

JANUARY 2017 BEHIND THE CURTAIN JOURNAL ENTRY

12X12 PICTURE BOOK CHALLENGE SUCCESS AND LEARNINGS

BY CHILDREN'S AUTHOR JENNIFER PHILLIPS

I made it! All last year, I did the [12x12 challenge](#) where participants write 12 rough picture book drafts over 12 months. Last month, I highlighted the 12 stories I tackled. Some of these are far enough along that **I've** included them on my available manuscripts list.

Sustaining the pace remained the hard part all year. I worked ahead on a few drafts when I could, knowing certain months would be extremely busy. I had to keep remembering that no one was really judging the quality of these drafts. The online community of writers is extremely supportive. You **don't** have to post your work for critique but if you do, the expectation is that you also critique **others'** works. **It's** a huge gift to each other.

Between critique exchanges and the amazing webinars with authors, editors and agents, here are a few golden nuggets **I've** learned so far about writing picture books:

- Invest energy in developing strong characters who pull readers into your story.
- Every word needs to work hard. Be brutal in editing.
- Children like repetition and patterns—remember that **you're** writing for them, not grown-ups who might find repetition tedious.
- Your story should invite readers to participate in some way (e.g., predicting what will happen next, making fun noises or movements, etc.).
- Be willing to experiment. Focus on imagery and play with the words.
- Lay out your stories in picture book dummies to refine the pacing and where page turns happen.
- Titles really matter—they have to hook the reader (including the grown-up who will be buying the book).
- Sharing your work in process will make your writing better. Find supportive critique partners or an online community and **you'll** be amazed at how **people's** questions and ideas open up new possibilities in your writing.

I hope to succeed in participating in the second level of 12x12 this year. The focus will be on revisions and submission to agents and editors. But either way, revision will be the name of the game this year.

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