

# Matchmaking Your Manuscript: An Online Workshop for Children's Writers

with Lisa Bullard and Laura Purdie Salas

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## Matchmaking Your Manuscript:

### How to Find the Right Publisher for Your Children's Book Project

A six-week online workshop from January 26–March 6, 2009

Do you have a manuscript ready to submit to a children's book publisher? Are you feeling overwhelmed by the process? The children's book universe is complex and can appear impenetrable to unpublished writers. The good news is that there are things you can learn to help you demystify this business. The goal for this course is for you to gain the knowledge and confidence to create a submissions plan for your manuscript. And those same steps will work for your future writing projects as well.

The workshop will be team-taught by two published children's book writers. We can't teach you a secret handshake, because, unfortunately, one doesn't exist. And we aren't agents. We won't be submitting your manuscripts for you. What we will do is guide you step-by-step through the submissions process and show you how to improve your chances of publication. We have a passion for working with new and emerging writers. We have hands-on experience as writers and writing instructors, and we'll share our editing and publishing expertise with you.

This class will cover:

- researching publishers
- understanding the children's book marketplace
- identifying market trends
- writing query and cover letters
- exploring other routes to publication (agents, contests, magazines)
- and creating your submission package

Here's how it will work:

Class will begin. In our posts (one each week), we'll share specific how-to tactics for the week's topic, real-life publishing anecdotes, advice based on our knowledge of your individual projects plus our knowledge of the industry, and tips on habits that will make you a market-savvy writer. We'll also help boost your confidence and dispel common myths about the submissions process. Each post will conclude with a homework activity that will deepen your knowledge and take you a step further toward completing your submissions plan.

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Early on in the class, you'll send us a brief sample of your project. That way, we can tailor our approach, information, and exercises.

After you read each post and complete the assignment, you'll comment online. These might be responses, ideas, homework excerpts, and questions. We'll give our thoughts and answers and respond to your homework exercises. This personal feedback will be crucial to helping you become comfortable with and more familiar with the publishing maze. We also encourage you to talk with each other and share opinions and information. Class discussions are a terrific component of our online class.

And the best feature? We will provide individualized feedback on your cover letter and submission package! (Note: to maintain the reasonable fee charged for this workshop, we will be unable to provide individualized feedback on your manuscript. But reading that excerpt will help us give specific advice for your cover letter.)

We'll ask you to set aside at least three hours each week to complete the homework. You'll want to make sure you are at a point where you can commit to this, because that will lead to more vital online conversations and will also pay off in your high-quality submissions plan.

By the end of the class, you will have a good sense of where your project fits into the current marketplace. You will have created a list of potential publishers for your project and have written a working cover letter. More importantly, you will understand why each publisher is a good possible fit. You will feel confident that you are focusing on the steps that will really move you forward and increase your odds of finding a publisher that's a match for your manuscript. You will also have started to build connections with other writers and may even have found some companions to move forward with on your writing journey.

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## Nuts & Bolts Info: Matchmaking Your Manuscript

The class will be limited to 15 people.

The cost is \$250 with a discount for CLN members. See <http://www.childrensliteraturenetwork.org/events/clnevent.html#match> for details.

This class is **for individuals writing for children or young adults in all forms and genres**: fiction, picture books, nonfiction, poetry, fantasy, etc.

**Critique:** In addition to our ongoing responses to your homework assignments and discussion questions, you will also receive a thorough critique of one cover letter, query letter, or selected portion of a nonfiction proposal. You may choose to receive your feedback privately via email, or you may post your letter or proposal for the entire class to comment on (in addition to the instructor feedback).

\*Special note: This is *not* a critique of the merits of your story, novel, etc. Rather, it's an evaluation of your cover letter, query letter, or proposal. We will ask you to send a brief writing sample at the beginning of this class. However, this is not for critique purposes. It's strictly to help us tailor the class to our students' needs. It helps us know what kind of information will be most useful for you. We will not be critiquing that writing sample. If you would like clarification on this issue, please contact us before you register.

You are not required to purchase any outside materials for the class.

All class materials will be confidential. The materials we post are for your information and use, and you are free to print them out to save as a reference. We ask that you not forward them to other people or photocopy, email, or share them in any form with other people. Letters and writing samples posted by classmates are strictly confidential and you should not retain copies of anyone's work. Thanks for your cooperation. We need these assurances to make everyone feel comfortable sharing their work!

For online info or to register, see <http://www.childrensliteraturenetwork.org/events/clnevent.html#match>

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## Syllabus: Matchmaking Your Manuscript

### Week One

- Introductions
- Children's Book Categories (picture books, young adult, etc.)
- How to write a "hook"

### Week Two

- Publisher research
- Identifying trends
- The children's book marketplace
- Special sales opportunities

### Week Three

- Cover letters
- Query letters
- Synopsis
- Proposals

### Week Four

- Your submissions package

### Week Five

- Agents
- Contests
- Magazines

### Week Six

- Networking
- Next steps
- Wrap-up

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## Class Excerpt

Here's just a small taste of the information and expertise you'll find in our workshop posts.

### Setting the Hook

Today's reality is that children's books need to be marketable. When an editor falls in love with your work, they have to turn around and "sell" your manuscript to their marketing department, their sales reps, their publisher. You can help them by including a clever "hook" for your manuscript at the beginning of your cover letter. A hook is a one-sentence sales pitch that grabs people's attention and makes them want to read further.

But condensing a manuscript down to its bare essence isn't easy. Writing marketing copy is a whole different animal than writing a story. Here are some simple exercises you can try to warm up your marketing muscles:

- Practice writing hooks for books that are already published and that you know well. What would sell that book to a friend?
- Work your way down a shelf at the bookstore, reading the back cover copy or the flap copy for the books in that section (choose the fantasy section if you're writing fantasy, picture books if you're writing picture books, etc.)
- Practice your "elevator speech" on your friends or family. This is how you would describe your manuscript to a stranger if the two of you were trapped together in an elevator for three floors. What details make their eyes light up?
- Ask your critique group to brainstorm with you.
- Study the one-liners from movie posters the next time you're in a movie theater. Here are some of my favorite attention-grabbers, none longer than sixteen words:  
"A comedy about one bride, two grooms, and 34 flying Elvises."  
"She didn't believe in angels until she fell in love with one."  
"When you're searching for a killer, the last suspect you want to see is your son."

Once you've completed some or all of the exercises, try your hand at a hook for your own manuscript. We'll compare results as a class, and the instructors will give you individual feedback to help you fine-tune your results.

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## Bios

**Laura Purdie Salas** started out writing for adults, but she soon discovered that kids were her favorite audience. After college, she worked as a magazine editor and freelance writer. She then taught 8<sup>th</sup>-grade English and rediscovered her love for children's literature. Laura turned her focus to writing for kids and has never looked back. She writes poetry, realistic fiction, and nonfiction books and articles.

Laura is a member of the [Children's Literature Network](#) and [SCBWI](#). She teaches writing for children through the [Loft Literary Center](#) in Minneapolis and is a former instructor for the [Institute of Children's Literature](#). She also teaches several [online classes](#). She has led workshops on researching publishers several writers' conferences.

Laura has [ten poetry books](#) with Capstone Press, and another poetry collection with Clarion Books, [Stampede! Poems to Celebrate the Wild Side of School](#), is due out in 2009. Laura is also the author of [Write Your Own Poetry](#). She has also written more than 50 nonfiction books for kids. Click [here](#) for a complete listing of her books. You can learn more about Laura at her [website](#) and her [blog](#). See [http://www.laurasalas.com/present/MYM\\_bio2.html](http://www.laurasalas.com/present/MYM_bio2.html) for Laura's clickable bio.

**Lisa Bullard** is the author of more than forty books for children. Her picture book [Trick-or-Treat on Milton Street](#) won an International Reading Association/Children's Book Council "Children's Choice Award," a National Parenting Publications "Children's Resources Silver Award," and was named an honor title for the "Storytelling World Award." Her ["Animal Opposites" series](#) won a 2007 "Teacher's Choice Award." Her most recent title is [You Can Write a Story! A Story-Writing Recipe for Kids](#).

Lisa regularly teaches children's book writing at the [Loft Literary Center](#) in Minneapolis. She is also on the Loft's Education Committee, was one of two Children's Book-Writing Advisors for the Loft's innovative Master Track program, and has been honored as a Loft Teaching Fellow.

Lisa's background includes sixteen years' experience as a publishing professional. She worked for nationally renowned publishers Graywolf Press, Coffee House Press, New Rivers Press, and [Lerner Publications](#). Lisa is a past president of the [Minnesota Book Publishers Roundtable](#) and is a graduate of the [University of Denver Publishing Institute](#).

Lisa enjoys working with writers at all stages of development and loves to share her enthusiasm for children's books. You can learn more about Lisa and her books by visiting her [website](#). See [http://www.laurasalas.com/present/MYM\\_bio1.html](http://www.laurasalas.com/present/MYM_bio1.html) for Lisa's clickable bio.