizabethlevy.com>;

More on the commercialization of children's literature in a later chapter.

Organizations such as the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI) offer resources to help the creators succeed in the business end of book publication (<http://www.scbwi.org/online-resources/frequently-asked-questions/>). Authors and illustrators are good at writing and art, not necessarily talent management, sales, accounting, and all of the other components connected to creating books. Most authors and illustrators can be contacted directly via email or they may use a personal assistant (often a partner, sibling, adult child, or friend). Either way, marketing and publicity have a major impact on sales and the "enterprise" of creating children's books. The publishers do not strongly advocate for the small or mid-level authors and illustrators and they rarely market their books appropriately.

Pedigree and product. While some critics, teachers, and librarians are quick to summarily disregard popular series (Schurman & Johnson, 2002), many authors and illustrators create extraordinary books that engage readers. These writers and artists don't happen upon success by chance; they study, prepare, write and illustrate incessantly. They work at their craft and along the way their work pays off.

Children's book authors attend well-respected and prestigious schools, colleges, and universities to study English, literature, writing, illustration, design, and languages

- J.K. Rowling studied at the University of Exeter;
- Nikki Grimes attended Rutgers University;
- Suzanne Collins attended the Alabama School of Fine Arts and Indiana University;
- Neil Gaiman went to Whitgift School and Ardingly College;
- Jeff Kinney attended the University of Maryland;
- Mo Willems graduated from the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University.

Children's book illustrators attend the top art and design schools

- Molly Bang attended the University of Arizona;
- Anthony Browne attended Leeds College of Art and Design (Figure 7.6);
- Eric Carle attended the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna;
- Floyd Cooper graduated from the University of Oklahoma;
- David Diaz went to the Fort Lauderdale Art Institute;
- Jerry Pinkney attended the Philadelphia Museum College of Art aka The University of the Arts;
- Chris Van Allsburg went to the Rhode Island School of Design and the University of Michigan;
- Nina Crews attended Yale University and earned a BA in art (Figure 7.7);
- Dr. Seuss attended Dartmouth College and Oxford University.

Figure 7.6

Anthony Browne, a prolific and award-winning artist, created an illustrated series based on Willy a wimpy chimp. *Willy the Wimp* by Anthony Browne, 2008, London, UK: Walker Books. Cover from 2014 edition, copyright 2014 by Anthony Browne.

Figure 7.7

Nina Crews takes familiar folk tales and sets them in modern, urban settings. One example is *Jack and the Beanstalk* by Nina Crews, 2011, New York, NY: Henry Holt and Co. Copyright 2011 by Nina Crews.

Of course, a lot of persistence and a little luck are associated with the types of series that create international buzz and garner movie deals. But for the most part, series are successful because readers fall in love with the characters, plots, and styles of the creators.

The Ghosts

When people think about book series, *Nancy Drew* and the *Hardy Boys* often come to mind. Or they may like the *Babysitter's Club* or the *Magic Tree House*. “Series books” are familiar and memorable because they are often written on a concept of sameness through recurring characters, themes, and plot structures. In these instances, series books are often written by ghostwriters.

Amy Boesky is a ghostwriter. In her essay, *The Ghost Writes Back*, she reveals some insider perspectives on the process. <https://www.kenyonreview.org/kr-online-issue/2013-winter/selections/amy-boesky-656342/>

Writing for *Sweet Valley High*, I wasn't supposed to be original. Or different. My job was to pick up somebody else's thread and follow it: *just write the story*. Spice it up with dialogue, add a toss of a blond curl here, a sparkle of a blue-green eye there. Create a subplot and weave it through the narrative.

I liked the discipline of writing SVH, the structure. Francine created the story plots, which arrived in my mailbox in manila envelopes and, when I took them out and studied them, read like long, free-verse poems. Eight or nine pages of single spaced directives that laid out exhilarating and implausible fables of duplicity, innovation, risk, and triumph. My task was to turn these into “chapter outlines,” adding my own subplots, mailing them back to my editor, and waiting for his approval. Once I got the green light, I worked with the precision of a Swiss clock.

Other ghostwriters tell of similar tales. R.L. Stine conceptualized each *Goosebump* book (Figure 7.8), outlining the plot and providing general information to his ghost; the ghost added the dialogue and details (Dudak, 2013). Most ghostwriters have very little contact with the named author (less so when the author is dead). The writers typically deal with an editor who hands over the details of the book.

According to Gross (2015), the ghostwriter benefits from a consistent paycheck, the continual practice, and the freedom to write without scrutiny. However, ghostwriters never receive credit, acclaim, or great financial reward.

Figure 7.8

R.L. Stine created one of the most famous series of children's books—the Goosebump Series. *The Curse of the Mummy's Tomb*, by R.L. Stine, 1993, New York, NY: Scholastic. Cover art copyright 2003 by Scholastic.

Series, such as *Sweet Valley High* or *Goosebumps* are representative of the series books bemoaned by critics. Their predictable plots are intended for repeat readers, not representative of high literary art. Similar to the writing of a television series, in which all of the successive iterations are replications of the pilot, to write such a repetitive story, requires a system.

Yes, *Goosebumps* are ghostwritten. R.L. Stine started the series and had to use ghostwriters to keep up with the demand. He developed the concept for each book and outlined the plot, but ghosts wrote the rest.

The secret behind the longevity of *Nancy Drew* and the *Hardy Boys* is simple. They're still here because their creators found a way to minimize cost, maximize output, and standardize creativity. The solution was an assembly line that made millions by turning writers into anonymous freelancers—a business model that is central to the Internet age (Gross, 2015)

But not all ghostwriting occurs with such writing rigidity. Shel Silverstein was a ghostwriter for Johnny Cash and other singers such as Dr. Hook. He also published cartoons and stories in *Playboy* (Silverstein, 2015).

Watch Shel Silverstein sing with Johnny Cash (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dmt7wooTnr8>).

The Celebrities

Many celebrities use ghostwriters or “co-authors.” But you probably figured that out. The celebrities, who may have success as actors, comedians, or musicians, write children’s books figuring anyone can write for children. But it’s just not true.

Many celebrities use ghostwriters For example, Dustin Warburton co-wrote with several celebrities: <http://www.csmonitor.com/The-Culture/Family/Modern-Parenthood/2014/1020/Children-s-books-written-by-celebrities-The-good-the-bad-the-charming>

First, notice the fact that celebrities write short children's picturebooks that are often pulled along by the artwork. For example, LeUyen Pham illustrates Julianne Moore's text in *Freckleface Strawberry* (Figure 7.9). LeUyen Pham also illustrates the *Alvin Ho* series by Lenore Look, *The Princess in Black* series by Shannon and Dean Hale (Figure 7.10), and a series of board books by Jabari Asim (Figure 7.11).

Second, notice that celebrities who do not have "writing" backgrounds never write novels. There are a few individuals who have some level of fame in other "writing" careers (e.g., Mike Lupica is a sports writer and he's created a series of sports-themed novels for kids), but a successful non-writer is rare.

Sometimes the celebrities are inspired by their own children and occasionally these individuals have backgrounds writing for television or stand-up (Jimmy Fallon is one example, Figure 7.12). Other times the celebrities are merely searching for other revenue streams (e.g., Dennis Rodman's book was co-written with Dustin Warburton; Mary Kate and Ashley Olson's books were ghostwritten). Sure, celebrity authors get an initial bump in sales due to marketing and name recognition, but if the quality isn't there, the sales drop off quickly.

Figure 7.9
Freckleface Strawberry started as a successful book by a celebrity author and now there is a book series and musical. *FreckleFace Strawberry* by Julianne Moore and illustrated by LeUyen Pham, 2007, London, UK: Bloomsbury. Cover art copyright 2007 by LeUyen Pham.

Figure 7.10
Shannon Hale writes an excellent essay on boys and series books. *The Princess in Black Series* by Shannon and Dean Hale and illustrated by LeUyen Pham, 2015, New York, NY: Random House. Cover art copyright 2015 by LeUyen Pham.

Figure 7.11
LeUyen Pham illustrates several series. One series is by Jabari Asim. *Whose Toes Are Those?* By Jabari Asim and illustrated by LeUyen Pham, 2006, New York, NY: LB Kids. Cover art copyright 2006 by LeUyen Pham.

Figure 7.12
Jimmy Fallon is an example of a celebrity author who has a writing background as a comedian. He also writes children's books from his personal experience as a father. But notice that this picture book does not list the illustrator, Miguel Ordóñez, on the front cover. *Your Baby's First Word Will Be Dada* by Jimmy Fallon and illustrated by Miguel Ordóñez, 2015, New York, NY: Feiweil & Friends. Cover art copyright 2015 by Miguel Ordóñez.

A recent example of a celebrity flop is a book by Kim Kardashian <http://radaronline.com/celebrity-news/kim-kardashian-naked-selfies-selfish-book-flop/>

Behind closed doors, children's book authors and illustrators dislike the phenomenon of celebrity authors. Here's why—children's book creation seems romantic and lucrative, but it's not. Authors and illustrators work years, and suffer countless rejections, to get published. Then, if they get published, they have to work their way up the publicity ladder to get promoted and marketed by their publishers. They travel to schools and talk to a lot of kids. Remember all of those book awards and literary reviews? Someone has to send copies of the books. Publishers push and promote the books that they believe will sell. Sales are tied to trends and fluctuations in the market. Celebrities bypass the traditional routes of literary scrutiny with their name recognition. Then they re-direct the publishers' time, attention, and marketing away from those who have made children's books a career.

Again, if a kid likes a celebrity book, read it. But don't be surprised if they don't like it. Celebrity books are targeted for parents or adults—the people who actually recognize the celebrity's name. If a parent likes the book and will read it aloud, I encourage it. As I said before, good readers find quality. You have to make the reader first, and the parents who read to their kids make readers.

Do babies like caviar?
Does one's first sip of beer or wine taste good?
Taste develops with experience. Experience comes from motivation and success.

The Fans

The book publishing field is complex and filled with roadblocks. It is the fans who must endure long waits for the next book in the series. Taking matters into their own hands, the fans created their own literature series that are easily disseminated across digital networks—fanfiction.

Did you know that *Fifty Shades of Gray* is fanfiction for the *Twilight* Series? A book, popular with teens, can become another book popular with millions of adults.

I discuss issues of “appropriateness” and fanfiction ratings in another chapter.

Did you know that the *Harry Potter* series and the *Twilight* series have spawned more fanfics and fandoms than any other book series?

Fanfiction is a series book gone wild. Fanfiction is a genre of literature in which the fans of original literature develop stories about characters, the settings, or plots of the original books.

Check out these fanfiction sites connected to children's and young adult series books:

- AO3: <http://archiveofourown.org>;
- Fanfiction.net: <https://www.fanfiction.net/>;
- Wattpad: <https://www.wattpad.com>;
- FicWad: <http://ficwad.com>;
- Harry Potter Fanfiction: <http://www.harrypotterfanfiction.com>.

Fanart is often included with some fanfics, but there are other sites that focus specifically on the art (Figure 7.13):

- Deviantart:
<http://www.deviantart.com/>;
- Tumblr:
<https://www.tumblr.com>;

Figure 7.13

My daughter creates fanart for anime, manga, and cartoons. She posts it on her bedroom wall, closet doors, and in notepads. Not all fanfic and fanart is made public. Photo copyright 2015 by Jenifer Schneider.

Fanfiction is popular among teenage youth and it is frequently studied by literary scholars. Fanfiction is also popular among adults. In fact, some very famous adult writers create fanfiction.

- Meg Cabot: Author of the *Princess Diaries* wrote *Star Wars* fanfic as a teen.
- Cassandra Clare: Author of *Mortal Instruments*, wrote very popular fanfic based on *Lord of the Rings*.
- S.E. Hinton: Author of *The Outsiders*, writes *Supernatural* fanfiction.
- Neil Gaiman: Author of *Coraline* writes a number of strands of fanfiction.

In contrast to the authors who write or encourage fanfiction, some fight the practice with their poison pens and, on occasion, with legal action. The Copyright Act of 1976 gives a copyright owner the exclusive right to reproduce, adapt, distribute, perform, and display his or her work. The Copyright Act prevents others from doing the same. However, when someone wants to recreate or extend their experience with characters, plots, and images, there are some exceptions made when the reproduction or adaptation meets the criteria for fair use:

If a writer of fan fiction (sic) is sued for infringement the writer can make an argument of fair use. Under fair use, there is a four factor test that the courts apply: 1) the purpose and character of the use (commercial in nature or nonprofit educational purposes), 2) the nature of the copyrighted work, 3) the amount and substantiality of the portion used in relation to the copyrighted work, and 4) the effect of the use on the potential market of the copyrighted work. (Fan Fiction and Copyright Law by Sam T.

<http://lawblog.usfca.edu/internetjustice/2013/fan-fiction-and-copyright-law/>)

For example, throughout this textbook, I worked with a copyright librarian to determine if I met the conditions of fair use when I wanted to include cover art of children's books. I also worked with her to seek permission to perform (i.e., read aloud) certain works. According to Michael Thomas, founding partner of Creative Vision Legal, (<http://www.creativevisionlegal.com>), "there is no bright-line rule; fair use analysis is really tricky and complex" (personal communication).

At one point, before Web 2.0 and the prevalence of platforms conducive to participatory culture, literary/musical/artistic "remixing" and "borrowing" were clearly viewed as plagiarism. Rap music borrows rhythms, lyrics, and beats. But now it's hard to control and difficult to decide. For now, most fanfiction seems to go unchallenged and it continues to thrive.

Revisiting a Number of Things

In the beginning of this chapter I discussed the popularity of series books in connection to the number of sales, promotions, critiques, uses, and readers. Clearly, a book's success is much more complicated than one good promotion or one noteworthy critique. Although there are mechanistic processes surrounding the production of many series, there is no single recipe for a series success, unless, of course, you give credit to the creators.

I ended the chapter with a look at serial writing and illustrating. Whether prolific and profound, ghostly, celebrity, or fan, children's literature creators are in high demand. All sources indicate that children's and young adult series are holding up markets in both print and ebook sales as well as Internet traffic and fandoms (Bluestone, 2015). Of course, increased production might impact quality; but increased production and alternative publishing also create space for new ideas and challenging conventions. In the next chapter, I further explore children's book publishing and marketing trends.