

EIGHT KEY STEPS FOR WRITERS OF YA AND CHILDREN'S BOOKS



Bestselling author Alice Kuipers was born in London. She moved to Canada in 2003. Her first novel, *Life on the Refrigerator Door*, was published in 29 countries and won several awards. Since then, she has published two further award winning YA novels internationally, with the fourth, *The Death of Us*, published in September last year. Alice has three small children and she began writing picture books for them. Her first picture book *Violet and Victor Write The Best Ever Bookworm Book* was selected as an Amazon best pick for December 2014. She has two chapter books coming out in the next couple of years and a second picture book.

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What We'll Cover TODAY

- How to *really* understand your audience, and master word counts, age ranges and themes
- How to find your voice -- and the voice of your child and teen characters
- How to sound modern and relevant within a vivid plot
- How to develop great characters
- How to master dialogue
- How to edit your own work
- How to make time for writing in a busy, stressful world
- How to manage your online presence and connect effectively with publishers

How to *really* understand your audience, and master word counts, age ranges and theme

- Read widely – I've added a reading list as supplementary material
- Research the type of book that most appeals to you
- Involve yourself in the lives of children and teens. Watch their shows. Explore their favourite sites. Read their stories (eg: Wattpad) Volunteer
- Accept that all the rules can be broken, but you still need to know them

The 'Rules' and Conventions

- The trend *tends* to be that children like reading about characters a little older than they are. **Normally a couple of years older – so, a seven year old will enjoy reading about a nine year old character.**
- Check out “Understanding Children's Book Genres” on <http://www.writeforkids.org>. Make sure you understand the audiences for children’s and young adult books.
- Word counts vary from site to site, publisher to publisher – again, research this, read the supplementary material which gives suggested word counts, and then see how your story fits.

Good Rules to Keep in Mind

- Children like to read about other children.**
- Be wary of stereotypes, especially those that are no longer contemporary.**
- Think about the time you're setting the book.**
- Don't make the mistake of thinking writing for children is easy.**

Themes and Stories

- Big ideas come from constantly being open.
- If a theme feels too grown up for your audience, you can always move into a different age group. Eg: Too much sex? Then is it NEW ADULT?
- But don't be afraid of pushing your reader. Teens and children are often far smarter and savvier than we give them credit for.
- Don't preach.
- Be true to the stories YOU want to tell.

How to find your voice -- and the voice of your child and teen characters

- There's a correlation between the types of books you want to *read* and the type of books you'll want to *write*
- Notice as you write what sort of age your characters tend to be. If you naturally want to write about sixteen year olds, chances are you're writing YA. If, instead, your main character is nine or ten, you're probably writing a chapter book or early middle grade novel.
- I tend to find my character and then put them in more and more difficult situations. In re-reading and editing, I hone the voice.
- Listen to real children and teens speak – either on a screen or – preferably – in real life. **READ OTHER BOOKS WRITTEN FOR THEM!**

How to sound modern and relevant within a vivid plot

- Plot first. Your character IS what they do. The more challenges you throw at them, the more they will change and grow.
- Set up. First challenge. More obstacles to what they want. When they get what they want, do they even want it anymore? Character changes. New balance achieved.
- Truths are universal. Yes, read and inform yourself on issues facing teens today. But those first experiences, those first feelings are what you need to focus on.

How to develop great characters

- What does CHARACTER is ACTION mean?
- See the character questionnaire I've included as supplementary material. It's also on my website: <http://www.alicekuipers.com> under "classroom".
- Avoid teens with no friends, clichéd Kitty the Cat in picture books, opening with a character getting out of bed, single dimensional bad boys, brainiac boys and ballerina girls: stereotypes.
- Make them real, vivid, deep, true. Then make life harder for them!

How to master dialogue

- Listen. ALL THE TIME.
- Please, please, please take the time to teach yourself how to punctuate speech. Consider it YOUR JOB!
- Authentic teen and child voices are hard. Expect it to be hard and expect to have to rework it later.
- Read your work aloud.
- Try the dialogue workshops I have for free on my website: <http://www.alicekuipers.com/teachers-librarians-writers/>

How to edit your own work

- First draft is for you. Every other draft is when you start thinking about the reader.
- I've said it already, but read it aloud.
- Think about the work in two layers – macro and micro.
- Start recruiting readers. If possible, find a teacher, a child, a good friend, and a big reader.
- Have a look at my editing checklist in supplementary material.
- Consider hiring a freelance editor. One I've used is <http://www.picturebookpeople.com>

How to make time for writing in a busy, stressful world

- Take it seriously.
- List your writing priorities.
- Make even more time for reading. That *has* to come first.
- Look realistically at your schedule.
- Are times or word counts more of a drive for you?
- Make a clear space.
- Until writing is a big part of the time you have for you project, try not to fritter hours on social media or worrying about publishing.

How to manage your online presence and connect effectively with publishers

- Select which social media site you like and enjoy.
- Goodreads, Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, own website. Consider finding a professional to help you with your site and your 'brand'.
- Think about how much time you want to spend on this aspect.
- Decide traditional or self-publishing or hybrid.

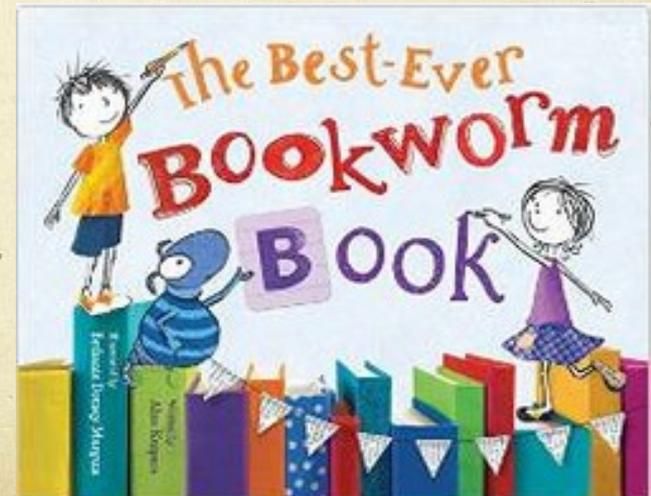
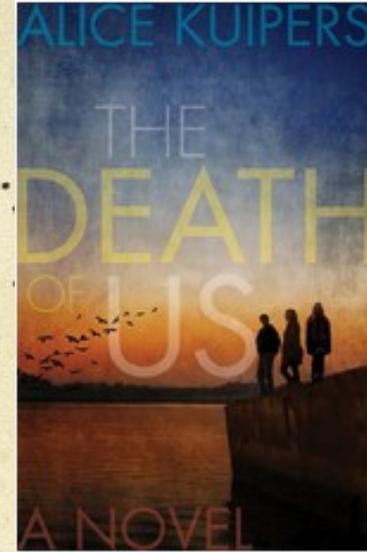
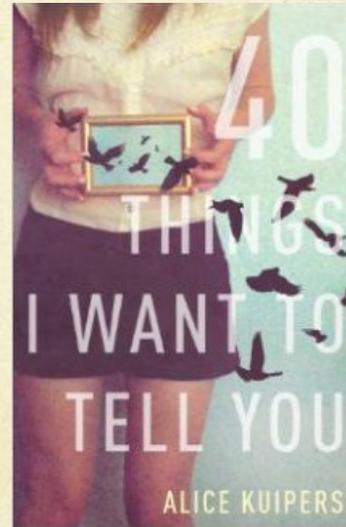
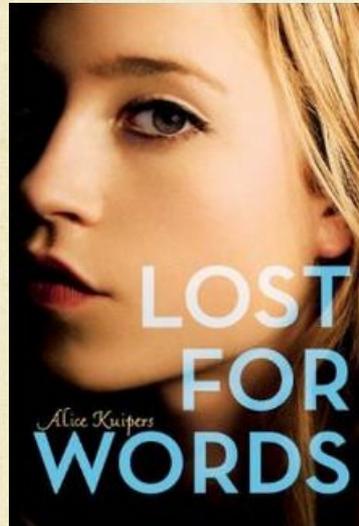
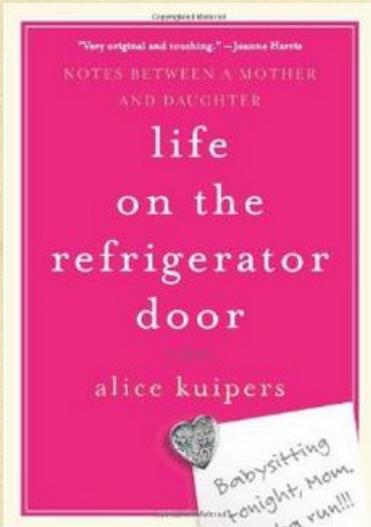
Traditional Publishing

- Picture books - submit text only
- Research which publishers suit your story
- Submit widely and expect rejection. I still get rejection letters all the time.
- Anticipate a long time between finishing a draft and the published book.
- Use social media to discover new agents and publishers. And trusted resources like CBI's newsletter.

I've provided you with supplementary material as a PDF: reading list, character questionnaire, age groups, editing checklist.

<http://www.alicekuipers.com/teachers-librarians-writers/>

Stay in touch with me on Twitter, Facebook, Goodreads or Tumblr and let me know how your writing life goes!



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