

Can you suggest niche markets for selling rhymed verse?

Q: I write stories in rhymed verse and have had trouble finding a publisher. Can you suggest other outlets for this type of writing?

If some of your verse is inspirational, I'd suggest approaching publishers of religious/inspirational books. As another option, I'd recommend exploring opportunities in the greeting card business, where rhymed and un-rhymed verse (both secular and inspirational) is commonly used.

According to Marty Roelandt, an independent art director who provides creative services and art direction to the paper and gift industries, "There are a lot of similarities between the children's book and greeting card industries." One of the success factors in both businesses depends on the ability of an editor (in publishing) or art director (for greeting cards) to be able to integrate an author's words and an illustrator's pictures to convey a unified message. Text needs to be short and to the point. Art needs to be compelling enough to attract attention in a store crowded with product.

"Traditionally, verse is what sells cards," explains Roelandt. "Authors should start by learning about the different companies and the lines of cards they produce. Visit card stores. Check Writer's Market. Read the gift trade magazines, such as Giftware News and Gifts and Decorative Accessories. Know that most text is purchased as work-for-hire, rather than on a royalty basis. Content is occasion-oriented (Birthday, Mother's Day, New Baby). Text is written to specification and described in terms of "divisions of sentiment" (ie. for Valentine's Day — "wife to husband," "son to mother," "friend"). Larger card companies also distinguish between "levels of warmth" ("intimate/warm," "distant/cool"). The writer needs to be able to synthesize a feeling and hit the target with just a few words," says Roelandt. "Once you're ready to start talking with companies, write and ask for their writer's guidelines and be prepared to send samples of verse you've written."

Illustrators can check Artist's Market and request artist's guidelines. They should also send samples, though Roelandt advises against sending original art. "Send a limited quantity of good quality reproductions that are appropriate for the market and that show you can illustrate for the lines the company puts out. Also consider providing art for other product lines, such as gift bags, ornaments, or collectibles. Contact some of the alternative card companies that have art-driven lines that use simple, or no text."

Authors and illustrators wanting to succeed in this market may want to show that they can provide a broad range of text and art, or a single special style. There's a growing need for freelancers in this field. There are also many alternative card companies and an expanding number of "caption categories." Diet, divorce, and pet loss are some of the new categories of cards you may be seeing at your local store. "In the last ten years, there's also been a lot of change in the look and tone of greeting cards," says Roelandt. "Text is more varied. It can be conversational, personal, or irreverent. There are also more illustrative art styles and contemporary formats being used." The last word is that, regardless of whether the look and tone of a card is traditional or not, the text and art should tell a story that encapsulates a feeling, or a moment in time. 5:6/99

