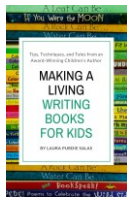


Networking and Promotion

Networking and promotion are tasks that professional writers have to take seriously. If you write strictly for love, or if you hold down a full-time job and only write for income sporadically, then you don't have to worry about it quite as much. But once you make the leap to working writer, you might as well get comfortable with networking and promotion—they will be your frequent companions.

Fear or dislike of networking and promotion keeps plenty of writers from really being working writers, and I'll admit they are not my favorite part of this career. As an introvert, I would happily leave promotion to the publisher! But publishers expect authors to help promote themselves and their books now, and your efforts can even make the difference in whether or not a publisher acquires your manuscript in the first place!

So set aside your fear or irritation and bear with me. In this section, I'll share my thoughts on these two dreaded aspects of a writing career. And hopefully you'll see that even someone like me, who is not all that comfortable with this stuff either, can do a decent job of it. And so can you.



©2018 This is a brief excerpt from Laura Purdie Salas' ***Making a Living Writing Books for Kids***. Available in Kindle and paperback editions. Free Kindle edition with the purchase of 354-page paperback book. For more information, visit Laura's website at www.laurasalas.com

Networking vs. Promotion

I define networking as getting to know people. Networking is meeting and building relationships with people whose passions or businesses or goals intersect with mine in some way. As a children's writer, these people might be writers, teachers, librarians, editors, publishers, parents, policymakers related to children's literature, people who work at non-profits related to children's literature, etc.

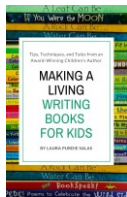
I define promotion as actions specifically meant to increase visibility of me as an author or of my specific books. When I appear at events, do book signings, create postcards related to my work—those are all promotion.

At events, I both network and promote. For instance, at a conference in a few months, I will 1) present at a session, 2) sign books, and 3) host a table at a Children's Literature Luncheon (meaning everyone at the table will get a copy of one of my books and I'll be the “author at the table”). I'll also 4) hand out lots of bookmarks and rack cards. Those four specific tasks are promotion, with a goal of introducing me and my work to educators. But I will also attend other people's sessions, meet up with groups of writers and teachers, and go to other writers' signings. Those are all networking activities, or building relationships.

What's a Platform?

Before diving any deeper, a word about platforms. We keep hearing how agents and publishers are looking for authors with platforms. Platform in that sense is an established relationship with people who would likely support you by buying your book.

If you are the Surgeon General and want to sell a book about health for kids, you have a huge platform of people who will be aware of your book. If you are a celebrity, ditto. Maybe you are someone who blogs about adoption and you have 83,000 subscribers. That's a great platform if you want to write a children's book featuring adoption. Maybe you're a cartoonist for the New Yorker who wants to illustrate children's books. Agents will be scrambling over



©2018 This is a brief excerpt from Laura Purdie Salas' ***Making a Living Writing Books for Kids***. Available in Kindle and paperback editions. Free Kindle edition with the purchase of 354-page paperback book. For more information, visit Laura's website at www.laurasalas.com

each other to get to you first because of your notable platform as a New Yorker cartoonist.

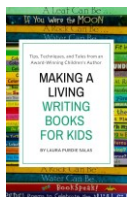
Most of us, me included, do not have this kind of platform. It doesn't mean you can't get published. Sure, editors and agents would love it. Built-in audience? Who wouldn't love that?

So, moving on.

The other kind of platform, the one more reasonable for most of us to try to create and build on, is about finding our particular niche that somehow relates to children or literacy and connecting with other people about that topic. That connecting usually, but not always, happens online.

For example, I have a writer friend who writes beautiful poetry and picture books. She is a former writing instructor with deep roots in prestigious educational circles. Her stand against high-stakes testing in the schools has been a major part of her platform in recent years. Peace and tolerance and equality are also areas in which she is vocal and reaches lots of people. Note: she did *not* choose these interests in order to build a platform! They are part of who she is and what she feels strongly about. But by aligning herself in certain ways on these issues, and sharing authentically about them frequently on her blog and on social media, she has become associated with these topics. They are a platform of sorts for her. She has connected with many, many people because of those topics. Those connections, many of them, are likely to want to support her books, even if her books are not directly about those topics.

Think about what matters to you. What do you feel passionate about? It's OK if it's two or three passions rather than one, though I think any more than that gets too confusing. One or two key passion points probably works better. Again, please note you are *not* choosing to focus on something in order to make it your platform. You are looking about what you already feel strongly about and thinking about how you might share it in a way that works well with your children's writing career. When you make your passion more public, and when you can relate it to books and kids in some way, you build yourself a platform. When agents or editors Google your name, they will quickly find you and see what you stand for, who you connect with, and what your platform is.



©2018 This is a brief excerpt from Laura Purdie Salas' ***Making a Living Writing Books for Kids***. Available in Kindle and paperback editions. Free Kindle edition with the purchase of 354-page paperback book. For more information, visit Laura's website at www.laurasalas.com

YOUR TURN: Spend some time thinking about what your platform as a writer is or will be. Identify one to three key elements that you want people to associate with you when they think about you as a writer.

Social Media

I Hate Social Media

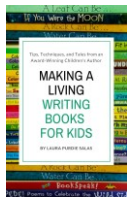
I feel for you. I often find social media overwhelming. But I think you **MUST** be on at least one social media platform. It's where so much of both networking and promotion happens these days.

If you are already on one platform, like Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram, great!

If you aren't, read an article on the benefits of the different platforms for writers. To me, Twitter is probably the best place for kidlit writers, because so many teachers and librarians hang out there. But whatever platform you choose, just choose one!

Here are some basic steps/tips:

- Create your profile with your writer self in mind.
- Find a recent article online about [Social Media Platform] for Writers. Read it. Follow the advice that feels comfortable to you.
- Lurk for a few weeks to get comfortable.
- Join in the conversation.
- Follow other children's writers.
- Share about books you admire, your writing process, topics you're writing about.
- Only 20% or so of your content you share should be about your book for sale.
- Retweet or Share other people's content.
- Respond when people Comment on your content.
- Give it time. It will take six months or so (in my experience) before you start to feel comfortable and really connect with people.



©2018 This is a brief excerpt from Laura Purdie Salas' ***Making a Living Writing Books for Kids***. Available in Kindle and paperback editions. Free Kindle edition with the purchase of 354-page paperback book. For more information, visit Laura's website at www.laurasalas.com

- Once you're comfortable with it, evaluate your time spent and the relationships built. If you want to add another platform, go for it. If not, that's fine.
- You do not have to be everywhere. You do have to be somewhere.

What Do You Say?

Sometimes I worry too much about what I will say. It's about being part of a community. So if you don't know what to say, just participate in the conversation by answering other people's posts and comments. Or by sharing other people's posts.

By doing this, you bolster other people and become a valued member of the kidlit community. There are always plenty of people with lots to say. And eventually you will be comfortable enough to start talking. But when you're getting started, don't worry about coming up with incredible stuff. Just responding to other people's incredible stuff will be enough for a while!

No, Really, What Do You Say?

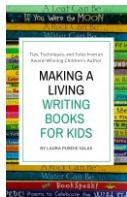
OK, a few specifics.

80+% of your posts should be giving. Giving information or encouragement or entertainment. 20% or less should be promotional—good news about your books and events.

Experiment, but when you find what you do well, and what others respond to, stick with that. If you can become sort of consistent, then your connections will know what to expect from you. And when they're looking for that, they'll know who to come to.

Here are some of the things writers share on social media:

- tidbits about their work in progress
- behind the scenes looks at their writing life/events
- where they are getting their inspiration
- funny bits about their everyday lives
- interesting things they learn in research



©2018 This is a brief excerpt from Laura Purdie Salas' ***Making a Living Writing Books for Kids***. Available in Kindle and paperback editions. Free Kindle edition with the purchase of 354-page paperback book. For more information, visit Laura's website at www.laurasalas.com

- photos and articles about their particular topic (not their book, but their topic—a science writer might share cool science facts)
- books they love
- good news about writer friends
- quotations about writing and reading
- happy book birthday wishes
- political issues relating to literacy and education

You won't do all of these! This list is just to show there are lots of possibilities.

In the Moment

Social media is largely about immediacy. And as a writer who likes to consider my words and let them simmer a while, that is terrible! My worst habit is having a cool thought or taking a great picture and thinking, I'll share that later. I never do. Or I do, but it feels stale and outdated by then. I'm trying to get better about sharing something now and then *in the moment* from my writing life.

So Tweet or Post that great quotation someone just shared at a conference. Tweet it during her presentation and tag her, if possible. Tag the organizers, too. This amounts to a public "Great job!" for all of them. And who doesn't love that? So you get to network AND share something inspiring with your connections. If you do it right now.

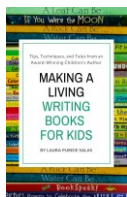
A Few Tips

Think of who you want to connect with: other writers? teachers? your readers? parents? industry people? Think about what that group of people might like to read and try to deliver it.

Don't just share links. Pull out a tidbit so that people scrolling through their Feed get something out of your post, even if they never click on a link.

Use photos! Visuals attract lots more readers!

Realize that there are no hard and fast rules about how often you should share. Sharing multiple times a day can feel like overkill, but keep in mind that probably only a very small percentage of people who follow you will see any one



©2018 This is a brief excerpt from Laura Purdie Salas' ***Making a Living Writing Books for Kids***. Available in Kindle and paperback editions. Free Kindle edition with the purchase of 354-page paperback book. For more information, visit Laura's website at www.laurasalas.com

given post. I personally am overwhelmed when someone shows up in my Facebook or Twitter feed with 10 different posts in a single morning. Sometimes I unfollow that person because, since I only check social media a couple times a day and I don't scroll down very far, someone who posts that much is keeping me from seeing other people's posts. So, start with what seems do-able to you. If that's one post per day, no problem. Maybe you post about your own work every couple of weeks, then, and you post about other people's books and blogs the rest of the days. If you want to post five times a day, that's fine, too. Basically, you just have to get in there and try it out and experiment to see what works for you and (importantly) what you can keep up with without feeling overwhelmed.

As you connect with or follow other authors on social media, certain people will resonate with you. What they post entertains you or touches you. Follow those people more closely (don't get creepy about it) and you can gather good info about what you yourself can share.

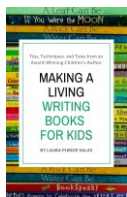
Try Lots of Things

I have tried and failed at many social media things. I have started hashtags nobody else adopted. I have asked questions nobody answered. I have shared links nobody clicked on. It doesn't matter. I just move on and try something else.

Of course, I don't say something about my latest client in a fit of irritation, because that's going to come back to haunt me! But I don't worry about figuring out just the right thing to say, either.

Say something. Try something. Write something. The things that bomb will bomb through lack of response. When you stop doing those, nobody will notice—they never noticed it in the first place!

So even if you're a planner, like me, chill out. Try a bunch of different stuff. Maybe when you share "Happy book birthday" posts, you notice you get a ton of Likes and Retweets. So, do more of those! Or perhaps your wryly humorous notes on a writer's life are getting a big response. Do more of those! When you find something relatively easy to do that people like, make *that* a mainstay of your social media effort.



©2018 This is a brief excerpt from Laura Purdie Salas' ***Making a Living Writing Books for Kids***. Available in Kindle and paperback editions. Free Kindle edition with the purchase of 354-page paperback book. For more information, visit Laura's website at www.laurasalas.com

YOUR TURN: If you are on no social media platforms, pick one and set up an account. If you already use social media, evaluate how well you're using it. Are you connecting with people you want to connect with? Are you growing your network? Are you participating? Come up with one goal to improve your social media use this month.

Networking

Why?

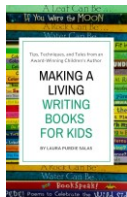
We're back to that first habit: "Write lots of things and meet lots of people." As we build a writing career, we often don't even know about many opportunities until we meet someone who tells us about them. Someone who knows someone who knows someone who needs a writer.

And even once we have a publisher or an assignment or a book, we still need a lot of people. People who help us spread the word. People who know a person who knows a person who specializes in the topic we are writing about. People who know which agent would be just perfect for us. People who help us celebrate—or survive rejection.

Networking is how you find all these people who will enrich your career and your life.

Networking Is Not a Dirty Word

Do you see networking as a schmoozy practice for slimy salespeople looking to close a deal? I used to. But that's not what networking is. Networking is connecting with other people whose passions intersect with your own: in this case, writing for kids. I like to picture networking as building a safety net. Writing can be a little bit lonely and a little bit scary. But when you



©2018 This is a brief excerpt from Laura Purdie Salas' ***Making a Living Writing Books for Kids***. Available in Kindle and paperback editions. Free Kindle edition with the purchase of 354-page paperback book. For more information, visit Laura's website at www.laurasalas.com

have a safety net, you have people to help. You can ask them questions: Hey, do you know a Random House editor who likes quirky novels? You can commiserate: Yep, eight months and still no reply. Best of all, you can celebrate with them: Book launch party this weekend!

Networking is about building authentic relationships, not reciting your elevator pitch to anyone in a 10-mile radius. But it can lead to both satisfying relationships and concrete results. My writer friend Lisa Bullard found her agent through networking. I have found several new freelance clients through networking. People whom I met through networking have nominated my books for awards. When you build authentic relationships, good things tend to follow.

Bring Something to the Table

Networking is a relationship. It's not just asking for information or help from other people! You have to bring something to the table, too. Early in my career, I felt I didn't have anything to offer, but that wasn't true. It never is.

Here are some great things you might be able to do for writers or educators or editors.

Keep up with some segment of the kidlit world so that you can offer info when that topic comes up: the latest awards, new poetry books, which editor has moved where, writers in your state, whatever. You don't have to know everything! But you do have to know *something*.

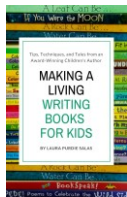
Be a sharer. Take pictures and share them online. Or share books and writers you admire online.

Be a connector. Introduce people to each other.

Offer resources. If you know a writer you want to connect with is passionate about, say, Amish culture, send her that cool article you just read in a magazine.

Answer questions other writers have about research, etc. Remember, an expert is just someone who knows a little bit more than someone else.

Offer to assist a speaker in a session at a conference or other event. You could pass items out, display props, etc.



©2018 This is a brief excerpt from Laura Purdie Salas' ***Making a Living Writing Books for Kids***. Available in Kindle and paperback editions. Free Kindle edition with the purchase of 354-page paperback book. For more information, visit Laura's website at www.laurasalas.com

These are just a few possibilities. The point is, when you know what it is *you* have to offer, whether it's great critiques or reviews you share widely, you won't feel so awkward approaching other writers, educators, or industry people. It feels great to help others out, and in the process, you will begin building relationships.

YOUR TURN: Brainstorm until you come up with at least one clear skill or expertise that you bring to the table.

Research Before Events

Whenever I'm going to an event with writers or industry people, I do advance research. I read about the speakers in advance. And I try to read at least one book written by (if the speaker is an author) or edited by (if the speaker is an editor) each person.

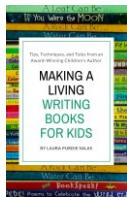
I still do this as time allows. As I wrote this, I was heading to the National Council of Teachers of English annual conference. I would be attending a swanky dinner hosted by one of my publishers. I received the list of attendees, and I was thrilled that it was mostly writers/poets I knew! Yay! But for the bloggers and editors and writers on the list I *didn't* know, I did some research. It made meaningful conversation much easier, and I ended up being invited by two different people to speak on panels over the next couple of years.

Set Networking Goals

Because I'm an introvert and rather socially awkward, I find it helpful to set concrete goals before events. For instance, here are some goals I set one year for a national convention for teachers. I was going to be speaking, signing books, and also seeing my publisher, and I had some questions to ask and promo items to hand out.

Ask C how to be invited to be on more presentations.

Give out all my poetry bookmarks and school visit flyers.



©2018 This is a brief excerpt from Laura Purdie Salas' ***Making a Living Writing Books for Kids***. Available in Kindle and paperback editions. Free Kindle edition with the purchase of 354-page paperback book. For more information, visit Laura's website at www.laurasalas.com

Ask D who J should submit my work to, now that my editor has left.
Connect with T and Jo.

I make my goals as specific as possible. If I take 100 school visit brochures, my goal is to hand out all 100. Or my goal at a social gathering might be to simply introduce myself to five new people. Or to make myself go up to some specific people I've met before and say to them, "You might not remember me, but I'm Laura Purdie Salas, and we met at" whatever.

I usually have two to five goals for each event. I try to make them attainable, but things that push me out of my comfort zone. Checking the goals off my list makes me feel great, and if I didn't set them, I would probably just hide out in my hotel room with a hot bath and a good book.

Be Brave

Confession time. Most of the people I know casually but see regularly (at the gym, the library, the bakery) have no idea I'm a children's writer. The only people who know are the people who come right out and ask, "What do you do?" Why? Because I don't want to be pushy.

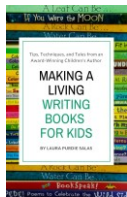
I know. Ridiculous. So, what's the solution? Here are three things I've tried at different times.

Vow to tell at least one new person per week that I'm a children's writer.

Carry a beautiful giveaway item (like a bookmark) featuring my work so that I can hand people something tangible.

Wear or carry awesome things that show my work, like a cute workout tank with art from one of my books, a scarf featuring a poem I wrote, or a notebook with my book cover on it. These make great conversation starters, and my husband gives me great gifts like this all the time, so I have no excuse not to do this one! On the resources page, I'll list a few companies my husband or I have used to order stuff like this.

All three of these have worked for me at various times.



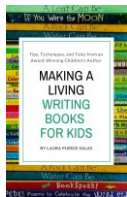
©2018 This is a brief excerpt from Laura Purdie Salas' ***Making a Living Writing Books for Kids***. Available in Kindle and paperback editions. Free Kindle edition with the purchase of 354-page paperback book. For more information, visit Laura's website at www.laurasalas.com

Forgive Your Own Faux Pas

I think of each conversation as a draft. A first draft. I have to, because otherwise I would be so mortified at my faux pas that I might never speak again. I always forget people's names (even once a member of my own online critique group!). I have called people the wrong names. I told a writer how much I enjoyed her book, **XYZ**. But she didn't write it. Oops. I congratulated an illustrator on her Caldecott Honor. Which she did not receive. I have stood awkwardly beside two people talking, trying to casually join their conversation.

I've done it all. And it's embarrassing, every single time.

But I try not to obsess about it! I figure that if I am genuinely open and friendly, it will work out. Yes, people might think I'm a little awkward. But I'm a writer. Conversation is not my strong suit. So if I make a mistake, I apologize and move on. Life is too short to spend it mortified.



©2018 This is a brief excerpt from Laura Purdie Salas' ***Making a Living Writing Books for Kids***. Available in Kindle and paperback editions. Free Kindle edition with the purchase of 354-page paperback book. For more information, visit Laura's website at www.laurasalas.com