

Myth Number One: Books for young readers need to teach “lessons.”

The ancestor of today's young adult novel back in the 1800s did teach a lesson although sometimes a lesson that would be frowned on today. What is now called the “domestic novel,” for example, carried at its heart the message that young women would succeed in life by being obedient and subservient to men (men who might be a little shady, themselves). The modern young adult novel, especially beginning with the 1960s tends to resemble real life much more closely, something that sophisticated and life savvy young readers appreciate.



Authors who chronicle the events of life the way they really are appeal to young readers. We asked Chris Crutcher in an interview for Writer's Slate magazine if he thought life was unfair because fate seems to have no favorites in his books.

“No, I think life is exactly fair. Bad things happen to good people and good things happen to bad people.”

Chris went on to explain that this aspect of life is one of the hardest things we must learn to deal with as we grow up. “Our lives are made up of a series of losses and our grace can be measured by how we face those losses and replace what is lost.”



Chris Crutcher's characters often have less than perfect families and lives.

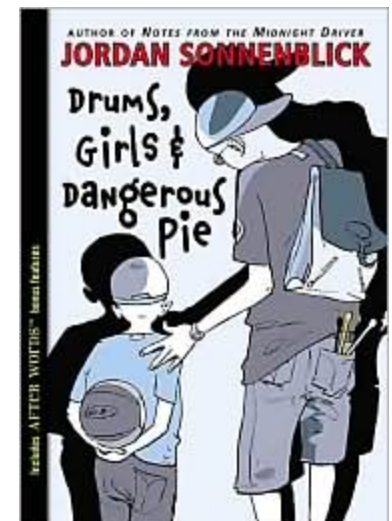
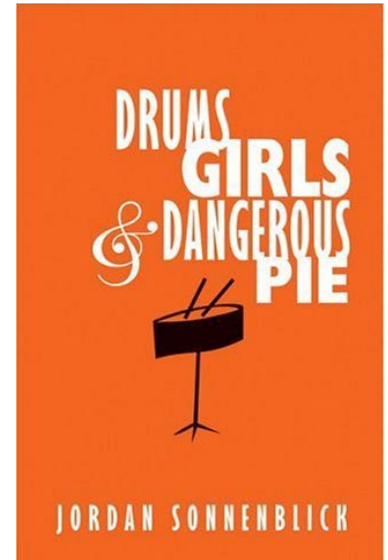
His material comes largely from his experiences as a counselor of dysfunctional families.

“Stories can help teenagers look at their feelings or come to emotional resolution from a safe distance.... I have never met a depressed person, or an anxious person, or a fearful person who was not encouraged by the knowledge that others feel the same way they do. ‘I am not alone’ is powerful medicine.”



Myth Number Two: If they are about a serious subject, they need to be “solemn.”

Jordan Sonnenblick, former high student of Frank McCourt, wrote his first book because it was the book one of his students desperately need. Like Jordan’s main character, his middle school student was struggling with the impending death of a sibling.



Jordan talks about the therapy of reading, which helps us to handle the tragedies of life, and how humor is a coping mechanism



“You can better handle the real sadness of life having experienced it in a non-lethal dose combined with humor in your reading, helping you survive what might otherwise feel like unbearable pain in real life.”



Sherman Alexie, whose *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian* won the National Book Award, comments about respecting young readers' ability to handle complicated issues and about the necessity for humor in life.



“...censorship, which arises out of not taking kids seriously, which I hate...I believe censorship is really about condescension. It's the notion that kids don't have complicated emotional lives, don't have complicated responses to a complicated life. Censorship is an attempt to make kids and their lives simple. Being accustomed to that sort of treatment, kids just respond well to anything that takes them seriously.”

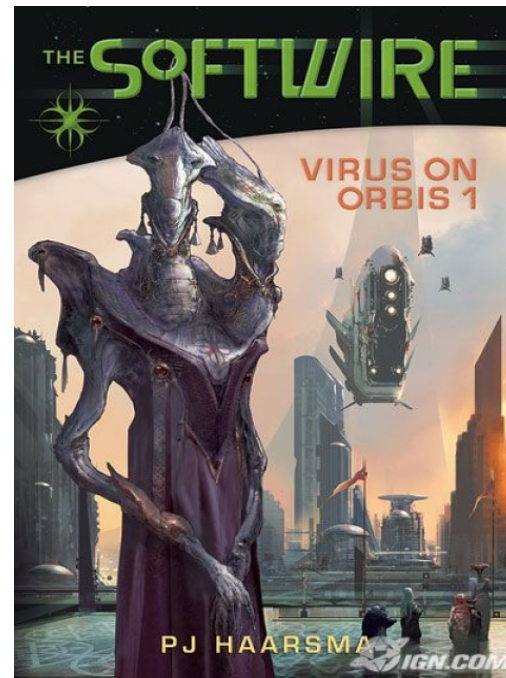
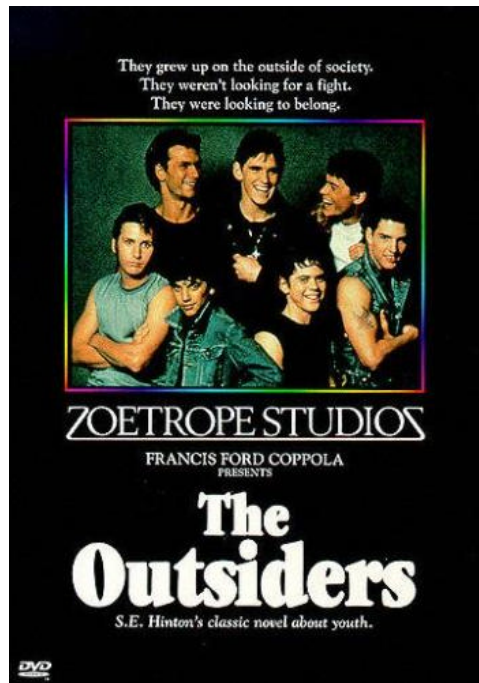
Which takes care of Myth Number Three: You can't use swear words or talk about sexuality, drugs, bad parents, etc.



“I think in its origins, my humor is a defense mechanism. By using humor publicly, I may be showing people how to use it as defense mechanism, or maybe as a weapon, too. Humor can be used both defensively and offensively. Sometimes life can be so bad that humor is the only way you can talk about it. The only option to humor is silence. Unfunny people scare me. Unfunny people are up to no good.”

Myth Numbers Four and Five: It's easier to get a YA book published than one for adults and there's less competition at the YA level.

Unlike popular reading for adults, young adult novels accumulate over time. Schools continue to use books that prove themselves for as long as they can keep their hardbacks serviceable or buy new or used paperbacks (*The Outsiders*, 1967— *The Software*, 2007). To get a book accepted for publication, an author must have a truly new idea (or an interesting new take on an old one), not just a recycled one, and the writing has to be good. Teens are also the biggest spenders at the box office. Where the money is, there is also the competition.



Myth Number Six: Promoting your books through talking at bookstores and schools, etc. is fun and easy.

In your imagination, put yourself in front of a middle school gym with 800 sixth, seventh and eighth graders, during eighth period, the day before spring break.



And try to decide which Circle of Hell Dante would place that in.



Once you have a manuscript, how can you get your big break?



➤ [home](#) > writing contests

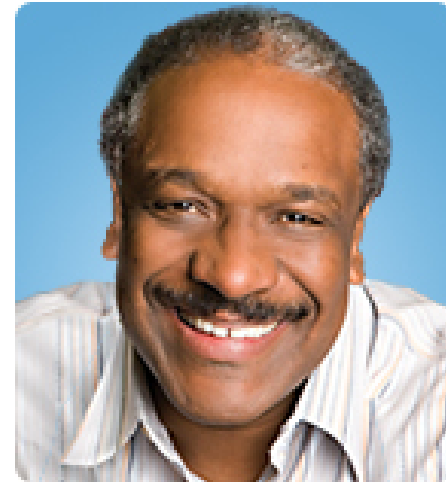
- Delacorte Yearling Contest for a [First Middle-Grade Novel](#)
- Delacorte Press Contest for a [First Young Adult Novel](#)

Delacorte Press Books for Young Readers is proud to announce the
Eighteenth Annual
Delacorte Yearling Contest for
a First Middle-Grade Novel*

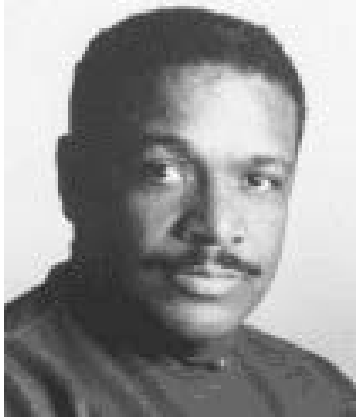
<http://www.randomhouse.com/kids/writingcontests/>

The advantages and disadvantages of this contest are pretty simple:

1. Your manuscript is guaranteed to be read, and by people who know what will sell.
2. You don't have to convince an agent to take you on.
3. You get an immediate advance if you win.
4. You're in with a huge publisher if you win.
5. You have to win, and they're pretty picky.
6. You are stuck with that contract (no agent or bargaining).



This vault to stardom through the Delacorte First YAL Contest can be fast!



Saginaw Street yawned in front of me like a grand
n, I felt as if one step into it would be the end.

I felt an arm go 'round my waist, it was Muley, the man
k lids one place up the line from me.

**“Christopher, you all right? Need some help to
your car?”**

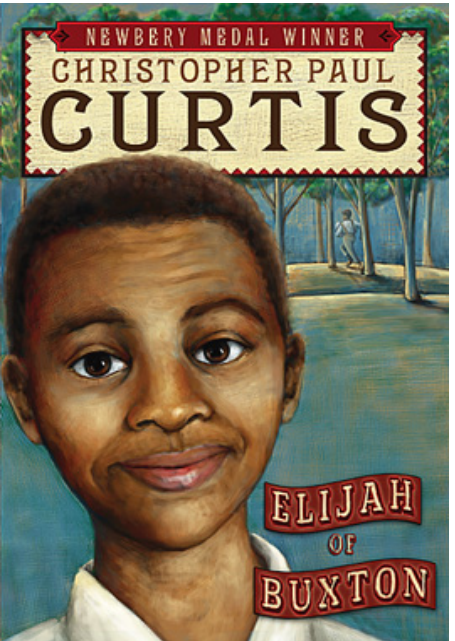
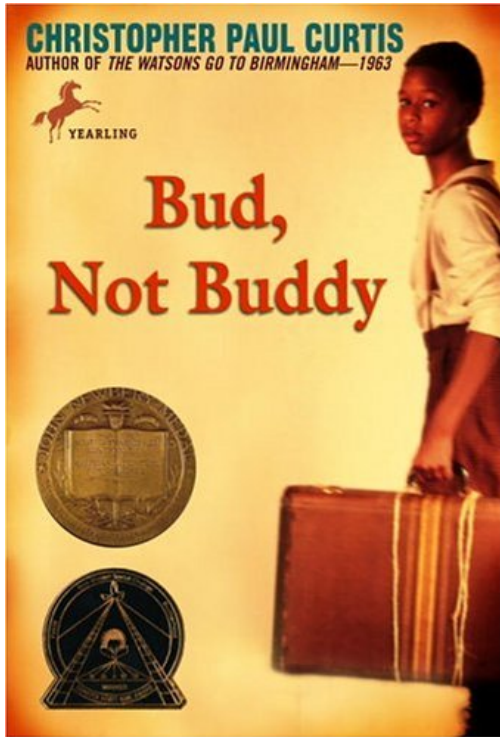
Muley was taking me across the street, he'd picked up my jacket and the
book I'd been reading and tucked them under one huge arm and me under the
other, we floated across Saginaw and down to the lot where my car was parked.

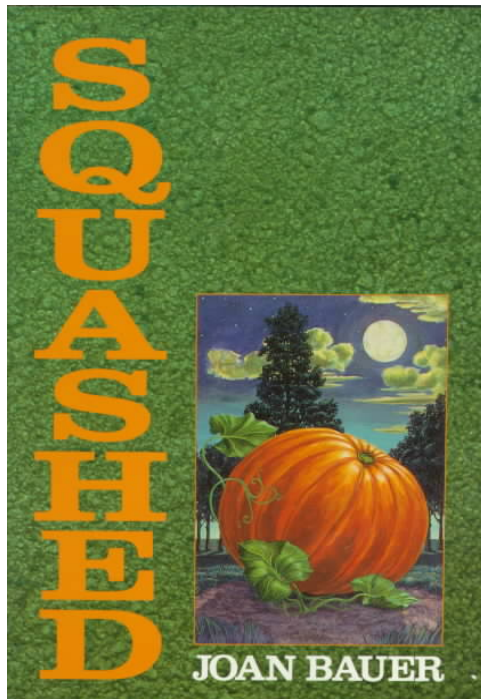
Muley looked at me and said, **“If I was you I wouldn't come in tomorrow, I
know how you feel, some of the time it's just too much, isn't it?”**

I had to agree, it had become too much, but more importantly it had
become too little, it had become nothing.

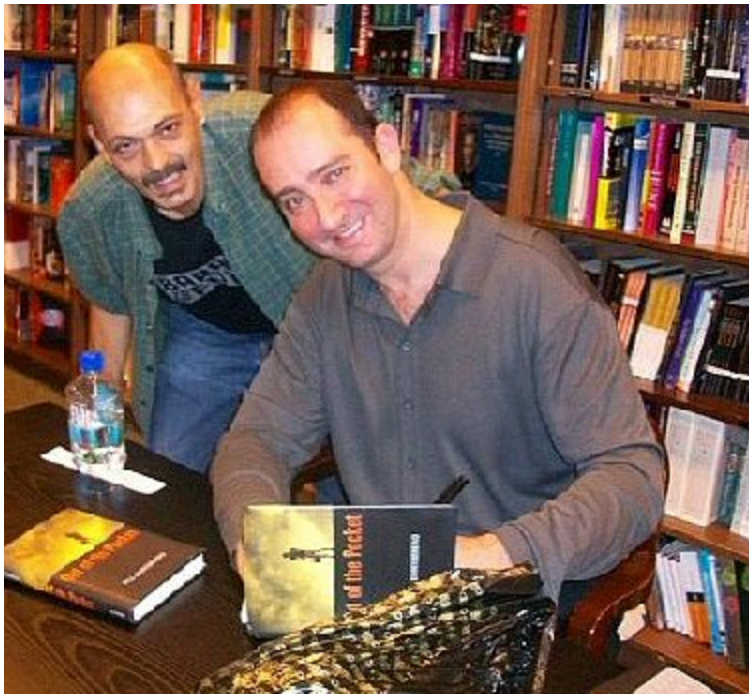
I am fervently glad that this man has found the right work.

**And grateful, always, that Delacorte Press became part of Christopher Curtis's story
on the day his manila envelope landed in our contest.**





Some novelist use the old fashioned way,
however, which can take a lot longer.



Caryn Wiseman

Agent

caryn@andreabrownlit.com

[Representative Deals](#)

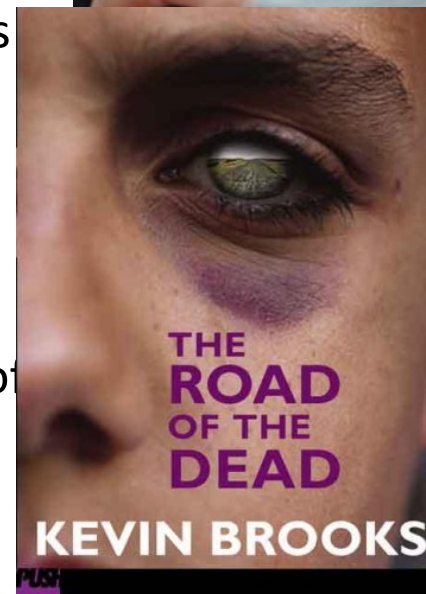
Caryn has been an Agent with the Andrea Brown Literary Agency, Inc. since early 2003, and has sold almost 80 books. She handles children's books only: young adult and middle-grade fiction and non-fiction, chapter books, and picture books (fiction and non-fiction). She represents a *New York Times* bestselling author, first-time authors, and authors at every stage in between. Caryn holds an MBA from the Anderson School at UCLA, and a BS from the University of Virginia, and her fifteen years of business experience prior to joining the Agency emphasized editing and writing as well as sales, negotiation and client management.

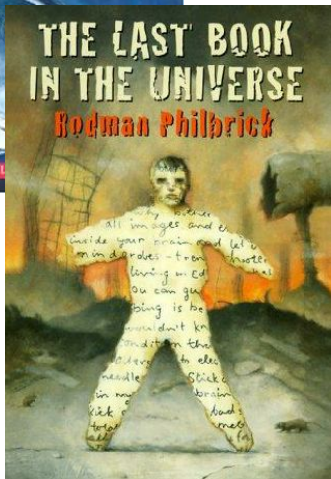
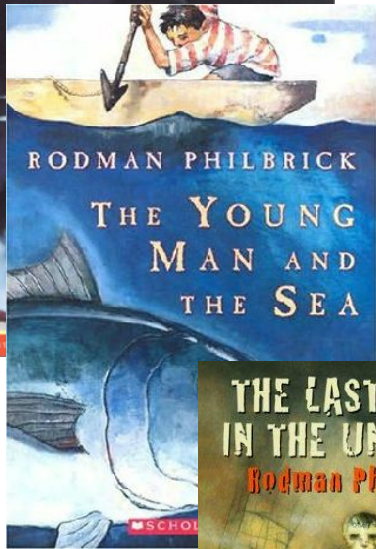
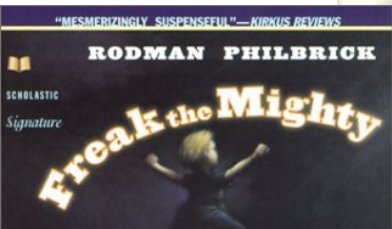
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The writing does come kind of naturally now, but it didn't when I first started writing. When I was writing stuff for adults, I was unpretentiously trying to write the great masterpiece, the great novel to show how good I was. But you can lose track of the story that way. When I started writing for and about teenagers, the story became the main thing. You've got to write a good story first. I found that all the nice little bits of prose and poetry that I like in a piece could still go in, but they are almost like the garnish to the main course, which is the story. I've always loved really good writing, especially good writing that includes a good story; that's the ideal—when great writing doesn't get too much in the way of the story. That's what I have aimed to do in my writing. I sometimes have to be a bit hard on myself and edit out stuff [I have written] I like, passages that are really good writing but maybe get in the way of the story. I've had to learn how to do editing like that with the help of my publisher. I still enjoy the art of words and style.





I started out wanting to be a literary innovator, much more concerned with the style and complexity of the prose than with the story itself. Eventually I discovered that readers of all levels seem to respond to narrative first of all, and that an overly developed style—which calls attention to the author—can actually detract from the power of the narrative, and thereby diminish the story. And I do believe in the general rule that a good story indifferently written will trump a poor story well-written. All of which is not to say that I don't spend many hours rewriting my prose, trying to get it just right. In my case that means taking out all the extra words.

Identification and Engagement are the Keys

- Mel Glenn who spent his adult life teaching English at his alma mater, Abraham Lincoln High, in Brooklyn, after a tour in the Peace Corps, (author of *Split Image*, *Class Dismissed*, *Who Killed Mr. Chippendale*, and many other great books), says this:



“A major key for good young adult literature is one word—identification. . . . When a reader can say, “Hey, I feel what that character is going through,” a tangible connection has been made[and] The reader and the protagonist intertwine”

