

A Writer's Invitation into an Imaginary World



Villains, heroes, monsters – and plenty of cake!

John Parsons



A Writer's Invitation into an IMAGINARY WORLD



Dear Reader

Writing fiction can be a fun and rewarding job – but creating interesting and exciting stories can also be challenging. As in every job, there are some tools and processes that writers use, and in this book I'm happy to share some of them with you.

“

THERE'S ONE VITAL THING THAT THEY
STILL NEED – AND THAT'S IMAGINATION.

”

Once a writer has all the tools and is comfortable with the processes involved in creating a great story, there's one vital thing that they still need – and that's imagination. A writer's biggest challenge is creating an imaginary world in their mind, and then being able to invite their readers into that world. I hope you enjoy reading about that process!

John Parsons



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A **WRITER'S** Invitation Into an Imaginary World

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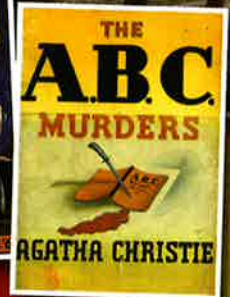
Introduction

Planning a Book

Agatha Christie, one of the world's best crime and mystery writers, once said that the best time for planning a book is while you're doing the dishes. For me, it's while I'm in the shower!

I've written over two hundred fiction books, so that means a lot of soapy hot water has gone down the plughole while I've been working. While I'm in the shower is a great time to think about characters, settings and events without being interrupted. There are no phones to answer, no people to talk to, and nothing to worry about (except for how much hot water is left).

The Life of a Fiction Writer



Agatha Christie wrote 66 novels and 160 short stories. Her books have sold over 4 billion copies!

When the hot water does finally run out, I know it's time to go to my desk, sit in front of my computer and arrange the many thoughts swirling around in my imagination into words, sentences and paragraphs. That's always the hard part – especially because the moment I sit down, I immediately remember a thousand very

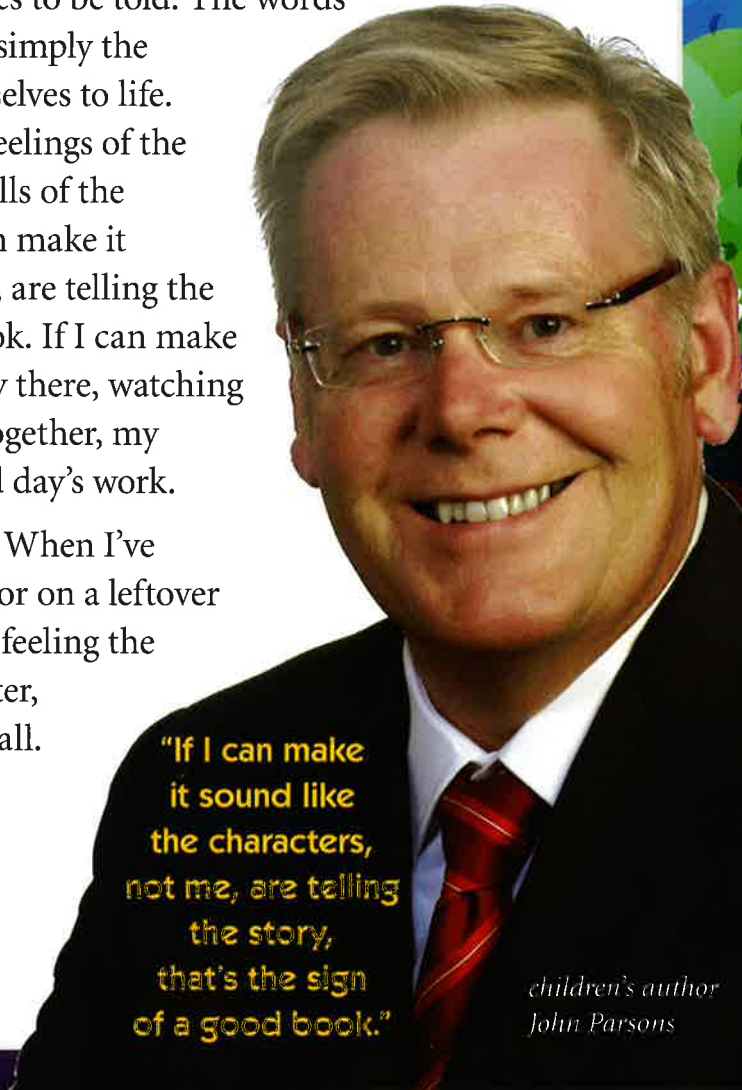
important and urgent things that I should be doing. Mostly, these things involve going to the refrigerator and checking for leftover cake, or taking my dogs for a walk or sitting out in the sunshine watching the grass grow. On tough work days, I have to fight the urge to do the vacuuming or polish my shoes or take out the recycling bin (which is usually overflowing with crumpled paper containing half-written stories).

Who's Telling This Story?

But, despite all these distractions, stories do get written. Oddly enough, I often feel that it's not me who is doing the writing. It's like the characters in my head really want their stories to be told. The words that I type into the computer are simply the characters' way of bringing themselves to life.

Page by page, the voices and the feelings of the characters and the sights and smells of the settings develop and grow. If I can make it sound like the characters, not me, are telling the story, that's the sign of a good book. If I can make the reader feel like they're actually there, watching the characters, I tell myself that together, my characters and I have done a good day's work.

When that happens, it's amazing. When I've finished, I can go to the refrigerator on a leftover cake-hunting expedition without feeling the slightest bit guilty – and for a writer, that's probably the best feeling of all. Better still, I know I don't have to share my secret treat with my characters, even though they've done most of the work!

A portrait of John Parsons, a middle-aged man with light hair and glasses, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and a red patterned tie. He is smiling and looking towards the camera.

**"If I can make
it sound like
the characters,
not me, are telling
the story,
that's the sign
of a good book."**

*children's author
John Parsons*

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The Fiction Writer's Job

For teachers inspection ONLY

The **Most Important** Question

I decided I wanted to be a writer while I was still at school. When I was ten years old, my teacher read one chapter of a book to our class every afternoon before school finished. The stories she read were about children who had amazing adventures while they were camping on wild moors, or exploring ruined castles or discovering buried treasure.

We didn't have wild moors, ruined castles or buried treasure where I grew up – and even if we had, I'm sure I would have got into big trouble if my parent had caught me camping, exploring or digging up the backyard.

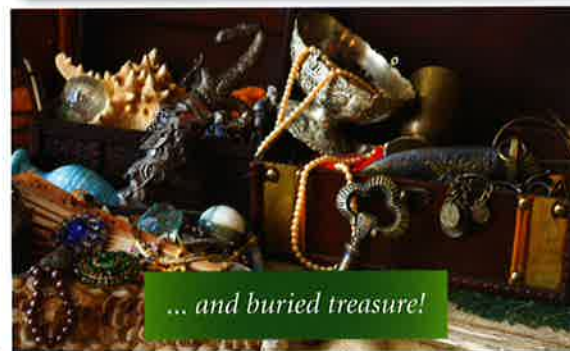
I was, however, surrounded by characters and settings – even though they just seemed normal at the time. I just needed to think differently about them. When I discovered the most important question that starts every good story, I was on my way to becoming a writer.



Wild moors ...



... ruined castles ...



... and buried treasure!

That question is “what if ...?”

My First Book

The very first book I ever wrote was about going fishing. When I was about ten, my grandfather and I used to walk to a little stream every evening and try to catch eels. There's nothing unusual about that – but then I thought “what if ...?”



What if, instead of us trying to pull eels out of the stream, the eels were really trying to pull us *into* the stream?

What if both sides were trying to catch each other – and what if both sides went back to their homes at the end of the evening, grumbling about the huge eel (or boy) that had got away?

That idea turned into the first book I ever wrote. And that book ended up getting a prize in a national writing competition. And that prize helped me realise that writing might be a job that I could do.



“What if ...?”

A Job Description

A job description for a writer might read like this:

Classified Ads

Wanted: Fiction Writer

We are seeking applications from people who want to become fiction writers. A fiction writer's job is to use words to transport readers into an imaginary world. In that imaginary world, the writer must combine characters, settings and events in a way that makes the reader want to carry on and finish the story. These are the skills and qualities that we are looking for:

- Must have a good imagination
- Must come up with new ideas every week
- Must have good general knowledge and research skills
- Must have good language skills
- Must be able to work alone
- Must be able to take criticism
- Must be willing to think about characters, settings and events 24 hours a day (even in the shower)
- Must have a supply of hot water
- Must be willing to work hard, concentrate and have enough willpower to not spend your days eating cake
- Must have own toolbox.

Please submit one narrative you have written, along with an explanation of why you think you would like to be a writer. This explanation must be no longer than thirty words. Please also note things you have done that other people might find interesting, places you know that most other people have never been to, and anything in your life that might make you able to see things from a different perspective.

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computer program

ACCOUNTANT

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For teachers' inspection ONLY

A **Writer's** Toolbox

In the same way that a builder needs tools to start constructing a house, writers need their own tools before they start building stories. The most important tool that I have in my imaginary "writer's toolbox" is a pen.

Let Me Write That Down!

I never know when an idea will pop into my head or when I will see something that makes me think: "Hey, I can use that in a story." That's why I always carry a pen. I have used that pen to write story ideas on napkins, on airline tickets, and on the backs of envelopes.

Pens are better than pencils, by the way. When there's been no paper around, I've written notes on the back of my hand, the front of my hand and halfway up my arm. You can't do that with a pencil. If you're like me, using a pen means that you can read your notes again in the shower before you wash them off.



Do a story about a bunch of Vikings who get attacked by a giant smelly wombat!

FLIGHT

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