

What's the Difference Between a Magazine Story and a Picture Book Story?

A few notes from author Denise Vega

Both a short story for a magazine and a picture book story are short, so what makes a story right for a magazine and not for a picture book or vice versa?

Illustrations

Picture books rely heavily on the illustrations *to help tell the story*. These illustrations may provide clues to what might happen next, visualization of the characters, juxtapositions or surprises, and a deepening of the theme, among other contributions. Magazine stories may have illustrations that accompany them, but these are usually only to highlight a particular scene described in the story text. A magazine story can be read and understood without its illustrations, but picture book texts would not be whole without the illustrations.

Action/Page Turns/Setting

Depending on the target age, magazine stories can be more reflective and internal, while picture books tend to focus on external events and actions, even as they often explore deeper themes through layered meaning in both the text and illustrations. In a picture book, things are happening on every page and with every page turn we experience more, and/or are moved to another location, feeling tension building if it's a narrative story. In short stories, pages turns don't matter. In fact, if there is a page turn in a magazine story, it relates to fitting the text on the page, not creating movement and anticipation. And a short story can have the same setting. This is possible in a picture book, but it comes with challenges for both the writer and illustrator, so you don't see it often. Finally, magazine stories allow room for description--of characters' appearance, setting, etc. Picture books usually leave out description unless it's vital to the story because the illustrator fills in those visual details.

The Multiple Reading Factor

For picture book authors, the magic words are: "Read it again!" (Though perhaps not so much for the person who is reading it to the child for the zillionth time ☺) To elicit this response, the story must be rich and layered and provide the child with *an emotional experience*. This can occur through humor, surprise, lyrical or rhythmic language, a sense of safety, security, warmth, and more.

Best advice: Set aside some time to visit your local library and read as many stories in magazines and picture books as you can. In the picture books, note what happens before a page turn, how the illustrations complement or enhance the text, how many scene changes there are. In magazines, note the development of the story, the amount of description, internal and external dialogue. After awhile you will begin to have an inner sense of the differences, which will help in your own writing process.