

# WHERE DOES A STORY COME FROM?

## 5 METHODS to GENERATE IDEAS

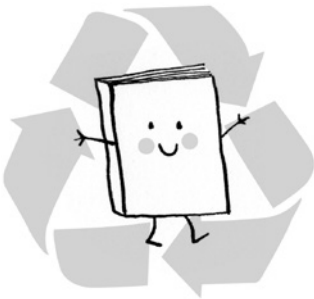
There are many ways to come up with story ideas. Here are five methods that I use when creating text and illustrations for my books.

### METHOD NO. 1

# RECYCLE

Tell an old story in a new way. The key word here is NEW. Use different characters, twist the point of view or plot, turn the story on it's head!

My story, *The City Kid and the Suburb Kid*, which was illustrated by Linda Bleck, is based on Aesop's Fable, *The Town Mouse and The Country Mouse*. *The City Kid and the Suburb Kid* is different from the original in several ways. One difference is that the cousins are boys rather than mice. Another differences is that the story is set in the city and a suburb, not the town and country.



### Exercise

Choose a well-known fairy tale or fable and tell it in a new way.

Examples of books that recycle old stories:  
*The Absolute True Story of the 3 Little Pigs*, written by Jon Scieszka, illustrated by Lane Smith.  
*Little Red Gliding Hood* written by Tara Lazar, illustrated by Troy Cummings

*The Three Ninja Pigs and Ninja Red Riding Hood*, written by Corey Rosen Schwartz, illustrated by Dan Santat.

## METHOD NO.2

# DISCOVERY

In *The Twelve Days of Christmas in Michigan*, the author, Sue Collins, and I already knew a lot about Michigan, since we both live and vacation in the state. We set out to learn even more about what makes Michigan unique by reading and visiting places like Greenfield Village in Dearborn to learn more about the model T, or to see Main Street on Mackinac Island. After we armed ourselves with information, the author then built a story around the places we learned about and I was able to draw them.

### Exercise

Choose a topic of interest, a place, animal or event. Discover more about it by reading, watching videos or visiting a museum. Develop a story around your topic.

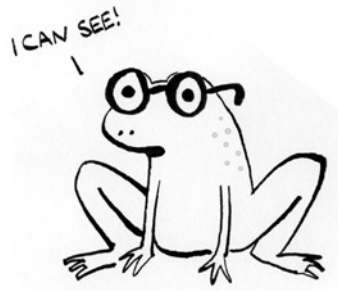
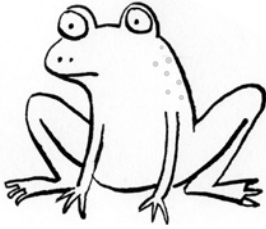


## METHOD NO.3

# PLAY the “WHAT IF” game

Ask questions about ordinary things or characters. (the questions can be ridiculous)  
What if your mom was secretly a superhero?  
What if you could walk on the ceiling?  
What if people were as small as an ant?

WHAT IF  
a frog needed  
GLASSES?



### Exercise

Write down as many **What if** questions in a timed period, say 5 minutes. Choose one of the questions to develop further for a story. This can be done individually, or as a group.

### METHOD NO. 4



I write and paint stuff that I like. Seems obvious, right? I have collections of buttons and shiny things, toys and interesting lamps. And I love dogs and superheroes. These characters and items end up in my artwork and stories. I've written several stories about dogs, and the *Ten Rules of Being a Superhero* contains both toys AND superheroes.

### Exercise

Make a list of things you like. Activities, objects and pets are all fair game. Write a story containing one or more of the items on your list.

## METHOD NO.5

# Doodle



I keep a sketchbook handy at all times. Doodling loosens up my hands for sketching and is a warm-up for writing. I like to doodle without knowing what I'm going to draw. Once, I doodled a bear and a squirrel on the same page. I imagined what their personalities were like and wondered if they could ever be friends. What did they like to do together? What would challenge that friendship? Those doodles and questions eventually led to the book *Bear and Squirrel are Friends...Yes, Really!*.

### Exercise 1

Make a sketchbook. Take ten sheets of paper – 11 x 17" copy paper folded will make a 8.5" x 11" book. Or make a mini sketchbook using half of an 8.5" x 11" sheet. Fold the papers in half. Cover with a sturdy sheet of construction paper, staple and decorate.

### Exercise 2

Doodle! Spend 10 – 15 minutes sketching in your book. At the end of the period, look at what you've drawn. Is there a character you want to know more about? Ask questions. What is their name? What do they like? Do they have a problem to solve? Write a story about that character(s).

### Combine Methods

I used Doodle + Discovery to create *Old Rock (is not boring!)*



KEEP  
WRITING!

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