

Just the Right Word: The Power of Language in Your Picture Book

Every word counts in children's books. Make sure every word not only needs to be there, but also is doing what you want it to do.

A Few Considerations

- Is it the *right* word? Ask yourself: What am I trying to convey? Fun? Fear? Comfort? Sadness? Excitement? Make sure the words you are using are doing the job you need them to do.
- If it's a verb, is it the most active and most precise description of the action you want to convey?
- Does the sentence lend itself to alliteration, simile, metaphor, onomatopoeia, internal rhyme etc? If so, consider using one or more of these conventions.
- Can you use a "double duty" word? (A word that does more than one thing—conveys character *and* shows action, sets a mood *and* conveys character/action/emotion, etc)

Extraneous Words

Using these often means passive construction

To Be verbs: Is, am, are, was, were, will be, have, has, had been, will have been, and be (exceptions of course are situations such as the imperfect tense, in which the action is still going on)

Telling and often extraneous words: by, would, like, as if, seemed, told, felt, started

Our Sound Tools

(write down as we discuss!)

- Alliteration
- Onomatopoeia
- Consonance
- Assonance
- Repetition
- Rhythm
- Rhyme

A Word (Okay More Than One) On Rhyme

“A good rhyme, a repetition of sounds, pleases us...and settles in the ears pleasantly...[R]hyme can be a wonderful tool. But used poorly, rhyme is not only ridiculous but sometimes keeps us from saying what we wish to say.”

~ Myra Cohn Livingston in *Poem-Making: Ways to Begin Writing Poetry*

A few tips:

- Story first, rhyme second
- Carefully crafted rhyme through stanza, scheme and meter – study good rhyme and scan your lines for good metrics. Learn the rules before you break them!
- Avoid awkwardly constructed or forced rhyme
- Fresh, inspiring rhymes rather than predictable ones