

FEBRUARY 2017 BEHIND THE CURTAIN JOURNAL ENTRY

CREATING A STORYSTORM OF PICTURE BOOK IDEAS

BY CHILDREN'S AUTHOR JENNIFER PHILLIPS

I love to brainstorm. **It's** one of those activities that makes me feel productive and creative.

January was right up my alley. I participated in Storystorm, which used to be called PiBoldMo for Picture Book Idea Month. Writers try to generate at least 30 picture book ideas in 30 days. Organized by **children's** author Tara Lazar, **there's** online camaraderie and 30 days of helpful blogs (with giveaways).

I'm usually big on volume. I had a harder time this year. There were more distractions and I found I needed to dig in new places for ideas that **weren't** recycled versions of past ideas. Still, I made it, generating exactly 30 ideas by end of the month.

I used some of the strategy reminders from the blog posters to stimulate fresh thinking. Examples include asking "**what if?**" questions, building story ideas from random words (I like to use random images as well), plucking from news stories and changing perspectives from one character or object to another. I also blew the dust off a really old file of clippings meant to help me with ideas.

Mid-month, I tried to let the distractions around me become fuel for ideas rather than fight what was out of my control. This helped a bit and yielded a few ideas.

Now **I'll** start to pull from the list, letting the ideas that sing to me the most get my attention in the coming months. **I'm** participating in the 12x12 picture book challenge again this year. I have several ideas to revise first but then some of my story storms are sure to make an appearance on my active writing list.

What's the value of participating in challenges like these? For me, **it's** the discipline of having a deadline along with the chance to get knowledge and inspiration from other writers. Some challenges are more time intensive than others. Many are free or have minor costs.

I have a plan for how **I'll** challenge myself this year. How about you?

Check out [Tara Lazar's blog](#), where she also advertises the yearly Storystorm enrollment process (**it's** free).

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