

 **HARLEQUIN** PROUD PARTNERS OF FOLD ACADEMY 2019-2020

WRITING YOUNG ADULT FICTION

WITH
SANDHYA MENON

REGISTER AT thefoldcanada.org/academy

LITERARY WEBINAR SERIES

SATURDAY, APRIL 11 // 12PM-1PM EST





Writing Young Adult (YA) Fiction

DO'S AND DON'TS

Who the heck am I?

HI! I'M SANDHYA MENON.

I'm the *New York Times* bestselling and award-winning author of four young adult books (so far!). My books have been featured on *The Today Show*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Seventeen*, and *Buzzfeed*, just to name a few!



What is YA Fiction, Anyway?

- Typically, but not always, focused on protagonists between the ages of 15 and 18, in high school (grades 9-12).
- **Common conflicts:** peer groups, romantic/sexual identity, gender identity, parental/authority figures, career decisions.
- **Big question:** Who am I and who do I want to be?
- **Big question in romance:** Who am I, who do I want to be, and how does my love interest fit into the equation?
- **Many genres within YA:** Fantasy and romance are the two biggest, with thrillers getting bigger.
- **Word count:** Typically at least 75K, but range is 55-100+K. Mine: 95-100K.



Broadly...

The Do's

- Speak to actual teenagers and young people at least once a month (more if you can!). To write for this population, you have to know and like this population.
- Day jobs are a great way to do this—librarians, booksellers, therapists, teachers.
- Can't swing that? Volunteer: libraries (teen section; teach workshops), schools, shelters, teen groups, rec centers. Reddit!
- Read at least 2 YA books every month, especially those published within the last year or two.
- Browse the endcaps and tables at your local bookstores to see what's selling.



Broadly...

The Don'ts

- Don't be lingo-heavy. Dates the book.
- Don't write your book based on a YA you read in 2008.
- Don't write an adult book disguised as a YA. Not every book with a 15-18-year-old protagonist is YA.
- Don't forget to pay attention to the lens of the story!



The Nitty Gritty

#1: The Hook

- Master “high concept”: Can you distill your story idea down to one sentence that makes readers sit up and want to know more?
- Ex., (a) *Gossip Girl* meets *Beauty and the Beast* at an elite boarding school. (b) An Indian princess must con a British aristocrat into falling in love with her so she can break his heart to avenge her family’s honor. (c) *The Breakfast Club* with murder. (d) A girl secretly in love with her best friend buys him a winning \$140 million lottery ticket, which throws their lives into chaos.



#2: Let's Talk about Sex

- Spectrum of sexual content, with most novels falling on the more chaste side.
- Generally no more than one explicit sex scene, but most sex scenes fade to black.
- Sex scenes must generally serve a purpose: This is YA, not erotica, so what do the teens think about their sexual lives? Consent? Is it their first time? Generally not written to titillate.
- No explicit scenes in my own novels, but I do have one fade-to-black scene that served a purpose.
- You might run into issues with distributors: Ex., B&N and SJM, Scholastic.



#3: Writing Teen Romance

- The protagonist(s) should still have their own primary goals. Ex., Dimple wants to get into a coding program to work with her idol, Jenny Lindt; Rishi wants to become a comic book artist. Jaya wants to avenge her little sister; Grey wants to break the curse that has haunted him all his life. Pepper and Jack both want to help their family's burger businesses succeed.
- More than adult romance, teen romance should showcase a healthy emotional and physical relationship between the two characters. We have a serious duty to our readers.
- Five main beats: Doorway (10-25%), Mid-point (50%; in romance, the first kiss or admission of feelings), Crisis (75-85%), Climax (90%), Resolution (90-100%). Craft book recommendation: *The Plot Whisperer*. Romance beat sheet: Jami Gold.

Q&A Time!

