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

Readability & Level	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

Creativity, Intrigue, & Relevance for Audience	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

			• 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)
	Dialogue	5%	• Dialogue is used when it is natural and advances story plot. • Dialogue is accessible for striving readers: • It is concise, like speaking, without unnecessary words. • It is clearly assigned (to the speaker) and easy to follow

	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%	