

Jane Yolen

Things to Do Today

Write.
Scheme.
Cross out.
Dream.
Draft.
Two.
Revise.
Renew.



#Yolen365

Jane Yolen's first book was sold on her 22nd birthday. Now, 54 years and 365 books later, she is one of the grand dames of children's literature. She has written in practically every genre imaginable and for every age from newborns to adults. She lives and writes in western Massachusetts and Scotland on her own and with many collaborators including all three of her grown children. Her books and career have been honored with the Caldecott, the Golden Kite, the Kerlan, the Science Fiction Grand Master, the Nebula, and too many more to mention. Six colleges have awarded her Honorary Doctorates.

If you would like to follow her, she can be found at www.JaneYolen.com or on Facebook and Twitter @janeyolen

How I Write

First Thing in the Morning

I am an early riser—light and birdsong call me awake. Once awake, I become *The Writer*. I do my exercises, first physical—stretches, weights, 20 minutes on my recumbent bike. And then I do my writing exercises. I write a poem every morning. Sometimes I am simply revising an older poem. But, this sharpens my mind, reminds me of the power of words. Of the importance of selecting the *right* word. Teaches me again how to compress my writing. Forces me again to think about the arc of a poem or a story, how not to be too protective of those often *too precious* words. Then I read my email, maybe do some revision. Maybe start a new book.

BIC

I tell my own writing students, BIC is the magic word. It means Butt (or Bottom or Behind or Bohunkus) in chair. It's a reminder that all writing needs time in the pressure cooker. That without doing the actual writing, you can't call yourself a writer.

Writing Every Day

Yes, I write every day, and no I don't get tired of it. But because I have a low tolerance for boredom, I don't work on the same thing every day unless there's a deadline I have to meet. In a single day I might work on a poem, revise a picture book that's gone awry, smooth out a bit of a graphic novel, and rearrange a book of poems so that the various poems "talk" to one another. I might also send out poems to literary journals, talk to my agent, work with my daughter on our next book tour. But always and first and foremost I write. Even on the weekends. The glory of being a *professional* writer is that I can take vacations any time I want. The difficult part of being a *professional* writer is deadlines don't wait for vacations so I always work wherever I am.

Revision

I think revision is the best part of any writing. It's where it comes alive. Look at the word itself. *Re-vision*. Having a new vision, a new dream. The word is close to *re-invention*, *re-invite*. Writing is the most malleable of the Arts. All you need is a bit of time, and an eraser--whether that is a chalk board eraser, a pencil eraser, or the delete button on a computer. No work a writer does is ever truly lost. What you wrote before is the cellar of what will become an impressive house. Time to get to the next level.

Ideas

People always want to know where ideas come from, as if there's a local store writers go to buy inspiration. But honestly, ideas are everywhere, for free, thick on the ground. It's not the idea itself but what a writer does with it that matters. Also because I have written so many books, the world outside of publishing thinks I write quickly and easily and get published in the same fashion. If you're reading this, you will find all of those things to be false.

Most of the books coming out in 2018 (my #Yolen365 year) had long circuitous routes. But not just this year, all of my books have stories behind the stories. For example, my book *Owl Moon* came directly (and indirectly) from family owl walks in a small copse of trees on Phoenix Farm, our 15 acre farm in Western Massachusetts. Writing it, though, was not easy. I was unable to find it's proper form for many years until my daughter Heidi—the child in the book—was in college. Why so long? Because I had many false starts, many different narrators, until one day far from home, teaching in Washington State, I began again. Maybe I needed distance, or the longing for home, but on that day, I began the *right* version. Then after five editors turned it down, the sixth bought the book, found illustrator John Schoenherr, and the real magic began.

Often an idea seems like one thing, becomes another. Before writing *Letting Swift River Go*, I had a very sharp vision of a teenage girl in a boat at the Quabbin Reservoir in Massachusetts looking into the dusk of the water and seeing her drowned town below. This became the first chapter of a YA novel. But, then the child character spoke to me, and the book became a picture book with the first chapter becoming the last spread.

So, how did my 2018 books start?
Where did I get those ideas?



Ideas Become 2018 Books

Meet Me At the Well (Januray 16) I minored in religion at Smith College but was never really comfortable with the stories and fates of the women in the bible. Mostly, they were underserved, overlooked, given a bad rap. So, when author Barbara Diamond Goldin began inviting me to her feminist seders, I asked if she wanted to write about these women with me. 10 years later, we have a book illustrated by Vali Mintzi. (Charlesbridge)

A Bear Sat on My Porch Today (March 6) My granddaughter Glendon was living at my house while I was in Scotland when she wrote me an email that said a bear had been on the porch and it wouldn't go away. Yeah—she handed me the story. My editor loved it. It took him about four years to find the perfect illustrator, Rilla Alexander. (Chronicle)

Mapping the Bones (March 6) I was having breakfast with my editor who wanted me to write a new fairy tale novel. I blurted out *Hansel & Gretel, starving, forest, house of candy*, and finally, *pushed the witch in the oven*. *OVEN* stuck in my throat. Being Jewish, that word brings me to one place—the Holocaust. The plot for the book was laid out before the tea arrived. (Philomel)

On Gull Beach (March 27) I had wanted to write a gull book, especially after helping a baby gull who fell off the roof of my house in Scotland. I fed him until he fledged and flew off. But, this book, illustrated by Bob Marstall is nothing like the book I thought I was going to create. There is, however, a rescue--though not of the gull! (Cornell)

Stone Cold 2: Sanctuary (April 1) The idea for this trilogy (this is the middle book) is straight out of my love of noir mysteries, graphic novels, and Scotland. Combine those with my co-author and son Adam Stemple, and you get a gargoyle detective in 1930 Edinburgh. Illustrated by Orion Zangara. (Lerner)

Mixti-Maxti (April 25) I wrote the humorous poems about authors that wound up in this book over a period of about five to ten years, just to amuse myself. Some were published, many were not, but eventually I realized I had enough for a book. A small Scottish/European publisher who had done one of my other poetry books, agreed. (Papaveria)

How Do Dinosaurs Learn to Read (July 1) is the 12th in the How Do Dinosaurs big book series. It started its life as an early paper-back book that Scholastic used as a give-away. It underwent a massive restructuring, rewriting, and enlargement and is now its own book. Illustrated by Mark Teague. (Scholastic)

Crow Not Crow (August 27) My son, Adam Stemple, taught his wife Betsy, a city girl, how to bird by something he called the “Crow Not Crow” method. I had long tried to get him to write it as a picture book. But he’s really a novelist at heart. So I finagled him into writing it with me since it wasn’t really MY story to tell. Illustrated by Elizabeth Dulemba. (Cornell)

Monster Academy (September 1) My daughter Heidi E. Y. Stemple and I had an idea for a little Vampire in the big city. We worked on about five completely different versions of this idea. Eventually, we brought the vampire into the classroom. My favorite character? Miss Mummy (an actual mummy) the teacher who slowly unravels during the course of the day but never stops smiling or engaging with the children. Illustrated by John McKinley. (Scholastic)

Fly With Me: National Geographic’s Book of Birds (October 16) Three years ago, my children, Heidi, Adam, and Jason, (all authors in their own right) and I wrote a book of animal stories for NatGeoKids. For a family of birders, the next project—a book of birds—was a dream project, but immensely difficult, too. As you would imagine, there was a lot of research involved. (National Geographic Kids)

Finding Baba Yaga (October 30) Baba Yaga, the iconic, fierce, mortar and pestle riding, Russian witch with an iron nose and iron teeth, who eats naughty boys but loves feisty girls, has long been my culture hero. She has shown up in many things I have written throughout the years, but it was when I read a very funny lovelorn column online which she (purportedly) writes, I knew there was a whole book there. It became this verse novel. (Tor)

So You Have an Idea—Now What?

The first thing I do is write the idea down or I will forget it. Not all ideas become books. Some become poems or short stories. Some ideas may languish for weeks, months, even years, but I revisit them periodically and sometimes one lights a spark.

When that happens, the storyteller in me asks: *what if?*
And when I try to answer that, a story begins.

Writers In The Classroom

All professional writers fall into 2 groups: those who love the writing and those who hate and suffer through the process. I love to write. All professional writers fall into 2 categories: those who plan ahead and make outlines and character lists, and those who fly into the mist. The latter are also called pantsers. As in seat-of-the-pants. I fly, oh do I fly.

In your classroom you will have both kinds of writers. Forcing them to change is a mug's game. All you will get are grumpy students and a grumpy teacher. Yes, you can teach form and format and you can teach grammar. But teaching writing has to begin with an understanding that everyone can write under the right circumstances, but being in a classroom is not necessarily that write-right place for every child.

I can write in a room full of loud strangers, though I prefer absolute quiet. I write in the morning. One writer friend writes all night long with a playlist of songs accompanying her every thought. I know some who like to write in crowded coffee shops or on a plane or when the baby naps or when a cup of tea is at hand. Yet we expect our students to perform their writing in a classroom full of whispering, antsy, shuffling classmates, some of whom are watching the clock and counting it down out loud.

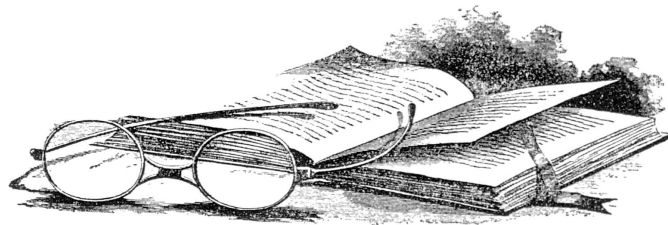
So give the children some room, give them a choice of how they fly. Remind them that stories and poems and essays are *rewritten*. Give them a journal for their writing that is sacred to them and no one else gets to see it because that's where you try out new ideas but needn't show them to the world. After all, I am in a critique group but am very choosy about what I allow my friends to see in its rough form. . .

And tell the kids I was writing at 5 and 6 and 7 and 8, and am still writing today at 79. If I can do it and make mistakes--and then find the mistakes and fix them-- they can, too! And I am telling them this--writer to writer with my B firmly in my Chair.

Classroom Activity

Model writing by taking part in the activity
alongside your students

1. Have students each come up with 10 ideas from real life or their imagination.
2. Write these ideas down in their Writer's Notebooks.
3. Choose one idea.
4. Let each student chose where to think and write.
5. Let each student chose what genre the idea will become—poem, narrative, fiction, nonfiction, essay...
6. Write.
7. Save the unused ideas for future use.



For a Free Downloadable Book-a-Day Calendar
go to
www.JaneYolen.com

A Sip of Aesop, Acorn Quest, Adventures of Eeka Mouse, All In The Woodland Early, All Star, All Those Secrets of the World, Alligator's Smile, Alphabetiary, Among Angels, An Invitation to the Butterfly Ball, And Twelve Chinese Acrobats, Animal Fare, Animal Stories, Animal Train, Apple for the Teacher, Armageddon Summer, Atalanta and the Arcadian Beast, B.U.G., Baby Bear's Bedtime Book, Baby Bear's Big Dreams, Baby Bear's Books, Baby Bear's Chairs, Bad Girls, Bagpiper's Ghost, Ballad of the Pirate Queens, Barefoot Book of Ballet Stories, Barefoot Book of Dance Stories, **Bear Sat On My Porch Today**, Bedtimes for Bunny, Before the Storm, Before the Vote/After, Beneath the Ghost Moon, Best Witches, Bird of Time, Bird Watch, Birds of a Feather, Bloody Tide, Boots and the Seven Leaguers, Boy Who Had Wings, Boy Who Spoke Chimp, Briar Rose, Brothers of the Wind, Bug Off!, Camelot, Cards of Grief, Centaur Rising, Child of Faerie/Child of Earth, Children of the Wolf, Color Me a Rhyme, Come to the Fairies Ball, Commander Toad and the Dis-Asteroid, Commander Toad and the Intergalactic Spy, Commander Toad and the Planet of the Grapes, Commander Toad and the Space Pirates, Commander Toad and the Voyage Home, Commander Toad In Space, Count Me a Rhyme, Creepy Monsters/Sleepy Monsters, **Crow Not Crow**, Curse of the 13th Fey, Curses Foiled Again, Day Tiger Rose Said Goodbye, Dear Mother/Dear Daughter, Devil's Arithmetic, Dimity Duck, Dinosaur Dances, Dove Isabeau, Dragon Night, Dragon's Blood, Dragon's Boy, Dragon's Heart, Dragons and Dreams, Dragonsfield, Dream Weaver, Eeny/Meeny/Miney Mole, Egret's Day, Ekaterinaslav, Elfabet, Elsie's Bird, Emerald Circus, Emily Sonnets, Emperor and the Kite, Encounter, Except the Queen, Faery Flag, Fairies' Ring, Fairy Tale Feasts, Favorite Folktales from Around the World, **Finding Baba Yaga**, Fine Feathered Friends, Firebird, Fireside Song Book of Birds and Beasts, Fish Prince, Flying Witch, **Fly With Me: National Geographic Book of Birds**, Foiled, Friend, Giants' Farm, Giants Go Camping, Gift of Sarah Barker, Girl in a Cage, Girl in the Golden Bower, Girl Who Cried Flowers, Girl Who Loved the Wind, Good Griselle, Good Night Little Bunny, Grandad Bill's Song, Grandma's Hurrying Child, Grey Heroes, Greyling, Grumbles from the Forrest, Grumbles from Town, Guide to Writing Books for Children, Gwinellen, The Princess Who Could Not Sleep, Hands, Hannah Dreaming, Hark!, Harvest Home, Haunted House, Heart's Blood, Here There Be Angels, Here There Be Dragons, Here There Be Ghosts, Here There Be Unicorns, Here There Be Witches, Here's a Little Poem, Hip Hippos, Hippolyta and the Curse of the Amazons, Hobby, Hobo Toad and the Motorcycle Gang, Honkers, Hoptoad, Horizons, Hostage Prince, House/House, How Beastly!, How Do Dinosaurs Choose Their Pets?, How Do Dinosaurs Clean Their Rooms?, How Do Dinosaurs Count to Ten?, How Do Dinosaurs Eat Cookies?, How Do Dinosaurs Eat Their Food?, How Do Dinosaurs Get Well Soon?, How Do Dinosaurs Go to School?, How Do Dinosaurs Go to Sleep?, How Do Dinosaurs Go Up and Down?, How Do Dinosaurs Laugh Out Loud?, How Do Dinosaurs Learn Their Colors?, How Do Dinosaurs Learn to Read?, **How Do Dinosaurs Learn to Read?**, (2x on purpose) How Do Dinosaurs Love Their Cats?, How Do Dinosaurs Love Their Dogs?, How Do Dinosaurs Play All Day?, How Do Dinosaurs Play with Their Friends?, How Do Dinosaurs Say Goodnight?, How Do Dinosaurs Say Happy Birthday?, How Do Dinosaurs Say Happy Chanukah?, How Do Dinosaurs Say I Love You?, How Do Dinosaurs Say I'm Mad?, How Do Dinosaurs Say Merry Christmas?, How Do Dinosaurs Stay Friends?, How Do Dinosaurs Stay Safe?, How Do Dinosaurs Write Their ABCs with Chalk?, Hundredth Dove, Hush Little Horsie, Inway Investigators, Isabel's Noel, It All Depends, Jane Yolen's Old MacDonald Songbook, Jane Yolen's Mother Goose Songbook, Jane Yolen's Songs of Summer, Jason and the Gorgon's Blood, Jewish Fairy Tale Feasts, Johnny Appleseed, King Long Shanks, Lady and the Merman, Lap-Time Song and Play Book, Last Changeling, Last Dragon, Last Laughs, Last Laughs/Prehistoric, Last Selchie Child, Least Things, Letter From Phoenix Farm, Letting Swift River Go, Little Frog and the Scary Autumn Things, Little Frog and the Spring Polliwogs, Little Mouse and Elephant, Little Spotted Fish, Longest Name on the Block, Lost Boy, Lullaby Songbook, Magic 3 of Solatia, Mama's Kiss, **Mapping the Bones**, Mary Celeste, **Meet Me At the Well**, **Mixti/Maxti**, Meet the Monsters, Meow, Merlin, Merlin and the Dragons, Merlin's Booke, Mermaid's 3 Wisdoms, Mice On Ice, Mightier Than the Sword, Milk and Honey, Milkweed Days, Minstrel and the Mountain, Mirror Mirror, Mirror to Nature, Miz Berlin Walks, **Monster Academy**, Moon Ball, Moon Ribbon and Other Tales, Mother Earth/Father Fun, Mouse's Birthday, Musicians of Bremen, My Brother's Flying Machine, My Father Knows the Names of Things, My Uncle Emily, Naming Liberty, Neptune Rising, No Bath Tonight, Nocturne, Not All Princesses Dress In Pink, Not One Damsel In Distress, O Jerusalem, Odysseus in the Serpent Maze, Off We Go!, Old Dame Counterpane, On Bird Hill, On Duck Pond, **On Gull Beach**, On the Slant, Once There Was a Story, Once Upon a Time (She Said), Once Upon Ice, One Hippo Hops, One-Armed Queen, Originals, Owl Moon, Passenger, Pay the Piper, Pegasus/The Flying Horse, Perfect Wizard, Picnic With Piggins, Pictish Child, Piggins, Piggins and the Royal Wedding, Pirates in Petticoats, Plague of Unicorns, Pretty Princess Pig, Prince Across the Water, Prince of Egypt, Pumpkin Baby, Queen's Own Fool, Radiation Sonnets, Rainbow Rider, Raining Cats and Dogs, Raising Yoder's Barn, Ring of Earth, Ring Out!, Roanoke, Robot and Rebecca, Robot and Rebecca and the Missing Owser, Rogues, Romping Monsters/Stomping Monsters, Rounds About Rounds, Sacred Places, Sad/Mad/Glad Hippos, Salem Witch Trials, Scarecrow's Dance, Sea King, Sea Man, Sea Queens, Sea Watch, See This Little Line?, Seeing Stick, Seelie King's War, Self Portrait with 7 Fingers, Sending of Dragons, Seventh Mandarin, Shape Me a Rhyme, Shape Shifters, Sherwood, Shirlick Holmes, Simple Gifts, Simple Prince, Sing a Season Song, Sing Noel, Sister Bear, Sister Emily's Lightship, Sister Fox's Field Guide to the Writing Life, Sister Light/Sister Dark, Sky Dogs, Sky Scrape/City Scape, Sleep Rhymes Around the World, Sleep Black Bear Sleep, Sleeping Beauty, Sleeping Ugly, Snow In Summer, Snow/Snow, Soft House, Spaceships & Spells, Speaking in Pearls, Spider Jane, Spider Jane on the Move, Stone Angel, Stone Cold 1, **Stone Cold 2: Sanctuary**, Stone Silenus, Storyteller, Stranded Whale, Street Rhymes Around the World, Sultan's Perfect Tree, Switching on the Moon, Sword and the Stone, Sword of the Rightful King, Take Joy, Take Joy 2, Take Two!, Tales of Wonder, Tam Lin, Tea With an Old Dragon, Things that Go Bump in the Night, Things to Say to a Dead Man, This Little Piggy, Three Bears Holiday Rhyme Book, Three Bears Rhyme Book, Thunder Underground, Time for Naps, Too Old for Naps, Touch Magic, Transfigured Hart, Trash Mountain, Troll Bridge, Trust a City Kid, 12 Impossible Things Before Breakfast, 2014, Uncle Lemon's Spring, Under the Star, Vampires, Waking Dragons, Water Music, Weather Report, Wee Rhymes, Welcome To the Green House, Welcome To the Ice House, Welcome To the River of Grass, Welcome To the Sea of Sand, Werewolves, What Rhymes with Moon, What to do with a Box, Where Have All the Unicorns Gone?, White Jenna, Whitethorn Wood, Wild Hunt, Wild Wings, Wings, Witch Who Wasn't, Wizard Islands, Wizard of Washington Square, Wizard's Hall, Wizard's Map, Wizard's Map, Wolf Girls World on a String, Writing Books for Children, Xanadu, Xanadu 2, Xanadu 3, Year's Best Science Fiction and Fantasy for Teens, You Nest Here with Me, Zoo 2000.



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