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WRITING FOR TEENS AND WRITING FOR ADULTS

I enjoy writing for teens. They expect much, but are so rewarding because their responses are upfront and specific. ‘Boring’ means exactly what it says!

In general, teens are far more demanding readers than adults. They will not wait patiently for something of interest to happen—it has to happen NOW! This is a reflection of the fact that they live, far more than most adults do, in a world of electronic entertainment with its constant cascade of stimulating images and sounds. The need for almost instant gratification, allied with what seems to be a shrinking attention span, has ramifications for writers of children’s books.

Pacing in teen novels is extremely important. Although, of course, for contrast there should be slower, more thoughtful passages, in general these readers prefer the story to move along rapidly. Understanding this has influenced my adult books, where my pacing seems to be much faster than it was years ago, when I first began writing.

This forward drive has influenced me to curtail flashbacks in teen novels and concentrate on moving the story along in a series of (I hope) vivid scenes, so the overall structure is more straightforward.

Physical description of characters doesn’t differ, although in adult fiction the readers’ greater breadth of experience does mean that some references to behaviour and possessions resonate more deeply. Motivation for characters in adult fiction can be more nuanced.

Protagonists in general are more subtly drawn for adults. Teen readers identify strongly with characters close to their own age or slightly older, whereas adult readers, having lived longer, have experienced life more extensively and can empathise with a wider age range.

For a similar reason — experience of life and living — adult readers respond to deeper and subtler thematic concerns. This is not to say that young people are not sensitive to themes expressed in novels — indeed they are, although they are unlikely to label underlying ideas as ‘themes’.

The reader’s response to conflict in fiction is again posited on each person’s unique experience and the immediacy of that experience. For example, a novel featuring bullying would strike a chord in many teen readers, but not perhaps with the same intensity in adult readers. Or adult readers might simply experience it from a different perspective.

The appreciation of irony and satire may also be influenced by the age of the reader, although here, too, I think teen readers are not always credited with the abilities they have to recognise these literary devices.

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