

Book Dash 7 November 2015, Durban

The books created on this Book Dash day will be your gift to the world. There is a huge lack of relevant, accessible literature for South African children, containing characters they can relate to and stories that resemble their own lives. The book that you create will be published, printed and distributed freely to literacy organisations, ECD centres, libraries and directly to homes across South Africa and abroad. We want your uninhibited creativity to shine on the day, but try to keep in mind what type of book you would like to create and for which age-group.

Links

Nalibali is a national campaign for reading for enjoyment based on research done by PRAESA (The Project for Research in Alternative Education South Africa). Their website provides a lot of links, infographics and downloadable resources on why and how we need to write for and read with children in South Africa. Check them out here: nalibali.org

The African Storybook Project collects creative commons stories from across Africa and puts them all on their website. Book Dash books are on the website too! You can sort by language and level of reading ability. Once you have decided what level you would like to write for, you can get more inspiration here: www.africanstorybook.org.

All books created at previous events are listed on the **Book Dash** website. They are a great example of what can be achieved in 12 hours: <http://bookdash.org/see/books/>

Great tips from authors and illustrators

Some of the best children's books build on classic storylines such as folklore, fairytales and myths (whether African or otherwise). Simplified or modernised versions of these well-known stories can be incredibly effective and a good way to start writing for children. The most important thing is to distill the story to one that a young child can understand and to not place too much emphasis on any morals or lessons that take away from the fun of the story. You can read two interesting pieces on this here [Folktales in Children's Literature](#) and here [Folklore in Children's Literature](#)

Writing tips for kids from children's authors: <http://bit.ly/kidsbooktips>

Top 10 illustration and design tips for children's books:

<http://www.theguardian.com/childrens-books-site/2014/mar/11/david-mackintosh-top-10-illustration-and-design-tips>

An interview with Ghanaian children's book writer Meshack Asare on writing for African children: publishingperspectives.com

Great books with simple stories and simple illustrations

A quick online search for these titles will let you see much of each book. Have a look, or look at these in a bookstore or library.

International

- *Monkey and me* by Emily Gravett
- *Orange, Pear, Apple, Bear* by Emily Gravett
- *Ten little fingers and ten little toes* by Mem Fox and Helen Oxenbury
- *Toddle Waddle* by Julia Donaldson and Nick Sharratt
- *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle
- *I Want My Hat Back* by Jon Klassen
- *Harold and the Purple Crayon* by Crockett Johnson
- *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus!* by Mo Willems

African

- [*Three Friends and a Taxi*](#) by Maryanne and Shayle Bester [published by Jacana](#)
- [*Porridge*](#) by Zimbili Dlamini and Hlengiwe Zondi
- [*Soccer Game*](#) by Letta [Machoga](#)
- [*I like to read*](#) by Letta Machoga
- [*Khalai talks to plants*](#) by Ursula Nafula
- [*Big blue bus*](#) by Mecelin Kakoro
- [*Come back, Cat!*](#) by Karen Lilje, Nicola Rijsdijk and Sam Scarborough.

What makes a good Book Dash book?

We're creating new, high-quality storybooks for children under five in Africa.

A big challenge is how to create great books in a very short time. To make that possible, we have some rules, some guidelines, and some tips for everyone at a Book Dash. It's especially important that writers, illustrators, designers and editors know these well.

To make it possible to produce great books quickly, we balance constraints and spontaneity. Carefully chosen constraints help us avoid distractions. Space for spontaneity lets volunteers bring their own magic to new books.

Many aspects of our books are determined in advance, including a template InDesign document and flatplan (a page-by-page map of the book). These constraints help us move quickly, and ensure that the books can be flexibly translated and printed afterwards.

Book specifications

Every book is 200mm square in size, and contains 32 pages:

- 1: a book-plate page ('This book belongs to')

- 2–3: a double-page spread of solid colour or decoration (endpapers)
- 4: a copyright/license page
- 5: a title page
- 6–29: 12 double-page spreads
- 30–31: a double-page spread of solid colour or decoration (endpapers)
- 32: a blank page or small decoration (often a detail from one of the images in the book).

You'll get printed flatplans for planning your book when you arrive on the morning.

(If the endpapers were dropped, it could be printed as a 32-page self-covering edition at lower cost. The size is the biggest that accommodates good short-run digital printing, allowing for cost-effective small runs as well as large offset runs. The 200mm size also allows illustrators to work on A4 paper and scan it on an A4 scanner, while allowing for 5mm bleed all round. The inside of the cover is left blank.)

All text must be pure black and must have space around it for translations into languages that need more space. (This way, several translations can be printed in one print run by switching only the black-ink plate. Designers must be careful to use pure black for text, not black as a combination of CMYK.)

Only use elements (pictures, text) that are created on the day or are also open-licensed in ways that allow derivatives and commercial use. (E.g. use fonts from [google.com/fonts](https://www.google.com/fonts).) Attribute all your sources on the copyright/licensing page.

Writing guidelines

- Aim for less than ten words on a page. Cut out everything that isn't absolutely essential. Let the images provide all the detail, so that the words become only a nudge in the direction of your story.
- Express one thought per sentence, no more.
- Stories should be fun and should not aim to be worthy or educational. Avoid 'numbers' or 'colours' books. We need stories.
- Avoid complex clichés or idioms – young children won't follow them, and they rarely translate into other languages.
- Only introduce more complex concepts and/or words towards the end of the book if you need to, building on ideas and words introduced earlier.
- Different voices/characters in your book will make reading aloud fun.
- In books for young children, images and words are intertwined, so think visually and work closely with your illustrator.
- If you can create your story with no text at all – a wordless book – that's great! Wordless books are great for child–caregiver interaction, useful if a caregiver is illiterate, and never need translating. It is perhaps harder to "write" a wordless book than one with words, so if you want a challenge go ahead!

- When writing for children, you need to consider what makes a text difficult or easy to understand. Fountas and Pinnell have written extensively on this, but they summarise the 10 factors that play a role in text complexity here: [What makes a text complex?](#). Try to consider all of these when you write your draft story and on the day.
- Absolutely *no poetry*: no rhyme and metre. Rhyme and metre is much harder to get right than most people realise. They take ages to refine, and you won't have enough time at a Book Dash. We've seen, too, that in an effort to get their rhyme and metre right, writers sacrifice entire story elements just to use a phrase that fits the poetry, to the detriment of the story. Also, poetry won't carry over when translated into other languages anyway, and it's likely that more copies of your book will be distributed as translations than in your original language.
- **Submit your first draft on Monday the 2nd November.**

Illustration guidelines

- Bring the characters to life -- imagine them from various angles and in different situations, so that you know them well on the day.
- Think of visual pacing: Can you change perspectives between pages for dramatic effect? Work with the writer: could you have some pages without words, where an image is the "reveal" or punchline?
- Keep your style and process simple: time is tight at the Book Dash!
- Please be sure to bring all of your required illustration materials along with you on the day. You will not have time to pop out to the shops.

Designer guidelines

- Bring your laptop or computer, and make sure it's pre-loaded with InDesign before you arrive.

Working together

At a Book Dash, each team has 12 hours to create a finished children's book. Your team consists of a writer, an illustrator and a designer. The day is designed to help you do your best work fast. You'll work directly with a few experts:

- a facilitator, who'll keep you on track
- an editor, who'll help you refine text, solve editorial challenges and proofread
- an art director, who'll help you refine your overall design and layout
- a technical director, who'll make sure the lights stay on.

There will also be other support volunteers around, keeping things ticking along.

Well in advance, each team's writer should send the organisers a rough story outline. This goes to the illustrator, who'll prepare rough character sketches. The illustrator will need to bring their characters to life quickly, so imagine them from various angles and in different situations, so that you know them well on the day. The designer will get the InDesign templates in advance – look through them before the day so you're familiar with the layout and can mull over how you'll work with that.

You won't have time on the day to develop everything from scratch. The invention of your story and characters and design ideas should happen in advance and over time: in the bath, on a long walk, in quiet meditation. The Book Dash is about making that real, assembling your pieces and polishing them. If you're worried you haven't prepared enough in advance, try drawing on old folk stories, or tweaking characters you've drawn before (any licence terms allowing). Keep designs simple.

The most important thing to focus on is that we're creating new, high-quality storybooks for children under five in Africa. Make sure you read our guidelines on 'What makes a great Book Dash book'.

Writer

The writer is responsible for developing the story and getting the words perfect. Try to bring a laptop on the day to write and edit on.

The deep quality and longevity of your team's book rests on you more than anyone. Remember that children and parents will read your book together over and over and over again. Its story – even if it's incredibly simple – must be woven beautifully, and its text deftly and perfectly crafted.

The hardest part is usually keeping it simple: you should be aiming for just five to fifteen words on a page. As with any writing, you're going to spend your day creating endless drafts and revisions. You will read your own story so many times you'll feel like you're going crazy. Draw

on the editor who works with your team: you'll need their help to create something that will last.

'Writing your story out just one time is not enough. You'll need to revise carefully. Once you think it's done, go find a quiet corner and read it aloud to yourself 15 times over.'—Book Dash volunteer

You'll finish long before the illustrator and designer. Once your writing is done, you're there to keep your team motivated and well fueled. You can also use the time to help spread the Book Dash word, blogging about the event or writing about your book, or see if you can help other writers and teams finish.

Illustrator

The illustrator is responsible for creating at least twelve beautiful, storytelling images really fast. No pressure! Please bring your own illustrating equipment and media. If you work in physical media, we'll have a low-res scanner available on the day, and will arrange professional scanning afterwards.

Out of everyone else at a Book Dash, you have the most to do in the time available. Choose to work in a style that makes illustration quick: it's better to get through every illustration and then come back to refine them than to perfect a few and never finish. Also, be firm if anyone is slowing you down, and ask if anyone can help save you time: it's everyone else's job to help *you* finish in time. Good luck!

'You have around 40 minutes per illustration (rough guide). If you want to finish 12 illustrations in time, you're going to have to graft. Stick to something simple. Unless you're doing a lot of preparation beforehand, simple is going to look better given the time-frame. Limit your colour palette to two (or three) colours, or choose a style that doesn't require a lot of fine detail work.'—Book Dash illustrator

Work with the designer closely. Remember to make sure that your illustrations don't overlap with text in the book. When printing multiple translations we need to just be able to switch the text plate to save printing costs. If text and images overlap, or text is incorporated into an illustration, this can be impossible.

Designer

The designer is responsible for layout and typography. Please bring your own computer running Adobe CS5 or later. We'll give you IDML files as templates for your cover and book interior.

Since you're the one putting your team's book together on screen, you have to draw together the pieces of the team puzzle, realising the visions of the writer and the illustrator while bringing your own talent to the mix. You have a lot to care about: gorgeous typography, colour choices, cover and page layout, Book Dash image elements, and so on. Make sure you read the Book

Dash guidelines on book production: you're the one who has to enforce those rules on your team's work.

When choosing fonts, it's very important that you use an open-licensed font – one that can explicitly be redistributed and used freely. (All Book Dash books are open licensed, and an all-rights-reserved font can prevent us from distributing effectively.) We strongly recommend choosing from the following fonts on [Google Fonts](#):

- Crimson Text
- Josefin Sans
- Roboto
- PT Serif (can be paired with PT Sans)
- Noto Serif (can be paired with Noto Sans)

You're going to need to be very organised to pull everything together. For the first few hours you'll have less to do than the writer and illustrator, so try to use the time constructively. Choose your text font, prepare your palette, and do your file prep early on in the day. You can also use placeholder text to do lots of design thinking, and chat to the other designers in the room to share ideas.

In advance of the day, and on your team's flash drive, you'll get two template IDML files: one for the cover, and one for the book interior.

The cover template includes images and instructions to:

- include the names of the team members on the front cover
- leave the Book Dash logo where it is on the back cover
- leave our standard image of a father reading to a child in position on the back cover.

The cover does not include a spine, since most Book Dash books will be saddle-stitched (i.e. stapled, with no spine).

The interior template includes images, instructions and template text for:

- a book plate page ("This book belongs to") which includes a mandatory cellphone image and text, which you should leave in place
- an imprint page which includes the Book Dash logo and template licensing text. You should update this text with your team and event details.

To keep things simple for those who work on your book after you, follow standard InDesign file packaging conventions by placing all source images in a Links folder alongside the book and cover files.