

How writing a kids' book is a lot easier said than done

By: Chris Read

Queenie Jean is in Trouble Again started off as a simple desire to tell a humorous story about a ten-year-old girl who doesn't quite fit in. When my kids were young, they loved reading funny books, but there weren't many to choose from. Early readers suggested the protagonist had ADHD, like my own daughter, and thus Queenie was born. I soon learned that despite being a voracious reader of all genres, writing a kids' book is a lot easier said than done.

My adult life involved working as a chartered accountant with a number of nonprofits. I could balance the books, dream up the budget and write short concise business memos, but writing a story kids would actually want to read? That required a whole new skill set! So I took writing classes offered by local universities and workshops with local authors. I attended writers' conferences and filled countless spiral notebooks with writing rules, tips, and advice. I joined writers' groups and gleaned wisdom from their newsletters.



I also learned all I could about Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). From the time my daughter could talk, I knew her brain was wired differently from mine, but twenty years ago, I had no idea what ADHD was or meant. Very few people did! Fortunately, the research on ADHD and treatment has advanced significantly. But I didn't want to write a clinical treatise on ADHD; my goal was to create a totally immersive 1st person POV experience

through the eyes of Queenie. The reader sees only what she sees, and they hear only what she hears. I wanted to show the magnitude of ADHD in family life—it's not just a set of behaviours observed during school hours but a 24-hour, seven-days-a-week complicated reality.

Just like the research an author does for historical fiction, my research on ADHD provided the authentic scaffolding for the story; my middle grade audience won't sit through obvious info dumps, but nuggets of information sprinkled here and there throughout the novel which explain Queenie's behaviour, well, those are gold.

I started submitting my manuscript about 10 years ago, and yes that was far too early; I submitted to agents and indie publishers that accepted unagented manuscripts. There aren't many agents in Canada that represent middle grade novels, and those that do often have full client lists. So, I received a ton of rejections.

What were the problems with my manuscript?

Turns out the issues were very similar to the ones the hosts on *The Shit No One Tells You About Writing* talk about all the time, like lack of specificity, insufficient tension, stakes that aren't high enough, and an unsatisfactory character arc. After much rewriting and reworking, I'd submit again, and get rejected again.



Over the years, life happened, and I put my manuscript away for long periods of time, but I didn't give up. I entered several writers' contests and even won a writing award. Sometimes I received constructive criticism. Other times the feedback I received was not so encouraging—publishers suggested that no one wanted to read a book about a girl with ADHD, and/or that no one wanted to buy a novel set in Vancouver, Canada.

In the fall of 2022, I decided to do all I could to find a publisher for Queenie. Luckily, I found an amazing editor and writing coach who agreed to work with me. We hammered my manuscript into shape, and I submitted once again.

Queenie Jean finally found a wonderful home with Heritage House Publishing. They let me add drawings to the novel of Queenie, Queenie's dog Coco, and the Very Important Principal Mrs. Payne, and more, all done by Queenie (actually by me).



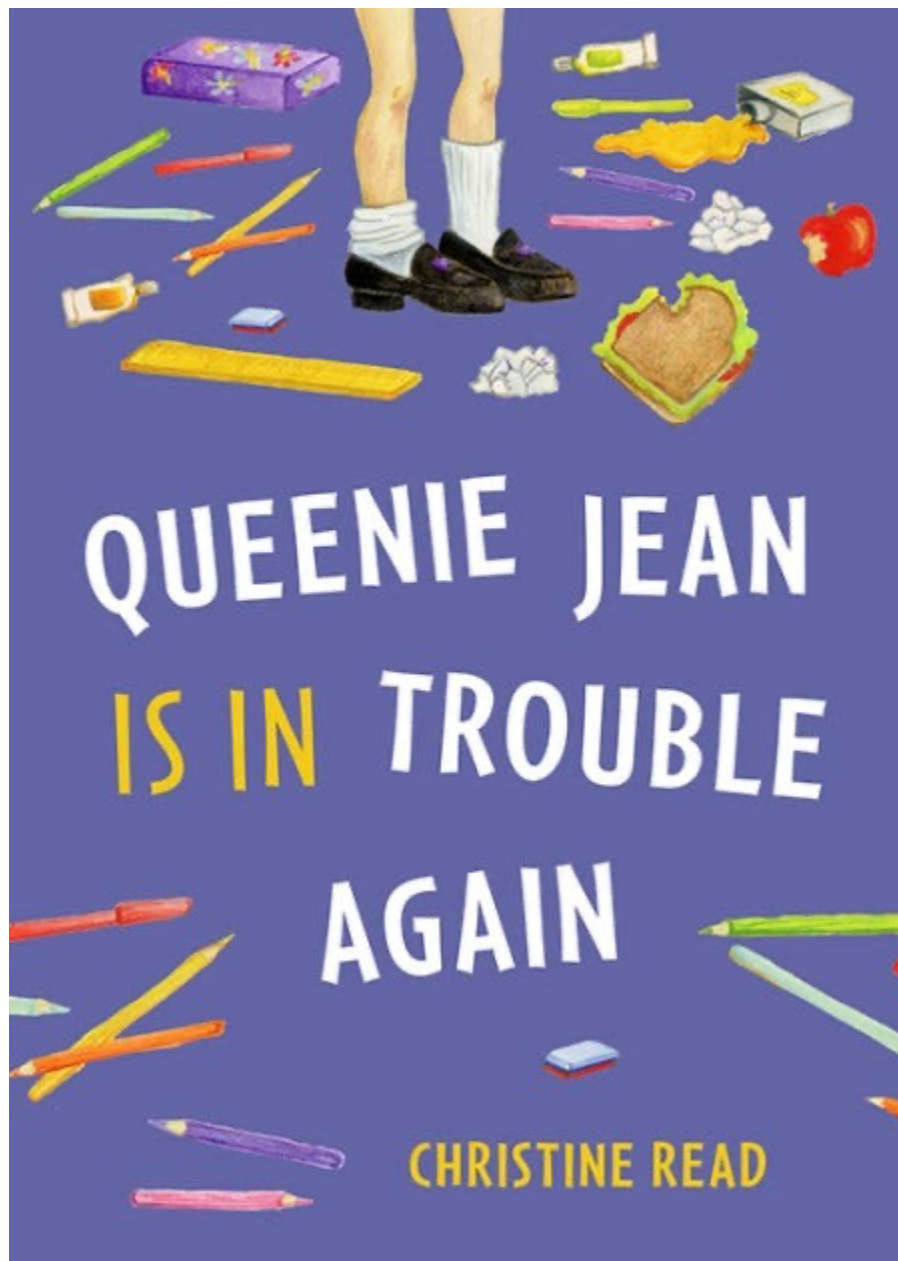
The marketing manager suggested I listen to your podcast, specifically the episodes on marketing. I dipped my toes into the world of The Shit, hesitantly at first – after all, what does writing a middle grade novel have in common with a

memoir or thriller or romance? Of course, it turns out quite a lot, starting with the importance of hooking the reader in the opening few pages.

While **Queenie Jean is in Trouble Again** is inspired by the adventures of my daughter almost twenty years ago, the novel is a contemporary work of fiction. Queenie has an easier time with school and family than my daughter did. Hopefully by telling stories like this one, people will smile, perhaps recognize themselves or perhaps recognize their friend or classmate. And maybe there will be a little less misunderstanding in the world about ADHD.



*Hailing from small-town Ontario, **Chris Read** has worked as a piano teacher, camp counsellor, waitress, math tutor, chartered accountant, finance director, treasurer, and executive director. She is married and a mother to two grown children, one of whom has ADHD. After many years of working for and with not-for-profits and charities, Chris decided to return to her roots and wrote a humorous book for kids about a girl with ADHD. She lives with her family and their Labrador retrievers in a rural seaside community outside Vancouver.*



You can purchase *Queenie Jean Is In Trouble Again* on our Bookshop.org affiliate page [here](#). Buying books through this link supports a local indie bookstore, as well as *The Shit No One Tells You About Writing* 📖❤️