

## **My Adventure with Little Koala**

I never expected children's literature to have as many complexities as it does. It has its own subset of genres, different age groups to target, and techniques specific only to itself. This children's story is the first long-term project I have kept with from beginning to end. It didn't begin the way it ended up, but I worked through my struggles and created a final project of which I am very proud. This book is entirely my own work, from the story line to each piece of the binding. Not many people can claim that they created even the binding of their own book, but I can. Sticking with this project made me face my struggles and figure out a way to work through or around them so that I could be proud of the work I created.

When I chose the class, I thought finding an idea for a children's book would be easy. I figured I could write basically anything and call it children's literature. However, when I actually sat down to brainstorm, my mind was blank. Every idea that popped into it would trigger an example in my mind of another book, already written, with the same idea. I was stuck with some of the biggest writer's block I had ever encountered. I will admit that, because of this, I put off starting my book for quite some time; I didn't want to be met with more struggles in something that I thought should be so simple. That was my mistake: I assumed that, because it was for children, it would be as easy to conjure up and create as it was to read. I underestimated the legitimacy of children's literature as its own subset of literature and instead viewed it as an easier form of literature for adults.

Once I was forced to begin brainstorming all over again, I sat down and took the approach of thinking about what I know well enough to write about it. I know that writing what you know is the best way to begin brainstorming, but I forget that when I struggle. My story inspiration ended up coming from an outing my boyfriend had planned for us this previous

summer. We don't do typical dinner-and-a-movie dates, so he planned a safari for us in a nearby forest preserve. He went to the dollar store and bought a bunch of stuffed animals, two nets, and camouflage bandanas. He went out and placed the animals throughout the trail and then came back to get me. The stuffed koala was the last animal we found and he was the only one who didn't fit into the landscape he was in. I thought about this story and wanted to base it around this koala. I pictured the lake and forest preserve in my mind as I tried to plan out this story.

I started planning the story by drawing a picture of the lake and the different parts. I listed the animals that would typically be in the woods and tried to figure out what element I could focus the story around to help teach kids something. I started off with trying to teach the readers their directions such as right, left, up, and down. As I went on, though, this made the story very complicated and hard for even me to follow. I had been color coding my notes and picture and then realized that I could make the story about colors. I knew I had to be careful so that it did not become a race issue. That's why I stuck with animals that are colors that humans aren't: yellow, green, orange, etc. After I shifted the direction of the story to incorporate colors, the plot flowed more smoothly. I ended up needing to change a few things after my critique in class, but I took the suggestions to heart and they helped improve the quality of my story. My ending was a little drawn out and confusing before, with Little Koala going back to find his parents and his parents not realizing he had even left, but then I was given the suggestion of having his parents come find him and his friends. I liked this better because it didn't make the parents seem careless and it shortened my ending. I also changed the Koala Family's home as well. I initially had them coming on an outing from the zoo, but a good number of my classmates voiced opinions that this didn't make much sense. I changed it to the family being on vacation from their jungle home, which I felt made more sense since he was so curious about his

surroundings. A jungle and a forest are very different settings, and it would make sense for him to not understand why the animals here were so segregated. It also allowed me to say that his neighbors at home were parrots and lions, which the zoo didn't allow me.

In my opinion, the strengths of my book are the storyline and the animal images. I really like how the story came out and I think it would be easy for kids to keep focused on. There is a good amount of words on each page, so parents would need to help the children, but I added as many color words as there as so that the children could read these and learn their colors. I also think the color words make the story more descriptive and the cover and binding I chose are kid-friendly as well. They are light, pastel colors and the cover has a nice texture that kids would like to touch. If I had more time, I would have hand-drawn my images, but with the time constraints, I didn't have enough confidence in my artistic abilities to do a good job on all of the images. There were almost 30 pages in my book, all with a lot of detail. I didn't think I could finish all of that by hand by the end of the semester. Otherwise, I am very happy with how my book turned out.

This book was one of the most enjoyable but most difficult assignments I have completed at the University. It forced me to work through my struggles and get through to the end of the project and gave me the confidence that I actually can finish an entire project. It taught me that children's literature is so much more than a simpler version of adult literature. It has its own intricacies and methods. Most importantly, working on this project sparked my interest in writing more children's literature. I have only previously attempted to write literature for adults, but I realized that most of my reading experience is with young adult and children's literature at this point in my life. Now I want to shift my focus and work on stories for young adults; this class got me to that point.

