# STUFF EVERY CHIDREN'S BOOK SHOULD HAVE

BASIC PAGE STRUCTURE

Note that page one is always on the right, but children's books need to use spreads. Pages 1 - 3 are usually intro pages that lead us to the story in the first spread on pages 4 and 5.

Children's books are plotted in spreads, not pages. Codes are used to indicate spread position for the illustrator.

You might write Spread 1 AB to indicate the illustration should cover the whole spread.

Or, Spread 1A would indicatew just the first page on the spread, and 1B would be the second.
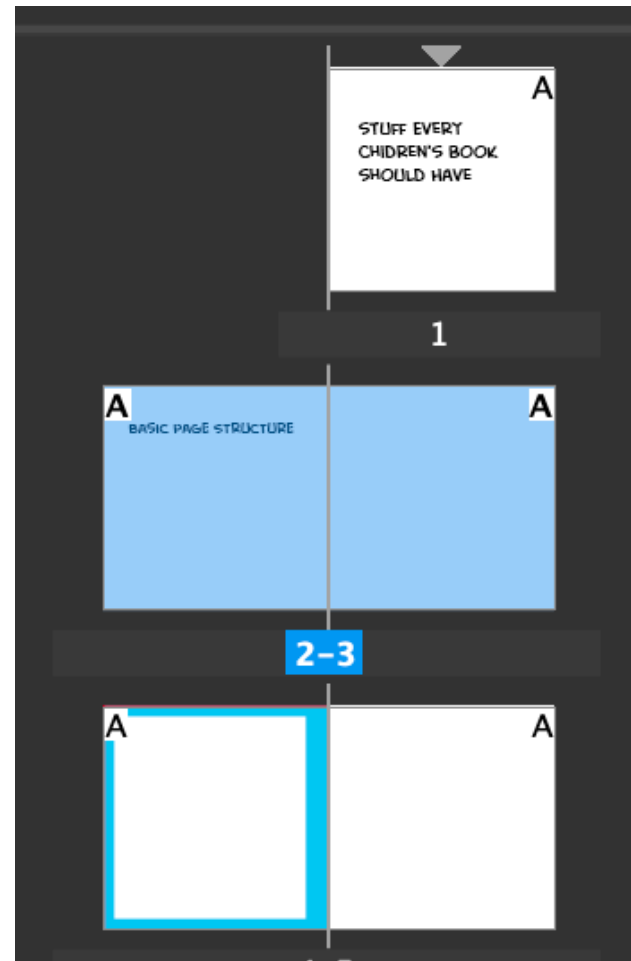
Standard margins are .5 inches all around, indicated in blue. The inside margin is close to the spine so is usually given 1 full inch to accomodate the binding.

Bleed is red in this image. This is basically the wiggle room for what might be cut off when the book is trimmed.

Art should sort of "fade away" at this boundary, there should be nothing important in the red or blue areas.

Text can't be laid out in these areas either. Every illustration should contain a blank area where the text should go.

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING

Most children's books are full color casewrap (hardcover). Your printer only offers these services in a few different sizes. Refer to the trim sizes matrix here:

https://www.ingramspark.com/hubfs/downloads/trim-sizes.pdf

here are the hardcover sizes as a list.

5 x 8
5.5 x 8.5
5.83 x 8.27
6 x 9
6.14 x 9.21
6.69 x 9.61
7 x 10
7.5 x 9.25
8 x 8
8 x 10
8 x 10.88
8.25 x 10.75
8.5 x 8.5
8.3 x 11
11 x 8.5

The size should be the first thing in an illustrator's contract. If an illustrator's work doesn't match one of these sizes it has to be cut down to fit the page.

An illustrator should know the size and frame in at least an inch on all artwork to account for the bleed and margin. No important artwork should be in the bleed or margin, and that part of the image should be soft-focus.

Every illustration should have a blank area for text or a plan to put text somewhere else, such as a blank strip below the image.

Amazon kdp has very limited hardcover sizes, so the best place to produce a children's book is on ingram. A children's book on Amazon is usually paperback.

AMAZON VS. INGRAM

Most children's book authors and illustrators picture their books in bookstores. If you are using Amazon KDP to upload and output your book that is extremely unlikely. Amazon is at war with booksellers and booksellers hate Amazon! This has a lot of implications. First of all make sure you own your own ISBNs through myidentifiers.com. If you use the ISBNs Amazon provides, booksellers can look up your book and see that it's an Amazon book and they will have no interest.

Ingram on the other hand, is the primary distributor for booksellers all over the world, even Amazon uses their services. If you want to be in bookstores you should use ingram with your own ISBN.

Amazon color process looks better than Ingram color, and Amazon can create books that look great and cost less money to make. You can make a lot of money with a book on Amazon because everyone buys their books there now and they are driving bookshops out of business! But when it comes to marketing a children's book to your local bookshop, no one will be interested in an Amazon book.

Amazon has some limited hardcover options, but not the usual children's book sizes you are probably looking for. Can you have your cake and eat it too? Sure! Create the hardcover on ingram and the paperback on Amazon.

SCALING THE ARTWORK

A five by eight book project sounds like a lot of fun, you might think of the small books made of Beatrix Potter's work. However this project can be a head-scratcher for an artist. It would be hard to draw that small in order to keep the work proportional!

If you decide on the scale beforehand, it is an easy process to make sure your art is in the right scale before you even start. Use this guide for more information:

https://emerald-books.com/scaling_artwork.html

Just start with the 5 x 8 surface and draw a diagonal in order to work comfortably at the right scale.

If you are an artist or editor that doesn't want to work with math, square pages are the best. It's always easy to check when something is square and the art will fit perfectly in the ingram 8.5 by 8.5 format. Just make sure the spreads are well planned and that you are visualizing the book from the beginning.

If you want to work effortlessly, just keep the edges free from detail and work on square illustration board.

THE SPREAD PLAN

A spread plan is more important than the text or the illustrations. How do you plan a spread that has no words? How do you plan a spread that is just an empty blue page and nothing else?

The artist and writer both work according to the spread plan. The spread plan is kind of like the director for a movie.

A movie can use plenty of silent scenes, as long as they are moving the story forward. Sometimes an image inside of a blank vingnette communicates more powerfully than a full illustration.

After choosing the size of the book, create a spread plan that shows the pages in thumbnail. If the book is square, create a square spread plan. You might use sticky notes or 3x5 cards glued into a notebook or onto a large sheet of posterboard.

The following two pages show a spread plan.

1

blank

2 A B

endpages
full spread

endpages
full spread

3 A B

Dedication and
imprint informa-
tion

Page title / paper
title

4 A B

4A
text
"Robin hood and
his merry men...

4b:
full bleed illustration:
Robin smiling and nock-
ing an arrow to his bow.
No space for text

5 A B

5AB
full spread
Exterior, robin finds a door in a large oak tree. He pushes
the door open and we can see inside. The inside of the tree
is like a tavern. Friar tuck is enjoying a beer.

5B has a little space for 3 lines of text
Text: Friar Tuck was first among the merry men, and......

6 A B

6A
full bleed illustration:
Maid Marion on her bal-
cony staring out over the
forest dreamily. No text
on this page

6B
vignette: small
illustration of robin
picking flowers and
looking up at the
castle.
Text: Oh noble and
brave the warrior,
and yet his heart.....

The spread plan doesn't show the whole script, and it doesn't show all of the illustration instructions either. Instead it serves as a template for both the writer and illustrator to work together.

The script and the illustration dossier should be separate text documents that both refer to the spread plan by using the codes, 6AB or 4A, etc.

In this way if the writer knows the page she is working with is blank, she knows two full paragraphs will have the intended space. Similarly, the illustrator will know to create a small vignette on a page with a lot of text by following the spread plan.

There's nothing worse than text covering the illustration just for lack of space. It's also a drag when the illustrations just show exactly what the text is saying. A spread plan can vary the importance of text and image so they can work together in harmony instead of just forming a repetition.

PAGES

Not all of the pages serve the story.

Some pages serve as an introduction to the environment of the story and others give important information.

Children's books are all about emotion and setting the mood, and special pages help transition into the world of the book.

The following gives descriptions of types of pages and their purpose.

COVER

The cover is at least 50% blank space.
The title needs to be readable at the thumbnail level.

The cover is an introduction and shouldn't give away the story.

It has to be enticing so often uses silhouettes or just suggestions of what will happen in the story.

The illustrator shouldn't put any text on the cover, just leave plenty of room for the designer to add text.

Most children's books are purchased based on the cover only, so the cover is a critical part of sales.

BACK COVER

The back cover should be almost completely blank.

An illustration on the back cover should just provide a little setting for the text. You can see on the second example there is just a giant tree trunk to hold the text.

Most readers will be drawn to a book by the front cover, then flip it over to read about it and make a purchase decision without even looking through the book.

The back cover can't be just an illustration from the pages, it has to be specially designed.

The back cover text should be carefully written and edited. It is the most important piece of writing in a children's book.

INFO PAGE

The info page precedes the end pages and gives publisher information.

It is also a great place to list upcoming books or the publisher website, or any information you wish to convey.

A small illustration here looks great too, as long as it isn't a full page.

ENDPAGES

Endpages are just an empty pattern or design that lets you know you are entering the world of the book. They can be the first thing in the book, or the info page or dedication can come first. Endpages are "gateways" that appear at the beginning and end of the book. Both designs here give the feeling of entering the woods.

TEXT TITLE

A text tile follows the endpages.

If the endpages have color on the back, that page is on the left.

Otherwise this is just a blank spread.

The title appears in text with no illustration.

This builds a sense of suspense, just like the lights going dark at a movie. The text title doesn't have any other information, just the title.

SPREAD TITLE

The spread title has a full spread illustration but it has a white background. It has the full title, author and illustrator and publisher imprint.

It gives a sense of the story spilling over onto a blank stage.

STORY PAGES

A great art director knows that the composition is just as important as the illustrations and text for telling the story. In this page from Tico and the golden wings, a blank column is reserved for the text, so that the reader has a sense of descending down from the trees. Tico is trapped on the ground. In this page from Where the Wild Things Are, one line of text appears on a blank page, which feels lonely and secretive. The white border around the image seems to form the wall. Max feels frustrated and confined.

One of the most perfect compositions in children's literature. Up until this point the text had been on blank pages, now we see the image slide in. The frame is gone since Max isn't in his house. The normal world is sliding away, but the text is doing its best to hold on to it's position. This is technically a full spread but page A only has a tall vertical rectangle available. Sendak draws a tall monster that fits perfectly. We feel the world getting weirder and bigger just because the text is sliding over.

and in and out of weeks
and almost over a year
to where the wild things are.

When Max arrives at the island the illustration becomes more horizontal. This echoes the way the world is viewed from a boat. It also gives us a longer frame to see more of the wild things. Notice also how the image and text aren't exactly in sync. The text talks about how scary they are but the images tell a different story. The monsters are all smiling and look welcoming.


And when he came to the place where the wild things are they roared their terrible roars and gnashed their terrible teeth

and rolled their terrible eyes and showed their terrible claws

During the wild rumpus scene, Max and the Monsters get a whole spread! No text is necessary here since we can see them dancing and howling. Max's world has expanded and feels wild and full. Note that there is no room for text in this illustration. Adding a panel of text on top of the art to say "they were wildly dancing and howling" would only detract from this image.

POST MATTER
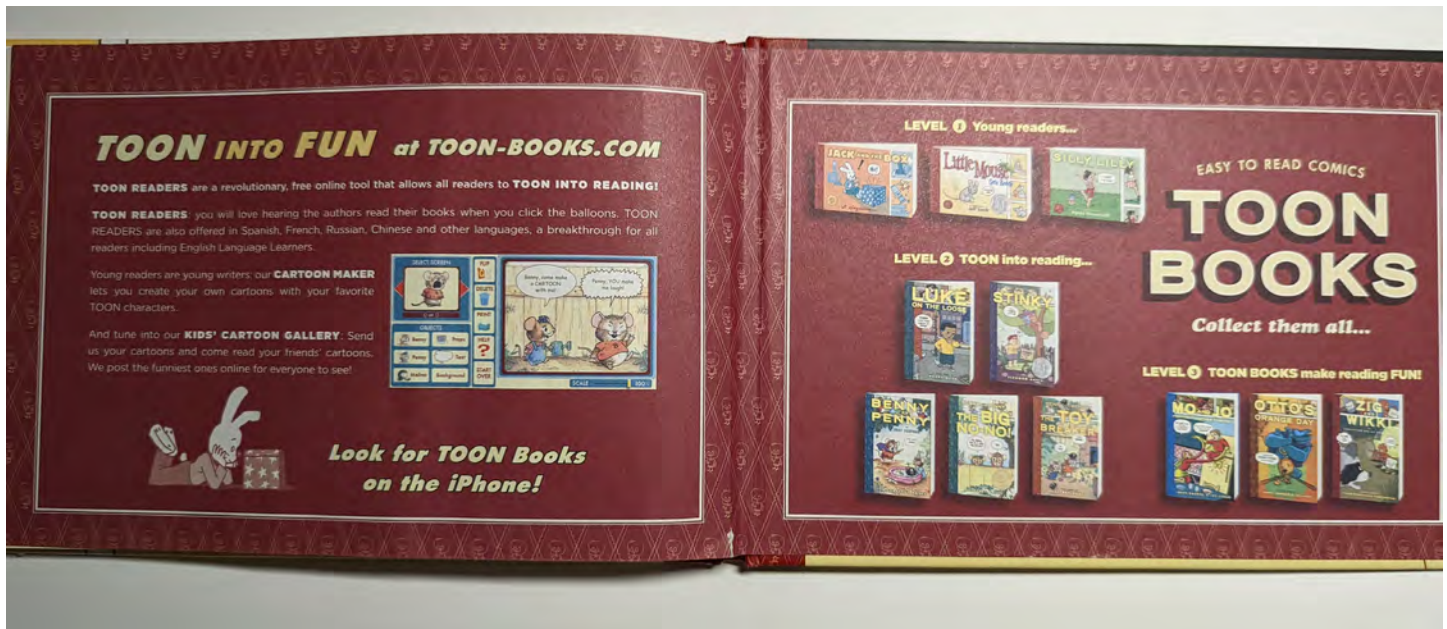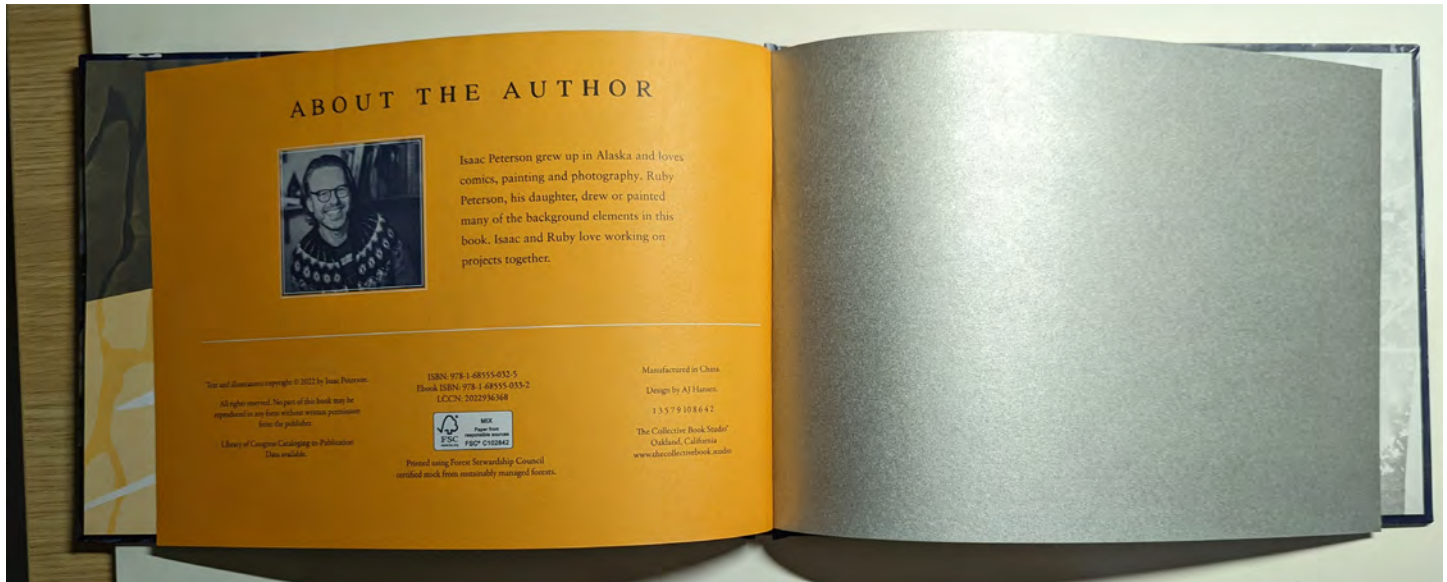
After the story is finished, there can be a page or a full spread of post matter. Post matter can include an about the author page, or a full list of upcoming books. In the toon books example, the post matter advertises the website, a story-telling app, and even lesson plans for the classroom.

In the Gray Fox example (top) the postmatter includes about the author and all the publication information. The publication info appears here at the back of the book instead of at the front. The front of the book only has a spread title, then endpages, then the story.

Postmatter can come after endpages or before. The endpages conclude the story, so it is nice to think about whether you would like to close the curtain on stage before giving information.

IN GENERAL

The book as a whole needs to be considered from the beginning. This is usually the job of the art director, but many creative people can do their own art direction. If that sounds like you, then the best thing you can do is collect children's books.

The masterpieces of children's literature, such as Where the Wild Things are and Tico and the Golden Wings, are masterpieces for a reason. Every element comes together perfectly to tell the story. Art direction is something you might not even notice as a reader, but as you ease in to the story in the text title and spread title, and pull back the curtain in the endpages, you will feel the effect even if you can't describe it. A great process for learning more about design is just purchasing children's books and writing out their spread plan in a notebook. Take notes on how the text is placed in the illustration. Is there a blank space on the image, or is the image on a full page with the text opposite? Is there a frame around the image with the text underneath?

Good design is difficult to notice, since it makes room for the feelings of the reader to flourish in their own way. Bad design makes a racket, and disrupts the story in ways that are hard to ignore.

Every children's book needs art direction in the form of a plan from the very beginning. The size of the book needs to be the first thing, and it has to be one of the ingram hardcover options. The spread plan needs to be established from the beginning, since the artist will have to draw extra elements for the title pages and for the endpages. All of the needed information must be in place as well. The back cover text is especially important. If the back cover is just an image, well the book won't sell.