

# "Becoming a Puzzle Master"

with Evelyn Christensen

March 2-4, 2010

Evelyn Christensen writes puzzles galore! She's had over 100 puzzle acceptances from children's magazines such as *Fun for Kidz*, *Boys' Quest*, *Hopscotch*, *Pockets*, *AppleSeeds*, *Guide*, *Faces*, and *Calliope*. She has authored (or co-authored) 40 puzzle books which have sold over 250,000 copies. Visit her website to see her brand new books just out— <http://evelynchristensen.com>. Her Puzzles page has new puzzles every week and her Teachers page is chock full of downloadable puzzles and activities.

Jan Fields is moderator of this interview/workshop, and Web Editor of the ICL Web Site. Green shows names or usernames of people and the questions they asked of our speaker.

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**Jan Fields:** First, a bizillion thank yous for sharing with us about puzzles. I actually am always interested in puzzles. I've sold a couple but haven't done many -- and I'm always fascinated by the new ones I see. And I've always been impressed by your market savvy...anytime anyone asks about a market, I see your name pop up with things you learned from selling them puzzles! So, brava on being a go-getter! And thanks for sharing with all of us here. You know I think you're the cat's meow.

**Yaya:** Welcome! Welcome, Evelyn! I'm soooooo happy you are here. Thank you so much for coming to help us learn more about this great art. I do soooo appreciate it. I hope you enjoy your time on the boards. Have fun. Holler if you need anything. We're all very glad to learn from you.

**Ev Christensen:** Hi everybody! I'm delighted to be with you for this workshop. You definitely had me laughing by the time I finished your post, Yaya. I've benefited so much myself from all the wonderful information and resources here at ICL that I'm glad to try to give back a little. I hope our discussion these three days will be helpful to everybody.

**Yaya:** How long have you been creating puzzles, Evelyn?

**Ev Christensen:** My first puzzle book was published in 1995, but I was creating puzzles before that, so it's been more than 20 years.

**omalizzie:** While searching your web site, I came across your Wordoku Puzzle books. This is a very interesting concept! I've never been able to figure out those sudoku # puzzles and likened them to the Magic Squares I could never figure out as a kid. I think it has something to do with the #'s. I looked at your page examples from your Wordoku Animal and Wordoku History and guess what, I finally was able to understand the workings of these puzzles. How

does one go about beginning these types of word puzzles? Is there a standard format you use or is it all a puzzle for you to put together as well?

**Ev Christensen:** I'm delighted that my Animal and History Wordokus helped you understand how the basic sudoku-style puzzles work, Omalizzie. I think they're a fun kind of puzzle. The way I create them is to begin with a grid that has the same number of rows and columns as the number of letters in the word I'm using. I divide the grid into sections so that each section has the same number of squares as letters in the word. I personally prefer there to be some kind of symmetry to the arrangement, but sometimes that's not possible. I start filling in the grid with the needed letters, using problem solving and some trial and error, until the grid is complete. Then I go back and delete letters to create the puzzle. And finally, I check the puzzle by working it myself. So, yes, you're right--it's a puzzle for me to put together as well.

**Jan Fields:** Could you tell us your favorite type of puzzle to make? Is there one that just is always enjoyable to do? And as a side question, what type of puzzle do you find is the easiest to sell? Is there one kind that almost every editor likes to see? If not, what are some of the most popular -- and least popular?

**Ev Christensen:** Actually, I love having variety. For a while I was working on creating a set of state puzzle books--I completed manuscripts for five of them. Every puzzle in each of those books was a different kind. I had such fun creating those books, and I think they are some of my best work, but unfortunately, I've never found a publisher for them.

**Ev Christensen:** As for the easiest kind of puzzle for me to sell, it's my special kind of word sudoku. And I hope that doesn't mean that everybody who reads this is now going to start subbing them. LOL. Be creative and come up with your own variation on puzzles. That's what I did.

**Ev Christensen:** Some of the most popular kinds of puzzles are still the crossword puzzle and the word search. (I've seen as many as three word searches in a single Boys' Quest issue.) Some of the least popular are the word search and crossword puzzle. Sound contradictory? It's not. The difference is in whether you do something creative with your word search or crossword puzzle. For example, with the word search—if you create a simple square puzzle with a list of words and send it off to a magazine, you'll likely get a rejection. There's nothing special about that puzzle. But if you add a twist to the basic puzzle, then you're more likely to get an acceptance. Some examples:

**Ev Christensen:** --Write a poem and have the words in your word search come from the poem.  
--Have your letter grid be a different shape than the usual rectangle or square. If it's a themed magazine, try to coordinate the shape with the theme.  
--Have the leftover letters spell out a word or message.  
--Ask how many times a particular word can be found in the puzzle. For example, in my state puzzles, the Kentucky word search asked how many times the abbreviation KY could be found, in addition to asking for the regular list of words.

**Ev Christensen:** As far as being creative, the most creative word search I've ever seen was by Agnes Maddy in the June 2008 issue of Pockets. Agnes wrote a poem to go with her word search and used every single word from her poem in the puzzle except "I." But she didn't stop there. She color-coded every word and the reader used that color to draw a straight line through the word in the puzzle. Guess what! It created a picture! But she didn't stop there. The leftover words spelled a Bible verse! Wow! I was so impressed.

**Ev Christensen:** Other kinds of puzzles I see a lot of in kids' magazines are coded messages and logic puzzles. And, of course, mazes are always popular.

**omalizzie:** When you send puzzles to a magazine market for consideration, do you send one at a time or is it okay to send a couple or more at once?

**Ev Christensen:** Unless the submission guidelines say otherwise, it's usually okay to send more than one at a time. I often do. That's especially true if it's a themed magazine and I'm sending puzzles for different issues. If they aren't themed, in one sense your puzzles may be competing against each other, so that's something to consider. Also, if they're not themed and I've never had a puzzle accepted by that particular magazine, I probably wouldn't send more than one of the same type of puzzle to them at one time.

**omalizzie:** I know word finds and crosswords have been on the market for many years. I never really stopped to think that someone out there was making all of them up. How long did it take you to realize that you had enough puzzles in your head to form books?

**Ev Christensen:** I was actually a stay-at-home mom when I wrote my first book, Clip Clue Puzzles. The idea for the book was sparked by a Christmas gift of colored paper clips by one of my children to a sibling. We were playing around with the clips, and I thought, "I should be able to do something 'neat' with these. Most manipulatives used in classrooms are so expensive, but these would be something any teacher could afford." I came up with the idea of giving clues to determine the color order of clips in a line. I created about a dozen of the puzzles and included them in a talk I was giving, primarily to parents, at the state gifted conference in Georgia. A parent came up to me afterward and said she liked my whole presentation, but that her favorite part was the paper clip puzzles. That was the encouragement I needed! I went home and over the course of the next several months, in between changing diapers and entertaining pre-schoolers, I wrote the rest of the book.

**omalizzie:** Were puzzles a big part of your childhood? What prompted your decision to construct puzzles for the magazine/book market?

**Ev Christensen:** Yes, puzzles and games were. I have five siblings and grew up in a small town in eastern Kentucky where the kind of extra-curricular activities that fill most children's schedules these days were practically non-existent. That left plenty of time for games and puzzles. My father had also spent two years of college studying to be an aeronautical engineer before he decided to become a minister. That engineer's mind of his didn't disappear, and he was good at challenging us kids to wonder about the hows and whys and puzzles of all kinds of things. And Mom was the wordsmith. She taught Latin and I still remember some of the Latin riddle-puns from her class.

**Ev Christensen:** Well, you know how I happened to write my first puzzle book. I didn't write for the children's magazine market until about ten years after that. I discovered an online forum for children's authors, heard other people talking about writing for magazines, and got hooked! And I have to say that Jan's Kid Magazine Writers ezine website (this no longer exists) was a huge help in my breaking into that market.

**Lady Lori:** Writing puzzles had never occurred to me, though I have loved them all my life. I feel like a spark just caught fire. Dare I ask the payment question? Do magazines pay a similar fee for puzzles as they would for short articles? How is payment figured?

**Ev Christensen:** I'm glad you're getting excited about creating puzzles. The range of payment is quite wide, which isn't surprising if you've been around children's magazine publishing for very long. I've received checks from \$10 to \$75, but the majority have been at the lower end. (In other words, you probably aren't going to get rich selling puzzles to children's magazines, but it is fun.) As to how payment is figured, some magazine staffs themselves don't seem to have a consistent rule. With one publication I've received these amounts, in order, for similar puzzles: \$40, \$35, \$45, \$35, \$30, and \$20. I figure that some days the person doling out the money must just be feeling in a more generous mood than others. And, of course, the trend in the last four may be a reflection of the tightening economy. The Bluffton group (Fun for Kidz, Boys' Quest, and Hopscotch) normally pay \$10 a puzzle. But if you're contributing drawings that are part of the puzzle they'll pay \$15. For example, for an Antarctica issue I drew 5 penguins across the top of the page, 5 fish across the bottom, and then connected the two with a tangle of lines. They basically used the puzzle as is, photocopying it, and so paid me \$15.

**ArborVitae:** I was just wondering- how long does it usually take you personally to create a puzzle? Does it depend on what type of puzzle you are working on? Does it get easier as you get more experienced?

**Ev Christensen:** There's really no good answer I can give you to the first question, because it does truly depend on the kind of puzzle. Some might take a couple of hours, some a couple of days. It does get easier as you get more experienced.

**Jan Fields:** Now, I've noticed that you tend to really be right on top of new markets and send them puzzles. If they don't mention puzzles and they're new...how do you figure out what kind to send them? Do you just kind of guess or do you have a system for figuring out the most likely to work? Also, have you had any success with reselling a puzzle...getting it into more than one market? Or do you just sell and move on?

**Ev Christensen:** As far as new markets go, yes, I do just guess. I pay attention, of course, to the age of their target audience and whether they have a particular focus for their magazine as a whole. It also really helps if they have themes, because then, if my puzzle incorporates one of their themes somehow, I can know I'm more likely to be in the range of something that interests them.

**Ev Christensen:** I haven't tried reselling any of my puzzles. I have had several of them republished in non-paying markets such as *Stories for Children*. Nancy Sanders, a guest speaker in one of your recent workshops, talks about writing to get published, as a separate goal from writing to earn income and writing for personal fulfillment. It's important to feel the success of seeing your work published even if you're not earning income for it, so that's what I accomplish with my recycled puzzles. Plus, I like that my work is giving more kids a chance to have some fun.

**omalizzie:** I saw on your website that you have a Tangram puzzle book. So please enlighten me. What is a Tangram?

**rogersm:** This might help -- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tangram>

**Ev Christensen:** Yes, Rogersm's link is a good one for explaining tangrams. Basically, tangrams are a 7-piece geometric puzzle, which originated in China many years ago. It consists of 2 small triangles, 2 large triangles, a square, a parallelogram, and a middle-size

triangle. The 7 pieces can be put together to form a square, a triangle, and countless other designs.

The interrelationships among the pieces are what make the set particularly fascinating. For example, the 2 small triangles can be used to make the middle-size triangle, the square, or the parallelogram.

**Ev Christensen:** My book, *Tan-Tastic Tangrams*, is different from most tangram books in two ways. My puzzles don't require all 7 of the tangram pieces. I start with very easy puzzles to help puzzle solvers see and understand the relationships among the pieces. That helps them be successful with the later, more challenging puzzles.

**Ev Christensen:** My puzzles also ask for multiple solutions to most of the puzzle designs. I think this builds flexibility in thinking. We need problem solvers in our world who are willing to try lots of different approaches to a problem. If the first idea they try doesn't work, do they have the ability to look at the problem in a new and different way? I think finding 3 or 4 different solutions to the same tangram design, encourages that ability to think flexibly.

**Jan Fields:** Have you ever done picture puzzles? I see so many of those in magazines and often wonder if they're all done in house or if you have to be an illustrator...or whatever. By "picture puzzles" I mean things like logic puzzles where the clues are in the illustration and things like that.

**Ev Christensen:** Picture puzzles come in lots of different forms. Probably my favorite kind to solve is the hidden pictures—usually a fairly complex picture with lots of tiny objects you look for within the big design. I've created one of those. It was so hard to do that I probably won't try any more of those.

**Ev Christensen:** Another popular kind of picture puzzle is the find-the-differences puzzle. This puzzle gives two pictures which look very similar and you have to find how they differ. There are usually ten or more differences to look for.

**Ev Christensen:** Another fun kind involves a 3x3 or 4x4 set of similar pictures. Each row, column, and diagonal has something unique about it which the solver tries to identify. One of my puzzles like this was published in a Fun for Kidz' weather issue. The picture was an umbrella resting on a pair of boots. Examples of the differences were: in one row the handles were turned right instead of left, the boots in the first column had buckles, and umbrellas in the left diagonal had six ribs instead of five.

**Ev Christensen:** Other picture puzzles might involve a whole group of similar objects and you have to match all the pairs. Sometimes such a puzzle only has one exact match and you have to find that.

**Ev Christensen:** You can draw a picture, cut it into maybe 5x5 squares and mix them up on the page, but give coordinates for each one (like C4). You also give a blank grid with the coordinates. The object is for the puzzle solver to draw each piece of the picture in the correct square, thereby creating the entire picture.

**Ev Christensen:** I'm sure there are lots of other kinds of picture puzzles, but those are the ones that come to my mind right now. I've created at least one of each of these. I haven't

created any of the mystery puzzles you're referring to, Jan, and am actually not familiar with them. Sorry.

**Ev Christensen:** With all picture puzzles, I think being an illustrator helps, but at least with some of them, like my umbrella and boots, it's not required. As to whether the puzzles are done in-house or not, that will depend on the individual magazines. For example, *Guardian Angel Kids* and *Berry Blue Haiku* (recent ezines to arrive on the scene) are both doing all their puzzles in-house.

**Ev Christensen:** There might be some cases where a magazine would pay you for a picture puzzle idea and then draw it in-house, but I haven't tried that myself and I don't know for sure that that happens.

**yaya:** You popped my bubble 'cause you said you are an illustrator. I was hoping that some magazines accept more basic pictures. \*sigh\* Do you know if there are any magazines who accept non-professional artwork? Thank you. My guess is, there are none, but I can always hope. Remember, you already popped one of my bubbles. Just sayin'...

**Ev Christensen:** Yaya, I don't consider myself an illustrator. I can draw simple line figures and some of my drawings have been published, but I'm no good at backgrounds or colors.

**Ev Christensen:** I said in my response to Jan's question about picture puzzles, that I think it helps to be an illustrator, but that it's not required for some kinds. Obviously, you'd have to be an illustrator to do one of the hidden picture puzzles, but not one of the 3x3 puzzles having something different in each row, column, and diagonal.

**Ev Christensen:** Do I know if there are magazines that accept non-professional artwork? I don't know that for sure, but my guess would be that there are. If you have a particularly creative idea for a puzzle and can convey that clearly through the drawings you send, I don't see that having their in-house illustrator illustrate your puzzle would be that different than having that person do illustrations around a puzzle (which frequently happens). But I think it depends on the kinds of puzzles we're talking about. When I was responding to Jan, for some reason I was visualizing a full-page more involved scene (like some that Highlights does) and those seemed more iffy to me.

**Ev Christensen:** The bottom line is—if you have a good idea, go ahead and submit it. The worst they can do is reject it, and maybe they'll say yes. (I'll cross my fingers for you.)

**yaya:** I really like the way you think. I have many, many Tools that I use for making my puzzles. In fact, I have several of those Walmart Special type Large Drawers made of plastic, filled with the many tools that I have used in creating different types of puzzles. Do you use very many different things in your creation of puzzles? I mean, do you see something and often see a lot more than what the item was intended to be?

**Ev Christensen:** Yaya, my ability to see multiple, unintended uses for items is my curse. It means it's hard for me to throw anything away. A normal person can get rid of an object when it's intended use no longer serves them, but since I can easily see at least five other uses for it, do you think I still have it? Of course! Along with the 6,957,184 other things in our car-less, 2-car garage. For my puzzles I frequently play around with objects—paper clips, coins, tangrams, color tiles, abacus, Cuisenaire Rods, etc.

**Yaya:** Do you mind sharing with us what your writing schedule is? Is there anything you do to get psyched-up for writing or creating puzzles?

**Ev Christensen:** In general, I don't have a writing schedule. If I have a book deadline, I may agree with myself that I'll write x number of hours a day (and if I'm needing motivation I'll reward myself for being good and accomplishing that). If it's a tight deadline (and those have been the case a lot of times), I pretty much work non-stop, taking breaks only for bathroom, meals, family obligations, and church.

**Ev Christensen:** If it's the fun part of creating puzzles, I don't need anything to get me psyched up. The creative process is energizing in and of itself. But writing puzzle books frequently involves non-fun parts. For example, in some of my math puzzle books creating the designs that students will end up with is fun. Determining the 24 or so equations that will produce that design can be tedious. In those cases, I just treat the work as any other job. You do what has to be done, because you've signed a contract to do it and you know the final goal (a published book) is something you want.

**omalizzie:** How many pages are typical in a puzzle book? Do you send an entire manuscript to the publisher for consideration or just a certain number of pages and maybe a list of topics you are puzzling?

**Ev Christensen:** My longest puzzle book is 106 pages. The shortest is 36 pages. My books have all been with educational publishers, and I think they tend to have shorter puzzle books than trade publishers. For example, I own a sudoku book with 300 pages and a crossword puzzle book with 562 pages. They are both from trade publishers.

**Ev Christensen:** If you're planning to submit to a specific publisher, it's wise to go to their website first and check out what size the puzzle books are which they generally publish. There's lots of variation even among educational publishers.

**Ev Christensen:** Usually for puzzle books it's fine to send just a representative sample to a publisher for consideration and a list of topics if the puzzles aren't all going to be on the same topic.

**Yaya:** I really was amazed at how many books you have written. Do you work with an agent to sell your puzzle books? Also, I'd like to know if your books are time-sensitive or, do you create them with a mind to long-term sales? Thanks.

**Ev Christensen:** No, I don't have an agent. I was told by an agent at one point that I would probably be just as successful selling puzzle books on my own as through an agent. I think she was right. It's not a niche that I think many agents know or have particular contacts in. The times when I've really wished I've had an agent for my puzzle books are when I've had to negotiate contracts. I really hate that part of being an author. I also would love to have an agent for my picture books, but so far no success there.

**Ev Christensen:** I definitely create my books with long-term sales in mind. That's one of the wonderful benefits of educational publishers. They usually keep books in print much longer than trade publishers. My first book was published in 1995 and of my 40 books that have been published, only three are no longer available.

**Jan Fields:** Does your puzzle writing ever creep over into your other writing? Right now, I'm waiting to hear back from an educational publisher on a proposal for a series that heavily uses codes and riddles -- which should be challenging since I'm not a puzzle master (though the sample chapters worked out fine...I even came up with a new code idea)...but I know editors like stories with puzzles. Do you do those...puzzles within stories?

**Ev Christensen:** I actually have not written any stories that incorporated puzzles, but I do think my pleasure in writing children's poetry is closely connected to my love of puzzles. I find that creating rhyming pieces is a lot like solving a puzzle. You have to get the words and the meter and the rhymes and the story to all work together at the same time. As I mentioned with the tangrams, good puzzle workers have to be flexible in their thinking, willing to try one approach and when that doesn't work, willing to try something different. The same is true of writing rhyme. And in the end the puzzle solution has to "fit," meeting all the constraints of the puzzle--just like a rhyming piece. And both give such a satisfying feeling!

**Yaya:** Do you or have you ever made and sold a Rebus Puzzle or a Rebus Story? If so, have you had to do the illustrations for them? How do you submit them, and what's the difference?

**Ev Christensen:** I have sold rebus stories but not ever rebus puzzles. I did not have to illustrate my rebus stories, and I don't think you would have to illustrate your rebus puzzles. I submit my rebus stories in regular story format with the suggested picture words in bold.

**Ev Christensen:** There are rebus puzzles. They would probably fall under the category of codes. They use pictures or letters to makes sentences. Here's a short rebus poem that I remember from my childhood--

YS U R  
YS U B  
I C U R  
2 YS 4 ME

**Jan Fields:** Did you ever have an idea for a new kind of puzzle that just didn't work out? Sometimes I get kind of wild ideas but then they turn a little complicated. I did do a puzzle once where you filled in the blanks in sentences with Bible quotes...then if you took the words that went into the blanks and put them in alphabetical order, you got a new message. And that worked out great but there were moments when I thought...why did I come up with this stupid idea anyway? Anyway, do your puzzle ideas always pan out?

**Ev Christensen:** I'm smiling at your "stupid idea" that worked out great, Jan. Wild ideas, crazy brainstorming...that is so what creating good puzzles is all about. For the rest of you who want to write puzzles, do give yourself the freedom and permission to play around with ideas, numbers, words, shapes, patterns...whatever, with the full realization that not everything is going to work out. (Certainly not all of my ideas do.) Just have fun in the process.

**Ev Christensen:** Perhaps I should also mention that even if you get your puzzle idea to work out, that doesn't necessarily mean you'll find a publisher for it. I have a few complete puzzle book manuscripts that have never sold, but I have oodles of puzzle book ideas I've proposed that have not found a home.

**Ev Christensen:** There's always hope though. I'm totally thrilled about my new *Abacus Conundrums*, a book of puzzles based on the abacus. It's coming out in April, and I was just proofing the final files last night before it goes to the printer. The publisher has done a

fabulous design job—giving the book full-color, write-on/wipe-off pages. Anyway, this is a book I wrote 7 years ago. I subbed it countless places, even corresponding for several months at one point with a publisher in Japan about it. I feared it was destined to sit forever in my files. The moral of the story? If you truly believe your puzzle idea is a good one, don't give up on it.

**Carina:** How do you categorize or classified "Puzzles"? Can you give us some examples of the different types? How many hours a day do you spend on creating and solving problems?

**Ev Christensen:** Broad categories of puzzles might include: word/sentence/story puzzles, number puzzles, picture/diagram puzzles, and shape puzzles. But there is much overlap among those. Here are some examples.

#### Word/sentence/story puzzles

- Crosswords
- Word searches
- Word Scrambles
- Word chains
- Codes (the range for codes is limitless and might well include numbers, pictures, or shapes. The final outcome, however, is usually a word or sentence.)
- Logic puzzles
- Clue puzzles (Example: see my [Clip Clue Puzzles](#))
- Hinky Pinkies (see example on my website puzzle page)
- Homophone sentences
- Grid puzzles where you give rules for marking out certain letters/words and you're left with the secret word or sentence
- Word pictures (You try to guess the word or phrase represented by the way words are arranged on the page. E.g., "denshe'sial" would be "she's in denial.")
- Analogies
- Venn diagram puzzles (Example: see my [Venn Perplexors, Levels 2-4](#))

#### Number puzzles

- Path puzzles (Example: see my [Math Path Puzzles](#))
- Sudokus
- Magic squares
- Addition squares

#### Picture/diagram puzzles

- Hidden pictures
- What's different about these two pictures
- Tangles—follow the paths to see which pictures at top connect to which ones at the bottom
- 3x3 or 4x4 set of pictures: what's the same in each row, column, diagonal?
- Mazes
- Dot-to-dots
- Hidden patterns within a grid of patterns (Example: look for a flower-flower-car-star sequence in a grid of lots of pictures)
- Coloring in a grid to make a picture or design (Example: see my Multiplication Mosaics or Math Busters: Addition at <http://evelynchristensen.com/books.html>)
- Following a path through a grid to reach a particular picture (Example: see my Subtraction Secrets at <http://evelynchristensen.com/books.html>)

Shape puzzles

--Jigsaw puzzles

--Tangrams

--Pentominoes

--Toothpick puzzles (where you have an arrangement and move or remove a certain number of toothpicks to leave x number of squares or triangles.)

**Ev Christensen:** The amount of time I spend on puzzles depends on what obligations I have. For example, last fall I had three puzzle book deadlines for the first of October. Two of those I didn't find out about until the middle of August. Fortunately, I had co-authors for all three of those books, but I still worked on them 12-14 hours on most days during those six or seven weeks.

**Ev Christensen:** On the other hand, some days I'm busy doing market research, updating my website, subbing my picture books, subbing puzzles already created, corresponding with my editors about a lot of finish up details on new books coming out, proofing files from editors, networking on the internet, or participating in an ICL workshop so I may not create any puzzles at all on those days.

**Ev Christensen:** Even if I'm not creating any puzzles, I often do work a crossword or sudoku while I'm eating lunch.

**yaya:** I would really like to know what your system of organization is for your puzzles. Do you keep hard copies of all of your puzzles, as well as disks?

**Ev Christensen:** I used to keep hard copies of all my puzzles. I no longer do that, but I do have a cubby with 24 slots beside my desk where I keep file folders of projects I'm actively working on. (Older things are in file drawers.) I also have there two folders of rejections, one for magazines and one for picture books. The picture book one is especially large. I have a folder of rejected puzzles to try to find other homes for. I have a folder of magazine contracts and a list for each year of magazine income.

**Ev Christensen:** Currently, I keep most puzzle files on my computer. For the last four books I wrote I did not make a hard copy at all. I have a general computer folder titled "Puzzle Book Manuscripts." Each book has a subfolder within that. If it's just an idea, not yet fully developed, it may have just a file. Book folders will have lots of files, because my computer isn't happy if a file has too many pages of extensive graphics. As a result I may have to break manuscripts into 5 or 10 page segments. As I get close to the end of a project I will have folders within the book folders labeled things like "Final version--almost," "Final version," and "Final version revised." It's amazing how many times you think you're through with something, and then there are more edits.

**Ev Christensen:** For magazines, I have a computer file where I list magazines and their submission guidelines, including themes if they have them. (That file is now 77 pages long of point 10 text.) I refer to it often. I have a file with a color-coded record of my magazine submissions. (You can find an explanation of that on my website under the article "Keeping Those Babies Sent Out." <http://evelynchristensen.com/keepbabies.html> ) I have a file with a Current Resume where I list every acceptance I get. Then I have a folder with the magazine puzzles themselves. Within that, in addition to individual puzzle files, I have some subfolders. If there's a magazine to which I sub a lot, I'll have subfolder just for it. I have a subfolder

labeled "Christian." I have a subfolder for some specific types of puzzles I create. And I have a subfolder labeled "Submission Letters."

I also keep a chronological list in a notebook of all my on-going submissions both magazine and book. And for magazines to which I sub a lot, I maintain a hardcopy list of things I've sent them. I think that's everything.

**yaya:** When you started out selling your puzzles to magazine markets, were there mistakes you made that taught you better ways to do things? And if so, do you mind sharing those lessons?

**Ev Christensen:** I learned pretty quickly that for magazines that use themes, it's a good idea to try to get puzzles submitted as soon after the magazine posts new themes as possible, because the issues fill up fast.

**Ev Christensen:** I also learned that some smaller publications have trouble with graphics in Word document files if I'm submitting by email. There was one magazine that published a couple of my puzzles with totally messed up graphics, so that the puzzles were impossible to work. I've since learned how to create pdfs, and I now offer to send the puzzles that way in addition to Word files. That seems to have solved the problem.

**Ev Christensen:** A couple of times I've had editors tell me they thought my puzzles were too hard for their targeted age. Since I'd taught the targeted age in school, I didn't agree with them, but I realized that I probably give kids credit for being able to do much more challenging kinds of thinking activities than a lot of people do, so I've learned to make my puzzles a bit easier--for the sake of the editors, not the kids.

**Yaya:** Do you have a few markets that you mostly stick to? It doesn't really sound like it, but I was kinda' wondering.

**Ev Christensen:** With my book markets I have loyalty to my publishers, but if I offer them something and they choose not to publish it, then I will look for other markets. This is especially true if I've already developed the idea into a full manuscript. That's how I happen to be working with several different publishers at this point in my career.

**Ev Christensen:** As for magazine markets, I'm open to submitting to any publication that's likely to want what I write, as long as the magazine's philosophy isn't in conflict with my values or faith beliefs.

**Carina:** I think mostly I want to know if there is a 10 step method in creating games and puzzles. Because I've only create one word puzzle in my life . I would love to learn how to create games and puzzles. What suggestions do you have for some one that wants to start "designing" puzzles? Is there a book we can study? Do you ever write a story and create a game to match your story or do you just get random ideas around you. How do you keep it fresh and original, so that is isn't always the same old "done that"?

**Ev Christensen:** I'm glad you're so interested in puzzles, Carina. As far as I know, there's not a book or 10-step method that tells you how to create games and puzzles in general. I would suggest that the best starting place is to spend some time working lots of puzzles first. Buy some puzzle books or magazines, or look through children's magazines at your library. Once you get familiar with different kinds of puzzles you may start having ideas of your own about

how you could create them. The fact that you've already designed one puzzle means you know you can do it!

**Ev Christensen:** I think your suggestion of writing a story and then creating a game to go with it is an excellent idea. That's sort of what the new online children's magazine Bumples does.

**Ev Christensen:** There are some computer programs you can buy which will help you create certain types of puzzles like word searches, crossword puzzles, word scrambles, etc. That might be something to consider after you know the kinds of puzzles you want to create.

**Ev Christensen:** I do get ideas from all around me. Sometimes they come like the proverbial "light bulb." (I consider those gifts from God.) Keeping it fresh and original is part of the challenge. Constantly looking for new ideas and just playing around with words and numbers and shapes is all part of the process. It's sort of the "puzzle of creating puzzles."

**Yaya:** May I just say that there is actually a book you might be able to get? It is a very old book and you would have to buy it from Barnes and Noble or Amazon, in their Out of Print Books. The title is *How To Make And Sell Original Crosswords And Other Puzzles* and it was written by William Sunners in 1981. I use mine all the time. In fact, I have literally worn-out three of them and given several as gifts to others who wanted to learn how to create puzzles. Needless to say, I find the information in there very helpful, even though some of it is outdated. It gives some very good basics for creating puzzles. I hope that helps.

**Ev Christensen:** Thanks for sharing, Yaya. Sounds like a good resource.

**yaya:** Do you have a certain number of puzzles that you determine to send out each week or each month or anything? Or do you have a certain number of hours you work each day? And if you could give me some tips on approaching magazines, that would be great.

**Ev Christensen:** The answer to both of those is no. If I get a new idea, I work on it. If I hear about a new magazine market, I try to work up something to sub to them. But I don't do things by a rigid schedule.

**Ev Christensen:** I try to become familiar with a magazine first—either get a copy to study or at least go online and see if they have samples from their publication there. I try to create something that's somewhat similar (so it fits in), but that's at least a little different, because I think magazines sometimes have a regular contributor who does a certain kind of puzzle for them. For example, as I've studied the three magazines from Bluffton, I've noticed that the puzzles that involve taking fractions of different words to come up with a final word have all been done by the same writer. I think editors, at least in some cases, develop some loyalty to contributors who have been publishing with them for a while. So, I try to be creative and give them something different.

**Ev Christensen:** With religious magazines I check which version of the Bible they prefer, if my puzzle is going to involve a scripture quotation.

**Ev Christensen:** Themed magazines have been a good way for me to make puzzle sales. I know they're going to be looking for things that tie in with their theme, so I have a specific direction to work toward. Liana Maloney maintains a list of magazine themes on her website (<http://www.lianamahoney.com/8.html>), so that's a good resource to consult.

**Ev Christensen:** I pay attention to the age of their target audience. I try to make sure my submission is neat, looks professional, and has no errors. And I follow any submission guidelines the magazine has.

**Ev Christensen:** Other than that, I just hope for the best, send my baby on its way, and start working on something else.

**yaya:** Do you submit to a lot of magazine markets in a short span of time? Also, do you have many markets who buy from you repeatedly? How often are you able to submit to the same market?

**Ev Christensen:** There are four magazines that have bought more than ten puzzles from me, so I guess those qualify as “buying from me repeatedly.” Sometimes I’ve submitted to a lot of magazine markets in a short span of time. I tend not to submit to magazines when I’m in the middle of writing puzzle books, so when I’ve finished up a book, I may do a binge of submitting to magazines to sort of “catch up.” Unless, they’re a themed magazine, I don’t usually submit more than one puzzle to a magazine until I hear back from them. If they have themes I will usually try to send something for each of their themes.

**daystar:** I'm completely new here but I do have a puzzle question. I have a puzzle I'd like to send to Highlights. I have my own small illustrations (like clip art) for the puzzle. Do I add color or leave these as black and white? Thanks for any help.

**Ev Christensen:** My recommendation is to include both a black-and-white and a color copy of the puzzle in your submission. I don't know how you feel about your illustrations. If you only want the puzzle published if it includes your illustrations, that's fine. If you don't mind if *Highlights* substitutes their own illustrations, then I would be sure and say that in your submission letter.

**Yaya:** I would very much like to know more about how to get into doing word puzzle books. Would you mind sharing what the steps are?

**Ev Christensen:** My experience has been with educational publishers, not trade publishers, and I would suggest you start there.

**Ev Christensen:** The first step is to become familiar with the markets. What publishers are likely to want the kind of puzzles you create? I have a list of educational publishers on my website (<http://evelynchristensen.com/markets.html>). Here is a list of some of the ones that publish puzzle and/or activity books:

Carson-Dellosa  
Cottonwood Press  
Creative Teaching Press  
Critical Thinking Company  
Edupress  
ETA/Cuisenaire  
EvanMoor  
Geography Matters  
Good Year Books  
Hayes School Publishing Company  
Incentive Publications, Inc

Learning Resources  
Lorenz Educational Press  
Nasco  
Pieces of Learning  
Prufrock  
Scholastic  
Teacher Created Materials  
Teacher Created Resources  
Teaching & Learning Co.  
Workman Publishing  
Zephyr Press

**Ev Christensen:** Go to my website, and start clicking on these publishers and their guidelines. Study their website catalogs. If possible, go to a teacher-education store and look at actual copies of puzzle books they've published.

Consider whether your puzzle book idea(s) can be tied in with curriculum standards. Educational publishers want to sell books, and teachers are buying books which they think will help raise their students' test scores. If there's a way you can connect, your puzzle book will probably have a stronger chance of being published.

**Ev Christensen:** This link has some information about curriculum standards <http://www.corestandards.org> . Or you can go to one of the larger states such as Texas, New York, or California, and check their standards. (Here's the link for Texas-- <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=6148>)

**Ev Christensen:** Once you've decided what publishers to target, prepare your submission and start sending it out. Most publishers are fine with just 3 or 4 sample pages of your puzzles, along with the answers. Be sure to proof them carefully.

**Swati:** I've always been fascinated with puzzles all my life. The satisfaction of solving one is incomparable. I would like to design word or graphic puzzles for children. I would like to know how does one estimate the difficulty level to be set for the appropriate age. It shouldn't be too easy or too difficult to solve.

**Ev Christensen:** Swati, you've asked one of the hardest questions there is about designing puzzles. Part of the reason it's hard is that people differ so widely in their puzzle solving abilities, and individual people themselves often differ in the kinds of puzzles they're good at. One child might be a whiz at geometric puzzles, but really struggle with word puzzles. Another child might find logic puzzles a breeze, and be totally stumped by number puzzles. Another child who usually makes straight A's in class may struggle with almost any kind of puzzle. And the D-student might shine when it comes to puzzles. If all these students are the same age, how do you decide which one to use to judge your puzzle?

**Ev Christensen:** My best advice is to try your puzzles out on several kids within the age range you think is right for them, and see how the kids respond. Just know, however, that it's not a precise science and that adults frequently disagree among themselves about the matter. Giving an age range helps some. And when I'm submitting a puzzle to a magazine I will frequently say in my cover letter, "If you'd like this puzzle to be easier or more challenging, I'll be happy to adjust it," assuming, of course, that it's the kind of puzzle that can be adjusted.

**ColoradoKate:** Are the puzzles you submit "camera ready?" I mean, are they created with word processing and drawing/painting software, to look polished and pretty much like they do when the mags run them? Or are they laid out on graphpaper in pen or pencil? Or something in between? What do magazines expect to receive?

**Ev Christensen:** As to what magazines expect to receive—I think most children's magazines are probably fine with hand drawn puzzles if they look professional. I personally would not submit something in pencil, because to me that doesn't seem as professional. Some magazines ask for your computer file of your puzzle once they accept it. Fun for Kidz, Boys' Quest, and Hopscotch are like that. But with my picture puzzles that I had drawn on paper, I just told them I didn't have a computer file and they were okay with that. Some magazines, like Pockets, never ask to see a computer file. And some like Guide take submissions by email so you need to have an electronic file of your puzzle. You can probably scan your puzzle and use that, if you haven't created the puzzle on the computer.

**Ev Christensen:** Except for illustrated puzzles, even if you send your puzzle "camera ready" most publishers are going to have their graphics design person do something more creative with it, so it won't end up looking quite like what you sent.

**Ev Christensen:** All of what I've been writing refers to magazine puzzles. If you're interested in doing puzzle books, then you're probably going to need to learn how to create your puzzles on the computer. All of my publishers want my manuscripts on computer files. Publishers may even have specific requirements about what kinds of files. I originally worked on a Mac, but had to switch because my publisher couldn't use those files.

**schriscoe:** Thank you so much for being on here to answer all of our questions. I was wondering, Do I put the answer key on the same page as the puzzle or a separate page for puzzle books? magazines?

**Ev Christensen:** For magazines, it's definitely fine to put the answer key on the same page as the puzzle if there's room and it doesn't make it look crowded. For puzzle books, I assume you talking about when you're sending a proposal to an editor. In those cases, most of the time you're sending several sample pages of puzzles, and you should include the answers on a separate Answer Key page.

**Ev Christensen:** I realize this is not a question that was asked directly, but since Kate was asking about formatting and since another author friend asked me a couple of weeks ago about how to do this, I thought there might be others who were interested. How can I format crossword puzzles on the computer?

**Ev Christensen:** I have just finished typing up the directions and posting them on my website, so if you want to know go to <http://evelynchristensen.com/writers.html> and look in the Articles section. I'll try to get directions for doing word searches typed up and posted also. If anyone feels inclined to try these directions out and tell me if there are places that don't make sense, I'll be glad to try to edit them. Just let me know.

**Jan Fields:** Thanks for all the great stuff you gave us throughout this workshop. I know you worked like crazy.

**Ev Christensen:** I've loved being with all of you for this discussion! Thank you for inviting me, Jan. I hope everyone will be successful with all their puzzling adventures. Best wishes!

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