

JUNE 2016 BEHIND THE CURTAIN JOURNAL ENTRY

HARD PARTS OF WRITING NON-FICTION FOR YOUNG READERS

BY CHILDREN'S AUTHOR JENNIFER PHILLIPS

My biography on *Robert Wadlow: The Unique Life of the Boy Who Became the **World's** Tallest Man* continues to generate a steady stream of interest. People around the world are just fascinated with Robert, even though he passed away 76 years ago.

Fielding questions about Robert got me thinking about the hard parts of writing non-fiction for young readers. There are many joys. But here are a few of the hard parts:

- **Deciding what facts to include and what to leave out.** Sometimes this frustrates readers who want more. But I'm learning how important it is to keep a tight focus. That means not throwing in every fact about a subject, no matter how interesting. (With each of my books, I post supplements for kids, teachers and parents.)
- **Deciding how to present information so *it's* fact-based but not boring.** Especially with history-based non-fiction, discovering details that bring the story to life is important but can be challenging. Unless you are writing a creative non-fiction piece where it is clear some elements are fictionalized, you have to unearth information that can be very hard to unearth.
- **Getting the reading and interest level right.** There's lots of research and expert guidance about sentence length, vocabulary and concepts for kids in each age group and grade level. There are educational guidelines like the Common Core. Yet this still feels like as much art as science. You have to bring together the mechanics of writing about a subject with creativity, even in the "**simplest**" of stories.

I love learning about and exposing readers to new subjects. So, I keep plugging away to improve as a **children's** writer in how well I bring non-fiction to life in interesting ways. One way is to read, read, read. You can do a web search for useful lists of books to try. There are so many great ones, I **can't** possibly list even a few of my favorites. Do your shelves include great **children's** non-fiction? I certainly hope so!

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