

## **Publishing Educational Books and Materials—Part 2: Cross-Marketing Kid Lit**

by Mary Ellen Lepionka 2/14/08

My last article attempted to illustrate the great diversity within the education market and the importance of market fit. Where do your products fit in the education market and are they market ready? To start, here are some suggestions for cross-marketing children's literature (sometimes referred to in the trade as kid lit) and young adult literature (referred to as YA books—books for teens).

If you publish children's or YA literature to the trade, reviews and awards are important starting points for cross-marketing to education markets. School librarians acquire books that are reviewed favorably in *School Library Journal* ([www.schoollibraryjournal.com/](http://www.schoollibraryjournal.com/)) and *Booklist* ([www.ala.org/ala/booklist/booklist.htm](http://www.ala.org/ala/booklist/booklist.htm)). They also buy books that have received awards for writing or illustration (see a list of such awards at [falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/awards.htm](http://falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/awards.htm)).

Your book should already meet industry standards for book production and manufacturing. School libraries prefer hardback books and often have books rebound using library bindings (see [www.lbibinders.org/home.htm](http://www.lbibinders.org/home.htm)). Middle school and high school libraries rely on rebound paperbacks for their fiction collections. Librarians also like to see PCIP or CIP data (see [cip.loc.gov/](http://cip.loc.gov/)) on the copyright page and/or a MARC record (see [www.loc.gov/marc/](http://www.loc.gov/marc/)), as this information saves them time and effort when cataloguing acquisitions.

Your book also should meet genre standards in content and pricing. These vary by subject. Big hardbound reference books for the nonfiction aisles in school libraries are higher-priced compared to the slim Scholastic-style paperbacks that are sold directly to students and their parents at book fairs or in book clubs (see [librarypublishing.scholastic.com](http://librarypublishing.scholastic.com)). Schools as a rule do not make returns or resell new books (except in fundraising efforts) and so may receive deeper discounts than trade bookstores. Libraries usually do not want consumables—books such as thematic coloring books or skills workbooks that school districts or teachers might buy for classroom use and subsequent disposal.

Content standards also vary by region and locality. Private schools and homeschoolers may address particular needs in their choices of reading matter for students. Public schools have community oversight, censorship lists, textbook committees, and approved reading lists. After ensuring that your product is right for school libraries, therefore, getting on an approved reading list is the next step. Approved reading lists may be state wide, as in California (see [www.cde.ca.gov/ci/rl/ll/](http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/rl/ll/)), or by school districts (see [www.davis.k12.ut.us/curric/languagearts/readlist.html](http://www.davis.k12.ut.us/curric/languagearts/readlist.html)). Approvals are based on reviews and awards and recommendations. However, be aware that your award-winning graphic YA novel or lauded children's book on same-sex marriage, for example, may not be approved in all districts or states.

Reading incentive and assessment programs are another important point of entry to elementary and secondary school markets. Two popular programs are Accelerated Reader (AR) (see [www.renlearn.com/ar/](http://www.renlearn.com/ar/)) and Scholastic's Reading Counts (SRC) (see [teacher.scholastic.com/products/readingcounts/index.htm](http://teacher.scholastic.com/products/readingcounts/index.htm)). AR and SRC will calculate the reading level of your book using the Lexile system, will rate your book for students,

and will write a test for it. (To see how the Lexile rating system works, go to [www.lexile.com/DesktopDefault.aspx?view=ed&tabindex=1&tabid=49&tabpageid=79](http://www.lexile.com/DesktopDefault.aspx?view=ed&tabindex=1&tabid=49&tabpageid=79) and click on “Lexile Codes”.) The tests are designed to quantify student achievement in reading. Students accumulate points by reading AR- and SRC-rated books and taking the tests, for which there are various incentives. School librarians and school districts automatically buy these books. For detailed information on submitting titles, see “Selling to the Elhi Market: Part 1: Reading Incentive and Assessment Programs” by Linda Carlson (*PMA Newsletter*, June, 2007).

Other than Lexile analysis, for school markets you at least need to determine the reading level, difficulty level, and age or grade level of your book, and this information should be prominent in your promotional literature. These are different measures, and various algorithms exist for computing them, based on factors such as word length, number of syllables, sentence length and the like (see [school.discoveryeducation.com/schrockguide/fry/fry.html](http://school.discoveryeducation.com/schrockguide/fry/fry.html)). Use several scales to determine the grade level and readability of your product, such as the Fry Readability and the Flesch-Kincaid Reading Ease. For a quick free check on the readability of your prose, try uploading a portion here: [www.timetabler.com/reading.html](http://www.timetabler.com/reading.html). Conceptual aspects of your content also may affect accessibility to students and age appropriateness.

One reason that reading level is important is that it links literature to the grade-based curriculum. The better you can explain the connections between your product and the curriculum to which your second-grade or tenth-grade readers are exposed, the more successful you will be in placing your product in schools. For example, is yours a picture book suitable for pre-K to grade 1 students, a story with vocabulary taught in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, or a chapter book that can be read independently by 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> graders? Is your book on a topic in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade science curriculum or in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade social studies curriculum? (For textbooks, the subject of my next article, connections between your book and the curriculum are crucial.) Another reason that reading level is important is that school library budgets often are allocated by genre or subject matter and by grade level to ensure even collections. At the same time, funds for all acquisitions may be disbursed only once or twice a year.

Librarians order from catalogs (school publishers and library wholesalers) and review recommendations, increasingly online. For insight on the role of catalog sales in this market, see “Publishers and Vendors” in Resources for School Librarians ([www.sldirectory.com/libsf/resf/vendor.html#top](http://www.sldirectory.com/libsf/resf/vendor.html#top)). Librarians also are influenced by book exhibits at library shows, especially the regional and national conventions of the American Library Association (see [www.ala.org](http://www.ala.org)) and the state school library associations. As in public libraries, librarians also place orders based on patron requests. Giving presentations, demonstrations, or readings in school libraries is a time-honored way to promote books for students, and it is customary to donate a copy of the book to the school library as part of the promotion. School visits require a lot of planning and preparation but have proven value in selling books. For more information, see “Author Visits to Schools: Prime Support for the Children’s Book Publishing Habit” by Toni Albert (*PMA Newsletter*, October 2002).

Consider, too, that you can market your children’s literature or YA books to college stores that buy trade books. College students buy these books as gifts for family members and friends, especially before holidays. In this case an age range or grade

level noted on the back cover simply aids the consumer in making an appropriate purchase. Your real buyer, however, works for a bookstore--a specialized independent store or retail chain--and applies the same values as any trade bookstore. College stores are not easy to penetrate. Those that are franchises of chains, such as Barnes & Noble and Follett, stock trade books that corporate buyers purchase at a national level from vendors of record. College stores are retailers that serve only students and sell many items other than books, such as sweatshirts, mugs and other items with school insignia. To compete for attention, you might look into becoming a trade book vendor of record to NACSCORP ([www.nacscorp.com](http://www.nacscorp.com)) or otherwise working through the National Association of College Stores ([www.nacs.com](http://www.nacs.com)) and the Independent College Bookstore Association ([www.icbainc.com](http://www.icbainc.com)).

This article is the second in a series that explores how to determine where your products fit in the education market, whether those products are market ready, who your real customers are, and how to reach them. The third and last article in this series will focus on how to market your textbook or professional book.

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*Mary Ellen Lepionka founded Atlantic Path Publishing in Gloucester, MA, in 2002 ([www.atlanticpathpublishing.com](http://www.atlanticpathpublishing.com)) and is the author of professional books and articles on academic writing and textbook publishing. Mary Ellen is a member of SPAN and PMA and also a board member of the Independent Publishers of New England ([www.ipne.org](http://www.ipne.org)).*