

# RCW and KNIGHTS OF



**This handbook is created from notes on the live workshops. They are reflective of a conversation, shared with the intention of making the advice given there more widely available, but can not be considered a comprehensive guide.**

**Thank you to the following authors, editors, agents and publishing professionals for offering your time and expertise.**

**Aisha Bushby, Alice Oseman, Claire Wilson, Eishar Brar, Elle McNicoll, Emily Thomas, Emma Jones, Fiz Osborne, Georgia Garrett, Jasmine Richards, Jasveen Bansal, Katie and Kevin Tsang, Mary Watson, Sam Copeland, Sharna Jackson & Tanya Byrne.**

# Session One: 'Intro to Children's Fiction'

## Defining Middle Grade (MG) and Young Adult (YA)

- MG is for readers typically between ages 7 and 11.
- YA is for older teenagers and adults. It tends to include more mature content and would not generally be seen in primary schools.
- Many books fall into the gap between these two better-known definitions – these are variously described as upper middle grade, 12+ or teen.

## How does your work go from manuscript to published book?

- The majority of submissions to traditional publishing houses are made from agents. Editors will read the manuscript and then take it to an internal acquisitions meeting with other publishing teams (e.g. sales, rights, marketing) where they will discuss whether to buy the book and at what level they feel they might offer. After an author has agreed a publishing deal and their contract with the publisher has been negotiated, it can typically take between 6 months-1 year for them to complete the editorial work required before it is ready for publication.
- However, submissions can also be made from packagers whose job it is to come up with a story idea, outline the plot and characters, seek out the right writer who can bring it to life, and then manage the process. Once they've hired the right author to execute an idea, they will send the first three chapters and a very detailed outline to publishers in the hope that they will then buy and publish the work. Packagers could be seen as an amalgamation of agent and editor. Many publishers embrace the packaging model for the population of the more commercial side of their lists, as it outsources some of the editorial work and market research, and can be a quick and effective way of responding to a specific gap in the market.

## What does an editor do?

- When new submissions come in editors will read subjectively, but also consider how the concept and genre fit the broader list, and market.
- Many children's editors commission writers to execute an idea that has originated in-house, but the majority of commissioning is original work that comes to them from agents and packagers.
- Much of an editor's job in the office also involves coordinating teams. They are the author's route to working with Marketing & PR, Sales, Production, Rights, Design etc. In this way editors act as project managers who are able to see the big picture and

the details – the broader project requirements and each department’s individual concerns – and thereby seek solutions that meet everybody’s needs.

## What are your top tips for editing?

### **Read your work out loud:**

- This is especially important if you’re writing for children because children’s books are so frequently read aloud by a parent, teacher or the child themselves (even 9 year olds are reading out loud).
- This is also a really useful way of giving you a sense of how long it takes for your story to get to the point. Younger readers tend to have a shorter attention span so it shouldn’t take a long time for your story to get started or for characters to start talking.
- Dialogue is key for younger readers, so you need to focus on it and make sure that it sounds authentic. Reading aloud is useful here too.

### **When you receive structural criticism don’t take it personally:**

- You should ideally learn to distance yourself from structural criticism and be able to take editorial changes on board.

### **Put your manuscript aside for a while and then come back to it for a different perspective:**

- Letting your writing rest is important because when you return to it, you’re more likely to spot awkward phrases, mistakes, or gaps in the story.

### **Avoid repetitive sentences:**

- Sometimes you may have written three sentences that say the same thing. You need to know when to make cuts that will make the pace cleaner and smoother. Even younger readers will be able to notice when you are repeating yourself.

### **Know when you’re done revising your manuscript:**

- You are never going to make your manuscript perfect alone.
- You could spend forever editing your manuscript, draft after draft, and still think it needs more work. If you can’t see the wood for the trees anymore it’s about knowing you’ve done as much as you can for it.

### **Separate your editing tasks:**

- Try not to revise everything at the same time as this can be overwhelming.
- Instead, break it down into manageable stages.

- In the first read-through, check your dialogue. In the next read-through, look at structure, and in the read-through after that, focus on characterization, and so on.

### What is the hallmark of a good children's book?

- Convincing world building.
- Believable well drawn characters.
- Characters we care about doing things that we care about. Characters are a key part of why you are invested in the book. No one will care about a huge battle if they don't care about your characters.
- Considered, satisfying and well mapped out story arc.

### Don't be patronising

- When you're writing for children or teenagers remember that they like to laugh and they like to be moved but they do not like to be patronised. It is always obvious when an adult is writing as though they are talking to a younger person.

### Bring all of yourself to your writing

- Bring yourself to the genre and put kids that look like you in that book.
- Remember that it's ok to have fun with this. Your writing does not always have to be about trauma and the difficulty of existing.
- It is still rare to see a child of colour at the centre of a fantasy adventure. Make sure you write what you would have wanted to read when you were a child.

### What should you look for in an editor/publisher?

- The vision your editor has for your book needs to chime with your own vision. When you're looking for an editor or a publisher, you want to pick one that you admire. Sometimes the biggest publisher isn't always the best. Make sure you choose someone who will give you a bespoke publishing journey, and build a team around you that shares your vision for the book.
- Editors need to understand how to communicate their feedback to you in a way that you feel most comfortable with. It is their job to make suggestions that reflect your voice and vision instead of putting their own into your work.
- You need to be able to get on well with your editor and feel comfortable with them.
- It's a really close relationship, but still a professional one. Your editor has bought your book because they love it but remember that they are also working on other books. Try to be mindful that they cannot drop everything for you and that you should

also listen to them. Editors should have space to do their job but also give you what you need.

- If your book does not do as well as hoped, remember that it is not always because your editor has not done everything they can for it. Their career progression is based on the books they acquire, so it is important for them that it succeeds too.
- Don't forget your sense of self and make sure you always know you deserve to be there. You are going to walk into majority white rooms in publishing so this is really important. If you don't feel like you don't belong, your agent should be there to remind you that you do and help you be heard.

## Writing crossover fiction

- It is important to write the book that you feel that you want to write instead of trying to force it into a category where it doesn't belong. Don't overthink writing across different genres and never change your voice because you think it needs to fit a more lucrative part of the market.
- You should always aim to write up for MG. Kids enjoy reading from the perspective of *slightly* older characters who they find cool and can look up to. But the same is not true for YA readers. If you are writing for young adults, then you should make sure to stick within the YA age range.
- Your publisher will also be able to tell what age range your book is for and it's up to you if you decide if you're willing to implement their editorial suggestions in order to better service that area of the market.
- There is a space after picture books and before middle grade (ages 5-7) that is really underserved, for various reasons:
  - i. Those books are often a series but if you're a first time author then writing a series might be intimidating.
  - ii. Books in this area often tend to sell fewer copies so a lot of publishers end up creating things in house to ensure that it hits the market in the right way.
  - iii. The high profile children's books tend to be MG, and authors write what they see.
- There is space for more in that market but it's about understanding what those readers want to see in books which is often very light hearted and fun. No one in publishing is saying a blanket no to upper middle grade or lower middle grade. Make sure you are able to sum up your idea in a one liner. Pip Jones' *Squishy McFluffy* and Francesca Simon's *Horrid Henry* are good commercial offerings in this area.
- Is there a disadvantage to writing different books in different age ranges?
  - i. You will need to be thinking a few years ahead: be sure to cover this in the initial conversation with your agent so that your plans are aligned.

ii. Writing across genres and age ranges is a useful way of showing you have strengths in different areas so you will be kept in mind by editors for all projects.

iii. However, it is generally true that publishers are going to want to establish you in an age range for the first few books if you are a debut author. This is because they often want control over the building of a brand and the pitching for retail space.

iv. If you are signing with a publisher for a multi-book deal you need to make sure that you are thinking about what you want to do next. Your vision for the second book needs to align with their own. If you feel pressure to keep on brand and it is not working then you should speak to your publisher and work out a solution. Asking to convert a multi-book deal to a single book is always an option.

## Expectations and Edits

- Your book will probably not become an instant bestseller overnight, and building your name as an author takes time. The first book is only your first step in that journey and you need to make sure you keep the momentum going.
- 'Editing is writing on somebody's skin.' This is another way of saying that every author is naturally going to be sensitive and protective about their work. However, you need to be able to accept feedback. When you get your edit, have a read, put it away, and don't respond in the moment.

# Session Two: 'Finding an Agent'

## What is an agent and what do they do?

- Agents are the main conduits between the publisher and the writer. Their job is to find new authors, sell them to the publisher and then manage their careers for the long term. Agents protect, edit and guide authors.
- The author/agent relationship is often a longer-term one than the author/editor relationship, as authors tend to work with different editors throughout their career while a good agent relationship will remain constant. Agents have to really love your work since their relationship with you lasts for years, and equally you really need to feel you connect with them.
- Agents are also responsible for making sure that the publisher does the best possible job. They're the mediator when something uncomfortable comes up between the author and the publisher, and while they will give honest advice, ultimately they are going to feel most loyal to the author because that is who they work for.
- Agents are not usually reading submissions during working hours, but firefighting problems and coordinating with foreign rights teams, publishers, Film & TV subagents etc.
- Editors might have to juggle which of their books get a bigger budget each season, but agents don't have to set books against each other and there aren't as many conflicting interests – they can always be fully behind their author.

## Are there any universal rules for submissions that really matter?

- Your work does not have to be in a specific font size or double spaced and even the synopsis and author biography don't matter as much as your MS. If possible, avoid making spelling mistakes in the main email because words are the agent's business.
- Agents don't care about what qualifications you have or where you work. It ultimately boils down to having the confidence to submit your writing, rather than qualification and connections.
- Don't submit your work to more than one agent at the same agency but do submit widely, and notify everyone if you are receiving interest or taking meetings.

## Do you read cover letters and synopses?

- You do need to write these but they are not the most important factor. A synopsis should be one page at most, an outline that shows the general flow of the story. It is unnecessary to lay everything out scene-by-scene and agents will rarely read a

synopsis that does this because it still doesn't give them a sense of whether the story works.

→ What to include in your one page pitch letter:

- i. An introductory paragraph.
- ii. A paragraph on the book. Agents want to see something similar to the blurb that's on the back of a book, i.e. a confident pitch for what makes your book interesting.
- iii. Comparisons are a useful way of demonstrating quickly what to expect and how it fits the market. However, try to avoid comparing yourself to the big archetypes (e.g. Harry Potter) as it might show you have not been reading widely. If it makes you uncomfortable to compare yourself to an established author, then you can say that your work would appeal to fans of X.
- iv. However, don't feel held back if you can't think of any comparisons. This probably means that you have an idea that is very different to what is out there and books have sold well in the past without comps.

### How important is the first page?

- You should start by telling your story in a distinctive way.
- A strong voice is very important.

### How do you find the best agent for you?

- When you are searching for an agent make sure you know exactly what you're looking for in that person. Look at their website and see what they say they can offer you.
- Finding an agent is like dating so you also need to be able to work out if you're compatible. Make sure the partnership feels right to you.
- It is important to look at what authors an agent is already representing and how you would fit on their list. Try to find someone with the same interests in reading as this shows they are more likely to share your vision for the book.
- Try to have a face-to-face conversation with them first because you need to get a feel for the relationship in order to be confident that they can be trusted to manage your career.
- *The Writers and Artists Yearbook* is a very useful springboard to finding an agent. You could also take a look at what agents are cropping up in *The Bookseller* and in the acknowledgements at the back of books you enjoy.

- Make sure the agency is a good fit for you. Does this agent represent books that you could be in a mix with? Do you feel you can trust this agent to manage your career? Do you want a more established agent with a list of fifty clients or somebody younger who will have more time to hand hold you?
- Look at the agent's social media and see if you connect with their interests.

### Do agents suggest parting ways with an author if they are unable to sell a project?

- Both sides are allowed to say that the relationship is not working and it should always feel like an equal relationship. If an author's book doesn't do very well sometimes they can feel they might want to change agents but this doesn't happen very often.
- An agent should stick by you even if they can't sell your first manuscript. Plenty of great deals are for books that are not the author's first.

### Are agents put off by manuscripts that are over the word count?

- If you are in the ballpark for what is marketable then your agent should be able to see past the word count and work with you to edit and sell it.
- However, if you are wildly over (e.g. a 5k word picture book, 70k lower MG, 200k YA) you might want to work to cut this down before submitting to agents, to make it easier for them to see the potential.

### Is it worth submitting to publishers/editors directly or should you find an agent first?

- The publisher might match you with an agent if they would like to pursue your work but it is a danger to enter into an agreement without representation. Contract negotiation is very important and agents will be able to navigate you through that process.

### Have agents offered representation based on a few chapters or unfinished manuscripts?

- If you can write really well then an agent should be able to see that, but note that you could lose momentum if you can't deliver the rest of the books for years.

### If an agent doesn't like the illustrations in a manuscript for an illustrated story, would they still consider your work for representation?

- If the agent loves the story but doesn't think the illustrations are working then they would usually talk to you first about finding another artist.

How many clients do you sign via the slush pile vs events such as pitching competitions, friend recommendations, etc?

- A lot of authors come in from the unsolicited submissions pile. It is never referred to as a slush pile in house. This is the heart of what agents do.
- Agents will also approach a writer themselves if they are interested in representing them.

When reading your slushpile, do you keep some to decide on later, or is it yes/no straight away?

- The ones agents put aside to think aside will often end up finding representation elsewhere.
- If you have another agent interested in your work, you should email the other agents you have submitted to so that they know to put your work at the top of their reading pile.

How many agent rejections are too many?

- This is not quantifiable. If you receive a lot of rejections it does not mean that you are not a good writer. It might just mean that you need to do more work on the manuscript or that there's another idea that will work better.

## Session Three: 'Publishing A Debut'

How has the experience of publishing debut been for you?

- It can be difficult if your book feels very personal and revealing and includes a difficult subject matter that can get you down. However, you should feel proud of seeing this through because of the people it will help. It may not be easy for you emotionally but in the end it will be worth the hard work.
- The world can see your heart on the page but you can't leave it there.
- Publishing during a pandemic can be particularly stressful because you don't have a sense of what is normal.

Is there anything you would do differently next time around?

- Whenever possible you should try not accepting jobs that take up all of your creative brainspace. Note that this is not the same as *not* taking jobs. You need a job to be able to write but you also need to have one that is able to work with your writing life. For example, it can get overwhelming if you are also trying to juggle directing and managing large projects while trying to meet your writing deadlines. You need to protect your writing time and do your best to deliver when you are supposed to.

How does writing a second book compare to the first?

- Being a debut author is a unique experience. It is usually a book that is written outside the world of publishing, but the second book is harder because there are more expectations.
- When you're writing the first book you're in a quiet room alone, but this is not the case for the second book. You therefore need to learn how to recreate that metaphorical quiet room again. Block out the other voices and only listen to the ones you trust. Those voices should primarily belong to your agent and your editor.
- It's also harder because you've used up all the easy lines at the forefront of your mind so you need to dig deeper to find other ways to express the same things in your second book.
- Every word you write makes you a better writer so the bar rises much higher each time.

What advice can you give to first time authors?

- If you're clear that this is what you want to do, make sure to widen your network and meet new people. People in the publishing industry want to share and support each

other, so you should join networks and make connections on social media to make you feel more welcome.

- Share your work with people you're comfortable with to prepare you for reviews. When people read your book you will feel very exposed and this can be very stressful and emotional. The earlier you can get used to sharing it with people the better.
- But don't read reviews. These are for readers not for authors. You need to continue writing regardless of what people think. One person will like the ending, another will not. You should listen to feedback from your publisher and from your agent, but not from reviewers.
- Once your book is ready to go make sure to have a goal. It is impossible to please everybody in such a big industry so you need to remember what your goal was for the book. Every book is different. Don't compare yourself to anyone else, and make sure you are focused on a specific audience – know who you are trying to reach.
- There's a tendency to look at big announcements- for example number of translation deals, book of the month etc.- and doubt yourself. But it is often not as splashy as these highlights make it seem. In fact, it's normal for things to go quiet in the first few months after publication and you might not see opportunities crop up until a year after your first book was published. Remember that a slow burn career does not make you a failure.

## Session Four: 'A Writing Career'

What advice would you give to yourself if you could go back to the day before you signed your first deal?

- Get more involved in the writing community and make more writer friends. There's such a benefit to making friends with people who are going through a similar experience as you are. Having other people around you who are there to uplift you and support you is very important.
- Social media helps you connect with people who can understand you but writers don't talk publicly about how difficult it is. A lot of it is very glamorous so you can feel alone when you're having a hard time. Be honest on Twitter about your struggle because people can relate to that.
- As writers you have to be able to articulate those feelings other people can't but are still expected to be thick skinned. It is ok to be vulnerable. Hold your nerve and don't let people tell you who you should be writing for and what story you should be telling.
- It can be hard to feel like you can speak up if you aren't happy with something but your voice matters.
- Appreciate that in publishing things can take time and it is not necessarily a bad thing that it takes so long.

Has the industry changed in the time you have been working as an author? What future changes would you hope for?

**There must be a focus on representation, not just diversity.**

- Writers of colour can currently only get a seat at the table if they are writing about pain and trauma, or if they are as exceptional as Zadie Smith or Kazuo Ishiguro. This is comparable to the film industry where a black woman can only win an Oscar for a role a white woman can't play e.g. Lupita Nyong'o for *Twelve Years a Slave*. And writers of colour are not allowed to be mediocre in any way.
- But diversity should be across the board. Writers of colour should be able to succeed in commercial fiction, not just literary fiction. Where is the Black Sophie Kinsella? Or Korean Dan Brown? There should be stories for everyone about everything, not just about pain and trauma. And if the most interesting thing you have to say about your character is that they're black or gay you're doing it wrong. Those things will naturally feed into the story.
- There is an appetite for the ordinariness of diversity. Writers of colour should have the space to be part of the ordinary. This includes room for tropes to be reinvented.

Everyone should have room to be The Chosen One, for example. The ordinary needs to be celebrated and accepted.

- There has been bigger changes to the openness to different stories but publishers need to look at the books that are taking up most of the space and make sure that there isn't complacency around this— i.e. just because they have one or two successful writers of colour on their list, they shouldn't feel the job is done. We should be striving for representation, not just diversity.

**The age demographic of the YA audience has changed. And it is still changing.**

- The YA audience has now also expanded to also include adults, which is a change from 2012 when its readers were perceived to be teenagers. Does this mean that we will see more books come out in the style of YA being written for older people? YA should develop into a new category of fiction that is something in the style of YA but for older readers- *not* New Adult. Sally Rooney serves that area of the market, for example, but there is still a big gap here that needs to be filled.

Do you have any advice for authors of colour to prepare them for walking into white dominated rooms in the publishing industry?

- You're going to attend meetings where you're the only person of colour in the room and it will be uncomfortable.
- White editors you come across who don't understand different cultural practices might question why you have included them in your story. If you're bringing up homophobic or racist issues then people can also become defensive and you might be worried about getting a reputation as difficult. But this should never be on you alone as an author. Your agent needs to have your back, because it is easier for them to make themselves heard. It is therefore important to find a great ally and build a support network around you. You shouldn't be the only one in your corner. You need to find someone you trust to communicate your ideas.
- You also need to focus on what is within your control, and that is your writing craft. Don't doubt yourself.

# Session Five: 'Events & Building an Author Profile'

How would you describe an author profile?

- An author profile is online and offline, consumer facing and trade facing. It helps reviewers and booksellers know what you want to say and how you want to say it.
- It is how you treat your readers, your team, your peers, staff at festivals and bookshops etc.
- Your brand can be something that is either built from nothing or established. It is independent from one of your books and can exist on its own outside the publishing industry.
- Social media can also be used as a tool to help writers build a brand. It has become a huge part of author life to have that approachability.
- Remember that you can choose how much of yourself you put online. There's no pressure to feel like you have to be online all the time.

Is a profile necessary or even useful at submission stage?

- An author profile is not necessary but it is useful. It allows PR & Marketing teams to get a sense of who you are and come up with a plan a lot faster than they would for someone who has no author profile. However, creators with a big online following and those with none are treated similarly. It all boils down to your writing.
- Connections on a local level have the most impact. Someone can have a huge online following but if it isn't relevant to book then that won't transition into sales.

How might an aspiring author go about building a profile before they have a book out?

- Publishing Twitter is accessible to everyone. Following a lot of people on that platform will allow you to see what conversations are happening around a book when it is being published.
- Social media is a great way to connect with other writers. It can feel like everyone knows everyone but a lot of those friendships came up only after they got into publishing. There's no prerequisite to know people. A good way of connecting with other writers online is by championing their work. If you loved a book you should let that author and their publisher know.

- If you're nervous about joining social media, you can start building your profile on a local level by interacting with booksellers and going to events etc.

### What should authors be asking their publisher to support them with?

- It is important that your brand is recognizable and that your readers always know what they are getting. Egmont have done a brilliant job of packing the SAM WU books in this way, for example.
- You should also build a reputation of doing school events, turning up on time, being reliable etc. These are the things that make you good at a regular office job and are equally applicable to authors.
- Expect your books to be put out for everything (e.g. reviews) and in return you'll do events and blog posts etc.
- Ask your publisher for a list of actionable items because this will make you feel more confident.

### What advice would you give a new author looking at setting up social media accounts?

- Don't be shy about promoting your own work. Social media is the platform for that. But make sure that your publisher is also doing the same.
- Authors don't need to have a presence on every single social media platform. You should focus on putting your energy into the platform that you can get the most out of and leave the rest to your publisher.
- Hachette has a starter pack for authors which lets them know who they should be following. Ask your publisher for resources if you would like more guidance.
- If you don't feel qualified to take part in a particular conversation, call your publicity team for advice. Getting a sense check from other people is important because there will always be an angle that you haven't considered. It's ok to reach out and ask for that support.
- You don't always have to tweet. There's no pressure to be on everything all the time unless it is something that you feel strongly about. Being an author is about writing and not necessarily about standing in front of other people in order to make sure you have a say on everything. If you also have a full time job it can be difficult to stay on top of everything that is not directly related to you or your writing and that's ok too.

### What advice would you give about an author approaching their first events.

- You might find the idea of speaking to over two-hundred children intimidating but you should be able to turn to your publicist for help and ask them to go with you the first

few times. It is also useful to attend festivals/book events and ask your publisher if you can shadow another author to get more experience.

- Remember that it is normal for things to go wrong. There is a lot that is outside of your control e.g. technical issues, children asking inappropriate questions etc.
- School events are great because they can help you establish a relationship with teachers and publishers. Children's books sell through word of mouth marketing. It's what builds the buzz around a book.
- School events can be a concentrated tour around publication or continue long after, and generally involve an assembly style solo event with a Q&A. Schools can also ask for creative writing workshops with smaller groups. It is entirely up to you what content you cover, so you should think about what you want readers to take away from that event.
- Some publishers also offer third party training for events to help build confidence
- Building relationships through events is important, as librarians and booksellers are the gatekeepers of the industry and are also on a lot of judging panels. Make sure to send booksellers, librarians and schools a thank you tweet after your event to build goodwill.
- Reach out to organizations like Authors Aloud who can get you into schools.
- You should also not be afraid to charge for school events. A lot of authors make a significant proportion of their money this way.
- Make sure you have a bookseller on board that will do all the logistical work on your behalf. This is important because it will take the edge off and allow you to focus on the event itself.
- Remember that you don't always have to have an answer for everything. If you don't want to step into a conversation don't feel pressure to answer on stage. You are allowed to say that you don't know enough about something to answer.
- If you don't want to do school events, talk to your publicist. There are a lot of alternative options out there and they will be able to find something for you to do that you're more comfortable with. You can also ask your publicist for a smaller event if you don't feel confident jumping into your first event with 250 children in the audience. It doesn't always have to be a blanket yes to everything. Make sure to give your publicist feedback so that they know what's working and what isn't.
- It's also ok if you don't have a lot of events booked or if you have a small audience. Building a profile takes time. Your first event may have only six people in the audience, but the next one will have more.

## Can an author profile be built organically without a big marketing spend?

- Yes. Anyone can find an audience, understand what they want and figure out how to give that to them in a mutually beneficial trade.
- If there's something your publisher isn't exploring, you should raise this with them and discuss why they're not doing something.
- An author profile can also be built organically if you chair events before you're published and uplift voices other than your own. There are a lot of events hosted by keen bloggers because publishers notice their enthusiasm online. Shouting about books that you love can therefore be a way into those circles. You need to actively look for opportunities that will allow you to meet those gatekeepers and spend time building your profile before your book has come out.
- Be authentic. If you have other interests you should share them.

## Who should we follow for good examples of successful author brands, either self-built or publisher-backed?

- Cressida Cowell's *How to Train Your Dragon* is a very recognizable children's brand. She still gets in front of readers and doesn't shy away from doing school events.
- Angie Thomas has a very successful author brand that is not attached to just one title and she is also a fangirl who is always lifting up other authors.
- Elizabeth Acevedo is also great at talking about her book but always talking more generally about her love for poetry and verse. She also does a lot of events.
- Sophia Thakur, author of *Somebody Give This Heart a Pen*, also built her brand before her book came out.
- Tomi Adeyemi's interviews are also good examples of how to build an author profile. She always knows what she wants to promote, gets her comps in quickly and no matter what the interviewer asks her she still manages to hit her points and say what she wants to say.

## Panelists' Reading Recommendations:

If you're writing in a specific genre you should read around that and see how you can take it a step further. Editors are always looking for something different. Make sure you read widely and look at the books that have sold really well. This will give you an understanding of the audience you are trying to appeal to and what your work is able to offer that is different.

There are a lot of Middle Grade classics to look back on e.g. Michael Ende's *The Neverending Story*, C.S. Lewis' *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* etc.

*The Hunger Games* trilogy by Suzanne Collins is a really good example of an idea that is easy to pitch because it can be quickly summed up in a one line pitch.

Katherine Rundell's *The Good Thieves* is an example of a technically perfect plot and structure. The *Paddington* movies are also a very useful tool for understanding story, albeit in a different format.

Patrick Ness, *Chaos Walking* trilogy.

Sarah J. Maas, *Throne of Glass* series.

Jacqueline Wilson

Dean Atta, *The Black Flamingo*

Sharna Jackson, *The High Rise Mystery*.

*The Girl Guide's Handbook*

Jennifer Egan, *A Visit From Goon Squad*.

Kwame Alexander, *The Undefeated*.

Mars Heryward, *The Long Exposure*, which is available to read [here](#).

Ali Land, *Good Me, Bad Me*.

Jessica Love, *Julian Is A Mermaid*.

Tomi Adeyemi, *Children of Blood and Bone* and *Children of Virtue and Vengeance*.

Sophia Thakur, *Somebody Give This Heart a Pen*.

Cressida Cowell, *How to Train Your Dragon*.

Elizabeth Acevado, *Clap When You Land*.