



EZRA JACK KEATS BOOKMAKING

Writing a Children's Book: *Teaching Artist, [Katie Yamasaki](#)**

[Tutorial 2 of 3](#) - approx. 8 minutes

Story Arc & Character Development

1. (00:12) - Story Arc: Beginning, Middle, End
2. (2:24) - Story Arc: The Basics (See pg. 2 below)
3. (3:09) - Character Development, Creating a Backstory (See pg. 3 below)
4. (4:09) Character Development, Your Character Meets a Challenge (See pg. 4 below)
5. (5:57) - Showing Not Telling

* Katie Yamasaki is a muralist and children's book artist. She has painted over 80 murals with diverse communities around the world, exploring issues of social justice. Her children's books focus on similar themes of social justice and underrepresented communities. Her books *When the Cousins Came* and *Fish for Jimmy* recount personal family stories about the internment camps of WWII and growing up in a multi-racial family. Katie's most current book, *Dad Bakes* will be released in Sept., 2021 and have starred reviews from Kirkus and Publishers Weekly. Katie worked as a public school Spanish and Art teacher in both the Detroit and NYC public schools for 14 years. www.Katieyamasaki.com or @katieyamasaki

Story Arc: The Basics

Your student's book needs to have a *beginning, middle and end.*

For a book with a linear or circular story the beginning, middle and end can be mapped out using the story arc outlined below.

But even though a concept book (as mentioned in Writing Tutorial #1, timestamp 8:25, i.e.: counting, alphabet, colors) doesn't follow the same arc as a narrative story, the concept book still needs to establish a pattern, theme, or logic that explores the subject and will carry the reader through the beginning, middle and end of the book.

- **Beginning . . .**
 - Show who or what the book is about.
 - Introduce the conflict or establish the arc
 - Introduce the world in which they live.
- **Middle . . .**
 - Describe how the main character (and supporting characters) face the conflict. or Show why you are ordering information in the way you do.
 - Help the reader get to know the characters/world through specific details and the way
 - Have your characters respond to things that are happening to them.
 - Create a turning point when the nature of the conflict changes. or Establish a point at which the reader can see the possible conclusion of the information they're being given
- **End . . .**
 - The conflict is resolved. or Let the reader know why you've presented the information to them.
- **Along the way, a strong story will:**
 - Help us get to know the main character(s) and relate to them.
 - Make us care about what happens, and how the conflict is resolved.
 - Exist in a world that feels as unique and special as your world.
 - Be easy and engaging to be read aloud.
 - Have specific details that help us better understand the main character and the world they inhabit.

Character Development

These exercises can relieve some of the pressure when students feel a little stuck:

1. Creating Backstory

Create a backstory for your character. Scribble down details that you might not include in the story, like, what is their favorite food or activity, or what is their greatest fear. Here are a few more questions:

- a. Where is your character from originally?

- b. Describe your character's family (or who they consider their family/community).

- c. What does your character like to do when they have a chance?

- d. Describe your character's personality.

- e. What is one thing that no one knows about your character, something that they keep secret.

Your Characters Meet a Challenge

Write about how your character(s) might respond to a challenge. Create a situation in which your character(s) must respond to a series of 2-4 unexpected events.

For example:

Your character, Estefania, leaves her apartment for school one morning, dragging her kid sister, Marta, along. They walk 3 blocks but Marta is hungry. Estefania goes into the local bodega (small grocery store) to get a breakfast sandwich for her sister. But when she tries to pay she realizes she forgot her wallet and her keys at home. Her mom is at work and her hungry sister is hanging on her leg, complaining.

- How will Estefania respond?
- Does she stay calm for her sister Marta's sake?
- Does she just forget about breakfast and take herself and her sister to school, both hungry and grumpy?
- Does she go to find a neighbor who can help them?
- Does she create a funny story to comfort her sister and arrange to pay the friendly bodega owner after school?

Estefania is in a bit of trouble and how she responds will help the reader get to know her better. Create a similarly messy situation for your character and show us how they resolve it!