

HOOKS AND LAYERS

What is a HOOK? What are LAYERS?

These terms are often used in the publishing world, sometimes interchangeably. This leads to confusion (including my own). So after many discussions, webinars, and workshops, I've finally developed my own working definitions. *

At the most basic level, a HOOK is what grabs readers' attention and LAYERS are what keep them reading. It is the intersection of one's best story, and both unique and universal selling points (market).

A **HOOK** draws readers into your story. It makes kids curious. For an agent or editor, the hook is why and how they will be able to sell the book. It's a marketing tool.

Another way to think about a HOOK is that it creates a unique way of looking at a topic, giving readers the opportunity to see a topic from a unique perspective. Hooks can make a topic or concept more relatable to readers; they can connect information to a child's everyday life. It may make readers reconsider what they think they know about something. It may make readers reconsider their own views. Hooks often generate reader questions, compelling them to read the book for answers.

LAYERS in a story help to develop and explore theme(s). They are the threads that run through a story and add interest and richness.

LAYERS may be subplots, social emotional elements, character development, and more. To make things even more confusing, the hook can also be one of the layers in the story. In addition, the voice, structure, and illustrations of the manuscript are oftentimes additional layers.

Ultimately, the exact definitions don't matter. And, sometimes there is overlap between these two concepts (when the hook a layer, for example). What does matter is that your stories have multiple hooks/layers. When deciding on hooks/layers for your manuscript, here are three questions to keep in mind:

1. What is going to grab your reader's attention and bring them into the book?
2. What are the different thread or elements that will run through your book that add richness? Identify 3-5.
3. What audiences will your book appeal to (knowing that you need multiple audiences)?

* Please note: These definitions represent MY interpretation of the various definitions I've encountered through industry experience and research. Different people use the words 'hook' and 'layer' differently.

Possible Audiences (people we need to hook):

- Readers w/ a passion about [topic]
- Teachers
- Parents
- Grandparents
- Book clubs
- Booksellers
- Indie bookstores
- Specialty retailers
- Schools and libraries
- Book fairs
- Publicists

Possible hooks/layers:

- Seasonal
- Friendship
- STEM/STEAM
- Animals
- Nature
- Environment
- Environmental issues
- Climate Change
- One person can make a difference
- Conservation
- Acceptance/differences
- Love
- Reassurance
- Community
- Kindness
- Diversity
- Humor
- Identity/self-worth
- Holidays
- Science
- Math
- Sports
- Neurodiversity
- Music
- Art
- Perseverance
- Anniversaries
- Loyalty
- Timeliness
- Social-emotional learning (SEL)
- Individuality
- LGBTQ experiences
- Specialized topic
- Family routines
- School routines
- Use of poetic devices (similes, metaphors, alliteration, onomatopoeia, etc.)
- Voice
- Text structure
- Illustrations
- Sidebars and callouts
- Back matter
- Author's note

* Please note: These definitions represent MY interpretation of the various definitions I've encountered through industry experience and research. Different people use the words 'hook' and 'layer' differently.