**Writing for Children - Course tutor: Judith Heneghan**

Judith Heneghan is an MA tutor and an award-winning writer of 70 nonfiction books for children, plus fiction including *Stonecipher* (Andersen Press), *The King of Kites* (ReadZone) and the *Dragon School* series of educational picture books (Wayland). She is currently working on a book about refugees for 5-7-year-olds.

**Course outline**

Do you want to write for young people? Not sure how to begin? This twelve-week course, taught by children’s author Judith Heneghan, is designed to guide you through the essentials. We’ll explore dynamic characterisation, compelling plot, and scary or laugh-out-loud scenes for a range of ages, interests and levels of experience, from picture books to Young Adult (YA). The focus will be on your writing, with plenty of discussion, examples, exercises, and opportunities to share new work in a fun and supportive environment.

**Week 1 (18th January)**

**Introduction - a world of ideas**

Where do ideas come from? Fantastical or realistic, funny, quirky, or deadly serious, we’ll take a first look at what makes a book for young readers stand out from the crowd. Then you’ll try some tailored writing exercises using objects and the senses to help you engage with your inner child.

**Week 2 (25th January)**

**All about character**

Stand-out characters are at the heart of all good fiction for young readers. Our characters can reflect children’s own experiences or offer doorways to unfamiliar lives as well as wish-fulfilment and all the big emotions. Who is your Tigger, your Matilda, your Voldemort? In this session you’ll create a new hero or a villain of your own.

**Week 3 (1st February)**

**Who is your reader?**

This session is all about the child’s eye view. How does the world appear to a five-year-old or a twelve-year-old? What do they care about, and what is their experience? Publishers expect you to match your story to a specific audience, and while every young person is unique, it helps if we have an ideal reader in mind.

**Week 4 (8th February)**

**What's at stake? The narrative arc of a story**

It is often said that the way to write a compelling story is ensure that a) the stakes are high and b) Things Get Worse. In this session we’ll explore what your characters desire, and the obstacles to satisfying those desires. Whether it’s a walk to the park, or a mission to save the world, the plot always thickens.

**Week 5 (22nd February)**

**The world of your story**

Every story needs a setting. Whether you are writing an epic fantasy trilogy or a picture book about a flea, you’ll need to ensure that the world of your story is coherent and compelling. We’ll experiment with strategies to ensure that your young readers can picture the action and explore the setting alongside your characters.

**Week 6 (1st March)**

**Ways of telling - point of view, language, voice and tone**

How are you telling your story? Is your main character the narrator? Is your style plain and unadorned, or more lyrical? Do you want to sooth, or thrill? In this session, we’ll focus on language and explore how to find the best words to show what we mean.

**Week 7 (8th March)**

**A look at picture books**

A picture book uses very few words to tell a story – a *big* story, with wonder, humour and heart. We’ll look at ways to approach new characters for your pre-reading audience and map out the ‘beats’ in a picture book, from wish, through escalation and change to the all-important surprise or twist or ‘ah…’ moment at the end.

**Week 8 (15th March)**

**First chapter books**

The emerging reader needs plenty of reading fun within an accessible structure that encourages them to reach the end. In this session you’ll invent and develop a simple scenario for a short chapter book that might even have series potential.

**Week 9 (22nd March)**

**Middle grade fiction**

‘Middle grade’ is fiction for readers aged 8-12. These readers are more confident about what they want or expect from a book, and frequently ask for adventure, mystery, friendship and humour. We’ll explore ways to write stories that are resolutely child-centred, with main characters who are becoming more independent while still needing a sense of ‘home’.

**Week 10 (29th March)**

**Keeping it real**

Most writers have things they want to say, and some choose to explore a specific contemporary issue in their fiction for young people. In this session we’ll look at what matters most to you, and how to explore this without patronising or preaching to your readers, with a particular emphasis on fiction for Young Adults (YA).

**Easter Break**

**Week 11 (19th April)**

**Writing non-fiction for children**

The days of dry, boring information books are long gone. Today’s nonfiction needs to be relevant, exciting, vivid and memorable for curious young readers. In this session we’ll discuss ways to bring your chosen topic to life, and how best to catch the eye of a publisher.

**Week 12 (26th April)**

**Where do you go from here?**

This course is designed to help you create a portfolio of ideas and projects for you to take forward once the sessions are over. In our final session we’ll look at ways to finish a writing project of your choice, as well as how to approach agents and publishers.