

FREE DOWNLOAD

Picture Book Planning Kit

Everything you need to plan, write and revise a 32-page picture book, from the first idea to a brief your illustrator can work from. Print it, or fill it in on screen.

What's inside

1	Story planner	Get the idea straight before you write
2	The 14-spread beat sheet	What each spread of a picture book usually does
3	Worked example	"Mira and the Noisy Night," planned spread by spread
4	Your spread map	Plan your own book, with each beat as a guide
5	Thumbnail storyboard	Sketch every spread and flip it like a book
6	Read-aloud and revision checklist	12 checks before anyone else sees it
7	Illustrator brief	Everything an illustrator needs to start
8	Manuscript format for agents	The rules, with a sample first page
9	The 9-step checklist	Track your progress from idea to finished book

How to use it: work through the parts in order. Parts 1 to 5 plan the book, part 6 improves it, and parts 7 and 8 get it ready for an illustrator or an agent. The full guide at authorwings.com/how-to-write-a-childrens-book explains every step.

1. Story planner

Answer each prompt in a sentence or two. If you can't, the story needs more thinking before you draft.

Your idea in one sentence

A character + a problem + what's at stake. Example: A girl can't sleep because the house keeps making noises.

Age category and word count

Picture books: ages 3 to 7, 400 to 800 words, 32 pages.

Your main character

Name, age (a little older than your reader), one detail a child will remember.

What they want

One clear want that drives the whole story.

Their flaw or fear

What gets in their way from the inside.

The problem

What stands between them and what they want, on the first spread.

Three tries

Try 1, try 2, try 3. Each one bigger than the last.

The turning point

The moment they decide to face it on their own.

The ending

How the problem is solved, and the feeling the child is left with.

The message (optional)

What the character learns, shown by what they do. Never stated as a lesson.

2. The 14-spread beat sheet

Most 32-page picture books follow a shape like this. Pages 1 to 3 hold the title, copyright and dedication, then 14 spreads and a final page tell the story. Treat it as a common shape, not a rule.

Pages	Beat	What it does
1	Title page	Title and art that sets the mood
2 to 3	Front matter	Copyright and dedication
4 to 5	Setup and problem	Meet the character and state the problem by the first line.
6 to 7	First try Page turn after this spread	The character acts on the problem. End on a question.
8 to 9	First result	The reveal after the turn. It solves a little, not all.
10 to 11	Second try Page turn after this spread	A bigger try, or a scarier moment. End on suspense.
12 to 13	Second result	Another reveal. The pattern starts to show.
14 to 15	Third try Page turn after this spread	The biggest try so far. End on suspense.
16 to 17	Third result	The third reveal completes the rule of three.
18 to 19	A quiet moment	Things seem solved. Hint that they aren't.
20 to 21	The biggest problem Page turn after this spread	Stakes rise higher than ever. End on suspense.
22 to 23	The choice Page turn after this spread	The character decides to face it alone.
24 to 25	The climax	The big reveal or the character's solution.
26 to 27	Things change	Show what the character learned or gained.
28 to 29	Winding down	Slow the rhythm. Lead to the ending.
30 to 31	The ending	Land the feeling. Solve the problem.
32	The last beat	A final image, twist or callback.

3. Worked example: "Mira and the Noisy Night"

The same beat sheet, filled in. Every reveal waits on the spread after a page turn, and the fourth noise breaks the pattern the first three set up.

Pages	Beat	Text	Art note
4 to 5	Setup and problem	Mira could not sleep. The house was full of noises.	Mira in bed, eyes wide, blanket to her nose
6 to 7	First try Page turn →	Drip. Drip. Drip. "What is that?" whispered Mira.	Dark hallway, a thin line of light under a door
8 to 9	First result	It was only the bathroom tap. Mira turned it off, tight.	Mira at the sink, flashlight in her teeth
10 to 11	Second try Page turn →	Creak. Creak. Creeeak. Mira's knees wobbled, but she kept going.	The staircase in shadow, looking huge
12 to 13	Second result	It was only the old stairs, stretching in the cold.	Mira patting the banister
14 to 15	Third try Page turn →	Scratch. Scratch. Scratch. Something was behind the kitchen door!	The kitchen door, two pointed ears in the gap underneath
16 to 17	Third result	It was only Pickle, wanting to come in.	The cat winding around her legs
18 to 19	A quiet moment	Mira climbed back into bed. The house was quiet. Almost.	Mira tucked in, the cat asleep at her feet, one eye open
20 to 21	The biggest problem Page turn →	WHOOO. WHOOO. This noise was outside. And it was big.	A huge shadow across the curtains
22 to 23	The choice Page turn →	Mira took a deep breath. She pulled back the curtain.	Mira's hand on the curtain, back view
24 to 25	The climax	It was an owl, as round as a pillow, looking right at her.	Close-up of the owl, nose to glass with Mira
26 to 27	Things change	"Can't sleep either?" asked Mira. The owl blinked.	Mira and the owl, face to face through the window
28 to 29	Winding down	They blinked, and blinked, and blinked...	Mira's eyes getting heavier across the spread
30 to 31	The ending	...until one of them fell asleep.	Mira asleep on the windowsill, the owl wide awake
32	The last beat	"Whooo," said the owl, very softly.	The owl watching over the sleeping house

4. Your spread map

Write your text in each row, add a note for your illustrator, and tick the spreads that end on a page turn. The beat under each page number is a guide, not a rule.

Tip: count your words when you finish. A picture book usually lands between 400 and 800.

Pages and beat	Text	Art note	Turn?
1 Title page			
2 to 3 Copyright, dedication			
4 to 5 Setup and problem			☐
6 to 7 First try			☐
8 to 9 First result			☐
10 to 11 Second try			☐
12 to 13 Second result			☐
14 to 15 Third try			☐
16 to 17 Third result			☐
18 to 19 A quiet moment			☐
20 to 21 The biggest problem			☐
22 to 23 The choice			☐

Pages and beat	Text	Art note	Turn?
24 to 25 The climax			☐
26 to 27 Things change			☐
28 to 29 Winding down			☐
30 to 31 The ending			☐
32 The last beat			☐

Total words: _____ **Target: 400 to 800**

5. Thumbnail storyboard

Sketch each spread in its frame, using the page numbers in the corners. Stick figures and boxes are enough. Seeing the whole book on two pages shows you where the story drags and where every page turn falls. When it works, copy the sketches into a folded dummy: 8 sheets folded in half make 32 pages.

	1	2	3
4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19

20	21
----	----

22	23
----	----

24	25
----	----

26	27
----	----

28	29
----	----

30	31
----	----

32	
----	--

6. Read-aloud and revision checklist

Work through these on every draft. Read the whole book out loud before you tick anything.

☐	1. The problem is on the first spread. No scene-setting before it.
☐	2. Every reveal sits after a page turn. Check each spread that ends on a question.
☐	3. The child solves the problem. No adult steps in to fix it.
☐	4. Nothing repeats what the art will show. Cut colors, clothes and settings the picture covers.
☐	5. Every line sounds right out loud. Mark any spot where you stumble, and rewrite it.
☐	6. The rhyme keeps its beat, or there is no rhyme. Count the stressed beats in every line.
☐	7. No line states the lesson. The character shows it by what they do.
☐	8. The cast is small. One main character and one or two others.
☐	9. The word count is in range. 400 to 800 for a picture book.
☐	10. The ending lands a feeling, a laugh or a twist. It doesn't just stop.
☐	11. A child who doesn't know you has heard it. Watch where they wriggle, and fix that spread.
☐	12. Someone else has read it. A critique group, another writer, or a professional critique.

7. Illustrator brief

Fill this in before you contact an illustrator. It saves rounds of revisions, and it gives every illustrator the same starting point to quote from.

Book title and age group <i>Title, category, ages, word count</i>
Format <i>Trim size and shape (tall, wide or square), page count, hardcover or paperback</i>
Where the text sits <i>On the art in a quiet area, or on a plain panel beside it</i>
Main character <i>Age, looks, clothes, one thing they always carry or do</i>
Other characters <i>Name and a short description for each</i>
Setting <i>Where and when the story happens</i>
Mood and colors <i>How the book should feel, and any colors to use or avoid</i>
Style references <i>Two or three published books whose art style you like</i>
Number of illustrations <i>Full spreads, single pages and spot illustrations</i>
Deadline and budget <i>When you need the art, and what you can spend</i>

Attach your spread map from part 4. It tells the illustrator what each spread shows and where the page turns fall.

8. Manuscript format for agents

If you're sending your book to agents or publishers, send the text alone, formatted like this:

- 12-point Times New Roman or a similar font, double spaced, with one-inch margins.
- Your name, email and phone number at the top left of the first page, and the word count at the top right.
- The title centered, about a third of the way down the first page.
- The story as continuous text, with page breaks optional, and art notes in brackets only where needed.
- No illustrations. The publisher pairs the text with an illustrator.

Sample first page:

Your Name
you@email.com · (555) 555-0123

About 650 words

MIRA AND THE NOISY NIGHT

by Your Name

Mira could not sleep. The house was full of noises.

Drip. Drip. Drip. "What is that?" whispered Mira.

It was only the bathroom tap. Mira turned it off, tight.

[Art note: The kitchen door, two pointed ears in the gap underneath.]

9. The 9-step checklist

Tick each step as you finish it.

☐	1. Choose the age category and word count Picture books: 400 to 800 words, ages 3 to 7, 32 pages.
☐	2. Find an idea built on a child's problem Use the story planner in part 1.
☐	3. Create a main character who solves it One clear want, a flaw or fear, a little older than the reader.
☐	4. Plan the 32 pages, spread by spread Use the beat sheet and spread map in parts 2 and 4.
☐	5. Write it to be read aloud Read every draft out loud.
☐	6. Decide how much to say about the pictures Agents: notes only where needed. Self-publishing: a note on every spread.
☐	7. Format the manuscript Part 8 for agents, parts 4 and 7 for your illustrator.
☐	8. Revise, read it aloud and test it Use the checklist in part 6.
☐	9. Send it to agents or publish it yourself Query letter and manuscript, or illustrator, formatting and publishing.

Ready for the next step?

AuthorWings can edit your manuscript (critique from \$249, picture book edit \$599), illustrate it (up to 16 full-color illustrations for \$2,595) or publish it in your name. Book a free call at authorwings.com/contact.