

# Vocabulary in Children's Literature

**Jo S. Kittinger**  
[www.jokittinger.com](http://www.jokittinger.com)

**ALA** - abbreviation for the **American Library Association**.

**Antagonist**- generally a character in a story that is in opposition with the main character. Sometimes the antagonist is some other element, such as a circumstance that runs counter to the wishes of the protagonist. An antagonist is not necessarily negative or an enemy. In some stories the antagonist is a friend of the main character or becomes a friend.

**Author/illustrator** - A person who both writes and illustrates articles or books.

**Back matter** - helps found at the back of a book, such as the glossary and index.

**Bleed** - when art runs off the edge of a page.

**Boilerplate Contract** - a publisher's basic contract (typically offered to new authors), prior to any revisions.

**Book Packager** - a company which puts together an edited manuscript with finished art to present as a package deal to publishers.

**Caldecott Award** - a prestigious award given annually to an American children's book for quality of illustration.

**Camera ready** - A manuscript or illustration which is ready for printing.

**Carnegie Medal** – an award by British children's librarians for an outstanding book for children and young people.

**CBC** – abbreviation for the **Children's Book Council**. The national nonprofit trade association for children's trade book publishers..

**CBC Awards** - Awarded by the Children's Book Council in five categories:

- CBCA Book of the Year: Older Readers
- CBCA Book of the Year: Younger Readers
- CBCA Book of the Year: Early Childhood
- CBCA Picture Book of the Year
- The Eve Pownall Award for Information Books

**Chapter Book** - a book that is broken up into chapters, for children just advancing past picture books, generally pre-teens.

**Character** - People or other living things that drive the plot in a story. In children's books anything from a cuddly bear to a talking cucumber might be a character.

**Climax** - the most dramatic point of a story, which usually occurs near the end.

**Commissioning editor** - An editor who has the power to commission, or assign, work.

**Conflict** - Strife; discord of action, feeling, or effect; antagonism or opposition. Conflict may be external, occurring between two characters or between a character and events, or between character and elements such as time or weather. Conflict may also be internal, occurring within your main character. These mental struggles arise when characters have opposing impulses or moral considerations. Conflict is essential for creating an interesting and exciting story.

**Cumulative story (Pattern Story)** - a story in which many elements or language patterns repeat until the climax, with a predictable text. Examples: *Chicken Licken*, *The House that Jack Built*, or *The Great Big Enormous Turnip*.

**Curriculum Vitae (CV)** - Literally "path of life." If a publisher asks for your CV they want to know your relevant education, life skills and writing credits, which include publications and awards.

**Decodability** - the ease at which a word can be sounded out

**Drafts** - the various stages of a manuscript. The first draft is the first complete version of the manuscript. Most writers go through several drafts.

**Easy Reader** - a book designed for children just learning to read on their own. Many publishers have easy reader series, each with specific and distinct guidelines.

**Editing** - reading through a manuscript and making changes for improvement. Structural editing looks to improve the plot structure. Line editing and copy editing seek to fix typos and other small errors. Style editing irons out stylistic issues.

**F & G (Folded and Gathered)** - Printed, but unbound, pages of a picture book.

**Galley proof** – printed pages of a manuscript generally sent to the author for correction. These are often followed by or replaced by page proofs. Galleys and page proofs are frequently sent electronically.

**Golden Kites** - annual awards presented by the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators in the following categories: fiction, nonfiction, picture book illustration, and picture book text.

**Gutter** - where the pages are joined in the middle when a book is open. Illustrators of picture books must work with the gutter in mind.

**Hard copy** – a manuscript printed out on paper.

**High concept** - a high concept story is one which can be distilled into a single sentence, such as "Teenage girl falls in love with a vegetarian vampire."

**Hi-Lo (High Low)** - a book with a topic that appeals to higher grade students, but with low reading skills. Written at a lower readability level than the topic would indicate.

**Illustration roughs** -- trial illustrations, sometimes sent to an author for approval.

**IRA** - abbreviation for the **International Reading Association**.

**IRA Children's Book Awards** - annual awards for an author's first or second published book for fiction and nonfiction awarded for primary (ages preschool-8) or intermediate (ages 9-13) level books.

**Junior Chapter Book (JCB)** - a book divided into chapters and intended for primary readers with beginning reader skills.

**Kate Greenaway Medal** - awarded by children's librarians in Great Britain for outstanding illustration in a book for children and young people.

**Kid lit, or kiddy lit** - colloquial term for children's literature.

**Manuscript (ms, mss)** - an unpublished book, story or article. This may be hard copy (printed on paper) or electronic file (existing on a hard drive or CD.) The usual abbreviation is "ms", with "mss" as the plural form.

**Motivation** - the reasons behind the actions of characters in a story.

**Newbery Medal** – a prestigious award given annually to an American children’s book.

**Orbis Pictus Award** - honor given annually by The National Council of Teachers of English for outstanding nonfiction for children.

**Pace** - the speed with which a story unfolds.

**PB** - abbreviation for **Picture Book**. A book in which the pictures are a vital element of the storytelling. Picture books are most often 32 pages long, but sometimes 24, 40 or 48 pages.

**P & L (Profit and Loss Statement)** - a document created, typically by the editor, outlining the projected cost to publish a book and the projected profit from the project. The P&L is a determining factor in whether or not to acquire a manuscript.

**Phonetics** – the branch of language study dealing with speech sounds, their production and combination and their representation by written symbols.

**Phonics** – method of teaching beginners to read or enunciate by learning the usual sounds of certain letters or groups of letters.

**Picture clues** - pictures included to help children figure out the text.

**Platform** - everything about you that helps sell your book. Key elements are referred to as "planks." For nonfiction these include: educational, professional, or substantial personal experience; membership or officer standing in relevant organizations; print or Internet credits; a mailing list; an established audience; or an "expert" reputation with the media. For fiction: connections to published writers; an established readership and mailing list; prior publications; and connections that might lead to reviews, serial sales, interviews, signings, or other appearances.

**Plot** - the storyline in a book.

**P.O.V.** - abbreviation for Point of View, also known as “viewpoint”.

**Précis** - a very short synopsis, a brief summary of your story.

**Printz Award** - Michael L. Printz Award for Excellence in Young Adult Literature, sponsored annually by Booklist and the American Library Association

**Proposal** - a document designed to interest a publisher in your book idea. It explains your idea and might include a synopsis, perhaps an outline (for nonfiction projects), discussion of your target audience and why this publisher is the best for your book, competing books in the market and why yours is different/better, and/or marketing ideas.

**Protagonist** - the main character in a story. Sometimes referred to as the hero or heroine. However, a protagonist need not be heroic.

**Rationale** - within a book proposal, the reasoning why a book should be published. The term may also apply to the motivation behind a plot point.

**Readability Level** - various computer programs can determine the grade level at which a child should be able to read your story. This is important for easy readers, early chapter books, and Hi-Lo books.

**Resolution** - the end of the plot, when the main problem or conflict is solved and other loose ends are tied up.

**RS (Reading Scheme)** - books geared to a particular reading level, to encourage growth as a reader.

**Sample and Synopsis (or “Synopsis and Three”)** - if an editor requests a sample and synopsis, they want to see a full summary of your novel, plus the first three chapters as a sample of your writing. At times, they may request only a single chapter, which should be the first.

**S.A.S.E (Self Addressed Stamped Envelope)** - to be enclosed with a manuscript with enough postage for return to the author.

**SCB (Senior Chapter Book)** - A book divided into chapters, intended for primary readers with higher reading skills.

**SCBWI** - abbreviation for the **Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators**, an international professional association which supports published authors and illustrators, while also nurturing those new to the field. Conferences are held around the world.

**Scene** - something that happens to one or more characters in a singular place and time.

**Sid Fleischman Humor Award** - an award presented by the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators for an outstanding humorous children's book.

**Sim-sub (Simultaneous Submission)** - sending a manuscript to more than one publisher at a time. Once discouraged, but now acceptable to most publishers as long as you mention this in the cover letter.

**SitNor (Situation Normal)** - the basic state of your characters when the story begins.

**Slush Pile** - the stacks of unsolicited manuscripts received at a publishing company.

**Spread** - the two pages visible when a book is open.

**Story Events** - major events that happen in book's plot. The incidents that move the story along.

**Sub** - shortened slang for "submission" of a manuscript, used as a noun or verb.

**Synopsis** - a summary of your story. A synopsis may be long or short, detailed or concise. All synopses present the main plot, including major conflict and resolution. A synopsis must include the ending, not a teaser as to what the ending might be.

**Theme** - the underlying meaning of the book.

**Unsolicited Manuscripts** - manuscripts submitted to a publisher without having been requested by an editor, or without benefit of an agent. Many publishers are closed to unsolicited submissions.

**Voice** - a quality every editor looks for, but is difficult to define. The "original personality" that shines through excellent writing.

**W.I.P. (Work in progress)** - a partially written story, novel or article.

**YA (Young Adult)** - a story intended for teenaged readers.