

I want to be totally upfront before I start writing any further: The homeschool writing course for the 7-year old in the aforementioned article was for my son, Ryan. And while I am proud of his accomplishment (what parent wouldn't?), this article isn't just about him. But rather, the point of this article is that, structured correctly, any ordinary child can get her story published and sold on Amazon.com by using a homeschool writing course similar to the one mentioned below. Read on to find out how.

### **How It All Started**

First some background facts:

Ryan loves writing stories, but his interest in writing isn't to the point of it taking over his life or anything. For example, when his sister, Lauren, is playing with him, he'll play to his little heart's content. But when Lauren goes back to playing with, say, her toys, Ryan will start writing stories. He'll usually spend around 20 - 30 minutes writing his story. His favorite subject? Haunted houses. In fact, my wife and I read so many different descriptions of haunted houses in his stories that, if we found ourselves in front of a real haunted house, we would probably start critiquing it on its merits rather than actually being scared by it (i.e., graveyard clearly visible in the front of the house? Good! No shutters on the windows with broken hinges? Bad!).

Anyway, seeing that Ryan was interested in writing stories, we decided to build an entire curriculum around writing. There was only one thing - we never had any experience teaching how to write a story. We figured that we would start by letting him know that we're going to improve his penmanship by helping him write any story that we wants to write about. We also told him that this story will be the story of all stories, the best of the best.

I still remember his reply, "Wow Daddy, that's great. How are you going to do that?"

At first I thought that we would just have Ryan start writing like he always does. But then, 20-30 minutes later, he would probably be done and that would be that. So, rather than teaching a writing course that would lead to Ryan creating 10-12 different stories, it became obvious that we had to plan the course out so that the final product would be his best and longest story.

Not knowing exactly how to proceed with planning this writing course, I started Googling topics about how to write stories from a kid's perspective. And that's when I hit pay dirt.

### National Novel Writing Month

It so happened that we were in the month of November when I found a site called [National Novel Writing Month](#). This site challenges not only children, but people of all ages to write with abandon for each day during the month of November. Interested in the concept, I researched the site further and found that the site included a [Young Writer's Program](#) section for kids 17 years old and younger. The fact that 22,000 young writers participated in this program in 2008 piqued my interest further.

Specifically, the young writer has to commit from the beginning to write a minimum number of words for her novel. For first graders (Ryan's category), the minimum suggested number of words is 300 - 3,000.

"3,000, what's that number, Daddy?" asked Ryan.

After explaining the meaning of this number, Ryan quickly thought that 300 would be a more reasonable number. And not knowing exactly whether this exercise may actually end up hurting Ryan's morale if in fact he didn't meet this goal, I summarily agreed.

Now, the great thing about the [National Novel Writing Month](#) site is that they provide clear and easily doable steps for writing a novel. I told Serina right away that we found our planned lessons for Ryan's writing course - we would follow the site's instructions, except for the deadline of November 30 for completing the story. I thought that Ryan would need more time because: 1) we were already at the end of the first week of November and 2) there were some excellent planning activities that would take some time even before writing would begin.

### Ryan's Writing Course Curriculum

The [Young Novelist Workbook](#), which is a PDF file that contains a series of planning and writing exercises customized for elementary, middle, or high school students,

helped us build our writing course for Ryan. Specifically, here is the lesson plan for the writing course:

- 1) Lesson 1 - What Makes a Great Novel. This is a simple discussion on what factors makes a novel great and not so great. I thought this was a great introduction to helping Ryan understand novels by breaking them down into their main building blocks.
- 2) Lesson 2 - How to Create Awesome Characters. This lesson included a discussion on what makes interesting characters followed up by an opportunity for Ryan to create his own main, supporting, and villain characters. Creating the characters first was a fresh way for Ryan to learn how to develop his story.
- 3) Lesson 3 - Making the Story. Rather than going straight into the plot, this lesson is a discussion on the motivations and fear of your characters as well as the challenges that they will face while identifying how your main character will defeat the villain. Ryan then used the worksheets provided in the workbook to complete this information for his story.
- 4) Lesson 4 - Outline the Plot. Can you believe it? After 3 lessons, Ryan finally got his chance to write the plot. But before that, we gave him the discussion on the elements of a plot. The workbook does a fantastic job in illustrating that a good plot should run like a roller coaster ride, with a calm and descriptive beginning, to an exciting event that causes rising action, then leading to climax and falling action, concluding with an ending. This discussion ensured that Ryan included these elements in his own plot.
- 5) Lesson 5 - Setting. This lesson discussed the importance of a good setting. After all, the setting sets the tone for the entire story. Ryan had a chance to include some good descriptive elements to this story to help the reader see the setting from Ryan's eyes.
- 6) Lesson 6 - Dialogue. This lesson covered the subject of what makes a great dialogue. Ryan also learned that the objective of a dialogue was to move the story forward and so should be written to meet that objective.

- 7) Lessons 7 Through Completion – Write Your Story. Wow. Although we thought the lessons were helpful, by the time we actually told Ryan we could now start writing his story, he was really chomping at the bit! But boy were we glad we went through these lessons first because it brought out so much detail and depth to Ryan’s story. Ryan wrote for about 20-30 minutes a day for about 30 days to complete his story.

As expected, by the time Ryan finished his story, it was early January. We counted up the words in his story and guess what? He wrote more than 2,000 words (40 pages double-spaced)!

After we printed out his [Participant Certificate](#), we wondered what we should do with his story, because it did feel special since this was the best story he ever wrote. Well, there was a solution to that, too, on the [National Novel Writing Month’s](#) website.

### **Ryan’s Book Gets Published**

I noticed that there was an online self-publisher called [createspace.com](#) that will publish your book. Since [createspace.com](#) is owned by [Amazon.com](#), there was an arrangement that any book published by createspace could be sold on [Amazon](#).

Now let’s pause for a moment. Because I bet at this point some of you are asking yourselves, “I don’t know a thing about publishing a book, how do you expect me to do that by myself?”

My response – because I did it myself without any special knowledge of publishing either. Createspace gives you step-by-step directions on how to fit your child’s book to their publication specifications.

The only thing I would strongly recommend that createspace is not clear on is to use [OpenOffice](#), a free writing program that works very similar to Microsoft Word. For those who rather use Word first, no problem. After the story is written in Word (which is what I did for Ryan’s story), you can download [OpenOffice](#) and just copy and paste your story from Word into an [OpenOffice](#) document. The reason why I recommend [OpenOffice](#) is because createspace requires that you convert your document file into PDF and I noticed, after many attempts, that Microsoft Word is just horrible at converting exactly what you wrote into PDF format (there are many

extraneous items in PDF that are added to the file when you convert from Word – many of these extraneous items are not visible to the eye and are instead, incomprehensible technical-sounding gobbly gook (at least to me) that make your PDF unacceptable to createspace). Using [OpenOffice's](#) "Export as PDF" function (in the File menu) allows a clean and exact replication of your child's work into PDF acceptable to createspace's requirements.

For our illustrations, we got my niece to create our book cover (although createspace allows you to select from their own preformatted covers) as well as one illustration per chapter. We did give her credit in the book for her awesome job.

Anyway, getting the proof copy (the copy of the book before we approve it to be sold by Amazon) from the mail was such a blast! Ryan's favorite author is R.L. Stine (as evidenced by the fact that Ryan chose to display his pen name as "R. M. Bae") so getting a hard copy of Ryan's own book really gave him some deep inspiration that, he too, could write books if he chose to do so.

After reviewing the proof copy, we approved it through createspace for publishing and by end of February, copies of Ryan's book were officially available on [Amazon.com](#).

So from beginning to end, the process of getting Ryan to write his story to getting it published and sold took about 4 months. And yes, in every step of the publication process, from editing for grammar mistakes to approving the book cover art, Ryan had a say in the matter, and I might add, some great insight into how authors write books and get published.

### **Ryan's Book - The Booby Trap Ghost**

Last but not least, for those who want to see what Ryan's book looks like, R. M. Bae's [The Booby Trap Ghost](#) is shown below. I have to confess that Ryan does make a small commission, as any author should, for each sale. Please don't feel compelled to make the small purchase unless you are curious about the quality of the skills of the 7-year old writer and createspace's ability to produce a truly professional-looking book.

And now, with no further adieu, please find below the text and picture link to Ryan's book:

ProntoLessons.com

Articles

Homeschool Writing Course for 7-Year Old Leads to Published Book  
(5/14/10)



[The Booby Trap Ghost](#)

R. M. Bae, Jessica...

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So there you have it – a homeschool writing course that led to a published book.

See you next time!

- Sun