

WRITING YOUNG VOICES

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SESSION HANDOUT/OUTLINE

This session is about writing voices of any age younger than adult, including major and minor characters and, importantly, the narrative voice as well.

Do's and Don'ts: Attitude and Approach

Don't condescend.

Don't just show them failing to be adults. Show them partially succeeding.

Don't just consider traits and skills they haven't acquired or mastered yet. Use things they haven't unlearned yet.

Respect and admire your young characters. Delight in them. Let yourself be in awe of them sometimes. This will reach your reader.

Do's and Don'ts: Dialogue (External Voices)

Use all the tools you already use in dialogue: Diction, syntax, grammar, punctuation, tone, style, timing, things left unsaid . . .

Make the moment feel young, with the words that are spoken or otherwise.

Use slang with restraint, so young voices will still speak to readers who come 20 years later or are 40 years older.

Don't be afraid to let your young voices use big words

Do's and Don'ts: Internal Voices

Not everything in the character's speech and thoughts has to be young, but we must see/hear something that is. (And what isn't has to be plausible.)

Be aware of all the voices in the scene.

The difference between the POV character's internal and external voices is filled with potential. Use it. These voices could be different ages, speaking of different things, even directly opposed to each other.

Additional Thoughts

It's an iterative process.

Remember. Then remember some more. Remember feelings, especially.

Try having your young voice think of the possible reasons for something – then delete the most likely reason an adult might see. Trust the reader to notice that the character is missing that one.

Young voices (should) mature over time.

If you make young voices precociously jaded, cynical, or especially thick-skinned, be sure you have an obvious reason.

Good Places to Study Young Voices

Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*

Huntley Fitzgerald, *My Life Next Door* (and sequel)

Amanda Sellet, *By the Book: A Novel of Prose and Cons*

Stephanie Perkins, *Anna and the French Kiss* (and sequel)

Ursula LeGuin, *Very Far Away from Anywhere Else*

David Baldacci, *Wish You Well*

Louise Rennison, *Angus, Thongs and Full-Frontal Snogging* (and sequels)

Jerry Spinelli, *Stargirl*

Charles Osgood, *Defending Baltimore from Enemy Attack* (autobiography)

Ralph Moody, *Little Britches* (and sequels; autobiography)

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