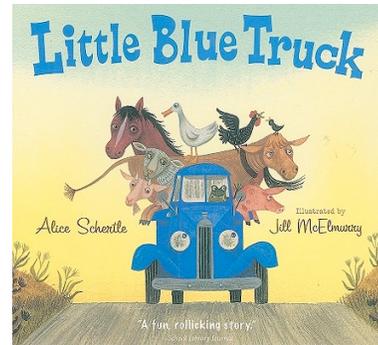


What Makes a Good Picture Book?

Author and poet, Alice Schertle, puts it this way:

Here's what it's **NOT**: boring, maudlin, preachy, flat, confusing, or long-winded.

What it **IS**: brief, original, fresh, often funny, satisfying, and possessed of something substantial at the center--call it a kernel of significance that makes it worth a child's time. Humor can provide it, so can language or character, or story. Like the child it's written for, this picture book can be cozy and quiet or it can sing and swing, but always it loves language. It's told in words that bear repeating – even a grown-up can savor them again and again. It's grounded in a child's own world, the real world or the play world of a young child's imagination. It's simple and simply irresistible. And a hair-puller to write.



from Marilyn Singer's, "[What Makes a Good Young Picture Book](#)"

Those of us who love reading and writing picture books know truer words were never spoken. So how does the aspiring picture book author work through the hard parts to write a picture book that "sings and swings," or that's "cozy and quiet," as Schertle suggests?

WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE

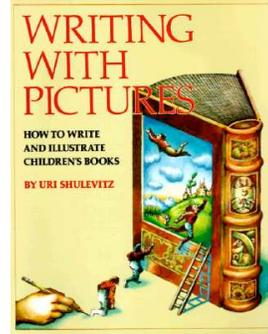


STORY AND PICTURES BY MAURICE SENDAK

First, a few basics:

1. Picture books come in all sizes, and cover all sorts of topics. Though traditionally picture books were written for children four to eight, today's picture book market often reaches "down" in age to the youngest child, and "up" in age to middle and high school students, as well as adults.
2. When it comes to buying picture books, adults are still, for the most part, the gatekeepers. It is parents, grandparents, librarians, teachers, etc. who purchase these books.
3. Picture books are usually 32 pages long (27 – 28 pages of actual story text), and short! In today's market that means fiction, *generally speaking*, lands in the 200 – 500 word range.

4. Not surprisingly, in picture books the illustrations are *at least as important as* the words. In *Writing With Pictures*, Uri Shulevitz says, "... the pictures do much more than illustrate the text. Often they expand upon the words and provide information essential to the story...most, or all, of the description – the setting, the characters, and the action – is shown through the pictures" (51).



5. A picture book is a team effort – a collaboration between writer, illustrator, editor, art director, and publisher. Each member of the team contributes his or her part to the process of making sure the final book is the best it can be, and each member must respect the roles the others play in the book-making process.

All in all, the best picture book is a finely crafted story, and something more. [Poetry.](#)