



FREE GUIDE · MICHELLEFARLEYWRITES

# 5 Things Every Children's Book Author Should Consider Before Self-Publishing

Hard-won lessons from a published children's book author who learned by doing.

*By Michelle Elaine Farley — writer, author, filmmaker & creative entrepreneur*

## 5 THINGS I WOULD DO DIFFERENTLY

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### 01 I would understand who my real audience is before writing a single word.

You want to write a children's book. You have a story, a lesson, a theme — maybe something deeply personal. That is beautiful. But here is what I did not consider: the child is not your customer. The child's community is. Parents deciding what goes on the bookshelf. Teachers selecting classroom read-alouds. Grandparents buying birthday gifts. Librarians building diverse collections. School administrators approving book fair titles. If I could start over, I would ask one question before writing: who is the adult buying this book, and why do they need it right now? Every marketing decision you make flows from the answer to that question.

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### 02 I would budget for the full illustration process — not just the illustrator's fee.

I hired a professional illustrator. That part I got right. What I did not fully understand was everything that comes after the hire. Illustrating a children's book is a process — and that process takes time and multiple rounds of back and forth. First you work through character design: Does this character look the way you imagined? Does the skin tone, the expressions, the personality feel right? Then you go through layout approvals page by page. Does this scene capture the emotion of the text? Is the composition telling the story the way you intended? Each round of revisions costs time, and depending on your contract, it may cost money. If I could start over, I would budget not just for the illustration fee, but for the full timeline — which can be six months to a year for a quality project — and I would ask every illustrator upfront: how many revision rounds are included, and what is your process for character and layout approval?

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### 03 I would build a bulk sales strategy before my book ever launched.

I spent too long selling books one at a time — at events, through Amazon, through word of mouth. It is slow, exhausting, and the margins are thin. What actually moved copies and made real money was bulk orders. One school order of 50 books at a modest discount earns more than 50 individual Amazon sales — and it takes one conversation instead of fifty. If I could start over, I would have a bulk pricing sheet ready before launch day. And every conversation about my book would end with: 'I also offer classroom sets and library orders — want me to send you my pricing?'

### 04 I would have pursued school author visits and book fairs from the very beginning.

This was the channel I underestimated the most. Schools are actively looking for diverse, local authors to visit classrooms, do read-alouds, and connect with students. An author visit often comes with a guaranteed book sale to every child in attendance — the school collects the orders, you show up, you leave having sold dozens of copies in one afternoon. I waited too long to pursue this. If I could start over, I would draft a simple one-page author visit pitch in my first month and send it to every elementary school librarian within driving distance. One yes changes everything.

### 05 I would learn how bookstores actually work before walking through the door.

I did not understand the mechanics of getting a book into a store — and it shows. Independent bookstores are not waiting for you to walk in cold. They want to know: Is it returnable? What is your discount? Do people in this community already know who you are? I would have built local name recognition first — events, press, showing up consistently — and then approached indie stores with a consignment offer, meaning they pay you after they sell with no upfront risk to them. For chain stores, I would have set up IngramSpark from the beginning so my book was already in the distribution system they order from, instead of trying to get in the back door.

#### Your action step — a scenario for each tip

##### Tip 01 in action:

Rewrite your next social media post to speak directly to the adult buyer. Instead of 'kids will love this,' try: 'Looking for a book that sparks a real conversation with your child about belonging? This one does that.'

##### Tip 02 in action:

Before signing any illustrator contract, ask two questions: How many revision rounds are included in your fee? And can you walk me through your character approval and layout review process? The answers will tell you exactly what you are paying for — and what will cost extra.

##### Tip 03 in action:

Create a simple bulk pricing tier today: 10 books, 25 books, 50 books with a small discount at each level. Save it as a PDF so you can send it the moment someone asks.

##### Tip 04 in action:

Draft a two-paragraph author visit proposal this week — who you are, what you offer, how to book you. Send it to three elementary school librarians near you. You only need one yes to start.

##### Tip 05 in action:

Visit one local independent bookstore on a slow weekday. Introduce yourself as a local author, ask who handles consignment, and leave a copy of your book with your contact info. That is how the relationship starts.

Want to go deeper? The book I recommend:

**Your First 1000 Copies by Tim Grahl — practical, honest guidance on building a real reader audience and selling consistently. Grab it on Amazon.**

*A lot of the questions I had while self-publishing — about clarity, creative direction, and whether I was even building the right thing — eventually inspired me to create **The Origin Workbook**, a guided reflection tool for people reconnecting with the life and creative work they actually want.*

**If you're rebuilding your creative life one brave step at a time, you're in the right place.**

Join my email community for honest conversations about writing, filmmaking, publishing, and creative reinvention. No fluff. Just real talk from someone doing the work alongside you.

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