

How important is it to have a literary agent?

Q: Is it necessary to get a literary agent to represent one's work if one has not been published yet? 2) If one gets a literary agent, should you carry on with the literary agent for other works or could one try for the same publisher or other publishers once one's book is published without any literary agent? 3) Should one get more than one literary agent for different kind of work –for example, one for children's another for poetry? 4) Should one carry on with a literary agent, or is there a point when one does not need the service of a literary agent? 5) How important is a literary agent to an author's career?

You don't necessarily need to have a literary agent for your first book, especially if it's a picture book, early reader or work for hire," says Edward Necarsulmer IV, Director of the Children's Literature Department at McIntosh & Otis. "For more intricate middle grade, YA or non-fiction (or very out of the ordinary picture book projects, it's more important because of an agent's knowledge of the publishing scene, editors' likes and dislikes as well as the marketplace as a whole.

It can also be difficult to get an agent as an unpublished author, however If you can, it can help quite a bit in getting a book published because a growing number of publishers don't accept unsolicited or unagented manuscripts. Also, agents help a lot because they know the types of books specific publishers want.

In terms of staying with an agent, Necarsulmer explained that "most agents want a long term relationship that will allow the author and agent to grow together. The better you do in your career, the more an agent can do in terms of advocating for you with your publishers in getting better royalties and in getting more done for your books in marketing and publicity."

Whether you have more than one agent will depend on the diversity of your work and on the agency you choose. Some are specialized and cover particular areas. Others, particularly larger agencies, have multiple agents who can address a broad range of needs, for example in books, licensing and film. In terms of staying with an agent, if it's a good relationship, you should get increased value from your agency as your career evolves and contracts and decisions become more complex. At the same time, you'll need to decide if the agency you're with is meeting your needs as those evolve. 9:10/08