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Deborah Halverson

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Writing Young Adult Fiction

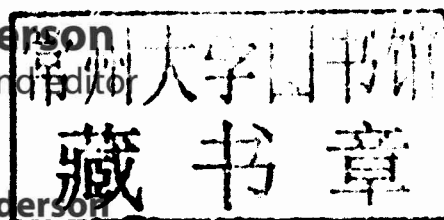
FOR
DUMMIES®

by Deborah Halverson

Award-winning author and editor

Foreword by M. T. Anderson

National Book Award Winner



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***Writing Young
Adult Fiction***

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DUMMIES®

About the Author

Deborah Halverson edited books with Harcourt Children's Books for ten years — until she climbed over the desk and tried out the chair on the other side. Now she is the award-winning author of teen novels including *Honk If You Hate Me* and *Big Mouth*. Armed with a master's in American Literature and a fascination with pop culture, Deborah sculpts stories from extreme places and events — tattoo parlors, fast-food joints, and, most extreme of all, high schools.

Deborah is also the founder of the popular writers' advice website DearEditor.com, a frequent speaker at writers' conferences nationwide, and a writing teacher for groups and institutions including the Extension Program of the University of California, San Diego. She freelance edits fiction and nonfiction for both published authors and writers seeking their first book deals. By conducting word-by-word line editing or more general substantive editing, Deborah helps authors hone their storytelling voices, synchronize age-appropriate language and subjects, and develop stories that appeal simultaneously to young readers and to adults such as parents, teachers, and librarians.

Deborah lives in San Diego, California, with her husband and triplet sons. For more about Deborah, visit her author website at www.deborahhalverson.com and her writers' advice website at www.deareditor.com.

Dedication

For Robin Cruise, who gave me not one but three big breaks . . . and more importantly, her friendship

Author's Acknowledgments

On my first day as an editorial assistant with Harcourt Children's Books, the managing editor walked me down the hall to view an art show of newly arrived paintings for a picture book then in production. I stood among a bustling crowd of editors, designers, production people, marketing gurus, and inventory, financial, legal, and support staff — all of whom had dedicated their careers and personal passions to creating entertaining and enlightening books for children — and it hit me: I'd found my people. I discovered that day what I've come to love about the writers and producers of children's books: They are a true community that cheers, collaborates, and works its knuckles to the bones in support of literature for young readers. The enthusiastic participation of the writers, agents, and editors who have contributed their expertise to the information you hold in your hand reflects that.

I extend immense thanks to the inspiring writers and teachers who've lent their voices to this book: M. T. Anderson, Kathi Appelt, Karen Cushman, Jennifer Donnelly, Jean Ferris, Cynthia Leitich Smith, Darcy Pattison, Mary E. Pearson, Gary Soto, Deborah Wiles, and Jane Yolen. Add to their voices those of my trusted children's book agent Erin Murphy and my friend Senior Editor Kate Harrison.

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Foreword

Do you remember the first time you, as a child, really fell into a book? When you turned the first page, you were sitting there on the sofa or lying on the floor or trapped in the back of a car with screaming siblings . . . and then a few more pages flipped, and you were no longer aware of pages or words or hair-pulling. You found yourself someplace else: standing on a mountaintop, sneaking through an underground lair, or curled up inside a hollow tree. You were completely lost in another world. It's an amazing sensation.

Our early experiences reading books can be intense. Every day, children are spirited away from bedrooms and kitchens and classrooms and the seats of buses. Toddlers demand the same book night after night, until they can recite each page and shout out each rhyme before their dozy parents can. Very few people are as passionate about books as children are. Kids devour books — in some cases, literally.

If you write to stir the emotions of readers, to move people deeply, to change people's lives, then you should consider writing for young adults. Who else will read your book 12 times? Who else will try to steal a copy from the library? Who else will sleep on top of your book? Who else will make a diorama of your book with the main character played by a Styrofoam cup? Who else, in short, will invest themselves imaginatively in your world like a young person will?

Young readers are still constructing their understanding of life. They do not yet know the ways of their species nor the ways of the world. As they read stories, they learn about justice and injustice, happiness and sadness, glory and delight and sorrow.

They also learn the rules of *story*. They learn how some novels reflect their lives and some novels take place on other worlds. They learn a grammar of stories — how sometimes things move quickly and sometimes things move slowly, how characters are different from and similar to real people, how plot twists happen and what makes a joke funny. Books for young people, after all, train us all to appreciate literature for adults — as well as to make some sense of our own teeming, crazy world.

So as you think about writing stories for young adults, remember that your audience will greet you ecstatically — but they'll also have high expectations. They will be fervent in their reactions, positive and negative. (Few adults, on finding a book boring, will throw it under the bed, start kicking the floor, and turn purple.) It's an amazing journey to take with a young person. I hope you enjoy it — and that you someday find young readers lost in your book, sunk in your world, whisked away from their bedrooms, their kitchens, their buses, exploring a place you made. That, after all, is one of the greatest gifts you can give them — and yourself.

—M. T. Anderson

National Book Award Winner, National Book Award Finalist, L.A. Times Book Prize Winner, and two-time Michael L. Printz Honor Book Author

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