

# Writer's Guidelines

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## Checklist for A BOOK by ME

- Choose a subject and register project online at [understandingworks.org](http://understandingworks.org)
- Read writer's guidelines
- Set up meeting with subject for interview (in person or on Zoom)
- Review interview tips
- Take several pictures with subject (sharp image with nice background)
- Get copies of old photos (10-12) of the subject spanning their life
- Write, edit, and consult with Story Coach
- Illustrate your project or find a student artist
- Complete ten-page book project
- Scan artwork (eleven pages including the book cover)
- Submit on [understandingworks.org](http://understandingworks.org)

## Suggested Timeline for Six-Week Writing Project

### Week One:

- Learn about writing project, view website, and writer's guidelines
- Attend A BOOK by ME training class
- Choose a subject
- Register book project on website

### Week Two:

- Introduction to subject's story
- Research (make sure your resources are reliable)
- Make a list of open-ended questions to ask the subject
- Arrange interview with subject

### Week Three:

- Complete interview and send thank you note
- Choose book title and discuss artwork with illustrator
- Write ten-page script

### Week Four:

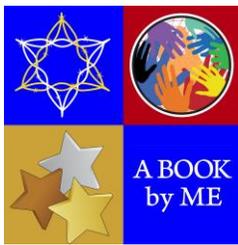
- Write and edit ten-page script
- Clearly mark Page 1, Page 2, Page 3, etc.
- Share text with artist and discuss artwork for book cover
- Edit work with Story Coach

### Week Five:

- Illustrate one piece of art for each page (plus cover art)
- Scan each illustration naming each file according to page it illustrates

### Week Six:

- Complete including About the Author and About the Illustration Page and Dear Reader
- Have Story Coach submit project



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## Choosing Your Subject

We only allow one children's book about each subject. We don't want you to work hard on the project only to find out another author wrote about the same person. After you have selected your subject, register online at [understandingworks.org](http://understandingworks.org)

### WHAT do you write about?

- Research the time period of your main topic.
- Research your area for possible stories. You can go to your local VFW, nursing homes, or put an article in the newspaper to locate a subject. Social media is very effective as well. See the example of a press release below.
- Use primary sources and up-to-date resources.
- Historical accuracy is extremely important. Look at photos online before illustrating your book to see what clothing, hairstyles, buildings, and cities looked like in this time period.

### WHO do you write about?

Preferably someone 1) in your area 2) still living and 3) who was directly impacted by an historical event. If the subject is deceased but you are able to find sufficient information about their story, please feel free to register the project online. Choose one of the following to write about:

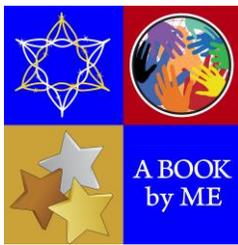
- Holocaust Survivor, Liberator or Righteous Gentile
- Human Rights – Civil Rights era
- Heroes – WWII, Korean War or Vietnam War veterans

**Press Release Example:** Send to your hometown newspaper. Use this example as provided or change as necessary:

WANTED: True Stories of Heroic Veterans

(Name of teacher) at (Name of school), encourages local students to participate in a special writing project. Understanding Works is looking for young people who love history and would like to be a published author. Their program, A BOOK by ME, preserves the true stories of heroic veterans and others, in books written by children for children.

A BOOK by ME was started in Illinois to document the experiences of WWII Veterans and Jewish Holocaust survivors. Now the search is on across the nation for more of these real-life heroes from WWII, Korean War and Vietnam. We want to share their stories so the next generation can learn about these remarkable people. These books sets can be donated to schools for educational purposes. For more information visit [understandingworks.org](http://understandingworks.org).



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## Registering Your Project

First, visit [understandingworks.org](http://understandingworks.org) to register your project. The paperwork includes contact information for you and your subject.

You will need to designate a person to be your mentor or “Story Coach” while you work on this project. It needs to be an adult, such as a teacher, parent, librarian, etc. Your coach will:

- help set up and attend the interview with you
- help you write the Dear Reader page of your book
- write a two-page Biography on subject (1,000 to 1,200 words max.) that will be published in the back of the book
- write a brief summary for the back cover of book
- help you obtain photos of the subject for the Dear Reader page and 10-12 pictures for photo page (older B&W spanning subject's lifetime and some more recent)
- take a photo of you with the subject for the About the Author page during the interview
- help you with any questions you have during the writing/illustrating process

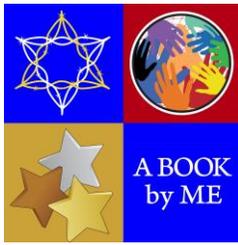
It is helpful to look at an example book. Check out books on Amazon. Visit [understandingworks.org](http://understandingworks.org) to see book sets for classrooms.

## Interview Preparation

Because some of the subjects may have been through a traumatic experience, the interview may be difficult for them. Take this into consideration by exhibiting patience and understanding. Be aware the individual may be hard of hearing so talk slow and clear.

Before the Interview:

- Phone the individual to make meeting arrangements (in subject's home or on Zoom)
- Let them know the approximate length of the interview, typically an hour.
- Ask if they would bring at 10-12 photos spanning their life. If the subject does not have a digital copy of these photos, you can 1) take a clear picture of the photograph using a cell phone 2) stop at a copy center and immediately return them 3) take the photos home to scan and return them.
- Ask permission to take several photos with them. Bring a cell phone with a good camera with you.
- Arrange for Story Coach to take the detailed notes so that you have another resource during your writing stage. The Story Coach will need this for the two-page biography.
- Ask permission to record the interview if you have a cell phone. This will be beneficial if you have trouble remembering a fact or detail later.
- Research your subject's time period. Include in storyline if appropriate.



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- Prepare potential questions in chronological order on paper to refer to during the interview: Example: pre-war years, war time years, liberation, post-war years. This will help you in the writing process. Ask questions dealing with the subject's family, occupation and education. Ask open-ended questions, like: Tell me about your family life before the war.
- Be prepared to hear something from your subject that may not be on your list but should be in the storybook because of its historical value.

## During the Interview:

- Arrive on time. Take time to tell them about you and why you want to write their story.
- Look them in the eye and speak clearly. Be a good listener and avoid interruptions.
- Respect the individual's time and energy level. Ask the subject if they need to take a break.
- Respect their right to *not* answer a question. You don't have to ask every question on your list.
- Clarify what you don't understand.
- Thank them for their time and for helping you understand that time period.
- It may be emotionally draining for the individual so display much gratitude.
- Notify them that A BOOK by ME will send them a proof copy of the book for them to edit. Remind them the need to sign a release.
- Remember to take a photo with them and get images spanning their lifetime

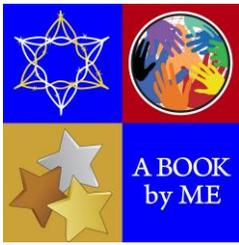
## After the Interview:

- Follow up with a thank you phone call a day or so later.
- Send a Thank You card.
- Keep the subject updated on your progress.

## Writing

### HOW do you write their story?

- Remember: there are only 10 pages. We suggest 2-4 sentences per page. Some stories need more detail.
- Have a beginning, middle and end: What was the person's life like before, during and after the war?
- You may include dialogue when the character expresses feelings or thoughts through the conflict or situation.
- Style: Past tense. Show the story, don't just tell.
- A good story should involve the five senses: sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell.
- Remember to leave the reader with a lesson learned or positive outcome.
- Stories must be exactly ten pages in length, plus the book cover – each page written and illustrated.
- Must be true stories. Must be well-written (so that a third-grade student can understand)



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- Have a captivating title, not just the person's name.
- Include a resource page (this will not be published; only for our reference when we check facts)

When you type the story, make sure to clearly mark the pages so that we can tell the exact order of the book. We suggest typing and editing on your own document, then copy and pasting into our form when you are ready to submit.

## Illustrations

**Read** the story thoroughly. **Research** the time period with specific attention to clothing, hairstyles, surroundings, buildings, roads, automobiles, trains, etc. **Reach** to the edge of the page --- use your colored pencils, crayons or markers to fill the space as much as possible to make for an eye-catching illustration.

Illustrations are to be done on separate paper from the writing. Use standard 8 ½ X 11 computer paper. You can use any art supplies. Usually, illustrators use markers, crayons, colored pencils, etc. The use of bold bright colors really makes a great presentation. The illustrations need to be dark because light coloring doesn't scan well. When you finish the illustrations, you must scan them. Label each picture file as the page number so that we can easily match the illustrations to the correct page.

## Submissions

Submission needs to be done through [understandingworks.org](http://understandingworks.org) on the Writer's Guidelines tab under A BOOK by ME.

**Note: All submissions will be reviewed but not all will be published.**

The Author Submission Form will include all the information below.

Book Title \_\_\_\_\_

Author: \_\_\_\_\_

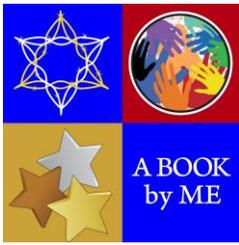
Illustrator: \_\_\_\_\_

Subject: \_\_\_\_\_

Check which Series:    Holocaust        Human Rights        Heroes

Write your story in the blanks below. You must fit the text into all ten pages.

Page 1



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Page 2

Page 3

Page 4

Page 5

Page 6

Page 7



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Page 8

Page 9

Page 10

About the Author – Write a paragraph about yourself, including age, hobbies, aspirations, etc. (Maximum 500 words)

About the Illustrator (if different from author) – Write a paragraph about yourself, including age, hobbies, aspirations, etc. (Maximum 500 words)