

Revision? What's That?

by Christine Liu-Perkins

When I began writing for children, revising was difficult for me. My first drafts were decent, but when critiques came in, I didn't know how to implement the suggestions. Sure, I could tweak words here and there, but I couldn't see the entire manuscript in a new way that enabled substantial changes. I was not at all ready for the kind of revisions editors would ask for.

I was surprised to discover that even well-known authors work through revisions. For example:

- Candace Fleming's initial version of *The Family Romanov: Murder, Rebellion & the Fall of Imperial Russia* was deemed "[boring](#)" by the editor. Understanding the difference between fact and truth led to her riveting final book.
- Jim Murphy described the pain of [deleting](#) passages to focus the narrative of what became *The Crossing: How George Washington Won the American Revolution*.
- Kathleen Krull had only [one sentence left intact](#) of *Harvesting Hope: The Story of Cesar Chavez* after revising with the editor.
- Melissa Stewart struggled with the structure for *No Monkeys, No Chocolate* through "[10 years, 56 revisions, and 3 fresh starts](#)." Take a look at her [Revision Timeline](#) for a chronicle of her process.

Clearly, if I wanted to publish, I had to learn how to revise.

If you're interested in revising skills, here are some sources that can help:

- Sneed Collard offers:
 - a book: [Teaching Nonfiction Revision: A Professional Writer Shares Strategies, Tips, and Lessons](#) (with classroom exercises by Vicki Spandel)
 - a [podcast](#) (and transcript) in which he introduces his thoughts on revision
 - an [article](#) about revising on the paragraph level
- Kate Messner's [Real Revision: Authors' Strategies to Share with Student Writers](#) has insights and exercises for various steps in revising fiction and nonfiction, plus tips from multiple authors.
- [Anatomy of Nonfiction: Writing True Stories for Children](#) by Margery Facklam and Peggy Thomas is a terrific guide for creating nonfiction from start to finish. Chapter 10 focuses on revising, and also handling critiques.

- Candace Fleming recommends [six steps](#) for revising nonfiction picture books.
- Melissa Stewart offers several [video mini lessons](#) on writing and revising
- Pat Miller shows how her *Substitute Groundhog* [changed](#) through thirty drafts over three years.
- Michelle Cusolito finds [using dummies](#) helpful
- Helga Schier explains doing rounds of revision [using post-it notes](#)
- For revising both fiction and nonfiction, check this [list of resources](#) provided by editors Harold Underdown and Eileen Robinson.

Have you found other sources helpful? If so, let me know in a comment below. I still have lots to learn!