JUDGING CRITERIA

Easy to read. Hard to put down.

Topic/characters/plot is mature, intriguing, & culturally relevant for readers 10+. Language is straightforward and easy to read. Format feels approachable.

Language and Format

- Submission is between 1,000 and 15,000 words. Text is well-spaced: broken into paragraphs or chapters (where relevant).
- Vocabulary is mostly familiar. Where possible, simpler words are used. This is done in a way that does not detract from the flow or voice.
- Sentences are mostly concise and direct.
- Language is concrete (limited use of figurative language and idioms).

Content

Characters: Stories should be character-centric.
- Main characters are relatable to teens or adults (at least 10 years old). Challenges, settings, and themes are culturally relevant and similar to those in readers’ own lives. Characters make decisions that develop the plot. Readers have someone to root for.
- Characters portraying real-life individuals are well-researched so that their portrayals are accurate and authentic.

Plot:
- Fictional pieces feature a strong central conflict or dilemma, which is relatable and compelling for teens / young adults. Involves tough choices, without easy solutions. Story sequence is simple to follow, but also engaging, with a clear beginning, middle, and end.
- Nonfiction plots feature real, authentic places and events, and provide readers with an accurate sense of who, what, when, where, and why.

Dialogue:
- Dialogue is natural, concise, and advances the story’s plot. It is easy to follow, with speakers clearly assigned.
# Rubric: 2021 Story of the Year Contest

## Criteria for Success: Readability

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| Length   | 5%     | - 1,000 – 15,000 words  
- Multiple short chapters, no more than 1,500 words in length. |
| Sentence Structure | 15% | - Sentences are concise, concrete, straight-forward, and focused on the subject. (without multiple clauses). They are catchy, but clear. |
| Vocabulary | 10% | - Tier 1 and Tier 2 vocabulary words only:  
  *Tier 1 words* (commonly used in spoken language): happy, run, baby, hat  
  *Tier 2 words* (used in mature language + content areas): explain, complex  
- Higher level words are supported by text (context clues, repetition.) |

## Criteria for Success: Content

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| Overall  | 5%     | - Short chapters and memorable characters  
- Sophisticated & contemporary themes, culturally relevant topics  
- Straightforward/familiar language and vocabulary |
| Topic & Title | 5% | - Topic is relevant and engaging to intended teen / young adult audience  
- Title is catchy; able to draw in teen / young adult audience |
| Characters | 20% | 1. The story features a *relatable* main character  
*Relatable Characters:*  
  - **AGE:** Character must be same age as your intended reader (or older)  
  - **Experiences:** Characters are culturally relevant to intended audience (encounter situations and settings that resemble reader context - same themes and challenges as teen/young adults’ own lives).  
  2. Characters are active, not passive. Readers have someone to root for and against.  
  3. Characters are unique or memorable, making readers want to read on  
  - **Non-fiction:** Real events/facts/topics handled in similarly intriguing way. |
| Plot     | 20%    | - Story features a strong central dilemma:  
  - Conflict is relatable and compelling for teens / young adults  
- Story sequence is easy to follow, but also engaging:  
  - Clear beginning, middle, and end |
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| Dialogue  | 5%    | - Writer builds-up to conflict, but “gets to the good stuff” quickly.  
- Resolution: loose ends tied up, or cliffhangers (for series especially).  
- **Non-fiction:** text revolves around a unifying central theme:  
  - Short story or text about real events (current or historical)  
  - Histories with a twist (i.e., unsolved mysteries)  
| Detail & Description | 10% | 1. **Overall Description:**  
  - Story includes powerful imagery and vivid descriptions  
2. **Setting:**  
  - Setting is clearly described. It's reflected in (and enhanced by) images when relevant |
| Pictures & Illustrations | 5% | - Pictures/illustrations are essential to story: they aid comprehension of text, but also add elements to story that would not otherwise be rendered through text.  
- Images appeal to teen & young adult audience: photographs or cool graphics |
| Total Score | 100% | |