

Short Attention Span Theatre: Writing for children gamers

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Production Coordinator



1st Playable Productions

- 3rd Party Developer
 - Troy, NY
 - Primarily develop young children's titles
 - If great opportunities come up, we don't say no
 - Original and existing IP
- Retail titles
 - Entertainment
 - Education
- Research titles
- All ages of audiences!



What do kids want?

- Kid testing
 - Pre-production and throughout the project
- Developmental needs
 - Define what they will find fun – what problems are interesting and new
 - Brain development
 - Social needs
 - Motor skills

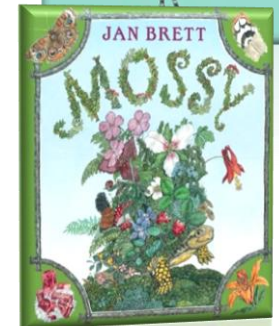
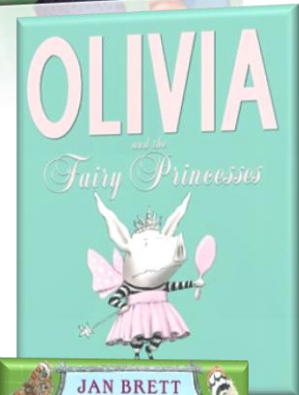
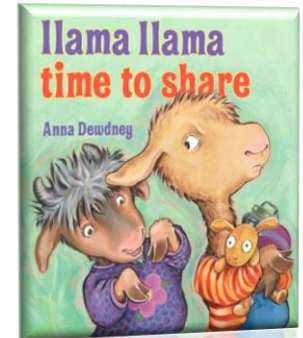


Children's book publishing

- They've figured out the same stuff!
- Protagonists are around the reader's age
- Categories used to guide the content of books
 - Picture Books – ages 3-6
 - Chapter Books – ages 6-8
 - Middle Grade (MG) – ages 8-12
 - Young Adult (YA) – ages 13+
 - YA and MG may be lumped into the same 'Children's book' category on bestseller lists.

Picture books – ages 3-6

- Developmentally
 - Struggle with fitting in
 - Asking questions
 - Learning big ideas about their world
 - What's it like to be an older sibling?
 - Physical coordination
 - Their actions affect things in their world

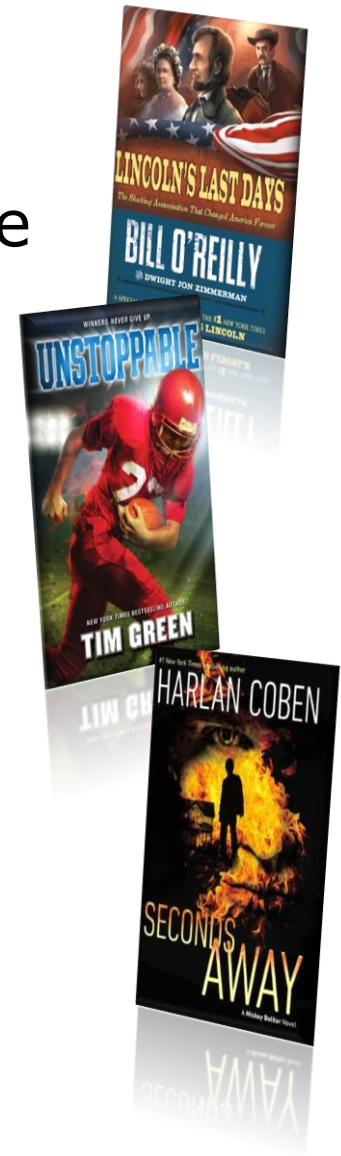


Picture books – ages 3-6

- Books
 - Give them a place for safe conflict, surprises
 - Allow for fun illustrations, dialog-light
 - Small, tight emotional arc
 - Rhyming is a hard sell
- Games
 - Encourage interaction with characters
 - Exploration of a game world
 - Creativity / destruction
 - Repetition

Chapter books – ages 6-8

- Developmentally
 - Overlaps with picture book audience
 - Improved physical reflexes / coordination
- Books
 - Often still based in real world
 - 8-10 chapters
 - Use cliffhangers
 - Often a series
- Games
 - Level-to-level story
 - End levels thrillingly!



Middle grade (MG) – ages 8-12

- Developmentally
 - Seek adventure / want to make a mark
 - Concerned with repercussions of choices
 - Friend groups
 - Social status is important
 - Mixed gender friends groups
 - Many experience losing friends around this time
 - Parents and adults are still safe support
 - Though you're unlikely to see them holding major roles in books
 - They're pretty tough



Middle Grade (MG) – ages 8-12

- Books
 - Impossible adventures / fantasy settings
 - Tough choices and wrong decisions
 - Humor!
 - Last chance to hook reluctant readers
- Games
 - Fantastical stories
 - Choices have repercussions
 - This age has some control over the purse strings, popular for publishers

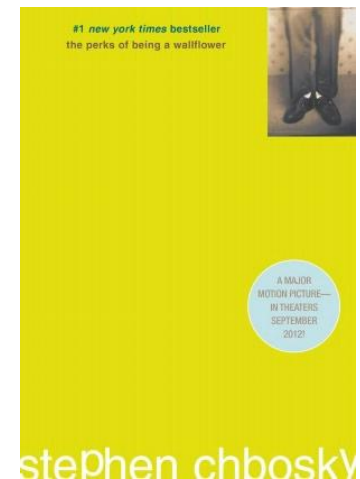
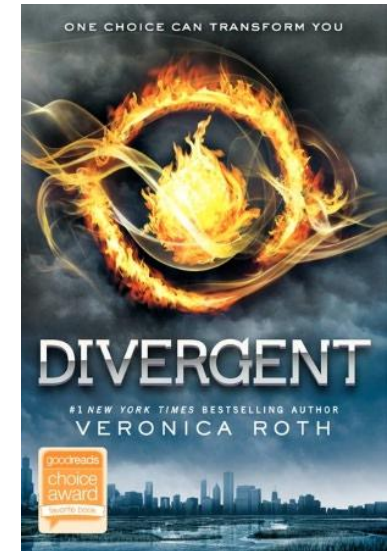
Teens!



- It's more than just Paranormal Romance, I swear!

Teens (YA) – ages 13+

- Developmentally
 - Feel emotions intensely
 - Their worlds can seem out of control
 - Anxiety about the world
- Books
 - Parental figures exist in the background if at all
 - Realistic endings, sacrifices, complexity
 - Coming of age, reflecting the changing world for the reader
 - Dystopia is (always) popular
 - Lots of boys have stopped reading books



Teens (YA) – ages 13+

- Games*



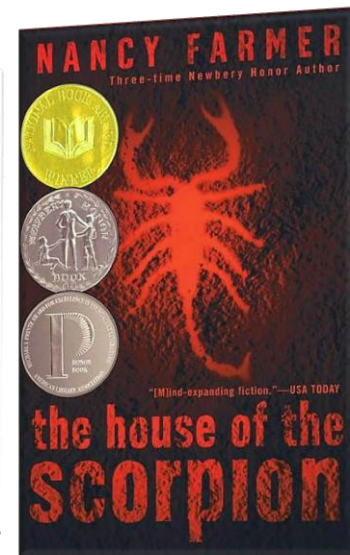
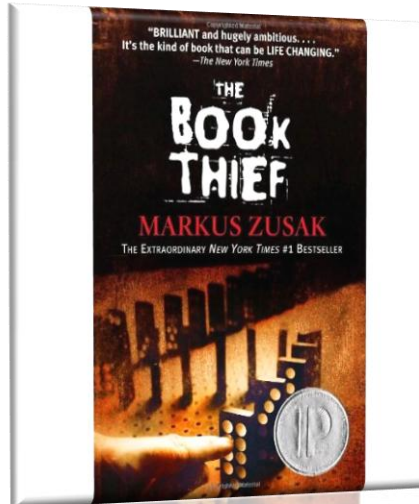
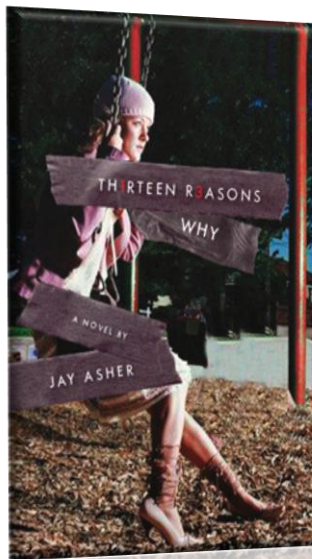
* I got these from the front page of Amazon searching for a T rating plus ranking by popularity. I can't say for sure that it's teens who are playing these games.

Tweens

- Books
 - Middle Grade readers who are going through intense experiences may read what people would categorize as Young Adult
 - Young Adult readers may also gravitate toward lighter stories
- Games
 - Same thing: Some want to play Ghost Recon, some want to play Pokemon

Darker stories

- Stories can range from sweet to 'edgy':
 - Edgy YA – ages 12+, 14+, 16+, depending on content
 - For MG – keep content secondhand, distanced from the character

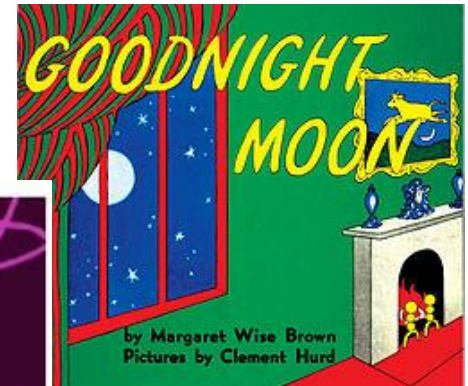
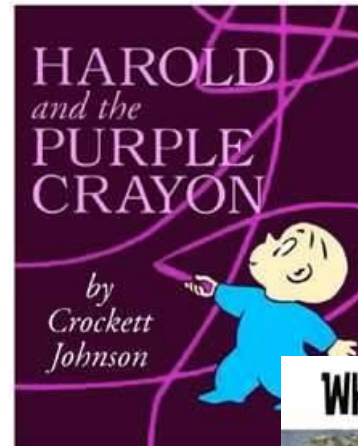


But you want to make an educational game!

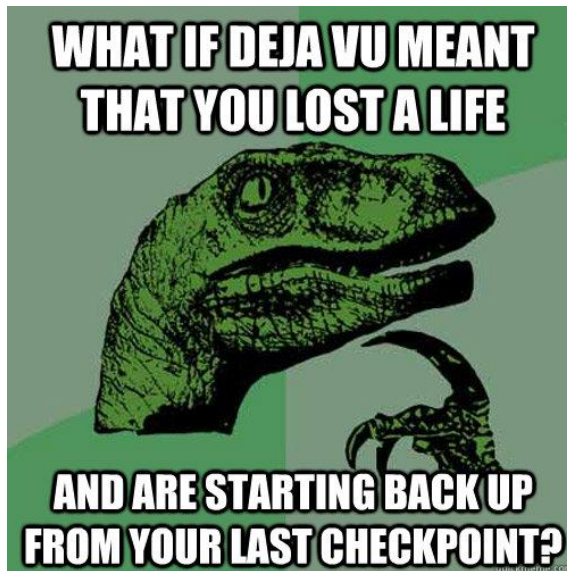
- Nonfiction Books
 - Make it read like fiction anyway
 - Familiar topic, different angle
 - Humor
 - Fun topics (Batman! The history of pizza!)
- Games
 - Same deal

Avoid

- Disregarding developmental needs will lead them to tune out
 - It will feel like you're not on their wavelength
 - Use an age-appropriate voice
- Preachiness
- Knockoffs



What if ...?



- Games could recapture reluctant readers?
- More teen games could tell the important coming-of age stories?
 - Disclaimer: Not all projects are good fits for these ideas!

Go forth!

- Break the rules!
 - Book publishing has 'rules' about protagonist ages and subject matter partly to help it figure out where to shelve a book
- Avoid knockoffs
- Research
 - Bestseller lists
 - Bookstore displays
 - Kids in your target age
- (Just avoid coming off like Sheldon Cooper trying to make friends)



Questions?

- Elizabeth McLaren
- elizabeth@1stplayable.com
- Please fill out your evaluations
- Write Club tonight at 8:30 @ Ginger Man