Children's Book
(~20 pages)

In groups of three or four, you will be writing, illustrating, printing, and binding children's books to read to local first graders. The object of these books is to teach your audience something about math or science.

You will decide your book's subject matter. But here's my advice: keep it simple, very simple, very, very simple—e.g., why the sun comes up in the morning, why water freezes, why two and two make four (not that these are simple matters). Also, your book should teach through storytelling, not lecturing; evocation, not instruction; showing, not telling. An audience as young as yours will not pay attention for more than a few minutes if you do not give them a story. Here's a formula, if it helps: story first, subject second.

Include these storytelling elements, examples of which are in parentheses:

- Characters (the sun)
- Conflict (needs to come up in the morning but has forgotten how)
- Dialogue ("Excuse me, Mr. Man in the Moon, but could you help me? I need to come up in the morning, but I seem to have lost my way.")

Include these three things, and you're on your way to creating an engaging story.

Of course, children's books also require illustrations. In fact, they are often remembered for their illustrations. But the illustrations in your books need not be intricate or fancy. As in prose, simplicity goes a long way. Look at the illustrations in *Not a Box* by Antionette Portis, for example: many of them are nothing more than black lines on a white page, straight out of the stick-figure tradition. Look, too, at the illustrations in *I Want My Hat Back* by Jon Klassen. They're a tad more involved than those in *Not a Box*. A tad. I want you to create clear, captivating illustrations, but I do not need you to produce elaborate watercolor paintings (though you can if you want!).

Length matters as well. I say at the top of this page that your books should be approximately twenty pages long. Fear not! Maybe you've noticed, but in case you haven't, children's books often have very few words. *Not a Box*, a twenty-seven-page book, contains seventy words. *Noisy Nora*, a forty-page book by Rosemary Wells, has two hundred and four words. It's likely that deciding which words will go on which pages will prove your greatest challenge.

We will be looking at some children's books together in class, and you will have a lot of in-class time to work on yours. Moreover, librarians from the Department of Special Collections and Archives will be leading you through a bookbinding workshop, thereby preparing you to transform your loose pages into one finely bound product.

Good luck!

Project Goals

This project emphasizes several important goals that all writers should bear in mind and that are consistent with those of the Program for Writing and Rhetoric at the University of Colorado at Boulder. The children's book project emphasizes shaping research, writing, and design to specific situations and purposes:

Writing in Context
Analyze social contexts and audiences to determine how they shape the various purposes and forms of writing.

Writing Process
Develop and understand various strategies for planning, researching, drafting, revising, and editing documents that respond effectively and ethically to rhetorical situations and audiences.

Research
Understand and use various research methods to produce written documents, including analyzing rhetorical situations, assessing and using resources, and determining how various media and technologies affect and are affected by users and readers.

Technology
Develop strategies for using and adapting various communication technologies to manage projects and produce informative and usable documents.

Document Design
Learn to communicate with visual data and understand and implement various principles of format, layout, and design to meet multiple user and reader needs.